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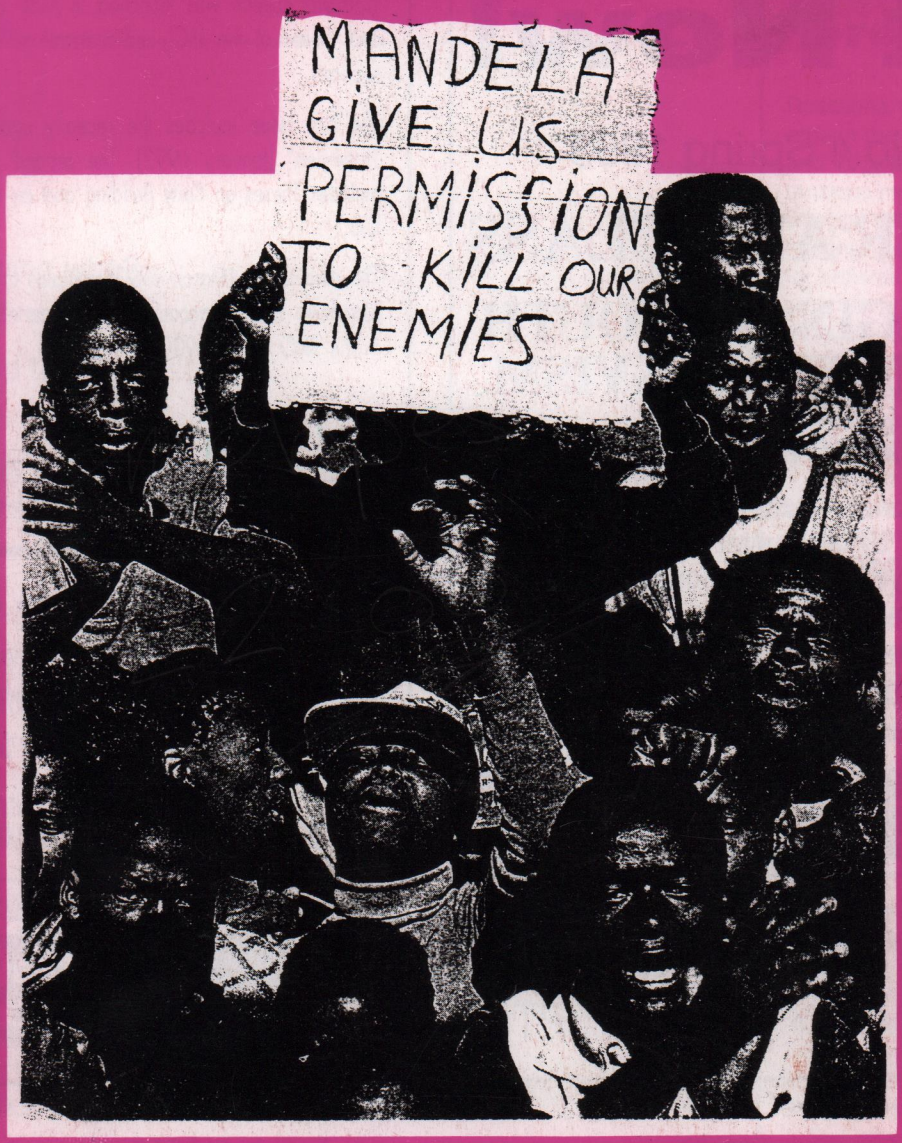

Marxism and the national question

Poland: stumbling towards capitalism

Religion and the revolutionary party

South Africa:

no compromise!

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Trotskyist International 12

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Foreword

Reactionary civil wars rage in the ex-USSR and Yugoslavia. Ethnic tensions mount in Africa. Struggles against national oppression or for national privilege exist along aside each other. Marxism is accused of being helpless in the face of national movements and ideologies.

Marxism is indicted of either having no explanation of nationalism or a vulgar economic explanation. In the main article in this issue we refute these charges through a critical review of the classical Marxist debate on the national question.

In another article on South Africa we look at how one possible solution to national claims—federalism—is currently being pursued by Inkatha and the Afrikaaners in order to prevent black majority rule from touching the power and wealth of white rulers.

Two other articles deal respectively with rational and irrational approaches to knowledge of the world. In one piece we offer our readers Trotsky's insights into the method of solving political problems; in another we examine the reasons that give rise to the alienated and fantastic explanations of the world as embodied in religion and how to deal [illegible]

Nicaragua: who holds the power?

SANDINISTA POLICE DISMANTLE WORKERS' BARRICADE IN 1990

The August spate of hostage taking of rival government figures by pro and anti-Sandinista forces pointed up the unresoved conflict at the highest levels of state power in Nicaragua.

This conflict is rooted in the inability of the Nicaraguan bourgeoisie to completely destroy the legacy of FSLN rule. For more than decade after the Sandinistas (FSLN) came to power in July 1979 there were two durable features in a turbulent Nicaragua.

Firstly, the commitment of the FSLN to land reform whilst at the same time preserving and promoting capitalism.

Secondly, the remorseless hostility of the USA to the FSLN and, its promotion of the campaign by key sections of the Nicaraguan bourgeoisie to wrest political power from the Sandinistas and retake control of the armed forces.

The first of these ambitions proved a utopia in the medium term for a country so poor and so exposed to economic blockade and armed intervention backed by the USA.

Despite some early reforms in social welfare and land reform, by 1985 the FSLN had come up against the limits of what could be achieved by simply reactivating a war-torn economy, utilising idle land and drawing on credit from the European Community.

Major and lasting gains in wages, housing and land distribution would have required a political assault on the major reservoirs of economic power of the Nicaraguan bourgeoisie, especially the export-oriented large landowners.

Of course, even this by itself would not have been sufficient.

But by maintaining the momentum of the revolution, by making it *permanent* both inside Nicaragua and beyond its borders, that is, by transforming it into a Central and then a Latin American revolution, there was a real possibility of success.

This would have meant placing political power in the hands of the workers and peasants instead of a nine-strong FSLN directorate trying to share it with the suspicious and treacherous "anti-Somoza" bourgeoisie.

But the Sandinistas were not proletarian revolutionaries. They rejected this perspective out of hand. They were "realists"! Their "internationalism" turned out to be diplomatic glad-handing with bourgeois and often bloody Latin American heads of state and endless rounds of meetings with European ministers.

The FSLN hoped that diplomacy would somehow loosen the economic stranglehold imposed by Reagan or halt the flow of military aid to the Contras in the northern part of the country.

With Cuba as their sponsor, they looked to the geriatric bureaucracy in the Kremlin, believing that in the New Cold War Stalinist self-interest would lead Moscow to quietly sustain the Nicaraguan revolution, if only as a pawn against the US.

This petit bourgeois outlook, inherently distrustful of the power of the masses, incapable of turning an anti-imperialist and agrarian *political* revolution into a social revolution, brought the Nicaraguan revolution to its knees, just as surely as the FSLN brought down the Somoza regime.

By 1985 the economy was in ruins with the highest inflation rate in the world. Unemployment grew, wages plummeted and land reform was indefinitely stalled.

This was not simply the consequence of economic and military sabotage sponsored by the USA, important as this was. Indeed such sabotage was inevitable from the bourgeoisie and could only have been replied to by declaring war on Nicaraguan capitalism. The fundamental cause was the FSLN's politics.

A people engaged in revolution, trying to make it survive, can and will make social and economic sacrifices in order to defend their power—so long as power actually rests in *their* hands and the sacrifices are borne by all. But when sacrifices visibly deepen inequality and power eludes the grasp of the masses then the people and the revolution part company.

Between 1985 and the elections of 1990, a process of growing apathy and demoralisation took place within the popular base of the FSLN. Worse, the suppression of workers' and popular democracy in favour of a managed "people's" power meant that the Sandinista leaders came to believe their own propaganda. And so too did most of the international left, including most so-called Trotskyists.

In fact the Sandinistas' popularity had suffered a steep decline that allowed the opposition bourgeois forces led by Violetta Chamorro and her US-backed UNO coalition to win the election and take governmental office from the Sandinistas.

War-weary and unwilling to reduce the goal of the revolution to simply keeping the FSLN in power at all cost, enough workers and peasants bought the idea that peace and renewed US aid would assist the reconstruction of the economy.

The USA had won the Cold War, and to the victor the prize.

The Sandinistas who retained command of the army consoled their followers that they would be able to defend all the gains of the revolution, and that once the economic situation had improved, they would sweep back to power at the next elections.

But the promised economic turnaround in Nicaragua has not happened. Over 32% of the country's manufacturing base has been wiped out in three years. Unemployment has rocketed with 18% of the workforce losing their jobs in 1990 and 1991 alone.

Titles to land for over 100,000 peasants have either not been confirmed or rescinded as the old landowners clamour for the return of their property.

All this has occurred because the Chamorro/US/IMF economic programme has demanded an end to social compensation, a destruction of unproductive public sector employment, a smashing of protective tariffs against imports from the US, and a restarting of debt servicing to the international banks.

With the election of the UNO government it appeared that both the Bush administration and the Nicaraguan right would be more than happy. Indeed, Chamorro was their candidate and Bush soon lifted the economic blockade of the country; negotiations reopened on aid packages.

But the second durable feature of the Nicaraguan political situation over the last thirteen years has been the determination of the enemies of the FSLN to oust it from its control over the armed forces. As we said in 1988:

"... the most crucial demand already voiced by the Contras and their US backers, by the Catholic Church and the Central American bourgeoisie, is for a 'neutral and professional army', a purge of the FSLN officers and their replacement with a professional (i.e. a bourgeois and US trained) officer corps." *Permanent Revolution 7*, p69)

After the FSLN consolidated its power over the state machine in the 1980s there existed a regular army of 50,000 with 40,000 reservists and a militia of between 50,000 and 100,000.

When it handed over control of the executive of the state machine to UNO in 1990 it kept its control over the army high command and thereby ensured its political loyalty.

So long as the FSLN could count on the allegiance of the army then it would operate as a key alternative nexus of political power. Given too that the FSLN was the only party with an organised mass base in society this did indeed put the FSLN in strong position to resist the counter-revolution.

The Nicaraguan bourgeoisie were not yet prepared for a full and open confrontation with all the bases of Sandinista power after 13 years of subjection to Bonapartist rule.

From the outset the UNO coalition of 14 parties were not united on how to tackle the problem of resolving this duality of power. The far right of UNO (Alfredo César) and the Bush administration favoured a swift resolution of the matter. The USA held back most of its promised aid until there was a "stabilisation of democracy" in Nicaragua.

The UNO right have consistently demanded three things: a reform of the Sandinista constitution under which the UNO won their 1990 victory but which also underwrites the FSLN control of the army; "civilian" control over the army and the police; and a reform of the judicial system so that FSLN appointed judges can be removed, allowing disputes over property ownership to be settled more quickly and openly in favour of the old landholders.

Over the last three years pressure on the government has resulted in a heavy purge of the police (the front line forces deployed against demonstrations and factory occupations), bringing it more under the executive's control.

There has also been a large-scale demobilisation of the militias and a reduction in the size of the army to 16,000, less than half its war time size.

However, Humberto Ortega remains in charge of the army and the FSLN's political control over it remains. The right wing demand repeatedly that Chamorro remove Ortega.

That she has made no serious attempt to do so is in large measure due to the fact that the army has been a loyal supporter of the government. It is not simply a function of Chamorro's weakness.

The last three years has seen a savage assault on the social and economic welfare of the Nicaraguan masses. They have resisted by occupying land and factories, launching strikes.

The only mass political force they look to for protection is the FSLN. In nine times out of ten the Sandinistas have sided with the government, calling for stability and sacrifice.

Naturally, the FSLN demands that the government speed up meeting the land claims of the poorer middle peasant who forms a key part of the social basis of Sandinism. It demands that more is spent on social compensation to protect the population against the worst effects of neo-liberalism. But it refuses to place itself at the head of resistance to the government. It insists on totally constitutional opposition and bides its time until the 1996 elections.

There is also another very important reason why Chammoro has insisted on maintaining—for the moment—the duality of power with the FSLN.

One of the central tasks of the post-1990 period was to disarm the population. Part of the professionalisation of the army was to make sure that it had a monopoly of armed power.

The FSLN have proved decisive in demobilising and disarming the popular resistance to the government. After all, since they armed the people they best know what the popular defence structures are, who are the disenchanted and rebellious officers, where the hidden arms caches are located.

Since the start of 1992 around 25,000 individuals (ex-Contras and ex-FSLN) have handed in over 45,000 weapons. It is calculated that another 30,000 weapons still exist in the hands of non-army personnel.

Many of these are said to be in the possession of around forty armed groups, with possibly as many as 1,500 people in them, mostly ex-soldiers. The political complexion and demands of these groups carrying out raids in the north of the country vary from the far left to the far right. On the left the Punitive Forces of the Left (FPI) was but the lat-

est to launch itself in February this year.

But the best organised is the Revolutionary Workers' and Peasants' Front (FROC) which on 21 July launched an attack upon the city of Esteli. Their demands included finance for small and medium industry and farmers, debt forgiveness, legalisation of land and houses distributed under the Sandinista regime and improvements in health care. It is led by an ex-FSLN army major, Victor Gallegos.

The FSLN sent in 1,000 troops with helicopters and tanks and routed them, killing a third of the 150 rebels. During the last three years the political lines that once divided Sandinista from Contra have broken down together with the social fabric of Nicaraguan society and many units collaborate in their aims or are mixed ("revueltos").

In addition there is a new far rightist group called "3-80" which simply demands the end of FSLN control of the army and has the unofficial support of Alfredo César.

In demobilising and defeating the resistance to the government the FSLN and Ortega are still proving of enormous value. Once this task is finished the FSLN high command, mistrusted by the masses and hated by the most active elements of the workers and poor peasants, will be dealt with relatively easily. The ousting of Ortega and the FSLN high command would not result in a resurgence of civil war in the countryside.

Despite all the undoubted benefits derived from FSLN control of the armed forces, the majority of the UNO coalition no longer believe it is necessary to underwrite this situation; more and more of the Nicaraguan bourgeoisie believe that their value has diminished, that the FSLN are now simply a road block to the fulfilment of the bourgeoisie's social and economic ambitions.

In September last year a majority of the UNO coalition staged a parliamentary coup and temporarily seized control of a majority of executive positions which they held until January 1993.

In turn this served to push the centre faction of UNO around Chammoro into a block with the FSLN deputies in the Assembly, forming an informal "co-government" at the turn of the year. As a result, eleven of the original 14 UNO parties are now in opposition to their own government.

The administration which now exists in Managua is a re-run of the popular front coalition, the Government Of National Reconstruction, that existed briefly after the overthrow of the Somoza dictatorship.

But whereas then the FSLN dominated the executive, now it is in an entirely supporting role. How long it is needed in part depends on how well it does its job in demobilising and demoralising its mass base and quelling armed resistance to the government.

For the moment the Nicaraguan bourgeoisie continue to debate its future strategy. On the one hand it could further discredit the FSLN in the eyes of its supporters in the run up to the 1996 elections while buttressing the government against the armed actions of its own disaffected rebels.

On the other hand it could remove the remaining judicial and political obstacles that the FSLN's constitution and its military power places in the path of the unfettered development of Nicaraguan capitalism. ●

Palestine, peace and the PLO

Israel was born in 1948 in an act of brutal oppression of another people. For the last forty five years it has continuously denied the very existence of the Palestinians, stolen ever more of their land and simply butchered them when they refused to suffer in silence.

For most of this time Israel has been financially supported by the USA. Boris Yeltsin may have got $1.6 billion for his 150 million Russians for services rendered to imperialism, but Israel gets $5 billion every year for its tiny population of less than five million.

In return for this money, which has frozen the class contradictions of Zionist society and bought the loyalty of Israeli workers for the oppressive actions of their government, the USA has acquired a reliable and rabidly aggressive guard dog in the heart of the Arab oil states.

In this region exist some of the most developed and militarised semi-colonial regimes in world: Syria, Iraq and Egypt. Each has powerful working classes and ambitious Bonapartist dictators.

Israel has played its part in fighting proxy wars for the USA, helping crush their weak and episodic resistance to imperialism.

In the process valuable oil reserves in the possession of conservative Arab petro-monarchies (the Gulf) have been safeguarded.

When 750,000 Palestinians were driven off their land in 1947-48 and jammed into 27% of the area they formerly occupied they did not accede to the accomplished fact. They vowed to fight to get their land back, to establish a homeland and to exercise their right to self-determination as a nation. In their refugee camps in the Gaza strip and in the Arab towns and villages of the West Bank they built many political groups and guerilla organisations.

From 1964 one group came to prominence—the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), then as now headed by Yasar Arafat. With the aid of the Arab states' money and Moscow support, the PLO built up a government in exile drawing upon the most influential and richest elements of the exiled Palestinian bourgeoisie from around the world.

For nearly thirty years the PLO forces veered back and forth between brave, if futile, acts of guerilla insurgency against one of the world's mightiest war machines and successive rounds of bourgeois diplomacy, brokered by one or other of the bourgeois Arab states or even the USA itself. The PLO's actions, whether isolated guerilla actions or

negotiations in plush hotels, have been essentially unaccountable to the Palestinian masses.

Each successive cycle of resistance and negotiation has seen the PLO leaders scale down their political ambitions.

At first the PLO insisted that Israel had to renounce its existence as a Zionist exclusivist state based on privileges for the Hebrew speaking people; it had to give way for a democratic and secular state on the whole of the territory of pre-1948 Palestine.

After defeat in the 1973 war, the PLO effectively abandoned this position in favour of begging the USA to help it negotiate a "mini-state" on the West Bank and Gaza strip, occupied since 1967.

All consistent advocates of self-determination for the Palestinians reject this project as a reactionary dead end to the struggle for national liberation.

A quasi-bantustan, economically and militarily dominated by Israel may be an attractive proposition for those like the USA who seek to stabilise the situation in the region by undermining any prospect that the Palestinian struggle may ignite a general wave of anti-imperialist struggles.

It may also seem an enticing prospect for the bourgeois elements in Palestinian society who could hope to find a niche for themselves running sweat shops on franchise for US companies in the name of reconstructing the West Bank and Gaza economies.

No doubt there will also be a pretty penny to be made by the few thousand or so new government officials in any mini-state.

But such a state would have little to recommend it to the hundreds of thousands of camp dwellers, migrant workers forced to travel to Israel for as many hours as they actually work, or to those in Gaza's thousands of small workshops making shoes and clothing for prosperous Israeli companies.

It would do nothing to break the economic dependency whereby in the Occupied Territories as a whole, one third of all income comes from wages earned in Israel.

But agreement to such a mini-state was not to be the PLO's ultimate capitulation. The mini-state idea soon gave rise to its natural complement—the tacit recognition of the right of the state of Israel to exist; that is, recognition that a historic and ongoing crime against an oppressed people should be endorsed by its victims.

There was more to come. In Madrid in October 1991 the latest and longest set of peace talks began between Israel, the Arab states in the region and representatives of the Palestinians.

The PLO, while not allowed to be represented officially, has guided the Palestinian delegation through ten rounds of talks. The eleventh is scheduled to begin in September.

What is at stake and what has been achieved?

To answer this we have to recognise that these negotiations about the future status of a Palestinian settlement—"land for peace" as George Bush once put it—emerged against a background of two significant events.

The first was an uprising, the *intifada*, on the West Bank and Gaza which has been unbroken since 1987. The frustrated and angry Palestinian population, particularly the youth, decided to fight the army of occupation rather than put up with the PLO's foot-dragging.

Since then a total of 1,200 Palestinians have been gunned down by Israeli troops and armed Jewish settlers, over 220 of them children. This mass revolt built up pressure for some sort of political initiative to take the sting out of the uprising.

But the talks began in late 1991 not 1988. Why? Because of the second factor—US foreign policy victories.

The USA won the Cold War and then humiliated Iraq in 1991, so bolstering the conservative Arab monarchies—the major force in favour of a capitulation to Israel as well as chief bankers to the PLO. After the PLO had backed a loser in the Gulf war (Hussein), it experienced a huge shrinkage of both its political and financial capital.

The USA guessed that the time was right to make the PLO an offer they would find difficult to refuse. But it had one final obstacle—getting the Israeli state to negotiate.

In creating Israel the USA created a Frankenstein's monster; it cannot be guaranteed to do as it is told. It has a habit of wandering off and creating scenes not scripted by its creator.

The substantial Zionist lobby has always been able to exert considerable internal pressure in the USA. Israel, whilst utterly financially dependent, has a relative autonomy.

At the start of the Madrid process Shamir's Likud-led government was in office. Their overall strategy was quite simple: Israel must expand and even annex the territories it currently occupies. Traditionally, the full annexation of the 1967 gains was ruled out by Zion-

ists. After all, Hebrew-speaking Israelis could end up in a minority in their own enlarged state.

But the real Zionist ideologues (like Ariel Sharon) could deal with this: perhaps not all Arab citizens should have a vote. Sharon said last July: "Our forefathers did not come here in order to build a democracy but to build a Jewish state."

Maybe in a war situation another mass wave of Palestinians could be driven over the borders.

Or more realistically, the millions of newly-released Jews from Russia and East Europe could provide the basis for changing the demographic balance in the West Bank. At present only 125,000 settlers have been located there, less than 12% of the total population of the Occupied Territories.

But under Shamir, Sharon or worse, the destabilising scenario of annexation, saturation and expulsion worried the USA; it was unnecessarily destabilising.

Why not get the Palestinians to come to terms with their defeat and that of their backers? Bush withheld $10 billion earmarked for settlements and new immigrants in order to get Shimmer to negotiate. It worked. But better was to come for the USA.

A Labour government under Prime Minister Rabin was elected in June 1992. Then Clinton won the US elections in November bringing about a new coincidence of interests between Israel and the USA.

Rabin had been the harshest of Defence Ministers—the iron fist against the *intifada* in 1987. But he was also an ideologue of Labour Zionism.

This holds to an equally racist anti-Palestinian vision of Israel's future; one based on the need to thoroughly settle and absorb the existing gains rather than engage in endless bouts of expansion .

Both aspects of Rabin could be seen in this year's 30 March decision to seal the borders between the Occupied Territories and Israel.

Rabin announced himself glad to be able to prevent Israel being "infested with Palestinian workers".

Labour sees that with an expanding population of immigrants and a stagnant economy, unemployment and disaffection among the Jewish workers will mount.

Over 200,000 Israelis are now out of work. Hence the need to downgrade the dependency on Palestinian labour. Eighty thousand Gaza workers went daily into Israel in the mid-1980s; before the sealing-off only 40,000 were coming in.

Rabin plans to retrain Israeli construction workers to replace Palestinians. Some 16% of new immigrants have been absorbed into the Israeli construction sector, once the preserve of Arabs.

The effect upon the Gaza and West Bank economy is devastating. Some 100,000 workers have been deprived of work and 700,000 dependants are affected. Twenty thousand lost their jobs for good. Unemployment in the Occupied Territories stands at 60%.

Of course, reducing the dependency on Palestinian labour inside Israel does not mean that the Occupied Territories loses their economic importance for Israel. Far from it.

They are a highly profitable source of cheap labour. The average wage in Gaza is only 20% of that in Israel. These profits are one reason for refusing to withdraw politically from Gaza.

Also the settler-controlled areas are economically profitable for Israel. One block of settlers—the Qatif Block—produces 40% of Israel's tomatoes destined for export.

So Israel wants to keep some political control which rules out sovereignty or even meaningful autonomy and yet gives the PLO something they can sell as an "interim" or "transitional" solution towards their goal of a "sovereign and independent" mini-state.

Thus Labour wants to set up four enclaves in the West Bank and two in Gaza, hemmed in by Jewish settlements. Jerusalem itself is absolutely non-negotiable. Rabin declared that it, "will forever remain the united capital of Israel".

Reflecting the new turn in relations since Clinton and Rabin teamed up, the USA has abandoned Bush's 1991 stance that all new settlements were illegal.

Indeed, the Occupied Territories are not to be considered *occupied* but only *disputed.* Moreover, one US paper, issued after the tenth round of talks collapsed, says that the interim phase is not to be seen as a transitional phase leading to "final status" with its implicit promise of more sovereignty.

Land for peace is off the agenda. Any Palestinian political autonomy would be negligible and there would be no legislative functions without an in-built Israeli veto.

Given the abject weakness of the PLO, the USA believes that it can be pressured into amending its territorial ambitions. It believes that the Palestinian people can be forced to accept far less than a mini-state.

The USA does not construct its foreign policy goals based on any notions of the rights of peoples. It does so on the basis of its own national, imperialist interest. If it can settle the Palestine "problem" while strengthening Israel, so much the better for its profits.

In addition, the USA has a larger objective in the talks—to neutralise Syria. President Assad was prepared to ensure "full peace" in return for the return of the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights.

For Clinton, Syria is also expected to accept Israeli "security zones" in Golan, just as the PLO will have to accept concessions on "autonomy" in the Occupied Territories and abandon claims on East Jerusalem.

The utter betrayal involved in this peace process has filtered through to the masses. They have expressed their anger on the streets.

May 1993 was the bloodiest month for years in the *intifada*: forty Palestini-

ans were killed by Israeli soldiers.

Rancour and recrimination have broken out within the PLO. The delegation to the talks has publicly attacked Arafat for his willingness to go over their heads and water down their negotiating stance.

In the West Bank there are now open attacks on Arafat by the previously utterly loyal press. The huge cut in PLO funding increases the pressure from Saudi Arabia to capitulate.

The subsequent mass clear-out of functionaries and journalists within the PLO (even the daily *Al Fajr* has closed down) has added to the new atmosphere of internecine conflict. But who will benefit from this upheaval in the ranks of the bourgeois nationalist PLO?

