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Barbarism in Palestine

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Class Consciousness • Housing Crisis • Postal Strikes
Italian General Strike • Zimbabwe**

Revolutionary Perspectives

Quarterly Magazine of the Communist Workers' Organisation
British Affiliate of the International Bureau for the Revolutionary Party

Series 3, No. 25, Spring 2002

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For correspondence write to:

CWO

P.O. Box 338

Sheffield S3 9YX, UK;

email: **cwo@ibrp.org**

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Editorial

Imperialist Rivalry

As we go to press it appears that the recent barbaric Israeli invasion of Palestinian cities is being scaled down and the siege at Bethlehem is ending. These events have illustrated clearly how the imperialist interests of the EU are coming into opposition with those of the US, not just with regard to Palestine but in the whole Middle East. This is discussed in detail below in the text, "Barbarism in Palestine". This opposition follows a number of earlier trans-Atlantic disputes such as the establishment of an International Criminal Court and the biological weapons inspection agreement, all of which the EU supported and the US has undermined. These developments represent a steady consolidation of opposing blocs.

A further sharp conflict between the EU and the US has arisen over the US decision to impose a 30% tariff on steel imports. This measure, which we discuss below in "The Agonising Death of Little Steel", is a new statement of intent in US policy. For 15 years the US has advocated open trade, and 15 times used the WTO (World Trade Organisation) to force other states to open their markets to US exports, now it is protecting its own markets. The EU is challenging this decision in the WTO but has also threatened £300million of annual sanctions on US imports to the EU from June onward, that is before any WTO judgment. These sanctions, which are targeted on the states that are crucial to Bush's re-election, have infuriated the US, which now threatens further retaliation itself. At present we are still at the stage of threats and counter threats but this does indicate how quickly such a dispute could escalate and undermine the WTO and the current round of trade negotiations taking place in Doha. Both sides realise the catastrophic consequences of undermining of the global organisation of trade, but their economic problems are always pushing them in this direction. The US tariffs do not apply to NAFTA (North American Free Trade

Agreement) and they are being opposed by the EU commission, hence the effect is a further strengthening of the blocs.

Global economic problems

The steel tariffs are an acknowledgment, by the US capitalist class, of the declining profitability of US industrial capital. This is further reflected in the astronomical trade deficit. It is thought that in this financial year this will amount to \$500bn. This in turn means that the US must attract this amount of capital from abroad — a sum that represents 10% of the total world savings. The failure of the US to attract capital on this scale is causing the dollar to fall. A falling dollar will affect the entire global economy and a rapid fall could lead to massive instability. In particular, countries exporting to the US could suffer severely. This is a further threat to peripheral countries, like Argentina, whose survival depends on exports to the US.

The Argentinian crisis has not stabilised. The collapse of the banking system has led to closure of the banks and freezing of deposits. The Argentinian bourgeoisie has, in effect, imposed a type of confiscation of savings. This has further disastrous effects for the middle classes and the working class. Tens of thousands of workers have been laid off. The provincial authorities face bankruptcy and in the face of the collapse of the banking system have resorted to issuing their own currencies. There are now over a dozen new currencies circulating in the country! The country remains entirely in the hands of the IMF and the international bankers who now demand overhaul of the banking system and the reigning in of the provincial authorities and the imposition of massive cuts in their spending. These measures can only produce a further sharp decrease in living standards for the working class. This is now the only solution the capitalist class has to their current problems. Argentina indicates what is in store for other peripheral countries.

UK and Railtrack

The global economic problems of capitalism have been reflected in the UK. For the first time for a decade a

budget openly imposing increased taxation has been passed. This is a reversal of previous policy though it is still not clear whether this represents a decisive change in direction by the British capitalist class. The developments at Railtrack reflect British capital's confusion over which direction to take. While the recent government actions represent a type of *de facto* nationalisation they also represent a capitulation to finance and banking capital interests. Investors in the bankrupt utility were paid off with some £300 million, despite the government's commitment not to compensate them. The method of financing of the new "non-profit" Railtrack means vast sums of interest will go to the lending banks. Railtrack, which has debts of £6.5bn, is to borrow £9bn from the banks and this is to be guaranteed via the Strategic Rail Authority, i.e. the government. This means that the banks will get an annual interest payment greater than the total track access charges. This arrangement amounts to a virtual re-nationalisation but means banking capital is further subsidised by the treasury. The state-capitalist demand so often raised by the Trotskyists, "Nationalisation without Compensation" has been converted by the Labour government into "Compensation without Nationalisation!"

All the economic problems which we are seeing in the world, result from contradictions in the capitalist system itself. In particular, it is capitalism's falling profit rates, which are driving the capitalist class to attack workers worldwide and to attack their imperialist rivals. These problems are derived from the internal structure and operation of capitalism. The ruling class can deflect these problems onto their rivals or other areas of the world, as with the steel tariffs or the bankruptcy of Argentina, or they can make them appear in different forms, as in the carnage in Middle East, but they cannot solve them. The solution lies with the workers of the world and it amounts to the destruction of this crisis ridden system and its replacement with a system producing for the needs of humanity — communism.

Fascist Bogey Used to Reinforce Democratic Illusions

Democracy – a Front for the Dictatorship of the Bourgeoisie

Democracy is, without a doubt, the preferred form of rule for the ruling class in the most advanced parts of the world economy.

Since the years immediately after the Second World War democratic norms of varying degrees have existed unbroken in North America, Australia, New Zealand, Japan and the states now at the core of the European Union. Following the collapse of the Moscow-led bloc the “non-democratic” aspects of the political superstructure in those states have been replaced with a variety of systems more closely resembling the forms existing in the countries of Western Imperialism. The ruling classes in many of the most significant states elsewhere (including India, Israel, certain of the Pacific “tigers” and parts of South America and Africa) have also adopted democratic forms for much of the last fifty years.

The political forms of democracy allowed the bourgeoisie to maintain its social control both during the period of economic expansion in the third quarter of the last century and in the extended period of crisis which followed. It also allowed the ruling class to react to and instigate change in and around the productive processes.

In the old metropolitan countries the decline of heavy industry such as mineral extraction, heavy industry and large-scale labour intensive factory production was managed within the democratic framework. This held true even during periods of high unemployment and significant realignments in the economy. Both during expansion and crisis democratic institutions have proved capable of managing the increasingly complex links and interactions between national and Trans-national state functions, on the one hand, and the operation of capital, in all its guises, on the other.

It is inconceivable that the bourgeoisie in the advanced capitalist countries would lightly choose to abandon political forms, which have served them so well for so long. The continuing usefulness of the democratic charade is shown by the ruling class’s commitment to keep workers involved in the electoral circuses.

The Erosion of Workers’ Democratic Illusions

The British bourgeoisie’s continuing commitment to democracy was clearly illustrated in the weeks leading up to the Council elections at the start of May.

Endless newspaper column inches and hours of radio and TV commentary were devoted to trying to reverse the all-time low levels of voting seen in recent elections, including last year’s General Election. In particular there was an open recognition that the electoral circus is no longer effective amongst younger people or in working-class areas.

The solutions on offer during the council elections were closer to gimmickry than any pretence at defending the supposed benefits and values of democracy. The idea of voting via the telephone or using ICT showed just how desperate the ruling class and their political parties had become. Such ideas appeared in the guise of spreading participation. The reality of the proposals meant that the state actually recognises that many people would put in more effort to buying a can of pop or chocolate bar than into carrying out what is meant to be the highest expression of political participation that the system allows.

An alternative solution, which is at present being considered by the Labour Party, is to make voting compulsory. This idea, which a group of 55 Labour MPs have pledged to give their support to, is a truly brilliant idea for increasing

turnout since those not voting would be fined. Such ideas are an indication of the desperation on the part of our rulers. They are not satisfied with the electorate and one wonders why, in the words of Brecht, they do not simply “dissolve the electorate and elect another one.”

The Use of the Fascist Bogey by the State ...

With the media and political parties already bemoaning the collapse of illusions in elections the threat of fascism was resurrected as a further way of cajoling more voters into the polling stations.

The campaign around the fascist “phantom menace” comprised two phases. The supposed threat of electoral success by the British National Party (BNP) received heavy doses of publicity for weeks before the poll. Using the involvement of a handful of fascist thugs in last summer’s riots the parties and propagandists trumpeted the threat posed by the tiny number of fascist candidates standing in the local elections. The possibility that a stray fascist might accidentally find its way into the hallowed atmosphere of local government by an electoral fluke was portrayed as something akin to the end of civilisation. In the end the British National Party (BNP) won 3 seats in Burnley and Labour and Tory councillors immediately vowed to isolate them in the council. The fact that the gentlemen and ladies of the democratic parties had equally happily presided over local government to force through the poll tax, hammer council tenants, slash services, strengthen the repressive powers of local police forces and carry out every dictat from central government was blithely ignored.

The charade of “all vote to stop the fascists” even reached the stage of the democratic parties in localities, half-heartedly calling for a vote for an alternative party rather than abstention.

The anti-fascist hysteria moved up a gear when the fascist Le Pen, due to the quirkish French Presidential electoral system, found his way into the second round of voting.

Suddenly the fascist menace could be presented in living form. The editorials had a new peg on which to hang their calls against abstention.

The archive film of British skinhead scum was replaced with the plump French fascist. The nonsensical myth was peddled that France was on the verge of descent into fascism but that every citizen could help avert this national shame. The solution to the descent into darkness was unsurprising. Those taken in by the democratic cliques of both left and right simply had to go and cast their vote for the democrat Jacques Chirac. National honour would be restored and, of course, in the process the democratic illusion would be strengthened.

The absurd impossibility of a Le Penite Sixth Republic became a new totem in the anti-fascist rhetoric in Britain, where calls to turn out to vote for democracy against fascism were redoubled in the run-up to May 2nd.

.... And by their leftist camp followers

This artificial struggle in favour of bourgeois democracy against fascism was nothing new to the demagogues of the left.

Regularly since the late 1970s the Trotskyists of various hues and their leftist fellow travellers have launched and relaunched anti-fascist activities and organisations to unite with their liberal, green, social-democratic and other "rainbow alliance" friends.

More obviously than ever before the left's rallying around an anti-fascist banner was blatantly part of the effort to help sustain the hold of democracy in mass consciousness. The call for anti-fascism became a mere shrill whisper in the calls to cast as many votes as possible for democratic candidates on both sides of the English Channel.

In the event the campaign was moderately successful and the turnout rose from an average of 25% in the last council elections to 35% this time. But this is hardly a great victory. It means that winning candidates generally have less than 17% of the electorate's support and cannot seriously be said to represent them.

Anti-fascism – Obstacle to Class Consciousness

Anti-fascism's role as a tool for confusing and negating class-consciousness is nothing new.

During the 1930s the left wing of capitalism used the supposed fight against fascism as one of its main tools to sabotage any working class resistance to the moves towards the Second World War.

The Trotskyists actively sought collaboration with left Social Democratic forces from 1934 onwards and the Stalinised Communist International formally adopted the strategy and tactics of the Popular Front at the Seventh Congress in 1935.

The defence of democracy against fascism turned into participation in bourgeois wars during the Spanish Civil War. It was to be used as a main mobilising tool particularly for the British and French bourgeoisies in the approach to and during the Second World War. In particular it proved a potent tool in the hands of the left who dragooned their followers into the service of their national state under the banner of the fight against the evil of fascism.

Since 1945 anti-fascism has been retained as one of the weapons of the left wing of capitalism. It has, of course, not had to be used as dramatically as during the 1930s. This is because the bourgeoisie has not needed to lure workers into a Third World War against a fascist enemy. Nevertheless anti-fascism or similar formulations have been used to support specific bourgeois factions in a variety of countries including Portugal, Spain and Argentina.

Le Pen — Not as Mighty as the Democratic Sword

Fascism is not a political system standing independently from the class nature of society. It is specifically a product of late capitalism – a system which has outlived its historic potential but which the working-class has not yet been able to destroy and replace. Neither is fascism something which the bourgeoisie embraces unless it feels a need to. As we have already pointed out, in countries such as France and Britain the bourgeoisie

has managed thirty years of crisis using the democratic state mechanisms. This democratic state, with which the needs of capital are totally intermeshed is capable both of lulling the working-class when circumstances allow and imposing restrictions and constraints when need arises.

It would be a totally perverse act by the ruling-class to turn to fascism when the democratic model is still able to contain and destroy any independent working-class mobilisation. The French and British rulers have dumped nationalised industries and shredded large elements of welfarism in the most recent phases of the crisis. Fascism would bring with it a high price to them in the form of heavy state bureaucratic control and other distortions of their economic system.

In the present stage of capitalism's crisis, capital is every day becoming more international and the trading blocs, such as the EU, are bringing nation states into a supra-national unity. Today's bourgeoisie does not need the extreme nationalism, which is the hallmark of fascism, together with its corporatism. Fascism, which is at root an expression of the petty bourgeoisie, can only come to power if the bourgeoisie proper sees a need for it, as occurred in Italy and Germany following World War I. Le Pen's announcement that he would take France out of the EU, restore the Franc and send 4 million immigrants packing show just how far he is from representing the real needs of the bourgeoisie today. Even the fascists' notorious ability to control the class struggle with naked violence is not needed today. The absence of a generalised class resistance and the related absence of a significant Communist vanguard means that bourgeois control is far from being threatened and the democratic control of the working class via the left wing parties and the trade unions is working very well.

Racism, which is another rallying call of the fascists, is very useful to the bourgeoisie for dividing the working class and preventing a united class resistance to its rule. While, on the one hand, the European states need immigrant labour to cheapen the rate of labour power and so increase the rate of

profit on European capital, on the other hand they need to divide the workers to sabotage any class fightback. As has been pointed out above the biggest racist attacks are carried out by the bourgeois state and are daily controlled and justified by the so-called "democratic" parties and their leaders. British ministers, like Blunket the home secretary, manipulate immigration and asylum issues with consummate skill to stir up racism in the working class. Le Pen himself argued that he was no more racist than Tony Blair - only less of a hypocrite.

The fascists will continue to attract layers of the lumpen proletariat and the petty bourgeoisie. Until they achieve the backing of significant layer of the capitalist class the prospect of a fascist coup only exists in their own diseased skulls and that of the media manipulators and their leftist cheerleaders.

Resisting Racist Attacks With a Class Response

The liberals and left wingers highlight the supposed links between the fascist organisations and racism. Acts of racist thuggery and violence are seen as predominantly a result of the fascists and the suggested reaction is to drag workers to the polling stations to vote against fascist candidates.

The argument starts from a false premise and leads to a dangerous and reactionary conclusion.

Of course it is true that some acts of racist violence are carried out by fascist militants but having conceded that point our anti-fascist confusionists miss three points.

Firstly, many racist acts are carried out by individuals who are not members of a fascist organisation but have simply been deprived by the nationalist and racist filth which permeates every aspect of capitalist theory and practice.

Secondly, the fact that members of fascist organisations commit nauseating actions will not be altered one jot by the election of an isolated fascist councillor in the occasional council. The fascists will carry out acts of violence and thuggery because that is part of their political stock-in-trade. Workers voting for Chirac, Blair, Laguiller or the Socialist Alliance will not alter

the mutual attraction between racist thugs and fascist organisations.

Thirdly, the vast majority of racist acts are carried out directly by the agencies of the democratic state. Whether it is the use of stop and search, restrictions on immigration, incidents of death or injury in custody, or the day to day harassment of black youth it is precisely the forces controlled by the non-fascist political parties which maintain and uphold racist legislation and practice.

Communist militants will not disregard acts of racist thuggery. Such attacks should be resisted whether in the work place or on the estates. We would encourage and work with effective self-defence measures both to prevent and retaliate against attacks against workers on the basis of their race or colour.

Our stance is far removed from leftist anti-fascism, which seeks cross-class unity to defend democratic capitalism against its fascist variation.

No Concessions to Anti-Fascism

It is not a coincidence that the reappearance of anti-fascism should take place alongside a minor upturn in the leftist forces, particularly around the "Socialist Alliance" electoral project.

In a situation where many previous labour voters were again experiencing the reality of Labourite government the left needed a new ploy to help maintain their position in the democratic game. The leftists repackaged state capitalist policies were the cornerstone for the "Socialist Alliance" playing their part in hauling those elements back into the electoral trap.

The upsurge in anti-fascism is another step in their strategy of propping up bourgeois democracy from the left.

Against the cross-class appeals of the anti-fascists we address those workers who have seen through the democratic charades.

At the present time the democratic state is a far bigger threat than the

fascist parties to workers and black people

For the self-activity of local workers against racist attacks irrespective of the instigators

Don't fall for the electoral con-trick - Capitalism is our enemy not this or that party

Only socialism will sweep away forever the poisons of racism and bigotry.

