

# Internationalist Communist Review

From Titoism to Barbarism

Behind the Butchery in Bosnia:  
IBRP Statement

Social Democracy and the  
Working Class in Britain

Trotskyism and Counter-revolution

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# Editorial

Once again the International Bureau welcomes its English-speaking readers to its unitary publication. The *Internationalist* prefix to *Communist Review* by no means spells a change in orientation but is simply designed to remove any ambiguity on where we stand, and in particular to avoid being mistaken for an old Stalinist publication in Britain of the same name.

The few months since our last issue have seen a significant stepping up of capitalism's global crisis. In economic terms, the break-up of the European Exchange Rate Mechanism last September was one of the more dramatic demonstrations of the fragility of the system. Not only did it reveal the growing powerlessness of even some of the strongest states to keep a semblance of control over the most prolonged crisis world capitalism has ever seen, but it showed too that the dream of a united capitalist Europe is just that. Today, as even the German and Japanese economies move towards so-called minus growth rates, the working class in capitalism's richest areas must inevitably face further attacks. After a decade or so of economic liberalisation and a growing helplessness in the face of the crisis, the international bourgeoisie is beginning to see once again the 'virtues' of Keynesianism. For the working class in the capitalist heartlands, however, the comforting safety net of the post-war settlement have gone for ever. Who now pretends that 'full employment' is a realisable goal? What future the welfare state in bankrupt economies where the notion of certain basic human rights is being replaced by ruthless 'cost cutting' and talk of the 'dependency culture'?

Yet an even more chilling indication of what capitalism has in store for humanity as a whole has been the plunge of the former Yugoslav state into a barbarous war. The article here (originally published in Italian in *Prometeo* 4, series V, November 1992) analyses the material basis for this conflict and the wider imperialist interests which have led to the present gruesome situation. Whoever thinks that such a conflict, or something like it, couldn't happen here is simply deceiving themselves. Above all, what the Yugoslav situation shows is that, without a unified fight by the working class against the impact of the economic crisis,

capital is free to impose its own most desperate and diabolical 'solution'. Yet even when war has broken out internationalists cannot avoid the task of doing everything in their power to bring about a proletarian response. The statement at the end of the article, produced with the help of comrades from the GIK (Gruppe Internationalistische Kommunisten) in Austria, is dedicated to this aim. It is being distributed within the old Yugoslavia and amongst Yugoslav emigres in Europe.

At the moment it is undeniable that, even where the working class has shown that it is still a force to be reckoned with - as it did in the autumn in Italy after the sudden imposition of massive cuts in living standards, and in Britain after the abrupt announcement of thirty-one pit closures - there is a sense of confusion and lack of clarity about how to fight back. It's not surprising. The working class is being bombarded with propaganda about the death of socialism and/or communism while the trade unions, busy negotiating away jobs and agreeing to ever-harsher productivity deals, are losing whatever credibility they still had. As the Yugoslavia article states, the working class is starting again from scratch (and not only in Yugoslavia). Yet there is a difference: A lot of illusions have been shattered, including the illusion that the crisis will go away, that prosperity is round the corner. At the same time there is a growing willingness on the part of political minorities - both within and without what we would consider as the strict proletarian camp - to reconsider the way forward for the class struggle. To our mind it is no accident that we are receiving correspondence from the Trotskyist camp, nor that the proletarian camp itself is losing some of its insularity. (The article on the 1st World War and the working class in Britain, for instance, was recently the basis for a presentation to a workers' study circle in the north of England.)

Finally, it is with regret that we announce the disappearance of Lal Pataka from political life - at least as far as we are aware. A reminder, if we needed one, of the difficulties facing revolutionaries isolated in any one area.

IBRP January, 1993

# Yugoslavia: From Titoism to Barbarism

The statement at the end of this article is being distributed throughout the old Yugoslavia in the appropriate languages. As every reader will understand, an undertaking such as this requires the active collaboration of all the European signatories. But we all consider that it is the clear duty of the, admittedly weak, European revolutionary vanguard to make their voice heard in this tortured country and so contribute to the beginning of a vital political struggle.

This battle also involves establishing nuclei of revolutionaries in the Balkans. Such nuclei will have to take the path of revolutionary Marxism and be firmly anchored in its principles and method as a necessary precondition for any possible reappearance of the class struggle onto the historical stage. Otherwise faction fights of the bourgeoisie will hold undisputed sway, as they are driven crazy by a crisis which they can neither understand nor control.

By its nature the statement is somewhat lacking in detailed explanation and argument. However, should the nucleus of a revolutionary vanguard be established there will be plenty of opportunities to deepen and develop the arguments. This, as a first step to defining an overall political direction and programme with more detailed tactics.

Here, we shall attempt to elaborate the methodological framework and understanding of the situation shared by the signatories of the document. As usual, our examination of even such dramatically important events as have occurred recently will try to avoid being a mere chronicle; a method we have criticised elsewhere. Instead, we adopt the Marxist method of situating events in their material context and of examining the class forces at play and the motive forces behind them in order to point to how the situation could actually be changed.

## The overall situation

One of the axioms of the Marxist critique of political economy is that the cyclical crisis of accumulation - induced by the tendency for the rate of profit to fall - can only lead either to the destruction of the capitalist mode of production itself (via a proletarian insurrection and the beginning of the revolutionary process towards communism) or else, failing this and therefore still within the ambit of capitalism, to imperialist war. During such a war the massive destruction of means and forces of production recreates the conditions for a higher rate of profit and so for a new cycle of accumulation. A further lesson, confirmed by the present period, is that the definitive crisis of the cycle does not necessarily manifest itself suddenly but can develop throughout a long period distinguished by slumps and partial recoveries which, while the general health of the

system declines, generate and nurture the tensions between the capitalists, their states and their blocs based on common interests. These tensions, and nothing else, lead to economic wars and from there to fighting wars. (Needless to say, the various bourgeoisies do not fight wars to recreate the conditions for a new cycle of accumulation, something they are likely not even to be aware of. Rather they make war, or cause proletarians to make war, when they are about to go under, when they have to resolve, or think they can resolve, concrete problems emerging from the earlier economic and political history determined by the crisis: Perhaps the destruction of a competing country or bloc of countries which would otherwise suffocate them; perhaps the military conquest of plunderable regions considered vital and contested as such, etc.) The crisis phase in the present cycle of accumulation opened up in 1971 and it has proceeded until today through a long series of depressions and recoveries, none of which have



succeeded in re-establishing the previous conditions for imperialist accumulation, but have instead prepared the ground for ever-more serious depressions.

### Its reflection in Yugoslavia

From its break with the USSR in 1948 Yugoslavia has lived with its feet in two camps. As leader, together with India, of the bloc of 'non-aligned nations' which sought their own economic and political elbow

room in the complex interplay of the confrontations and contradictions between the East and West, Yugoslavia perhaps gained more (again with India) than the others. Thanks to its geographical position, it was able to run with the hare and hunt with the hounds, and profit to the maximum possible extent from its pretended equidistance from the two opposing blocs.

Under Tito's political and diplomatic guidance, the Yugoslavian bourgeoisie was able to consolidate itself after the 2nd World War initially as the administrator and guardian of so-called 'socialist self-management'. Technology and a few finished goods from the West (particularly Europe) were imported while raw materials and semifinished goods were brought from the East and the rest of the periphery (the so-called 'Third World'). Finished goods and machinery were exported, primarily to the Soviet bloc.

The arrival of the crisis like an avalanche in the Soviet Union and the Eastern bloc was immediately reflected in Yugoslavia by a ruinous rate of inflation, a fall in GNP and a growth in debt. At the same time, existing trends in Yugoslavia's commercial relations began to be reversed.

When we talk about a creeping international crisis we refer to the totality of processes like this which we have been examining for years. One of the most relevant of these is the bankruptcy of the productive apparatus of almost all the countries of

the capitalist periphery (once opened to the world market), crushed as it is by the immeasurable technological supremacy of the imperialist metropolises. In order to sustain internal demand on the one hand and to keep its industries on their feet on the other, the Yugoslav state was compelled to print money and put itself into debt at the same time. But credit from Western capital translated itself - amongst other things - into the pressing demand for the removal of existing import barriers. This is at the root of the turn round in trade relations mentioned above. The following table drives the point home.

This is also at the root of the tensions (read divergence of interests) between the factions of the bourgeoisie which immediately expressed themselves in the growth of nationalism.

### Self-management and the Yugoslav Bourgeoisie

The formation of the new Yugoslav bourgeoisie - comprising the higher party bosses and state bureaucrats, both federal and in the republics, as well as the industrial managers and various technocrats - commenced during the 2nd World War itself. At the end of 1942 the Yugoslav partisans, the large majority of whom were militants of the Yugoslav Communist Party, already controlled a vast homogenous region which included most of Dalmatia and Bosnia. There were other liberated zones in Slavonia, Serbia and Slovenia. The supreme military command (essentially Tito) convoked a conference of all the liberated zones in Bihac, Bosnia. The majority of the delegates were from the Communist Party, but there were also many delegates more or less representative of the Croatian Peasant Party, the Democratic Independents, the Agrarians and Muslims. The conference elected a clandestine parliament, the Antifascist Council of Yugoslav National Liberation (Avnoj) and its executive committee took on the role of government.

**Table 1 Yugoslav Export Markets**

(in millions of \$)

	1984		1986		1988	
	Mill\$	%	Mill\$	%	Mill\$	%
Western Industrialised Nations	3659	35.7	4486	40.5	6483	50.7
'Developing' countries	1654	16.2	1554	14.0	1785	13.9
Eastern Bloc	4895	48.0	5044	45.5	4511	35.3

[Based on data from the Federal Statistical Office, 1989]

In this way the post-war structure of Yugoslavia - a structure simultaneously centralised and federal, military and national - was outlined at the start of 1943 with a social programme which proclaimed "the impartiality of private property" and supported "private initiative in industry, commerce and agriculture".<sup>1</sup> Thus Tito, as undisputed head of the partisan movement, had, with the Red Army's help



(even if this was certainly not generous), freed the country from the German and Italian invaders and had reunited a country previously torn by ethnic divisions stirred up by European imperialism.

The state control of credit and the means of production, together with the essential portion of the means of distribution, following the soviet model in line with Stalinist counter-revolutionary ideology, cut the feet from underneath the previously dominant classes in the various republics, thus switching off the main motor of inter-Yugoslav rivalries.

The first Five Year Plan was in 1947. The party's apparatus was compact and it gathered around itself the technical strata and petty bourgeois intellectuals who were called upon to administer industrialisation under the aegis of the state and with the assistance of Soviet advisers. The working class, without well-rooted traditions of autonomous struggle, grew up with the myth of socialist reconstruction in its Titoist version and remained substantially passive, chained to wage relations in the 'real socialist' style: extremely hard work for extremely low wages. But it did not react.

The peasantry, as always, contained very great differences within it. The poor and middle peasants had been the mainstay of the partisan movement. According to the constitution, they should have been respected, including their ownership of land. But this did not happen. The start of Stalin's polemic against the Yugoslav leadership caused the Yugoslav CP's central committee to launch the process leading to the forced collectivisation of the land (at the beginning of April, 1948). This measure, intended to convince Yugoslavia's Cominform partners of its allegiance to the 'real socialist' faith, was instead denounced as a left deviation of unrepentant adventurists, so proving that the real causes of conflict lay elsewhere.

### The Rupture with the USSR

The political rupture with the other countries of the East, meant that Stalin had lost a round in the more general fight that he was playing. He was clearly trying to force the Yugoslav party into an attitude of mere blind obedience. His response to Tito's resistance was to try to overthrow him from inside his own Party. Once the operation 'total subjection' failed, which however was fully successful in other cases (Bulgaria, Poland, Hungary), there was nothing for it but the excommunication of the heretic.

The risk of Yugoslavia falling directly in the hands of the West was calculated as being small. It was the epoch of the great love affair with China, which in every respect was rather more important

than Yugoslavia to the Soviet Union. Stalin was also convinced that Tito was already far too strong in Yugoslavia to be overthrown by forces friendly to the West whilst, on the other hand, he would not be able to totally change his ideological clothes. Moreover, the rupture had also defeated the Yugoslav CP's aspirations to play the role of co-partner in the domination of the Eastern bloc. The grain of truth contained in the original accusations by the Kremlin against Tito was that the Yugoslav objective was to impose a kind of vassalage on neighbouring governments (of Bulgaria and Albania, for example). This would have led to Belgrade assuming the rank of ally with Moscow as part of a joint axis participating in the imperialist exploitation of the satellite countries.

Stalin was ill-disposed to surrender a single atom of his iron control over his empire, whose monolithic unity was being tested in the first great battle of the Cold War, in Berlin. The age of the tanks had yet to arrive and the bloc's troops were not employed to impose their will (as they were to do in Hungary 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968) and the game stopped there.<sup>2</sup>

In fact the Eastern bloc adapted itself to Yugoslavia, making it a neutral buffer between itself and the West, a kind of no man's land between the two fronts. Stalin probably did not foresee that this could result in Yugoslavia setting itself up as the leader of the non-aligned countries or that it would succeed for a certain time in developing an international diplomatic role, albeit of second rank, which it would use to draw all possible economic benefits.

Pride in the Resistance became the ideological glue of the Yugoslav state, formally distinct from that of the USSR and engaged in a hard polemic with it. In the ideological warfare which followed the rupture the Yugoslav leaders, who a little earlier had been proclaiming their absolute loyalty to the 'Fatherland of socialism', ended up accusing their ex-protector of falling prey to the dangers inherent in centralised planning "which had, some time ago, already led to a bureaucratic counterrevolution and the exploitation of the working people in the Soviet Union".<sup>3</sup>

Kidric's description of the 'Law on the Administration of the Planning of the National Economy' which introduced self-management is illuminating. Its method is simply to rename things. Thus 'surplus value' becomes 'surplus labour' or 'excess labour' (with regard to the labour socially necessary for production), which is "unified through the means of exchange, that is, the money of the State treasury" in order to be "distributed in a fashion and according to the aims useful to the society of the working people, that is, in a socialist way".<sup>4</sup>

Thus, in the USSR the workers were exploited because the distribution of 'excess labour' was not carried out in a fashion and according to the aims useful to the workers, whereas in Yugoslavia, even before the new law on self-management, it was so distributed. And how so? Because, "naturally, in our People's State, under the direction of the revolutionary communist party ... it is distributed" - as mentioned above - "in a socialist way". Titoism represented an ideological trap for those who saw in it the first true realisation of socialism in contrast to the degeneration of the USSR, without ever putting the questions which should already be obvious from what we have quoted above. The first question among many is: What distinguishes the two "ways" of distributing the excess labour which makes one socialist and the other bureaucratic and exploiting? We would say that there has never been a theoretical answer to this question. Instead we are given an axiom derived from another which states that the Soviet party was degenerate and the Yugoslav Party was not: from here the path leads to the fog of ideology.

## The Origins of Self-management

The collectivisation of the land soon proved to be a mistake. In 1952 agricultural production collapsed, inducing the state to redistribute the land in small allotments. Even earlier than this, however, the administrative regime for industrial production was changed. The laws introducing self-management in all branches of labour were passed in 1950, as an original and creative form of "real socialism", Yugoslav-style.

After the break with the USSR, and in the absence of any help from the former Big Brother, it was necessary to greatly increase the productivity of labour to accelerate the process of accumulation. Russian forced industrialisation had marched to the ideological tune of Stakhanovism, relying on the misguided idealism of those workers left after the decimation of the revolutionary vanguard in the civil war: in this way the consensus was assured. In Yugoslavia something else was needed. First of all it was necessary to prevent any revival of nationalism. Then workers' involvement in the capital accumulation process was assured by a direct link between wages and productivity in the form of joint management.

That it was capitalistic accumulation was proved by the persistence of all the economic categories proper to capitalism: wages, profit, commodities and the market as regulator of prices.

The laws instituting self-management established that wages could only grow on condition that profits grew, while the general ratio between the

two in each sector and each enterprise was centrally planned by the state. Workers received a wage according to the labour power they surrendered: in the productive process this yielded a value greater than its price, this surplus value was then divided according to fixed ratios between the enterprise management, the local administration, the Federation and the enterprise itself. The share due to the enterprise was in its turn divided into a fund for accumulation and a wages fund, which was transformed into a kind of productivity bonus. Kidric explains:

*The regulatory, or rather precise planning function of the basic proportions of the social plan is primarily reflected in fixed pay, while the role of the market is primarily manifested in the variable pay from the wages fund ... For individual enterprises the variable part of pay directly depends on the net income of the enterprise (art. 3 of the Law on Wages Funds in Enterprises and Economic Associations), which means it depends on, amongst other things, the productivity of labour and its real use to satisfy market demand.<sup>5</sup>*

Such laws thus constituted a further incentive for production, for continually increasing productivity, offered by the management to the labour force. It meant the drawing in of the workers into the task of keeping the number of workers employed in an enterprise to an absolute minimum, one of the essential conditions for increasing productivity.

