

1917

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

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ROB McNEELY

Brave Newt World:

American Reaction

The Republicans' victory in the November 1994 U.S. Congressional elections completed the turn from the bi-partisan 1960s rhetoric about a "war on poverty" to the no-holds-barred assault on the poor of the 1990s. Their main political goal is to destroy the idea that the state can or should be used to ameliorate the inequalities of the market. The message is that people should lower their expectations and get ready for a return to the good old capitalism of the 1920s and 30s, when desperate

poverty for those out of work, and semi-poverty for those employed, were normal in "good" economic times as well as bad.

The U.S. already has the biggest gap between the "haves" and "have-nots," and the highest rates of poverty, infant mortality, illiteracy and hunger, of any advanced capitalist country. An estimated 100,000 Americans die every year simply because they cannot afford medical care. The past several decades have seen a mas-

Save Mumia Abu-Jamal!



18 March: Montreal united-front demonstration against barbaric death penalty demands freedom for Mumia Abu-Jamal, former Black Panther on Pennsylvania's death row since 1982

sive transfer of wealth from the working and middle classes to the propertied elite. In 1972 the wealthiest one percent of American families had 27.7 percent of the nation's total wealth; by 1989 this had increased to 37 percent (*Times Literary Supplement*, 10 June 1994). Since the 1970s real wages have steadily eroded, even in industries with rising productivity and profits. The power of the corporate monopolies has grown steadily, as companies embrace a form of corporate anorexia in their quest for increasing profitability through "downsizing." Millions of people have been impoverished, their hopes for the future destroyed. Those who have kept their jobs are overworked, overstressed and battle-weary. Good jobs, as opposed to minimum-wage "McJobs," are scarce, and many workers are apprehensive about being pushed into the growing ranks of the unemployed.

One of the first targets on Newt Gingrich's hit list was the meager \$167 million annual funding for the National Endowment for the Arts, which the Republicans characterize as "a sandbox for the nation's affluent cultural elite." An article in the 21 February *New York Times* on the NEA casually commented:

"For almost all its life, the endowment's funding was justified by the cold war. Time after time, the specter of a Soviet 'cultural offensive' persuaded Congress to finance the arts, raising the appropriation from an initial \$2.5 million in 1965 to a peak of \$188 million in 1980."

In the post-Soviet "New World Order," Gingrich & Co. see no use for frills like the arts or public television. Nor do they see any reason for making any further pretense of seeking to redress the legacy of historic injustices to women, blacks and other minorities through social policy. Nor for feeding the hungry, nor providing wheelchairs for the disabled.

The Republican "Contract With America" is part of a global offensive by the capitalists aimed at eliminating the "welfare state," or "social market economy" (as it is known in Europe). This is not due simply to the demise of the Soviet Union, although this has given the rulers a much freer hand. In the U.S. this offensive comes as an escalation of twenty years of union busting, speed-ups, give-backs and "downsizings" aimed at raising profit margins.

American capitalism is carrying a \$5 trillion federal government debt, in good part a legacy of Ronald Reagan's arms-spending spree of the 1980s. The requirements of debt service reduce funds for private investment in domestic capital markets and weaken the dollar internationally. Since the American ruling class remains committed to continuing the massive program of corporate subsidies and maintaining the world's most formidable military machine, the deficit is to be reduced through drastically slashing social programs.

'Expensively Cheap' Capitalism

The only "social service" slated for expansion is the repressive apparatus. There will be lots more police and prisons to control those whose struggle for survival puts them on the wrong side of the law. America already has four to five times as many of its citizens imprisoned per capita as its West European rivals. Liberal social reformers agonize over the fact that the "savings" gained from slashing social overheads don't come cheap. Edward Luttwak, who laments the passing of the "American Dream," compared the "expensively cheap" capitalism of America with what he sees as the more rational "cheaply expensive" capitalism of Japan:

"When I drive into a petrol station in Japan, four clearly underemployed young men leap into action to wash and wipe the headlights and windows as well as the windscreen, and check tyre pressures as well as the oils, in addition to dispensing the fuel. With government-regulated petrol prices being high and uniform, that is how