The danger exists that it will be Hammas. This Islamic resistance movement, founded in 1988, commands around 16% of the support on the West Bank and possibly 20% or more in Gaza.

If victorious, its anti-Semitic, anti-democratic, anti-woman and theocratic solutions would spell ruin for all progressive forces in Palestine and Israel.

Revolutionaries would be obliged to co-ordinate their struggle against the Israeli occupying forces with anyone prepared to fight to get the Zionists out.

But this requires total political independence and a struggle for national liberation which is tied to a struggle for the overthrow of capitalism.

We must fight for an end to all national oppression. This implies the destruction of the Zionist state which is by its very nature a state based on discrimination, and the oppression of another people.

A workers' state in Palestine would recognise and defend equality of rights for the Arab and Israeli Jewish nationalities, their language and culture. This can only be achieved by a mass insurrection that breaks the ability and will of the Zionists to resist.

By supporting all just and democratic demands of Israeli workers against their bosses and their own government we can also help break up the cross-class alliance of the Zionists. ●

Swedish model loses market appeal

Ever since the Second World War, Sweden has been marketed as the very model of the Social Democratic welfare state, a country where capitalism had been tamed and made to serve all its citizens. Swedes, it was believed, enjoyed a broad social equality regardless of income and class position.

This was expressed in the concept of the nation as a "People's Home" a slogan first formulated by the Social Democracy in the mid-1930s. But this reformist utopia is now coming to an end. Sweden is beginning to look more and more like mainstream capitalist Europe. Nothing is as it used to be.

What were the underlying reasons for the Swedish "miracle"? What has brought it to an end?

The crucial element in understanding the situation is the unique role played by social democracy which held office for nearly half a century. After being one of the main exporters of labour power to the USA—and, to a lesser extent, Canada and Australia—Swedish capitalism entered its imperialist phase late, approximately during the First World War.

In this, as in the Second World War, Sweden remained neutral—despite strong pro-German sentiments in the ruling class— and used this exceptional position to further its own penetration of the world market.

Industrialisation had initially taken place with the help of capital from Britain, Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands. It was largely channelled by the state, ruled at the time by politically backward semi-feudal elements headed by the monarchy. A combination of foreign capital, Swedish innovation by firms such as Ericsson, today one of the world's largest telecommunication companies), and state-backed infrastructural development, provided the basis for Sweden to succeed as an imperialist late developer.

Increasing difficulties in feeding the rural population—the main reason behind the high level of emigration—created tremendous pressure for urban modernisation and a rapid expansion of cities in the north of the country where most of the raw material resources were located.

Emigration amounted to about 20-25% of the population during the period 1880-1920. There were essentially two components in this diaspora. First, all those who fled from hunger in the countryside caused by bad harvests and rural over-population. The rest were made up of the many workers who escaped from the bosses' blacklists.

After the general strike of 1909, many militants could not find work and had little alternative to unemployment and starvation but to emigrate.

Many of those who fled played a prominent role in the workers' movement of the countries in which they settled.

The most well-known is Joe Hill, the famous song writer of the US "Wobblies". Others, like Carl Skoglund found their way to Trotskyism; still others belonged to groups like the Socialist Labour Party, founded by Daniel De Leon.

The openly bourgeois parties in Sweden were not well developed at the end of the last century and could not compete with the social democrats

in terms of an active, organised membership.

The liberals lost the battle with the social democrats in the trade unions and the general radical movements of the 1880s. The bourgeoisie had no effective party structure, designed to take part in a modern bourgeois parliamentary system.

That is the reason why the leap from an underdeveloped rural country to a highly modernised capitalism essentially took place under the political hegemony of social democracy. A sort of process of "permanent reform" took place, a product of uneven and combined development.

The bourgeoisie was growing in economic power yet retained many political ties and dependencies with the feudal nobility, without roots or support within a sizeable petit bourgeoisie that it could use as a counterweight against the large working class.

The bourgeoisie gradually took hold of the state without the need for a revolution but proved at the same time unable to dominate political life without recourse to the opportunist leaders of the labour movement.

This necessitated important concessions. Universal franchise was rather late in coming to Sweden compared to other west European countries—1921. In 1917, the vote was given to adult males as a result of ruling class fears about revolution. In general, all democratic rights were granted under pressure from the labour movement.

During the 1920s, it became clear that only social democracy itself could lead a thorough modernisation of Swedish society; only they had a modern political apparatus rigidly controlled by a labour aristocracy and bureaucracy that was already well entrenched before the First World War.

Under the political influence of the German SPD this bureaucracy was determined not to risk their hard won privileges and future prospects under a dynamic capitalism by "irresponsible" strikes and revolutionary action.

The majority of the union apparatus and political full-timers were conservative; this layer had everything to hope for if the Social Democrats could gain power.

From these roots the labour bureaucracy in Sweden grew to be probably the most suffocating, well developed, and integrated into the bourgeois state of all the labour bureaucracies in the capitalist world.

The social democratic project was ripe for realisation when the world depression hit Sweden in the late 1920s and early 1930s. It gave rise to a highly developed and institutionalised form of class collaboration, based on social democratic domination over the unions and marginalisation of labour radicalism.

Economically, it relied upon a series of state measures to keep unemployment down and avoid a collapse of the domestic market. This proved highly successful but only because Swedish industry enjoyed a privileged revival in Europe in the later 1930s as a result of general rearmament elsewhere for which Sweden was one of the main suppliers.

But it was also from this time that social democracy made a priority of sponsoring export oriented industries (Volvo, Electrolux, Atlas Copco, Ericsson). Without their growing share of world markets there would have been no money to pay for the reforms that were to come.

One could say that, in Sweden, reformism worked for half a century. The working class was generally satisfied with the reforms that it received in a unique welfare system that was built by taxing a blossoming export industry.

The capitalists, for their part, tolerated this state of affairs while profits grew. Moreover, the social democrats provided them with a highly skilled, educated and disciplined workforce.

Big strikes were unusual from the late 1930s through until the late 1960s; the engineers strike of 1945, which ended in defeat, was an exception. Workers were not allowed to strike during a definite phase of conflict according to a 1938 agreement between the Swedish trade union federation (LO) and the employers' organisation.

The unions' task was to get the workers back to work as soon as possible; if they failed they could be held responsible for a breach of collective contract.

During the first thirty years after the war the harmony between the Social Democrats and the bosses broke down just once, and then only partially. It concerned the attempt by the Peasant Party to introduce a general system of pensions based upon the individual's work record.

The Social Democrats organised a plebiscite against this in 1956 and, supported by the Stalinists in the unions, they won. This was the first time the Social Democrats did something to which the bourgeoisie was hostile.

Apart from this, the system of collaboration worked well for both sides until the late 1960s and early 1970s when a new unrest became visible in a series of "wildcat" strikes throughout the country. These were also often directed against union officials.

The most influential of these strikes was the miners' strike of 1969-70. It left a profound mark upon the shape of the left and was a decisive factor in the creation of several left centrist groups.

The re-emergence of these strikes showed that the very privileged position of Swedish capitalism on the world market was coming to an end. The real turning point in this decline was the world recession of 1974-75 which threatened to throw the whole system out of balance.

The Social Democrats responded by cementing their alliance with the most far-sighted section of capitalists on the basis of a new wages policy. Its effect was to get more work for the same money; a rapid process of rationalisation and closure of unprofitable firms ensued.

At the same time, a huge apparatus was created by the state to take care of those who lost their jobs or who were transferred from unproductive jobs in farming and fishing into the industrial sector. Retraining and relocating were the essential elements of this system. In this process, hundreds of thousands of farmers and unemployed were moved from backward agriculture to the cities and industrial jobs.

However, the sacrifices that were entailed for the workers in this restructuring of Swedish capital in the mid 1970s led to the second post-war rupture between social democracy and the bosses.

Ground between the determination of the bosses to get more from them than they could actually deliver in a period of revived militancy, and the growing disaffection of sections of workers with what they had already surrendered, the Social Democrats lost the 1976 election.

But the international and domestic economic situation did not greatly improve in these years. As a result, the open bourgeois governments of 1976-82 were forced to enact much of the

Social Democrats' programme: subsidies to ailing companies to avoid unemployment, increased taxation to finance the state budget.

When the Social Democrats returned to office in 1982, they launched a new strategy called the "third way", a policy of even greater concessions to the bosses. The main reason they lost the general election in 1991 was because they promised to deepen this pro-boss policy.

Their election programme was very similar to that of other European governments, insisting on austerity and stabilisation. Profits were to be raised by making industry more competitive. Thus wages had to be held down.

No further reforms that would cost the state money were promised; instead taxes were to be lowered for the wealthy. A central element was to restrain the growth of the public sector and transfer resources into the private sector.

One policy that especially alienated the working class base of the social democrats was the big change in the tax system that they negotiated with the employers which led to a reduction in the system of progressive taxation; the rich got richer and the poor got poorer.

Meanwhile, in opposition, the two main liberal and conservative parties, now joined by the Christian Democrats, began to look like a coherent alternative for the first time since the 1930s. Although they had been in office during 1976-82 they did not really have a different project to the Social Democrats.

Bourgeois opinion by the mid-1980s crystallised around the idea that there had to be a "change of system". A series of political scandals (chief among them the Bofors bribes scandal over arms sales to India) and the murder of prime minister Olaf Palme discredited the image of the social democrats, a view now actively promoted by sections of the bourgeoisie.

Well before the fall of the Berlin Wall it was customary for opposition bourgeois politicians and mass media to compare the Social Democrats with the Stalinist regimes in Eastern Europe. The biggest anti-working class mobilisation of the decade was directed against the "wage earners' funds"; the bourgeoisie was determined to get its hands on them to mobilise greater capital for their needs.

The present government's "action programme" is much more focused than that of the weak 1976-82 government. Its central axis is to start reversing the welfare state programmes. It has also legislated further attacks against socialists in the labour movement.

A decisive factor that lies behind the government's plans is the decision to enter the EC. This is an inevitable step for Swedish multinationals. Swedish companies are increasingly becoming part of transnational EC and US outfits.

The Volvo-Renault collaboration will probably end in merger as soon as Renault is privatised. Saab, the other car multi-national, has been split up and the personal cars division is closely integrated into General Motors. The main steel monopoly has fused with British Steel. ASEA has fused with Brown Bowery to become ABB.

In addition, a number of Swedish companies are international giants themselves. Ericsson, Atlas Copco, Electrolux and Swedish Match are among them. They have located an increasing part of their production facilities abroad. Swedish firms now employ nearly half a million workers outside Sweden. One of the biggest centres of Swedish capital is Brazil; São Paolo is well known in Sweden as one of the biggest industrial cities in "Sweden".

The extreme exposure of Swedish firms to export markets (mainly Germany, Britain and USA) together with growing centralisation in Europe, means that it is impossible for Swedish capital to stand apart from the next stage of European integration.

Still, the most obvious result of the last two years' economic development in Sweden has been to allow the country to catch up with its Nordic neighbours in the gravity of its crisis. The budget deficit has mushroomed and by August this year unemployment was nearly half a million.

Last autumn the Swedish currency was in a deep crisis and interest rates were raised to a staggering 500% for a while to stop the selling of the krona. Faced with this crisis the social democratic opposition and union leaders agreed to a series of "emergency measures" to attack the living standards of the working class.

These proved hugely unpopular within the trade union movement. Protests occurred but were headed off. One positive development is the rise in already high levels of unionisation in Sweden, mainly due to the fear of unemployment

The unions administer the unemployment benefits in Sweden and this has led to a situation where more than 98% of blue collar workers are in unions and 97% of white collar workers. This is a potentially powerful force for change and resistance. It is a force which is bound to collide with the huge and conservative union bureaucracy.

Last winter the militant mood in some sections of the workforce was exemplified by the fight by the mineworkers' union. After news broke that top bureaucrats had been given special contracts awarding them generous compensation in case they lost their jobs, angry union meetings in the Northern minefield demanded the removal of the bureaucrats.

Despite tremendous fighting spirit, the miners lost because of their lack of an established, anti-bureaucratic leadership, able to make the link between the government's attacks and the bureaucrats' special treatment.

The political weakness of the vanguard sectors can also be seen in the fate of the experiment to create a workers' party in 1990. Launched by some social democratic union leaders yearning for the "good old days" of social democracy, the Workers' List only attracted a few hundred social democratic workers.

It then split into a myriad of personal cliques where left social democrats mingled and clashed with ex-Maoists and a small group of supporters of the centrist Morenoite current.

Any attempt to build a new workers' party without a revolutionary programme will be doomed to failure. All the burning issues of the day must be addressed consciously and clearly and each in turn point the way towards the need to seize power.

Such a party needs to fight against the cuts and privatisation programme of the government. The growing menace of state racism and neo-Nazi gangs needs to be met head on by black and labour movement self-defence groups.

Any action programme which failed to link the struggle against racism and fascism with the struggle against capitalism would be useless.

As the seductive smile on the face of Swedish social market fades to reveal the sharp teeth of corporate capitalism, workers will have need of a Trotskyist perspective and revolutionary party to protect themselves from a savaging. ●

South Africa: contours of a

South Africa begins its long countdown to next April's elections. The ANC hope to focus all black hopes on this process. Meanwhile, the right continue to exact concessions by their violent response. Lesley Day outlines the dangers facing the black proletariat

Despite the murder of top ANC and South African Communist Party (SACP) leader Chris Hani on 10 April and continuing murderous provocations by the far right and Inkatha, the negotiations between Nelson Mandela and F W de Klerk are still on course. De Klerk has emphasised that multi-racial elections and the subsequent installation of an interim power sharing executive based on the proportions of the vote received will go ahead on 27 April 1994.

Details of a map of a nine province post-apartheid state have already been released by a special commission.[1] The proposals suggest that the new South Africa should have a German-style federal constitution.

All the provinces—like the German *Länder*—should have their own legislature, prime minister and cabinet. The federal government would be correspondingly weaker. Whilst the ANC and the SACP still says they favour a unitary system there are signs that it is willing to be flexible on this too.

All this shows that a "democratic" counter-revolution is in an advanced stage of planning. It would be a counter-revolution because it would rob the masses of the real content of their long struggle against apartheid and its predecessors. It would rob the black population of the land, the fabulous natural resources, condemning them to super-exploitation in the mines, fields and factories for generations to come. Even if the last legal remnants of apartheid went, even if a model European or North American style democracy were a real possibility, if the white capitalists and landowners are allowed to keep the fruits of their past plunder then there is no hope of really ending racism and social inequality.

The greatest threat to these "democratic" counter-revolutionary plans, unfortunately, lies at the moment in the forces of "undemocratic" counter-revolution, Buthelezi's Inkatha Freedom Party, Andries Treuernicht's Conservatives, the hardline generals and police chiefs and the fascist AWB.

counter-revolution?

These forces have simply carried on with De Klerk's old strategy, which he renounced when he reached agreement with Mandela on the interim government.

It amounts to covert support by the police for the rampages of the Inkatha murder gangs in the townships. Its purpose is to prop up Inkatha and to undermine the ANC-led popular movement and frighten the latter into conceding a constitutional system which would preserve the power and privileges of the whites and their bantustan stooges.

A virtual war is raging in Natal between the South African police and Inkatha *impis* on the one side and the ANC "comrades" on the other.

In 1992, over 3,000 people were killed in political violence in South Africa, almost all of them black. In 1993 the total looks set to be even higher. In the first five days of July over ninety deaths were recorded in townships around Johannesburg. August was marked by a series of bloody attacks by the racist police on ANC strongholds.

The virtually unopposed attack by the fascist AWB on the location of the negotiations between the government and the ANC on 25 June shows that important sections of the racist far right and of the state apparatus are in collusion. They are willing enough to take South Africa down the road of all out war rather than give up their power and privileges. The question is: are they *able* to do it?

In fact the "white far right" has been progressively weakened over the last year. The referendum of spring 1992 gave De Klerk a mandate for the reform programme and marked a watershed for the diehard reactionaries. Since then the mainstream Conservative Party politicians have accommodated to the constitutional talks.

The fascists of the AWB, together with their mass base in the white petit bourgeoisie (especially the small and medium farmers), have meanwhile turned towards the reactionary-utopian aim of carving out a Boer homeland.

Nevertheless, their influence within the security forces and ex-members of government and security circles means they do still constitute a real threat, graphically illustrated by the assassination of Hani, the AWB attack on the negotiations and the formation of a "Committee of Generals".

This reactionary cabal could provide a focus for direct military rule should there be a complete breakdown of the National Party/ANC deal, should De Klerk resign and should the masses be demobilised by their leadership.

But these are big "ifs". It is more probable that the right will simply provide a source of destabilisation, scare tactics and pressure on the talks to force more and more undemocratic concessions from the ANC leaders.

The far right is more and more coming to rely on its alliance with Buthelezi and Inkatha. With mass support and a material base in the Natal/KwaZulu state machine, the Inkatha feels betrayed by its former sponsors, De Klerk and the National Party (NP).

Now that the South African imperialist bourgeoisie has accepted that it must share power with the ANC, Inkatha has begun to be an encumbrance. But the white reactionaries who are joining Inkatha in substantial numbers see it as a way of creating a powerful anti-ANC/Cosatu block that may be able to carve up the country reserving the best portions for themselves.

However, despite its greater access to arms, Inkatha has been unable to drive out the pro-ANC/COSATU leadership within the township communities and workplaces even inside its own strongholds. It now appears to be losing support amongst the Zulu population.

But it still has mass support and the ability to generate bloody chaos. Buthelezi in turn uses this as leverage to extort further concessions from De Klerk and Mandela. What he wants is either a confederal constitution or independence for KwaZulu/Natal.

An agreement by the ANC and the National Party to any federal constitution agreeable to Inkatha would entrench

ANC PROTEST DEMONSTRATION, 1992

the "right" to privileges of the whites and their homeland stooges. It would preserve their control over the land, natural resources and the means of production.

Revolutionaries, together with all working class and township militants, need to mobilise now against the policy of constitutional concessions prior to elections which the ANC embarked on in November of last year.

Despite the clear existence of a pre-revolutionary situation in South Africa, as shown by the deep economic crisis,[2] the divisions in the ruling class and the unwillingness of the masses to continue in the old way,[3] the crucial *subjective* element—a revolutionary leadership—is still lacking. For the moment, the leaders of the ANC and COSATU are able to obstruct and sabotage the revolutionary initiative of the masses, despite the terrible provocations of the right.

The roots of this betrayal lie in the twin failures of the apartheid system and of the leadership of its main opponent, the black proletariat. In the 1980s apartheid became a fetter on South African imperialism which it was unable to break for political reasons—the reliance of the National Party on white working class and petit bourgeois support on the one hand, and the growth of working class militancy, along with revolutionary nationalist and socialist ideas on the other.

By the end of the 1980s important changes had occurred which broke this deadlock: the aftermath of the revolutionary situation of 1986 which left the working class defeated but not smashed, the crisis of Stalinism and accommodation between Moscow and the western imperialists, the weakness of South African imperialism in southern Africa necessitating a change of policy, and the continuing decline of the South African economy.

Those capitalists who favoured a controlled democratic reform were able to put in place a National Party leadership committed to this policy. Meanwhile the ANC, together with its Stalinist partner the South African Communist Party (SACP), had tightened its grip on the mass opposition movement.

The essence of the agreement which is being developed between the ANC and the imperialists is that the "democratic" reform of apartheid will be no such thing. Under the influence of the SACP, which occupies vital positions within the ANC leadership, the movement has dropped its commitments to thoroughgoing democracy or to imminent social change, limiting itself to a mild reformism which will not threaten the imperialists.

Despite the enormous prestige that Chris Hani had amongst the masses, he had no substantial differences with Mandela or Cyril Ramaphosa's present course of action. His occasional criticisms were no more than was necessary to retain his hold on the masses. His Stalinism committed him totally to the defence of capitalism and the ANC road of compromise with the white racists. That is why the *Financial Times* could say:

> "Mr Hani was the undisputed leader of the township youth, of the unemployed and angry youth. No other leader of the ANC could present compromise as victories with such ease; no other leader could argue for peace by presenting it as a kind of struggle—in short rallying radicalised youth behind the project of a negotiated solution. That is what makes Hani's death such a tragedy."[4]

In their estimate of those workers leaders who are willing to compromise and surrender, our class enemy has an unerring instinct. This is because it is the instinct of self-preservation. South African workers would do well to heed it.

Despite the continued repression, despite the ANC's 1992 walkout of Codesa, they have always returned to the negotiating table bearing new concessions. The ANC uses "mass action" as a safety valve to reduce the pressure of their critical rank and file.

At the same time it is a way of pressurising De Klerk. The masses are thus used as a stage army. The ANC has abandoned the fight for a sovereign constituent assembly and for a majority-rule government. It has abandoned the slogans for the natural wealth of the country to pass into the hands of the majority.

The national unity government that they have accepted will lock them into preserving white capitalist wealth in the mines, factories, and the land. Similarly, if the first majority elected parliament does assemble it will not have decisive power. That will remain with the thoroughly racist and imperialist armed forces, which will resist any attempt to purge them.

The talk of "merging" MK, the ANC's armed wing, with the standing army is a thinly disguised way of achieving the dissolution of any independent armed forces that might have any loyalty to the masses in the new South Africa. The domestic and foreign multinationals will get some extra policemen to safeguard their investments.

The ANC's desire to ensure that it profits from the creation of a multi-racial South African imperialism has led to it taking important steps in transforming itself from a self-styled revolutionary nationalist movement into a bourgeois political party.

Its leadership is now able to decide policies independently of any links to Moscow, another confidence-building factor for the imperialists.

The ANC now commands substantial support from the emerging black bourgeoisie as well as the new middle class. However, it retains the character of what Trotsky called a "party of the popular front" because of the continuing presence in it of the SACP, and most of leaders and many of the members of the huge trade union federation COSATU. Cyril Ramaphosa is its secretary general and effectively second in command. This presence of the workers' leaders allows the ANC to discipline and control the proletariat—the main role it will play for capitalism in any future power-sharing government.

The *Financial Times* as well as observing the pliancy of the ANC leaders has observed, not without irony, the ANC journey from "Marxism" to shamefaced Monetarism:

> "Seldom can a liberation movement have been through such a fundamental political learning process as the African National Congress has undergone in the three years since Nelson Mandela was released from prison. Seldom can an opposition party have shed so much ideological baggage or been so confronted with the limits of its power before taking office—and in no area more than that of economic policy."[5]

The ANC over a year ago threw out its pledges to nationalise the decisive sectors of the economy. It claims that in a post-apartheid South Africa a mixed economy which encouraged foreign investment would be a catalyst for economic development in the entire region. This includes a prior act of submission to the monetarist gods, the IMF and the World Bank.

The ANC's chief economist, Tito Mboweni, has said "We want their overall stamp of approval, the kind of working relationship that will send a signal to private investors that we are pursuing policies that are not unsustainable".[6]

ANC spokesmen have freely accepted that there can be no substantial increase in the state budget and have picked up the Thatcherite language about "not throwing money at the problems". The immediate task of any new bourgeois government would be to attack the working class.

The IMF and the World Bank are already demanding a massive austerity and privatisation programme as the price for re-integration into the world finance and investment system. The Finance Ministry itself envisages massive cuts in state spending, a wage freeze and further tax increases.

Yet to give the masses any of the things they have fought so long and hard for—a decent health and education service, decent housing, new jobs, equal wages with whites, a solution to the land question—will all require money to be thrown at them, the billions upon billions expropriated from the masses over generations. A post-settlement administration will experience a massive "crisis of expectations" which will have to be contained by a combination of political and, if necessary, military means.

There is rank and file distrust of the negotiations. This can be seen and heard at Mandela's rallies when he talks to the masses like a cross elderly school teacher whose pupils are getting restive. When he tells them that they must compromise and make sacrifices thousands respond—"Enough is enough!".

But Mandela has a stock answer: "If you don't want this policy, if you don't want me as your leader, then tell me and I will go". The helpless, frustrated silence which greets this indicates that at present there is no opposition strong enough to mount a serious challenge to him and channel the anger felt by workers and youth.

The leadership of COSATU has also been able to contain militancy and is now committed to a social contract with the new government. This has been facilitated by a relentless increase in bureaucratisation and the political domination of COSATU by the SACP and social democratic reformists.

The left Stalinists such as Harry Gwala (and the Youth League leadership), together with the left fakers around Winnie Mandela, have not mounted a sustained opposition. She may strike a chord with remarks about the ANC leaders' eagerness to get into a bed with silk sheets with the white racists but her own reputation precludes her becoming a serious or principled alternative. After each retreat by the ANC leadership they have acquiesced and failed to lead an open opposition.

The forces with any mass following outside the ANC present no fundamental alternative to it either. The PAC's majority leadership is committed to the process of managed transition and has taken its place at the table of negotiations. Its use left rhetoric—"one settler, one bullet"—has enabled the PAC to attract some radical youth and retain a limited base in the workers' movement (in Nactu and some community organisations).

Its armed wing may be under the control of the external PAC rather than the internal leadership, but its thoroughly bourgeois nationalist politics make it incapable of providing a revolutionary alternative given that the room for manoeuvre for such nationalism is now extremely narrow.

Amongst the small propaganda groups of the "Trotskyist" left there is not much clarity. In particular there is a strong tendency to shy away from the hard task of intransigent political opposition to the ANC and its popular frontist strategy.

The Marxist Workers Tendency (MWT) has remained committed to its strategic orientation to the ANC. It continues to express "support for a majority rule ANC government with

power firmly in its hands, offering to accommodate genuine representatives of minority groups".[7] It seeks to act as semi-reformist advisers to the ANC.