## Ideological Manoeuvres

This was the shape of Yugoslav capitalism's productive apparatus, palmed off as the Yugoslav "road to socialism". This required a massive distortion of the ABC of Marxism, precisely in terms of a critique of political economy. Let's read some more of Kidric:

*Thus it is obvious ... that the fundamental question is that of the possibility or impossibility of the exploitation of man by man in the socio-economic system springing from the Yugoslav revolution, or rather the question of who administers the excess labour - and behind this question, sooner or later the even more basic one inevitably manifests itself: who really takes possession of that excess labour?<sup>6</sup>*

One of the fundamental principles of political economy is the following: In the capitalist mode of production the exploitation of man by man neither occurs through, nor is brought about by, the distribution of commodities, but rather in the process of production itself; where things are produced utilising labour power as a commodity. Or, in other words, the fundamental question is

who decides what and how much is produced, the working class on the basis of real social need, or ... the market.

Kidric and, more generally, all the inventors of 'real socialism', i.e. state capitalism, base their theories on the axiomatic existence of the market and regard labour power as a commodity.

Here we have the Yugoslav confession:

*Precisely because the very fact that daily production depended almost entirely on the basic plan given from above, the economic organisations and economic associations did not base themselves on the law of supply and demand and on the needs of the market. We can say that in our country they ignored this law and these needs almost entirely. The satisfaction of the market's needs was in reality almost entirely abandoned to the greater or lesser intelligence and perspicacity of the state apparatus for works and planning. ... For this reason there were cases in which the market demanded commodities of one type while a firm would produce another type for months when, given the same materials and qualified manpower, it could have produced exactly the commodity required by the market.<sup>7</sup>*

In essence what he is saying is that complete central planning was less sensitive to the demands of the market and therefore less flexible and efficient. Self-management could remedy this with the added, but totally ideological and Titoist, bonus that it would be more ... socialist.

In truth the Yugoslav manoeuvre - which was Kidric's, as author of the Law on Self-management - was subtle and, in the polemic with the 'bureaucratic counterrevolution' of the USSR, drew more than a few 'communists' into the trap, and not only in Europe.

Kidric was well aware that if self-management was presented as the ending of "the suffocation of objective economic laws" it could appear as a "return to their anarchic action innate to classical capitalist production and distribution". But this is not the case he argues, "On the contrary, in the new Yugoslavia under the power of the working population and the administration of economic organisations and associations by workers' councils, it is a question of the socialist domination over objective economic laws, therefore of a new qualitative phenomenon within our process of building socialism".

But our astute author goes further to recognise that "Marx and Engels denied the operation of the law of value and the existence of the production of commodities in socialism, when speaking of it in

general, and only stressed payment according to work done as the last residue of bourgeois right." Kidric is not stupid and he doesn't deny certain truths. How does he resolve this, then?

*For the initial elements in socialist social relations and their further development, two things are necessary, in addition to a certain domination over the law of value at least by state capitalism. 1. At least the elements of an administration by the direct producers of the basic means of production. 2. At least the elements of socialist democracy with the content and character of power.<sup>8</sup>*

Kidric is talking about the initial elements and we cannot say that he is wrong. The fact is though that the first element necessary for distinguishing state capitalism from socialism in Yugoslavia is precisely what's missing. The ideological axiom, which cannot be demonstrated by the facts because they negate it, is that Tito's national war was a socialist revolution. Yet this is denied, not only by the facts, but by the partisan's programme.<sup>9</sup>

In terms of historical materialism this is therefore rather weak. But half-truths proved rather useful for Yugoslavia's critique of the Soviet Union - which claimed it had built socialism by 1952 - where "not even the above-mentioned elements" had been achieved "because they had been suffocated by the bureaucratic counterrevolution as the most dangerous obstacles on its reactionary road". Rags are better than nakedness, but this was enough for many bad 'Marxists' to accept rags in the place of the fine silk of the road to socialism.

We will finish reading Kidric with the following choice pearl:

*In this manner we really will achieve the construction of socialism, by dominating the weak material productive forces, in this manner we will avoid the fatal danger of the initial role of the State in the backward material productive forces degenerating into a bureaucratic caste system and preventing the construction of socialism - this is a question that the Russian revolution did not resolve. The Yugoslav revolution is resolving it today.<sup>10</sup>*

Naturally, in one country; naturally, without a workers' revolution; naturally, by virtue of and thanks to the holy spirit of revolutionaries à la Tito.

## The Corrections

The self-management system underwent several adjustments and refinements right up until the



recent general collapse of the Eastern bloc, which affected Yugoslavia too, despite it being a peculiar version of the system. After the already-mentioned redistribution of the land in 1952, we are reminded of the 1965 reform which was a response to a period of economic stagnation and inflation in the first half of the Sixties. For some time the Yugoslav internal market had been developing closer relations with the international market and now these links became direct. Internal prices were linked to the international exchange system. A new rate of exchange with the dollar was fixed and the fiscal system was reformed, reducing taxes on production and increasing those on consumption (a typical measure of classical capitalism when confronted with inflation, restraining internal demand and encouraging exports). The principle behind this was the same as is being peddled in Italy today by all those who want workers to pay for the crisis: the firm's profitability is the altar on which all sacrifices are to be made. As in all developed capitalist regimes, the central bank reserves for itself the role of checking this and credits are only given on the basis of prospective returns, i.e. on the basis of profitability.

In a different vein, the definitive version of the self-management system came into being with the adjustments aimed against nationalism in 1976. Self-management, as it had developed until then, had generated a bourgeoisie made up of all the elements previously mentioned as well as a heterogeneous petty bourgeoisie composed of more or less organised and associated professionals, more or less organised intellectuals, peasants and entrepreneurs in commerce or the service sector. Amongst these strata a dangerous nationalistic ferment began to brew outside of the federalism of the Party, now called the League of Communists.

The Federal State in the shape of the League had to regain control. Since the opportunity still existed, there was nothing more effective than to use workerist ideology. Self-management was to change the focus of even more workers' loyalties, this time from the factory to the State. The basic organisation of associated labour, as wage labour was called - the BOAL - was proclaimed to be the basic organ of self-management. This sent its delegates to the workers' council which dealt with things on the lowest level, but also sent its representatives to the Factory Council. This dealt with things like taking on workers and bonus percentages if the previously fixed targets had been met. Finally, there was the Workers' Enterprise Council which determined basic wages and the proportion of profits destined for investment. It was the Workers' Enterprise Council which selected the management and factory directors. An analogous model was adopted for political administration. Some of the BOAL delegates took part in the Communal assembly;

the delegations of the Communal Assemblies made up the assembly of Republican communes which elected its delegates to the Federal Assembly, equivalent to a parliament.

The system was managed from below. In the Western democracies too, the system appears to be managed from below, with the difference that in Yugoslavia the elections by citizens were supplemented by elections from the workplace organisations. As in the West, where the real domination of capital ensures that institutions function within the ambit of the system through client mechanisms at every level under the control of the establishment parties, so in Yugoslavia (and other East European countries) the self-same domination of capital, in its form of a single-party state capitalism, ensures the functioning of the system and the continuity of single-party power. Such a party, or League, would make use of various socio-political organs originating from it and under its strict control - from the Party's cells in the factories and workplaces to the Veterans' Association, from the Communist Youth (the equivalent of the old school tie network) to the Assembly of Communist women, to the Socialist Alliance.

## Happy Times at an End

All this was plain sailing so long as there were no great shocks to the underlying determining factor, the economy. On the one hand the exploitation of the proletariat was assured by the enormous Party and State apparatus which suppressed any sign of class struggle. On the other, the increasing variety of bourgeois factions continued happily dividing up the surplus value extorted from the proletariat. This continual refinement of wage labour relations was accompanied by all the other typical aspects of capitalist society. Indeed the division of the spoils took place in the usual fashion, independent of the formal appearance of Yugoslav capitalism. A proportion of the industrial profit went to factory directors and managers who pocketed the best part of the company wage funds. Similarly, in agriculture a generous income was hived off for managers whilst anyone in a position of power in the political and administrative apparatus received generous stipends and privileges according to their position. Finally, the State Bank - the administrator of the collective capital - paid out interest to anyone with a deposit account.

However, by the second half of the Eighties the countries of the periphery were already being devastated as the effects of the economic crisis in the West were offloaded onto them. In the USSR the severity of the crisis was already obvious. Yugoslav industry limped along, weighed down by its overall debt (\$21bn in 1989), the lag behind



Europe in terms of technology and productivity and by the lack of flexibility in investment and production. Given the climate of extreme economic liberalism instituted by the international bourgeoisie, the proposed response of Markovic, the Federation president, was rejected. Instead, Ivan Ribnikar, from the Economics faculty of the university of Ljubljana and adviser to Markovic, was to declare to *South*: "the reforms we have had from the Fifties to today have been more or less cosmetic. But now we are preparing fundamental changes to the economic system."<sup>11</sup>

## The Effect on Enterprises

The changes involved progressive liberalisation and the dismantling of bureaucratic regulations. This led to the complete autonomy of each enterprise vis-à-vis the market, in other words to the unleashing of competition between enterprises which were thrown onto the international markets, particularly the European. According to the plans of the poor economists devoted to liberalism all this was intended to impel the economy towards renewal and recovery.

But in the context of the worldwide crisis throwing enterprises onto the international markets only meant further pressure towards their own narrow self-interest. The anarchy in production that state capitalism supposedly made socialist by "the revolutionary nature of the party in control" had sought to control now returned in full vigour. Let's look at an advert placed in an international journal in 1989 by Iskra, the largest electrical and electronics company in Yugoslavia:

*It is no secret that some economic and social difficulties in Yugoslavia have had a negative impact on export-oriented Yugoslav companies. This has become evident with the contraction in Yugoslav firms' competitiveness which has hit their terms of trade and made exports much less attractive and profitable ...*

*We believe in the economic reforms which should have a positive effect on the overall Yugoslav economy, pushing down the very high rate of inflation and allowing enterprises linked to the market to realise their full potential ... It is also a question of attracting investment capital to Iskra through the constitution of joint ventures in Yugoslavia under the new regulations for foreign investment. This law should make it much more attractive for foreign investors, from every point of view: from the transfer of profits to the full participation in the company board of the joint venture.*

*But, above all, the abandonment of the rigid non-market (sic!) economy, which had disastrous effects on Yugoslav enterprises, should develop creativity and enterprises able*

*to face the market, the known factors behind the success of Western Europe ...*<sup>12</sup>

We have quoted this advert at length to show the dominant thinking of the management, and future owners in a formal sense too, of the then Yugoslav large firms which are now Slovene, such as Iskra, or Croatian, such as Iskra's competitor, Rade Koncar. Survival was at stake and the great hope was that companies freed from the central State's bureaucratic shepherding, but still in receipt of generous support and subsidies from that State, would succeed in grabbing a position on the international market, relying primarily on low labour costs.

## The Effect on the Local Bureaucracies

Even more than on the Federation, the effect on the federal republics was an avalanche of requests for support from the technocratic bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie whose proportion of surplus value stemming from trade and the service sector was being eroded. At this point the republics, or rather the bureaucratic strata of the state bourgeoisie, who were undergoing spending constraints offloaded their responsibilities onto the Federation. This rupture with the administrative framework on which the Federation had been based was presented as a reform but quickly led to a political crisis for the Federation itself.

Radical changes in political administration are always delicate matters which require strong nerves and the cohesion of all the forces concerned. If the political leap is made by an apparatus already shaken by internal crisis and from a basis already being undermined, then the leap is likely to become a drop into collapse. Moreover, this was not happening in the context of a world serenely engaged in the expansion phase of the cycle of accumulation. It was, and is, a specific Yugoslav manifestation of the crisis of the accumulation cycle itself which certainly cannot be remedied by relying on the rest of the world. The leap was into the dark with a set of disparate forces, each dedicated to 'save yourself if you can'.

It is this situation which determined the reckless dash for autonomy by the richest republics (Croatia and Slovenia), nourished and supported by the most reactionary and backward forces of nationalism. The old League of Communists was irreversibly broken, its bourgeois programme having fed the very centrifugal tendencies which tore it apart. In the political tower of Babel which ensued, various elements from the League changed their names and programmes and followed the prevailing wind of independence in each republic. New governments were born which contained more than a few figures from the old 'communist'



leadership while large parts of the local administrations remained unchanged.

## From Nationalism to Racism and Barbarism

In this dramatic political crisis the salient feature in the dominant ideology was the loss of identity. Once the old scheme, the risky yet reassuring structure of Titoism, had gone the bourgeoisie hadn't another. From necessity they had recourse to the old bourgeois or even pre-bourgeois ideological armoury, no matter how weak this was theoretically. As in Russia where even the portrait of Nicholas Romanov has resurfaced, so in Yugoslavia there are those who call for the return of the monarchy, those who unsheath the antique sword of the medieval clashes between the Turks and the Serbs, those who go back to the short-lived Croatian state of the High Middle Ages and those who fight each other on the basis of ethnic differences. Such stupidities are all that the bourgeoisie can scrape together to sustain their war of all against all.

None of this should be surprising. Nor should we imagine that it is solely a Yugoslav phenomenon. When capital's accumulation cycle is drawing to a close it means the end of an epoch where the bourgeoisie can see a future for itself, when it can 'unfurl the sails of thought and direct the instruments of action'. In such situations the traditional ideological schemas to which the citizens of bourgeois society conform begin to weaken; the superstructural framework which dominates the political and civic scene, which is supposedly constructed on moral values, civic principles and ideals, totters. Ideas and philosophies which have a strong appeal to wide sectors of the collectivity no longer appear, simply because their determining base - a new class which is able to be their historical protagonist - is absent. And where there is a threat of such a protagonist appearing, even if only as a threat, the same factions of the bourgeoisie who are most ruthless in their barbarity will be there to strangle it at birth. It was,

*Precisely to strike against the emergence of class divisions, to prevent the reconciliation of the workers, that the destruction of Vukovar took place. In this city twenty different nationalities lived side by side, almost all marriages were mixed and the working class was the majority of the population. This class worked in three industrial enterprises. They were the very same workers who three years previously had demonstrated in front of Parliament calling on all the other workers to make a general strike. For this reason the*

*systematic destruction of the city had to be effected and the population, which had always been united and had defended itself in a unified fashion, had to be divided against itself on the basis of nationality. What the statified capitalist market had united, now had to be divided through political decrees and concentration camps...13*

This is the drama of Yugoslavia. Yet still the internationalist vanguards remain isolated. This is the framework in which every antiquated ideology, once apparently superseded, now provide the most rancid cover for the wretched interests of the middle classes and seeks legitimacy in the same way as the old certainties of the past. In Yugoslavia such ideologies are rampant and have reached the point of justifying massacres. In Italy this has not yet happened. Here we are in a more restrained phase, but the phenomenon is fundamentally similar.

In Italy, more than in the other West European countries, the crisis has led to a deepening of the chasm between the various components of the ruling class. This phenomenon has become bound up with the end of the Cold War and the possibility of the governmental process becoming completely blocked. The consolidation of the governing parties into a consortium of political power and crime on the one hand and, on the other, the ideological exhaustion of the theoretical alternative (basically the PCI) - which in any case was only an apparent opposition and in practice complied with the Cold war set-up - has created a difficult situation for the Italian bourgeoisie. It has led to the near collapse of the political framework itself. In terms of political programmes the result has been the vigorous appearance of federalist tendencies where the immediate interests of fractions of the bourgeoisie are evident. (Especially those of the so-called entrepreneurs in the North.) Their ideas are as stupid as they are reactionary but, nevertheless, they are taking hold. And they are taking hold of a proportion of the citizenry in general, though they do not necessarily identify themselves with Lombard small industry. How many proletarians are attracted to the Lombard and similar Leagues? In Italy too there is an absence of a reference point inside the working class which expresses the class's historical perspective. The working class in general is even absent from the scene of its own material struggles and fractions of the bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie who are in the process of disintegration are able to win some people from every class to their most stupid ideas.

## International Responsibility

In Yugoslavia the shooting has long since broken



out. It is a situation which the imperialist powers only helped to make worse.