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Trotskyism vs. the 'Third Camp'

Korea: the Forgotten War

The Korean War, which raged between 1950 and 1953, left over three million dead and a country divided. Many of the dead were victims of the massive, deliberate terror bombing of civilians by the forces of "Western Civilization," under the flag of the United Nations. The war, which very nearly resulted in the second nuclear attack by the United States on an Asian nation, continues to echo in Korean politics today. Yet it is now remembered in the U.S. primarily as the backdrop for the sexual adventures and cynical witticisms of "Hawkeye" Pierce and his buddies in the anti-militarist 1970s American television series, *M*A*S*H*. Even most leftists know far less about the Korean "police action" than its Vietnamese sequel.

The Korean conflict illustrated how Washington's Cold War strategy of "containing" and "rolling back" Communism meant intervening abroad to crush social revolution and national liberation struggles. Today, as liberals and various self-proclaimed leftists call for greater UN military involvement in world affairs, it is appropriate to recall that the United Nations' first major military campaign was an attempt to strangle the Korean revolution. The Korean War also provided a test of the political character of the various supposedly Marxist currents of the early 1950s. Coming as it did a little over a year after Mao Zedong's armies crushed the remnants of Chiang Kai Shek's forces, the conflict in Korea appeared to many as the latest in the inexorable march of Moscow-inspired Communism. The various tendencies on the left reacted to this phenomenon in very different ways.

Most studies of the origins of the Korean War focus on the fundamentally uninteresting question of whose troops crossed the 38th parallel, the border between the Koreans, first on the morning of 25 June 1945 (the official start of the war). This focus is common to most Western historians, as well as the self-serving accounts inspired by both Korean regimes. This approach ignores the earlier massive social struggles in Korea, in which more than 100,000 people were killed or wounded, and which provides the only basis for understanding the partition of Korea and the subsequent civil war. New Left historian Bruce Cumings' definitive two-volume work, *The Origins of the Korean War* (which was banned in South Korea) provides the most thorough and detailed examination of this history.

The international situation, primarily characterized by the U.S.-led global Cold War against Communism, provided the framework for the war. The intervention of the UN/imperialist forces on one side, and China on the other (with substantial material support from the USSR), determined the war's outcome. But its roots were indigenous, and can be traced to the potentially revolutionary upheavals that followed the collapse of the Japanese Empire in 1945.



DAVID DOUGLAS DUNCAN—LIFE

U.S. Marines in retreat, December 1950

Until the beginning of this century, Korea was an essentially agrarian society, ruled by the Confucian Yi Dynasty, with the support of an elite of bureaucrat-landowners, the *Yangban* caste. As capitalism entered its imperialist stage, however, Korea, like the rest of the world, became an object of attention for rival Great Powers and the disruptive influence of world capitalism. When Japan defeated Czarist Russia in 1905, Korea came under its control. Five years later, it was officially annexed as the principal overseas colony of the Japanese Empire.

Korean society during the colonial period was a perfect example of what Leon Trotsky called "combined and uneven development." The colonial regime instituted a land "registration" of *Yangban* and peasant holdings. Some land (mostly that of poor peasants) was lost when "undeclared" land became Japanese property. The purpose of the land registration was to allow the regime to extract more food from the Korean countryside. The Japanese allowed the indigenous elite to retain their land in return for their acceptance of and collaboration with colonial rule, while it forced many of the peasants off the land into the Imperial Army, or into the (mostly Japanese-owned) factories. Japanese concerns employed 1.3 million Koreans at the time of liberation in 1945. Hundreds of thousands of other Koreans relocated to Japan or Manchuria to find work.

During the forty years that Korea was occupied, the Stalinized Communist Party gained considerable support for its role in organizing strikes and anti-Japanese guerrilla operations. Japanese propaganda reinforced

the popularity of the CP by attributing all anti-colonial activity to "Communist subversion." The peasants longed to be free of their oppressive rents, and grew to despise the foreign overlords and their Korean *Yangban* collaborators. Capitalism, landlordism and foreign domination were inextricably mixed in colonial Korea.