Its key demands on such a government are for "public ownership of the major industries and banks, under democratic workers' control, proper houses for all, decent education for our children". This programme, the programme of the Freedom Charter, is a reformist one, for all the fact that the ANC has now abandoned it. The MWT give no warning to the masses that any ANC government would be a bourgeois government and with today's leaders it would be a pro-IMF one to boot. If we add to this, as MWT suggests, representatives of the white minority and its bourgeois parties it would only be black majority rule under the same white dominated capitalist system.

After his assassination the MWT *politically* identified itself with Chris Hani, despite his Stalinism and his total support for the present sell-out deal. It said of him that he was "a militant revolutionary" that he was "feared by the bosses" and that they pledged themselves "to fight for his ideals".[8]

MWT try to dress up Hani as a closet supporter of permanent revolution since: "He recognised that our struggle for genuine liberation would not be complete until we have achieved socialism."[9]

This is nothing more than the usual Stalinists refrain, "democracy now and socialism sometime in the future perhaps". In short, the MWT refuses to call for a break with the ANC popular front or to fight openly for the creation of a revolutionary socialist party, at best hinting at the need to "unite the forces of the left".

Qina Msebensi (QM), the organ of Comrades for a Workers' Government, the South African section of the LTT, stands clearly to the left of the MWT. It raises the revolutionary slogans of workers' councils and armed defence squads, a revolutionary constituent assembly, the overthrow of apartheid capitalist tyranny and a workers' government.

It has drawn up a programme of action embodying these demands. But there remain elements of serious confusion in its slogans. Its call for a "revolutionary interim government" deliberately confuses the call for a revolutionary workers' government with the ANC's interim government proposals.

Why is an *interim* government needed at all? Before elections to a constituent assembly any provisional government would be an instrument of delay, compromise and democratic counter-revolution. Interim to what? What class character would this government have? Is the ANC to be in it? And COSATU too?

QM also continues to place demands on the ANC as if it was a reformist *workers'* party. They call on the ANC to "organise the masses to take power", and want to extend critical electoral support to the ANC, including its bourgeois elements, in the full knowledge of the economic attacks that will rain down on the black toilers by such a government.

QM refers to the ANC leaders as petit bourgeois reformists. But it is not a workers' party or even a radical anti-imperialist petit bourgeois movement. The ANC is a popular front; it is a class collaborationist bloc between workers' organisations and bourgeois nationalists in which the latter call the tune.

The correct class tactics would be to call on the leaders of the workers' organisations, COSATU and the SACP, to break with their bourgeois strategy designed to meet the needs of a pro-IMF black neo-liberal bourgeoisie and their white capitalist allies. They should mobilise the masses for the immediate and unconditional calling of elections for a sovereign constituent assembly and take up the struggle for a workers' government.

Despite the acute crisis of leadership the greatest danger to the plans of the imperialists and the ANC remains the power of the black proletariat. As the elections loom and the campaign of violence against the black community grows, the need for a working class answer to the crisis will become ever more pressing.

What should it be? It must start from the consciousness of the masses today and show the way to the achievement of their fundamental needs via the creation of a revolutionary workers' government.

At the moment the overwhelming mood of the masses is for a thoroughly democratic destruction of the apartheid regime. The way to stop all attempts to frustrate the democratic aspirations of the masses by backstage deals and concessions to the racists is to call for *immediate* elections to a fully sovereign Constituent Assembly, elected by universal direct and secret suffrage of all over the age of 16 and those under 16 who are in full time work, with no literacy qualifications. There must be a truly nationwide proportional representation with no undemocratic threshold percentages for the representation of parties.

To make such an election process reflect the will of the majority, it is essential to break the white racist and capitalist monopoly of the armed forces and the media. Otherwise it will be used to harass, intimidate and deceive the masses. Township and workers' organisations must establish control over the media to enable the voice of the workers, the unemployed, housewives and the rural poor to be heard.

The electoral campaign and the vote should be supervised by the unions and the township organisations. These organisations should make it clear that they will support only candidates from the workers' organisations who agree to be answerable (that is, recallable) by their electors.

Should elections to a constituent assembly take place they will provide the working class with the opportunity to prevent the sell-out. The precondition for this is that it can vote for candidates who oppose the sell-out.

To this end revolutionaries themselves should stand as many candidates as they are able to. In addition, they should fight for an electoral bloc of all working class organisations opposed to the sell-out and demand at the same time that the SACP, COSATU, at local and national levels, break from the ANC and join this bloc.

If the influence of the centrist, Stalinist and trade union organisations means that no working class electoral op-

position exists to the sell out we would call for a critical vote only for candidates of the workers' organisations, in the first place, SACP or COSATU candidates chosen by, and in some way accountable to, their unions.

If the electoral system or the nature of the electoral bloc make even this impossible we would be forced to call on workers to actively abstain, to spoil their ballot papers or vote blank.

Should the elections turn out to be directly to a new legislature on a common voters' roll then it would be equally impossible to call for a vote for the ANC. A vote for the ANC is a vote for an undisguised bourgeois government. Again if revolutionaries were themselves unable to stand as candidates we would call for a vote to the workers' organisations and their candidates and call on them break from the ANC.

Only the complete dissolution of the bantustans, the overthrow of their reactionary collaborationist regimes and their complete re-integration into South Africa can ensure that there are anything approaching democratic elections to a constituent assembly. Revolutionaries must oppose any privileges for any "nationality"—white or black, and any autonomies or secessions that are designed to preserve or to achieve them.

Above all, any claim to "self-determination" for, or secession by, the white racists must be fought to the end. The entire population must vote freely and equally for an assembly that has full powers to arrange the state forms as the masses wish. After the total overthrow of white racist power, the smashing of its apparatus of repression and that of its bantustan stooges, then and only then, would it be correct for revolutionaries to defend the right of any of the formerly oppressed nationalities to self-determination, to autonomy and even to secession.

The purpose of defending this right is to undermine any remaining reactionaries of the Inkatha type who tried to terrify sections of the Zulus or other ethnic groups, claiming that they were going to be dominated by the Xhosas. Ethnic or "tribal" oppression in other African states over the last forty years shows that these fears are not simply the product of the bantustan leaders lie machine. But revolutionaries should in no way advocate separation or the creation of mini-"national states". The economy of South Africa and above all the labour movement has gone a long way to unifying the workers of the various ethno-linguistic groups. The working class needs this precious unity to press on to the expropriation of the capitalist corporations and the white farmers.

Any constituent assembly could only carry out a progressive role if it rejected the reform of white-dominated South African imperialism and aimed at the revolutionary destruction of the white bourgeoisie's monopoly of the land, mines, factories and businesses. To accomplish this would require a revolutionary workers' government at the head of the armed masses.

This cannot be achieved by elections alone, let alone by an interim government—with or without the white racists. The imperialist state must be smashed and replaced by the power of workers' councils. These councils are not only the organs of workers power, they are needed right now to mobilise mass action up to and including an indefinite general strike to force immediate elections to a sovereign constituent assembly.

The workers' and community organisations must now organise a mass, trained and disciplined workers' militia that must arm itself by any means necessary. Once armed the millions strong black proletariat of the mines and factories and the townships can and must struggle to establish their own class power, the dictatorship of the proletariat.

The most pressing task for the working class in South Africa is the building of a revolutionary workers' party which could rally opposition to the class collaborationist policies of the COSATU and SACP leadership and demand that the workers' leaders break from the ANC

South Africa is the major power in the entire southern part of the continent. It is the only imperialist power on the continent. Thanks to Pretoria's imperialist policy over decades, in Namibia, Angola and Mozambique there is economic devastation, famine and countless numbers of refugees.

Racist South Africa armed the reactionary UNITA and RENAMO forces. South African workers must fight now for the withdrawal of all South African trcops, advisers and covert operations organisers in the region and for the expropriation of the all the South African European and US multinationals in the region. They should extend critical support to the FRELIMO and MPLA bourgeois regimes as long as they resist the pro-imperialist guerillas.

The working class of the entire region, in alliance with the poor peasantry, should develop organs of their own class power, both councils and militias. The South African proletariat must aid the workers of the region to create their own revolutionary class parties and fight for a Socialist Federation of Southern Africa. ●

NOTES

1 The ANC would prefer a tenth province consisting of the Transkei, Ciskei, east Griqua land and the East London region

2 In 1990 and 1991 South African GDP dropped by 0.5% and 0.9%. In 1992 the fall was 2.1% and projections for the "recovery" year 1993 are 0.0%. Inflation ran at 14.4%, 15.3% and 13.9% respectively, and is projected to be 11.3% in the same years. Industrial production fell by 3% per annum in 1991 and 1992. Unemployment is staggeringly high—in 1991 42.6% of the potentially economically active population. Even if the economy were to attain a growth rate of 4.5% p.a. it would continue to rise. In fact over the last few years it has averaged 1.3% (all figures quoted in *Financial Times*, 11 June 1993

3 The mass action campaign launched by the ANC and COSATU in January 1992, the subsequent breakdown of the Codesa talks, the police-Inkatha response with the Boipatong massacre led, on 3 and 4 August, to the largest stay-away in South African history. Likewise the massive general strike on 14 April after Chris Hani's assassination involved some 2.5 million people. There can be no doubt of the masses desire for a revolutionary change in their dreadful conditions and an end to bloody repression.

4 *Financial Times*, 13 April 1993

5 *Financial Times*, 11 June 1993

6 Ibid

7 *Congress Militant*, April 1993

8 Ibid

9 Ibid

Marxism and national

The collapse of Stalinism has seen nationalist wars erupt in Yugoslavia and the former USSR. The unity of numerous "third world" states is also challenged by a new wave of national struggles. Marxism has a rich tradition of analysis on the national question, yet the lie is still repeated that there lies its Achilles' heel. Dave Stockton looks at the classical period of this analysis

At the close of the twentieth century a new wave of national struggles is sweeping the world. These struggles involve claims for national privilege as well as protests against national oppression. The oppressed of yesterday often become the oppressors of today.

The collapse of the USSR, together with the growing differences between the USA, the EC and Japan over policy for restoring capitalism, has led to a fracturing of former multi-national states along ethnic or national lines by national groupings trapped within them.

Despite the essential internationalism of revolutionary Marxism, the durability and ferocity of national identity and ideologies comes as no surprise to communists, reflecting as it does, the chronic weakness of a class conscious leadership in the international workers' movement.

For over a hundred and fifty years, Marxists have charted the development of nation building, national movements and the multi-faceted ideological self-justifications that accompany them. The roles played by various national groups in the 1848 revolutions in Europe, the claims and counter-claims of various nationalities trapped within the Austro-Hungarian and Tsarist empires up to the First World War—each in turn sparked a debate that provided all the essential tools of analysis and intervention needed today.

Marx and Engels never gave a general rounded definition of a nation. Nevertheless, their whole approach was to treat the nation, not as some primordial category applicable to all epochs, but as a result of socio-economic evolution and, indeed, of revolution.

They saw the nation state as a product of the development of capitalism, a development full of contradictions and far from complete even in their lifetime.

They considered that the expansion and centralisation of commodity production at a national level was a progressive development. They approved of the "unity of great nations which, if originally brought about by political force, has now become a powerful coefficient of social production".[1]

While they recognised that the bourgeois class was fundamentally a national class, they saw in this the basis of its progressive role in the bourgeois revolutions of the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries. Yet, as capitalism itself

and the question

became a fetter on the productive forces, so too would the nation state within which it developed.

In contrast to the bourgeoisie, the proletariat aimed to build an international order and so, from the outset, its methods of struggle and goals had to be thoroughly internationalist, not nationalist. This did not mean, however, that the proletariat no longer faced national tasks.

Capitalism did not solve all the tasks proper to the bourgeois epoch, leaving the proletariat a clean slate on which to work out purely socialist tasks. Marx and Engels defended resolutely what they called "the old democratic and working class tenet" of the "right of the great European nations to self-determination". These nations were Spain, France, Britain, Italy, Germany, Hungary and Poland. Later they were to add other large and "viable" nations.

The notion of "viability" was the recognition that consciousness alone, or some abstract right, were not enough to ensure a nationality the possibility of independent statehood. In a letter to Kautsky in 1882, Engels commented:

> "The very first conditions of national existence [are] large numbers and compactness of territory . . . It is historically impossible for a large people to discuss seriously any internal questions as long as its independence is lacking . . . An international movement of the proletariat is in general only possible between independent nations . . . to get rid of national oppression is the basic condition of all healthy and free development."[2]

At the same time, they refused to recognise any absolute "principle of nationalities". They refused to recognise or support the right of *every* self-proclaimed nationality or ethnic group to secede from the large national or multi-national states. During and after the 1848 revolutions in Europe, they considered this "principle" as a weapon of reaction, utilised by the Russian Tsar and the French Emperor Louis Napoleon, the two main leaders of the counter-revolution in Eastern and Western Europe respectively.

Marx and Engels' perspective was based on support for the three national struggles of Central Europe that were pitted against these reactionary powers—the German unification struggle and the Polish and Hungarian struggles for national liberation. Nothing which undermined these struggles could be supported.

Poland was a state made up not only of Poles but also of Ruthenes (Western Ukrainians) and Lithuanians. Hungary was a state inhabited by millions of Croats, Slovaks and Romanians, among others. If all these nationalities were to secede to form mini-states under the protection of Russia, then Poland and Hungary would become non-viable states. They would then be unable to defend the democratic and social revolutions in Western and Central Europe by restraining Tsarism within its borders.

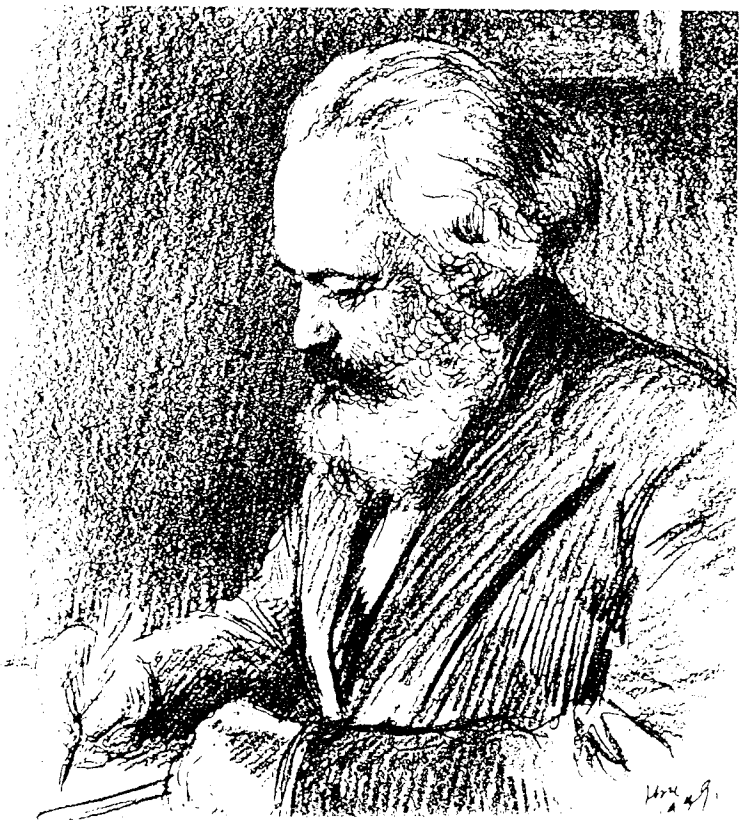
Marx saw pan-Slavism and the call for national independence for all the smaller Slav peoples as a tool of reaction. Such a call undermined and split the progressive national struggles against the reactionary states and their allies. Marx and Engels were absolutely right in this recognition that not *all* national struggles played a progressive role.

For example, the Croats, under their leader, the Ban Jellacic, were in the vanguard of the Habsburg counter-revolution against the Viennese proletariat as well as the Italian and Hungarian national liberation struggles. In the specific context of a European-wide democratic revolutionary struggle against feudal reaction emanating from St Petersburg and, after 1851, from Paris too, the various national movements had to be judged as either progressive or reactionary.[3]

Marx and Engels hoped that an independent Poland and Hungary would block the road to the military intervention of Tsarism. Then, together with a triumphant revolution in Germany, they would launch a revolutionary war that would break up the reactionary eastern colossus.

This perspective of a revolutionary "world war" was understandable in the mid-nineteenth century, when Britain and France were the only large developed capitalist states which could be said to have completed their bourgeois revolutions. But a series of events was to shatter these hopes and eventually render this perspective obsolete.

In the first place, the Crimean War revealed just how conservative the British and French ruling classes now were. The defeat of the Polish rising of 1863 and the compromise (Ausgleich) reached between the Hungarian gentry and the Austrian ruling dynasty in 1867 ended the progressive role of Hungarian and Polish nationalism. The defeat of the



Paris Commune in 1871 and the conservative character of the British workers' unions during the 1870s and 1880s held back the internationalism of the most developed and experienced workers' movements. By 1870, Germany and Italy had completed their nation-state building through "revolutions from above". Added together these events cut the ground away from Marx and Engels' former hopes for the European revolution. Towards the end of the 1860s and throughout the 1870s they cautiously began to modify their perspective and their views on specific national struggles, although this did not mean that they rejected their entire earlier general political framework.

Central to Marx and Engels' re-evaluation of the national question was their changing estimation of Russia. They soon began to notice the development within the Tsarist empire of revolutionary social and political forces that would destroy it. Yet, if Russia was changing from being the socially stagnant, feudal bastion of reaction it had been, if it too was pregnant with revolution, then it might be necessary to modify their attitude to the national struggles of the smaller Slav peoples. Their change of view was neither complete nor systematic but their new positions foreshadowed the change in the Marxist attitude to the self-determination of nations which took place in the Second International.

In 1867, Marx had altered his attitude to Irish independence. Ireland had not figured amongst the "historic nations" in his or Engels' writings in the 1840s or 1850s. It had a very weak bourgeoisie and a woefully under-developed capitalism. But, argued Marx, "Previously, I thought Ireland's separation from England impossible. Now I think it inevitable, although after separation there may come federation." [4]

Marx became convinced that:

> "Every industrial and commercial centre in England now possesses a working class divided into two hostile camps, English proletarians and Irish proletarians. The ordinary English worker hates the Irish worker as a competitor who lowers his standard of life. In relation to the Irish worker he feels himself a member of the ruling nation and so turns himself into a tool of the aristocrats and capitalists of his country against Ireland, thus strengthening their domination over himself . . . This antagonism is the secret of the impotence of the English working class, despite their organisation." [5]

Here, Marx and Engels worked out one central tenet of the proletarian attitude to the national question; namely, that all such oppression obscures class consciousness and obstructs the class struggle of the workers in *both* the oppressor and the oppressed nation. The former, because they cannot separate their policy from that of their own rulers; the latter, because so long as they have a national grievance they cannot concentrate on the struggle against exploitation.

Therefore, it is the task of the workers of the oppressor nation to fight for the freedom—the right to separate statehood—for the oppressed nation. By this means, the international unity of the working class can be strengthened. It was at this time that they formulated the dictum which they frequently repeated, and which has become a cornerstone of the Marxist position on the national question—"Any nation that oppresses another forges its own chains". [6]

Marx went on to champion this position in the First International, arguing that "the Irish, as well as other oppressed nationalities" should have their own sections and their own representatives on the General Council.

Engels now thought that an independent Serbian state might even block, rather than extend, Russian influence in the region. Indeed, once Tsarist Russia erupted in revolution, Engels envisaged a national future for the hitherto "historyless" southern Slavs and even for the Ruthenes of Poland.

In 1888, he outlined the following perspective:

> "To me, the primary condition of the emancipation of the Central and Eastern European nations is the overthrow of Tsarism . . . we shall see the collapse of this fatal power, represented by Bismark. Austria will disintegrate as it will lose the only justification for its existence, i.e., to prevent by its mere existence Tsarism incorporating to itself the scattered nations of the Carpathians and of the Balkans. Poland will come to life again; Little Russia [the Ukraine] will be able to choose its political connections freely; the Romanians, Hungarians and the Southern Slavs will be able to regulate their affairs and their border questions free from foreign interference." [7]

It should be noted that Engels' perspectives were conditional on the revolution breaking out in Russia but, nevertheless, his hopes were very different from those of 1848-51:

> ". . . if a revolution broke out now in Russia, it would spare Europe the calamity of a general war and it would be the beginning of revolution in the whole world."

The generalised use of the demand for self-determination for oppressed nations did not enter the Marxist programme until the 1896 London Congress of the Second In-

ternational. Strongly supported by Karl Kautsky and by the Russian Social Democrats, it was equally strongly contested by Rosa Luxemburg. Both sides to the dispute, however, recognised that Marx and Engels' international perspective had to be changed.

Russia's feudal structures were being increasingly undermined by the growth of capitalism. The same was the case in Eastern Europe and the Balkans. Rosa Luxemburg embraced the view that in this new epoch of international capitalism, world market dominated by the major capitalist powers, *all* national struggles had become utopian.

Kautsky and Lenin drew an alternative conclusion; that there was no longer any danger of the national struggles of Eastern Europe playing into the hands of Tsarism. Rather, there was the possibility that the national oppression of the Tsarist empire and the growing struggle of the imprisoned peoples against it would be a powerful auxiliary factor in the approaching bourgeois revolution.

Kautsky played an important part in systematising and re-elaborating Marx and Engels' views to fit the new period that was opening in the last decade of the nineteenth century and the first years of the twentieth. His 1887 study, *The Modern Nationality*,[8] was the first Marxist attempt at a general theory of the national question.

He argued, like Marx, that the emergence of modern nations is a direct result of the fundamental driving forces of the capitalist mode of production—internal markets, common regulations and free wage labour. Moreover:

> ". . . the concentration and separation of modern societies into national states was one of the most powerful levers of modern economic development." [9]

However, Kautsky saw another tendency developing out of this very process:

> ". . . above a certain limit, such separation into national states becomes superfluous and is even a fetter on continued economic development."

Kautsky gave enormous emphasis in his analysis to the role of language. He saw the basic tool for uniting all classes into a single nation as a common home-grown language. Thus languages play the role of barometers of the stage of development of the productive forces. Kautsky analysed the past as a process of linguistic consolidation whereby dialects and even pre-existing languages merged and fused.

Moreover, for Kautsky, this was a process that did not stop with the formation of the presently existing nations:

> "To the extent that international communications expand, the need is felt for a medium of international communication, a world language." [10]

This process would be a result of the eventual development of a world market and an international economy which would in turn lead to an assimilation of nationalities which Kautsky observed as a fundamental tendency within capitalism.

This tendency to assimilation could not, however, be forced by political means. Still less could it be reversed by mainly or purely political means. Kautsky observed that forcible measures, such as Tsarist Russification in Poland, would never obliterate national differences that rested on important differences of economic development.

Even if, as in Ireland, language differences *were* overcome, widely different economic conditions would continue to sustain national differences. Only deep-going economic homogenisation could lead to complete national assimilation.

Kautsky's economic, territorial and linguistic analysis was generally accepted by Lenin as the basis of his own position and they generally supported one another in their polemics with Rosa Luxemburg and the Austro-Marxists. Kautsky never gave a general definition of a nation, claiming later that:

> "*Nationality* is a social relation which is modified continuously and which under different circumstances has a very different meaning; it is a Proteus which slides through our fingers when we try to seize it." [11]

Or again:

> "Nation is a social formation difficult to apprehend, a product of social development, that rules have never been able to transform into a precisely defined social organism." [12]

Kautsky also contributed to the Marxist discussion on the solution to the national question in Eastern and South Eastern Europe. He introduced or, rather, systematised, a distinction between nations and ethnic communities.

According to him, nations were sizeable, cohesive communities that had developed, or were rapidly developing, on the basis of capitalist economy. Ethnic communities were entities whose evolution into independent statehood encountered serious obstacles because of territorial fragmentation, small size, backward economic development or lack of cohesion.

Clearly Kautsky's homeland, Austria, was a case in point. Kautsky was very influential in the drawing up of Austrian Social Democracy's "Brno Programme" in 1899. This proclaimed its goal as a "democratic federation of nationalities" with guaranteed protection of national minorities within each autonomous unit.

Kautsky was to promote the goal of federation several times in the new century. In his article, "The National Question in Russia" (1905), he argued for the slogan of a "United States of Russia" based on territorial autonomy for all the nationalities of the Tsarist empire.

In 1909, with respect to the Balkan nationalities, he raised the demand of a "Democratic Balkan Federation",[13] a slogan supported by Trotsky and the Romanian revolutionary Christian Rakovsky. Last, but not least, Kautsky, faced with the heightened tensions of the pre-war period in Europe, raised the slogan of a "United States of Europe".

In retrospect, whilst Kautsky's "historical-economic" approach was relatively fruitful and materialist, it had important weaknesses. It was developed on the eve of the new wave of nationalisms that grew rapidly between the 1905 Revolution and the First World War.

This wave was felt not only in Eastern Europe but also in Latin America and Asia, with the Mexican, Turkish, Persian and Chinese revolutions. Imperialism provoked vast

oppressed and super-exploited populations to struggle against it and the banner they took up was that of national rights.

Kautsky, on the other hand, overstressed the tendency to the assimilation of nations under the impact of the development of the world economy. He optimistically thought that this would lead to the rapid development of proletarian internationalist consciousness.

In what was a characteristic feature of the rest of Kautsky's work, this view betrayed the lack of a profound grasp of the dialectic of development, of the way that the struggle against national oppression could hasten the growth and differentiation along class lines of proletarian forces in the colonial and semi-colonial world.

What Kautsky was unable to foresee and welcome, Lenin, initially his pupil, was able to develop into an analysis far richer than that of his former teacher.