*From the beginning of 1991 it was impossible to ignore the fact that independence was on the agenda in at least two of the republics of the Yugoslav federation: Slovenia and Croatia ... It was foreseeable that the crisis between the Yugoslav republics would take on dramatic proportions if it was confined within the federation's borders. In short, the great powers who claimed to have a responsible international role were inevitably concerned about this.<sup>14</sup>*

So wrote Paul Marie de la Gorce in one of his long articles chronicling the relationship between the Yugoslav crisis and the policies of the USA and European states. Briefly, what happened is that the USA, and behind it the majority of European countries, declared itself against the recognition of the new states, whereas Germany, in the name of a very self-interested 'right of peoples to self-determination', declared itself strongly in favour of such recognition. This was followed by a period of controversy and so-called debate in the EC in which Germany wanted Croatian and Slovenian independence to be recognised immediately, without conditions. Meanwhile the other EC countries temporised by claiming the need to defend national minorities in those countries and requesting guarantees for this. This phase was closed by Germany's imperial act when it confronted the others with the *fait accompli* of its own unilateral recognition of these republics.

*... the reticence and resistance of the other European states rapidly gave way to complete adherence to the decisions made in Bonn. From then on the mechanism which would transform the Yugoslav crisis into a serious and extensive conflict was set in motion.<sup>15</sup>*

It is obvious that the international framework is shifting. At first Britain and France openly lined up with the USA against the break-up of Yugoslavia but later they fell into line. On the other hand, Germany from the first took an official stand (as evidenced by the press and the state positions of the governing parties) directly opposed to America. In the Europe-wide game of blackmail and negotiation Bonn succeeded in dragging the others behind Germany's anti-American stance. But the fact remains that the US and Germany are divided; a fact which certainly cannot be explained by their different cultural traditions of ideological approaches to the 'rights of peoples'. There are obviously divergent interests behind the different options favoured vis-à-vis Yugoslavia and these can be summed up without much difficulty:

- Germany wants to stabilise its own position as a 'protector' of the countries in a region already

dominated by the Mark, thus securing markets and possibly investment concessions for itself.

- The USA views the growth of German power in Europe with extreme suspicion and is doing everything that a foreign policy which is not yet aiming at war allows to impede this, or at least to slow down the consequences.

Germany therefore pushed the Croat and Slovene bourgeoisies towards secession, it armed them and supplied them on credit so that their republican militias and the most rabid nationalist gangs could stand up to the remains of the Federal army. It then stood back and watched.

Not so Serbia, which was the *de facto* head of the federation and saw itself being deserted by the most industrialised republics, those with the highest revenues and the largest income for redistribution on a federal scale. The conflict was inevitable. But equally inevitable was the fact that the armistice imposed by the concert (so discordant!) of the world powers would only apply to the direct and 'official' clashes between Serbia and Slovenia and between Serbia and Croatia. In reality the conflict proceeded in the form of civil wars between the so-called Serbian minorities and the host 'nationalities', in particular between Serbian militias and Croatian forces and, vice versa, the Croatian militias against Serbia.

Once traditional barriers collapsed, all the depraved fantasies and myths could be unleashed. It is not so different from what is happening in the European metropolises (and in the USA, et al.), where citizens on the margins of economic and social life of the bourgeois collectivity reject conformity with the values of those circles from which they are excluded and instead adopt more irrational and extreme ideologies (from neo-Nazism to Eastern mysticism). Thus in Croatia there was no absence of human material to tack together in private militias for the defence and affirmation of Serbian ethnicity, and the same in Serbia for the Croats. The reasons for organising them lay in both republics, and this goes for their arms and finance which someone certainly provided, and which went from the respective 'mother countries' to forces which were theoretically completely extraneous to, but in reality, fully involved in the subterranean struggle between the powers. On the other hand, the political and ideological hold of such militias is far less than the noise they make and the destructive power they can unleash.

*On July 23rd 1992 what should have been the electoral meeting of the party (Paraga's HSP-HOS, the neo-Ustashe militia, ed.) in Pola became a press conference in the Hotel Istria precisely because of the poor turnout.<sup>16</sup>*

The USA had to accept the independence of

Slovenia and Croatia. There are basically two reasons for this. The first is that at the moment German impetuosity is being tolerated in exchange for guarantees of a new lease of strategic and political life for NATO and the containment of Europe's autonomous tendencies in the military sphere. The second stems from a particular American interest in the Bosnian question.

### The Bosnian question

Bosnia-Herzegovina is certainly not among the richest republics, as can be seen in table 2:

**Table 2**  
**Disparities between the Republics**  
**in 1988**

Republic	Unemployment rate (%)	Illiteracy %	Average wage (1988 dinars)
Slovenia	3	0.8	615,813
Croatia	6	5.6	437,870
Bosnia-Herzegovina	14	14.5	338,926
Montenegro	18	9.4	297,571
Macedonia	16	10.9	274,585
Serbia*	11	11.1	364,559
Vojvodina	11	5.8	380,469
Kosovo	25	17.6	272,554

\*Excluding the autonomous provinces of Vojvodina and Kosovo

Source: *Le Monde Diplomatique*, September 1991

With the highest illiteracy rate and one of the highest unemployment rates (even in the far-off 1980s), it was among the worst-off in the federation. Here the desperation of the poor, which, in the absence of a class movement always looks for some other idealist reference point, took on the form of pan-Islamism.

In 1983 the present Bosnian president, Alija Izebegovic, earned himself a political trial from the Titoist authorities for having clandestinely circulated an 'Islamic Declaration' which was an impassioned plea for the establishment of Islamic regimes and for pan-Islamism. Needless to say, the author assumed the leadership of the Party of Democratic Action as soon as other parties were allowed to exist. During the 1990 election campaign he republished the Declaration and won

a majority of Muslim votes and the first presidency. After this came the Bosnian independence referendum, where the Serbs were asked to abstain. Izebegovic and his pan-Islamism won. At this point the USA entered the scene and executed an unashamed U-turn regarding the defence of the integrity of the Yugoslav state.

The slaps in the face delivered to the Arab world and Pan-Islamism in general have been many and loud in the last few years: From the clash with Iran to the Libyan bombings and the Gulf War. The divisions created in the Islamic world, in every case as a result of American intervention, have been accepted by the ruling regimes but have certainly not been welcomed enthusiastically by the masses. Moreover, Saudi Arabia and other Arab and Muslim states have already expressed their sympathy for a Bosnia run by an Islamic fraternity. Nothing remained for the USA but to conform to the EC's resolutions. On 30th May, 1992 the UN Security Council's resolution 757 decided on sanctions against Serbia, thus opening the process which led to the suspension of the Serbo-Montenegrin federation from the UN.

### Islam - an Ethnic Grouping?

Only an ideological monstrosity like Stalinism, even if in its Titoist garb, could transform a religious group by decree into an ethnic unit or nationality.

Bosnia's capital, Sarajevo was held by the Turks from 1440 to 1878 when it passed to Austrian rule. In four centuries there had been plenty of opportunity not only to colonise the area with natives of Turkey, but also to Islamicise the local peasantry.

The Muslims, therefore, were not ethnically homogenous - even if we could assume the term had any meaning in an area where precapitalist trading patterns had already created a varied mix of ethnic groupings.

After the Austrian conquest the leading industries and political administration fell into the hands of the new arrivals from Serbia and Croatia (and who knows where their ancestors came from). The poor - predominantly Muslim - remained poor. Nor had the situation changed much after two world wars and a succession of regimes and governments in the area. The local Islamic petty bourgeoisie, vulnerable to historical-religious ideologies, found in pan-Islamism a means of defending their 'rights' on the basis of national and religious identity. By the same token it was easy for these same ideas to take root amongst the poverty-stricken masses. Once again, we find that

those who know how to act in the absence of a working class movement have the key to the future in their hands. And here the working class, as well as being numerically weak, does not have the experience of struggle or contact with comrades in Europe. Islam, therefore, did not threaten the social order; did not make revolutionary appeals to the exploited class - which was to remain exploited, as all religion demand. On the other hand, the Titoist regime either had to crush any aspiration for a distinct identity or else recognise an innocuous version of it. Izebegovic's troubles in the early Eighties did not stem from his having placed himself at the head of the Islamicists, but from more disturbing aspects of his manifesto. Now, after a re-shuffling of the cards but still entirely within the confines of capital, this manifesto has become a powerful motorforce for a miserable and tortured independence.

### The Bourgeoisie's Elastic Principles

The founding agreement of the Conference for Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) expressly confirms the inviolability of frontiers: i.e. frontiers are not supposed to be changed without the agreement of the countries concerned. But Yugoslavia's international frontiers have been destroyed through the unilateral decisions of Croatia and Slovenia, made without any agreement with either the federation or the other republics involved. The outcome? Recognition by the EC which did not bat an eyelid.

However, the CSCE's rigour in the interpretation of its own principles returned immediately Serbia and the remains of the federal army openly supported - at least initially - the Serbian militias, and their struggle against the new Croatian and Bosnian authorities. Then came the noises about Serbian interference and the attempt at conquest. Sanctions were imposed and the CSCE refused to recognise the new federation comprising Serbia and Montenegro, demanding its exclusion from all international organisations and excluding it from the CSCE itself.

In the meantime, the USA changed its 'principles' - from opposition to the dismemberment of Yugoslavia to sanctions against Serbia, to the exclusion of the new federation from the UN.

Conclusion: If the principles behind the treaties between European states can be discredited and redefined to suit the changing interests of those concerned it means they have little meaning or value. Once differences become irreconcilable, then treaties can be overthrown. Moreover, it is significant that we are talking about accords involving the European Community.

One final observation on the proposal of the Secretary of the UN, Boutros Ghali, that the role of the United Nations should be to act as a 'superpoliceman' for peace. The concrete propositions in Boutros Ghali's document (*The Agenda For Peace*) are as articulate as they are stupid. They reveal the Secretary of the United Nations acting as a forecaster who understands nothing of the world in which he makes his predictions. It is no accident that the US has already said no to the most concrete proposals whilst rejecting the majority of the remainder. The USA sees NATO - at least at present while its control over it is secure - as the instrument for its own interests. This is especially the case as Boutros Ghali's proposals would admit Germany and Japan to the UN Security Council. It is not surprising therefore that the USA is profiting from the impotence of UN troops in Yugoslavia to slip in preparations for intervention by NATO.

### Ruinous Games

Thus, in the Balkans a complex and ferocious hand is being played by the Great Powers via the armies and militias of ex-Yugoslavia. The question of who is supplying arms to who could be the subject of a long and complicated research project, but frankly this is of little interest to us. If they are discovering illegal arms imports from these regions in Italy then undoubtedly the arms trade is voluminous.

The absurd and cynical little manoeuvres over humanitarian aid to Sarajevo are also part of the same game. This is being overseen, not by the Red Cross, but by the Unprofor troops. These troops have not enforced the passage of aid and if anyone cares to erect a barricade - the Serbian or Islamic militias for instance - the UN troops stop and so does the aid.

Meanwhile, away from the media spotlight, the war goes on in huge areas of Bosnia, as the great powers' game unfolds. The massacres will continue, interspersed with improbable armistices, until the reasons for the conflict are defused and the militias disarmed, or else until another, more radical and progressive solution occurs ...

But the room for mediation between the combatants has been virtually reduced to nil and arms will continue to arrive through legal or illegal channels because, behind the wretched Yugoslav contest, other players are playing a game of much wider significance. Capital's cyclical crisis is marching towards its final phase: the final clash between the Great Powers to decide who will oversee the next accumulation cycle. It will not be stopped by the cowardly pacifism of those who would have the UN intervene everywhere, nor by those who put



their trust in the cross of Jesus or universal brotherhood. None of these, nor the pretended good will of the men of government can do anything to prevent the tragic logic of capitalism and its political needs because they all operate within its framework. Only the resurgence of the working class can stop the bourgeoisie's march towards its final solution.

## **Towards the Proletarian Response**

We haven't enough information to make predictions about the possibility of a proletarian opposition developing in ex-Yugoslavia. The scanty information we have received talks about strikes and demonstrations by workers against the war, including those which took place in Sarajevo some months ago.

We look to this information, and only this, because it shows that there is at least the minimum condition for a new start. It is a diversion to seek, as some do, the grand 'political' idea as the basis for gathering together a supposed vanguard, but a 'vanguard' based on some other ground than class. It is ridiculous to hold up pretentious political formulas against the rotten, but nevertheless victorious, political ideologies of the bourgeoisie since the former will only be rapidly superseded by events which are controlled by others. Instead it is necessary to face head-on the problem of working on two different but intersecting planes: To pose once again the historical perspectives and social programme of the proletarian revolution at the same time as agitating for the revival of the workers' material struggle on the daily level of the class struggle.

## **Communism is Dead: Long Live Communism**

Ideas, programme and phraseology which recall the previous Stalinist/Titoist experience will certainly not find favour with the masses or amongst potential political vanguards. On the other hand, they never found favour with us internationalists who well knew their capitalist and reactionary content. It is therefore necessary to pay maximum attention to avoid any ambiguity. This will not be easy but it is possible. It means returning to the essential content of the revolutionary and, consequently, internationalist programme.

A confrontation between classes presupposes a confrontation of political agendas. Capitalism, whether private or state, produces for the valorisation of capital against real human needs. The revolutionary programme is for production to satisfy the real needs of the human collectivity. Capitalism is based on the division of society into

classes, the revolutionary programme is for the disappearance of classes. Capitalism, based on the anarchy of conflicting capitalist interests (from the bottom right up to the level of the state), leads to wars, society's decline into barbarism and a breakdown in the balance between humanity and the environment. The revolutionary programme is for collaboration of everyone on this planet, based on production for need.

Nothing has happened to reduce the urgency of the revolutionary programme. Capitalism's existence continues as do its consequences. With it survives the deepening division of society into classes. Also in existence, even if it remains silent, is the class which alone can realise this programme, as are the material reasons for its autonomous struggle.

## **The Working Class Must Make its Presence Felt**

The massacres carried out by the militias can never succeed in annihilating the working class nor, therefore, the possibility of that class proving its independent existence. Thus every effort has to be made to encourage workers to make themselves felt as workers. Here too, things must begin from scratch. Yet - as the dossier on Croatia and Slovenia which we are publishing shows (See note 13) - some of the preconditions do exist. The material situation is extremely serious for the working class and is becoming progressively worse in all the republics. The call for organisation and solidarity between wage labourers does not rest on thin air. Our appeal aims, therefore, at 'rousing' any vanguards prepared to act on this basis.

## **Footnotes**

1. François Fejtő, *Histoire des démocraties populaires* Vol.1, Staline edition du Seuil, Paris 1979 p.58.
2. For a more detailed examination of the content of the polemic between Moscow and Belgrade and the PCInt's analysis in 1948, which demonstrated the imperialist nature of both the actors, see No.2 of *Quaderni di Battaglia Comunista*, dedicated to Yugoslavia: *la borghesia rossa dal federalismo alla frammentazione* (Yugoslavia: the Red Bourgeoisie from Federalism to Fragmentation) published recently.
3. See the interesting pamphlet entitled 'The Economy and the Direct Producers' by Boris Kidric, former partisan commander, first president of the Republican government of Slovenia and, at the moment of writing, Industry Minister and president of the Federal Economic Council in Belgrade. Italian translation by Epi, Milan, 1952. Quotes from pp.10-11.
4. op.cit. p.11.
5. op.cit. p.22.
6. op.cit. p.16.
7. op.cit. pp.17-18.

8. op.cit. p.27.

9. See 'Il programma dei partigiani titoisti', reprinted in the above-cited Quaderni di BC no.2.

10. See Kidric op.cit. pp.50-51.

11. See South September, 1989, 'Survey on Yugoslavia' p.41.

12. op.cit. pp.46-47.

13. See 'Slovenia e Croazia dopo la separazione', PCInt. Trieste, Edizione Prometeo, 1992. In this dossier, distributed by our comrades in Trieste, the economic, political and

social history of the separation of the two republics are traced with ample reference to the programmes of the political forces there and the economic projects of the G7.

14. See 'La coûteuse myopie de la communauté internationale' in *Le Monde Diplomatique* no.460 (July, 1992) pp.6-7.

15. *ibid.*

16. See 'Slovenia e Croazia dopo la separazione' op.cit.

17. See the many extracts in *Il Manifesto* 22.10.92 and in *Le Monde Diplomatique* no.463, October 1992.

## Behind the butchery in Bosnia

# Why internationalists oppose the war in ex-Yugoslavia

When the Soviet bloc collapsed the world's ruling classes declared that a new period of peace and prosperity had begun. Three years on, the weight of events has brutally given the lie to this 'prediction'. While journalists and 'opinion makers' paint peaceful scenarios for the future the bosses are getting ready to make workers slaughter each other in the interests of capital.