With the Japanese defeat in 1945, the principal obstacle to social revolution was removed. The Korean elite was widely discredited by its decades of collaboration with the colonial government. The partial modernization carried out by the Japanese had destroyed the traditional society in which the *Yangban* had an organic role. A substantial section of the masses had become modern industrial workers, but, with a few individual exceptions, the members of the traditional elite had not transformed themselves into capitalists. On 9 August 1945, when the Japanese authorities handed over power to Yo Un Hyong, a bourgeois nationalist who formed the Provisional Committee for Korean Independence (PCKI), the situation in Seoul had many parallels with that in Moscow or Petrograd in February 1917. The PCKI was forced to rely on the leftist People's Committees, which sprung up spontaneously from the political activity of workers and peasants. Under the banner of the *Chon Pyong* (the National Korean Labor Council), workers took control of industry across the peninsula. The *Chon Pyong* was predominantly under the influence of the Communist Party, but it also contained some social-democratic tendencies. According to Stewart Meacham, labor adviser to the American occupying forces, "virtually all of the larger factories" were taken over by workers' unions (quoted in Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War*). The *Chon Nong* (National Council of Korean Peasant Unions) was moving to dispossess the landlords. In short, the level of social struggle was comparable to that going on in Italy or Greece in the same period.

This was the situation that greeted the victorious Allied Powers. At Yalta, they had agreed that Korea would be administered under a joint trusteeship for a period of ten to thirty years. When the Soviet Army advanced into Korea after the USSR declared war on Japan on 8 August, the Americans quickly insisted that the Soviets not advance south of the 38th parallel (a line arbitrarily chosen by Dean Rusk, at the time a minor official in the U.S. War Department, in order to ensure that the American zone included Seoul). Stalin, anxious to preserve the wartime alliance, and relatively uninterested in Korea, immediately agreed, and Soviet forces withdrew to north of the line.

U.S. vs. Popular Movement

From the beginning, the Americans were chiefly concerned with halting the popular movement and suppressing what seemed to be an imminent social revolution. "General Order Number One," issued by General Douglas MacArthur, the Supreme Commander of American Forces in the Pacific, commanded Koreans to obey Japanese authority until American troops arrived. When the Americans, under General John Hodge, did land at Inchon Bay on 8 September 1945, they refused to meet either with the PCKI or the People's Committees,

which went ahead and proclaimed the establishment of a "Korean People's Republic" a week later. On 15 September, Merrell Benninghoff, chief political advisor to Hodge, reported that:

"Southern Korea can best be described as a powder keg ready to explode at the application of a spark.

"...[S]uch Koreans as have achieved high rank under the Japanese are considered pro-Japanese and are hated almost as much as their masters....

"All groups seem to have the common ideas of seizing Japanese property, ejecting the Japanese from Korea, and achieving immediate independence....Korea is completely ripe for agitators."

—Cumings, *op cit*.

However, all was not lost according to Benninghoff:

"The most encouraging single factor in the political situation is the presence in Seoul of several hundred conservatives among the older and better educated Koreans. Although many of them have served with the Japanese, that stigma ought eventually to disappear."

He proposed that these "democrats" ought to be given material support and encouragement by the occupiers. In a later report, he noted approvingly that this grouping, now organized as the Korean Democratic Party (KDP), "have stated that they realize that their country must pass through a period of tutelage, and that they would prefer to be under American rather than Soviet guidance" (*Ibid.*). Dr. Synghman Rhee, who had spent most of his adult life in the United States, was the ideal head of the KDP. The Americans assisted the fledgling regime by ensuring the cooperation of the Japanese-trained security forces. All Japanese laws continued in effect, subject only to the overriding authority of MacArthur's military decrees. In December 1945, the Military Government officially banned the People's Committees. General Hodge admitted that, "'pro-American' had become an epithet akin to 'pro-Jap national traitor'" in the popular mind (quoted in S. Lone & G. McCormack, *Korea Since 1850*).

Not surprisingly, the Korean masses turned toward resistance. In the summer of 1946, the American occupiers initiated mass arrests of Communists and finally managed to suppress the People's Committees. Spontaneous resistance was no match for the Japanese-trained and American-backed security forces. In all 200 police were killed, along with thousands of workers and peasants. Mark Gayn of the *Chicago Sun* described the struggle as "a full-scale revolution" and reported that, "hundreds of thousands, if not millions of people" were involved (*Ibid.*).