Rosa Luxemburg was the founder of the Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland (SDKP). She rejected Marx and Engels' lifelong support for Polish independence and Karl Kautsky's continued espousal of this cause.

At the London Congress of the Second International in 1896, Luxemburg opposed its support of the self-determination slogan. She said that the proletariat should not be drawn into a "series of sterile national struggles", citing those of the Czechs, the Irish and of Alsace-Lorraine.

In her 1898 study, *The Industrial Development of Poland*, Luxemburg argued that Poland had been decisively integrated into the Tsarist empire by economic development. Neither the Polish bourgeoisie nor the growing Polish proletariat had any interest in restoring an independent Polish state. Only the shattered remnants of the old gentry, the despairing petit bourgeoisie and the intelligentsia were still nationalist. Their project had "not only a utopian but also a reactionary character".

The repeated attempts to unify all the Social Democrats of the Tsarist empire meant that Luxemburg and Lenin's views on the national question were bound to clash. At the Second Congress of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (RSDLP) in 1903, the Polish Social Democrats opposed the pledge to self-determination within the programme (Clause Nine) and walked out when their advice was not heeded.

Again, at the 1908 Congress, Lenin vigorously defended Clause Nine and emphasised how important the right to secede was in winning the trust of the workers and peasants of the minority nationalities. Lenin increasingly believed that a correct attitude to the national question was, like the agrarian question, vital to the proletariat during the bourgeois revolution.

Luxemburg's major work, *The National Question and Autonomy* (1908), argued that the general right to self-determination was an abstract and metaphysical right, like the "right to work" or the "right of every man to eat off gold plates". The independence of most small nations ran against the laws of economic development and would be reactionary, certainly in the case of Poland.

Luxemburg argued on the basis of the strongly economically reductionist logic of her views on the national question in the Balkans, where the hopeless backwardness of the Ottoman Empire made the struggles of the more economically advanced Greeks, Serbs, Bulgarians and the Armenians progressive.

In these circumstances, she argued, their secession was, indeed, desirable. It should not be assumed, however, that Rosa Luxemburg ignored or downplayed Tsarist oppression of Poland. Against it, she advanced the demand for *autonomy* but not secession.

The weaknesses of her positions on the national question lay in a strong economistic tendency. She stressed, in a very unilinear way, that capitalist economic development, once it transcended the bounds of the petty territories of small nationalities, doomed these nationalities to a fruitless struggle. Their bourgeoisie, the natural bearer of the national banner, would inevitably and decisively desert it, leaving only reactionary classes as its champions.

All this ignored the profoundly contradictory course of capitalist development itself, its uneven (and combined) character that might make the bourgeoisie return to national demands. She also ignored the fact that the petit bourgeoisie was, as a class, the constant source of new layers of aspiring capitalists.

But, most importantly, Luxemburg ignored the fact that common national, linguistic and cultural (including religious) oppression could weld the classes of a nation together in a common experience of oppression convincing the masses that separation was the only solution.

Lenin argued that Luxemburg was plain wrong to compare the right of self-determination of nations to the right of "gold plates for everyone" or "work for all". These latter demands clash with the essential economic nature of capitalism. The right of self-determination, however, was a key democratic right, one not in flat contradiction to the very nature of capitalism.

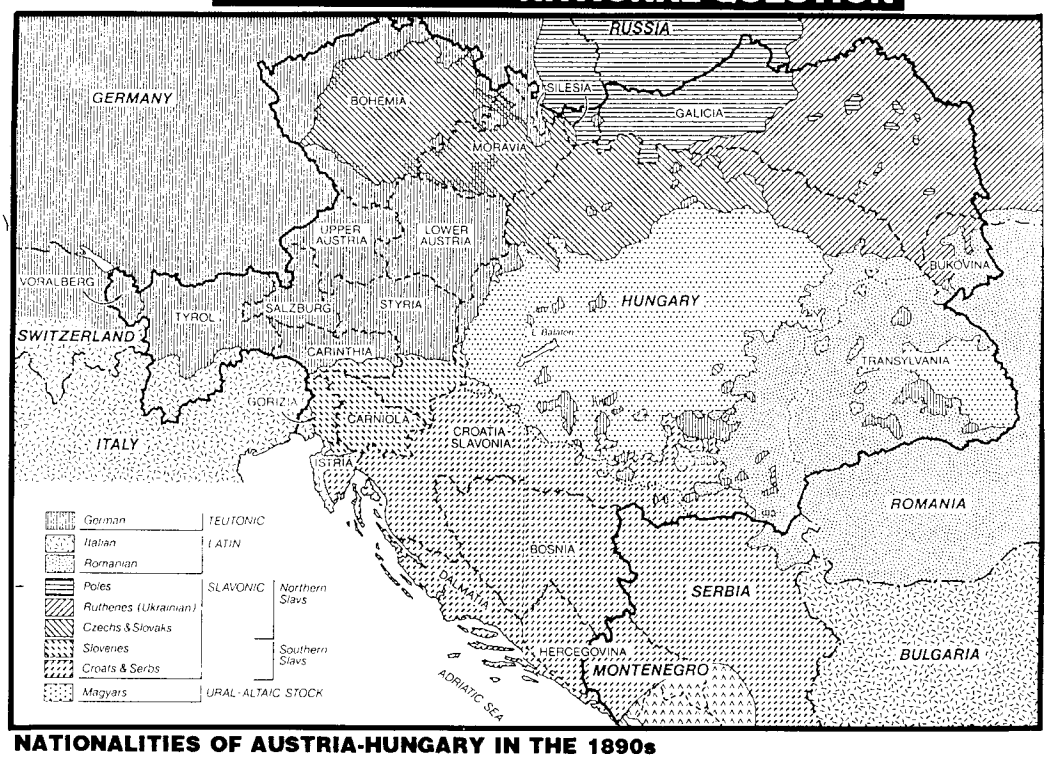
Moreover, the working class needed to use democratic rights to extend its power within capitalism and, therefore, it had to fight for them. If the working class did not take the lead in this fight then other classes—the bourgeoisie and the petit bourgeoisie—would. Lenin repeatedly pointed out that Luxemburg's arguments should lead her to reject all democratic rights in favour only of class rights, of specifically workers' rights.

The pre-1914 Habsburg and Romanov empires were, as multi-national entities, the key focus of the national question for the Marxists of the time. Austrian Social Democracy operated in a state which had upwards of 15 different nationalities, of which two, the Austro-Germans (23.9% of the population) and the Hungarians (20.2%), were ruling nations over the two autonomous halves of the empire. The Polish and Croat nobility also had considerable power in their regions.

The major oppressed peoples were the Czechs, Slovenes and Ruthenes in Austria, and the Slovaks, Serbs and Romanians in Hungary. In addition, there were Serbs, Croats and Muslims in the jointly administered Bosnia-

Herzegovina. The Jewish population, especially the economic and political refugees from the east (Russia and Austrian Galicia and Bukovina) were the target of anti-Semitic "direct action" by the Christian Social Movement and the German Radicals' student following.

Austrian Social Democracy's position on the national question was developed in its definitive form at the Brno (Brünn) Congress of 1899. It resolved that the empire should be transformed into a federal state of nationalities. These nationalities should have autonomy within their self-governing areas and scattered regions should be formed into a joint national union. The rights of minorities should be legally protected and there should be no privileges for any one nationality, including no official state language.[14]



NATIONALITIES OF AUSTRIA-HUNGARY IN THE 1890s

The "Brno Programme" outlined a federal, territorial solution, similar in some respects to that adopted in the USSR after 1922 or in Yugoslavia after 1945. However, it did also assert that the national question was "first of all a cultural demand". The implication was that the authorities for the autonomous areas would concern themselves mainly with questions of language, schooling and culture. The central, federal government would be responsible for social legislation and regulating economic life.

The actual proposal for *personal* national-cultural autonomy, whilst it originated with Etbin Kristan, a Slovene delegate at Brno, was theoretically elaborated by Karl Renner.[15] Renner's explicit aim was to "replace the political struggle of the nationalities for power with the orderly procedure of court and parliamentary transactions". Renner, a civil servant in the Habsburg state machine, and with mental horizons to match, narrowly focused on the "legal concept of nation". He openly espoused "separating the national groups' cultural and educational life from that of the state and the economy".[16]

With a complacently positive attitude to his homeland he went on to recommend to the restive nationalities that they stay within the Habsburg dynastic frontiers:

> "Once the nations are free from the state in national affairs, then there is no better home for them than this Danube state."[17]

But, for Renner, this could only be done on an individual basis. Indeed, his definition of a nation stressed that:

> "The nation is an association of persons of common thoughts and common language, a cultural community of modern people who are no longer bound to the soil."[18]

He insisted that the nation was an association of persons (*ein Personenverband*): "Nothing can decide national affiliation but the nationality declaration of the individual freely made in front of the competent authorities."[19]

This right must exist extra-territorially for all who registered. The German in Bohemia or the Czech in Vienna would be able to attend their own schools and cultural institutions, be taught or entertained in their own language. The strictly non-national central state institutions should be left to deal with military, police, judicial, fiscal and monetary matters.

This, Renner believed, would syphon off nationality concerns, leaving the parliament to trouble itself with social reform. He remained convinced that the "territorial principle can never bring compromise and equal rights, it can only bring with it struggle and oppression because its essence is domination".[20]

Renner, together with Max Adler,

Otto Bauer and Rudolf Hilferding, was a leading figure in the Austro-Marxist school grouped around the journal *Der Kampf* from 1907 onwards. This school rejected what it called materialist metaphysics, which they defined as "the privileging of economic over social relations".

It attacked the predominant Kautskyian "economic determinism" in the Second International which sought the ultimate origins of all social phenomena in the development of the relations of production. Indeed, Adler rejected historical materialism outright, claiming that Marxism is a "sociological" theory, a theory of "social processes" which insisted on the irreducibility of *social* consciousness to an economic base.

This method was, in fact, subjectivist and non-materialist for all its emphasis on the "social" and the "collective". It lay at the heart of all the Austro-Marxist work on the national question and was the basis of Bauer's assertion of the irreducibility (and eternity) of *national* consciousness.

This idea is once again important because Bauer's work is at present undergoing a highly favourable "re-evaluation" by Marxists and non-Marxists alike as "Leninism" is seen as discredited on the national question, as on much else, in the wake of the collapse of Stalinism.[21]

Renner and, following him, Otto Bauer, went on to make an eclectic separation between the sphere of social

consciousness in which national culture was located, and the economic sphere.

They recognised the state-wide and, indeed, international, scope of economic development, and from this deduced the necessity of opposing the subdivision of these states (especially Austria-Hungary), and of eventually achieving a union of these states.

Moreover, they went on from this to split the national question off from the sphere of politics and the state. Renner did this most radically. This split, between the economic-political and the social-cultural, was the ground from which the ideas of national cultural autonomy sprang.

Otto Bauer defined the nation as a community (*Gemeinschaf*), one which experiences the "common reciprocal interaction" of its individuals and which, in turn, replicates itself in the national identity of each individual. Distinctive traits are laid down by a common history over a long period and these make each individual within the nation spontaneously recognise the common identity they share with their compatriots. This applies to all classes, to the totality of associated individuals.

Of course, Bauer did not deny that a common economic condition (i.e. exploitation) was the basis for uniting workers of different nations and for dividing them from "their own bourgeoisie". But he saw this simply as just one more identity which every individual possesses alongside family, regional and sex-gender identities.

Bauer did not hold an a-historical, formalist view of national character. He believed that it had material, economic and social roots that changed over time. Nations were of considerable antiquity but passed through many transformations with changes in the modes of production. Thus, the German nation existed in a primitive Gentile form at the time of the Romans, but this underwent repeated radical changes and transformations with the development of feudalism and capitalism.

In general, the existence of class domination and exploitation resulted in the exclusion of the dominated and exploited classes from the national community and national consciousness. Modern social revolutions, however, broadened the social classes that felt themselves part of, and participated in, the national culture. This process of admission could never be complete so long as capitalism persisted and only socialism would resolve it. Then the proletariat would become truly and completely national.

Bauer's definition of the essence of the nation, therefore, combined all of these elements:

"The nation is the totality of men bound together through a common destiny into a community of character." [22]

This definition subordinated, and relegated to a sec-

Myth and reality

The endless multiplication of nation states or of states claiming to be nation states in the twentieth century is cited in evidence of the universality and the natural character of nations. Nations may not always have existed, goes the argument, but they are the highest possible stage of the human community.

A world of nations is, alongside capitalism and parliamentary democracy, part of the "end of history". But the twentieth century has not just seen a stable and harmonious pattern of nation formation on the West European model.

Rather, they have come into existence through bloody conflict, either in the fight against national oppression or for national privileges.

The attempt to portray nations as natural and eternal is part of an attempt to disguise the class motives that give rise to the struggle for statehood. Yet nation states—"the typical normal state form for the capitalist period"—according to Lenin, were a new phenomenon in human history.

The bourgeoisie can never present them as such. From its earliest days as a class it had to present nations as a re-birth of something which had up to that point been divided, usurped and obscured by feudalism or dynastic absolutism.

But the economic, social, political and legal basis on which it created these states was fundamentally new. In some cases (France) it was able to build on the work begun by enlightened despotism, which was a regime obliged to rest partly on the support of the nascent bourgeoisie and thus to carry out some of the latter's tasks.

The French Revolution did not have to smash the absolutist state but rather purge it of its feudal elements and complete the development of a centralised army, state bureaucracy and a uniform system of national administration.

Unlike the monarchs and the nobility this upstart class of merchants, lawyers and manufacturers could not claim to derive their power either from ancient custom, from royal descent or from God.

Since it was plain that they had acquired their power by revolutions made by the subordinate and exploited classes they had to acknowledge this in some way and maintain that all political power derived from the people, that is, the Nation, of which they were now the leading and representative part. The state thus had to express the sovereignty of the nation. In turn, its citizens had to be patriots.

Thus citizenship is supposed to be more or less identical with membership of the national community; namely, all those speaking the national language, sharing its distinctive national culture, possessing its "national character".

Yet this community was defined by bourgeois ideologists in two different ways, although pragmatic combinations of these are frequent.

The first stresses the historic, the organic and the emotional. For German nationalists of the Fichte type the territory of the nation is itself a part of its physical, corporeal identity.

The nation is "blood and soil". Nations can no more be moved from one territory to another than persons can be moved from one body to another.

This view is based on a refusal to see the nation as a social entity but rather to insist that it is an organism like a plant, an animal or an individual human being. It is anti-rational, insisting on the sacredness of the homeland, its inalienability. It is the basis for claiming and recovering "lost" national territory, inhabited by another people, perhaps for

ond order, the question of antagonistic classes, economic relations, the state, language and territory. At the same time, it elevated common psychological and cultural make-up to the first rank. Far from resolving the national question, by removing national oppression and, thereby, removing an obstacle to proletarian unity, Bauer inscribed on his banner the goal of cementing national unity.

Under capitalism, Bauer supported Renner's non-territorial principle (i.e. non-secession). He consequently favoured the preservation of national-cultural differences and with them the hegemony of bourgeois and petit bourgeois forces over the proletariat. Socialist strategy was limited to the parliamentary struggle for social reforms and the trade union struggle for economic advancement.

This strategy left Austrian Social Democracy loyally supporting the state. No wonder Emperor Franz Joseph could remark that there were only two forces holding his empire together in the years immediately before the outbreak of the First World War—"My army and my Social Democrats".

In February 1913 J V Stalin arrived in Vienna to work with Lenin and other Bolsheviks on a polemical pamphlet aimed at those who had taken up Renner and Bauer's "national-cultural autonomy" slogan. The Bund—the General Jewish Workers' Union of Lithuania, Poland and Russia—was among them. At the Second Congress of the RSDLP, in 1903, the Bund had demanded to be admitted to a federal party as the sole representative of Jewish workers, wherever they were located in the Tsarist empire. Lenin and the *Iskra* faction rejected this on the grounds that it "*sanctions* segregation and alienation, elevates them into a principle, a law" which would be equally bad for Jewish and Russian workers. Lenin believed that a unified, centralised party was necessary to fight the unified, centralised Tsarist state.[23]

In addition, factional fragmentation left the Mensheviks very strong in Georgia. The Bolsheviks who, from the Prague Conference (1912), were trying to reconstruct the party on a democratic-centralist basis against the "Liquidators" and the "Conciliators", were obliged to fight all attempts to turn the party into a federation of national parties. Lenin was naturally pleased, therefore, to enrol "a splendid Georgian" in the task of combating nationalism and decentralisation.

Stalin's "Marxism and the National Question" was, as Trotsky said, "his most important . . . rather his only theoretical work".[24] Nevertheless, Stalin's classic definition, ". . . a nation is a historically formed stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life and psychological make up manifested in a common culture"[25] was, Trotsky said, a "theoretically correct and

in the genesis of nations

centuries or millenia (e.g. Serbian claims to Kossovo, Zionist claims to Eretz Israel).

The second approach treated the nation as a social contract from which the citizen received liberty in return for patriotic devotion. The Jacobins adopted the view that "a nation is a daily plebiscite" and "the people without liberty has no patrie".

Many nations claim a longevity much greater than the epoch of the bourgeois revolutions. In Europe these claims are often rooted in the period of the establishment of barbarian kingdoms on the ruins of the western provinces of the Roman Empire. Suitable figures are co-opted as national unifiers (Alfred the Great for England, Clovis for the French).

With the disintegration of the USSR the people in Mongolia are now "discovering" that Ghenis Khan was the founder of their "nation" in the twelfth century. Also pressed into the service of the national myth-makers is the epic poetry of these and even older periods. Sometimes religious ideology and history also plays a part.

These legendary origins were, however, not originally national myths but feudal, religious and dynastic myths, stories of ruling houses from the Dark and Middle Ages.

In a period that stretches roughly from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century these ancient myths were converted into national myths.

Amongst the more recently formed nations of the twentieth century a similar process has occurred but over a much shorter time, making the "artificiality" of this process much more visible. National myth-making is a task of poets, dramatists historians, and latterly of film makers and novelists.

For a modern national consciousness to be established by the bourgeoisie, these "ethnic" origins, real, mythological or a mixture of the two, play an essential role. A nation has to have a historic dimension—the "community of fate" of the classic definitions of the nation.

This can relate to the actual history of the ancestors of the current population, the cultural achievements of previous inhabitants, the history of the colonisers of a given territory, the religious community and culture of its people.

The national myth-makers treat these ideologies as an independent driving force. They do so in order to displace and obscure the real class motive forces which led to the formation of the nation.

Modern Jewish nationalism (including Zionism) has to transform the religious history of the Jewish merchant/artisan centred communities into the history of a 3,000 year old nation.

Religious ideology has played an important part in the nationalism of oppressed nations like the Poles and the Irish. It remains a resource for nation-creators or dividers as in the Indian sub-continent. Likewise, tribal-confederation identities (Africa) can serve as a starting point for nation creating.

The existence of "ancient nations" in the distant past, (e.g. the ancient Egyptians, Assyrians, Greeks, Romans, Chinese, Aztecs, Incas) in no way proves the millenia-long existence of nations.

Whilst geographical compactness and linguistic homogeneity may have given them a conscious ethnic distinctness the slightest acquaintance with their history reveals the ideological basis of the state and the common consciousness of its people was not based on national identity, let alone the concept of the sovereignty of the nation.

Hence the complete absence in these epochs of such a concept as the right of nations to independent statehood. If this reflection within right/law was completely absent this is because the socio-economic reality which might lead to it was also absent. ●

practically fruitful"[26] answer to the problem since it pointed to a solution founded on a *territorial* and *political* basis.

It is theoretically correct because it locates the birth of nations in the epoch of a definite mode of production before it goes on to identify further specific historical and ideological determinants. It is practically fruitful because it goes on to champion a consistently democratic solution (self-determination up to and including separation) which actually promotes the development of the class struggle.

This starting point promotes democratic measures which facilitate the political and economic emancipation of the toilers and liquidate at one and the same time all forms of national oppression which obscure the proletariat's understanding of its exploitation. Stalin actually suggests that the best solution might be "the autonomies of such self-determined units as Poland, Lithuania, the Ukraine, the Caucasus", but this would only be achievable if the real Russian proletariat fought for these nations to be able to make their own unhampered decision about it.

Stalin's project started with discussions in Cracow with Lenin. Then he moved to Vienna where Bukharin played an important role. Since Stalin could not read German, Bukharin did most of the reading, selected and translated the key quotes and explained the argumentation of Bauer and others to Stalin. Under such circumstances it is very likely indeed that a good deal of Bukharin's method and views found their way into Stalin's text. Trotsky was later to observe that "the logical construction of the article, not devoid of pedantry, is due most likely to the influence of Bukharin, who inclined to professorial ways".[27]

Bukharin was greatly attracted to bourgeois sociological theory. This had an effect on his methodology. Lenin said in his "Testament": "There is something scholastic about him, he has never made a study of dialectics, and, I think never understood it."[28]

This weakness, in the form of an eclectic combination of elements, was part of Bukharin's "contribution" to Stalin's work. On the national question, Bukharin was also clearly impressed by Bauer's emphasis on psychology and culture and it was doubtless due to him that these "factors" found their way into Stalin's famous definition. There was even a whiff of Bauer in the proviso that a nation was a "historically constituted stable community".

These elements taken from Bauer were indeed combined with the need for a common territory, economic life and language. But their mode of combination had a check-list character. Which elements are prior, which generate the others, what are the contradictory relations between them; these questions were not tackled. The eclectic character of this combination was made wooden and dogmatic by the addendum:

> "It must be emphasised that none of the above characteristics taken separately is sufficient to define a nation. More than that, it is sufficient for a single one of these characteristics to be lacking and the nation ceases to be a nation . . . It is only when all these characteristics are present together that we have a nation."[29]

This encouraged a normative, check-list, approach to the characteristics of a nation. Many nations or nationalities would have to be, or have been, denied recognition on the basis of this. Stalin himself ruled out the Jews. Lenin, on the other hand, referred to the Jews as "the most oppressed and persecuted nation in Russia".

Lenin also explicitly asserted that every "national culture" was, in fact, a contradictory whole, with "elements of democratic and socialist culture" alongside of, and subordinated by, a "dominant bourgeois culture". Therefore, the "general national culture is that of the landlords and the bourgeoisie" and even of the clergy in many cases. On these, and many other questions, there were differences with Lenin, who himself never offered a definition of a nation in any of his works and warned repeatedly that a very concrete analysis had to be made of each national question.[30]

Lenin based himself firmly on Marx and Kautsky. He located the national question firmly in the development of capitalism:

> ". . . the national state is the form most suited to present day conditions, (i.e. capitalist, civilised, economically progressive conditions, as distinguished from medieval, pre-capitalist conditions). It is the form in which the state can best fulfil its tasks."[31]

Lenin, like Kautsky, insisted that this was also a political question since it dealt first and foremost with the form of the *state.* Lenin argued against Rosa Luxemburg's claim that economic interdependence made self-determination a utopia. Against Bauer and the Bund's position that the national question was primarily one of culture and psychology, Lenin insisted that the national question was first and foremost a *political* question.

Lenin said that the dominance of small countries by the big capitalist "imperialist powers" no more made the right to self-determination redundant than big capital's domination of the state and parliament made electoral rights and freedoms useless. On the contrary, Lenin pointed out that imperialism had the effect of broadening national struggles beyond Europe onto the world stage:

> ". . . capitalism having awakened Asia, has called forth national movements everywhere in that continent too; that this tendency is towards the creation of nation states in Asia."[32]

Indeed, it was within the state that successfully defended its independence in the 1860s and 1870s—Japan—that capitalism had developed the fastest. In a thoroughly dialectical way, which developed and transcended the work of Marx, Engels and Kautsky, Lenin argued that there were two historic periods in the development of capitalism, periods which, however, co-existed and overlapped in different parts of the globe.

In "Critical Remarks on the National Question" (1913) he analysed two tendencies as being at work within capitalism; first, a drive to the creation of national states and, secondly, a tendency to obliterate national peculiarities by means of the world market. The first tendency predominates over the second in the period of capitalism's youth. The second

comes to dominate the first during capitalism's maturity, demonstrating thereby its ripeness for socialism.

However, capitalism had not developed evenly over the globe. Whilst the second stage was largely completed in Western Europe and North America by the last quarter of the nineteenth century, it was far from complete, indeed had only just begun, in Eastern Europe, Russia and in Asia in the first years of the twentieth.

In the first phase, as had been the case in countries like Germany and Italy, mass national democratic movements had arisen. This self-same process was now to be seen not only in the underdeveloped parts of Europe but in Mexico, China, India and the Philippines. Meanwhile, in the developed states the national question now had little or no progressive role because there was "a highly developed antagonism between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie".

Luxemburg's mistake was to lose sight of the difference between states where this process was complete and those where it was not. In Tsarist Russia the immediate task was now the destruction of the Tsarist dictatorship. In this task the small minority of workers (10% of the population) required allies—the peasantry and the oppressed nationalities.

These nationalities could include the petit bourgeoisie, and even the bourgeoisie *if* they were fighting Tsarism. The proletariat still faced a whole series of bourgeois democratic tasks, and for them to be achieved the proletariat had to be the leader in this revolution.

For this reason, and not simply as a disguise to evade censorship, Lenin called the Bolsheviks "consistent democrats". As such they had to be ardent fighters against all forms of national oppression, of all coercion. Lenin stated:

> "*Insofar* as the bourgeoisie of the oppressed nation fights the oppressor, we are always in every case and more strongly than anyone else in favour for we are the staunchest and the most consistent enemies of oppression." [33]

He continued, in a direct challenge to Rosa Luxemburg's accusation that this meant supporting the bourgeoisie:

> "The bourgeois nationalism of any oppressed nation has a general democratic content that is directed against oppression and it is this content that we *unconditionally* support."