K

Internationalist Communist 20

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Nationalism and Imperialism against the Working Class

The months of March and April brought a massive escalation of the bloodshed in Palestine. The familiar cycle of assassinations and daily killings by the Israeli army followed by Palestinian retaliations via suicide bombings has been broken by the army's re-occupation of most of the Palestinian areas handed back under the Oslo agreement. In this manoeuvre the Israeli army has carried out an orgy of destruction, murder, mass arrests and torture all of which has led to the deaths of hundreds of Palestinians and the deportation of thousands to Israeli gaols. The atrocities carried out by the Israeli Defence Force (IDF) include the use of civilians as human shields; summary executions; bulldozing of homes with occupants still inside; a massacre at Jenin and the refusal to allow Red Cross or Red Crescent medical staff in for over a week. This refusal ensured that the wounded would die and allowed the evidence to be hidden. All these actions, which violate the conventions of war, have been well documented in the bourgeois press. It is clear also that these atrocities were planned in advance and that the IDF was consciously following tactics pioneered by other occupying armies, notably those of the Nazis during the Second World War. The Israeli daily *Ma'ariv*, for example, reported an Israeli officer instructing junior officers to study how the Germany Army operated in the Warsaw Ghetto⁽¹⁾. The relevance of

the Warsaw Ghetto was, of course, that the IDF was about to operate in narrow streets with a large civilian population as, for example, the Nablus Casbah, or the refugee camps of Jenin and Gaza.

At the time of writing, the IDF remains in occupation of most of the occupied territories though they have not yet entered Gaza. Under pressure from the US, the Israelis have lifted the 5-month siege of Arafat's Ramallah compound but have blocked any UN investigation of the massacre in Jenin refugee camp.

After Oslo, What next?

For the Israeli state the Oslo peace process really meant that the Palestinian Authority (PA) should act as a surrogate Israeli police force to prevent Palestinian attacks on Israel. With the PA controlling the Palestinian masses the Israelis imagined they would be able to continue settling the occupied territories, but in peace. The settlements in the occupied territories are witness to the fact that all the Israeli governments since 1967 have intended to eventually annex these territories. The settlements are a means to this end. The Israeli bourgeoisie has seen these settlements as a continuation of those established in Palestine before partition. In 1948 these settlements formed the launching pad for the seizure of a vastly greater area of Palestine than that laid down in the UN partition programme of 1947.

Israeli settlements and connecting roads are strategically placed throughout the territories to break up the concentrations of Palestinian population and allow the Israeli army rapid access to anywhere in the territories. As the late Israeli general, Moshe Dayan, boasted, it is these settlements which give Israel the justification for keeping the army in the occupied territories. The dramatic growth in the settlements since the Oslo peace process started shows the Israeli ruling class was never serious about giving back the territories or a Palestinian state. The table below indicates how the numbers of settlements and settlers have grown.

The figures show that settlers in the West Bank have doubled since the Oslo accords while those in East Jerusalem, which Israel formally annexed in 1968, have increased by 20%.

The type of statehood the Israeli bourgeoisie envisages is something similar to the South African Bantustans, pioneered by the apartheid regime. The way this statehood is supposed to operate is that the settlers appropriate the principal sources of wealth while areas not directly under their control serve as sources of cheap migrant labour, labour with no rights in Israel. The economies of these areas are destined to be totally oriented towards that of Israel and the nominal self-rule conceded conceals relations of total domination. While

Israeli Settlers in Occupied Territories⁽²⁾

	West Bank and Gaza	East Jerusalem	Golan Heights
Number of settlements, 2002	130 (West Bank) 16 (Gaza)	11 Areas	33 Areas
Number of settlers, 1967	0	0	0
Number of settlers, 1972	1500	6900	-
Number of settlers, 1983	29 090	-	-
Number of settlers, 1992	109 784	141 000	-
Number of settlers, 2001	213 672	170 400	17 000

the Israeli state is able to impose these conditions by force on the conquered Palestinians, in the long term this cannot succeed without Palestinian agreement. But the Israeli bourgeoisie are not prepared to make any concessions to achieve such agreement. For them the Oslo accords were a smoke screen behind which colonisation leading to annexation could proceed. Their consistent violation of these accords is only further evidence of this.

When Arafat rejected the Barak offer at Camp David and launched the new intifada, in Israeli eyes, he had broken the fundamental principle of the Oslo settlement, namely to act as policeman of the Palestinians. While continually calling on Arafat and the PA to crack down on the anti-Israeli violence they also took matters into their own hands and carried out assassinations, frequent incursions into PA areas to arrest suspects and carry out killings, collective punishments and destruction of PA buildings. All these measures ultimately failed and the present massive assault is a continuation of the same tactics. It is now clear that the target of the latest attacks is the PA itself and the institutions derived from the Oslo process. Although there has been much gratuitous destruction of the basic infrastructure of urban life such as water and electricity supplies, medical centres, ambulances and housing, the primary targets appear to have been Police stations, security buildings and Government offices, which have been systematically destroyed. The leader of the PA, Arafat, has been branded as an enemy, placed under siege and urged to go into exile while his lieutenants have been arrested and taken to Israeli gaols. The PA is now quite unable to function and could not act as an Israeli police force even if it wanted to.

Reoccupation of the West Bank and Gaza

After the atrocities of the last few months it is going to be quite impossible for the Israelis to build up a compliant Palestinian police force and it is clear that the only way attacks against Israel can be controlled is through re-occupation by the Israeli army. The logic of the recent events will necessarily lead to a return to the pre-Oslo situation, which is what Sharon has always

wanted. The majority of the Israeli bourgeoisie are now behind him on this. However, occupation failed to control the previous intifada (1987-93) despite barbaric repression and massive deportations of Palestinian militants. The intifada was only ended by the Oslo agreement, and such repression is bound to fail again. In fact, reoccupation could lead to a repeat of the Lebanese quagmire in which the Israeli army was engulfed for two decades after the 1982 invasion of Lebanon. The only way reoccupation could succeed would be if it were accompanied by the type of measures the Israelis used in 1948 and 1949. These measures which led to the massive extension of the boundaries of Israel from those proposed by the 1947 UN partition plan, led to the mass expulsion of 700 000 Palestinians. They amounted to ethnic cleansing. They were achieved by massive terrorisation of the Palestinian population including massacres of civilians. The recent massacre in Jenin, which is in the long tradition of Israeli massacres of Palestinians, which started in 1948 at Deir Al Yassin and continued at Sabra and Chatila, is possibly a preview of what is planned.

Sharon has always advocated the incorporation of the West Bank and Gaza into Israel and this is the direction his actions are inevitably leading. For Sharon the only real problem is to get his Washington masters to agree. The more the PA controlled areas can be reduced to chaos and lawlessness and resistance can be represented as terror, the more likely he is to achieve this. Sharon's strategy is thus a long term one. However, it is now 54 years since the 1948 expulsions, the interests of US imperialism have changed and Washington would not tolerate fresh expulsions. Israeli policy is thus leading to an impasse.

Palestinian Ruling Class strategy

For their part, the Palestinian ruling class have calculated that continuation of the terror campaign will force the Israelis to withdraw from the occupied territories sooner or later. The *intifada* was Arafat's answer to the offer the previous Israeli prime minister, Barak, made at Camp David in July 2000. This offer was, as explained above, a type of apartheid Bantustan consisting of

only 10% of Palestine. Most of the settlements and their roads were to remain part of Israel; Jerusalem was to be the undivided eternal capital of Israel; a 10 mile wide military buffer zone would encircle the West Bank and refugees kicked out of their homes in 1948 would not be allowed to return. This offer, which was obviously impossible for Arafat to accept, appeared as a provocation. In seeing terror as the road forward the Palestinian ruling class are following the precedents of the Israelis themselves who used terror against the British, forcing them to leave Palestine in 1948 without implementing the UN partition plan of 1947. They are also following the more recent precedent of *Hizbollah* who forced the ignominious retreat of the Israeli army from Lebanon.

For the Palestinian bourgeoisie the *intifada* was the final card in their hand. Any further retreat represents unconditional surrender, and it is, of course, this, which their Israeli counterparts are demanding. The next move will, however, be determined by the interests of US imperialism and in the present circumstances is likely to entail Israeli concessions.

The struggle in Palestine, as we have constantly pointed out⁽³⁾, is part of a wider imperialist struggle to dominate this region of the world and control its principal resource, oil. The partition of Palestine and the consequent establishment of the state of Israel was engineered by the US as a means of ousting British and French influence from the area after World War Two, and Israel has remained the US's principal ally in the region ever since. With the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the US's rival in the area disappeared and the US attempted to impose an American peace (*Pax Americana*) on the area. However, the removal of Russian imperialism from the region did not mean the removal of imperialist rivalry. Imperialist rivalry springs from the operation of the capitalist system itself and it is not surprising that the EU is openly moving into opposition to the US, not only in Palestine, but also over the entire policy of US imperialism in the Middle East.

***Pax Americana* under threat**

Although the US has always seen Israel as its principal ally in the region and the local protector of its

interests, it has also required Arab client states to give it access to the oil resources of the region. Since the state of Israel was created by forcefully seizing Palestinian land, and since Arab regimes have fought wars to recover this land there has always been hostility between Israel and the US's Arab clients. The Palestinian problem has always been the weak point of US imperialism's strategy. The US has used economic and military power to make its Arab clients accept its Israeli ally and sign up to *Pax Americana*. By use of US aid, Jordan and Egypt have been obliged to sign peace treaties with Israel, while the Gulf states, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait now all have US bases and US troops stationed in their territories. Officially this is to protect them against Iraq and bring them into a common *de facto* alliance against US enemies in the region. The US has, in this way, managed to control the major oil producers and the major oil supply route of the world. For the US, the next step is the elimination of those regimes which still oppose its interests in the region, namely Iraq and Iran, and to take control of their oil reserves. The real reason for the proposed attack on Iraq is that it contains the second largest untapped reserves of oil after the Caspian Basin. Just as the Afghan war has brought the US imperialism closer to the Caspian deposits, so a war with Iraq would give it access to the Iraqi reserves. In March US vice president Cheney was sent to the area to drum up support for an invasion of Iraq.

The Palestinian conflict is threatening to upset the US plans for Iraq and the region as a whole. There can be little doubt that Sharon's assault on the Palestinian territories was approved by Washington. The ridiculous spectacle of Bush alternatively saying he supported Israel's right to defend itself, its war on "terror" and its punishment of Arafat and then saying the Israeli army should withdraw immediately was designed to provide cover for his Arab client states. The same is true of Powell's mission to the area, whose slow progress gave the IDF ample time to complete their massacre in Jenin before he reached Israel. Bush was, in effect, making a fool of his Secretary of State by allowing him to appear powerless and incompetent, in order to appease his

Arab clients. It is significant that Bush now says he is satisfied with Israeli withdrawal while their army still occupies all the major towns of the West Bank in flagrant violation of the Oslo accords of which the US itself is a guarantor.

The Arab regimes which are the US's clients are desperately unpopular and corrupt. They are consequently highly vulnerable to populist criticism from their opponents who demand they cut links with the US because its Israeli ally, whom it arms to the teeth, is daily butchering Palestinians in the pursuit of a greater Israel. If these regimes, notably Saudi Arabia and Egypt, were overthrown, they would be replaced with anti-US regimes. The US would then risk the repetition of what happened to it in Iran in 1979. The US support for Israel has led Iraq to call for the Arabs to impose an oil embargo on all countries supporting Israel. Although Saudi Arabia has dissociated itself from such a plan such dissociation is not guaranteed. It is significant that a senior Saudi representative warned, in the *New York Times* (24/4/02), that the Kingdom might use the oil weapon against the US if Israel was not restrained, and that, rather than supporting an attack on Iraq, it might demand closure of the US military bases in the country. For its part Iraq has exploited this weakness in the US strategy and associated itself more closely with the Palestinian cause by paying money to the families of those killed in the struggle with Israel, including suicide bombers, and cutting off its UN-approved oil supplies to US companies for a month. These things have infuriated the US.

To try and extricate themselves from their awkward position the Saudis have proposed a peace plan for the Israel/Palestine crisis and have had it endorsed by the Arab League at their March summit in Beirut. This plan, which the US may have had a hand in drafting, is based on UN resolution 242 and proposes Israeli withdrawal from all occupied territories in return for Arab recognition of Israel. Although it is, of course, rejected by Israel it could form the starting point for a future peace conference.

European Imperialism Moves to Oppose the US

Differences between the EU and the US have become more obvious in the present crisis. Europe is the largest donor to the Palestinian Authority (PA), which it sees as its route back into the Middle East and to its oil riches. It has been furious to see over 25 million Euros worth of projects it funded ground to dust by the Israeli army. The EU has reserved the right to claim the money back from Israel. It has also demanded that the Israelis pay the PA \$800M it is withholding. The European parliament has voted to suspend its association treaty with Israel and there is talk of trade sanctions. Germany has applied military sanctions on Israel.

Although the EU did endorse Powell's doomed mission, it has repeatedly criticised the US for not doing enough to restrain Israeli and failing to prevent it obliterating all that has been achieved since Oslo. The EU has launched its own peace plan which was unveiled in February and which criticised,

the Israelis consistent and insidious efforts to undermine the Palestinian Authority.

The plan called for fresh Palestinian elections, after the elections the declaration of a Palestinian state to be recognised by Israel etc. Two months later the German foreign minister, Fischer, presented another peace plan including Israeli withdrawal from all occupied territories, the dismantling of ALL settlements, the creation of a Palestinian state, an internationally monitored buffer zone and international security guarantees. Israel has treated the EU plans with utter contempt and even prevented an EU peace delegation from meeting Arafat.

These developments indicate sharp differences of interest with the US. The EU is, however, Israel and the region's biggest trading partner, and in the long run will hold the key to the future development of the eastern Mediterranean. Trade negotiations at present underway (the "Barcelona Process") include both the Arab states and Israel. Exclusion of Israel and trade sanctions could significantly damage Israel's economy. European politicians are

now openly calling for this weapon to be used.

The differing imperialist interests of the EU and the US which have already been seen with regard to Iraq and Iran have emerged more clearly than ever before in regard to Palestine. In the immediate future these differences could torpedo US plans to complete *Pax Americana*, and in the long term they will lead to further proxy wars in the region.

The Interests of the Palestinian and Israeli Workers

The politics of the occupied territories and of Israel are dominated by nationalism. While the Palestinian bourgeoisie are forever saying they want their state, something now endorsed by the European bourgeoisie and to a lesser extent the US, the Israeli bourgeoisie say their state is under threat and that they are fighting for the survival of the nation etc. A battle for land and the right to exploit the Palestinian working class is being fought out under the banner of nationalism and manipulated by the imperialist powers for their regional interests. This struggle has nothing to offer the working class. Palestinian workers will be no better off being exploited by their native bourgeoisie whose corruption in the PA provide a glimpse of what their real interests are. Palestinian workers are, however, materially tied to the PA since it is the source of much of the money coming into the territories. It is being kept afloat by funds from the Arab League, principally Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, which it administers and uses to pay its staff.

The conditions of the Palestinian working class are appalling. Economic collapse and 50% unemployment is coupled with social breakdown. Shortages of basic commodities were the norm even before the latest invasion and have now become much worse. Theft, prostitution and despair are widespread. Under these circumstances workers are prey to nationalism and recruitment to the nationalist cause. This cause is a deadly one. Young men and women volunteer for suicide missions in the knowledge that at least their deaths will bring their families \$12,000. Workers are thus literally recruited as cannon fodder in the national

struggle and this macabre slaughter is blessed with the holy water of religion and the dead are promoted to the rank of martyr. The most disgusting lies of the bourgeois class are used to keep up the steady flow of blood.

On the Israeli side workers are mobilised to the army for the cause of protecting the Jewish state and the settlers. Their humiliation, torture, and murder of Palestinians are justified by each fresh suicide bombing. The more blood is spilt on both sides, the greater the indoctrination and hatred becomes.

The situation for the working class is extremely grave and unlikely to change in the short term. The only way forward for the working class, both Palestinian and Israeli, is to raise again the workers banner of "class against class" against the bourgeois one of "nation against nation". Although the current situation and the nationalist and religious divisions in the working class make this difficult, it remains the only way to escape from the present catastrophic situation. As we say in the leaflet printed below which was given out in Italy;

The urgent problem is how to extract the Palestinian proletariat - and also the Israeli working class - from the humiliation and ferocious repression of the Israeli state on the one hand, and on the other, from the nationalistic/religious calls of their own bourgeoisie.