Unlike the Americans who suppressed the popular movement, the Soviets sought to incorporate it. Stalin ordered that "anti-Japanese groups and democratic parties and their activity should be aided." Of course, they were also to be controlled by the Kremlin oligarchs. In February 1946, the Soviets set up the Provisional People's Committee for North Korea, which was to co-ordinate the local committees in the Soviet zone. At the head of this organization, selected by Stalin himself, was a young Communist named Kim Il Sung. Although he had played a creditable role in the anti-Japanese resistance with the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and as a captain in the Soviet Army, he was by no means the preemi-

nent leader of Korean Communism, as he would later claim. His chief qualification was his apparently unquestioning loyalty to Stalin (see: G. McCormack, *New Left Review* No. 198). After assuming control, Kim quickly moved to arrest his foremost rival for popular support, the bourgeois nationalist Cho Man Sik (who was apparently later executed).

The regime set up by the Soviets was a bureaucratic workers' state closely modelled on the Soviet Union. While there was no element of direct political rule by the working class, it did carry out, in a bureaucratic, top-down manner, a social revolution. Women's legal equality was decreed for the first time in Korean history. On 6 March 1946, the decree on land reform was published, which distributed all large estates to those who tilled them and provided compensation only to "patriotic" landlords. The distribution of the land to individual farmers was put under the control of the District People's Committees. Decision Number 91 of the North Korean Interim People's Committee, proclaimed on 6 October 1946, nationalized all industry owned by the Japanese or by collaborators. Again, in keeping with Stalinist policy, there was an attempt to exempt the so-called patriotic bourgeoisie from these strictures. However, this attempt at class collaboration failed, since almost all Northern business owners and their families moved into the American-occupied zone, where many went on to play significant roles in the South Korean right. As long-time Korean expert and Harvard professor, George McCune, wrote in 1950:

"The mass of the Korean people in the north reacted favorably toward the Russian regime especially when it was accompanied by many of the revolutionary benefits of a socialist society. In South Korea, on the other hand, the so-called fundamental freedoms of democratic society were not much appreciated by the Korean people in view of the lack of social reform and because of the irregularity with which democracy was applied."

—G. McCune, *Korea Today*

The "irregularities" were of course due to fears about the results. According to a U.S. intelligence report of February 1946, the left would overwhelmingly win any fair election called on the peninsula. To avoid this, the American authorities were compelled to be a bit "irregular" in their application.

The dramatic difference between the Soviet and American occupations is not explained by Stalin having a more benevolent disposition toward workers and peasants than Truman or Hodge. It was because Stalin's regime rested on a very different form of social relations than Truman's: the major means of production in the USSR were socially owned. In order to retain control of occupied areas, whether in Eastern Europe or North Korea, it was necessary for the Soviets to bring local social relations into line with those prevailing within the USSR itself. Since the demands of the workers and peasants could only be met within the framework of socialized property, there was a certain correspondence between the indigenous drive for social revolution and the aims of the Kremlin.

The fundamental incompatibility of the social system in the USSR with that of its capitalist "partners" meant



US DEFENCE DEPT.

Kim Il Sung: hand picked by Stalin

that, despite Stalin's best efforts, the wartime alliance could not long survive the defeat of Germany and Japan. This global polarization had an immediate effect in Korea. Korea was supposed to be administered under a joint U.S.-Soviet trusteeship; however, talks between the two broke down both in the spring of 1946 and then again in the fall of 1947. During the latter round of discussions, the Soviets proposed simultaneous withdrawal of Soviet and American troops. Worried that their client regime in Seoul, which had barely survived mass uprisings in 1946, might succumb without an American military presence, the U.S. unilaterally withdrew from the negotiations. The American strategy was to turn the issue over to the United Nations, which they dominated. A United Nations Temporary Commission on Korea (UNTCOK) was set up to administer Southern affairs until Korea could make the transition to a "democracy" to the West's liking.