Of course, the proletariat could not support all its aspirations unconditionally, could not support national exclusiveness, the oppression of other minorities within the oppressed nations and so on. Hence the need for the slogan of self-determination.

The question of self-determination, Lenin insisted, "belongs wholly and exclusively to the sphere of political democracy", that is, to the realm of the unhindered right to secede and establish an independent state.

Against Rosa Luxemburg, he objected that autonomy, which might well be a correct democratic arrangement—similar in kind though much greater in scope to democratic municipal and local government—was not the same thing as the recognition of complete sovereignty for the oppressed people. Marxists favoured autonomy in many concrete circumstances, but it was not a right. The only consistent *right* in the national sphere was the sovereign right to decide whether to secede or not. Lenin combined this staunch defence of the oppressed nations with a no less firm insistence that Marxism is opposed to all nationalist ideology permeating or seeking to influence the proletariat.

Marxists have no positive interest in creating or preserving the "national peculiarities" of peoples except inasmuch as they contribute to the common cultural and scientific treasury of a future classless and nationless humanity.

The strategic goal of Marxists is not the proliferation and separation of nations but their merging and, indeed, their ultimate disappearance. Marxists are opposed to the slightest forcible or coercive assimilation into the national identity of a large oppressor nation. But we are also opposed to artificial attempts to hold up or reverse the spontaneous and voluntary assimilation process that is a feature of capitalism and will be even more marked under the proletarian dictatorship and transition to socialism.

Lenin was an implacable opponent

of the Bauer solution which maintained and promoted national consciousness, culture and a cross-class identity, and yet simultaneously avoided a democratic answer to enforced retention within the boundaries of another state and denial of the right to secede. Lenin insisted that supporting the *right* to secede was not at all the same as advocating that every nation concerned *should* secede. Lenin used the analogy of the right to divorce; to advocate the *right* is not synonymous with advocating it in any specific case.

Indeed, Lenin saw the right of nations to self-determination as a means of holding large states, even multi-ethnic states, together. In his polemics, he never voiced any objection to the SDKP's rejection of secession for Poland. He merely objected to their attempts to remove *the right* to such secession from the All-Russian Empire party programme.

He shared with Luxemburg the objective of an immediate common struggle for the democratic and the socialist revolution by the Polish and Russian workers. Both Lenin and Luxemburg recognised that secession of nations was in itself an evil since it always to some degree separates proletariats, divides the forces of the labour movement and hampers the development of the productive forces. But, for Lenin, even all these consequences were a *lesser* evil than coercive or forcible union. This could only poison the relations between the proletariats of the nations concerned by making the oppressed workers identify their oppression as originating from *all* classes of the oppressor nation.

Recognition of this right, for Lenin, also carried the obligation to assist the oppressed nation to carry out this right, that is, to establish in a democratic manner what really is the will of the majority of the nation concerned. When this will is established beyond doubt, then it is the duty of revolutionaries of the oppressor nation to practically aid the oppressed to secede.

We have seen how what was to become the Marxist position on the national question developed over the pe-

riod between 1848 and 1914. Marx and Engels laid down the basic concepts of the nation state as a typical product of the bourgeois epoch. They held from the beginning the view that those large viable national units in which capitalism had developed or was developing, deserved, indeed needed, political independence.

Their attitude to other national claims was subordinated to the perspective for the completion of the bourgeois democratic revolution which formed the core of their perspectives for thirty years after 1848. However, they also began, especially in their writings on Ireland, to lay down a more general appreciation of what the workers' tactics should be when faced with national oppression.

They formulated their dictum "any nation that oppresses another forges its own chains". Their specific conclusion was that a proletariat which does not fight the national oppression visited by its "own" bourgeoisie upon another people would never be able to emancipate itself from this self-same class. It was for the Second International and, in particular, the trend represented at first by Kautsky and later by Lenin, to develop fully the position on the right of all oppressed peoples to self-determination. The rich debate with the "cultural-psychological school" helped the development of the qualitatively superior Leninist position.

It is no accident that those who wish to reject Lenin's position have to return to Luxemburg or Bauer. But Lenin's basic approach, rooting all linguistic, cultural and ideological attributes in the growth of bourgeois and petit bourgeois classes on the basis of capitalist property relations, is vastly superior theoretically to all subjectivist theories.

On the basis of this approach, we can provisionally offer the following definition of what constitutes a nation:

> A nation is made up of antagonistic classes under the hegemony of the bourgeoisie or its agents. It is based on the possession of, or aspiration to gain, sovereign control of a territory on which to organise its economic, social and political life. Its component classes must share a common written and verbal means of communication, (language or languages). On the basis of real and/or mythologised common historical origins, the dominant class and its agents reproduce a national consciousness (which has a psychological, cultural as well as a political component).

Such a definition must not, however, be understood normatively. That is to say, we do not suggest that if a given claimant to nationhood lacks one or more of these characteristics then it is not a nation and, consequently, forfeits the rights appropriate to one. This is the method of Stalinism, liberalism and sectarianism.

Since nations come into being in struggle, it is very likely that, in many concrete cases, important elements of nationhood should indeed be lacking and are only objects of aspiration. Nations are the product of real social struggles in concrete historical periods.

They are also the product of the entire bourgeois epoch (from the transition from pre-capitalist society to the transition to socialism). Thus, nations could exist before the bourgeoisie gained political power and after it had lost it in any single country.

At the same time, Lenin's approach—which, we are convinced, informs the definition offered above—is welded to a fruitful tactical and strategic practice for the proletariat. It aids all genuinely democratic struggles for national liberation where these represent the will of the majority of the nation concerned.

Of course, no one tactic alone can conquer the influence of the most powerful and specific ideology of the bourgeois epoch. But, support for the right of oppressed nations to self-determination does undermine bourgeois nationalism and promote proletarian internationalism. ●

NOTES

1 K Marx and F Engels, "Civil War in France", *Selected Works*, London 1970, p289
2 Letter from Engels to Kautsky 2 February 1882, cited in "Nationalism and Socialism", Horace B Davis, *Monthly Review*, New York 1967, p17
3 We do not have the space here to deal with the much discussed question of Engels' writings in 1848-49 on the theory of the "non-historic" peoples. We hope to do so in a future issue of *Trotskyist International*. But, whether or not this theory had, or has, a valid place within Marxism, Marx and Engels were certainly right that no *absolute* progressive character could be given to all national claims and aspirations, divorced from their international political context.
4 K Marx, Letter to Engels 2 November 1867, *Marx and Engels on Ireland*, Moscow 1971, p141
5 K Marx, Letter to S Meyer and A Vogt, 8 April 1870, ibid pp292-295
6 K Marx, *Collected Works* Vol 21, Moscow 1985, p120
7 F Engels, Letter to Ion Nadeji, 4 January 1888, cited in I Cummings, *Marx and Engels and National Movements*, London 1980
8 Reproduced in G Haupt, M Lowy and C Weil, *Les Marxistes et la Question Nationale*, Paris 1974
9 Ibid, p119
10 Ibid, p121
11 K Kautsky, "Nationality and Internationality" (1908), ibid, p136
12 Ibid
13 K. Kautsky, "The National Tasks of Socialists Among the Balkan Slavs", cited in Renaldo Munck, *The Difficult Dialogue*. London 1986, pp32-33
14 E Nimmi, *Marxism and Nationalism*, London 1991, p129
15 Lenin and Stalin were thus mistaken in ascribing to the Brno Programme the position of "national-cultural autonomy".
16 Cited in J Schwarzmantel, *Socialism and the Idea of the Nation*, London 1991, p154
17 Ibid, p156
18 Ibid
19 Ibid
20 Ibid
21 See for example, E Nimmi, op cit
22 Otto Bauer, "The Nationality Question and Social Democracy", reproduced in Bottomore and Goode (eds), *Austro-Marxism*, Oxford 1978, p107
23 In practice, however, degrees of autonomy did exist within the RSDLP. During the decade after 1902 Polish, Latvian and Finnish Social Democrats—often Lenin's allies—were semi or completely independent parties for whole periods.
24 L Trotsky, *Stalin* Vol 1, London 1968, p235
25 J Stalin, *Works* Vol 2, Moscow 1953, p307
26 L Trotsky, ibid
27 Ibid
28 V I Lenin, *Selected Works* Vol 3, Moscow 1971, p741. Within two years (1916) Bukharin was engaged in a very fierce polemic with Lenin on the national question, claiming, like Rosa Luxemburg, that imperialism had become such a total world system that national state independence was a fiction. In the here and now it was an impossibility and under socialism it would be unnecessary. Thus, Bukharin claimed that the self-determination slogan was now outmoded. Throughout these later debates, which indeed continued after 1917, Stalin played no role.
29 J V Stalin, *Works* Vol 2, p307
30 Lenin never thereafter made any explicit reference to Stalin's pamphlet or its famous definition.
31 Lenin, *Questions of National Policy and Proletarian Internationalism*, Moscow 1970, p47
32 Ibid, p49
33 Ibid

Ways of thinking

Leon Trotsky's writings are a rich source of advice to activists about how to solve difficult political problems. Keith Harvey draws attention to his insights

"The dialectic is neither fiction nor mysticism, but a science of the forms of our thinking insofar as it is not limited to the daily problems of life but attempts to arrive at an understanding of more complicated and drawn-out processes."[1]

We are living in a time of historic changes and reversals in world politics. These sudden changes, revolutions and counter-revolutions, are themselves the product of "complicated and drawn-out processes". The end of the Cold War, the collapse of the Soviet Union, the death of Stalinism as a pole of ideological attraction for the struggles of the world's oppressed and exploited, are just the most obvious manifestations of this.

These events have, in their turn, brought into play long dormant conflicts and given them renewed importance. The unity of imperialism, which revolutionaries have taken as given for nearly half a century, is beginning to break up.

The increasing conflicts between the imperialist powers, expressed in the tensions between Europe and the USA over policing the new world order in former Yugoslavia and Somalia, present revolutionaries with new and, at the same time, old, problems.

In periods such as the present one, just as in the 1945-50 period when the old world order was constructed, a failure to apply a *dialectical* political method in analysing these shifts and turns will result not only in a higher than usual number of errors of perspective and programme but in a qualitative degeneration.

This is because, in relatively stable times, when change is slow and the political and economic landscape seems frozen, the concepts and ideas we have accumulated over time—our doctrine—work well enough for us to understand what is going on around us. But, in a period where, in Marx's words, "there may come days in which twenty years are embodied" then established doctrine alone is insufficient for us to orient ourselves.

In the light of new and unique historical experiences, we need to re-elaborate our ideas, discarding any aspects of our doctrine that have proven inadequate in the test of life. In such times, there is a premium on a political militant having and using a correct political *method,* that is the dialectical method. As Lenin said, "Dialectics *is* the theory of knowledge of Marxism".

Without such a method, revolutionaries can fall prey to dogmatism, impressionism or an eclectic combination of the two. The former arises from an insistence either that reality has not changed or that all its changes can be accommodated within existing conceptual frameworks.

New phenomena are simply reduced to old ones, or rejected out of hand since they do not fit into the dogmatists' lifeless schemas. This approach turns Marxism into a sterile orthodoxy. The orthodoxy of a Kautsky or a Cannon is only marking time until it collapses into opportunism.

Its apparent opposite, shallow impressionism, occurs as a result of a hasty reaction to the most immediate changes in appearances. It sees these changes as invalidating the entire existing theoretical or methodological framework. Its changes of analysis do not proceed on the basis of the same method but rather by abandoning it completely. The bitter fruit of this method is wholesale revisionism.

How can we ensure that what we achieve in periods like the present is a creative re-elaboration, rather than a destructive revision, of the Marxist programme? Naturally, to stress the need for a correct method, even assuming we understand what this method consists of, does not guarantee in advance correct results for our analysis.

Results have to be judged both from their ability to

explain and anticipate real movements in the world and to attract working class forces to fight for them, as well as from the logical internal consistency of the concepts and their compatibility with Marxist fundamentals.

A mastery of the dialectical method, then, is not simply a debate about Marxist philosophy, whose defence is the task of "party intellectuals", while those with little inclination for High Theory can be allowed to get on with practical struggles on the streets or in the factories. On the contrary, it is about consciously mastering a way of understanding the world, a world within which we seek to act at definite points in order to change its direction. As Trotsky remarked:

> "Dialectical training of the mind [is] as necessary to a revolutionary fighter as five finger exercises to a pianist . . ."[2]

Thus, whilst hatred of capitalist exploitation and oppression is a necessary starting point for a revolutionary fighter, it is insufficient for a party seeking to lead the working class by guiding and directing it to the seizure of state power.

What would any worker think of a "doctor" who, negligent of the achievements of biology or anatomy, of the development of a foetus from conception to birth, was armed only with the view that childbirth was one of the beautiful mysteries of life given to us by God? They would recognise such a person immediately as a quack not be entrusted for one minute with the care of a future mother.

The same holds good for politics. It is *possible* to arrive at the right conclusions by hunches, or political "horse sense". But such successes will have an accidental character. The point is that a *systematic, generally consistent* analysis and, therefore, the strategy and tactics based upon it, is only possible with a correct political method.

There are laws that govern *thinking* about the real world "out there". They have to be grasped and used in any act of conscious investigation. Trotsky as a practical activist, as the main leader of the October insurrection and the organiser of the Red Army, as well as a brilliant theoretician, was absolutely insistent on this point.

Unlike Lenin, he never wrote a book devoted to philosophy as such. But he far from neglected the subject. What concerned him most in his writings was how to train party cadre in the method of dialectical logic, so as to equip them with a method of research and analysis. The aim was to enable the cadre to arrive at correct programmatic conclusions and then seek verification for their conclusions in the practice of the party and the class.

Trotsky often used the analogy that "philosophy" was like a toolmakers' guild in relation to all the other sciences. The toolmaker was essential to various branches of production but was not a substitute for them. Armed with the materialist dialectic alone, but ignorant or scornful of the subject matter in all its empirical detail, one will simply make a mess. But armed with it and with the relevant knowledge, real advances can be made.

There is considerable prejudice about "dialectics" amongst those brought up in Anglo-Saxon countries. These difficulties arise because the Anglo-Saxon world has for centuries been the home of a very different method; we call it empiricism. We can crudely sum this method up in the phrase, "seeing is believing", or less crudely, "we don't know anything about the world except what is provided through experience, through our five senses".

Trotsky once argued that British empiricism had a certain merit compared to other methods used. For example, *rational idealism*, very common in the culture of continental Europe, is a conscious enemy of materialism and the dialectic. It fiercely defends the self-sufficiency of formal logic, especially the syllogism, against dialectics and, indeed, against the unexpected discoveries of the natural and other sciences. It seeks in Reason a world of eternal and unchanging truths.

Empiricism, by contrast, contains a primitive, underdeveloped form of the dialectic. By this, Trotsky meant that, where dialectical thought is the logic of *evolution*, of change, of development, empiricism recognises them, but only unconsciously, so to speak.

The great achievements of British scientists in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (e.g. Newton, Boyle) were arrived at because they were rigorously faithful to the notion that what is true is what we observe and record, time after time, through experimentation. Because of this method previous "common sense" views were challenged and overthrown. For example, a greater breadth and depth of observation of the natural world and an accurate recording could reveal to Darwin, despite his naive philosophical stance, that species could and did undergo transmutation.

Of course, this is not to suggest that "facts speak for themselves". Darwin himself had to make *theoretical generalisations*—for example to explain the mechanism of this transmutation—generalisations which could never arise simply out of observation.[3] But his theory of evolution through natural selection did accommodate the observations, was materialist and provided a framework that best explained future observations.

Yet it is important to understand that the relative merits of this empiricism are restricted to the study of natural history and natural science. Unprejudiced recording of the physical, biological and chemical world can reveal the truth of the dialectic—constant motion and change. This is not the case in the study of politics, history and economics.

British people take a particular pride in their "common sense". This trait of the national culture is, as Trotsky noted, a result of the early victory of the British bourgeoisie and the growth of capitalism over several centuries with an accompanying reduction in the influence and power of the church, both in the realm of ideas and in social and economic life.

This led to the adoption of a crude materialism, adequate for practical business and the natural sciences. Their very success with this method, led British bourgeois thinkers to view all attempts at systematic and consistent thought, all attempts at theoretical generalisations, whether idealist or materialist, as a waste of energy. They adopted a sceptical, agnostic attitude to such approaches.

This finds its popular expression in the frequent identification of the theoretical with the impractical. People prefer to use their common sense. But what is "common sense"? Basically, years of practical experience in some field or other—in the factory or in the family for example—has given rise to certain established truths about the way the world operates.

It is common sense not to put your hand in the fire, since experience shows that it hurts. For many good cooks, it is common sense which dictates how to combine a variety of ingredients and in what proportions to make a cake.

Common sense ideas do not arise because people agree one day that they will do something in a particular way. No, they are the result of doing things in a particular way for so long that they are taken for granted, with certain modifications occasionally being made in the light of experience.

Common sense also operates on the basis of formal logic, perfectly adequate for the many occasions where we need to treat the world as, in practice, unchanging. It is common sense because it worked in the past; if it worked in the past, and works equally well today, then things must change very little.

A shop assistant selling vegetables will work for month after month with the idea that a pound of fruit is exactly the same weight each time it is served to a different customer. Proof of this proposition is that the customers act as if it is true. But further investigation would reveal that each "one pound" does not in fact equal one pound. Each successive customer is likely to receive a fraction above or below one pound. Nor are the fruit the same each time and they will vary in size, quality and freshness.

So the idea that one pound of strawberries is equal to any other is only an *approximate* truth. Even the idea that any one strawberry is equal to itself is flawed since each piece of fruit is proceeding from ripeness to rottenness. At a certain point, the decay will make the fruit unusable. But, for everyday use, a pound of strawberries is a pound of strawberries.

Hence, formal logic is far from useless. Indeed, it is essential. But it has limits to its usefulness. Dialectical logic, which stresses that matter and processes are in a constant state of evolution, is superior in understanding more difficult and complex processes and, faced with them, gives a richer, fuller truth. As Trotsky noted:

> "Dialectical thinking is related to vulgar thinking in the same way that a motion picture is related to a still photograph. The motion picture does not outlaw the still photograph but combines a series of them . . ."

It was the German philosopher, Hegel, who first systematised, into general and abstract "laws", the properties of dialectical thought. He did this on the basis of an encyclopaedic knowledge of the natural sciences of his time, the arts, history and, of course, philosophy.

Out of his studies, he summarised the laws of the dialectic. Hegel was an idealist but this did not invalidate the insights he made into these laws. At the very core of dialectical logic, lies the recognition that all natural and social phenomena consist of contradictory parts.

Contradiction is the co-existence of conflicting elements within a whole. The *unity* of these opposed elements for example, capital and wage labour, within the capitalist system, provides the essential dynamic for the movement and conflict. Each of the polar opposites with such contradictions is necessary to the existence of the other. But the contradiction produces development, change: the introduction of new machinery that increases the "productivity" of labour for example. Such adaptations and changes do not simply go on without affecting the totality, the nature of the natural order or social formation.

Another dialectical law concerns the development of *quantitative* changes into a *qualitative* transformation. The temperature of a pan of water increases quantitatively as it is heated. When the temperature reaches 100° C, however the quantitative increase in energy effects a change in the *quality* of the water. At a particular moment of qualitative transformation, the water becomes vaporised.

Related to this, is the antagonism between content and form. What was initially a form which could accurately express a certain content becomes, by further development of that content, unable to accommodate it and stands in contradiction to it.

This indicates for example, that a process of change can proceed *within* a recognisable form gradually and incrementally but only until a point is reached where the form can no longer accommodate the changes. At this point the object is *transformed.*

An example of this is, as Engels noted, the fact that capitalism's competitive compulsion to an "unheard of development of productive forces", runs into contradiction with the relations of production, capitalist ownership: "The mode of production rises in rebellion against the form of exchange".

Connected with this understanding of change is the concept of negation and transcendence. All motion tends to transform objects into their opposite. But such negation does not simply obliterate what it negates, it also combines with and preserves it. Thus, it does not simply resolve the contradiction at the heart of the movement but also preserves it by transferring it onto a higher level.

Primitive classless society was internally highly cohesive, a function of its closeness to simple subsistence. The development of production, the growth of a surplus, the destruction and supercession of communal existence by a society convulsed by class conflict, was the price to be paid for humanity dominating nature. Under socialism, a product of this class struggle, this negation will be transcended: an even greater mastery over nature will be combined with a superior form of internal social cohesion and co-operation, through the reappearance of classless society at a higher level.

Some critics have said that this is a schema foisted onto reality, a variation of the religious myth of an original innocence, the fall and, finally, redemption. But Marxism does not analyse only forward movements in human history but

also retreats. The Russian workers *negated* capitalism in 1917. The triumph of the Stalinist counter-revolution in the 1930s completed the destruction of the political rule of the workers' council state, replacing it with a bureaucratic dictatorship.

The revolutionary political power of the proletariat was *negated* by the bureaucracy, acting in this as an agent of the world bourgeoisie. But the economic conquests of the Russian workers, the planned and statified means of production, were not simultaneously liquidated. An element, indeed *the* decisive element, in terms of identifying any state's class character, the proletarian property relations, was *preserved*. A new phenomenon—the degenerated workers' state—came into existence.

Trotsky knew that this was a temporary phenomenon whose contradictions would also have to be resolved. In the words of the *Transitional Programme*:

> "Either the bureaucracy becoming ever more the organ of the world bourgeoisie within the workers' state will overthrow the new forms of property and plunge the country back to capitalism; or the working class will crush the bureaucracy and open the way to socialism."[4]

This prognosis is being totally confirmed, though belatedly and, so far, in its negative variant. But, more importantly, it guided Trotsky to a revolutionary strategy which combined intransigent revolutionary struggle to destroy the Stalinist dictatorship with the defence of the USSR and the struggle to preserve and democratically transform the planned economy.

This analysis was only possible on the basis of an understanding and utilisation of the laws of the dialectic. Those within the Trotskyist movement who did not, such as James Burnham and Max Shachtman, not only did not and could not understand Stalinism, but ended up on the wrong side of the barricades. Likewise, today, anyone who rejects or misunderstands the dialectical method is likely to meet disaster in analysing the restoration process in the USSR and the other degenerate workers' states.

Before we examine how these laws of the dialectical evolution of matter operate in the realm of cognition, of *thinking* matter, we have to establish clearly that we are materialists. All practical everyday life and all serious natural science is conducted on the basis that the world and the universe exist independently of, and prior to, human consciousness of them.

Human thinking has to work on and with impressions made by this objectively existing world upon our senses and the extensions of those senses that we have created in the form of tools and scientific instruments. Our thinking, including the use of formal and dialectical logic, is not a flight of fancy, a piece of subjectivism that we impose on the world. Some of Trotsky's supporters nevertheless thought this was the case.

Max Eastman, Trotsky's literary agent from the 1920s onwards, thought that dialectical thinking was metaphysical nonsense. The laws of the dialectic did not exist and were merely the human mind imposing fanciful constructions upon the external world.

He claimed to recognise the value of *believing* in dialectical thinking, in that it gave Lenin a tremendous *flexibility* in thinking, enabling him to avoid dogmatism in the face of new facts. But that was all. For Eastman, dialectics was a useful device, but was not lawfully connected to understanding the real world of politics.

Even leaders of the Fourth International in the 1930s were equally scathing about the "scientific" value of dialectical logic. In the Socialist Workers Party (USA), Max Shachtman was a sceptic while James Burnham was an open opponent of the dialectic. He believed that there was no connection between politics and "philosophy". Political positions had to be judged in their own terms without reference to "dialectical logic".[5]

Trotsky's answer was to insist that dialectical logic was no arbitrary construction. On the contrary:

> "We call our dialectic materialist since its roots are neither in heaven nor in the depth of our 'free will' but in objective reality, in nature."[6]

The independent existence and primacy of that world to our thoughts is a real *premise* for Marxists. We reject playing with words as in the objection: "How do we know that the real world exists independently of us if we can only know it through our senses?"

Scientific investigation proves the prior existence of matter before our own existence and, in this sense, we and our minds (which are a form of matter) are related to the external world as a part is to the whole. We are a specialised extension of this world; the laws that govern its operation govern us, though in particular forms that derive from the specialised character of this type of matter.

Since mind is a form of matter, it must have arisen as an adaptation in animal evolution selected and developed functionally. Otherwise, why did it arise as a separate form of matter? Trotsky recognised this when he noted that "Dialectical cognition is not *identical* with the dialectic of nature. Consciousness is a quite original *part* of nature, possessing peculiarities and regularities that are completely absent in the remaining part of nature."[7]

How can we maintain the idea of the primacy of the objective real world "out there" and yet give a creative place to thought? First, we have to grasp the multi-layered nature of consciousness:

> "Consciousness is a generic term for the relationship of animals (including men) with the external world that is brought about by the activity of the brain; it includes sensations, the elementary form of consciousness, perception—the fitting together of sensations into a complex but concrete representation of the complex relationships of complex objects—and ideas, which reproduce the properties and relations of things in abstraction and which are . . . specifically human. Thought is the name we give to this higher form of consciousness, where ideas are produced and manipulated."[8]

The relationship between different aspects of con-

sciousness obeys certain rules.[9] Thus, sensations, perceptions and thought all reflect objective reality, but differently and with increasing precision. Concepts (the product of thought) are both closer to the objective reality that they reflect and, at the same time, more remote from it than sensations; they are closer in the sense that they more accurately reflect its real nature (its movement, the essential inner relationships) but they are more remote in that they are less direct, more mediated, than sensations because thoughts pass through the filter of language.