It is necessary for the working class to put forward its own political alternative to the current orgy of senseless killing and suffering. There are many on both sides who are disgusted with what is happening. The refusal of some Israeli reservists to serve in the occupied territories, and the tenfold increase in their numbers in the past 3 months, is an indication of this. The Israeli working class, both Jew and Arab, which will pay in more material ways for the "military operations" in the West Bank. Despite massive US support the Israeli government has had to create an emergency budget to fund its deficit. Sharon's austerity plan is being debated by the Israeli Cabinet as we go to press. It calls for spending cuts on child allowances, tax increases such as 1% on VAT as well as increased petrol taxes. There is also to be a "war levy" of 1% on all

workers' gross wages taken directly to finance the bloodbath. The war in Palestine/Israel will have no winners and it will not end as long as the profits system dominates the globe. It is utopian to think that there is any national solution within capitalism.

There is an urgent need for those workers who are beginning to realise the need to break with the entire spectrum of bourgeois politics to unite to form a political organisation. An organisation able to put forward the interests of the working class of the region and put forward the vision of a world free from this murder and barbarism into which bourgeois society has sunk.

The barbaric events we are today witnessing in Palestine are a direct result of the operation of the capitalist system itself and imperialist rivalry for the wealth of the Middle East. These events reveal the true nature of capitalism, a hideous nature which is usually camouflaged behind the lies of human rights, democracy, international law, bourgeois culture etc. Though its form may change, this barbarism will continue as long as the capitalist system of production dominates the world. The atrocities in the Middle East are not an isolated phenomenon. The wars in Yugoslavia, the Caucasus and Afghanistan are all expressions of the same fundamental problem - the capitalist system of production itself. The only solution is the overthrow of capitalism and its replacement with communism. This will mean the socialisation of the means of production worldwide and their use in production for the needs of mankind and its development. This, of course, has nothing to do with the state capitalist system, which existed in Russia until 1991. It will also mean the abolition of all state borders and the standing armies, which defend them. The struggle for communism is an international one in which the Palestinian and Israeli workers will play an important part.

CP

Notes

1 Quoted in *Independent* 30/03/03 by R. Fisk. The irony of the fact that the victims of the Warsaw Ghetto were defenceless Jews is less important than the tactics used by the *Wehrmacht* for killing them. These are useful against the Palestinians.

2 Published in *Foundation for Middle East Peace* Report March 2002. It should be remembered that **all** the settlements are illegal under international bourgeois law.

3 See RP 21, "The Middle East - Still Imperialism's Battleground," and RP 20, "The Palestinian Proletariat is Spilling its Blood for a Bourgeois State".

Liberation Won't Come from Two Separate States

Deportations, destruction, massacres of innocent and defenceless citizens: the bloody cycle which recommenced more than a year ago with the Nazi-style provocation of Sharon has tragically accelerated. Yet Israeli mini-imperialism has always had a free hand. Thanks to the US veto in the UN, Israel has been allowed the luxury of invading territory which no international law could possibly permit and of rampantly inflicting cruelty on the Palestinian population by means of repression and ethnic cleansing. All this was — and is — part of the logic of American imperialism. In fact, Israel remains the precious bridge-head for US interests in the Middle East. Despite any passing and superficial disagreements between the two, this role is even more indispensable today, when the conflicting interests of imperialism are sharpening under the pressure of capitalism's world economic crisis. But, for now, all the Arab, Russian, and, above all, the bourgeoisie of the European Union can do against the arrogance of the United States and its Israeli policemen is appeal for peace, calls which are as hypocritical as they are impotent.

Beyond the daily victims of military aggression, the situation in both the occupied territories and in that controlled by the PLO is becoming disastrous: unemployment, under-employment, under-payment, bestial working conditions, massive emigration, are the norm. Employed and unemployed live in shanty towns and refugee camps without services or drinking water. Where they exist, the drains are open to the sky and illness is the order of the day.

In such circumstances the enrolment of the proletariat and sub-proletariat to the nationalist cause is almost automatic and, **given the absence of a working class political alternative**, the illusion of fighting for a better life under an indigenous bourgeoisie is inevitable. For the same reason, it's

inevitable that a good part of the Israeli proletariat which is threatened — if in a less dramatic way — with layoffs, cuts in wages and the 'social state', turns a blind eye to the bellicose and racist nationalism of their own bourgeoisie.

But the hypothetical Palestinian state, whether in the PLO version or that of Hamas, would only strengthen the bourgeoisie in question while the Palestinian proletariat would still be subject to unemployment and obliged to emigrate either to Israel or elsewhere in order to counter the same super-exploitation and miserable wages as before. Today no state can escape from the 'globalisation' of markets, and it certainly will not be for the Palestinian bourgeoisie to reverse the course of capitalism.

The urgent problem is how to extract the Palestinian proletariat — and also the Israeli working class — from the humiliation and ferocious repression of the Israeli state on the one hand, and on the other, from the nationalistic/religious calls of their own bourgeoisie. This is not with a view to an immediate and improbable revolutionary solution — too many elements are missing for this, from the party to a minimum level of class consciousness — but so that the yearning for liberation which exists in Palestine, the suffering, the outrage at the abuse of power and the blood that is being spilt daily is not exhausted in one of the most tragic episodes of nationalism, without even throwing a seed of revival of the revolutionary class struggle.

April 2002

Post Office Workers: The Fight Goes On

As we write postal workers are being undermined by the CWU. They were due to strike from 8th May for 24 hours in rejection of a 2.4% pay increase in exchange for changes to working practices. As we wrote in RP24, the threats facing postal workers from low pay and privatisation are being met by a trades union determined to do everything in its power to prevent any fightback. Since our last article, the situation facing workers has become more serious. Labour is determined that privatisation should go ahead as quickly as possible. Postcomm, the Government regulator, wants full 'liberalisation' by 2006. This would mean from a total workforce of 220,000 at present, some 40,000 will lose their jobs over the next three years. There are plans to reduce the number of deliveries, and one third of urban post offices are due to close in addition to the 547 which closed last year. Parcelforce staff alone will be cut from 11,700 to 5,000. Distribution staff will also be badly hit.

If there was anyone left on the planet who still thinks Labour is the lesser electoral evil for the working class, let them think again. Wages for postal workers have always been notoriously poor and most make a living wage only by working overtime. Most workers take home a flat wage of less than £150 a week. At the same time as Labour refused them a 5% wage increase, it added insult to injury by offering the two Consignia bosses a 10% increase on their salaries. Chief Executive John Roberts already gets £205,000 per annum with £11,000 extras. Both were forced to refuse the increase, not just because of the outcry against it, but also because it would have been difficult for them to push through swingeing cuts based on the fact that Consignia is losing £1.5 millions a day when they accepted £21,000 to bring them up to line

with the over inflated salaries of other Consignia bosses. At the same time postal workers were offered a 2% increase.

Labour and Privatisation

Those on the left who urged us to support Labour to avoid privatisations are now urging us to support state control and fight Labour's plans. They ignore the fact that the capitalist crisis itself is behind the push to privatise. It is not the whim of a few power hungry, greedy politicians or spin doctors. Postcomm didn't prevent an increase in the price of stamps just because it wanted to lose profits for the state sector, it wanted to stop the cross-subsidies so it would be easier to hive off the profitable elements of the industry and devalue capital in the sector left behind. By splitting up the state sector, selling off the profit making parts and restructuring what's left, the working class will be made to pay for capitalism's failures. Not only will there be massive job losses but those left behind will face huge increases in exploitation through wage cuts and increased 'flexibility', including making one worker do two or more jobs, forcing longer hours, worse conditions, worse safety etc. Arguing for control to be left in state hands is not the solution. The state has proven time and time again it can be just as expert at squeezing the most out of workers than the private sector. It is just as capable of making mass redundancies and paying poverty wages, which it has been doing. Postal workers would still be expected to pay an unacceptable price to make the industry profitable. The point is not which is the better boss, state or private, but how to fight back against capitalism and its attacks.

Trades Unions — Fixers for Capital

Much has been made of the fact the Communication Workers' Union has cut its contribution to the Labour Party by one-third, to be phased in over three years to give Labour a chance to adjust. Up until now it has been one of the Labour

Party's biggest financial donors. It has said it will still continue its affiliation to the Labour Party and will provide support for MPs. According to Bill Hayes:

Money over and above that we want to use more effectively
Financial Times, 25/3/02

It is obvious that the union sees its role as one of political pressure group, persuading this or that bourgeois party on the best policy for capitalism. What it is not spending its members' money on is supporting them in their fight against the devastating attacks they currently face. Rather, it is doing everything in its power to stop any fightback. In February postal workers voted to take strike action on pay. The unions deliberately separated off issues of pay from issues around privatisation. At the time, their request for a 5% increase had been rejected. Since then, the one day token strike set for March 6th was called off by the CWU. Instead they organised a demo for the 16th March to allow angry workers to let off steam. The CWU has recommended workers accept a new pay offer, a two year settlement of 6.9% depending of course on them accepting job cuts, speed ups, 'flexibility', and an end to unofficial strikes. Meanwhile the union has been busting a gut to smooth the way for privatisation. It is holding meetings with Consignia to put together a package which would push privatisation through without leading to strike action. They have worked on terms for voluntary redundancies, although naturally Consignia hasn't ruled out forced lay-offs. And despite its cut in funds, it is doing everything it can to ease the pressure on Labour from the working class. Despite the fact strikes have sunk to the lowest level since records began, unrest is brewing in the state sector generally and strike action is threatened from teachers, council workers, rail workers and others. The last thing Labour needs is to fight a class war on several fronts. There is also the danger that these sectors might link up with one another.

Which way forward?

It is not enough to call for a national demonstration and the democratisation of the union's political fund as the SWP have. The whole point of the union is that it takes its members' money and uses it to sabotage any resistance. It fritters away workers' money and energy on token one day stoppages which do no damage at all to the bosses plans, that's if it even goes that far. Its role is to ensure the smooth running of any industry it operates in, to make sure redundancies go ahead without any strike action being taken. The unions do not organise the working class, they split it up, sector by sector, trade by trade, pitting employed against unemployed and those in the private sector against those in the public. What is important to the union is union survival and the survival of capitalism, no matter what the cost to the working class. There is hope for postal workers to fight the attacks they face if they link up with other sectors of the working class outside of and against the unions. Through mass meetings and by sending delegations to other workers they can win, but they must be aware that the union is just as great an enemy to them as any boss or government.

RT

Last Issue: Revolutionary Perspectives 24

**Argentina; Post Office;
Railworkers;
The Euro; Enron;
Consciousness (Pt 4): Social
Democracy and Revisionism;
Immigrant or Italian: Same
Class, Same Struggle;
Revolutionaries and the "War
on Terrorism"; War and the
ICC; The West Bank in Ruins**

Below is a leaflet given out by our Italian comrades at demonstrations in support of the General Strike on 16th April. The Berlusconi regime is trying to remove the remaining benefits of the post-war settlement in the same way Thatcher did in Britain a

decade ago, grinding down the working class for ever greater exploitation. As our comrades show, the unions are instrumental in aiding Berlusconi in his attacks on our class.

General Strike, But Against Capital!

The violent global attacks by the bosses and the Berlusconi government - which are being carried out against all salaried workers and employees - are merely the completion of work started by earlier governments of whatever political form. To a large extent they had already begun to demolish the 'Social State', that is, they had attacked indirect wages and pensions (which workers have already paid for). These governments have cleared the way for a complete lack of security for workers, i.e. work for low wages, an increase in the hourly levels of work and an increase in the arbitrary power of the bosses. After introducing flexibility in taking workers on, the bosses now want to introduce flexibility to sack them, which means they will have the chance to sack people as and when they please, especially in the South, without even the weak obstacle of legislation like article 18.* They will also carry on dismantling the pensions system. In short, to complete the work, the government has prepared a new law on immigration which will significantly worsen the already difficult conditions faced by the immigrant proletariat. Greater exploitation and oppression for immigrant workers also means greater exploitation and oppression for all workers.

Faced with such a grave attack, the union federation of the CGIL-CISL-UIL were forced, as always, to reign in the eagerness of the workers to fight. In recent months there has been an increase in class struggle, as shown with the demo of 23rd March. The unions split workers up, dividing them into various categories and regions. Then, in an entirely predictable way, they continued to practice their plans all of which are disastrous for the working class, such as reaching the agreement of public employees

and the contracts for textile workers etc. This was the reason the general strike was held, albeit a month early, by the CGIL-CISL-UIL, and was clearly meant to act as a safety valve to help release the anger which has been building up in the working class. It was used as an attempt to relaunch the centre-left, a reformist practice which the capitalist crisis has rendered totally impractical. In reality, we are at the end of the epoch where partial concessions and small improvements can be obtained by sectional strikes. Just as unrealistic are demands for a 'European' salary or a minimum guaranteed income for the unemployed, whether they are pursued through normal harmonious union practice or 'antagonistically', albeit strictly remaining within the anti-strike rules. In this epoch of crises the bosses and the governments direct everything towards their desperate defence of their profit margins and their speculative manoeuvres. They are led in this by the industrial and financial sectors of the bourgeoisie which intensify the exploitation of the working class and multiply the hot-beds of war.

We must determinedly oppose the attacks on our working and living conditions and at the same time drive back those wars already going on, as well as those to come. We are in fact at the start of a new phase of imperialist rivalry which highlights still further the fact that our immediate and historical interests are totally opposed to those of the bourgeoisie. With regard to war, whatever forms of social opposition might emerge, they will be considered a type of treason and therefore either forbidden or severely limited. What's more, war is always paid for by the sacrifices of workers. Whilst it cuts salaries, pensions and health,

the Finance Ministry has increased the cost of military spending as a favour to the repressive apparatus of the state.

For this reason we are here today on the streets together with workers and those who recognise the gravity of the attacks on their interests. We are not here to sow illusions on the 'reconquest' of the social state, nor to construct some 'better world' through the impossible project of reformism, by somehow civilising the mechanisms of the market and exploitation. We are here to say we must not fall into the trap of allowing ourselves to be used blindly in a manoeuvre in the ever shady deals between the bosses, the government and the unions (as we have seen, less security and more exploitation in exchange for withdrawing article 18). Nor are we here just to struggle against this infamous government, or to clear the road for a different, but equally anti-working class government. We will strike to agitate for the unity of the working class and all exploited people in the anti-capitalist struggle, to propagandise the one way out of the catastrophic attacks on both the ideological and cultural fronts made by a capitalism in crisis. We strike for a communist revolution, for a society without classes. The heroic Argentinian proletariat, in its struggles, has formed the basis of a real self organisation from below and aimed for the unity between all proletarian sectors, and even with all its limitations, it shows us the way.

***Partito Comunista
Internazionalista (Battaglia
Comunista)***

* Article 18 forces employers to take back workers unfairly sacked in enterprises of more than fifteen employees.

Council Housing: Are Reports of its Death Exaggerated?

The history of council housing is in many ways the history of capitalism's current economic crisis. At its peak in the post war boom, social housing started to suffer as the crisis came about in the '70's, with much of the best stock going under Thatcher as she pushed the ideal of home ownership and the right to buy, subsidising it with tax breaks for mortgage holders with Mortgage Interest Tax Relief. While this was going on tenants suffered a gradual worsening of public sector housing. Councils were unable to build new stock, relying instead on leasing land to Housing Associations and making nominations to ease their waiting lists. They couldn't spend the capital receipts from sales. Council housing has suffered years of under-investment. Local Authorities are not allowed to borrow from the private sector against their assets and spending on the Housing Revenue Account is woefully inadequate given the run-down state of most of the stock left. There is now a £19 billion backlog of repairs and improvements, but for the last decade councils have suffered from Government clawbacks on the Housing Revenue Account, and some £10 billion from council house rents has been taken from the council housing sector.

Stock Transfer — the future of Social Housing?

In the Housing Green Paper, Labour has set out its plans to privatise all 3.2 million council homes in Britain through stock transfer at a rate of 200,000 homes a year for the next ten years. With the mass transfer of stock in Glasgow it was on target, even if tenants voted by a narrower margin than expected. But then along came tenants from Birmingham who rejected the council's and the government's plans and have thrown the whole thing wide open. Despite the fact that Birmingham City Council spent £3.7 millions persuading council tenants to vote for the transfer, 65% voted against it on a 67% turnout. Birmingham worked

hard for a yes vote. Despite claims it doesn't have enough money to do repairs it still managed to personally visit every tenant and send everyone a special video starring Aston Villa ex-manager Ron Atkinson. Tenants were told if stock transfer went ahead it would carry out £1.25 billions worth of repairs and modernisations over the next decade. If tenants voted against they were told they would get nothing. What they weren't told, however, was the £1.2 billions raised from the banks would be more like £350 millions once liabilities had been paid off. This would have been paid for by increases in rents as will happen in Glasgow, where guarantees not to raise rents beyond inflation levels only stand for five years. Since they need to raise £715 millions to make up for a starvation in funds previously, Glasgow's tenants will pay with massive rent rises.