Events in ex-Yugoslavia are a tragic demonstration of this. Internationalists throughout the world - the class conscious advance guard of the working class - categorically denounce the Yugoslav bourgeoisie. These are the people who got rich and grew fat under the previous federal regime of fake socialism and who are responsible, first for the break-up of the federation and the war, and now for the atrocious massacres which are taking place.

### The Local Culprits

The Yugoslav bourgeoisie comprises the party and state bureaucrats, the company directors and managers who, until the end of the '80's, fraternally shared out the surplus value extorted from the workers throughout the republic. There was money and wealth for all of them - wealth produced by workers in the factories and fields. At the same time the workers themselves were conned into believing that 'self-management' was a form of socialism, a type of workers' power. In reality productive relations in Yugoslavia are the same as in all the other capitalist countries:

- For part of the working day workers produce value equivalent to their wages. The value they produce during the rest of the day is appropriated by the capitalists - whether individual or collective - to use how they please.
- Things are produced, not to satisfy real social needs, but to make a profit by selling on the market where only those with enough money can buy.

So it doesn't make much difference if workers themselves decide on minor details of how the firms are run.

While Yugoslav workers were becoming worse off in relation to their comrades in the West their bosses, the so-called socialists, were getting rich. Then, in the '70's, the crisis arrived. The economic crisis which hit the entire world economy. In Yugoslavia too profits diminished and the bourgeoisie found fewer opportunities to do well for themselves. This is how the nationalist tensions among the various Yugoslav republics began. Each section of the bourgeoisie began to demand the best possible position for itself:

- In the richest republics (Slovenia, Croatia) the bourgeoisie began to lay claim to the entire wealth produced in their area and wanted an end to the contributions made to the federation as a whole.
- The Serbian bourgeoisie raised the banner of hyper-



nationalism in order to defend the administrative privileges it enjoyed as head of the Federation. When the latter began to crumble Serbian nationalism was used as an excuse to annex part of the territory of the other republics.

- In the areas worst hit by the crisis (Kosovo, Macedonia) the bourgeoisie began to raise their reactionary ethnic banners. They wanted new, 'autonomous' administrative set-ups where it would be easier for them to get their own political rake-offs. In Kosovo, for instance, 90% of the population is ethnically Albanian but local government and the best jobs are in the hands of Serbs. When the Serbian-dominated Yugoslav government began to attack regional autonomy in the '80's it was easy for the local petty bourgeoisie to transform an already existing conflict of the Albanian population against the Serbian-controlled state into an ethnic-national one of Albanians against Serbs in general.

This class of parasites who led the old Yugoslav state were completely mesmerised by their immediate interests. Thus the various national fractions unleashed their ideological campaigns. They played off the most backward and uncivilised ideas of nation, ethnic origin and religion against each other. Then they armed themselves. They put machine guns, mortars and armed tanks into the hands of their mercenary thugs in the national armies or militias and launched one against the other. The workers and the poorest sections of the population have been left at the mercy of this hellish onslaught.

### The International Culprits

All the leading European countries as well as the United States have had significant roles to play. British, German, Italian, American bosses have sold arms to the various Yugoslav republics and have supported them either openly or secretly for two basic reasons:

- so that they can make profits from arms and munitions sales;
- to keep up links with the republics which might provide them with markets for their own goods and investment opportunities. In other words, they are being used as pawns in the international game of inter-imperialist rivalries which is underway.

The world economic crisis has not only led to the downfall of the Soviet empire, it has exacerbated the clash of interests and manoeuvrings amongst the major

capitalist powers. All told, it is only the world's workers who are paying the cost: with increased exploitation, unemployment and enormous sacrifices in the strongest countries; absolute misery and hunger in the poorest.

The various inter-European and other negotiations, between the EEC and the UN, between the Western European Union and Nato, are an obscene game where the rival players are not yet sure about the exact way to carve up Yugoslavia. Despite being in deep crisis, Russia remains an important military and economic power and she is still not out of this game. Even the minor states in the area have a part to play: from Austria which has important material interests to defend, to Greece which fears the independence of Macedonia. Now, under the monstrous hypocrisy of humanitarian aid, these powers are preparing for armed intervention. The USA has already warned that if Europe (read Germany) does not stabilise the situation then they will intervene (via the UN or Nato). It is the latest step in the march of world capitalism towards a third imperialist world war: the only solution the bourgeoisie has to the crisis of their mode of production.

### Who are the Combatants in the Yugoslav War?

In Yugoslavia the capitalist powers are confronting each other with their armies and militias. It is the monetary funds of these powers which are maintaining the armies, paying the mercenaries in the militias and the private nationalist bands of Seseli, Paraga and other warlords, big and small. As in every bourgeois society, there are always desperate people ready for anything. Ready to sell themselves for a loaf of bread and ready to enlist with the massacring bands for the thrill of war. It also shows the extent of the hypocrisy reached by the international ruling class. After arming the butchers and letting them loose, they are now quarrelling about how to intervene to put an end to the butchery.

### Who Suffers?

Imperialist wars always confirm the law that while the fighting is done by the military (regular forces or otherwise) it is the civilians who suffer. The cost of the war continues to be paid by the workers in the factories and fields and by the unemployed who seek work and a means of subsistence. Houses are being destroyed by shells; the civilian population of conquered towns and villages are being massacred; the catastrophic economic crisis brought on by the war has thrown tens of thousands onto the streets, slashed their wages and available



foodstuffs, all adding to the suffering. All this in the name of nationalism, ethnic identity, and, even worse, religion - since religion had for a long time ceased to be a barrier between in Yugoslav people. Mixed marriages, spontaneous shifts from one area of the country to another - who amongst the working class used to care whether their neighbours were Croat rather than Slovene or Serb, whether Montenegrin rather than Bosnian? Yet the struggles and massacres which are the outcome of the creation of mercenary militias based on one or other of these divisions have brought these monstrous reactionaries back on the political scene.

### How to Respond?

The tragic events which have happened and are still happening are due to the policy of the national and international bourgeoisie. Against this, the exploited class has yet to put forward its own policy. As in other tortured parts of this planet, only the revival of an autonomous class struggle can put a stop to the massacres in Yugoslavia. The proletariat has to once again pose the historical question of the class struggle. The central problem is how to begin.

First of all it's necessary to refute and denounce the bourgeoisie's sinister nationalist, racist and religious manoeuvres. Workers must not fall into the trap of following the false logic which the ruling class has always used to justify the massacre of those they rule. What workers need to do now is:

- Fight against the wage cuts which the war policies in Serbia, Croatia and Bosnia have engendered.
- Boycott the war machine in every way possible - from the production to the transport of arms.

The most class conscious workers need to organise demonstrations in the cities of ex-Yugoslavia under the slogan: **This is a bosses', not a workers' war.**

Not a person, not a penny for bourgeois nationalism.

Organise the revolutionary vanguard of the working class round a programme of struggle against the war and the denunciation of capitalism. Start to build an autonomous political organisation of the working class: the revolutionary internationalist party.

Internationalists worldwide support any revolutionary vanguard which emerges in Yugoslavia and which is prepared to make a stand against imperialist war. This is the only terrain on which to fight against the

outbreak of a third global massacre and revive humanity's struggle to free itself from the chains of wage labour and class divisions.

This statement is produced by the

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# Social Democracy, the 1st World War and the Working Class In Britain

For Marxists the 1st World War marks a watershed in capitalism's history. Unlike previous wars this war encompassed the entire globe. It was a direct outcome of the imperialist rivalry amongst the 'great Powers' - a rivalry which was not simply the result of bellicose policies on the part of particular governments but an inevitable consequence of the process of capital accumulation. By the beginning of the 20th century the concentration and centralisation of capital had reached monopoly proportions and the 'purely' economic competition between firms inside national boundaries was more and more becoming competition between *national* capitals where the lines between economic, political and military interests merged into a single interest: the interest of the state.

In short, as Lenin was the first to point out, capitalism had reached a new stage in its development from which there could be no going back. With its economic laws now operating on a world scale the system's cyclical crises could no longer be resolved by the old means of bankruptcies, shut-downs and take-overs. Henceforward a much more massive devaluation of capital would be required; the kind of devaluation that can only come with the wholesale destruction and rundown of constant capital associated with modern warfare.

For the working class too the 1st World War also marks a watershed. For those who had eyes to see it proved the impossibility of capitalism being peacefully and gradually transformed into socialism. The absurdity of the idea that the same expansionary forces which had led to capitalist imperialism would go on to push capital towards some sort of centralised world system where war was a thing of the past was staring the workers' movement in the face. Few chose to face up to this. On the contrary, when war finally broke out in 1914 the 2nd International collapsed as the

majority of its affiliated parties abandoned any pretence at proletarian internationalism. In truth though, despite its pledges to wage "war on war" in the run up to 1914, the 2nd International had never been able to reach agreement on what the international working class should do in the increasingly likely event of an inter-imperialist war.

## Imperialist war and the 2nd International

Only a minority - associated with the figures of Lenin and Luxemburg - actually regarded such a war as an opportunity for the working class to overthrow capital. In 1907 for example, they had managed to get a further paragraph added to the resolution on war adopted by the International Socialist Congress which met at Stuttgart. It read as follows:

*In case war should break out anyway, it is their (the working class') duty to intervene in favour of its speedy termination and with all their powers to utilise the economic and political crisis created by the war to rouse the masses and thereby to hasten the downfall of capitalist class rule.<sup>1</sup>*

Yet, as the opening words of this sentence imply, the majority of the 2nd International were not seriously considering the possibility of war actually happening, much less the possibility of the working class seizing the opportunity to "hasten the downfall of capitalist class rule". A predominant aspect of social democratic thinking was the belief that the democratising of existing society would inevitably lead to the proletariat gaining political power (since it was assumed that the working class would be the majority in an advanced capitalist society) and thereby to socialism. The advent of

socialism was seen as the logical follow-up to the democratic revolution. And inside the stronghold of social democracy, the German Social Democratic Party (SPD), this was a 'revolution' which an increasing number of social democrats assumed would come via the ballot box. This, despite the fundamentally undemocratic system of Germany under the Kaiser. In fact there was compelling evidence that sooner or later those holding political power in Germany would have to take account of the electoral strength of the working class - or else go under. By 1912 the SPD could boast that it had 110 seats out of 397 in the Reichstag - the result of 4.5 million votes at the polls. But it is one thing for capital to be pressurised into conceding political reforms it is another for the working class itself to take hold of political power and overthrow capitalism altogether.

Yet what today seems glaringly obvious was not so apparent to those who lived under autocratic regimes such as Wilhelmine Germany or, even worse, Tsarist Russia. The institution of bourgeois democracy - some sort of parliamentary system with possibly a constitutional monarchy - would have involved a revolution in the political make-up of these states. Whilst such a revolution was inconceivable in Russia without the forcible overthrow of the Tsar, in more capitalistically advanced Germany the peaceful transformation of the capitalist state came to be seen as a distinct possibility by the 'revisionist' right wing of the SPD. Strictly speaking this did not involve a direct split between reformists and revolutionaries, at any rate from the standpoint of the proletarian revolution. The issue at stake was the bourgeois democratic, not the socialist revolution. Kautsky, for example, did not suppose that the political system of Wilhelmine Germany could be peacefully transformed and in this sense he was an anti-revisionist. Yet he came to theorise that the centripetal forces of international capital would eventually lead to a 'supra-imperialist' capitalist world where wars would be unnecessary and which would furnish the basis for international socialism. By implication of course international socialism would be instituted piecemeal and peaceably, but the full import of this was not clear. For the present - that is until 1914, the distinction between the long-term maximum programme (socialism) and the minimum programme (immediate reforms) enabled social democrats to hold on to the illusion that revisionists, reformists and revolutionaries alike were all working for the same ultimate goal.

Illusion it was though; an illusion fostered by the apparent unanimity of the forces of the 2nd International against war and their very real ability to mobilise workers in anti-war demonstrations. During the first Balkan War (1912) the International Socialist Bureau (ISB) issued an

anti-war manifesto which recognised that "the Balkan conflict can at any time become a general conflict" and appealed to the proletariat of Europe to "take action against war and against the spread of the Balkan conflict ... with its whole organisational might, with mass action." Even before the manifesto was published on 29th October, 1912 there were massive demonstrations in Germany. On 20th October 150,000 workers had demonstrated in Berlin alone and mass demonstrations spread throughout Europe. On 17th November - following the request of the SPD - large-scale protests were organised in all European capitals where there were parties affiliated to the International.

*On this occasion representatives of various socialist parties, Jaurès and Renner in Berlin, MacDonald, Vandervelde and Scheidemann in Paris, spoke up and warned governments that 'they shall not set Europe ablaze with impunity' ... In Pré-Saint-Gervais near Paris over 100,000 people demonstrated. 'We are not powerless', the whole socialist press said again and again, 'because the rulers will not wage war if they realise that the people do not want war.'*<sup>2</sup>

Against this background an extraordinary Congress of the ISB was held at Basle. In the words of Jean Longuet (French right-wing Socialist), it was intended to be "a powerful demonstration of the unity of the socialist movement in the anti-war struggle, a harmonious expression of the power of the International". Yet, despite the rhetoric and heady atmosphere generated at Basle, the social democrats were further away than ever from agreeing a concrete strategy in the event of war actually breaking out. The overwhelming emphasis at the Basle Congress was the **prevention** of war by putting pressure on governments. Alexandra Kollontai (then a Menshevik) recorded her impressions of the Congress in a letter,

*One felt the need to frighten Europe, to threaten it with the 'red spectre', revolution, in case the governments should risk a war. And standing on the table which served as a platform I did threaten Europe ... It was tremendous, you know, the protest of the peoples against war, and Jaurès' marvellous voice, and the wonderful and hoary head of my beloved Keir Hardie, and the great organ, and the revolutionary songs, the meetings ... I am still dizzy with all I have lived through...*<sup>3</sup>

Not only did the majority regard the prospect of proletarian revolution as a means of threatening governments rather than something to be directly worked for, at Basle the ISB resolved to step up the anti-war campaign by "ever more energetic propaganda, by ever firmer protests" which would be extended to include the middle class and pacifists



in general alongside the working class. In other words, working class action against war was to be limited to demonstrations and turned into a populist movement. Any notion that imperialist war was intrinsic to capitalism was quietly rejected. The establishment of a peaceful capitalism via disarmament, not socialism via revolution was now the International's express aim. Accordingly the ISB rejected out of hand Luxemburg's proposed amendment on mass action to the draft Basle Manifesto. This read as follows:

*This action must be strengthened in form and in intensity as the threat of war increases so that in the event of the ultimate calamity it can culminate in decisive revolutionary mass action.<sup>4</sup>*

Similarly, opposition by Pannekoek, Radek and Lensch to the working class aligning itself with middle class pacifists went unheard, as did their critique that the International's policy of urging capitalism to disarm was utopian. Although the ISB continued to call for socialists to organise meetings and demonstrations right up to the beginning of the war, once this policy of threatening governments with revolution had inevitably failed and war finally broke out, nationalism proved to be the strongest sentiment within the ranks of social democracy.

When the war finally did begin, amongst the social democratic parliamentary representatives of the belligerent countries only the Serbians voted against war credits while in Russia the Menshevik and Bolshevik deputies (to Lenin's anger) abstained. As Schorske has put it for German Social Democracy:

*The slogan 'To this system, no man and no penny' was finally abandoned for the slogan which had competed with it since 1907: 'In the hour of danger we shall not leave the Fatherland in the lurch.'<sup>5</sup>*

In France, Guesde and in Belgium, Vandervelde - leader of the Socialist Party and President of the ISB - joined capitalist war cabinets soon after the war began. Labour stalwarts, Arthur Henderson and J.H. Thomas in Britain joined Lloyd-George's Cabinet in May 1915.

## Imperialist War and the British Working Class

Revolutionary Marxists have tended to explain mass working class support for the 1st World War

in terms of the betrayal of socialism by the leaders of Social Democracy. Clearly this has more than a little bearing on the situation in Germany where thousands of young recruits went off to war singing social democratic songs, having been assured by the SPD leadership that this was a war of legitimate national defence against attack from the *bête noir* of the International, reactionary Russian Tsarism.

In Britain however the Labour Party, as distinct for the Independent Labour Party (ILP), was composed largely of trade unionists who generally made no claim at all to be socialist or else Fabians who rejected outright the idea of proletarian revolution and supposed that socialism had something to do with the extension of state (i.e. the capitalist state) control over society. In any case the marxist conception of socialism coming about through class struggle was anathema to Labourites who, in the words of Engels, acted politically as the tail of the Liberal Party and the thought that "workers have no fatherland" (*Communist Manifesto*) never entered their heads.