But thought is active not passive. Thought is a reflection *upon* reality not simply a reflection *of* it. Thought takes the raw material of its own more primitive forms of consciousness (and those of others), including other concepts, and produces novel ones, selecting, mixing, projecting future solutions.

Part of this process of thought is knowing how to think according to the material nature of the subject matter under study and the situation we find ourselves in. When will formal logic do and when is it insufficient?

The logic of thinking lies in this power of abstraction and concretisation, of analysis and synthesis; moving away from and back to sensuous reality, comprehending the connections and relationships of matter.

But this method is not idealistic since it must proceed from an exhaustive study of the facts of the matter, their interconnections, their development. Then and only then will it reveal the inner laws of the real matter and not be an imposition on them. As Isaac Deutscher once said:

> "Dialectics is indeed the grammar of Marxist thinking. But just as one shows ones mastery of grammar not in reciting its rules, but in living speech, so one shows ones grasp of dialectics not in mulling over its formulae, but in coming to grips with specific, large and vital issues in history and contemporary affairs."[10]

Trotsky, in a different context, said much the same in 1926 when he cautioned his party cadre to avoid "communist swagger" which occurs when cadre content themselves with "reciting the rules" of dialectics and fail to study the material under discussion:

> "You cannot foist dialectics on facts, but must derive it from the facts, from their nature and their development . . . To apply dialectic materialism to new areas of knowledge is possible only having mastered them from within."[11]

Naturally, even then, having done all this, a revolutionary fighter is only approaching the most important step. The *truth* of the process of cognition is not in interpretation but in *practice*, in verification, through knowing where in the process of the class struggle to insert the revolutionary party to make an effect. Hence, our insights must find a suitable form for making this influence felt. Given the task, and the audience we are trying to reach, what is appropriate; theory, propaganda, agitation?

Both Lenin and Trotsky consciously formulated many of their theoretical and practical insights guided by the laws of dialectical thought. The theory of uneven and combined development is nothing other than the specific application by Trotsky of the idea of the contradictory unity of the world economy. It starts from this premise and is applied to the totality of late nineteenth century Russia. Not identity but unity of contradictory and diverse aspects.

Lenin hammered away time and again that in politics one should always be guided by one principle in particular—perhaps, for Lenin, the most important law of dialectical thinking—the notion that the truth is always concrete:

> "Marxist thought is concrete, that is it looks upon all the decisive factors in any given question, not only from the point of view of their reciprocal relations, but also from that of their development. It never dissolves the momentary situation within the general perspective, but by means of the general perspective makes possible an analysis of the momentary situation in all its peculiarities. Politics has as its point of departure precisely this sort of concrete analysis. Opportunist and sectarian thought have this feature in common: they extract from the complexity of circumstances and forces one or two factors that appear to them to be the most important (and sometimes are to be sure), isolate them from the complex reality, and attribute to them unlimited and unrestricted powers."[12]

Here, concrete means not the immediately sensuous and visible, something available to our senses to see or touch. Rather, concrete means here a combination of di-

verse abstractions. An abstraction is a one-sided truth viewed in isolation. In analysis, these abstractions must be given their due and consistent weight in order to arrive at a combination that results in concrete analysis. Trotsky's writings are littered with examples.

Trotsky writes of the revolutionary trade union leader who conducts his policy only on the basis of the idea that trade unions are organs of bourgeois incorporation into the state in an epoch of capitalist decay. This is one abstraction and, as such, a partial truth. Another is that trade unions are organs of elementary (economic) class struggle, another abstract and partial truth. We could add more and more to our definition, that they are schools of socialism etc.

But the point is what combination of these truths and what weight should we attach to them at any given conjuncture? This is decisive for determining practice. A Marxist who today conducted policy based solely upon the conservative nature of trade unions, their totally bourgeois character would—under revolutionary sounding phrases—be guilty, in fact, of reactionary politics.[13]

Lenin himself had cause to criticise Bukharin among others for their failure to follow the strictures of this law. In 1920, in Russia, there was a debate in the RCP between Trotsky and Zinoviev on the role of trade unions in Russia. The latter said that they were a school for socialism and the former that they were an apparatus of the state under the dictatorship of the proletariat. Bukharin, falsely claiming that in avoiding the "one-sidedness" of either Zinoviev or Trotsky he was being dialectical in his approach, intervened to say that the trade unions were . . . both. Lenin disagreed:

> "The gist of his theoretical mistake in this case is substitution of eclecticism for the dialectical interplay of politics and economics (which we find in Marxism). His theoretical attitude is: 'on the one hand, on the other', 'the one and the other', That is eclecticism. Dialectics requires an all round consideration of relationships in their concrete development but not a patchwork of bits and pieces."[14]

Lenin said that Bukharin did not recognise the centrality of the law that the "truth is always concrete". This meant that Bukharin stopped at abstractions such as these and did not examine the problem in all its details; hence he arrived at mere eclecticism. He presented no independent analysis of the matter and, therefore, no evidence as to why anyone should treat the first, second, third or fourth aspect of the object as decisive in this situation.

If truth is concrete it must be verified in practice, in the light of experience and be corrected in the light of developments in the real world. Here, the law of the transformation of quantity into quality is decisive. For Trotsky, it was "probably the most important law". Certainly, this is the case for a revolutionary practice.

Trotsky was forced on many occasions to re-elaborate his concepts and ideas to meet changing realities. He says that concepts are necessary but, at the same time as they capture an aspect of the truth, they kill it, since the truth is really a process of change and development.

A concept can be said to analyse a changing reality but, at a certain point, that reality bursts the bounds of the concept's adequacy; quantity turns into quality and we must re-elaborate, or replace, the concept. We must retain what remains valid and reject what does not. We must develop a new and richer concept.

> "Historically humanity forms its 'conceptions'—the basic elements of thinking—on the foundations of experience, which is always incomplete, partial, one-sided. It includes in 'the concept' those features of a living, forever changing process, which are important and significant for it at a given moment. Its future experience is at first enriched (quantitatively) and then outgrows the closed concept, that is, in practice negates it, by virtue of this necessitating a theoretical negation. But the negation does not signify a turning back to *tabula rasa*. Reason already possesses: a) the concept and b) the recognition of its unsoundness. This recognition is tantamount to the necessity to construct a *new concept*, and then it is inevitably revealed that the negation was not absolute, that it affected only certain features of the first concept. The new concept, therefore, has, by necessity, a *synthetic* character: into it enter those elements of the initial concept which were able to withstand the trial by experience, plus those new elements of experience which led to the negation of the initial concept."[15]

As we have seen, the most important single development that Trotsky had to analyse was the degeneration of the Russian Revolution under Stalin's reign. The very idea of Russia being any kind of a workers' state at all came under repeated challenge from within and without the ranks of the Fourth International in the 1930s as the enormity of the crimes of Stalin against the working class inside the USSR became apparent.

Those inclined to empirical and normative thinking could only operate with the idea that a workers' state must include all the following features: workers' management of production, progress towards the eradication of inequalities, progressive withering away of the state, sovereign rule by the soviets. In the absence of any of these the definition could no longer hold.

Trotsky started differently. He first of all argued that the fundamental aspect of the definition of the class nature of the USSR must, for a Marxist, start from the nature of the property relations. Despite the fact that the working class under Stalin did not plan production directly and democratically, capitalism had been completely eradicated. Hence, Trotsky started with a scientific analysis that began with an understanding of what it was that he was studying—the class nature of societies and states.

For quantitative changes to pass into qualitative ones, there would have to be qualitative change in this aspect, the property relations, of the USSR. A degeneration of the political superstructure, however important and grotesque, could prepare the way for this transformation but should not be identified with the transformation itself. Thus, Trotsky's method was historical, charting the stages of a process of change and giving all the specific contradictions their due weight.

The post war history of the Fourth International was plagued by the inability to approach the task of conceptual re-elaboration in a similar manner. After the war the Fourth International was ultimately incapable of analysing correctly the changes that were taking pace in world Stalinism. Its expansion into Eastern Europe after 1944, and the subsequent conflicts between nationally powerful Stalinists, like Tito and Mao, and Stalin himself, disoriented the Fourth International.

Before the Second World War, it was an adequate, approximate truth to define Stalinism as "subservience to, or carrying out the political interests of the Kremlin". But, after the war, this was inadequate to a new situation where new degenerate workers' states had come into existence (with the aid of Moscow). Their very existence demanded that Trotskyists broaden the definition of Stalinism to escape from the limitations of too narrow a definition which identified it with the interests of the bureaucracy of the USSR.

In fact, by failing to do this, and by insisting on the pre-war, narrow definition, the way was paved for the false conception that Tito had ceased to be a Stalinist when he clashed with the Kremlin after 1948. And this was despite the fact that, as early as 1928, Trotsky had laid the basis for a re-elaborated, broader definition of Stalinism when he predicted the ultimate social patriotic degeneration of Stalinism, that is along national lines.

Similarly, only a concrete dialectical analysis could recognise that, whereas before October 1917 workers' states could *only* come into existence through the smashing of bourgeois state power by sovereign workers' councils, the triumph and subsequent degeneration of the Russian Revolution changed (i.e. extended) the ways in which workers' states (even if degenerate from birth) could come about. Bureaucratic social overturns could take place, abolishing capitalism after having first subordinated the working class to a bureaucratic dictatorship.

Again, for many in the Fourth International after the war it was an essential (i.e. not just a historically grounded) truth that the working class had to participate independently in the process of overthrowing capitalism or it could not happen. Thus past truths, embodied in classic formulations, tripped up and confused those who could not use the method of Marxism but only mechanically follow its doctrine.

The notion that the bureaucracy could overthrow capitalism (a revolutionary act) whilst blocking the transition to socialism, which certainly does depend on independent class action (a counter-revolutionary act) could only be derived from a concrete and dialectical analysis.

Since 1989, the Trotskyist movement has been faced with equally important challenges of conceptual elaboration. Trotskyists inherited the idea from Trotsky that capitalism could not be restored inside the USSR, or any workers' state, without a civil war. It was impossible to "wind the film of reformism backwards", as Trotsky said.

But it is clear that this idea was based on a premise, namely that the working class in these countries would defend the existence of post-capitalist property. This was especially true inside the USSR where the working class had made the revolution and experienced the fruits of this before the degeneration.

However, this truth too was historically grounded, like all others. Once the conditions which supported it changed then it was going to be falsified. The fact is that the effects of decades of political oppression and stagnation of the economy at the hands of the Stalinists, plus the fact that, in Eastern Europe, the abolition of capitalism was seen as an imposition from without, meant that the working class did not experience the post-capitalist property as its own, to be defended on the barricades.

On the contrary, the masses were unable to distinguish between the source of their oppression (the Stalinist caste) and the property relations. Change and development, even here, oblige us to reconsider our inherited ideas, to keep what is positive within them and discard what can not be sustained. The next years will be full of challenges to Marxism. As a truly scientific theory, and a weapon in the class struggle, it is hardly surprising that the class enemy tries repeatedly to discredit it.

Many worshippers of the power of the Soviet, Chinese or Cuban bureaucracies will, with the final collapse of their gods, regard Marxism itself as redundant; still others will retreat into a sect-like affirmation that inherited doctrine alone is sufficient. Both will prove incapable of theoretical refinement, fearful of the challenge, lest they only produce revisions. Genuine Marxism will renew its programme, gain new adherents and press on to new victories for our class. ●

NOTES

1 L Trotsky, "A petit bourgeois opposition in the Socialist Workers Party", in *In Defence of Marxism*, New York 1973, p49
2 Ibid, p54
3 In a letter to Alfred Wallace, Darwin himself said ". . . without speculation there is no good and original observation.", quoted in *Darwin*, A Desmond and J Moore, London 1992. p463
4 L Trotsky, *The Transitional Programme*, New York 1977, p142
5 "But there is no sense at all in which dialectics . . . is fundamental in politics, none at all. An opinion on dialectics is no more fundamental for politics than an opinion on non-Euclidian geometry or relativity physics." J Burnham, "Science and style", in *In Defence of Marxism*, op cit, p196
6 L Trotsky, *In Defence of Marxism*, op cit, p51
7 L Trotsky, *Trotsky's Notebooks 1933-35; Writings on Lenin, Dialectics and Evolutionism*, 1933-35, New York 1986 (*Notebooks*), pp101-102
8 P Fryer, *Labour Review* Vol 2 No 5, London 1957, P16
9 "Consciousness splits nature into fixed categories and in this way enters into contradiction with reality. Dialectics overcomes this contradiction—gradually and piecemeal—bringing consciousness nearer to reality." Trotsky calls the relationship between consciousness (i.e. cognition) and nature as "the most important problem of dialectical philosophy", *Notebooks*, op cit, p101
10 I Deutcher, "Discovering Das Kapital", in *Marxism in Our Time*, Berkeley 1971, p261-62
11 L Trotsky, *Problems of Everyday Life*, p263. Also: "The dialectic does not liberate the investigator from painstaking study of the facts, quite the contrary: it requires it. But in return it gives investigative thought elasticity, helps it cope with ossified prejudices, arms it with invaluable analogies, and educates it a spirit of daring, grounded in circumspection." in *Notebooks*, op cit, p92
12 L Trotsky, *The Spanish Revolution*, New York 1973, p292
13 "Dialectical thinking gives to concepts, by means of closer approximation, corrections, concretisations, a richness of content and flexibility; I would even say a succulence which to a certain extent brings them close to living phenomena. Not capitalism in general, but a given capitalism at a given stage of development. Not a workers' state in general, but a given workers' state in a backward country in an imperialist encirclement.", L Trotsky, *In Defence of Marxism*, op cit, p50
14 See Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol 32, pp90-93.
15 *Notebooks*, op cit, p101

Poland stumbles capitalist

The election of a new government in September will herald an attempt to make a

Over the last three years we have argued that the transition from Stalinist command planning to capitalism would be a long and arduous process, despite the fact that the ruling parties collapsed relatively swiftly after 1989. The coming to power of bourgeois restorationist governments throughout Eastern Europe in the years 1989-91 was a necessary, but by no means sufficient, pre-condition for the overthrow of the bureaucratically planned economies.

Between the subjective desire for the return of capitalism and the existence of even a rough and ready regime of accumulation of exchange values lies a stormy ocean of transition in which a number of rocks have to be successfully negotiated.

Like the nuclear family after a successful proletarian revolution, command planning after a successful political counter-revolution has to be replaced, not merely declared "abolished" with a wave of the hand. While the legal status of the old planning ministries may have been be made null and void, while government decrees may no longer "recognise" the legitimacy of the old system and have declared the market king, economic reality has soon borne down upon the newly triumphant regimes.

Some of the difficulties in throwing a bridge between desire and achievement arise from the nature of modern capitalism itself. Capitalism is not simply a market for the exchange of goods and services—this can equally be achieved through barter and a system of simple commodity production.

There is no denying that these forms of exchange and circulation of goods have become widespread in countries like Poland, filling the gap opened up by the demise of centralised, all-embracing planning. Enterprises deal directly with each other, swapping stocks of one good for another, which in turn can be used as "money" to purchase much-needed equipment or raw materials from a third enterprise.[1]

As in all transitional periods in the history of modes of production, the merchant, the speculator and all kinds of legal and illegal intermediaries spring up to oil the connections between different segments of industry and agriculture. These layers, which in "normal" times play an entirely subordinate and even repressed character, in such times as we are now experiencing act as a catalyst, helping the disintegration of the old system and preparing the way for the "new". Private fortunes are made, capital is accumulated in this primitive fashion, some hoarded, some salted abroad, some channelled into the fledgling stock markets.

The progress of the transition period can be partly judged by the degree to which this primitive accumulation becomes subordinated and replaced by different kinds of market, ones which reflect the existence not of merchants but of the owners of capital and wage labour.

Such markets do not spring ready-made into existence; they have to be constructed. Physical means of production have to be given a new monetary value (their capital stock) according to measures that prevail on world capitalist markets within which they will be expected to perform.

This is a precondition for this embryonic capital to be divided into small parcels of ownership (shares) that can then be traded on capital markets where their value can expand or diminish, where they can be taken over or obliterated according to profitability.

But who can perform this act of capitalist calculation, who can institute the market mechanisms? How can enterprises be privatised before there is such a market to be sold into? Who can be given the title to ownership of capital in order that commodity owners can face each other in the market?

The answer to each one of these questions is far from

s on the road to restoration

final push to capitalism. Will they succeed? Martin Suchenak weighs up the odds

technical. They presuppose the resolution of a class struggle, between those classes that exist and those that are striving for existence. The working class is suspicious of, or hostile to, the break-up of its industrial associations into competitive units where this will lead to unemployment and wage cuts; the enterprise managers resist an honest calculation of their own factories' market worth or their debts when it may signal their impending demise.

Industrial manager, government official, financial adviser from the IMF, trade union leader—all eye each other with deep suspicion when the matter of property rights is debated in parliament or in the factory council. The process of turning privilege and power into wealth and title is not, therefore, an easy matter.

Poland is no exception, despite the fact that it entered the transition period with many advantages over its rivals. The experience of the 1981 coup and after, utterly discredited the Stalinists' dictatorship within the working class. This allowed an openly pro-capitalist leadership to reign supreme over the trade union Solidarnosc which, assuming governmental power, could speak for "society" against the bureaucracy.

Turning this to its advantage, the new Polish government of autumn 1989 turned its back on piecemeal monetary reform and in a January 1990 Big Bang of vicious monetary measures, slashed state subsides, unleashed prices and tried to introduce one of the preconditions for capitalist calculation.

Yet by the time President Walesa dissolved the Polish government in May this year, the restorationists had still not managed to take the decisive transitional measures necessary to transform Poland into a recognisably capitalist country. True, a large measure of monetary stability has been introduced, a stock market has appeared,[2] large sectors of industrial production for which there is no effective demand have been cut, tens of thousands of mini-private enterprises have been set up, a free market in agricultural goods has been established, and a recognisable labour market and reserve army of labour is slowly emerging.

But none of this can disguise one plain fact: the bulk of Poland's physical means of production has not yet taken the form of capital.

Despite the growth of the private sector since 1989, the state-owned banks and big industries still dominate the Polish economy. The private sector is concentrated on agriculture, trade (85% of all employed work in private enterprises) and construction (75% of workers in this sector). Only a small number of large scale industrial enterprises have been privatised.

There are a number of reasons for the dominance of state ownership of industry. On the one hand, there is a lack of private capital, both native and foreign, which would be prepared to buy the big companies and thus turn them into capital. Part of the reason for this is undoubtedly the protracted duration of the world recession. This ensures that we are living through a phase of widespread devalorisation and destruction, the turning of capital into vacant physical use-values without an exchange value.

In a period of expansion it might have been expected that many of the use-values in the former Stalinist states could have been transformed more easily into exchange values as the much lower productivity of these enterprises could still have found a market for their produce in a rapidly growing world market.

But since 1989 we have been very far from approaching this situation. In the west highly productive branches of multinational companies have been closing factories. This has significantly held back the tempo of capitalisation of the

means of production in the east. There has been an acceleration of foreign investment into Eastern Europe during 1992 and 1993. But its overall weight in the total economy is very small indeed and mainly confined to joint ventures.[3]

Secondly, the legislative framework is still incomplete. For example, protracted disputes over ownership of property are clogging the courts, some of them originating from before the Second World War. This significantly impedes investment and capitalisation.

In addition, privatisation efforts are meeting increasing resistance from the factory councils and the trade unions. This is not surprising, given that according to the so-called "pact on state enterprises", privatisation meant that the factory councils lost all their rights on the management boards of the enterprises. Even if the privatisation plans of the "mass privatisation programme" adopted by the Sejm in April this year were to be carried through, this would only lead to the privatisation of firms employing 4% of the total workforce and producing a mere 5% of GNP.[4]

Privatisation was only ever one route to capitalism in Poland, even if it was the restorationist's ideologically preferred route. It was quite clear from the experience of the previous governments and the failure of Balczerowicz shock therapy (January 1990), that the way to finally restore capitalism would not be found in privatisation as such, but in restructuring the non-commercial nature of the state-owned industrial and banking system, that is by forcing the notoriously indebted state enterprises and the state banks to act according to profit criteria—to create a large state capitalist sector. As one bourgeois commentator has put it:

> "By early 1992, it became apparent that solutions to the problems of enterprise privatisation and restructuring in Poland would have to include restructuring relations between state enterprises and the banking system, which was dominated by nine state owned banks that had been formally separated from the National Bank of Poland in 1989."[5]

At the beginning of 1992, inter-enterprise debts had already reached some $14.8 billion—approximately 15% of the Polish GDP. Why is the question of the banking system's relations to the state enterprises so important in monitoring the progress of the transition period, indeed, *decisive* in judging the point of qualitative transition in the transformation of the economic base of these societies?

We long ago pointed to the importance of approaching the study of the transition period concretely. We have to analyse the tasks of the transition from the conditions that the bourgeois restorationist governments inherited from the disintegrating Stalinist governments. Without exception, in the 1980s Eastern Europe witnessed extensive decentralisation and weakening of the planning indicators and the regulatory authority of the associated institutions. In Yugoslavia the process of dismantling the method of pure physical indicators in planned output had gone furthest before 1989, in the USSR it had developed the least.

After 1982, Poland travelled some considerable distance along this road before the Party finally relaxed its grip on the political apparatus of government. Did this mean that bureaucratic planning had long ceased to have any meaning in Yugoslavia or Poland in the 1980s? Has capitalism been restored?

Not at all. What occurred was a process whereby the Stalinist planners, desperately seeking to enliven productivity but opposed to introducing democratic control of the plan, deregulated and decentralised decision-making to plant and enterprise level. Day-to-day decisions were delegated and success in meeting plan goals moved away from reliance upon volume targets towards financial surpluses.

But the overall accumulation process—how newly generated wealth was to be used—was controlled by central state institutions and above all by the Central Bank and its specialised satellites (e.g. foreign trade, agriculture). The amount of retained surpluses, some key price levels (especially energy), investment decisions concerning new plant and equipment were regulated centrally.

These decisions were essentially politically motivated and not carried out according to capitalist calculations of profit maximisation or capturing market share from rival enterprises. Prices and output levels were not set according to these twin objectives but rather fixed in a way calculated to direct resources to predetermined military or political goals. These may have been to serve the power interests of one sector of the bureaucracy, to promote regional development or to pacify workers.

The key task of economic restructuring (as opposed to monetary stabilisation) thus centres on the reshaping of the relationship of the Central Bank to the main enterprises, to put these transactions on a primarily commercial basis. Money must broaden out from being simply a means of account to become a measure of capitalist value.

Above all, the Bank must allow money (including, particularly, its credit form) to expand in accordance with the enlargement of surplus value extraction, to promote production and allow the realisation of this value. The Olszewski government tried to tackle this problem by developing a debt-reduction programme which was proposed by the Suchocka government in August 1992. Called the Financial Restructuring Law, it came into effect in March 1993. Its purpose is to use a new $400 million World Bank loan plus the better part of the unused $1 billion IMF "stabilisation fund" to recapitalise the banks and get rid of their debts.

The lack of progress on this front in the three years after the Polish Big Bang accurately reflected the drawbacks of a dogmatic approach to the fashionable neo-liberal restoration strategy which deemed that the best role for the state in the process was to do as little as possible except privatise industry as much as it could as quickly as it could and let the market do the rest.

From the outset, this was a complete failure. There were no markets, only classes and castes with varying and limited control over the production and distribution. Enterprise managers kept production going through pre-existing links, piling up debts between each other with generally worthless promises to pay sometime in the future. The Central Bank

printed money and extended credit to cover these debts and pay wages. Commercial rates of interest on "loans" did not exist; money was not self-expanding value so much as an increasingly meaningless unit of account.

The government could not stand by. As early as 1991 it realised its privatisation programme was getting nowhere fast, bogged down in the sands of working class resistance and international disinterest. Also it was forced to intervene to set a punitive tax on enterprises that awarded decent wage increases. Moreover, in its attempt to get tax revenue it imposed a dividend tax on enterprises' assets.

This merely encouraged the managers to wilfully downgrade the estimations of their assets, thus further hampering the process of capitalisation. In turn, this worsened still further the net weight of the enterprise debts upon the banks' balance sheets, increasing the political leverage of the enterprises over the banks; the financial system had come to depend for its existence on turning over the debts and not foreclosing.

During 1992 and 1993, the government came to terms with its responsibility for shaping the transition to capitalism,[6] although here again progress has been hampered by the need to secure majorities for measures in a parliament in which Solidarnosc or old Stalinist parties' deputies have had to reflect, however inadequately and treacherously, the feelings of the working class.

But action was called for. By May 1992, some 45% of all state firms (which accounted for the bulk of production) were running at a financial loss. Poland was effectively running an extended IMF and World Bank overdraft facility. These imperialist agents should have called the receivers in a long time ago, but it is notoriously difficult to put padlocks on the gates of a whole country.[7]

The March 1993 legislation took a carrot-and-stick approach to the banks. By threats and incentives it aimed to get the Central Bank to take a tough stand against insolvent firms in exchange for releasing the banks from the full debt burden of these firms. Likewise, bad debts of enterprises were to be written off or sold (in exchange for shares), if the enterprises expressed their intention to develop and implement restructuring programmes in order to make themselves profitable and potentially sellable.[8]

But, given the past record of the state banks in forcing their creditors to restructure enterprises, to give loans according to profit expectations, the effect of this legislation remains in doubt. As the government itself admitted, the law would "only be applicable where banks restructure or sell their debt by March 1994".

This means that the whole programme runs the risk that debt write-offs will not be used to meet the aims of the restorationists—forcing unprofitable firms into bankruptcy and potentially profitable ones to capitalise their assets. Rather, it may just open a new round of credits to firms with written-off debts and, thereby, simply reproduce the practice of recent years.