It is interesting to note at a time when Tony Blair is running round the world trying to drum up support for war, using yet again the defence of democracy as his rallying cry, at home Labour is nothing if not completely anti-democratic. It is going to make sure stock transfers go ahead despite what tenants want. There is no open forum on this, no debate. Tenants have the ability to vote, though only at the end of an intensive propaganda campaign and a long hard sell by the Government, Local Authorities and private companies. Tenants should know what they'll be up against the moment stock transfer is suggested — an invasion of slick consultants and PR firms, a load of glossy brochures giving one side of the story, a council unwilling to debate any alternatives, 'consultation' meetings where the council and its advisers have already worked out the best strategies to get the results they want. Then there's the money. Stock transfer is potentially big business with huge profits to be made from tenants' rents, and the stakes are high. Glasgow City Council was promised by the Treasury it would wipe out its £900 millions housing

debt if it transferred its stock. As a result all but essential repairs were suspended for two years before the vote. Many tenants felt they had no choice other than to vote 'yes'. Now tenants are being warned not to 'expect miracles' by their new landlord, the Glasgow Housing Association. All councils are willing to spend vast amounts of money to get a 'yes' vote. If it looks as if they might lose, the Government is only too willing to step in with barrow loads of money to make sure it goes ahead. When Glasgow's stock transfer looked like it might fail the Scottish Executive stepped in with £415 millions to make sure things would go their way.

Glasgow was not alone. In the build-up to moves to privatise stock, councils deliberately run down their services and let estates and communities rot before throwing in the solution of stock transfer. They promise that all repairs and maintenance work will be done only once privatisation has taken place. They hold out the carrot of writing off huge housing debts after transfer. They frighten tenants by telling them if they vote no there will be no chance of any future investment in their homes or their neighbourhoods.

Tenants are never given the full picture. They are never told they will have no long-term guarantees about rent rises which could price them out of their homes. There are already murmurings about cutting back on Housing Benefit expenditure. Nor are there any guarantees that capital expenditure will last after the initial release of capital has been spent. Coupled with a potential loss of tenancy rights there is no doubt tenants will be worse off. And even when tenants have categorically voted against privatisation, the Government intends to slip it in through the back door. It has plans already for Birmingham as well as for other authorities to hive off operational functions such as repairs and maintenance to arms length companies in return for a share in rents which are bound to rise. It also plans to push for more so-called

'community based' options by privatising smaller estates one at a time.

Privatisation isn't the only problem. Local Authorities are also physically destroying their stock. Labour run Newcastle isn't alone in its plans to pull down thousands of homes. There are similar plans in Manchester, as well as in areas of acute housing shortage like Camden and Southwark. In Newcastle demolition was planned to free up now valuable riverside land for property development. Although the council hadn't really thought where thousands of households would go, the East End of the city was cited as a possibility, even though they also planned to demolish properties there, deliberately creating a housing shortage. One of Glasgow Housing Association's first moves was to announce the demolition of 11,000 homes with no plans to replace them.

Response of the working class

Newcastle's plans have been pushed back by the response of workers in the West End who were organised against the council. Stock Transfers have been defeated where workers have been determined, such as in Birmingham. But it's not just tenants who have a lot to lose.

Workers in Housing Offices face the loss of pension rights as well as facing uncertainty about employment. In Newcastle, where the build up to transfer is already rumbling, maintenance staff went on strike despite the fact that UNISON called the strike off after Newcastle City Council got an injunction the day before making it illegal. Rather than back their members, once again UNISON acted in its own interest and backed down. This isn't because of UNISON's leaders but because the unions themselves always have as their first priority their own wealth and their own protection and this inevitably conflicts with the interests of the working class.

Capitalism has never been able to solve its housing problems. It couldn't in the nineteenth or twentieth centuries and it won't in this. Like other aspects of social spending the council sector will be squeezed more and more as the crisis deepens, and the poorest sections of the community, including council tenants, will be the worst hit. The SWP has played the game of urging us to vote Labour then tries to get us to beg the Labour Party not to carry out its policies. Likewise 'Defend Council Housing', made up of community groups and trades unions, aims to halt privatisation, as

if the unions, instrumental in negotiating away jobs in housing, could defend the working class. But anti-privatisation campaigns on their own are not enough. Council housing is amongst the poorest and most stigmatised housing in the country. But it is also a very expensive way to live. It costs more to live in council owned property than to buy for the most part, and for people with a wage a mortgage is an increasingly cheaper option. Those left behind are usually on benefits and don't have the choice of moving. They face worsening conditions and councils are quite happy for it to stay that way, privatisation or not. Social housing, bit by bit, has been replaced with a third-rate, extremely expensive alternative. The more tenants link up with housing staff against stock transfers and demolitions the better their chances of defending jobs and much needed cheaper housing, but more importantly, the greater their chances will be of thinking of a genuine alternative to the expensive mess of housing under capitalism.

RT

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Class Consciousness and Working Class Political Organisation

Part 5: On the Eve of Revolution: The Debate between Luxemburg and Lenin

The Argument so far

Readers who have been following this series will know that we have argued that the working class is the only force which can overthrow capitalism and replace it with a mode of production based on the satisfaction of needs rather than production for profit. We have further argued that the working class has this role in the process, not through any innate moral superiority but because it is the only class which has no form of property to defend. As the ultimate exploited class its interest in the abolition of its own exploitation also means the end of all human exploitation. This lack of property however means that the proletariat is historically unique as a revolutionary class. It cannot abolish itself without first realising itself. In other words it has to be aware of its goal and its own collective strength. This means that what the proletariat also creates as part of the process of emancipation is its own consciousness. Although this arises from the conditions of exploitation it does not arise uniformly or at the same time (otherwise capitalism would have disappeared decades ago). It arises now here, then there. Local defeats snuff it out and limited victories give it oxygen. What this constant antithesis between workers and capital creates is a body of proletarians who retain the memory of struggle and understand that the greater goal is the overthrow of the exploiting system itself. These same proletarians, an advance guard of the whole class, if you like, seek not only to generalise the memory of the last struggle but to define the programme for the future. The struggle for proletarian self-emancipation thus pre-supposes the existence of a political organisation, a political party.

However, this stated, there are more questions to be answered. What is the relationship of the party to the rest of the class? What is the process by which the mass of the class itself comes to communist consciousness? In the last part we looked at the

experience of the development of the mass Social Democratic movement which developed after the death of Marx, and in the last years of Engels. We discussed how the movement became seduced by the possibility of arriving at power through bourgeois legality despite the fact that this stood absolutely foursquare against the revolutionary heart of Marx's thinking. We also showed that the debate on revisionism not only galvanised the left-wing of social democracy but in some ways was a sidetrack which obscured the gradual movement of social democracy into the capitalist camp. This was not obvious until the Great War of 1914 but in the years that led up to that cataclysm the left amongst the social democrats carried out a lively and serious debate about the nature of class consciousness and political organisation. It is to this that we turn in the fifth part of our series.

A New Generation of Revolutionaries

Twenty years after the death of Marx the very nature of Social Democracy came under the scrutiny of a new generation of revolutionaries. Rosa Luxemburg and Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov (who eventually took the pen name Lenin) were both born in the Russian Empire in 1870. Both were to become in different ways icons of revolutionary Marxism (something they would have both resented). However the mythology of revolutionaries lives on after them and they are impotent to correct it after they are dead. Posterity has tended to demonise Lenin for his success and sanctify Luxemburg for her failure. In fact they not only shared the same spirit of revolutionary Marxism but they were closer in their attitudes on the questions of class consciousness and political organisation than the bourgeois histories allow.

The Economic and the Political

Lenin has always been regarded as a cynical manipulator in the

eyes of his critics. This largely stems from what he wrote in his famous early pamphlet *What is to Be Done?*. The original sin of Lenin dates from his famous statement on the strikes in Russia in the 1890s.

These strikes were simply trades union struggles, not yet Social Democratic struggles. They marked the awakening antagonism between workers and employers; but the workers were not, and could not, be conscious of the irreconcilable antagonism of their interests to the whole of the modern political and social system, i.e. theirs was not yet Social Democratic consciousness...

We have said that there could not have been Social Democratic consciousness among the workers. It would have to be brought to them from without. The whole history of all countries shows that the working class, exclusively by its own effort, is able to develop only trades union consciousness, i.e. the conviction that it is necessary to combine in unions, fight the employers, and strive to compel the government to pass necessary labour legislation etc. The theory of socialism, however grew out of the philosophic, historical and economic theories elaborated by the educated representatives of the propertied classes, by intellectuals. By their social status, the founders of modern scientific socialism, Marx and Engels themselves belonged to the bourgeois intelligentsia.

What is to be Done? Lenin Selected Works (3 Volumes) Vol. 1 pp. 114

From the point of view of historical materialism we obviously have to reject Lenin's formulation or at least correct it. Marx and Engels may have been educated but their scientific studies had led them away from being the "educated representatives" of any class but the proletariat. As we stated in the earlier parts of this text Marx did not see himself as elaborating a theory but addressing the reality that confronted his

society. His premises were real and he was quite clear that he had “gone over” to the proletariat as a result of understanding the reality of exploitation. Lenin was in fact erroneously recycling here the arguments of Kautsky and Plekhanov about the importance of intellectuals (who in the conditions of the time had to come from the privileged classes). However the central core of truth in Lenin’s views was the idea that communist (or, as its equivalent in those days, Social Democratic) consciousness was not a direct reflection of the immediate struggle of the working class for survival under the capitalist system. The economic struggle could continue forever unless someone or some body put forward the real explanation as to why the proletariat was exploited. At the time only those who had the leisure and the education (clearly not workers who worked 12-14 hours a day) could elaborate those theories. But they did so on the basis of the real, existing class struggle. Lenin clearly explains this in the rest of his large pamphlet. Contrary to those who insist that Lenin was saying that workers were thick he pointed to the scientific contributions of exceptional workers like Wilhelm Weitling, and even Pierre-Joseph Proudhon. But what Lenin stresses is that they had had to escape from the shopfloor to be in a position to make their contributions. This issue then is not **who** clarifies class consciousness but **how** is that class consciousness to be carried forward. Here Lenin is at one with the founders of scientific socialism. Class consciousness is not the direct reflection of the daily material existence of the proletariat but is an indirect product based on reflection on the lessons of the high points of proletarian struggle. Lenin, it has to be remembered, was arguing here against those trends in the nascent Russian Social Democratic movement that argued that economic struggles were the only really important ones and that politics was irrelevant. This was particularly the case with the new “younger” (Lenin and Martov, both in their early 30s were now the “old”) leaders around papers like *Rabochaya Mysl* (Workers’ Thought), *Rabochye Dyelo* (Workers’ Cause) and the programmatic statement *Credo*. They had arisen when the early Social Democratic organisations had been smashed by

the Tsar’s secret police and their leaders exiled or imprisoned. The new “leaders” were intellectuals who glorified the spontaneity of the everyday struggle but gave it no effective leadership. In fact Lenin was far from saying that workers could not take in theory. He was arguing that these “amateurs” were not giving any leadership and the workers were losing confidence in socialism because they saw these people as a menace who brought police raids in their wake. Lenin excoriated their “handicraft” methods and stated no less than six times in *What is to be Done* that it was “the lag of leaders [behind] the spontaneous upsurge of the masses” which was causing the real crisis in working class politics in Russia. This is a rebuttal of the myriad of lazy critics, whether anarchists, councilists or anti-working class liberals who look for any reason not to support the October Revolution. They jump from the mistaken conclusion that Lenin said the workers were “thick” to the tragic way in which the Party dictatorship replaced the proletarian dictatorship after the Revolution of 1917, and for them, you need to say no more. It was all the product of the thinking of one man. Ignored is the fact that *What is to be Done?* was written in a particular context. Ignored too is the fact that Lenin himself later acknowledged that he had “bent the stick” too far. He was well aware of the real relationship between the daily struggle and the historical struggle of the working class. In 1899 he had already written

Every strike brings thoughts of socialism very forcibly to the workers’ mind, thoughts of the struggle of the entire working class for emancipation from the oppression of capital...

A strike, moreover, opens the eyes of the workers to the nature, not only of the capitalists, but of the government and the laws as well.

On Strikes in Lenin Collected Works Volume 4 pp. 315-6

Also ignored is the fact that Lenin himself, after the Bolsheviks had led the proletariat to power, continually exhorted the workers to take charge of their own destiny. Many examples can be found but one will suffice to illustrate the point here.

It is important for us to draw literally all working people into

the government of the state. It is a task of tremendous difficulty. But socialism cannot be implemented by a minority, by the Party. It can be implemented only by tens of millions when they have learned to do it for themselves.

Quoted in N. Harding *Lenin’s Political Thought* Volume 2 p. 181

At the same time Lenin’s arguments are no mere historically limited, dated tirade. Some of what he writes has validity for today.

The spontaneous development of the working class movement leads to its subordination to bourgeois ideology ... for the spontaneous working class movement is trade unionism and trades unionism means the ideological enslavement of the workers by the bourgeoisie.

But why, the reader will ask, does the spontaneous movement, the movement along the line of least resistance, lead to the domination of bourgeois ideology? For the simple reason that bourgeois ideology is far older in origin than socialist ideology, that it is more fully developed and that it has at its disposal immeasurably more means of dissemination.

Hence our task, the task of Social Democracy, is to combat spontaneity, to divert the working class movement from this spontaneous, trade unionist striving to come under the wing of the bourgeoisie, and to bring it under the wing of revolutionary Social Democracy.

What is to be Done? Lenin Selected Works pp. 122-3

What Lenin was arguing which remains true to today is that the ideas, programme and platform of the party are the outcome of the total material process taking place in society, a process which is above all historical. The daily struggle of the class does not create this whole view any more than the abstract thinking of the greatest theorists. When the daily class struggle bursts out of the trade union struggle, out of the confines of capitalist legality into moments of insurrection, then the class movement and class consciousness take great leaps forward. But when these movements die down the experience lives on only in the one historical body which can maintain that consciousness, and this is the revolutionary political party.

This party is not something that has no relationship with the class movement. It is not a *deus ex machina*, but a central element in the dialectical and contradictory process which leads towards the formation of a communist consciousness within the working class which is directly derived from material reality. When Lenin was arguing that consciousness would have to be brought to the working class from without, he meant that this consciousness would have to be brought from outside the physical boundaries of the daily class struggle itself. He did not mean that it was outside the process taking place in society itself.

As we already noted, it is true that Lenin did quote approvingly at length from Kautsky to support his idea that spontaneity in the daily struggle was not enough to create revolutionary consciousness. This quote contained Kautsky's unashamedly elitist view that "the vehicle of science is not the proletariat but the bourgeois intelligentsia" (ibid. p.121). According to Kautsky, it was "in the minds of this stratum" that modern socialism originated. This is, of course, fundamentally wrong and anti-Marxist as readers of the first two parts of this study will realise. It goes directly against what Marx and Engels wrote in the *German Ideology*. This was a period when bourgeois intellectuals claiming to be socialist thought they knew what was best for the working class.¹ Lenin was not particularly interested in that part of Kautsky's thinking (as his subsequent writings make clear) and had not yet realised that Kautsky was already a "renegade" to Marxism.

Indeed it is quite clear that Lenin rejects this view of Kautsky in that he thought that the best candidates for professional revolutionaries were workers, the "average people of the masses" who "are capable (in fact are alone capable) of **determining** the outcome of the movement"². Today the problem is not **who** elaborates revolutionary consciousness but what is to be the **vehicle**. And that has to be a permanent political body - a political party.

The statement that the daily economic struggle does not create socialist/communist/revolutionary consciousness of itself is so obvious

that it would never have been contested if it had not been for the experience of the degeneration of the Russian Revolution. We will look at this later but let us first round off the debate in Russian Social Democracy in 1902-3. If what Lenin's "Economist" opponents were saying had been true (and subsequent anti-partyists still echo) then there is no need for a revolutionary party. The class struggle cannot be abolished the reasoning goes. It is inevitable, and so therefore is revolutionary consciousness. Unfortunately this is not true, and the historical experience of the British working class has shown it time after time. The British working class went through a century of the fiercest economic battles in the nineteenth century. It created massive trades unions, defined itself and was aware of itself as a class, yet failed to create for itself a socialist/revolutionary consciousness. Quite the contrary, the advanced sector of the British proletariat, the unionised workers, functioned as a wing of the Liberal bourgeoisie without maintaining its class independence. Even leading members of the First International who came from this background eventually became Liberal MPs. This is exactly what Lenin argued; not that the "economic" struggle of the class must remain non-political if communists abstain but that its politicisation will take a bourgeois form.