Amongst this working class which "think about politics in general the same as the bourgeois think" (Engels, 1882) there was no shortage of cannon fodder for British imperialism. Only five weeks into the 1st World War 175,000 men had responded to Kitchener's famous *Call to Arms*. In all the voluntary system lasted until the end of 1915 and brought in 2.5 million recruits. The majority were working class and many left relatively well-paid jobs to go to the war front. In the coal industry, for example,

*... 191,170 trade unionists, almost a fifth of the total labour force, had joined the armed forces by February 1915.<sup>6</sup>*

In the early days, at any rate, there was undoubtedly popular enthusiasm for war, an enthusiasm which was encouraged by trade union and Labour leaders who not only agreed to suspend the class struggle during the war but encouraged workers to risk sacrificing their lives by urging them "to rise to the national crisis".

The widespread support for the war amongst the working class cannot be explained simply in terms of a desire for adventure and a change from the monotony of work and life at home. Nor is unemployment a satisfactory answer. Working class volunteers did not come exclusively from the ranks of the unemployed. With 20 per cent of the male population of prime military age (20-35) voluntarily responding to appeals "to help your country at this critical moment", it is clear that

patriotic values pervaded the British working class as much as the rest of society.

And patriotism was part of imperialist ideology: an ideology which, as Lenin later put it, "also penetrates the working class. No Chinese Wall separates it from the other classes". (*Imperialism, The Highest stage of Capitalism*.) Today this may appear obvious. It was not so obvious in August, 1914. In the first place, despite Lenin's use of the "workers have no fatherland" slogan to emphasise the betrayal of the 2nd International, there had by no means been an established anti-patriotic principle within Social Democracy. If anything, it was assumed that the interests of the working class represented the interests of the nation (i.e. in the sense of the majority of the 'people'), no matter that 'the nation' was increasingly identifying itself with the imperialist state. Thus, Rosa Luxemburg could still couch her attack on the German Social Democrats' failure to oppose the war in terms of their "desertion of the fatherland".

*Yes, Socialists should defend their country in great historical crises ... the highest duty of the Social Democracy toward its fatherland demanded that it expose the real background of this imperialist war, that it rend the net of imperialist and diplomatic lies that covers the eyes of the people. It was their duty to speak loudly and clearly, to proclaim to the people of Germany that in this war victory and defeat would be equally fatal, to oppose the gagging of the fatherland by a state of siege, to demand that the people alone decide on war and peace, to demand a permanent session of Parliament for the period of the war, to assume a watchful control over the government by parliament, and over parliament by the people, to demand the immediate removal of all political inequalities, since only a free people can adequately govern its country, and finally, to oppose to the imperialist war, based as it was upon the most reactionary forces in Europe, the programme of Marx, of Engels and Lassalle.*

*That was the flag that should have waved over the country. That would have been truly national, truly free, in harmony with the best traditions of Germany and the international class policy of the proletariat.<sup>7</sup>*

Here in a nutshell is the Social Democratic conception of internationalism: a coming together of distinct nations or peoples, not the overcoming of nationalist sentiments within the working class through a common struggle against capital which of necessity extends beyond national frontiers. It

was a conception which had its roots in radical democracy and in Britain, in an even earlier period of capital's development. Here too, but particularly in England, there had been a tradition of radical patriotism inside the working class.

It was a tradition which reached back before the French Revolution and incorporated populist myths

such as the liberty enjoyed by the English people in Saxon times, under "Good King Alfred" before the imposition of the "Norman yoke"; and variations of the "God is an Englishman" idea invoked by a strand in radical Protestantism from the English Revolution onwards. By the 18th century the radical patriot would probably have defined himself as a "freeborn Englishman" who had a

constitutional right to liberty; a right which was being usurped by a corrupt and tyrannical government in favour of an aristocracy which hailed from abroad. As the century progressed 'patriotism' became so much identified with radical opposition to government, especially extra-parliamentary opposition, that it was no longer regarded as a respectable attribute by the establishment. In the 1755 edition of Samuel Johnson's dictionary, for example, a 'patriot' is described as "One whose ruling passion is the love of his country". Twenty years on, after mounting calls for a radical reform led by figures such as John Cartwright (who wrote a pamphlet whose demands prefigured those of the Chartists), this definition was replaced by the famous aphorism that "patriotism is the last refuge of a scoundrel". - A 'scoundrel' presumably being someone who took the struggle for a representative parliament and against corrupt government to the populace as a whole. By the time of the French Revolution there was a thriving radical movement ready to absorb Paine's ideas on the Rights of Man and the Revolution's notions of democratic government. The freeborn Englishman merged with the bourgeois democrat in a popular movement for radical parliamentary reform. The artisans and wage labourers who were at its head articulated their political aims through Corresponding Societies and clubs like the Manchester Patriotic Society, comprising "mechanics of the lowest class". The calls for the restoration of 'Ancient Liberties' mingled with declarations about being 'Citizens of the World'. This particular blend of English radical democratic patriotism survived in working class political life through until Chartism, when:

*Once again there were Patriotic Societies and Patriotic newspapers. Chartist leaders, particularly if they had suffered imprisonment, were the "distinguished patriots", "the noble-*

*Imperialist ideology also penetrates the working class. No Chinese Wall separates it from the other classes. [Lenin]*



*"minded patriots", the "liberated patriots" (McDouall and Collins), "one of the greatest patriots the world ever saw" (O' Connor), "one of the most unflinching patriots of the world" (Fletcher) or simply the "PATRIOT LOVETT".<sup>8</sup>*

Yet it was a concept which never belonged exclusively to the radical democrats and which was always ambiguous. - The 'true patriot' was just as likely to invoke images of the Roast Beef of Old England (which tune was played at the Manchester dinner to celebrate the release of imprisoned Chartists McDouall and Collins) as the internationalism espoused by Harney and the Fraternal Democrats. Both sets of imagery could and were absorbed by the existing Parties of the political establishment as part of the process of undermining the threatening aspects of the radical movement. Liberalism, for instance, took over the old working class internationalism with its campaigns against autocracy and tyrannical government abroad. The Tories, on the other hand, skilfully used the sort of patriotism espoused by Cobbett or O'Connor as they peddled the image of England as the home of freedom whose benefits should be spread to less fortunate nations. This notion of patriotism was easy to tie in with John Bullish, 'little Englander' Toryism. Like all historical processes the ideological undermining of radicalism was not a clear cut affair but there was a turning point somewhere in the 1870s when, round about the same time as the Workmen's Peace Association was entreating the Foreign Office, "... to use your utmost influence in Favour of Neutrality in the horrible War between Russia & Turkey, and also against any increased expenditure on our armaments",<sup>9</sup> G.H. MacDermott was launching what would become known as the 'Jingo Song' round Britain's Music Halls (by this time a potent source of Tory propaganda). This became the most well-known of a host of similar patriotic songs which expressed the Tories' pro-Turkish policy (i.e. the fear that Russian might gain naval access to the Mediterranean) in popular form. It ran as follows,

*We don't want to fight, but by jingo if we do,  
We've got the ships, we've got the men, we've  
got the money too.  
We've fought the bear before, and while we're  
Britons true,  
The Russians will not have Constantinople.<sup>10</sup>*

Well before 1914 patriotism had become inextricably bound up with an imperialistic world view which was by no means the exclusive preserve of jingoistic Toryism but which extended across the political spectrum and throughout society. Already, in 1881 Lord Roseberry was countering the Liberals' traditional antipathy to imperial aggrandisement by redefining 'imperialism' as

'patriotism'. ("I mean the greater pride in Empire which is called Imperialism, a larger patriotism.") During the 1895 election campaign, Roseberry declared himself a 'Liberal Imperialist', defined as:

*First, the maintenance of the Empire; secondly, the opening of new areas for our surplus population; thirdly, the suppression of the slave trade; fourthly, the development of missionary enterprise; and fifthly, the development of our commerce, which so often needs it.<sup>11</sup>*

Whether cast in terms of militaristic territorial expansion or the reluctant shouldering of the white man's burden, the Empire had come to be regarded as almost an intrinsic part of Britain. By 1914 patriotism and imperialism were interdependent. A new ideological consensus had been forged in response to the changing international economic and political context in which Britain and her Empire found itself. Increasingly capitalist competition was becoming rivalry between states. Imperialist ideology was not just about hanging on to or even extending Britain's existing overseas possessions but, as with all the other 'Great Powers', involved identification of the nation with the interests of the state. In the early years of the twentieth century this dominant ideology came more and more to be associated with Empire loyalty. It was not just about patriotism but involved militarism, the cult of royalty and national heroes, and social Darwinism. After the Boer War in particular imperialist ideology became bound up with statism and national efficiency: the need for a strong economy to combat foreign commercial and industrial competition; the need for a strong army and navy to combat the growing military strength of rival states; and the need to reduce infant mortality since the birth rate was now seen as a matter of national importance. Children were a "national asset", "the capital of a country" on whom "the future of the country and Empire" depended. It was a world view many of whose aspects were shared by Conservatives, Liberals, Liberal Imperialists, Fabians, as well as a large number of trade unionists, Labourists and socialists.

By the late 19th century patriotism had become a key aspect of the ideology of the imperialist state. The weight of that ideology over the working class was immense. Empire propaganda permeated almost every aspect of workers' lives - from the school text book to cigarette cards and imperial exhibitions which linked British capitalism's success to imperialism; from the mass circulation popular press to music hall turns and songs; from children's literature to everyday advertising and commemorative knick-knacks. It was an ideology that was sometimes unconsciously, but often consciously propagated amongst the working class as an antidote to class conflict: a world view which

assumed unity of the 'national interest' and where individuals, not classes stood in equal relationship to each other and the state. The ease with which this ruling class ideology was transmitted through the bulk of the working class is undoubtedly linked to the development of a commercial, mass culture - part of a process more complicated than simply the 'bribery' of the upper strata of the working class with some of the material rewards of imperialism. The consolidation of the bourgeoisie's ideological hold over the working class through the eradication and replacement of relatively autonomous elements of popular, working class life was not simply the result of technological advance. Rather, the latter stemmed from the necessity to maintain profitability by producing for ever-wider markets. Before the mass market came into being the more autonomous aspects of the popular had to be either destroyed or absorbed and redefined. For example, the launch of the first mass circulation newspaper, the *Daily Mail* (which reached a circulation of 700,000 in four years), in 1896 was only possible once the old radical press had disappeared or been marginalised.

After the defeat of Chartism this was accomplished not so much by State repression but by the abolition of stamp duty and allowing free reign to the establishment of a commercial capitalist press. In the 1850s more perceptive representatives of the capitalist class, such as Milner-Gibson, president of the Association for the Repeal of the Taxes on Knowledge, had realised that,

*... a cheap press in the hands of men of good moral character, of respectability, and of capital [would give them] the power of gaining access by newspapers, by faithful record of the facts, to the minds of the working classes.<sup>12</sup>*

Free speech, one of the pillars of popular radicalism, was thus one of the weapons taken up and used by capital to eradicate it. The commercial and political interests of capital complemented and reinforced each other. This, not just with regard to the establishment of a popular capitalist press, but to virtually every aspect of what was to become the 'leisure and entertainments industry'. The result was a culture organised by capital for the working class. With this came capital's imperialist ideology as an intrinsic aspect of it.

This is not to deny that there was implicit antipathy towards the imperialist state based on class solidarity from a minority of politicised workers. Nor does it mean that workers in general were prepared to forego their immediate material interests in the years immediately before the 1st

*The ideas of the ruling class are, in every age, the ruling ideas ...*  
[Marx]

World War when, as Challinor argues, "Industrial strife at times verged on civil war". However, the working class political press associated with that strife remained a marginal aspect of everyday reality for the majority of workers. *The Syndicalist*, for example, achieved a monthly circulation of 20,000 at its height in 1912 - a far cry from the daily circulation of the commercial press. In keeping with their emphasis on industrial struggle, a broader anti-imperialism was not central to syndicalist propaganda, although anti-militarism

was. Amongst socialists in general few saw a contradiction between supporting the 'national interest' and the goal of a socialist future. This was not just in the case of the Blatchfords with their *Merrie Englands* and the Hyndmans peddling *England For All* - i.e. those who openly

supported British Imperialism. Socialists like Ramsay MacDonald and Keir Hardie (both ILPers) who regarded themselves and were regarded by others as anti-imperialist, fell in line on the outbreak of world war. Nation was now unambiguously put before class. Here is Hardie, for instance, the man who supposedly died of a broken heart as a result of the 1st World War and only four days after taking part in an anti-war demonstration in Trafalgar Square, speaking to his Merthyr constituents:

*A nation at war must be united ... with the boom of the enemy's guns within earshot the lads who have gone forth to fight their country's battles must not be disheartened by any discordant note at home.<sup>13</sup>*

Similarly, MacDonald's pacifism did not prevent him from offering his services to his country or from recommending that the working class do their duty:

*Should an opportunity arise to enable me to appeal to the pure love of country - which I know is a precious sentiment in all our hearts, keeping it clear of thought which I believe to be alien to real patriotism - I shall gladly take that opportunity. If need be I shall make it for myself. I want the serious men of the Trade Union, the Brotherhood, and similar movements to face their duty. To such men it is enough to say 'England has need of you'.<sup>14</sup>*

Compare this to Lenin whose first public utterance on the war (made in Switzerland to a group of Bolsheviks in September, 1914 shortly after his extradition from Austria) was to condemn "The betrayal of Socialism by a majority of the leaders of the 2nd International (1889-1914) [which] signifies an ideological and political collapse of the International."<sup>15</sup> Far from collaborating with



governments and bosses to ensure social peace, the task of revolutionaries was to work for the continuation of the class struggle during the war. Inevitably this would mean coming up against the state but if this involved the mass of the working class a civil war situation would be created - i.e. a potential revolutionary struggle between the working class and the capitalist class. Clearly such a tactic meant that revolutionaries must be prepared to adopt illegal methods of work. An important part of this work would be in the armed forces where revolutionaries must advocate, not pacifism and disarmament, but the turning of soldiers' and sailors' weapons against their immediate class enemy.

*The slogans of Social-Democracy must now be: First, an all-embracing propaganda of the Socialist revolution, to be extended also to the army and the area of military activities; emphasis to be placed on the necessity of turning the weapons, not against the brother wage slaves of other countries, but against the reaction of the bourgeois governments and parties in each country; recognition of the urgent necessity of organising illegal nuclei and groups in the armies of all nations to conduct such propaganda in all languages; a merciless struggle against the chauvinism and patriotism of the philistines and bourgeoisie of all countries without exception.<sup>16</sup>*

It was these principles and tactics which were behind the concept of revolutionary defeatism adopted by the Bolshevik Party and later incorporated into the programme of the Zimmerwald Left. They formed the only coherent basis for revolutionary opposition to the war.

## The Response of Socialists in Britain

The split which occurred within Continental Social Democracy over the issue of support for the war only had a faint echo in the British socialist movement. For the Labour Party as a whole, which made no claim to be socialist - and which had only been admitted to the International in 1908 by means of a special resolution - there was never any question of whether or not to oppose the war. Any debate which did occur therefore tended to be out of the main frame of the labour movement and reserved for the meeting rooms of the socialist sects, out of earshot of the majority of workers. Even worse than their political isolation though, was the muddle-headedness of the majority of British socialists, brought up in their own peculiar Lib-Lab radical tradition and for the most part without even a token adherence to Marxism or the necessity for the political overthrow of capitalism. In short, the ingrained nationalism and reformist mentality of the majority of the British left ensured

that issues such as the nature of the war and the possibility of a class struggle against it for the most part escaped them.

## The Independent Labour Party

There was thus no talk inside the Labour Party proper about "betrayal of the elementary truth of Socialism expressed long ago in the *Communist Manifesto*, that the workers have no fatherland" (Lenin). However, the ILP had been part of the 2nd International since its early days and its representative at the 1910 Congress of the ISB, Keir Hardie, had been in favour of a general strike as the best way to "prevent and hinder war".<sup>16</sup> What then was the ILP's official response to the war? - Basically a middle of the road, pacifist one. It was in favour of a negotiated peace and on 11th August, 1914 the Party's National Council issued the following anti-war statement which is clearly couched in national, not class terms.