Before the government was dissolved, in May this year, there were few signs of change. In particular, there

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have been hardly any cases where banks resorted to the bankruptcy legislation and brought them court. Despite the restructuring programme there is:

> ". . . still no obligatory trigger to push banks to monitor their clients' cash-flow and debt situation more closely, and no immediate threat of court proceedings to focus enterprise managers' minds on the need for radical restructuring."[9]

The Polish government does not just face a series of technical economic difficulties in restoring capitalism. These occur against a background of mounting hostility and suspicion on the part of the workers. Trade union-based resistance had been mounting as the effects of the 1990 Big Bang shock wore off. Workers began to regain a degree of confidence as the slump bottomed out during the second half of 1992; production in April 1983 was reported 8.1% higher than April 1992. Yet real wages had begun to drop seriously.

More and more workers felt confident enough to protest. The numbers on strike went up from 221,300 in 1991 to 752,500 in 1992.[10] The real offensive of the workers began to gather strength in the summer and autumn of 1992. Some 1,900 disputes were reported in the first quarter of 1993 alone. Naturally, in this climate, popular support for privatisation and industrial restructuring further declined. Therefore, the government resorted to proposing the Pact on Enterprises (sometimes called the Social Pact), which should aid the restructuring programme and the privatisation of the large state enterprises by incorporating the unions.[11]

This was the really new thing that the Suchocka government brought into Polish politics. It has to be seen as a means of supporting the implementation of the laws on debt restructuring and mass privatisation by defusing workers' resistance. The government offered the unions a say in how to privatise and commercialise state enterprises and guaranteed certain rights to influence supervisory broads of privatised enterprises. In exchange, the union leaderships have to ensure social peace.

One element of this class-collaborationist agreement was the introduction of legally binding limits on wage increases which would be negotiated quarterly between the unions, the government and employers' representatives at a national level. The negotiated boundaries would then determine the wages at enterprise level. This kind of national bargaining was an attempt to counteract the relative weakness of management at a plant level, which the workforce had exploited to push through "excessive" wage demands during 1991-92.

This pact was finally signed by Solidarnosc and the OPZZ (All Polish Alliance of Trade Unions) on 22 February 1993. But from the very beginning it was accompanied by a series of strikes. Initially, these were mainly concentrated in mining, particularly in Silesia, where a miners' strike effectively paralysed the region in December 1992. At the beginning of this year, other important strikes took place in the transport sector. A strike of the transport workers in the Lodz

Interview with

We print here an interview with two young Polish militants, "Jan" and "Piotr" both students at one of Poland's main universities. At their request, we have given them pseudonyms.

LRCI: How strong are the trade unions now? What role are they playing in today's crisis?

Jan: There are five trade unions in Poland today. The biggest one is the OPZZ (All-Polish Alliance of Trade Unions). They are yesterday's Stalinists and today's Social Democrats. The OPZZ has about six million members. Its leader is Spicalska who was a former party functionary.

Solidarnosc has about 1.7 million members and Solidarity '80 has about 40,000 members. The KPN on the far right also has its own trade union, which is a scab trade union. Then there are the so-called "independent trade unions" which are Christian-Catholic unions.

LRCI: Which layers of the working class support the trade unions? Where is Solidarnosc strong and where the OPZZ?

Piotr: Solidarnosc is strongest in Silesia, amongst the miners. This is for historical reasons. Whilst Solidarnosc was not founded amongst the mining proletariat, nevertheless the miners played the decisive role in the strikes of 1988, which then led to the so-called Round Table negotiations between the Stalinists and Solidarnosc. The KPN "trade union" is also strong in Selesia, because the KPN itself is very strong there.

OPZZ is strongest amongst the blue collar workers. But there is also the "Union of Polish Teachers", which is a part of the OPZZ, and rivals the presence of Solidarnosc among the teachers. Their strength is about the same. But if they strike separately they have no chance of winning. In Lodz the OPZZ is more important than Solidarnosc. But that does not mean that the latter is irrelevant. Solidarity '80 has localised strength, for example in the Stettin shipyards. There are also "peoples' unions" in the agricultural districts, particularly in northern Poland where an important part of agriculture was collectivised.

LRCI: What is the difference between Solidarnosc, the OPZZ and Solidarnosc '80? How do their demands differ?

Piotr: The reason why these unions cannot unify lie in the past. Solidarnosc bases itself on the traditions of 1980-81. For their leaders it is unthinkable for them to join with so-called "communists". The split between Solidarnosc and Solidarnosc '80 is also historic, going back to conflicts between Walesa and Solidarnosc '80's leader, Jurczyk.

LRCI: So what demands to the trade unions raise, for example, on the question of privatisation, of unemployment, wages?

Piotr: First of all, the demands of OPZZ, Solidarnosc and Solidarnosc '80 hardly differ from each other. For example, their answer to the question of unemployment is that everybody should be employed, because unemployment is bad for the youth. But they do not give any concrete guidance on how these aims could be realised, how we should fight for them. They do not concentrate on this, but rather on pinning the blame for today's misery on each other.

So Solidarnosc blames the OPZZ for its past role under Stalinism. And the OPZZ respond: "Look what you have done over these last four years!" Solidarnosc suggests that the workers would gain if ex-CP members were removed from their posts. They say that the workers would be able to live a life of dignity.

The OPZZ demands that state enterprises should not be discriminated against through taxation on their assets any more, that is, that private enterprises should pay the same taxes. On the question of privatisation OPZZ favour a very slow programme involving the weakest enterprises. This would keep the strongest in the hands of the state.

But, unfortunately, all the important parties and trade unions agree that it is necessary to re-establish capitalism. There is no significant left alternative which can really challenge this today.

All the trade unions are in favour of capitalism, and therefore have to accept unemployment and all the other things which are tied inseparably to capitalism. They only oppose the current way of doing it or elements of the process.

LRCI: What is the relation of Social Democracy to the trade unions?

Piotr: The Social Democrats do not really relate to the unions. On a parliamentary leve they made several proposals such as a Socia Charter. This was rejected by the majority ir parliament.

But liberals and the conservatives are ever more hostile to the trade unions. The liberals for example, want to reduce the role of th trade unions at the factory level, in effec eliminating any real influence the unions coul have on what is happening in the workplaces They wanted to allow the employers the rig to close down plants if workers take strik action.

LRCI: How strong is Social Democracy c the Republic of Poland (SDRP)? How mar members does it have, what is its socia composition? What exact relation is the between the SDRP and the OPZZ? Wha currents exist within that party?

Piotr: The SDRP has 16,000 members. Th

region last February brought traffic in central Poland to a standstill. The government had every reason to be wary of a growth in working class militancy and the potential for a nation-wide generalisation of these conflicts. Therefore, the attempt to tie the official working class leaderships to the overall economic strategy of the government via the "Social Pact" was quite an astute ploy by Suchocka.

This was even more important as in spring this year a new budget was adopted which included further reductions in spending on social security, education and health. In addition, price rises for electricity (10%), petrol (8%), gas (5%), medicine (18%) and public transport (30-80%) were introduced at the beginning of April as well as a tax on wages, which should contribute up to one third of total state revenue in the future. Most of these measures—in particular the budget for 1993—were brought through parliament with the votes of Solidarity deputies. Additionally, the government was able to get the law on privatisation adopted in April with the votes of Solidarnosc and the Democratic Left Alliance (block of the Social-Democracy, the OPZZ and small neo-Stalinist parties).

Polish militants

are hardly any workers in it. Most of the members are intellectuals or ex-PUWP (the ex-Stalinist party) members. In the PUWP the percentage of workers was also very low, about 37%.

But in the SDRP there are hardly any workers. The OPZZ full-timers are usually not SDRP full-timers. There are two wings within the SDRP.

Firstly, the Stalinists, people who still feel themselves to be Stalinists. There are also other Stalinist organisations, who stick very strongly to Stalinist principles. This is the case with some currents inside the SDRP who are represented by people like Miller on the leadership level. But Miller himself is not a 100% Stalinist.

Then there are social democrats. There are also other groups like the "Union of Polish Communists—Proletariat", who stood on the same slate as the SDRP for parliament and who are a part of the Democratic Left. Its members are firm Stalinists.

Outside the SDRP, some small left parties or currents exist. Firstly, the "Initiative Group for a Workers Party". This group criticises the Stalinist system and the SDRP but are still influenced by Stalinist ideas. They fight to keep Polish industry in the hands of the Polish state.

The Socialist Party has a tradition of anti-Stalinism and it split when its leader was expelled because he wanted to form an alliance with the SDRP.

The "Union of Labour" is an organisation of intellectuals which had previously been part of Solidarnosc. They concentrate very much on criticising the SDRP as crypto- Stalinist. It also played an important role in the struggle against clericalism and in the committees against the ban on abortion.

LRCI: There has been an important strike wave over the last months. What role did these groups play in the strikes? What were their demands? What were the main problems which occurred during the strikes?

Piotr: The last strikes were mainly sparked by the cuts proposed in the state budget which affected the wages and jobs of education and heath workers rather than industry. Solidarnosc played the key role in these strikes.

According to the government, 200 schools were on strike while, according to the unions, the figure was 600. All in all, there are about 1,000 such schools in Poland. Solidarnosc even threatened to organise a general strike. But it did not materialise because the government fell before the threatened date. During that strike, conflicts between Solidarnosc and the ex-Stalinist Union of Polish Teachers occurred. This was the reason why the teachers lost in the end.

The split between the unions led to a situation where some schools held exams whilst others did not. This led to growing concern amongst the parents and school students and eventually a large part of the population turned against the strike.

LRCI: What role does the church play? What have the working class and left organisations done against the ban on abortion? What kind of action did they take?

Piotr: All the left organisations have fought hard against the ban on abortion. The Union of Labour organised various committees and put pressure on parliament to hold a national referendum on the question.

They collected more than 100,000 signatures for a petition. The Social Democrats have also protested. Even the liberals were against the ban on abortion, although for different motives.

LRCI: How strong is the church's political influence in general? Is it growing?

Piotr: The forces who want a semi-religious state in Poland are getting stronger. Officially they do not hold a lot of positions.

Jan: But their influence is very strong. For example, the church has its own programmes on TV and radio.

And all the TV and radio programmes must espouse so-called "Christian values". Everyone who rejects these values openly can be punished.

In Posen a cinema wanted to show "The Last Temptation of Christ" and a case was brought against it by the public prosecutor. On TV there have been sackings and personnel changes in response to satirical programmes which lampooned the church.

LRCI: Through which political parties does the church exercise its influence?

Jan: In the first instance via the Christian National Union.

Piotr: In the Democratic Union there is clerical influence, but there are also anti-clericals like Labuda in the party. With regard to the so-called "soft right", for example, people like Alexander Hall, and the liberals, take the church's opinion into consideration in forming their policies. In the KPN, too, there is clerical influence.

LRCI: What are the most important problems and tasks facing the Polish workers' movement today?

Jan: We have to build a real revolutionary alternative. But today these forces are very small.

Piotr: Even if there is now a rise in working class militancy we also have to acknowledge that there is a tremendous political apathy at the same time amongst many workers. This is because they have been betrayed on all sides; they don't believe in anything any more. We have to turn the passive discontent into action. ●

This treacherous policy has met with increasing hostility from the workers, particularly Solidarnosc supporters. This pressure from below was expressed, for example, in the debate and vote on the budget for 1993. The union's leadership accused the parliamentary faction of being "disloyal", because it did not vote against the budget as the Solidarnosc leadership had recommended.

The growing radicalisation of the workers and the polarisation within society was expressed in the strike of public sector workers who are paid out of the budget. There are some 700,000 workers in health, 750,000 in education, 80,000 in science and 30,000 in culture. Up to now these sectors of the working class had protested comparatively little. Their class consciousness had been traditionally hampered by ideas of "professionalism". The high proportion of women amongst them had also led to a tradition of chronic neglect of their concerns by the union leaderships.

However, over the last years these workers have been hit extremely hard by the policies of the pro-capitalist governments. Funding for education, for example, dropped from 12.8% of the budget in 1990 to 8.8% in 1993. Furthermore, all governments since 1989 have been able to suspend the law which required that public sector wages had to keep pace with the national average wage. To add insult to injury, the wage fund for these workers was cut by another 5% in the 1993 budget.

Since the government refused to even consider new wage increases, the primary demand of the workers—negotiations—broke down and the public sector strike, which in the end led to the fall of Suchocka, was launched. According to Solidarnosc and the OPZZ, at least 20% of all workers took strike action. The Solidarnosc deputies in parliament were then pressured to put forward a motion of no confidence against the government; the Solidarnosc union leadership itself threatened the government with a general strike if the motion failed.

This was mainly talk. The motion of confidence was intended as a warning shot, a means to force the government into concessions, rather than bring down a government that Solidarnosc had created and had supported. The actual fall of the government took everyone by surprise.[12]

The stage-managed game proved to be one parliamentary trick too many. A government which always had to rely on its opponents' inability to form an alternative, rather than on its own strength, a government which did not command a parliamentary majority even on the basis of a coalition, proved vulnerable to the growing contradictions within Polish society. Having been handed an unexpected prize by the vote of no confidence, President Walesa—always keen to test his bonapartist powers and hopeful of a stronger and more stable government—exercised his constitutional right and dissolved the parliament and called new elections for September.

The weakness of the party system, its fragmentation into a ludicrous mosaic of small and even smaller parties, reflects the absence of strong native capital and of a stable petit bourgeoisie and middle class in the country. Despite a new electoral law—the introduction of a 5% threshold for parties and an 8% threshold for alliances—it is unlikely that the coming elections will lead to a more stable parliamentary basis for the restorationists. The parties and alliances which will probably be elected on 19 September are not likely to differ that much from the forces represented in the present parliament.

Whilst opinion polls have to be treated cautiously, particularly since they have usually proved to be relatively inaccurate in the past, it is almost certain the major opponents of the ousted government will perform relatively well. The Democratic Left Alliance, an alliance between the ex-Stalinist Social Democratic Party and the OPZZ, will most certainly gain more votes. The same applies to the Polish Peasant Party which was a bloc partner with the PWUP under the Stalinist regime and which is particularly strong in northern Poland where there are still significant numbers of collective farms. Of the right wing opponents to the Suchocka government, the far right nationalist Confederation for an Independent Poland (KPN) will maintain, if not improve, its position. Apart from these parties/alliances, only the Democratic Union and the Solidarity Trade Union, the core of Suchocka's support, can count on defending their positions.

The Christian Catholic right, with the Christian National Union as its most prominent component, may face problems in getting over the 5 % or 8% thresholds. This also applies to the so-called Olszewskiete and ferocious anti-communist forces (Movement for the Republic, Centre Alliance, the Third Republic Movement, the Freedom Party, Christian Democracy and the Christian Democratic Labour Party), which are in the process of forming an alliance called the Polish Union.[13]

There will be a new competitor in the electoral race as well: Walesa's non-party party, the "Nonparty Bloc to Support Reform" (BBWR). Not only is its name similar to Pilsudski's "Nonparty Bloc to Cooperate with the Government" from the 1920s. Walesa's version also takes up the ideologies of corporatism, of dividing the nation along the lines of estates rather than interests and parties:

> "For this reason, [Walesa] has suggested that the bloc be built on 'four legs': workers, employers, peasant farmers and local administration. Each of the four groups would sketch out proposals in twenty points or fewer, to fit on a single side of paper, and pledge to push these specific programmes forward in the new parliament. Implicit in the BBWR is also the need for a stronger executive, Walesa's most consistent political demand."[14]

Walesa clearly aims to profit from the momentum and political strength he has at least temporarily gained by dissolving parliament and announcing new elections. The BBWR would not simply be the President's ally inside parliament, it could also be a vehicle to help strengthen the bonapartist powers of the president should the next parliament prove as unstable and incapable of building the basis of a stable government as the last—which is far from unlikely.

The social base for such a presidential authoritarian bonapartist regime exists in the form of large layers of the

Polish population in the towns and countryside who have already turned their back on party politics, plus a large impoverished peasantry and urban petit bourgeoisie who could form the social base of a bonapartist dictatorship. It is no surprise that the BBWR is concentrating on mobilising these disgruntled layers, centring its appeal on the person of the president in the election campaign.

Such a bonapartist dictatorship may prove the only means of tackling the growing resistance from the working class. Tragically, there is a massive disparity between the anger—even desperation—of the working class and the political weakness of its leadership, the lack of a coherent strategy for safeguarding working class interests by both the OPZZ, the Social Democracy and Solidarnosc leaders. This means that further protests which do not lead to improvements, which exhaust workers' energy without making any real gains, could induce parts of the proletariat to see a "strong leader of the nation" as a lesser evil.

This is a real possibility if we look at the results of many of the recent strikes. For example, the strike of the Silesian miners in April displayed the typical strengths and weaknesses of the Polish working class today. On the one hand, it was an impressive strike in a whole region with fairly solid support.

On the other hand, its demands, basically that the government should take the miners' demands seriously, provide some welfare programmes and hear the miners' representatives, not only meant that the government could easily meet the demands, but also revealed to the enemy the lack of a serious willingness to fight to the finish.

Many reports of the myriad of smaller strikes suggest a similar pattern. Strikes and occupations quite often seem to be a means of expressing the misery of this or that sector of the working class, rather than a means to win a concrete goal. Even the public sector workers' strike, which lit the fuse that blew up the government, ended rather curiously. When the government fell it simply stopped, or more accurately, fizzled out, despite the fact that the wage demands had not been met.

The situation is not hopeless for the Polish proletariat, but its crisis of leadership is profound and far from being resolved. The decisive question will be whether the radicalisation which could be observed, for example, in the public sector strike in Warsaw, can be raised to the level of a coherent economic and political fightback against the next government.

The example of the Warsaw region, under the leadership of Jankowski, clearly showed that within the workers' movement there exists pressure on the official leadership to resort to more radical demands. Jankowski, unlike the national Solidarnosc leadership, demanded "Not only the ousting of the government but the dissolution of the parliament, a halt to all price increases, the postponement of the value-added tax, and tax benefits and new subsidies for state firms." The Warsaw region's Solidarnosc leadership also called for a general strike on 20 May for these demands and was able to paralyse the city's public transport on 21 May.

This also indicates that, in the last period, the Solidarnosc trade union has taken the leading role in most working class protests, despite its small size compared with the OPZZ, which could not decide whether it was a supporter or a rival. Under the pressure of the Polish industrial proletariat in its traditional strongholds, Solidarnosc has become less and less of a safety valve for the government. The conditions are ripe for the workers who struggled so heroically against the Stalinist dictatorship to turn against their new oppressors and would-be exploiters. ●

NOTES

1 "The planning principle would be converted for the transitional period into a series of compromises between state power and individual 'corporations'—potential proprietors, that is, among the Soviet captains of industry, the emigré former proprietors and foreign capitalists." L Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed*, London, 1973 p253

2 The Warsaw stock market has not worked as a means of concentrating capital. In 1992, only 14 firms registered and "compared with their initial prices all but two shares have lost value". (J Tittenbrun, "Der polnische Weg zum Kapitalismus", in: *Prokla 89*, Berlin, December 1992, p611)

3 Not surprisingly, a bourgeois commentator complains: "Foreign investment is still hesitant. In 1992 only DM 6.4 billion had been invested. Most of this came from the USA, followed by Italy, the Netherlands and Germany with a share of DM 400 million." (Quoted in H Schwiesau, "Unser nachbar Polen auf schwierigen Wegen" in *Zeitschrift für.europäischen Dialog und Perspektive 2/93*, p17)

4 M Brusis, "Privatisierungskonflikte in Polen, Ungarn und der ehemaligen CSFR", in *Osteuropa 7/93*, p. 683

5 B Slay, "Evolution of Industrial Policy in Poland Since 1989", *RFE/RL Research Report*, 8.1.93, p25

6 "Most state firms, in turn, showed relatively little interest in, or aptitude for, restructuring, especially since Poland's financial system was incapable of bankrupting insolvent firms that resisted restructuring." and ". . . firms that were chronically unprofitable should be shut down. The absence of available credit-initiated bankruptcy procedures meant that the ministry had to be actively involved in this process as well.", ibid. p22-24

7 ". . . declines in enterprise profitability wreaked havoc with the banks' balance sheets, so that by mid-1992 the viability of 30-40% of their loans was in doubt . . .", ibid

8 One novel creation of the transition period in Poland is the appearance of "vulture capital" markets—markets for the debt of firms that are insolvent or bankrupt; creditors thus make money by feeding on "dying" firms, by redeploying assets that still have any value.

9 D Meth-Cohn, P Koza and M Baker, "The heat is on", *Business Central Europe*, June 1993, p9

10 *RFE/RL Report*, 11.6.93, p5

11 Nevertheless some right wing or liberal government advisers and representatives of the private eemployers criticised the pact as a "sell out" to the unions.

12 The vote on 23 May was seen as a bizarre accident, especially since it was due to the fact that two of the government's parliamentary supporters were absent when the vote took place. Solidarnosc's parliamentary caucus had no idea of what government it wanted to replace the Suchocka government with; it did not think it would win the vote anyway.

13 These blocs are riven by personal frictions, which make it unclear exactly which blocs still exist. For groups like the Union of Labour, the Liberal Democratic Congress (Bielecki) and the Party "X" it will be extremely difficult to leap over the 5% hurdle. It is extremely unlikely that any group will gain more than 15—20% of the vote.

14 L Vinton, "Poland's New Election Law: Fewer Parties, Same Impasse?", *RFE/RL Research Report*, 9.7.93, p17

Religion and the tasks of the revolutionary party

Religious movements are on the rise across the world. What is religion and how do Marxists fight it? Mike Evans reviews the revolutionary approach from Marx to Trotsky

As the twentieth century of the Christian era draws to a close, religion is undeniably undergoing a powerful global revival. Its most dramatic victory of recent times is to have breached the citadel of the officially atheist USSR.

In formerly godless Russia the Orthodox Church is being exposed to competition. Protestant evangelist corporations from the USA are marketing their product in a big way. Jehovah's Witnesses are packing out football stadiums promising to heal the sick, make the lame walk and enact that most elusive of miracles, bring prosperity to the people on the back of capitalism.

Homegrown sects from Africa to Korea have made millions of converts. Muslim fundamentalism has swept westwards from Iran to Algeria and even Morocco, and eastwards to Indonesia.

The young are mobilised around calls for the establishment of a strict adherence to Islamic law. In the Indian subcontinent, first Sikh and then Hindu fundamentalists have declared war on the self-styled secularist traditions of bourgeois Indian nationalism.

In Latin America the pentecostal protestant sects counsel the shanty town poor to forget collective resistance to the established order and seek individual salvation with the Lord. Even in the imperialist democracies there are signs of religious revival and challenges to secularism.

What attitude should Marxists take toward religion? In both its world outlook and method Marxism is consistently materialist; consequently, it is militantly atheistic. Its stance toward religion has its philosophical roots in the materialist philosophers of the eighteenth century. The French materialists—Diderot, Holbach, Helvetius—as Plekhanov noted, "regarded all the psychic activity of man as transformed sensations". From this they drew a radical conclusion:

> "They declared constantly, very ardently and quite categorically that man with his views and feelings, is what his environment, i.e. in the first place nature, and secondly society, make of him."[1]

From this they drew the conclusion that to improve humanity one had to change society. In the eighteenth century the natural sciences were explaining the inner secrets of nature. Newtonian physics, chemistry, botany and physiology displaced superstition. The great scientist, Laplace, when asked by Napoleon where was the Supreme Being in his system exclaimed: "God? I have found no need for this hypothesis!"

For these thinkers the claims of religious truth were just so much deceit and quackery. Asked to account for religion they pointed to the ignorance and fanaticism of the early apostles, the credulity of the masses and later to the corruption and self-interest of the church. It was an outlook that reflected the radical stance of a bourgeoisie that still had to settle accounts with feudalism and its ideological mainstay—the Catholic Church.

But after the French Revolution the bourgeoisie, now in power, found that they had a use for religion after all. A reaction set in in bourgeois thought. Philosophers like Kant and Hegel found a subordinate place for religion either as the foundation of the moral order or as the developing principle of History.

It was left to a new generation of radicals to take up the struggle against clericalism and reaction in the 1830s and 1840s. The first step away from Hegel's theology had come with David Friederich Strauss' *Life of Jesus* (1835). Its target was Christianity. Christianity claimed that its doctrines, unlike those of other religions, were not myths but real history, a true witness of what had happened, namely the incarnation of an omnipotent supernatural being in the person of a definite individual.

The gospels recorded this history and were essential to Christianity's claims. Strauss demonstrated that the Gospel accounts were so internally contradictory that there was no question of taking them at face value, as *historical* accounts.

He held that they were rather the products of a myth-creating community which in developing its doctrines changed

the purported narrative several times over to incorporate these new doctrines. Christianity thus joined the Greek myths, the Hindu poems or for that matter the stories of the Old Testament in the category of religious mythology.

Strauss did not reject Christianity but he turned it into the highest expression of poetic ideal. In this ideal Strauss identified humanity as a species in unity with the divine. This standpoint remained an idealist one but it was also monist, and thus vehemently rejected a division between the material and the spiritual. Clearly it was but one step, albeit a major one, to turn this monist idealist conception the right way up and to see the divine as merely a mythical expression of the human.

This step was taken by Ludwig Feuerbach, author of the *Essence of Christianity (1841).* Marx and Engels—indeed the whole generation of Left Hegelians—were still wrestling with the idealist legacy of Hegel. They interpreted his system as a critique of existing semi-feudal, absolutist conditions in Germany. But they remained trapped in a contradiction between their political radicalism and their continued philosophical idealism.