*Since there can be no talk of an independent ideology formulated by the working masses themselves in the course of their movement,³ the **only** choice is either bourgeois or socialist ideology. There is no middle course (for mankind has not created a "third" ideology, and, moreover, in a society torn by class antagonisms there can never be a non-class or an above class ideology). Hence to belittle socialist ideology in any way, to turn aside from it in the slightest degree means to strengthen bourgeois ideology.*

What is to be Done? Lenin *Selected Works* Vol. 1 p. 121-2

"Anti-capitalists" of today could reflect on these words. You cannot be anti-capitalist without being communist. Instead of glib talk about "third ways" they should recognise

that no such beast exists. Historical experience in Britain though once again confirms the validity of Lenin's argument. In the General Strike in Britain in 1926 the working class under the influence of syndicalists paralysed the bourgeoisie for nine days but these syndicalists had no political programme and assumed that the movement would of itself bring down capitalism. Instead the more bourgeois of the labour leaders went to 10 Downing Street and when Baldwin gave them the alternative of supporting the British state or the British working class they chose the state.

We could also quote the experience of the US working class in the Twentieth century, which has mirrored the experience of the British in the Nineteenth. By raising the level of consciousness of the individual worker, through collective struggle, to that of identification with the rest of the class the economic struggle opens the possibility for the development of revolutionary class consciousness, but only the possibility. Without the intervention of the party, translating the historical programme of the working class into the material struggle of today, the class consciousness of the workers will decline or will even take a reactionary direction (as the bourgeoisie are fond of pointing out). Indeed class identity alone can be compatible with reactionary ideology. Sometimes the most reactionary workers are amongst the most conscious of belonging to the working class. In the great strikes in South Africa after World War One the mobilising slogan of the strikers was "Workers of the World Unite and Fight for a White South Africa"!

After What is to be Done?

The party as the bearer of the programme of the revolutionary achievements of the working class is at the core of Lenin's arguments. He was fully aware that steps in real movement were worth more than programmes but steps in real movement are often far apart in working class history. In the meantime the carrier of revolutionary class consciousness is the party.

It goes without saying that 'every step of real movement is more important than a dozen programmes,' as Karl Marx said. But neither Marx nor any other theoretician or practical worker in

the Social Democratic movement has ever denied the tremendous importance of a Programme for the consolidation and consistent activity of a political party.

Quoted in Paul Le Blanc *Lenin and the Revolutionary Party* Humanities Press, 1990. p. 161

It is often said that Lenin revised the ideas of *What is to be Done?* or even rejected them altogether after the first Russian Revolution of 1905. It is true that among many other statements Lenin argued that

The basic mistake of those who polemicise today against What is to be Done? Is that they tear this work out of the context of a definite historical milieu ... (it) polemically corrected Economism, and it is false to consider the contents of the pamphlet outside of its connection with this task.

Coll. Works Volume 13 p.85

But let us be clear about what Lenin corrected. He never once varied from the idea that the party was the bearer of revolutionary consciousness from the fact that its programme was the distillation of the proletariat's past experiences. Indeed *What is to be Done?* was aimed at a current which was already in decline.

"Economism", which had been more influential than the followers of the Social Democratic paper *Iskra* in 1900, was already collapsing by 1902. In a country like Russia where trades unions were illegal every economic strike became almost immediately a political strike. Any organisation which was agnostic on this issue was doomed.

What Lenin did want to correct was the bits he had written previously about the nature and structure of the party. Lenin was clear that the German Social Democratic model of an open party was not possible under the autocratic police state of the Tsar. This is why he called at this time for "a party of a new type". A small secret party consisting only of professional revolutionaries (preferably of workers rather than the disorganised Russian intellectual type) had to be taken on who could stay out of the clutches of the police whilst they spread propaganda and

agitation. This was the body which could transform the "sparks of consciousness" generated by the daily fight against capital into a political basis for attacking the state. 1905 changed this in that it was now possible to go for a mass enrolment of workers in the ambiguous conditions of the period when elections to the fake parliament or Duma before 1914 gave some scope for legal work.

Rosa Luxemburg and the Party

In terms of class consciousness and organisation Rosa Luxemburg is often cited by bourgeois commentators as the antithesis of Lenin, a Marxist who wasn't dictatorial and who was tolerant. Even would-be revolutionaries saturated with years of anti-Leninist propaganda look to her as someone who formulated a critique of Lenin's mechanical tendencies and therefore provides a more dialectical basis to understand the question of class consciousness. For example, Franz Borkenau, an influential ex-communist wrote a history of the Communist International in which he insisted that



A postage stamp with Rosa Luxemburg's face on it issued by the West German Social Democratic government in 1970 to celebrate the centenary of her birth. Unsurprisingly they did not commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of her murder by Freikorps under the direction of the Socialist Party in 1919. "First we kill you then we commemorate you."

...Lenin, instead of the belief in proletarian revolution, had put his hopes in a centralised group under his leadership, Rosa Luxemburg alone continued to believe in the proletariat.

World Communism Ann Arbor 1962 p. 45

This is a glorious bowdlerisation but one which is frequently believed by those unwilling to find out for themselves. It may come as shock to some of them that far from being a blind worshipper of spontaneity against the party Luxemburg, even in her 1904 critique of Lenin stressed

the need for a proletarian vanguard conscious of its class interests and capable of self-direction in political activity.

Organisational Questions of the Russian Social Democracy in Rosa Luxemburg Speaks (Pathfinder Press 1970) p.119

and far from raising spontaneity above organisation she insisted that a party was needed which "possesses the gift of political mobility, complemented by unflinching loyalty to principles and concern for unity" (*ibid.*). After the Russian Revolution Luxemburg only reinforced this view

Thus it is clear that in every revolution only that party is capable of seizing the leadership and power which has the courage to issue the appropriate slogans for driving the revolution ahead and the courage to draw all the necessary conclusions from the situation.

The Russian Revolution in Rosa Luxemburg Speaks (Pathfinder Press 1970) p.374

She went on to say that only the Bolsheviks had grasped "the true dialectic of revolutions" and to stand the wisdom of parliamentary moles on its head: not through a majority to revolutionary tactics, but through revolutionary tactics to a majority – that is the way the road runs.. Only a party which knows how to lead, that is to advance things, wins support in stormy times ... What ever a party could offer of courage, revolutionary far-sightedness and inconsistency in a historic hour, Lenin, Trotsky and other comrades have given in good measure.

ibid p.374-5

So what is the difference between Luxemburg and Lenin on class consciousness? To explain this we have to again understand the context in which the two were writing.

Whilst Lenin regarded the Economists as the Russian version of Bernstein's revisionism, Luxemburg had come to see that German Social Democracy was suffering from another disease. Whilst Lenin was trying to get rid of amateurism in Russia the "professional revolutionaries" whom Luxemburg met every day in Germany were far from the ideal of Lenin. In fact they were careerists, trades union bureaucrats, the petty clerks of a bureaucratic party machine, reformist parliamentarians. They were the ones who, scared of losing their petty privileges would lead German Social Democracy into collusion with the German military and support the imperialist war of 1914. The centralism of effort which Lenin realised was essential to get all Russia's scattered socialists together was already caricatured by the conduct of many socialists in the German party.

Luxemburg poses the central dilemma best in the following passage

On the one hand we have the mass: on the other hand its historic goal, located outside existing society. On the one hand we have the day-to-day struggle; on the other, the social revolution. Such are the terms of the dialectical contradiction through which the socialist movement makes its way. It follows that this movement can best advance by tacking betwixt and between the two dangers by which it is constantly being threatened. One is the loss of its

mass character; the other the abandonment of its goal. One is the danger of sinking back to the condition of a sect, the other the danger of becoming a movement of bourgeois social reform.

Organisational Questions of the Russian Social Democracy in Rosa Luxemburg Speaks (Pathfinder Press 1970) pp. 128-9

Rosa Luxemburg and Social Democracy

Luxemburg's confusions also have their roots in her experience of social democracy. For her (at least at one point)

The fact is that the social democracy is not joined to the organisation of the proletariat. It is itself the proletariat".

op cit. in *Rosa Luxemburg Speaks* p.119

Little wonder that she found it hard to break from the German Social Democratic Party even after the betrayal of 1914 ("Better the worst working class party than none at all" was her initial reaction). Luxemburg has a tendency here to see Social Democracy as the class movement even when she can see that it is riddled with opportunism. Her faith in the mass strike after 1904 is like an antithesis to the opportunism and capitulationist tendencies of the Social Democratic majority. So when talking about the party Lenin and she are talking about two different beasts. For Lenin, the small revolutionary party fights within the class for a revolutionary consciousness whilst Luxemburg looks to the spontaneous movement of the class to shake Social Democracy from its decline into reformism and opportunism. Thus her conclusion against Lenin, "Historically the errors committed by a truly revolutionary movement are infinitely more fruitful than the infallibility of the cleverest Central Committee." (*ibid* p. 130) was really (like the whole of her pamphlet) aimed at her own party and had little to do with what Lenin was arguing (as he himself noted). It is, in any case nonsense, since it is both a false dichotomy and seems to worship failure against success. Luxemburg had an incredible belief that new struggles in Germany would **of themselves** correct the course of Social Democracy.

If, at any time and under any circumstances Germany were to experience big political struggles, an era of tremendous economic struggle would open up at the same time ... If they stood aside from the movement or opposed it ... the union or party leaders would be swept away by the wave of events and the economic and political struggles would be fought to a conclusion without them.

Selected Works Volume 1 pp. 235-6

How they would be pushed aside Luxemburg does not say but she does not offer us the logical step of a split in Social Democracy leading to a new party.

Luxemburg went further than this in her last speech to the Founding Congress of the Communist Party of Germany. Having finally broken with Social Democracy only a few months earlier Luxemburg again missed the point. Criticising her former colleagues she said;

They think that to educate the proletarian masses in the socialist spirit means the following: to lecture them, distribute leaflets and pamphlets amongst them. But no! The socialist proletarian school does not need all this. Activity itself educates the masses.

This was dangerously wrong. In the first place the Social Democrats had no interest in revolution so any discussion of their methods was now irrelevant and in the second place such stress on activity as the only educator of the working class leads, and in the case of the KPD (German Communist Party) did lead to, voluntarism. Whilst Luxemburg herself condemned Leibknecht's declaration of the Spartakist Revolt of January, 1919 she had partially prepared for "activity" like this in her view of the development of class consciousness.

The Debate on Centralism

One of the main reasons for the differences between Lenin and Luxemburg is that Lenin was one of the first Russian Marxists created by the conditions of class struggle in Russia in the 1890s. Luxemburg came from Poland to join what she considered to be the greatest socialist party in the world. Her misfortune was that she was never so involved in party issues as Lenin. He was actually in at the foundation of the Russian Social Democratic

Bilan & Perspectives

ISSN 1623-



Editorial : l'Argentine

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Marxisme et conscience de classe

Labour Party. He had seen what would happen to it if it did not have a clear organisational framework. Hence he emphasises the need for centralism. Luxemburg, on the other hand was in friendly relations with all the reformists in Social Democracy and frequently expressed herself in private letters to people like Clara Zetkin as quite dismayed at the way the party leaders were going. But instead of developing a public critique against them, as Lenin did against people he respected and even loved (like Vera Zasulich and George Plekhanov), Luxemburg put her faith in the activity of the class correcting Kautsky's errors! And in every way her critique of Lenin's *One Step Forward, Two Steps Back* text is really not aimed at the Russian party at all. In fact Lenin complained that Luxemburg "does not acquaint the reader with my book but with something else..." Lenin actually rebuts every charge made by Luxemburg against him but we will give just one example. Luxemburg had accused Lenin of following the neo-Jacobin activist, Auguste Blanqui in thinking that a small elite (in this case the Party Central Committee) could make the revolution. Lenin was forced to reply:

Actually this is not so. I have never advocated any such view ... Our controversy has principally been over whether the Central Committee and Central Organ should represent the trend of the majority of the Party Congress, or whether they should not. About this "ultra-centralist" and "purely Blanquist" demand the comrade says not a word, she prefers to declaim against the mechanical subordination of the part to the whole, against slavish submission, blind obedience and other such bogeys. I am very grateful to Comrade Luxemburg for explaining the profound idea that slavish submission is very harmful to the Party, but I should like to know: does the comrade consider it normal for supposed party central institutions to be

dominated by the minority of the Party Congress?

Lenin *Collected Works* Volume 7 pp. 473-4

The Mass Strike

This leads us logically to *The Mass Strike*. Rosa Luxemburg actually wrote this when she was in Finland staying with Lenin and other Bolshevik leaders in 1906. She had recently been released from a Polish prison after 3 months imprisonment, having been arrested for entering Poland illegally in order to take part in the 1905 Revolution which was then in action throughout the Russian Empire. As a leader of the Socialist Party of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania she took part in



Lenin at Smolny 1918

the discussions which then led to its unification with the Bolsheviks at this time. This alone should convince anyone that whatever the political differences she had with the Bolsheviks she shared their revolutionary conceptions. It was to promote her idea of revolution that she wrote *The Mass Strike*. Her target, as always, was the German socialists, particularly the trades

union leaders. Luxemburg had been trying to get the German party to adopt a resolution in favour of the mass strike before her imprisonment. At the Jena Conference of the party in 1906 however the best that could be agreed was that the Socialists would call a mass strike in the event of the curtailing of voting by the Kaiser. Even this was too much for the trades' union leaders, who, for the first time, openly went against Social Democratic policies. Luxemburg's pamphlet was aimed at convincing the party to overturn the decisions of these trades' union leaders.

Once again Luxemburg's revolutionary intent was not matched by revolutionary arguments. In the first place she misjudges the nature of trades unions by insisting that they "are fighting organisations of the proletariat" (*Rosa Luxemburg Speaks* p.196). Unions have never been this. They have always been defensive organisations of the class. From here comes a second error where she argues that in the mass strike the economic and the political are of equal importance.

In a word, the economic struggle is the factor that advances the movement from one political focal point to another. The political struggle periodically fertilises the ground for the economic struggle. Cause and effect exchange each second. Thus we find the two elements, the economic and political, do not incline to separate themselves ... during the mass strike in Russia, not to speak of negating each other as pedantic schemes would suggest.

The Mass Strike in Rosa Luxemburg *Speaks* p.208

But as with so many of her arguments the elegance of the prose masks the weakness of the argument. It is quite true that economic struggles of the class, or more precisely the mass moments of such struggles, raise political demands which show that the class defines itself, creates its class identity, and advances its interests, both political and economic in struggle. But the consciousness which emerges from

those struggles is based on the political advances made by the proletariat and formulated by their class political organs. Sometimes the class is ahead of the party here as in 1905 in Russia where the Menshevik attempt to find a way of unifying strikes led to the formation of the Petrograd Soviet. This arose spontaneously out of the struggle in 1905 but its successful re-establishment as an organ of workers' power 12 years later was because the Russian Social Democrats had learned from that experience and recognised the value of that organ for establishing workers' autonomy. Luxemburg, in fact fetishises the **forms** of struggle which she thinks will automatically lead to the formation of class consciousness. In this she sometimes sounds religious

The most precious thing, because it is the most enduring in the sharp ebb and flow of the revolutionary wave is the proletariat's spiritual growth. The advance by leaps and bounds of the proletariat affords an inviolable guarantee of its further progress in the inevitable political and economic struggles ahead.

But this is a myth. Once the period of open class struggle is over the consciousness of the proletariat retreats, the class is once again atomised and divided. The workers who created the soviets in 1905 marched off to war in 1914 and when they re-created the Soviets in 1917 they still did not have an authentically proletarian content to start with (given that they voted to support the Provisional Government). It was only with the Bolsheviks' injection of class politics into the soviets based on the lessons of 1905 that the problem was overcome. Luxemburg in *The Mass Strike* consistently fails to analyse the **content** of the struggle and this in the end appears to leave her as a worshipper of spontaneity.

Or at least it would do if she did not also write such passages as the following

The social democrats are the most enlightened, most class conscious vanguard of the whole proletariat. They cannot and dare not wait, in fatalist fashion, with folded arms for the advent of the "revolutionary situation", to wait for that which in every

spontaneous movement falls from the clouds. On the contrary they must now, as always, hasten the development of things and endeavour to accelerate events. This they cannot do however, by suddenly issuing the "slogan" for a mass strike at random at any odd moment, but first and foremost, by making clear to the proletariat the inevitable advent of this revolutionary period ...

The Mass Strike in Rosa Luxemburg Speaks p. 200

However this is what Luxemburg inside Social Democracy failed to do and her tragedy is that she did not break with social democracy sooner. Naturally however we are looking back with the benefit of hindsight. Whilst the betrayal of 1914 sticks in our brains and now seems inevitable it was a blow which shocked both Lenin and Luxemburg. There was no single event before 1914 which made it easy to split with the movement (even if small groups like the Lichtstrahlen and the International Socialists already had done) she considered to be not just the organisation of the workers but the working class itself. Belief in spontaneity alone as the regenerator of the party was at times Luxemburg's only consolation.