*Our nationality and independence, which are dear to us, we are ready to defend: but we cannot rejoice in the organised murder of tens of thousands of workers of other lands who go to kill and be killed at the command of rulers to whom the people are as pawns.<sup>17</sup>*

In practice, though, even this mild anti-war statement was not complied with by many ILP leaders. Out of seventeen ILP councillors in Glasgow only two opposed the war in 1914, while twelve ILP MPs had signed a declaration in defence of the war by October 15th.<sup>18</sup> By February, 1915 the ILP had organised a Congress of socialists from the Entente powers (to which the Bolsheviks were not invited) where it agreed to resolutions describing the war as a war of 'liberation'. The inconsistency of this position does not appear to have struck ILPers like MacDonald, Glasier and Snowden who continued to propagandise against the introduction of conscription while the *Labour Leader* published sympathetic reports on the fraternisation of troops in January, 1915. Clearly the Party was confused and it is untrue to say that it "had not supported the war" or even that it was "unashamedly pacifist".<sup>19</sup>

Moreover, the pacifism which did exist within the ILP could not provide the framework for developing a revolutionary defeatist position. The ILP did not regard the quest for peace as anything to do with socialist revolution and had no conception of utilising the wartime crisis to develop the class struggle at home. For the ILP to have done this would have necessitated a break with its loyalty to the British state. This it was far from doing. Despite the anti-war sentiments and anti-militarist propaganda made by some of its members, this was made in the tradition of the



'freeborn Englishman' and the old radicalism rather than the standpoint of proletarian internationalism.<sup>20</sup> Thus ILPers joined with Liberals in December, 1914 to form the Union of Democratic Control which aimed to secure a negotiated peace and open diplomacy on the part of the British government. In the same month ILPers also helped to form the No Conscription Federation which, needless to say, did not prevent the introduction of conscription in 1916.

At the same time the ILP maintained its Labour Party links (for example, sending delegates to the Labour Party Conference in 1916) and often worked with it on various committees set up by the Government. In short, it was an umbrella organisation only capable of spreading confusion. What's more, unlike the SPD or the PSI in Italy, there was no organised minority striving for revolutionary clarity which could have split from the social democratic framework of the organisation.

### The British Socialist Party

Unlike the ILP, the British Socialist Party (BSP), with its origins in the Social Democratic Federation, claimed to have a Marxist basis. However, this had not prevented Hyndman and other SDF leaders from taking an expressly nationalist position during the Boer War, resulting in dissension within the party which was never resolved politically. By the time of the first BSP conference in May, 1912 the Hyndmanites found themselves in a minority on the newly-elected Executive. With the endorsement of a resolution by Zelda Kahan beginning,

*Recognising that the armies and navies of modern capitalist states are maintained and employed only in the interests of the capitalist classes of those states; recognising further that so far as the workers are concerned there is nothing to choose between German and British imperialism and aggression, the executive committee of the British Socialist party dissociates itself from the propaganda for increased naval expenditure ...*<sup>21</sup>

BSP official policy at once made a U-turn and came into line with the resolutions of the 2nd International. While the internationalists remained the majority in the Party by 1914 the Hyndmanites were once more in control of the executive while the crucial question of the party's attitude to the war remained unresolved.

*It is sometimes charged against the ILP that it has never formulated its theory of socialism. That is true, and therein lies its strength. [Keir Hardie]*

In the early days of the war Hyndman spoke on one of the three anti-war platforms at the anti-war demonstration in Trafalgar Square organised by the British section of the ISB. Nevertheless, by 13th August he was writing in *Justice* that "everybody must eagerly desire the defeat of Germany". A month later the Party executive (which now included members with anti-war views) issued a manifesto stating that since,

*...the national freedom and independence of this country are threatened by Prussian militarism, the party naturally desires to see the prosecution of the war to a successful issue.*<sup>22</sup>

This was followed by a manifesto advising party members to take part in the Government's recruitment campaign which evoked protest from several London branches and from Pollockshaws in Scotland, where John Maclean was a member. Yet although this further revealed the extent of the BSP's disunity it was not the signal for a decisive stand against national defence by the majority. Instead, the old factional skirmishes for control of the Party's executive organs began again.

### John Maclean's Stand

Only in Scotland did John Maclean and a few of the BSP local branches oppose the executive's line from the start. On 17th September, 1914 Maclean denounced the war as an inevitable result of capitalist imperialism and went on:

*It is our business as Socialists to develop a 'class patriotism', refusing to murder one another for a sordid world capitalism. The absurdity of the present situation is surely apparent when we see British socialists going out to murder German socialists with the object of crushing Kaiserism and Prussian militarism. The only real enemy to Kaiserism and Prussian militarism, I assert against the world, was and is German social democracy. Let the propertied class, old and young alike, go out and defend their blessed property. When they have been disposed of, we of the working class will have something to defend, and we shall do it.*<sup>23</sup>

Maclean immediately began to pursue an independent course of propaganda against the war in Glasgow but he remained aloof from the opposition's attempts to oust the warmongerers from the Party's executive. This is in keeping with his attitude throughout the internal struggles which had been going on since the Boer War. It illustrates the lack of significance he placed on political



organisation. Maclean was a teacher who placed great emphasis on Marxist education classes as a means of developing the class consciousness of workers on an individual basis. His ideas of how the working class as a whole would become revolutionary were vague however and he placed little importance on the creation of a programmatically coherent and unified party which could give a clear political and organisational lead to workers.

One implication of Maclean's views on organisation, or rather lack of them, was that he made little attempt to argue his case inside the Party. He had no intention of leading a national split from the BSP to create an alternative organisation firmly based on opposition to the war. Unlike Lenin and other revolutionaries like Gorter and Pannekoek, Maclean did not see that an ideological break with national defencism implied an eventual **organisational** split with social democracy. By the end of 1914 Lenin was already writing that:

*Internationalism consists in coming together (first ideologically, then in due time also organisationally) of people who, in these grave days, are capable of defending Socialist internationalism in practice, i.e. to gather their forces and "to be next in shooting" at the governments and the ruling classes of one's own "fatherland" ... because it is not an easy task, it must be done in company with those who only wish to do it, who are not afraid of a complete break with the chauvinists and with the defenders of social chauvinism.*

*... only through the policy of a most decisive break and rupture with the first current, with all those who are capable of justifying the vote of appropriations, 'the defence of the fatherland', 'submission to martial law', the eagerness to use legal means only, the renunciation of civil war. Only those who follow such a policy do in practice build a socialist international.<sup>24</sup>*

In the early years of the war Maclean did not share this conception. He didn't find it necessary to break from the BSP whose official mouthpiece, *Justice*, supported the British Government's war aims; whose right-wing attacked other members as "acting under instructions from Berlin", who attacked Maclean's own anti-war activities and plotted and campaigned for the arrest of fellow-BSPers who were opposed to the war. Like Luxemburg, Maclean seems to have thought that social democracy could be 'revolutionised' from within. Also like Luxemburg, Maclean took the view of the majority at the Zimmerwald and Kienthal conferences - i.e. for 'peace without annexations' and not revolutionary defeatism. Even so, his principled stand meant that by 1916

he was much closer to a revolutionary position and the editorial in the first edition of *Vanguard* presaging the founding declaration of the 3rd International three years later.

*Nothing but socialism will do. This monstrous war shows the day of social pottering or reform has passed ... we shall oppose all national wars as we oppose this one. The only war worth waging is the class war, the workers against the world exploiters, until we have obtained industrial freedom.<sup>25</sup>*

In effect this was calling for the "defeat of one's own government" but without preparing the working class for using the opportunity to overthrow the system in the crisis that followed. As we have said, Maclean had not reached this conclusion in 1916 but he was to change his mind when news of the Russian Revolution broke in 1917. Meanwhile, though there was no organised revolutionary opposition inside the BSP. The majority continued to vacillate between a position somewhere to the right of the Zimmerwald majority and outright national defencism. When *Vanguard* ceased publication in 1916 after the arrest of Maclean and his followers there was not even the embryonic basis for the development of a revolutionary fraction inside the BSP. This, despite the exit of the Hyndmanites in June of that year.

## The Socialist Labour Party

With about two hundred members in 1914, the Socialist Labour Party (SLP) was much smaller than the other socialist organisations. Like the BSP it had its origins in the SDF from which it had split in 1903 over the latter's increasing opportunism. Like the BSP the SLP claimed a Marxist base for its politics and, at least during its early years, demanded much greater political agreement and understanding from its members.

*A party which has undertaken the work of revolutionising society must be dominated not only by a common purpose but also a common plan of action. A revolutionary socialist party ... must present not only the appearance but the reality of an intelligent disciplined unity.<sup>26</sup>*

Challinor has rather dubiously (given the SLP's undoubted syndicalist-style abdication of broader political work in the strikes of munition and engineering workers during and after the war) pointed to the similarity of outlook between the SLP and the Bolsheviks on the role of the revolutionary party. However, on the extent of social democracy's opportunism in 1914, the SLP was more Bolshevik than the Bolsheviks. Until the outbreak of war Lenin had shared the view of the SPD as the "jewel in the crown" of social



democracy as a whole. As early as 1903, however, the SLP saw the seeds of the SPD's downfall as a revolutionary party in its success at the polls. Commenting on Eisner's explanation that the SPD had polled three million "republican, democratic, socialist, anti-military votes", the SLP retorted:

*This lumping of opinion and diversity of interest is to our mind the beginning of the undoing of German socialism ... the revolutionary party in Germany ... fed and nurtured on the revolutionary tradition, has become the ghost of its former self. The mere mass of constantly increasing supporters at the polls is the most dangerous ground that a revolutionary party can accept ... Regarded, then, from this point of view, the German socialist party has ceased to be revolutionary and has become reformatory ... We in England of the Socialist Labour party must learn the lesson of mere political success, if we desire in England there be formed a real militant class conscious working class.<sup>27</sup>*

Given this analysis, the SLP had no trouble seeing the capitulation of social democracy to national defencism as a direct consequence of revisionism nor did it share the centrist view of many in the ILP and BSP that the war could be ended by 'open' diplomacy. The SLP saw the war as an inevitable result of imperialist competition. The political conclusions were drawn in *The Socialist*,

*Our attitude is neither pro-German nor pro-British, but anti-capitalist and all that it stands for in every country of the world. The capitalist class of all nations are our real enemies, and it is against them that we direct all our attacks.<sup>28</sup>*

The SLP was apparently also amongst the small number of revolutionaries who in 1914 supported Lenin's view that a new International had to be formed.<sup>29</sup> In January, 1915 *The Socialist's* view that the war could open up a revolutionary situation was in keeping with the resolution of the Left at the 1907 Stuttgart Congress.

*As revolutionary socialists, we are bound to make the most of whatever opportunities present themselves for carrying our revolutionary principles into effect, and this war, involving as it does the working class of the leading countries in Europe in common disaster, may prove a blessing in disguise by providing them with the opportunity of throwing off the yoke of their common oppressor.<sup>30</sup>*

Clearly these views put the SLP ideologically in the camp of the revolutionary defeatists. There is some evidence too that the organisation took practical steps to implement such a policy whose practical implication was not for socialists to conduct an idealistic campaign for workers to

refuse to serve in the army, but to agitate within the armed forces. In November *The Socialist* claimed the SLP had been disseminating literature inside several regiments and quoted an internal document which stated "we shall do all that can be done towards stirring up insurrection in the army."<sup>31</sup> However, there is also evidence to suggest that the SLP's position was not so clearcut as Challinor would have us believe. It is certainly the case that the Party rejected national defencism immediately (the editor of *The Socialist*, John Muir was obliged to resign in 1914 for advocating such) but it's not so clear whether the official policy of "active opposition to the war" finally adopted at the April, 1915 Conference was one in line with revolutionary defeatism or with the Centrists and pacifists who wanted a negotiated peace without annexations. There was a difference. As Lenin put it in his report on the 1915 Zimmerwald Conference,

*... if we are really and firmly convinced that the war is creating a revolutionary situation in Europe, then it is our bounden duty to explain to the masses the necessity of a revolution, to appeal for it, to create befitting organisations, to speak fearlessly and in the most concrete manner of the various methods of struggle and of its technique.<sup>32</sup>*

The SLP may not have been so clear-sighted about this as Challinor makes out but of all the socialist organisations in Britain at the time it was ideologically closest to the Bolsheviks. In terms of capacity to influence masses of workers though it was, like all the other socialist groups in Britain, in the position of a sect with the great wall of the Labour Party and the trade unions preventing wider access to the minds of the working class.

## Some Concluding Remarks

As we said at the beginning of this article, the 1st World War marks a historical watershed for both capital and labour. As to why the majority of workers in Britain saw no reason to oppose it, we have to look further than the treachery of social democratic political leaders. A sell-out can only occur when established principles are thrown overboard. Despite its relationship with the ILP, the Labour Party did not stand for socialism. As part of an alliance of trade unionists still engaged in deals with the Liberals to prevent Tories being elected in working class constituencies, most Labourites were not interested in the formation of a socialist party of any description. The reason for this must be sought in the material situation and precise history of the British working class. Marx and Engels had put down the "political nullity of the English workers" (Engels) to the relatively high standard of living they enjoyed as a result of British capital's domination of the world market.



The net result was that workers in general tended to associate their own interests with those of the imperialist state. In 1883 Engels said (in a letter to Bebel) that this situation would continue so long as British capital's world monopoly remained. Likewise, until there was a spontaneous movement against falling living standards by the working class which socialists could get control of, socialism would remain "a hotch-potch of confused sects, remnants of the great movement of the forties, standing behind them, and nothing more".<sup>33</sup> However, Engels did not reckon on the Labour Party, that peculiarly British form of reformism whose existence pre-empted the formation of an independent working class party with a substantial working class base.<sup>34</sup>

Given the 2nd International's collapse in 1914 and the fact that revolutionaries today are not part of a mass 'socialist' movement but isolated from the bulk of the working class, whichever country they happen to find themselves in, it might be asked what bearing the absence of a clear-cut social democratic period in British working class history has for us today. In a general sense of course it's true that revolutionaries today are all in the same beleaguered boat, waiting for a change in the tide of working class passivity in the face of capitalism's economic crisis. However, each 'national' section of the global working class has its own historical legacy. That legacy in Britain is a Party which has never done anything other than defend the wider interests of the British state as it followed the coat tails of the avowedly capitalist parties (first Liberal, then Tory). Yet it has managed to define itself as the legitimate 'labour movement', outside of which there are only sects. Labour's failure to act in the interests of those who work for a wage is not new; it is just more obvious today. Today Labourism and the narrow-minded trade unionism that goes with it are still barriers to workers in Britain reaching a clearer view of where their real interests lie. This was a hundred times more the case during the time of the 1st World War and the revolutionary upheavals which came in its wake. This is not just because the Labour party could appear to be something it wasn't as a result of its umbrella-like inclusion of 'socialists' like the ILP but because the very absence of a mass social democratic party in Britain meant that the political issues which were discussed in front of the whole working class elsewhere were simply not an issue for Labour, and as often as not that included the ILP as well. This is not insignificant. The absence of wider political debate helped to reinforce Labourism and the low level of political awareness in general amongst the working class in Britain. Though revolutionaries were always a minority in all the important debates inside the International: on whether socialism could be achieved gradually and whether they could justifiably enter capitalist governments; on the difference between mass political strikes and trades unionism; on the nature

of a revolutionary working class political organisation; on the question of how to oppose imperialist war itself; at least these issues were reported and discussed in front of a wide working class audience. Not so in Britain where, as we have said, would-be revolutionary political fractions were left in the position of sects. Elements from these socialist sects did respond to the workers' movement which rose as the material hardships of war increased, and when the example set by the Russian Revolution inspired even workers in Britain to look beyond Labour, leading eventually to the formation of the Communist Party of Great Britain. Yet Labour remained the 'workers' party' in the minds of the majority of the British working class while the relatively tiny Communist Party became an apparently easily adaptable mouthpiece of the Comintern as the counter-revolution took hold in Russia. It is striking too how that Party took up again the banner of popular radicalism in the Thirties and Forties whilst the Communist Party Historians' Group led by Dona Torr and comprising people like Christopher Hill produced a whole host of works under the heading of 'people's history', 'our history', 'the common people' to reinforce the idea that the class struggle is a people's and therefore a national struggle. The theory of the Norman Yoke was revived to show that the task of the English working class was, in the words of Dona Torr, "to win the battle of democracy", a battle which stretches in an "unbroken English revolutionary tradition from John Ball to Tom Mann" while Christopher Hill explained to readers of a volume entitled *Democracy and the Labour Movement* that:

*Marxism has subsumed what is valuable in the Norman Yoke theory - its recognition of the class basis of politics, its deep sense of the Englishness of the common people, of the proud continuity of their lives, institutions and struggles with those of their forefathers, its insistence that a propertied ruling class is from the nature of its position fundamentally alien to the interests of the mass of the people.*<sup>35</sup>

He went on to argue that the working class must stand as a defender of the nation. Very convenient as a justification of the popular front antics of the Communist Party in the Thirties and its call on workers to participate in the 2nd imperialist world war under the banner of a people's struggle against fascism. For revolutionaries today the significance of the 1st World War remains - all such talk of 'people's struggle' of 'defence of democracy' or the like is so much bilge. The British working class is part of a world working class and 'our history' teaches us that we have no interest in sacrificing ourselves for imperialism.