Feuerbach's book came like a thunderbolt into the intellectual world. Engels was later to write:

> "With one blow it pulverised the contradiction in that without circumlocution it placed materialism on the throne again . . . Nothing exists outside nature and man and the higher beings our religious fantasies have created are only the fantastic reflection of our own essence. The spell was broken; the system was broken and cast aside . . . One must oneself have experienced the liberating effect of this book to get an idea of it. Enthusiasm was general; we all became at once Feuerbachians."[2]

Marx's most famous passage on religion reflects Feuerbach's influence on him. But it also illustrates the way he overcomes the main weakness of Feuerbach:

> "The basis of irreligious criticism is: Man makes religion, religion does not make man. Religion is the self-consciousness and self-esteem of man who has either not yet found himself or has already lost himself again. But man is no abstract being encamped outside the world. Man is *the world of man*, the state, society. This state, this society, produce religion, an *inverted world consciousness*, because they are an inverted world. Religion is the general theory of that world, its encyclopaedic compendium, its logic in a popular form, its spiritualistic *point d'honneur*, its enthusiasm, its moral sanction, its solemn complement, its universal ground for consolation and justification. It is the *fantastic realisation* of the human essence because the *human essence* has no true reality. The struggle against religion is therefore indirectly the fight against the *world* of which religion is the spiritual *aroma*.
>
> Religious distress is at the same time the expression of real distress and also the protest against real distress. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of spiritless conditions. It is the *opium* of the people.
>
> To abolish religion as the illusory happiness of the people is to demand their real happiness. The demand to give up illusions about the existing state of affairs, its condition is the demand to give up a state of affairs which needs illusions. The criticism of religion is therefore in embryo the criticism of the vale of tears, the halo of which is religion.
>
> Criticism has torn off the imaginary flowers from the chain not so that man will wear the unadorned bleak chain without any fantasy or consolation but so that he will shake off the chain and pluck the living flower. The criticism of religion disillusions man to make him think and act and shape his reality like a man who has been disillusioned and has come to reason, so that he will revolve around himself and therefore around his true sun. Religion is only the illusory sun which revolves around man as long as he does not revolve round himself."[3]

Marx recognised with Feuerbach the *alienated* character of religious consciousness. Qualities are taken from human social life—moral ideals, virtues—but then transformed into absolutes, turned into the qualities of an imaginary transcendent being whose perfection in turn condemns and annihilates the worth of real men and women.

Religion justifies and magnifies all guilts and repressions that arise from the oppression of women and youth in the family, the oppression of gay and lesbian sexuality.[4] Then it offers absolution and consolation for them. Religion's essential message is to denigrate humanity's capacity to shape its own destiny, to preach submission to laws "divine" and "natural" which reproduce exploitation.

Marx then recognised the cause of religious alienation as residing in a society of inequality, oppression and exploitation. This real suffering creates the need for religion. As a result Marx's solution is different from Feuerbach's.

Whereas Feuerbach wanted to create a humanistic semi-religion in which Man "worshipped" his own essence, Marx saw that this was entirely useless. The real task was to struggle against and overcome the real social causes of insecurity and suffering. Only then would the necessity for religious opium gradually disappear.

In taking this position Marx made a radical break from the bourgeois atheist view that religion is the main cause of social problems or that the spread of scientific and anti-religious propaganda is the main weapon in this struggle. Likewise, he rejected the anarchist view that God is the ideological embodiment of "Authority" and with the abolition of the state God will also be, as it were, abolished.

Marxism does not locate the cause of human exploitation and enslavement in any ideology, religion included. This explains why Marx, Lenin and Trotsky refused to include atheism in the programme of the revolutionary party. Bakunin and the later anarchists, on the other hand, gave a front rank place to the struggle against religion imagining that it is as easy to abolish God as it is to abolish inequality, the state, money and property.

For Marxists the disappearance of religion will necessarily be a gradual process taking place as all the material causes of alienation in social and individual life disappear and as humanity at last masters its own fate at all levels. Only the end of systematic insecurity in natural, social and psychological life will allow religion to wither away.

This much said, it should come as little surprise to anyone that in the USSR the coercive suppression of religious practice under Stalin—by closing places of worship, impeding the training of priests and the voluntary organisation of religious propaganda—had little lasting effect.

If Stalinism was unable to give the Soviet workers the power to transform nature and society so that all social oppression and insecurity disappeared, then it is no surprise that along with a longing for other commodities in short supply there should be an unsatisfied demand for religious opium.

This demand is now being enormously stimulated as the former Soviet workers experience all the fear and anxiety of the restoration of capitalism. If the workers of the CIS are unable to create a real collective, mass movement of resistance then one can expect the market for religious dope to expand.

In the struggle for the overthrow of capitalism, Marxism does not set as a precondition that first we must rid the masses of religious ideas. As Lenin expressed it:

> "Social Democracy's atheist propaganda must be subordinated to its basic task—the development of the class struggle of the exploited masses against the exploiters."[5]

Lenin gives the example of a strike where Christian workers, even a Christian trade union, may be involved in the strike. Here, he says, for the time of this struggle:

> "Atheist propaganda in such circumstances may be harmful—not from the philistine fear of scaring away the backward sections, of losing a seat in the elections, and so on, but out of consideration for the real progress of the class struggle, which in the conditions of modern capitalist society will convert Christian workers to social democracy and to atheism a hundred times better than bald atheist propaganda."[6]

For Lenin:

> "A Marxist must be a materialist, but a dialectical materialist, i.e. one who treats the struggle against religion not in an abstract way, not on the basis of remote, purely theoretical, never varying preaching, but in a concrete way, on the basis of the class struggle which is going on in practice and is educating the masses more and better than anything else could."[7]

The party's propaganda on religion starts from the view that religion is an ideological (false) consciousness arising out of humanity's domination by nature, class society and the individual's own unconscious or only partially understood psychological nature.

Marxism does not bar people who still bear the psychological chains of religion from joining the fight for the proletarian revolution. It does not even bar them from joining the revolutionary party. If a religious person accepts the revolutionary programme and in practice aids the party's propaganda and agitation—including what it says and does on religion—then they can enter the party's ranks.

TSARIST RUSSIAN TROOPS CARRYING AN ICON

Any contradictions between their activity as party members and their personal beliefs is a private contradiction that they will have to live with. What a religious party member would have to live with is that the party to which they belong does not hold that religion is a private matter.

Religion will always tend to push to the fore what it claims are absolute moral values. The party defends a fighting *class* morality of the proletariat, rejecting the idea that there can be any absolute morality, human or divine, whilst class society and even the memory and customs of it persist.

Religious belief therefore remains in all circumstances a form of ideological and psychological enslavement to the bourgeoisie. The party must by discussion, education and example try to persuade all of its members of the materialist outlook.

The party must publicly defend and expound an avowed atheist world view, especially in countries where a strong religious ideology still grips the masses. In countries where it is not legal to do so this would become part of its illegal work. It can and must refute the claims of religion to historic truth, to rationality and to scientificity.

Marxism encourages all forms of objective and scientific knowledge about nature and the universe, about the history and customs of societies, about human physiology and psychology. The spread of scientific knowledge can only tend to weaken and undermine religious dogma.

Marxism can patiently and objectively explain the multiplicity of competing religions, relating them to the various social formations, modes of production that have given rise to them. Marxists will not fail to point out the savagery, inhumanity and crimes committed in the name of religion through the ages. However, this anti-religious propaganda and agita-

tion must not set out to deliberately shock and outrage the religious sentiments of the oppressed and exploited classes (the anarchist method).

On the contrary, it must seek pedagogic methods to overcome prejudices. Anarchist (and Stalinist) outrages against religious buildings or believers and persecution of their clergy (except insofar as the latter are active agents of the counter-revolution) are completely alien to genuine Marxism.

Such actions in the context of the continued existence of conditions which give rise to religious alienation will have the opposite effect. It will apparently confirm religious ideas, that life *is* a "vale of tears" because they will seem a truer reflection of the conditions experienced by the masses than the lying optimistic official ideology that they are already living in a socialist paradise. Hence the rapid revival of religion once these repressions cease.

We must seek to use the contradictions within the religious outlook, agreeing with anything that is progressive. We should concentrate our fire on the most harmful and reactionary policies or doctrines, pointing out the pro-ruling class nature of the church leaders.

But we must not fight solely against its ideological influence. Through its various churches it seeks to fix heads, indoctrinate and circumscribe the possible forms of behaviour of the citizens of the state. The working class has to free itself from all such slavish adherence to the teachings of the church in political or moral life.

This is most obvious today in the question of women's rights, including control over conception and the right to terminate a pregnancy, and also the rights of lesbian's and gay men to be free of all forms of discrimination. Communists—all communists—must reject the claims of the church, the mosque or the temples to impose reactionary dogmas on the population.

We fight to ensure that for any state the religious beliefs of its citizens should be a private matter. No religious ideology should be taught in schools. All religious propaganda must be voluntary, paid for by the believers themselves, and not infringe on compulsory, secular universal education for children.

Marxism sees the principal weapon against religious alienation as the struggle against all exploitation and oppression, even or rather especially after the seizure of political power by the proletariat.

Whilst strongly supporting the diffusion of atheist propaganda in the 1920s by journals like *Bezbozhnik* ("The Atheist"), Trotsky pointed out with whom this was most successful:

> ". . . the advanced layers of the working class, who went through the school of revolution, that is acquired an activist attitude towards government and social institutions, have easily shaken off the shell of religious prejudices, which was completely undermined by the preceding developments."[8]

The less active or completely inactive strata can retain their religious prejudices and propaganda alone will not overthrow them. What weapons will? Trotsky says public dining halls, nurseries, clubs and cinemas will draw the masses out of the "close little cage of the family flat with its icon and image lamp". Education and, above all, entertainment will replace the theatrical ceremonies of the church with more varied and more rewarding diversions in terms of increased knowledge and greater relaxation.

Everything that promotes the real happiness of the masses, their growing understanding of how nature and society works, will weaken religion's leech-like hold on their consciousness. The liberation of women and of young people, including their liberation from sexual oppression and dependency, was a task the Russian revolutionary workers' state set itself. It is a task that every future workers' state will have to set itself.

In a world where the collapse of Stalinism is combined with a prolonged grinding crisis and stagnation of capitalism, the siren calls of religion are getting stronger once more. Faced with the revolt of the masses against poverty, capitalism and imperialism, various religions have, to preserve their influence, demagogically come forward as fighters against them.

Priests and mullahs, utilising their relative immunity, can became influential in mass struggles. Even archbishops (a Romero or Tutu) and ayatollahs (Khomeini) may come forward as denouncers of oppression.

But they will always be forces for containing these struggles and subordinating the masses to new forms of exploitation and oppression. Worse, if their institutions, the churches or the mosques gain prestige and a state recognised role (as they did in Iran or in Poland) then they will introduce all sorts of medieval barbarity back into political life, such as the oppression of women by the banning of abortion, compulsory veiling and so on.

But we must not forget either that every real struggle against oppression and exploitation undermines and potentially exposes these religious dope pedlars, even the ones who claim falsely to fight for better world in the here and now.

It is up to the revolutionary party to drive home these lessons, to assemble a revolutionary vanguard free of prejudices and able to lead the masses in throwing off not only the heavy chains of capitalist exploitation and social oppression but also the false flowers with which religion has so long sought to conceal them. ●

NOTES

1 G Plekhanov, "Development of the Monist View of History", *Selected Philosophical Works*, Moscow 1961, Vol 1 p546
2 Marx and Engels, "Ludwig Feuerbach and the end of Classical German philosophy"; *Selected Works*, Moscow 1970 p592
3 Marx, "Introduction to a Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law", *Collected Works*, Moscow, Vol 3 pp175-6
4 As a product of millenia, religion's myths, particularly in their artistic expression, contain many insights into social and psychological life and much of imaginative truth and beauty, albeit mixed with the ugly and the slavish. We should credit these merits solely and exclusively to the *human* capabilities of untold generations of real people fighting against the "blind fate" of nature and society.
5 Lenin, *Collected Works*, Moscow, Vol 15 p406
6 Ibid p407
7 Ibid
8 L Trotsky, *Problems of Everyday Life*, New York 1973 p309

Can the USFI reconquer hope?

***Richard Brenner* reviews "Socialism or Barbarism on the Eve of the Twenty-First Century", Programmatic Manifesto of the Fourth International (USFI)**

The historic shift in the world situation since 1989 has shattered many of the illusions of the international left. Stalinism has collapsed. Social democracy has declined in numbers and its leaders shifted sharply to the right. National liberation movements are defeated or in serious retreat.

All this has come as a terrible blow to political tendencies that had based their entire strategy on adaptation to these forces or on schemas involving the uninterrupted development of their socialist potential.

The United Secretariat of the Fourth International (USFI) is probably the most durable practitioner of this method. Since its foundation thirty years ago it has systematically trimmed its politics and programme to whichever national political formation happened to stand at the head of the masses.

The Programmatic Manifesto adopted by the USFI in 1992 has finally been published in English in the USA.[1] Even a casual reading reveals that the decline of the forces which the USFI has aped for three decades has introduced a note of deep disillusion, pessimism and even despair into their analysis.

The 1980s were a decade which witnessed serious defeats for the working class. These were possible because no mass revolutionary parties and international were built during the decisive class battles of the 1970s. So no serious challenge to the various reformist and petit bourgeois formations for leadership of the working class and the other oppressed classes was made. This was the fundamental cause of the failure to translate objective opportunities into real revolutionary victories. And it gets scarcely a mention in the USFI's programme. The strategic and tactical lessons of these defeats are not examined.

The USFI trusted the existing leaderships of the 1960s and 70s to project a leftward orientation that would yield "mass left wings" roughly adequate to the task of socialist revolution. The total failure of these forces to live up to the USFI's expectations is now attributed, not to their own false estimate of these alien class leaderships, but to unfavourable objective conditions. There were no victories because victories were not possible.

This denies the possibility that the many mass struggles of the 1980s could have developed into anti-capitalist challenges to the state or the Stalinist bureaucracy or the possibility of a new leadership being forged in struggle. Was there no anti-capitalist potential in the struggles of the South African workers' movement or the actions of the workers of the Stalinist countries in 1989-91?

Of course, Marxists recognise that a sharp decline of existing mass workers' parties will, in the absence of revolutionary alternatives, involve retreats in the previously achieved levels of class consciousness if parties entirely unconnected to the workers' movement take advantage of the political vacuum. But at the same time the weakening of the hold of mass reformist parties over the working class partly removes the political shock absorbers that post-war capitalism relied upon to contain serious upheavals. Moreover, the economic crisis and stagnation of capitalism and the widespread political crisis create a favourable objective basis for rebuilding the fighting potential of our class, yet this time upon a revolutionary basis.

The USFI is blind to this aspect of the international situation. They speak of an "epoch of a growing mass labour movement" which now, for structural reasons, is at an end. They one-sidedly emphasise the loss of those elements of mass social democratic and Stalinist organisations such as youth organisations, trade unions, sporting and cultural societies, without recognising that what is involved here is not simply a weakening of existing class organisation in certain countries but also the undermining of counter-revolutionary apparatuses that have held the working class movement in check.

The USFI sees in the decline of Stalinist and social democratic parties throughout the world "a serious loss from the point of view of rapidly constructing strong revolutionary organisations" and "a serious loss for the class as a whole". This is because:

". . . tens if not hundreds of thousands of active and exemplary militants—cadres and leaders of workers feminist and anti-militarist struggles, movements of solidarity with 'third world' peoples—have broken in recent years with the Communist and social democratic parties. But in the present context, most are sceptical about the possibility of creating something better."

How sharply this pessimism contrasts with Trotsky's fighting response to the far more serious disillusionment of militants from the mass organisations in the 1930s. In the *Transitional Programme* of 1938 he combined realism as to the immediate results of the defeats with an unshakeable optimism in the new forces arising ready for struggle and capable of rallying to the revolutionary vanguard if only revolutionary vanguard proved capable of providing [illegible]

"The defeat of the Spanish Revolution engineered by its 'leaders', the shameful bankruptcy of the People's Front in France, and the exposure of the Moscow juridical swindles—these three facts in their aggregate deal an irreparable blow to the Comintern and, incidentally, grave wounds to its allies: the social democrats and anarcho-syndicalists. This does not mean, of course, that the members of these organisations will immediately turn to the Fourth International. The older generation, having suffered terrible defeats, will leave the movement in significant numbers . . . When a programme or an organisation wears out, the generation which carried it on its shoulders wears out with it. The movement is revitalised by the youth, who are free of responsibility for the past."

But the only forces which the USFI can imagine as taking the place of discredited reformist parties are those of the right: "Reactionary and retrograde ideological tendencies invade the vacuum thus created."

The potential for revolutionary socialists to [illegible] this crisis to present a new programme for working class is absent from their analysis. And this is hardly surprising when one considers that the USFI's entire strategy has been based on covering up the need for the organisational, political and programmatic independence of revolutionaries. The USFI boycotts the presentation of a clear Trotskyist alternative to the vanguard of the working class, and instead confuse their banner with the left wing of Stalinism, social democracy, ecologism, pacifism and petit bourgeois nationalism.

After pointing to the difficulties that the imperialist democracies are having in the changed conditions of the new world order, it nevertheless asserts that we are seeing a strengthening of the powers of the state:

". . . sowing the seeds of a racist, pre-fascist culture. In the face of this reality, blindness is impermissible. Refusing to clearly see the current dangers—along with who and what are responsible for them—is just as irresponsible and cowardly today as it was before Auschwitz and Hiroshima."

Now the LRCI is the last tendency to downplay the threat posed by the rise of fascist parties in Europe. Our programme contains a militant and practical answer to the rise of the fascist gangs, with the call for the formation of defence squads, for no platform for fascists and the workers' united front. Despite their injunctions about the impermissibility of blindness, the USFI's "programme" contains not a word, not a single practical proposal as to how the workers' movement is to prevent the growth of the fascists.

Instead they spread the defeatist notion that we are already living in a pre-fascist culture. This has nothing in common with revolutionary realism, far-sightedness or responsibility. It is a demoralised, and to those who believe it, demoralising prediction of the probable outcome of the current crisis. Trotsky, in the 1930s, condemned these sort of "dire warnings" that suggest that the battle is half lost before it is fought.

The USFI go beyond the prediction that the right will benefit from the current crisis of the official labour movement to the idea that only the right can benefit from it. The Manifesto toys with the notion that the decline of Stalinism and social democracy is not a result of their betrayals and defeats, but a reflection of an objectively grounded decline in the very conditions for collective organisation. This is little more than a tacit acceptance of the propaganda of the neo-liberals, tinged with nostalgia for the good old days of state sponsored welfarism or bureaucratic planning.

"Individual consumption is encouraged at the expense of collective consumption (social services). Artificial needs are stimulated. Thereby over-consumption of 'new products' is promoted through advertising and market techniques, exploding the myth of consumer freedom. Late capitalism breeds a permanent atmosphere of unsatisfied needs which feeds a permanent generalised frustration.

In addition, growing privatisation of [illegible] consumption more and more deprives individuals of the elementary fabric of human relations. The [illegible] crude egoism of 'every person for herself or himself' is already a source of imbalance, crisis and irrationality in the realms of output, of income and of work, now extends its havoc to the spheres of consumption and leisure.

This privatisation plunges [illegible] even deeper solitude, cynicism and psychological depression by reducing their capacity for mutual communication, affection and reciprocal sympathy—things which become possible when life revolves around a collective unit, be it large or small. This creates new and serious obstacles on the road of acquiring socialist consciousness, of engaging in the fight for a qualitatively superior social order. These obstacles are not insurmountable but they are real. Concrete strategies to overcome them must be worked out."

This Frankfurt School litany of cultural pessimism is utterly reactionary. The increased alienation of the individual under capitalism is the objective cause behind the decline of the "collectivist" ideologies of welfarist social democracy and of Stalinism. It is not the political bankruptcy and treason of these leaderships that has undermined our organisations but the development of capitalism itself which has reduced the capacity of the working class to develop and maintain

socialist or collectivist aspirations. What attorneys for the labour bureaucracy these people are!

This vision of a near omnipotent and totally reactionary capitalism drugging and incapacitating its would-be grave digger is a petit bourgeois dystopia. It also engenders reactionary utopian solutions based on a desire to resist the extension of the alienating effects of modern "late capitalist" society. Marx welcomed the development of capitalism over preceding modes of production, not because it brought deepening alienation in its wake but because it gave rise to the modern proletariat, a revolutionary class whose interests lay in establishing a new collectivised order. But if modern capitalism has reached a stage where it systematically undermines collectivist organisation and consciousness rather than developing the objective basis for them then why not resist capitalist development entirely? The USFI programme nods in this direction with a romantic-reactionary pastoral idyll, in support of pre-capitalist culture against the encroachments of bourgeois development:

> "In the countries of the 'Third World', the cohesion at the heart of the village community, even where it is undermined by the caste system as in India or by a growing social differentiation, has also constituted a serious counterweight, blocking a total domination by prevailing bourgeois ideology and values."

What wretchedness! The hungry, landless rural toilers of the semi-colonial world: their communities, though without adequate healthcare, drainage, and sanitation, suffering diseases and high infant mortality rates eradicated in the West by modern medicine, suffering high levels of illiteracy due to lack of sufficient schools and teachers, can take heart. They are at least barriers to the advance of a bourgeois culture which will bring the "solitude, cynicism and psychological depression" that the leaders of the USFI are so cruelly suffering in Amsterdam, Paris, and Brussels.

But all is not lost! Section 20 of the Programme is entitled "For the Reconquest of Hope". Any reader getting this far will wonder whether these words are intended for the working class or are simply a project for the authors' own psychological therapy.

The revolutionary Fourth International under Trotsky concluded its 1938 programme with the words:

> "The advanced workers, united in the Fourth International, show their class a way out of the crisis. They offer a programme based on international experience in the struggle of the proletariat and of all the oppressed of the world for liberation. They offer a spotless banner."

Unlike the programmes drafted by Bukharin for the Stalinised Comintern or Kautsky for social democracy, Trotsky was not interested in abstract truisms about the socialist future and vague appeals for solidarity and struggle. The *Transitional Programme* provided a method and a system of demands that could be applied and focused to produce action programmes for the working class in particular concrete conjunctures. The USFI does not provide such a programme. It does not even claim to. It even expressly disclaims the need for such an approach. Why it does so is clear enough. Its real method can be seen in its comments on the "movement" against the alienation of labour under capitalism:

> "Revolutionary socialists do not approach this real movement with pre-established criteria. We do not judge it according to whether or not it can be co-opted by the established order, is gradualist or non-gradualist. Given its emancipatory nature it has the potential to strike at the very heart of bourgeois society (active strikes). The task of revolutionary socialists is to realise this potential and to stimulate it through our support and through practical political and theoretical initiatives. We try above all to progressively unify this movement until it attacks the bourgeois disorder in its entirety."

The lesson drawn by the "Fourth International" is that spontaneous working class movements and also the "new movements" of a multi-class character too, should not be "judged" each according to its politics; whether it is "gradualist" (i.e. reformist), or even whether or not it is being transformed into an agency for maintaining capitalism and policing the working class. Whatever its character, rest assured that it has the potential to strike at the "heart" of capitalism.

But for the working class to realise its revolutionary potential it must precisely learn to "judge" its "gradualist" leaders by harsh revolutionary "criteria", learn to renounce their existing leaders and to struggle against them. In short, the working class must build a new party that is committed to revolutionary communist leadership. That is the kind of "support" the workers' movement needs, that is what the "practical political and theoretical initiatives" of the Trotskyists should be directed towards. To "progressively unify" the mass of the working class in struggle it is necessary at one and the same time to divide them from the traitorous leaders and from anyone who seeks to shield them, whether in practice or through the literary circumlocutions of the "Programmatic Manifesto".

This does not mean a refusal to participate in trade unions, real class struggles or any other form of sectarianism, but it does demand an uncompromising fight against the two great reformist apparatuses within the working class movement and a commitment to a set of revolutionary politics independent of those forces.

To advise the workers not to judge their leaders or to tell them not to develop concepts and categories by which to recognise the politics, ideas and propaganda of their leaders is to disarm them in the face of Stalinism and social democracy. It is to obstruct the realisation of the emancipatory potential of the working class.

The entire Programmatic Manifesto of the USFI avoids precision on every serious revolutionary task in order to hold together a motley array of groupings, each adapting to the very different programmes being advanced by differing forces on their respective national terrains. The shrinking and splitting of the USFI sections worldwide gives reason to believe that this catalogue of depressions, fads and exhortations to "hope" will not do the job. And there really is hope for all of us in that! ●

1 *Programmatic Manifesto of the Fourth International*, published by US Supporters of the Fourth International, April 1993. Price: $1.00

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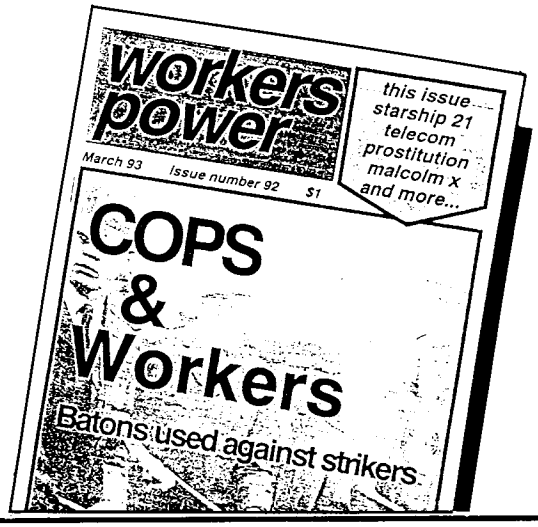

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