The best we can do is to learn from that experience. Luxemburg contemplated suicide when she heard that the SPD's Parliamentary fraction had voted war credits for the Kaiser. She was arrested for opposing the war, as was Karl Leibknecht, the first MP to vote against war credits (the second was Otto Ruhle). In clandestine conditions they formed the Spartakus League. But typically even this was part of the USPD, the pacifist socialists led by Kautsky and Bernstein! Thus even during the imperialist war Luxemburg did not plant a banner around which revolutionaries could unambiguously rally. After the November Revolution the SPD held the majority in the soviets and few workers had heard of the Spartakists. The formation of the German Communist Party took place over New Year 1919. By the end of that

January both Luxemburg and Leibknecht had died at the hands of the SPD's hired thugs. This tragedy only underlines the need to establish a revolutionary party well in advance of the spontaneous outbreak of the class. This also makes for a conclusion to the theoretical differences between Luxemburg and Lenin, differences which, as we have shown are more to do with their real experiences than with any difference in revolutionary temperament. Whilst Luxemburg thought the party was the class and that the spontaneous movement would make the party revolutionary, Lenin fully understood that only a minority would be communist in advance of the revolution. It was necessary for this minority to fight within the spontaneous upsurge for it to become a communist revolution. Once begun that revolution would alter the working class on a mass scale and make it ready, as "an immense majority", "to found society anew"[Marx]. In our next part we will look at the impact of the Russian Revolution of 1917 on the issue of class consciousness and revolutionary organisation.

Jock

Our pamphlet on Trotskyism is £2.50 from the group address



The Agonizing Death of Little Steel

CWO Introduction

It's not so long ago that it seemed the only economic news coming out of the United States was about the success of the 'new economy'. New technology, coupled with the miraculous rise in share prices of dotcom companies who'd often never made a profit, had supposedly made US capital the most productive in the world. The USA was set to lead the rest of the world economy towards a golden future where cyclical recessions and economic downturns would be a thing of the past. Forget about the massive discrepancy between share prices and the capital value or profit takings of companies. Forget about the huge increase in household debt and the fact that US Inc. has the biggest current account debt in history. All the rest of the world had to do was follow the US example and open their economies to ... US financial capital. Then reality caught up with the new American dream. The collapse of the high tech/dotcom investment bubble early last summer forced the economic pundits to admit that this was something more than an adjustment of share values. Recession (or is it a 'downturn', or at any rate 'negative growth') has not been relegated to history.

Well before September 11 made bad news part of the US official vocabulary, the Federal Reserve was busy trying to combat a growing tide of company bankruptcies with successive cuts in interest rates. In all there were eleven interest rate reductions last year but, whatever impact they had, they did not stop 257 companies officially going bust — more than twice as many as in the last US economic 'downturn' of 1991-2. Now, we are told it is just a matter of time before the US 'recovery' which will once again pull the world economy out of the

doldrums. Meanwhile, however, the shut downs and job losses continue. By the beginning of March over 120,000 job cuts had been announced in the US **this year**.

For the past thirty years, the US has been able to use its unique position as holder of the world's dominant trading currency to reduce the impact of the capitalist profitability crisis on its own economy and push the impact onto its rivals. In particular, over the last decade, the US drew in vast amounts of capital from the rest of the world, attracted by a strong dollar and high investment returns. The collapse of the US stock market which ushered in the present recession was not only the signal that the abysmally low real rate of return on US industrial and manufacturing capital was finally being recognised, it has narrowed the options for US capitalism as whole. It is imperative for the US that the value of the dollar is kept up and that the US is seen as a safe place to invest. If the USA were any other country the state of its domestic economy at the moment would have led to a massive withdrawal of investment and a run on the currency. As it is, however, we are now told the US needs to attract \$1.5bn **per day** from overseas in order to offset its massive current account deficit. This is becoming increasingly impossible but it won't stop the US administration from doing its utmost to prevent the dollar going into free fall. (Keeping tabs on oil supplies and control of oil markets is an essential part of this strategy and this is where US economic aims are pursued by military means.) As the article points out, "... steel producers in the US are going under because the costs of operating in the US are too high." So we have the spectacle of a Republican administration, the party of Reagan,

anti-interventionism and the free market, imposing import tariffs in order to protect 'American steel'. But then Bush is also using state spending to prop up ailing IT companies (more than \$52bn has been given to 'federal agencies' to buy IT products) and of course state military expenditure has shot up since September 11.

Inside the club of the world's richest states — the WTO (World Trade Organisation) — the US steel tariffs have been condemned by the EU as part of its permanent battle against the US. As yet, this dispute is more or less at the level of shadow-boxing and, although the US tariffs are being portrayed as a direct attack on the EU, in fact the main effect on European steel will be indirect since the tariff barriers are mainly against steel from countries outside Europe, such as Japan, and those with cheaper labour costs, such as Brazil or the former USSR. What the EU is worried about is that this cheaper steel finds its way to Europe and further undermines the order books of its own steel industry. Thus, the capitalist crisis continues to have a global impact and reduces the options not only of the US but of its weaker rivals. With two world wars, history has shown how capitalism responds when its options are narrowed. The 'war on terrorism' we are witnessing today is a reminder of what capitalist economic rivalry becomes when their economic crisis refuses to go away. This article is a reminder that US capitalism is not immune to the economic crisis and that in the United States, as everywhere else, it is the working class who pays.

CWO

The Agonizing Death of Little Steel

Hardly noticeable amidst the noise of the latest war drive of the US bourgeoisie is the tragic collapse of an entire industry taking its toll in the lives of tens, even hundreds of thousands of workers. As world capitalism sinks miserably in its own inherent contradictions the ruling class has only one course of action, to force austerity on the workers and jam one imperialist war after another down their throats. The collapse and restructuring of the steel industry in the US is a clear indication of the decay of this system and the heavy burden placed on the backs of the working class. The current state of affairs in world capitalism is apparent within the very centers of capitalism itself. LTV, the third largest steel producer in the country has filed for bankruptcy and cannot find a buyer.

"Little Steel", those steel producers in the US smaller than US Steel, in fact includes some of the biggest steel producers in the country. The outbreak of the economic crisis in Asia in 1997 and the weight of the dollar in the world economy have both acted to knock down an already sick industry. As the nations of the world try to export their way out of a crisis at root caused by a falling rate of profit steel producers in the US are going under because the costs of operating in

the US are too high. Leaving the steel producers and the unions the task of cutting back productive capacity, closing factories and cutting wages and benefits. Since 1998 some 25 steel companies have gone out of business in the US.

December 19, 2001, a federal judge gave the official go-ahead to idle the LTV mills in Cleveland, Ohio and East Chicago, Indiana along with their coke making facilities in Warren, Ohio and Chicago, Illinois, putting some 7500 people out of work. The impact of this shut down

extends far beyond the 7500 workers laid off. In Northwest Indiana some 9000 additional jobs will eventually be lost as LTV suppliers scramble to contract to other companies. Other steel plants in the region are also hurting. Bethlehem Steel is bankrupt. US Steel, Ispat Island Steel, and National Steel plants are all losing money. With Bethlehem Steel bankrupt and thus not paying taxes the local school district stands to lose some 40 percent of its budget. In Gary, Indiana steel makes up 50 percent of the local tax base. In 1980 50,000 steelworkers were employed in this area, today they number around 20,000. The capitalist response to their falling rates of profit is to eliminate their capacity to produce steel. LTV will run on so-called "hot idle", meaning the coke ovens will be kept on, through the end of February 2002. Should no buyer come forward at that time the coke ovens will be turned off permanently. On February 27, 2002, company assets will be auctioned off.

At the end of February supplemental unemployment benefits paid by the company, and already cut in half, will cease to be paid completely. The company will no longer fund job retraining and job search programs to its laid off workers. LTV will no longer pay into the medical trust fund that supplies medical benefits to some 55,000 union and 13,100 non-union retirees, the fund itself will run out of money by mid-summer 2002.



US steelworkers rallying behind their union banner in February to demand 40% tariffs on imported steel. A week later the Bush administration imposed 30% tariffs. It is natural that workers try to defend their livelihoods. But the unions always look for a solution that will help the bosses. This means workers are in a no-win situation from the start. The tariffs won't stop the unions negotiating further job losses and harsher conditions to increase competitiveness for workers left with a job.

Work in the steel industry is known for the debilitating effects on the health of its workers, creating chronic medical problems and exposing the workers to common toxins such as benzene, tar and hydrochloric acid. Many of these workers will now have a hard time finding ways to pay for their life's service to the industry.

In recent years some 29 steel makers have filed for bankruptcy protection under Chapter 11 of US bankruptcy law. Some steel companies like Edgewater, Great Lakes Metals, Trico, and Northwestern Steel and Wire have shut down completely. LTV is only the latest and largest of a growing list of casualties. Steel making in the US produces roughly 64 percent of what it is capable of producing and industry analysts say it will take another 20 percent cut in production in order to return the industry to profitability.

The role of the United Steelworkers of America (USWA) should shake people of any illusions they might hold of unions as the great defenders of the proletariat. In November of 2001, US Steel announced that it was in merger talks with Bethlehem, National and Wheeling-Pittsburgh. Company officials stated that in order for the

merger to go through there would have to be major concessions on the part of the workers and an agreement from the government to take up paying the so-called "legacy costs" of retired workers. These costs of a large aging workforce relative to the small number of workers employed in the industry today represents a major target of the bosses in their futile attempt to regain profitability. USWA stated that it would support the merger. This is hardly unusual as they supported every other initiative made by the owners regarding layoffs and benefit cuts. Instead of defending workers, which they can't do anyway, they have responded by mounting a nationalist campaign calling on government protection of the steel industry blaming the crisis on cheap foreign imports and cheap foreign labor. The US government has recently pledged at a meeting of the International Trade Commission in Brussels to cut US Steel production by the industry analyst recommended 20 percent. The US government indicated that any support for the US steel industry will hinge on how much the industry restructures, how many workers are laid off and how much wages and benefits are cut. The USWA will go along with this because they have no choice. Given the nature of the crisis it would matter little how militant or acquiescent the union or what shade of unionism was practiced. So the workers go to the wall and the unions will help put them there.

US Steel is making a move to control all of what is left of the steel industry in the US. They are, along with the USWA asking the US government for assistance. Namely, \$12 billion dollars in government aid to pay for employee benefits. They want the government to push aside antitrust laws that might get in their way. They further want tariffs on imported steel of up to 40 percent to protect their industry. Despite all the free market rhetoric of the US government they might just give the industry at least some of what it wants.

Only when workers start to see past the national chauvinism propagated by the unions and the state in this increasingly politically repressive environment, will they be able to defend themselves against this assault. What is also clear is that the bourgeoisie has no solution to this crisis; they talk free market gibberish until they run into economic difficulties and then they seek the shelter of the state. The real key to this crisis is not in the hands of the ruling class. It lies in the hands of workers and it signifies world revolution.

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INTERNATIONALIST NOTES

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The Zimbabwe Crisis and Western Imperialism

Regional Interests

In March the Zimbabwe president, Mugabe, and his ZANU party rigged the country's presidential election to give him another 6 years in power. This rigged election is only the latest episode in a crisis which stretches back to the mid 90's. The fact that the election has left the Mugabe regime in power means that this crisis will continue for some years to come. Although Zimbabwe is a minor country in capitalism's periphery, with a small population (12.5 million) and limited strategic value, this crisis is still important to western imperialism since it has the potential to destabilise the whole Southern African region and upset vital economic and strategic interests.

This region remains a leading producer of many important minerals, particularly metals such as manganese, antimony, magnesium, platinum and chromium. The last is an essential metal for military purposes since it is used for producing armour plate. Zimbabwe itself produces some of these metals — notably both platinum and chromium. In the last two years 2 new platinum mines have been opened in the country and ferro-chrome accounted for approximately 7% of the country's exports before the current crisis. South Africa also has great strategic importance since it controls the sea-lanes round the south of the continent, which link the Indian and the Atlantic oceans. Although this strategic importance has declined since the challenge of the Russian bloc ended, it will become vital again with the emergence of the new imperialist rivalries which will challenge the US's domination of the area and its trade routes.

Since the collapse of the Russian threat at the end of the 80s, the West has tried to impose peace on the region and to exploit its resources more thoroughly. These attempts have met with modest success. The principal success has been the demolishing of the apartheid regime in South Africa and its replacement

with an African Nationalist one more suited to managing capitalism's interests. The replacement of the apartheid regime, which the West supported tooth and nail while the Russian threat existed, meant that other barbaric conflicts sponsored by the regime and its US backer could also be ended. Accordingly the destabilisation of SA's neighbours was halted and Mozambique civil war ended. The Namibian struggle was settled and attempts were made to end the Angolan war. The SA and US surrogate, UNITA¹, was ordered to make peace with the Luanda regime. This peace process has taken over a decade but in late February this year the international isolation of UNITA finally proved decisive, and its megalomaniac leader Savimbi was killed. By early April a peace treaty was signed and an agreement made to incorporate UNITA soldiers into the Angolan army. A certain amount of political stability has thus been restored and modest amounts of new capital have flowed into the area to rebuild the area.

SA Gendarme of the West

The new SA regime has taken up the mantle, previously held by the apartheid regime, of gendarme of the interests of Western Imperialism. The regime has become the apostle of the IMF's economic policies and through its domination the Southern African Development Community (SADC) is trying to develop a regional trading bloc on the lines of the EU. In addition the SA president, Mbeki, has launched the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) which aims to produce economic development and good governance throughout Africa as a whole. South Africa now accounts for 40% of the continent's economy, and in the last decade has dramatically increased its trade and influence in Sub-Sahara Africa. In 1990 SA trade with Africa represented just 1.7% of its total trade but by 2000 this figure had risen to 12.8% and the value of this trade had increased over fivefold. This economic expansion has been

accompanied by an increase in political and military influence. The country has been at the forefront of efforts to resolve regional conflicts such as those of central Africa and has just hosted a peace conference for the warring factions of the Democratic Republic of Congo. The increased military influence is shown by the fact that there are now SA soldiers on "peace keeping" duties in Burundi, Congo, Ethiopia, Eritrea and the Comoro Islands. The massive military budgets of the apartheid era have been reintroduced and the country is to spend \$5.2bn on arms in the 4-year period ending in 2003. These purchases which are principally aeroplanes, helicopters and naval vessels indicate the country is preparing for a greater military role in the future.

For South Africa the chaos and potential economic collapse in Zimbabwe is a serious threat and the SA regime has been at the forefront of attempts to defuse the crisis. Internationally this crisis threatens what has been achieved in the past decade and has reduced foreign capital flows to the region. This is the last thing the ANC government wants. It also fears that many of the populist issues, which Mugabe is now pursuing and which are equally applicable to South Africa, could cause a similar conflagration there. The issue of land ownership is, of course, the most obvious but other equally explosive issues such as expropriation of foreign mines are now being threatened by Mugabe. These issues are the stuff of the national liberation struggle, and the SA regime is forced to tread carefully in opposing them. This is because these issues find a deep resonance amongst the millions of unemployed and destitute who feel betrayed by the deterioration in their living conditions which has occurred under the ANC government and its jettisoning of these parts of the liberationist politics. These developments, together with general lawlessness and attacks on foreign capital in Zimbabwe, have alarmed the SA government and awoken fears that the contagion might spread

south. Even if the Zimbabwe crisis is contained the SA State is likely to be saddled with a massive influx of refugees and obliged to provide emergency aid to Zimbabwe, and the threat of contamination is likely to increase the exodus of skilled workers from the South Africa.

The crisis in Zimbabwe threatens to destabilise the whole region is therefore a threat to both Western imperialism's interests and those of South Africa.

Zimbabwe's crisis

In the 7 years since 1995, Zimbabwe has moved from an IMF success story to a pariah state. It has now transgressed virtually all the IMF² rules of economic management and the canons of bourgeois democracy. It has not repaid its international loans, it has applied price controls to staple foods, it has introduced fixed exchange rates, it has exceeded budget deficit provisions, it has devastated its main source of foreign exchange — farming, and it has spent millions on a foreign war. These things have led to the suspension of international lending and rescheduling of debts. It has permitted partial breakdown of bourgeois law and order to enable expropriation of white-owned farms without compensation and permitted attacks on and extortion from foreign owned industry. It has introduced repressive legislation and packed the judiciary with its place-men. It has engaged in the war in the Congo and allowed its army commanders to loot the Congolese province of Katanga. It was, however, the March election which has produced the most international outrage. Western imperialism had prepared an alternative leadership in the shape of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) and intended to install its leader Tsvangirai as president after the March election. Needless to say the MDC's policies are to implement IMF programmes, give the central bank independence, abolish price controls and fixed exchange rates, privatise all state companies, purge the civil service of thieves and withdraw from the war in the Congo. There can be little doubt that the MDC would have won any free and fair election because of the catastrophic state of the economy. This was, however, something that the Mugabe regime could not tolerate because a new government would be

likely to expose the rampant corruption of the present regime and also look into the massacres in Matabeleland in the 1980's when tens of thousands were butchered by Mugabe's troops.