The collapse of the 2nd International in 1914 marked the end of an era; the end of any possibility

of a progressive political alliance of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. In capitalism's imperialist epoch there are no longer any progressive capitalist wars and there is no room for popular radicalism and the patriotism associated with it. What the 1st World War also shows us is that the class struggle does not end once war is declared. On the contrary, as Lenin realised, an all-out imperialist war spells the making of a political crisis for the capitalist class while the hardships, death and destruction which accompany it provide the material impetus for the development of a spontaneous working class movement against war and the existing political order. As the third cycle of capital accumulation this century drags to its inexorable close, world war is once again on the historical agenda and revolutionaries have to face up to the need to frame a response. Certainly we cannot expect the working class to act en masse on the outbreak of war. If workers' heads were full of capitalist ideology in 1914, how much greater and more sophisticated is capital's thought control today? Only dreamers suppose that capital's ideological hold over the working class can be undermined by the force of revolutionary propaganda alone. Until the existing order is undermined by the weight of its own material contradictions then the working class in general will remain unreceptive to revolutionary ideas. Despite twenty years or so of economic crisis, and despite the marginalisation of significant sections of the working class, workers in the capitalist metropolises are still relatively well off. It may be that the material impetus to revolt will once again be the deprivations of war. In any case, the response of revolutionaries will not be to suspend activities for the course of the war, to preach conscientious objection or pacifism. Their task will be to work for the continuation of the class struggle with the aim of turning the war amongst capitalist states into a war against the bosses at home in preparation for a revolutionary struggle for a new society. This is the basis for proletarian internationalism, not the pacifism of CND nor the patriotism of Labour.

# Footnotes

1. From 'Resolution Adopted at the Seventh International Socialist Congress at Stuttgart' in Lenin, *Collected Works* Vol. XVIII, Martin Lawrence p.467.
2. Georges Haupt *Socialism and the Great War* Oxford 1972 p. 84.
3. Letter to T.L. Scepkina-Kupernik, quoted op.cit. p.91.
4. op.cit. p.89.
5. C.E. Schorske *German Social Democracy, 1905-1917* Cambridge Mass. p.285.
6. Raymond Challinor, *The Origins of British Bolshevism* London, p.123.
7. Rosa Luxemburg, *The Junius Pamphlet* Merlin, London p.113.
8. Hugh Cunningham 'The Language of Patriotism 1750-1914' in *History Workshop Journal* 12, 1981 p.17.
9. op.cit. p.23. Cunningham notes that this particular petition

came from Mursley in Buckinghamshire "... and was signed by fifty-three people, three of whom marked with the cross of the illiterate, and at least thirteen of whom were women. Some gave their occupations: there were fourteen labourers, two carpenters, two bricklayers, two farmers, a publican, a shoemaker, a builder, a farm bailiff, and an 'edgecutter'."

10. Dave Russell, 'Patriotism, Jingoism and Imperialism' in *Popular Music in England, 1840-1914* p.114.
11. C.C. Elridge, *Victorian Imperialism*, London p.180.
12. Quoted by James Curran in 'The Press as an Agency of Social Control' in Boyce, Curran and Wingates, eds., *Newspaper History: from the 17th Century to the Present Day*, p.60.
13. Challinor op.cit. p.124.
14. Letter to the Mayor of Leicester, 10.4.14., quoted ibid.
15. Lenin, 'Revolutionary Social Democracy and War' loc.cit. p.61.
16. From a resolution proposed by Hardie and Vaillant (leader of the French United Socialist Party) and voted down by the SPD as an anarchist tactic. See Haupt op.cit.
17. See R.K. Middlemass, *The Clydesiders* p.56.
18. Walter Kendall, *The Revolutionary Movement in Britain 1900-21* London, 1969 p.111 and Middlemass loc.cit.
19. As do Kendall and Middlemass respectively, thus adding to the myths about the Labour Left.
20. For example, Bruce Glasier's pamphlet *The Peril of Conscription* stresses that the author is not against 'the fatherland' but imperialism and compulsory military service. Imperialism is typically seen in moral terms and not as an unavoidable product of capitalism's development.
21. Kendall op.cit. p.53.
22. op.cit. p.86.
23. Quoted in Nan Milton, *In the Rapids of Revolution* p.77.
24. Lenin op.cit. p.97.
25. Kendall op.cit. p.96.
26. Quoted from 'The SLP: Its Aims and Methods' in Challinor, op.cit. p.34.
27. Quoted from 'What is a Revolutionary Party?' SLP 1903; reprinted in *Proletarian* no.3, Communist Organisation of the British Isles (n.d.).
28. Challinor op.cit. p.125.
29. In November, 1914 *The Socialist* published a translation of an article by the Dutch revolutionary Marxist, Pannekoek which analysed the war as the consequence of imperialism and called for the formation of a new International. loc.cit. p.151.
30. loc.cit. p.126.
31. Kendall op.cit. p.75.
32. Lenin op.cit. p.347.
33. Engels to Bebel, August 30th 1883 in *Marx-Engels Selected Correspondence* Progress Publishers, p.344.
34. Though before he died Engels did think that the formation of a Labour Party would be a step towards the establishment of a socialist party proper in Britain. However, he could not have predicted the staying power of Labourism. By the time the Labour Party officially mentioned 'socialism' in its programme, in 1918 - the famous clause 4 on nationalisation! - it was part of a strategy to undermine support for a genuine revolutionary programme.
35. Quoted by B. Schwarz, 'The "People" in History: the Communist Party Historians' Group 1946-1956' in R. Johnson et. al. eds. *Making Histories* p.70.



## Correspondence

# Trotskyism and Counter-revolution

In *Communist Review* 10 we published, under the heading *The Life and Death of Trotskyism*, a review of the book *The Life and Death of Stalinism* by Walter Daum of the US Trotskyist group *The League for the Revolutionary Party* (henceforth LRP). Walter Daum replied soon afterwards and we are now publishing his letter with our further response. We do so because we believe the exchange underlines the distinction between Trotskyism (in its various guises) and the real revolutionary programme of the working class.

## Letter from Walter Daum<sup>1</sup>

Dear Comrades

A few comments on your review of *The Life and Death of Stalinism* in *Communist Review* No. 10.

1. Half of your article is an attack on Trotsky's analysis of Stalinism. But you do not deal with the book's discussion of Trotsky's theory. I assume you weren't convinced, but it would have been interesting to know your specific arguments.

Your attack on Trotsky is a false polemic, even though his analysis was wrong. You write:

*For Trotsky, nationalisation of the means of production equals the same thing as socialisation;*

your evidence is a citation from *The Revolution Betrayed*. But the cited passage doesn't say anything about socialisation or socialism, only that nationalisation plus the proletarian revolution marks the USSR as a transitional *workers' state* - not socialism.

In fact, Trotsky did not believe that nationalisation equals socialisation, only that nationalisation is a necessary (not a sufficient) step towards it. There is nothing new in this: Marx, Engels, Lenin also thought so too. Your next quotation from Engels only says that nationalisation does not bring about socialism. That's Trotsky's view as well.

The whole thrust of *The Revolution Betrayed* makes clear that your interpretation is wrong. One citation <quote>State property is converted into socialist property in proportion as it ceases to be

state property.</bodytext>This is part of a section on pp. 236-7 where Trotsky rejects Stalin's claim that state property equals socialist property. I quoted the passage in my book on p.129 to refute Mandel's claim that Trotsky thought the USSR had achieved socialist production. From a different starting point you reach the same false conclusion as Mandel.

2. You charge me with plagiarising from your work in my criticism of Mattick and Cliff. The point I "stole" seems to be that both of them call the USSR state capitalist even though they deny that the law of value applies in the economy's internal relations.

You and we may share the same criticism but I assure you that the LRP did not even borrow, much less steal it from you. We first became aware of Cliff and Mattick's contradictions in the early 1970s. (The book acknowledges our debt to Johnson/Forest on this question.) The LRP criticised Cliff on this point in the first issue of our magazine, in 1976 (*Socialist Voice* No. 1 p.26). I don't have at hand your document *Theories of State Capitalism* which you say is the source of the "theft", but I suggest it was written afterwards.

I realise that you may not have seen the early issues of our magazine, but still your charge is unwarranted: our criticism of Cliff is deeper than yours. After all on another critical point - the notion that state capitalism was the "purest form" of capitalism and that all capitalism is evolving in that direction - you *agreed* with Cliff. The LRP has argued all along that the opposite is true: that statified state capitalism had to decentralise in order to exploit the proletariat more effectively (see *Socialist Voice* No. 2 p.25).

In another article in *Communist Review* (p.19), you acknowledge your error on this question. That is itself commendable, since so few leftists of any stripe are ever honest enough to admit mistakes. But is worth noting that your correction - <quote>In fact, the USSR was a model ... not for the advanced capitalist states ... [but]for all those states which had not industrialised before the age of imperialism</bodytext>- states what is explained in detail in our book (p.254 etc.).



I do not charge you with plagiarism, above all since you do not share our analysis of this phenomenon in terms of permanent revolution. I do welcome your conversion to a partial understanding of something we have known for years because of what we have learned from Trotsky.

3. You accuse the LRP of "deliberate confusion" in arguing that defence of nationalised property in the ex-USSR and East Europe is "synonymous with the defence of workers' living standards."

"Synonymous" we never said, but under present conditions, privatisation in the ex-Stalinist bloc is an effort to super-exploit the workers. In East Europe today it means mass unemployment, astronomical price rises, elimination of subsidised consumer goods and social rights - in a word, a massive slashing of workers' living standards. The capitalist bosses are trying to strengthen a weak economy. You are the ones who are confused, comrades, if you do not see it. (By the way neutrality over privatisation is another point you share with Cliff.)

Yes, workers do have illusions in privatisation because of their hatred of Stalinism, but they will soon be out in force against the privatisers. There already is a serious workers' struggle in Poland, forcing the regime to retreat. Are you not on their side? It would be a crime to let your disdain for nationalised property prevent you from siding with the proletariat.

To be absolutely clear: defence of the workers' gains, and to this end nationalised property, in no way implies defence of the Stalinist state (or any other capitalist state). The fact that these states do not defend the workers' interests or nationalised property shows the absurdity of regarding these states as socialist or proletarian in any way.

4. On the question of Stalinist imperialism, you characterise our position as follows: "the USSR was not driven by the same underlying forces as the other imperialist powers." That's not what we say: the *underlying* forces were the same - class struggle, the drive for accumulation of capital - but the direction was different. Whereas traditional imperialism depended on the export of capital for profit, the Stalinist USSR used various other methods (looting, reparations, joint stock companies etc.) to acquire particular use values needed for its internal capital accumulation.

You challenge our view, suggesting that a non-standard interpretation of Stalinist imperialism leads to a defencist line towards the Soviet Union. It does not, as I show on pp.278-80. But then your article on the collapse of the USSR also has a non-standard view of Soviet imperialism.

*Soviet imperialism was of a different character ... Stalin had already looted most of the heavy industry in Eastern Europe. He now installed puppet regimes which were forced to pay further "reparations" to the USSR ... Thus ... the response of the USSR was old-fashioned colonialism." (pp.19-20)*

No, it wasn't old-fashioned colonialism, since that depended on acquiring new markets for manufactured goods - hardly the Soviets' need. But it was different from modern imperialism. Your analysis, as opposed to ours, taken to its conclusion might very well lead to defence of the USSR as a pre-imperialist form of capitalism, hence still progressive in Marx's sense.

In this same section you say that "the USSR became a fully fledged imperialist power in its own right with the signing of the Nazi-Soviet Pact in 1939". But in your eyes it became capitalist in the 1920s. Does this mean that in between it was capitalist but not imperialist? Or was it merely less than "fully-fledged"? Either way, a capitalist state which graduates to the top rank of imperialist powers in this century stands in defiance of the epoch of capitalist decay. Since you credit the LRP with an understanding of this epoch, I am curious how you think such progress is possible.

5. Throughout the review and *The Collapse of the USSR*<sup>2</sup>, you take side swipes at the so-called orthodox Trotskyists over the collapse of their theory. Indeed, they have a serious problem with the "counter-revolutions" now taking place in their "workers' states", since for them the state is being transformed from proletarian to bourgeois - peacefully and gradually, with no civil war - while the ruling Stalinist bureaucracy transforms itself into overt capitalists.

What a travesty! The rulers of a state belonging to the proletariat simply decide to transfer their state to the bourgeoisie. So much for the outdated Marxist notion that the state defends the interests and power of a specific class.

But you have the same problem. If the Soviet Union changed from proletarian to bourgeois in the 1920s, as you say, it did so gradually and relatively peacefully, certainly without a violent counter-revolution. It seems that you face the same problem as the Soviet defencists in reconciling your theory with the Marxist understanding of the state.

In any case the momentous events of the past few years have evidently compelled you to rethink some of your theoretical conclusions. I can only hope that the process continues, and that you come to recognise that Trotsky (as opposed to some of



his epigones) was not the anti-Marxist theoretical half-wit your articles make him out to be.

With communist greetings

Walter Daum.

1. The *League for the Revolutionary Party* publishes *Proletarian Revolution* from PO Box 3573, Church St. Station, New York, NY 10008-3573, USA.
2. Which also appeared in *Communist Review* 10.

## Our Reply:

Dear Walter Daum

Our apologies for the delay in responding to your April letter but we have had an enormous amount of work for a small organisation since we saw you in June in Paris. The imminent publication of CR 11 however demands that we make this a priority. Your letter plus this reply will be published there.

Some time ago you should have received a copy of **Revolutionary Perspectives 19** which contained a reprint of the article *Theories of State Capitalism* that had first appeared in **Revolutionary Perspectives 1** (April, 1974). We received a letter from the LRP a short time after this commenting on our publications and asking for an exchange. We did **not** say that you had "stolen" our ideas because our idea of the class struggle does not allow for notions about intellectual property. What we are trying to say when we compare your work with that of Cliff is that an understanding of the state capitalist nature of the imperialist epoch cannot be done from inside the Trotskyist framework, hence the eclecticism of the theories of the Socialist Workers Party and the LRP. Though they were both formed in the fight against the counter-revolution after the failure of world revolution in the 1920s, there is a huge gulf (we would say today a class gulf) between the methods and career of Trotskyism and that of the internationalist communist Left. Today it is no surprise to us that elements of Trotskyism, finding the old formulae no longer work should formally (though not in substance) take up the arguments of the communist left. Throughout history the survival of capitalism has been predicated on recuperating proletarian ideas and bastardising them in order to defend the existing capitalist order. This is what makes this question so vital for us.

## Nationalisation and Socialisation

As we think we have already answered many of the points of your letter in our original review in **Communist Review 10** we will start by framing the question. The debate on the class nature of the former USSR often gives rise to much textual exegesis. Marx, Lenin, Luxemburg, Engels etc are all much-quoted to add authority to arguments. Dead men and women after all cannot answer back. But such quotation is usually a sterile and quasi-religious attempt to justify an already-revealed truth. It is not an attempt to examine the real relations. Textual exegesis is particularly sterile when trying to get to grips with the Russian experience because it was in many ways a unique experience and in others an unexpected one. No-one had ever conceived of the problem created by a proletarian revolution in a huge territory (an empire in fact) which was numerically swamped with a petty bourgeois class. No-one had answered the question in practice of what happens to a proletarian revolution after 4 or 5 years of isolation in a hostile imperialist environment. And no-one had even considered whether socialism in one country was a possibility. It is from our present day responses to such questions that the future programme of the World Party of the Proletariat will be constructed.