Before the election there was a massive campaign of intimidation and attacks on the MDC. 114 MDC supporters were killed in the 18 months before the election! 4500 MDC polling agents have been chased from their homes and are on the run from the Mugabe thugs. 76 of their homes have been burned down. The leader of the MDC was conveniently charged with treason as were other senior members of the party. But all this was not enough to ensure victory for Mugabe! During the election all Zimbabweans abroad were disenfranchised as were 500 000 voters in urban centres when they were transferred to rural voting roles. Of the 800 000 voters in the capital, Harare, who detest the government, half were simply prevented from voting by not providing enough polling stations and opening the ones which were provided late and shutting them early. In addition it is claimed by the MDC, who have now challenged the legality of the election in the courts, that the rural ballot boxes were stuffed. All these things are a measure of Mugabe's desperation. Western imperialism has not hesitated to expose all these frauds, but not because the holy rights of democracy have been trampled under foot, as they claim. This is in any case, something the Western democracies are quite happy to do themselves whenever it suits them, as we have seen in the election of Bush in the US. The real reason is that their plans for the country have been checked and alternative lines of attack now have to be prepared.

Western imperialism has reacted by suspending Zimbabwe from the Commonwealth, applying sanctions which has been done by both the US and EU and freezing bank accounts of senior government ministers, which has been done by Switzerland. Mugabe does not appear to understand the position he is in and thinks that by autocracy and repression he can weather the pressure of international capital. There is little doubt, however, that Western imperialism will continue to turn the screws on the regime until it collapses. The principal area in

which this will be felt is the economy where, without loans or foreign investment and suffering sanctions, a further dramatic deterioration will take place.

The economic crisis

The present state of the economy is catastrophic. This is shown both in statistics and the flood of economic migrants pouring into South Africa. It is estimated that in 2001 over 100 000 people crossed illegally into SA under half of whom were caught and sent back. Those sent back often claim that the meal they received in SA police custody was the best they had in 6 months. Unemployment now stands at 60%, inflation is 120%, the economy has shrunk by 30% in the last 2 years³ and foreign investment fell 80% in 2001. Food production has collapsed because of the seizure of the commercial farming land⁴ and a country, which has always previously exported food, is now threatened with starvation. Half of the population are now going hungry and the UN estimates 500 000 people face starvation. After the election the agriculture minister, Joseph Made, announced plans to import 200 000 tonnes of maize immediately and said that over the next 18 months 1.5 million tonnes would be required.

The regime has got some help from Libya. It has long been rumoured that Libya is partly financing the adventure in the Congo. The war is estimated to cost over \$100m annually and the looting of diamonds and timber, which is controlled by top army generals and ZANU officials, is insufficient to cover this. Libya is thought to be providing some funds for this war and finance for other things such as ZANU's election campaign in March. Libya also provides 70% of the country's fuel requirements⁵ for which the regime no longer has foreign exchange. In early April Mugabe visited Libya to sign agreements for beef and tobacco exports to Libya to compensate for the Libyan help. However, Libyan assistance will not be able to make much difference to the country's economic problems and will aggravate its political ones with the US.

The regime is also claiming that it is returning to "socialism", by which it means "state capitalism" as existed in Russia before 1991. The government has introduced price controls for

staple foods such as bread and maize, but with inflation at 10% monthly the state is finding them impossible to enforce except where production has been cut back to reduce the consequent losses. Its response has been to threaten expropriation of all businesses that either did not stick to the government prices or that cut production. The regime has not got the resources to take over the whole economy and such threats are likely to produce further disruption and chaos. The regime has, of course, never had the slightest interest in socialism. On the contrary it has been a faithful supporter of capitalism since it gained power in 1980 and most of the '90's was spent demolishing state capitalist sectors of the economy under the IMF's Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESDAP). Mugabe's present rhetoric, in which he has threatened to seize British mines and British capital, is a further indication of desperation. The "socialism" of ZANU has consisted in the distribution of expropriated farms to ZANU officials and gaining share holdings in capitalist industries through corruption, such as refusing to grant permits until shares are handed over to officials, and state pressure, such as compulsory purchases. This is what Mugabe means by "indigenisation" of Zimbabwe industry. This rhetoric is designed primarily to fool the working class and head off serious class struggle.

Workers' Struggles

Conditions for the working class are dreadful. Even for those workers who still have jobs, wages are today less than 2/3 of what they were under the Smith regime before independence. The massive rate of price inflation has provoked strikes in many sectors of the economy, particularly the public services. An example is the strike of Social Security Workers who, in March, demanded a 30% cost of living adjustment. Previously nurses and even doctors have struck. There still appears to be significant militancy amongst the working class which Mugabe's thugs have not tamed. Immediately after the election of March the Zimbabwe Confederation of Trade Unions (ZCTU) called a 3-day strike against the harassment of its members. In effect this strike was called to protest against ZANU

intimidation and beatings during the election, and amounted to a protest against the rigging of the election. It thus became a strike in support of the MDC. The Mugabe regime immediately declared it illegal and set about repressing it under its recently passed legislation, "The Public Order and Security Act". This shows precisely what Mugabe means by a "return to socialism". In the event the strike was a failure not only because of state repression, but also because it was not a strike for immediate class demands. It was rather an attempt by the ZCTU to mobilise its members in a fresh battle for the MDC.

The MDC leader Tsvangirai was previously president of the ZCTU and sees it as his natural constituency. The ZCTU accordingly directs major strikes towards the political demands of the MDC. Even where strikes are for class demands, such as the 2-day general strike in July 2001 to demand the government revoke a 70% increase in the price of fuel, the ZCTU used the strike as a way of dissipating workers' anger and directing it towards the coming election campaign. It therefore became, indirectly, a mobilisation for the MDC and, needless to say, achieved nothing. After 2 days of striking workers went back to work and the government refused to repeal the increases. The ZCTU threatened to call a general strike⁶ if the government did not revoke the increases. This, of course, would be the only to achieve success, but the ZCTU gave no time limit for the government to act and 9 months have now passed without the government revoking the increases. On the contrary, fuel prices have risen further, and the ZCTU has not done anything at all.

The ZCTU is an arm of the bourgeoisie in the same way as the trade unions are in Europe. It sees its role as that of mobilising workers to fight as cannon fodder for the aims of the bourgeois opposition. For the struggle of the Zimbabwean workers to move forward it is imperative that this struggle breaks entirely from the politics of the capitalist class. Neither faction of the capitalist class is able to offer anything to the Zimbabwean workers apart from increases in exploitation and repression. The African nationalists

and the so-called "national liberation" struggle have betrayed workers and they will get nothing better from the representatives of international capital in the shape of the MDC. In fact, international capital understands that, in the long term, the only power able to force greater exploitation and worse conditions on the Zimbabwean working class is the MDC acting with its henchmen of ZCTU. Workers should raise their own class demands and prepare for a struggle with the regime for these demands. Such a struggle needs to be conducted as a struggle of class against class and organised outside of all the organisations of the bourgeois class such as the MDC and the ZCTU. Zimbabwe workers need to construct their own political organisations to further their struggle. They need to construct their own class party to raise the political demands in this struggle and to show that the fight is part of a greater fight, a global fight, for communism. As we wrote in RP22:

"Zimbabwe's problems cannot be solved in Zimbabwe. This is because they are part of international capitalism's problems, which cannot be solved without the destruction of the capitalist system itself and the construction of a communist world."

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Notes

1 UNITA is the acronym for the liberation movement whose Portuguese name means National Union for the Total Independence of Angola. It was formed by the CIA and SA as a vehicle to oppose the Russian backed MPLA, the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola. After US support was withdrawn, it sustained itself by diamond mining in the areas of the country it controlled. Its war with the MPLA has devastated the country.

2 For a fuller account of Zimbabwe's quarrels with the IMF see RP 22, "Zimbabwe on the brink".

3 Quoted in *The Independent* 18/03/02

4 See RP 18 "Zimbabwe - rival capitalist gangs struggle for power" for further details of the land resettlement issue.

5 Quoted in *Zimbabwe Dispatch* 10/4/02

6 See RP 22 "Zimbabwe on the brink" for an analysis of this strike.

Venezuela — Chávez and the Con of the ‘Bolivarian Revolution’ Survive — for Now

Venezuela is a country of great importance. It is not only world's fourth largest oil producer but is now the main US source of oil imports. And this is the key to the attempted coup in early April against the populist government of Hugo Chávez. Chávez, an ex-army colonel who himself tried to overthrow the government in a coup in the early 1990's, was elected as President three years ago. Since then he has dressed up his bourgeois programme in populist rhetoric. He calls it the “Bolivarian Revolution” after Simon Bolivar, the Venezuelan-born “Liberator” of much of Latin America from the Spanish Empire in the 1820's. Pseudo-revolutionary slogans and open friendship with Castro's Cuba have been accompanied by the organisation of grassroots “Bolivarian Circles” in an attempt to mobilise the impoverished masses behind the regime.

The success of this mobilisation was clear from Thursday April 13th to Monday April 16th when a military coup to overthrow the President was met with a pro-Chávez “contra-contra-revolución” (counter-counter-revolution) which saw Chávez return to the Presidency. The military coup was supposedly to come to the aid of those disenchanted with the Chávez regime. The week before the coup had been filled with strikes, some of them involving oil workers, with the collusion of their bosses, protesting at Chávez' imposition of his management team over the oil industry. The talk was of his “tyranny” in trying to impose his state capitalist regime on oil. In fact it seems that this operation was planned some time ago. The US had never been

comfortable with Chávez but when he appointed a former journalist, Vicente Rangel as his Defence Minister last August that appears to have been the last straw. Rangel was not only sympathetic to the FARC guerrilla movement in Colombia but asked the USA to vacate its offices in the Fuerte Tiuna military headquarters in Caracas. The fact that Rangel had previously criticised the corruption of many Army officers in the press meant that they were prepared to listen to US siren songs about support for a “golpe” (coup). A succession of high-ranking Army officers now took the plane to Washington (some ostensibly for medical treatment). Pedro Carmona, head of the Venezuelan equivalent of the CBI, was chosen as the new President and the strike movement was set in motion. It was all reminiscent of the overthrow of Allende in Chile in 1973.

However that is where the similarity ended. Chávez was arrested and whipped off to an island off the Venezuelan coast and it was announced that he had resigned. Chávez' wife however announced that this was not true and this brought the masses onto the street. Here the work of Chávez' Vice President in organising 500,000 Venezuelans in 30,000 “Bolivarian Circles” paid off. The street fighting led to scores of (as yet untold) dead and forced the Army to think again. Chávez was brought back as the only man who could avert civil war. The deal that he struck is already clear. Rangel has been sacked and moved to Vice-President. Cavallo, the existing Vice-President, has been vaguely promised another job. The man Chávez then appointed to head the Army has already been killed in a

helicopter “accident”. The drama is not yet over but it is clear that Chávez is now a true Bonapartist figure. He rules for the old ruling class with the support of the masses. As long as he doesn't offend the former he will survive as it will be sometime before the latter are disillusioned.

The following are extracts from our Latin American sympathisers who were compelled to rapidly renew their analysis of the situation as it unfolded. A longer and deeper analysis will be published in our central organ Internationalist Communist next month. Although the main point coming through was that Chavism, despite its antagonism with U.S. interests is a powerful force, not to be underestimated as its ability to weather the latest storm demonstrates, it is ultimately unable to deliver the goods to the working class who constitute the overwhelming majority of the country. Like all the nationalist, reformist, populist, and/or leftist trends, which on an international scale claim to oppose voracious capitalism's globalised evolution, it has no future in a world where capitalism's very survival depends on the demolition of all barriers to maximum profitability.

It is the communist movement alone which can liberate the working class and suffering humanity, and there is no substitute for the establishment of national sections of a centralised International Communist Party to lead the working class out of capitalism's hell.

Friday April 13th

Yesterday afternoon, Hugo Chávez performed the last act of his tragic-comedy. A “civic-military” *pronunciamiento* overthrew him. A military and bosses junta headed by the Venezuelan capitalists’ well-known boss, Pedro Carmona, (President of Fedecamaras, one of the two main capitalist associations), has assumed the reins of government. In his first declarations, the new president has underlined that the newly constituted regime will stay only as long as is necessary to demolish the work of the Chávez administration: the Bolivarian constitution will be annulled, the chambers and political organs of Chavism will be dissolved – as well as all the mechanisms and political devices which organised the mass of its followers –, the military, social and economic reforms of State-capitalism will be rolled back... The coup against Chávez, then, was no surprise. The conspiracy of the ‘Yankee government’, Fedecamaras and Coindustria, the big landowners and the CTV workers’ aristocracy, also involving, for military-strategic reasons the ultra-reactionary Colombian government¹, was so obvious and explicit that even Chávez, this man who suffers extreme myopia, could see it.

Saturday April 14th

Saturday afternoon saw a Chavista counter-coup, which put an end to the civic-military junta headed by Pedro Carmona. In spite of the bourgeois and imperialist mass media distortions and cover-ups today it is known that from Friday 12th of April, through the night, Chavez’ so-called “Bolivarian Circles” surrounded the military outposts of Caracas and, in spite of suffering more than 20 dead, succeeded in persuading the military to give up the coup. On Saturday morning the number of Chávez supporters in the streets approached a million. This enormous and imposing multitude was so great,

that the TV just decided to show it at night. It also had important armed sections, which circulated on motorcycles. In the afternoon, the mass had already taken over all radio and television stations and transmitted messages calling for a return to the “Bolivarian Revolution” and the restoration of Chávez, the constitution and the government was ratified in five elections with 80% of total votes. Similar actions were repeated throughout the whole country, motivated, it seems by the decision of the pro-Chávez sector of the army to endorse the so-called “Bolivarian government”. Everything indicates that the base of the army and low-ranking officers identified with the figure of the colonel and his slogans, fraternised with the Chavistas, leaving the coup-leading Generals isolated. Naturally, in the darkness of the caverns of Power there have been negotiations and pacts whose contents have not yet been exposed to public light. Anyway, everything suggests that the combination of the two mentioned forces have overturned Friday’s coup. The fifth republic has not died and Chávez is back from the dead saying “the dead that you killed enjoy good health.”

Certainly the drama of Chile’s Unidad Popular has not been repeated, but this is not due to Chávez’ greater electoral support – Allende’s Unidad Popular, on the eve of the 1973 coup, had also received strong ratification in parliamentary elections which did not prevent his downfall. But Chávez survived because of two main conditions; firstly the division of the army and secondly Chavism’s capacity for popular mobilisation, neither of which were sufficiently considered in our first analysis of the situation which immediately followed the *coup d’état*.

The masses — meaning a very high percentage of the population, as has been confirmed in recent days, —

came out in defence of Chávez and his “revolution” upon realising that the other option meant losing even the shirt off their backs. For them things were posed all too clearly: Chávez is the people, he is “our man”, Carmona represents, on the other hand, “the dictatorship of the powerful” as could be read on the demonstrators’ placards. Chávez is for agrarian reform, Carmona is “the law of the funnel of the rich” (the wide end for them, the narrow end for the people) according to the popular adage. For us these are obviously relative, even purely rhetorical expressions, but for the desperate masses who have never received anything from their governors but lead, they have the ring of truth.

...the revolutionary decantation of the masses can only be produced by the downfall of Chavism and/or the exhaustion of the populist political experience. Such a decantation will begin with a clear class demarcation which will provoke a change in the current “Bolivarian Circles” – that is to say, those organs where the masses have undergone their own political apprenticeship and developed a feeling of power – into truly autonomous organs, capable of acting in accordance with class tasks and perspectives ...

JA/Ant

Note

1 The only Latin American government which recognised the civic-military junta presided over by Carmona was that of Colombia through a public declaration via her own embassy and various cabinet ministers. As soon as the bosses and military coup in Caracas registered, the USA government rushed to authorise a credit of several hundred million dollars to help the “new government” and “contribute to the reconstruction of “democracy” in Venezuela”.

Afghanistan

US Imperialism Advances into Central Asia

By the start of 2002 the war in Afghanistan was won. US victory was never in doubt, since the *Taliban* regime was not backed by a rival imperialist power, and once the support from the CIA, directed via the Pakistan Intelligence services, was removed the regime collapsed like a house of cards. Many of the Northern Alliance warlords who have recently appeared have simply changed sides and were *Taliban* generals a few months ago. While it has been easy for the US to conquer the country in the battles where conventional military power is decisive, the task of concluding the guerrilla war against *Al Qaeda* and the *Taliban* has been less easy. The use of US air power had such a devastating effect that the rag-tag infantry of the Northern Alliance could sweep the *Taliban* from power in a couple of months. Today the *Taliban* is scattered and defeated, virtually no US casualties have been suffered. A new regime headed by the US's chosen figurehead, Karzai, is in power in Kabul. The King has been moved back from Italy to Kabul to provide stability and planning for a broader government after a grand council meeting (or *Loya Jurga*) is under way. The US has a military base in Kandahar and its troops roam the country freely arresting whoever they like, while many of its enemies have been arrested and taken to the US base in Cuba. Meanwhile a multinational peace force, in which the US has no part, but which it controls from its Florida command centre, provides the fig leaf for US action. The US advances in the whole region have been just as dramatic. 13 new US military bases have been established in the countries which neighbour Afghanistan, notably Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Pakistan and also Georgia at the west of the Caspian. If Bulgaria, Turkey, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia are included the US now has 60 000 troops stationed in the region and a network of forward bases from which these could be rapidly reinforced to mount attacks

anywhere in central Asia. In addition to the land bases the US has massive naval forces stationed in the Red Sea, the Gulf and the Arabian Sea. Intervention in other countries where opposition to US imperialism exists is either underway or being planned. 600 military "experts" are already in the Philippines taking part in the battle with Muslim separatists, and plans for invasion of Iraq have been published. Plans for intervention in other countries such as Somalia, Yemen, Sudan, Indonesia and Iran are being drawn up. Bush, in his state of the union address, announced that three principal countries were in the firing line and formed what he called an "axis of evil." North Korea, Iran and Iraq were in this way given notice that unless they started to comply with US dictates they could expect the same as the *Taliban*. The fact that these countries had no connection with *Al Qaeda* or the 11 September attacks did not matter. So confident is the US, following its Afghan victory that the Secretary for Defence Rumsfeld informed the world that the US would intervene wherever it pleased and that its allies would not be given a veto over US military goals. The message is clear, the US will tolerate no opposition to its imperialist interests anywhere and reserves the right to act unilaterally where it sees such opposition.

Since September 11 the increase in US military presence has been dramatic. However, the US still faces problems in Afghanistan and has called on the UK to provide 1700 marines for anti-guerrilla operations. This follows the fiasco of the US-led operation Anaconda where US troops were ambushed and a helicopter lost. A new sweep to try and find *Al Qaeda* guerrillas is underway. This operation, named "Snipe", seems equally unsuccessful. The crucial issue for the US is to get a proper settlement in the country. Infighting between

elements of the Northern Alliance and local warlords has started again, ministers in the government have been assassinated and attempts made on the lives of others. Recently 300 members of the *Hizb-i-islam*, a group previously sponsored by the CIA, have been arrested in Kabul. Instability appears to be increasing rather than decreasing. The longer NATO forces stay in Kabul the more they will be seen as an occupying power and they more likely they are to be attacked.

Military action for economic ends

The US military victory is, of course, intimately connected with the interests of US capital and once the country has been made safe for US capital we can expect to see US companies moving into the area. This is a long term US aim that it will pursue even if it cannot be immediately realised. It is therefore no surprise to learn that the new US special envoy to Afghanistan is Zalmay Khalilzad who previously worked for Unocal and, in 1997, negotiated with the *Taliban* for the construction of the two famous pipelines from the Turkmenistan oil and gas fields. One of these was to run directly through Afghanistan to Karachi for export of oil to south-east Asia and the US and the other was to go to the Pakistani city of Multan with a possible extension across the border to Delhi. The *Taliban* failed to create the conditions for the realisation of these and other US projects. There can be little doubt that once the military work is done these projects will be revived and others initiated.

In a few short months the US has achieved a startling advance in its interests at the expense of its rivals and, moreover, this has taken place with the complicit agreement of these rivals. The US has made a major thrust towards the resources of the Caspian basin and central

Asia. How has such a spectacular coup been achieved?

The war is imperialist

The war, like all wars fought by the US since the Spanish-American war, is an imperialist one, and its ultimate aim is to carve out new areas for exploitation by US capital. Like all wars in the imperialist epoch the root cause lies in the economic problems of the capitalist system, in particular the tendency of its rate of profit to fall. The imperative to increase profit rates is the force, which sets the great military machines in motion. Military action is the means of gaining cheaper raw materials, trade routes, areas of investment, cheaper labour power or simply strategic positions to block rivals getting access to these things and to better oppose such rivals in the future. In the Afghan war all these sordid bourgeois motives are obviously present and it is evident that the military campaign is simply the first step in the capitalist pillage of the region. The major powers in the alliance are thus the bourgeois equivalent of a gang of thieves.

Although the coalition pretends its motives are the most lofty ones, such as the destruction of terrorism, the protection of civilisation itself, protection of democracy, protection of freedom and so on this is sheer hypocrisy. What is being protected is the freedom for US capital to exploit raw materials and labour power without restriction. The suggestion that the US is against terrorism is complete rubbish. All its present "terrorist" enemies in Afghanistan, for example, were previously trained and paid by the US who, in those days, described them as heroes because they were terrorists attacking Russian forces. During the entire period of the Cold War, the US has been arming and financing terrorists against its enemies from one end of the world to the other. The US is also the only nation to have been found guilty of terrorism by the world court. This occurred because of its terrorist war in Nicaragua. It brushed aside this judgement with contempt and went on to veto a UN Security Council resolution calling on all states to

"observe international law!" So much for the US regard for civilisation and international law! It is clear there is only one principle involved, and that is whether terrorism is directed against the US's enemies or whether its directed at the US. The first is "good" the second is "evil".

The collapse of the Russian bloc in 1989 left the US as the sole superpower and put it in a position where it was possible to use this power without any serious opposition. Whereas the wars in the post-World War II period, such as the Korean and Vietnam wars did not lead to unambiguous gains for US capital at the expense of its rivals, those in the post-1989 period have. The wars such as the Gulf War and the Kosovo War have clearly seen the US use its military power to advance its economic and strategic interests at the expense of its rivals. The attacks of September 11th have ushered in a new period in which the US feels confident to use its military power far more freely and without bothering about UN resolutions, the sanction of "so-called" international law. The recent US Budget proposed by the Bush administration eloquently states where the new priorities lie. Military spending is to rise by \$48 bn next year bringing it to \$320bn which is more than 11 times the amount spent by a second order power like the UK. This figure is 40% of the total spent on the military by all countries worldwide. In the table of the top military spenders the US is now spends an amount equal to the combined total of the following 19 countries. By 2007 this spending is due to be increased a further 40% to \$450bn. The events of September 11th gave the US the opening it needed to advance the present campaign. Indeed these events have been so overwhelmingly to the advantage of the US that many have argued that they allowed them to happen in the same way as they allowed Pearl Harbour to be bombed by the Japanese. Just as Pearl harbour was the atrocity needed to mobilise the population behind the war with Japan, so the September 11th atrocities mobilised the population

for a major new military era in which the hesitation in going to war, which followed the Vietnam defeat, can be finally shaken off.

New wars lie ahead

While the major powers in this conflict are a gang of thieves, they are a divided gang with the junior members sharpening their knives as they try to secure a share of the spoils and a different outcome from the gang leader. The European powers, just like their US counterparts, are keen to get their hands on the wealth of the Caspian basin and central Asia, and both have the long-term aim of exploiting and controlling these resources. While the US wants to get the oil out of the region via a southern pipeline through Afghanistan and Pakistan, the Europeans want to see the oil and gas go west through routes leading directly to Europe. The Europeans do not accept US hegemony over the area. Although they will not, at present, dare to oppose the US openly, they are able to play a spoiling game and put spokes in the US's wheel. This rivalry can be seen in their attitude to the various problems, which the US successes have brought in their wake, and is an indication of future direct opposition.

The first area of continuing US difficulty is the Middle East, particularly Palestine and Saudi Arabia. The US is unwilling to break the impasse in Palestine by forcing a major retreat on its Israeli protegee; nor is it willing to allow Israel to impose the Sharon "final solution," namely the reoccupation of the Palestinian territories and a further massive expulsion of Palestinians. (See "Barbarism in Palestine" in this edition). The European Union through its own peace plans and peace missions to the area is clearly attempting to undermine the US control of the region and present the EU as a friend to the Arabs. It is a continuation of previous support for the Palestinian Authority (PA) and criticism of Israel for its destruction of EU funded infrastructure projects in the territory and its attempts to destroy the PA itself.

The continuing carnage in Palestine carried out with obvious US sanction has produced crises in the US's Arab allies. The most serious, from the US point of view, is that in Saudi Arabia. The Saudi regime never fully supported the US onslaught on Afghanistan and would not allow their bases be used for control of the air campaign. There is significant sympathy for the anti-Americanism of Osama Bin Laden in Saudi Arabia. During the last two decades capitalist development in the kingdom has produced significant new social forces which are tending to challenge the regime. A small indigenous Saudi working class has been produced together with a large lower middle class. There is unemployment amongst both groups and significant discontent as they have seen their living standards halve in the last 20 years. This discontent which is directed against the monarchy and its US backer is putting strains on the US alliance. It has been reported a number of times that the Saudi wants the US to remove its forces from the kingdom. Though this was initially denied by the US they later admitted it when the White House chief of staff Andrew Card stated that,

*They've been asking (the US to leave) for a long time ... we've been working to minimise the size of the support US forces have in Saudi Arabia, etc.*²

The bases in Saudi are, however, very important for the US as is shown by the recently announced US plans for coming invasion of Iraq which state that US air force command headquarters will be in the Prince Sultan air base in Saudi Arabia. The US obviously has no intention of vacating its Saudi bases and this position was made clear by the secretary of state Colin Powell when he said that the US forces would not stay,

"beyond the requirements that we have."

In other words the US, and the US alone, would determine how long its forces stayed. Such a contemptuous treatment can only weaken the position of the monarchy. The development of further discontent in Saudi could lead to popular unrest which, in turn, could force the US to

intervene militarily to support the monarchy. The US's principal ally in the Gulf is thus increasingly unreliable and may indeed become a liability.

A second region where US imperialism has encountered problems is in the Indian subcontinent where India and Pakistan are at present mobilised for war. A new India/Pakistan conflict would be a severe setback for the US as its Pakistani ally would be severely weakened and its support for US action in Afghanistan jeopardised. The US now finds itself the arbiter of regional disputes such as that over Kashmir. It has forced its Pakistani ally into a humiliating climbdown over its support for the armed groups it sponsored in the Indian State in Kashmir. The two main groups, both proteges of the Pakistani secret services (ISI) have been banned and their leading militants arrested, although they have not, as yet, been handed over to the Indian authorities as demanded by India. This has led to friction among the Pakistani ruling class since the strategies of the last three decades have been reversed by a single dictat from Washington. However, in early February, the Pakistani regime was rewarded by the signing of a Defence pact with the US. This pact allows the US access to Pakistani military facilities, including the two air bases already handed over to it in south west Pakistan, and makes it likely that it will receive US support in the event of a war with India.

In both these areas the Europeans have been content to distance themselves from the US and to try and exploit future developments. In regard to US plans for further wars sharp opposition to the US is developing amongst the European allies. There has been open dismay at the plans for the US invasion of Iraq which were made public in mid February, and similar protest at its threats to Iran. In both countries the Europeans have substantial economic interests which they have been pursuing without competition from the US because of the US proscription of trade with these two states. If the US were now to overturn the *status quo* by force and

install new US backed regimes in these states the Europeans would suffer significant losses. In a similar criticism, Japan has expressed disapproval at the US's linking of North Korea to Iran and Iraq as part of an evil axis which was on the list of future targets.

At the same time the Europeans have been mounting a campaign of outraged liberalism about the US's murder of civilians in Afghanistan which, according to a UN spokesman, amounts to between 3000 and 8000, and its barbaric treatment of its prisoners. Of course, the US can teach the Europeans nothing that they do not already know about the murder of civilians or the torture of prisoners. It is, however, one more example of the underlying differences of imperialist interests between the US and Europe.

There can be little doubt that the US will brush aside all the opposition of the Europeans and Japanese. This opposition indicates, however, that future imperialist conflicts are developing. These conflicts are developing out of the material conflicts for such things as raw materials, labour power control of trade routes etc. In the longer term these conflicts will rupture the Atlantic alliance and produce proxy wars just as we saw in the cold war era. These conflicts can only be the prelude for more generalised imperialist war between the main imperialist centres.

Al Qaeda and Islamic Terrorism

By means of its war in Afghanistan the US has succeeded in largely destroying the *Al Qaeda* bases and infrastructure in the country, though it has so far failed to capture the leaders it was seeking. However, the organisation has bases in many countries and while US imperialism continues to ravage the Middle East it is likely to continue to recruit the desperate and dispossessed into its ranks, and it will continue to attack the US. Indeed the war is likely to boost the propaganda of the organisation, since it gives it credibility as an

authentic opposition force to the US.

Although *Al Qaeda*, which was formed in 1989, is now in opposition to US imperialism its principal members and sections were all creations of US imperialism and were faithful fighters for US imperialism against Russian imperialism during the '80's. (See "Afghanistan — The War against the Working Class Continues", RP 23.) The turn against the US followed the collapse of Russian imperialism in 1989 and the US occupation of Saudi Arabia following the Gulf war of 1991. The organisation wrapped itself in the robes of Islam and its language became that of Jihad. It based itself in states where the central authority was weak but attempting to become a theocracy. It appears to have raised its funds from individual members of the Arab bourgeoisie throughout the Middle East and through Islamic charities. Its close links with the *Taliban*, which was armed and financed by the CIA via Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, meant that it had access to a ready supply of arms. Although millionaires such as its leader, bin Laden, show the links between individual members of the Arab bourgeoisie and the organisation, *Al Qaeda* as an organisation is an expression of the despair of the Middle Eastern petit bourgeoisie. The fact that the organisation has been able to recruit so widely is related to the collapse of Arab Nationalism and Pan Arabism in the '70's, and the subsequent rise in globalisation. The petit bourgeoisie who see no future

under capitalism dominated by global imperialism turn for salvation to a distant and largely mythical past dominated by Islam.

As far as it is possible to discern the programme of *Al Qaeda* they aim to restore an empire dominated by Islam as existed under the *Umayyad* Caliphs of Damascus in early years of Islam. This ambition, which is completely impossible to achieve, betrays a complete ignorance of the present capitalist society. Any theocratic government today can only be an administrator of capitalism and as such cannot escape the contradictions of the system and its crisis of profitability, which pushes all capitalist countries towards imperialism and war. Such an Islamic empire, if it were ever to exist, could not avoid becoming a new imperialist force and immediately having to confront the existing imperialist blocs. Neither can islands of theocratic capitalism escape the depredations of global imperialism. The theocratic regimes of Iran and that of the *Taliban* itself provide illustrations of this. Islam is not a way out of capitalism's problems and to pretend that there is some solution through Islamic capitalism is completely false. *Al Qaeda* thus represent a totally reactionary movement, which is totally opposed to the interests of the working class. There can be no question of the working class giving it any support whatsoever, on the contrary it must be ruthlessly exposed for what it is, namely, a backward faction of the capitalist class. There is one way, and only one way, that the present problems of the

world can be solved and that is through the overthrow of capitalism itself and the establishment of a system of production for need, namely communism. All else is pure utopia.

The Anti-War Movement

It is clear that the US is serious about launching future wars in the Middle East and in

south east Asia and mobilisations against the wars will continue in the metropolitan countries. In Britain the "Stop the War" coalition will continue its work. This coalition is a broad-based liberal pacifist coalition. It unites utterly diverse elements from Islamicists and Christian pacifists through Palestinian nationalists to sections of the social democracy (Labour Party) and capital's left wing in the form of Trotskyists. Within this movement there is no understanding of the cause of the war or how to oppose it.

The coalition's opposition has ranged from prayer meetings and candle lit vigils outside Parliament to petitions of MPs and demonstrations. These demonstrations have been addressed by speakers expressing completely opposing viewpoints and were utterly confusing for most of those who took part. Behind the scenes the SWP has been manipulating the movement as a front in order to use it as a recruiting ground. (See "SWP — Trotskyism and Allah", RP23.)

The peace movement, in fact, complements the war movement. By supporting many of the aims of the war, e.g. ending terrorism and establishing peaceful capitalism, its criticisms become criticisms of methods and tactics. The peace movement pretends that capitalism can be peaceful and that it can survive without wars if only it could return to the ways of negotiation, morality, justice and all the other fantasies. By doing this the peace movement is producing propaganda for capitalism. At the very moment when barbaric war is exposing the real nature of capitalism in its true "hideous nakedness" for all to see, the peace movement proclaims that what we are seeing is not the truth. The system could be peaceful, it could serve the needs of humanity etc. The peace movement is therefore doing useful ideological work for the war movement and could never genuinely oppose the war.

CP

Notes

- 1 See *Guardian* 12/01/02 and *New York Times* 24/04/02
- 2 CNN, 28/01/02

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