And these questions cannot be answered by rote learning of Marx's writings. What we must do is apply the **methods** of marxism to the new realities of the proletariat in the age of imperialism, in the age of capitalist decay. The first factor to consider is the nature of proletarian revolution itself. The reason why the proletariat will found a non-antagonistic mode of production is because it is a universal class which has no system of property to defend. However this also means that the proletariat cannot build up its economic order gradually within the existing social order as did the capitalists under feudalism. The idea of evolutionary socialism was wrong even when Bernstein was developing it. And because it has no property system to defend the proletariat's hard-won gains remain fragile so long as any vestiges of capitalist power exists anywhere in the world. Isolated, in a relatively backward, though major, capitalist power which imported most of its capital before 1917, it is not surprising that the Russian workers and their Communist Party only made a feeble beginning on the dismantling of capitalism. And even this embryonic process did not last long. By the start of the so-called civil war in which the RSFSR was invaded by 14 imperialist armies, the proletariat had ceased re-appropriating capitalist property (a process which had been backed by the soviet power). Over the next few years the process of state takeover of the economy and its centralisation continued but no longer with the

active efforts of the proletariat. Whereas the soviets had merely legitimised socialisations in the early months now the Sovnarkom were decreeing nationalisations. But as Lenin frequently testified at the time socialism cannot come by decree. What we now had was nationalisation by the state rather than socialisation by the proletariat. It is a distinction little understood by Trotskyists. Socialisation is carried out as part of the class struggle by the workers themselves. It is not a recipe for self-managed capitalism or (as all anarchists and councilists falsely claim) an attempt to avoid centralisation. Socialisation is the product of the working class themselves. Nationalisation though is by the state unaccompanied by that same mass movement. The state alienates the property from the proletariat and commences to rationalise and exploit the proletariat as an anonymous capitalist. In Russia it created a new ruling class of exploiters who alienated to their godfather, the state, the surplus value of the working class. The capital-wage labour relationship was not done away. On the contrary it actually increased as the basis of the new regime of exploitation. The knell of most private property might have sounded but the establishment of a public or state capitalist class ensured that capitalism survived albeit in a new and, in comparison with its classical model, distorted form.

### Privatisation and the Defence of the Proletariat

This important distinction between socialisation and nationalisation is not a mere play on words. The lesson of the Russian Revolution is that they are not synonymous. And the lesson of the last fifty years is that Trotskyism intends to repeat the errors of the past. This is amply demonstrated in the argument you put about the situation in the present-day Eastern bloc. You would raise the banner of nationalisation as a means of defending the working class. This demonstrates your programmatic defence of state capitalism. Your absurd attempt to disguise the poverty of your arguments by insisting that anyone who is "neutral" over privatisation is not on the side of the working class only reveals a lack of confidence in them. The key phrase you use here is "under present conditions". This is typical of Trotskyist formulations. You claim not to be in favour of state capitalism but are prepared to support it because "under present conditions" the proletariat is insufficiently conscious of the distinction. "Under present conditions" revolutionaries have the opportunity to demonstrate the exploitative nature of both state and private ownership of the means of production. Doing so is precisely what a revolutionary vanguard must do since we do not want a re-run of the errors of the past. Instead you advocate siding with the Stalinists in reinforcing

the idea that nationalisation is socialism! Yes we fight all attempts to super-exploit the proletariat but do so in a programmatically revolutionary fashion. This means opposing any attack on the working class irrespective of who is the owner of a means of production that has already been alienated from them. This Trotskyism has never done.

### The Counter-revolution in Russia

You agree with us that the peaceful process of the transfer of power shows that the ex-USSR was not a workers' state as unrepentant Stalinists and many Trotskyists still maintain. However you then say we also have a problem in assigning the failure of the Russian revolution to the 1920s because the decline of the proletarian state was a relatively peaceful process. But this only underlines your mechanical marxism. You must first recognise that even the best party with the most revolutionary programme in history cannot overcome insurmountable objective conditions. The imperialist intervention against the RSFSR might have lost on the battlefield but it gained its greatest victories at the heart of the revolution. Eight millions died in the period 1917-21 and the cream of the revolutionary proletariat was decimated. In the place of the former revolutionary proletariat the Bolshevik party vainly tried to hold the fort whilst doing all it could to foment international revolution. But the Bolshevik Party of 1921 was not that of 1917. It was ceasing to be a revolutionary force and becoming an avenue to a career in the new state capitalist reality. The class nature of a regime lies not in the names of its personnel but in the forces it represents. When the Bolsheviks in desperation, given the famine of 1921, were forced to retreat to NEP, to "state capitalism", to deal with the petty bourgeoisie, it signed its own death-warrant as a proletarian force. Only an international revolution would have been sufficient to reverse this process.

Lenin and Trotsky both knew that the revolution had reversed (or rather, that its weakness was revealed) in that period. Lenin, in his last article (March 1923) *Better Fewer but Better* wrote that *so much has been left over from Tsarist Russia, from its bureaucratic capitalist state machine*. A year earlier he had complained at the Eleventh Party Congress

*...and if we take that huge bureaucratic machine, that gigantic heap, we must ask: who is directing whom? I doubt very much whether it can be truthfully said that the Communists are directing that heap. To tell the truth they are not directing, they are being directed. (CW Vol 33).*

Trotsky and Lenin (as well as many social



democrats and revolutionaries of the period) were much taken with the course and development of the bourgeois French Revolution. Lenin even proudly took the title of "proletarian Jacobin" when attacked as such by, among others, Trotsky. And Trotsky insisted right up until 1935 that the Soviet "Thermidor" (when the radical process of property transformation in the French Revolution came to an end) had taken place in 1923. Neither Trotsky nor Lenin had denied the Menshevik claim that NEP was a "Soviet Thermidor" in 1921. Even in 1935 Trotsky maintained in *The Revolution Betrayed* that the Soviet Thermidor had occurred in 1923. His analysis is very good on many points. For example his note that

*the outstanding representatives of the working class either died in the civil war, or rose a few steps higher and broke away from the masses.* (p.89 Pathfinder 1972 edn.)

underline the shift in class composition of the regime. Trotsky points out that the Bolshevik party also changed its class composition on the death of Lenin in 1924. The Stalinists already had sufficient grasp of the party to institute the "Lenin levy" which recruited thousands of new careerists to the Party. As Trotsky commented,

*By freeing the bureaucracy from the control of the proletarian vanguard [which he had earlier told us was wiped out in the civil war - IBRP], the "Leninist levy" dealt a death blow to the party of Lenin.* (op cit. p.98)

Trotsky also informs us that the workers in Russia recognised a new class of exploiters at this time, the so-called "sovbour" or soviet bourgeoisie. It was only by clinging to the social-democratic definition of socialism (as a system in which no private property exists) that Trotsky could still insist that the USSR was a society that was still "transitional to socialism".

We shall return to *The Revolution Betrayed* later but the problem of explanation of the decline of the revolution lies, as we said at the beginning, in the nature of the proletarian revolution. It is now clear that a successful revolutionary outbreak has to take place at a time of general imperialist dislocation (1917) but where the proletariat in other areas, especially in the major imperialist areas, initially paralyse the capitalists from intervening and then go on, in due course, to establish their own power. The first phase of the period of transition will see piecemeal attempts to abolish capitalist relations whilst at the same time there will be a geographical extension of the area under proletarian power. A prolonged halt would give the imperialists the opportunity to regroup and to create such barbarism that the proletarian revolution would be derailed. This is what

happened to the Russian proletariat. The Bolsheviks thus went from being the agents of the proletariat, then to their guardians in the paternalist, Saint Simonian sense, then to the masters of a state in which the proletariat had all but been wiped out and then became the agents of a new form of capitalist domination. The violence you demand as the precondition for the overthrow of proletarian power occurred in plenty during the so-called civil war. It set in chain a process which saw the internationalists expelled from the Comintern and, by 1926, the establishment of the doctrine of "socialism in one country", the basic principle of Russian imperialism.

Your alternative in the 1930s is untenable. After all, the violence unleashed by Stalin was not the outcome of the class struggle (unless you fantasise that the already-defeated Left Opposition was a proletarian force of hitherto unknown strength). The Purges consolidated an already won victory for the new ruling class and provided an avenue of promotion (replacing 5 million functionaries is a real job creation scheme!) for the new class. But this is a symptom of the real counter-revolution which had occurred when capitalist relations managed to re-assert themselves during the last years of Lenin. It therefore seems absurd to us, and is the worst part of the book, to say that the counter-revolution happened when the bureaucracy "became conscious of its distinct status and its need to exploit the workers" just before the Second World War.

And this is another facet of decadent capitalism, both East and West, in this century. Whilst this more impersonal, collective class of exploiters remain riven by rivalries of economic interest they manipulate exploitation in a unified fashion against the working class, all the time mouthing the sentiments of some collective entity like the nation or even 'socialism'. The closer proletarian struggle gets towards questioning the system the more new ideological constructs capitalism digs up to justify its benefits to humanity. Today the proletariat has been betrayed by social democracy and Stalinism. It is the task of revolutionaries to understand the conditions for avoiding future defeats. But this brings us back to Trotskyism and Trotsky.

## Trotsky and Trotskyism

If you had read our articles carefully you would have seen that we consider Trotsky to have been a great revolutionary who was more clear-sighted about the course of the revolution in Russia than almost anyone else (see for example **Workers' Voice 54**.) However during the civil war Trotsky too succumbed to the growing weight of the counter-revolution. Although still retaining much of his insight he was not able to overcome the



limitations on his vision that this war imposed on him. His call for militarisation of labour in particular, shows him to be rather too fond, as Lenin noted in his Testament, of formal administrative solutions to problems of proletarian revolution. This formalism was to become more of a hallmark of his method as the years progressed. This did not make Trotsky a "half-wit" but it did lead him into formulations which split him from the revolutionary programme of the proletariat. His final "crossing of the Rubicon" was in 1935 when, having turned his back on discussions with the internationalist communist left, Trotsky told his followers to rejoin social democracy which had betrayed and butchered the working class after 1914. This was an act of desperation but Trotsky and Trotskyists have always cited this as realistic because it put Trotskyists in touch with a mass workers movement. But at what price? It trapped the Trotskyists in these organisations to the point of anonymity and helped in a small way to legitimise them to some revolutionary workers. It is a course which has been followed by most Trotskyists ever since (even if they don't go in for entryism they support, like the Cliff camp, the election of these social democratic gangsters). Even if we regarded the Fourth International as a revolutionary current (which we don't) the relationship of Trotskyism to Social Democracy and Labour movements would still be a tactical betrayal of the workers' movement. Many Trotskyists find it comforting to be in united fronts with social democrats because this gives an illusion of being part of a wider movement. But this is an illusion which was shattered in 1914 when social democracy supported imperialist war. The left of social democracy headed by Lenin were forced to separate by this betrayal. It was only as the Russian Revolution declined that notions of going to the masses and united fronts re-emerged. The communist left rejected these but Trotskyism has always based itself on the first Four Congresses of the Comintern (the united front being adopted at the Fourth). This is why Trotskyism is not equipped to rearm the consciousness of the revolutionary struggle.

Let us now take up the issue of Trotsky on socialisation and nationalisation. He was far more ambiguous than you claim. *The Revolution Betrayed* opens by stating that

*The bourgeois world at first tried to pretend not to notice the economic successes of the soviet regime - the experimental proof, that is, of the practicability of socialist methods. (our emphasis) (op cit p.1)* However he says two pages later that there is no hint of a classless society in the USSR therefore *there is not yet, in this fundamental sense, a hint of socialism in the Soviet Union.* This dichotomy exists throughout the book until it receives its final expression in the famous passage

*It would be truer, therefore, to name the present Soviet regime in all its contradictoriness, not a socialist regime, but a preparatory regime transitional from capitalism to socialism. (op cit p.47)*

Remember that this is 1935. After almost two decades we have a regime that still cannot be given a clear character in terms of its mode of production. It is quite correct to say that the Bolshevik regime was a transitional regime (only the most lunatic amongst anarchists can assume that the seizure of political power by the proletariat could be followed by the immediate abolition of capitalist relations). But, as we have said, in the early years of the Russian revolution we can see that there was a **tendency** to destroy capitalist relations (despite the distortions of Russian backwardness and imperialist war). But after 1921 this was arrested and even reversed. Only a new revolutionary outbreak in Germany or elsewhere could have rekindled it. By 1926 the Comintern wasn't interested in this but acted as an arm of Russian foreign policy.[1] But what then happens to a workers' state which is forced to re-adopt bourgeois norms (and had hardly got rid of bourgeois specialists and bureaucrats)? This was the question the internationalist communist left posed (and like Trotsky) took a long time to answer. But eventually they concluded that what had emerged in Russia was a new form of capitalist monopoly. Trotsky though, fatally continued to believe in the neither-nor society which cannot exist in any marxist version of history. It was founded on his ambiguity about property relations. For him nationalisation was a transitional step on the road to socialism and therefore he maintained that all that was needed to reverse the direction of the revolution was a **political** revolution. We will quote once again the passage from Trotsky you ignored in our review

*We must not lose sight for a single moment of the fact that the question of overthrowing the Soviet bureaucracy is for us subordinate to the question of preserving state property in the means of production in the USSR...*

*The USSR in the War 1939*

And when definitive evidence of the imperialist nature of the USSR (the Hitler-Stalin Pact of 1939) was available to contemporaries the followers of Trotsky were able to use Trotsky's formulae to pronounce Poland and eventually (in 1945) the rest of eastern Europe "degenerated workers' states". Your attempts to rescue Trotskyism from this morass should have convinced you that there are no survivors from this theoretical shipwreck. The Trotskyists have gone down with the good ship Stalinism. And the LRP which supports as "anti-imperialist" Kim Il Sung's regime in North Korea are in no position to



throw anyone a lifebelt. Please accept ours and drag yourself out of the stagnant water of Trotskyism. It is time the momentous events of the last few years compelled you to rethink some of your theoretical conclusions.

Communist greetings

Jock (for the CWO and IBRP)

#### Footnote

1. We haven't dealt with your debating point about when the USSR became imperialist. You can rest assured that we see that this is also in the 1920s when conscious state capitalism planning and abandonment of world revolution are both evident. The passage you quote referred to when it became self-evident to revolutionaries at that time. As to the colonialism issue we remain unrepentant in our characterisation. Colonialism was not so narrow as your definition maintains.

## Statement on Lal Pataka

It is with great regret that we have to announce the cessation of Lal Pataka as a publication in Bengali of the International Bureau. The circumstances of this are still not clear, even to us. All we are aware of is what the comrade responsible for Lal Pataka published as "Introducing Communist Review" towards the end of 1991. This was financed by us as an Asian edition of this journal but the comrade reproduced it with a 113 page introduction which amounted to a false critique of positions which neither the CWO nor the PCInt held (primarily that we saw war communism as a type of real communism). In fact most of his critique seems to have been based on a text by LLM (Hong Kong) which criticised, from a council communist point of view a text by the CWO of 1976 which the CWO had long since rejected. Today LLM has himself abandoned councilism (see Communist Review 10) and we have had no response from the comrade who edited Lal Pataka since. The letter reproduced below was written by our Italian comrades in a final effort to resume correspondence after more than a years silence from Calcutta.

Some cynical spirits might assume that we had too readily accepted this comrade into the Bureau. In response we can only ask readers to study Communist Reviews 3 and 4 to see how complete our political homogeneity was. The whole tragedy seems to us less to do with political differences than personal circumstance.

India in 1992 was seething between massive strikes involving tens of millions of workers on which the Western press was largely silent and religious fundamentalism as the Indian bourgeoisie strive to push the discontent of the masses down the usual reactionary roads. In the face of this it is a tragedy that, despite the existence of promising elements no solid nucleus of Indian communists

yet exists. However there are sparks of consciousness in the midst of this turmoil, and we in the IBRP will do everything in our power to fan them into a more substantial fire.

21.2.92

Dear Comrade

It is now more than a year since we received any communication from you. In your last letter you made a number of personal allegations against those comrades of the CWO who had the responsibility for correspondence with you. Your letter however did not make any political response to the substance of what we said in our response to your production of the Indian version of *Communist Review* 8. This was that you were mistaken on two points:

a) that the article written by our comrade did NOT say that war communism was really communism;  
b) that the changes to your article on China which were reprinted in *Workers Voice* were for no other reason than to correct the English.

Had your text raised any political difference, then we would have been glad to answer your criticisms (although this would have been embarrassing enough, given the manner in which they were raised). But it has been really impossible for us to establish the theoretical-political points to be discussed.

However, your main criticism appears to centre round our supposed Stalinist methods of internal organisation. This is a serious charge but nobody (inside the IBRP or outside it) has taken your



organisational accusations seriously: it couldn't be otherwise. It should by now be obvious to you from the lack of response from the internationalist communists of all tendencies that you have not been able to establish a clear political disagreement.

It seems to us that you have to state clearly what the political differences you have with the Bureau are, if indeed you have any.

It seems to us you are not interested any more in working politically together with the Bureau. But

if this is the case we would prefer that you gave us a clear political reason. Unless you can state what that political reason is in a way which is comprehensible to all (inside or outside the Bureau), there is no alternative for us but to assume that your experience with us is over.

Waiting for a quick and serious reply, receive our internationalist greeting.

For the IBRP

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