The 1948 Cheju Island Uprising

The formation of the Commission set off another cycle of grass-roots resistance in the South. The Stalinist South Korean Labor Party (SKLP) organized a three-day general strike beginning on 7 February 1948. In April, after UNTCOK announced that it would be conducting a separate election in the South, there was a guerrilla uprising on Cheju Island off the south coast of Korea, in which some rightists and military officials were killed. The central government reacted with a bloody crackdown. With U.S. naval and air support, they massacred between thirty and sixty thousand islanders (10 to 20 percent of the whole population) and forced tens of thousands of others to flee to Japan. The guerrillas fought on for months without any source of supplies, but were finally crushed. When elections were eventually held on Cheju, after the bloody "pacification" campaign,

UNTCOK reported that they were "marked by quietness" (J. Merrill, "Internal Warfare in Korea," in ed. B. Cumings, *Child of Conflict*).

UNTCOK's decision to conduct separate elections in South Korea was not only unpopular on Cheju, it was opposed by all elements of Korean society—with the exception of the far right and, of course, the puppet regime. Even Rhee's bourgeois opponents (among them Kim Ku, who had been Rhee's second-in-command in the Korean Provisional Government in exile) denounced the move as signifying the permanent division of the country. They met with representatives of the North Korean regime at conferences in Haeju and Pyongyang. All the opposition parties boycotted the election, but UNTCOK's official report nonetheless blandly declared the elections "a valid expression of the free will of the electorate in those parts of Korea which were accessible to the Commission" (quoted in Lone & McCormack, *op cit.*).

On the basis of these elections, the Republic of Korea (ROK) was declared in the South, with Rhee as president. It was quickly recognized by the United Nations General Assembly as the sole legal government in Korea. In response, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea was declared in the North, and the division of the nation was formalized. In late 1948 there was a renewed wave of unrest in the South. Elements of the ROK military at Yosu and Suncheon mutinied rather than be sent to suppress the remnants of guerrilla resistance from the Cheju rebellion. The reestablishment of People's Committees in Yosu created a political crisis for the regime on the mainland that was only contained with American assistance. As in Cheju, the rebels eventually retreated into the mountains to carry on a guerrilla struggle.

In 1949 both Soviet and American troops withdrew from the peninsula. Rhee was busy consolidating his police state, and even arrested some of the deputies put in place by the fraudulent National Assembly elections of the year before. He also arranged the assassination of Kim Ku, a right-wing bourgeois opponent. As the year progressed, war between the two halves of Korea seemed increasingly likely. Rhee could not eliminate the pro-North guerrillas, but they could not win without bringing Kim's regime into the conflict. Border incidents escalated throughout the year.

Kim privately sought support from Stalin and Mao Zedong for an invasion of the ROK. They were both somewhat reluctant, but ultimately agreed, based on the assurances of Kim and SKLP leader Park Hon Yong that Communist support in the South was so extensive that the invasion would meet with quick success. Stalin no doubt saw Kim's plan as a relatively cheap way to cause problems for his imperialist antagonists, but he was concerned above all with avoiding a general war, and thus was only prepared to give covert assistance to the People's Army. Mao also gave his blessing, although his attention was concentrated on invading Taiwan to uproot the last remnants of Chiang Kai Shek's Kuomintang government. All of this was denied in the official Soviet, Chinese and North Korean histories, which claimed that the North was simply attacked without provocation by

the Rhee regime. Recent evidence from Soviet archives confirms that Kim planned an attack, and that Stalin and Mao knew about it (see S.N. Goncharov et al., *Uncertain Partners: Stalin, Mao and the Korean War*).

It is also clear that Rhee's regime had aggressive intentions. Rhee publicly declared his desire to reunite the peninsula by force. In October 1949, he boasted that it would take him just three days to capture Pyongyang. General William Roberts, leader of the U.S. Korean Military Advisor Group (KMAG), the American military personnel who remained in the South to assist Rhee's army after the general withdrawal, asserted:

"KMAG is a living demonstration of how an intelligent and intensive investment of 500 combat-hardened American men and officers can train 100,000 guys to do the shooting for you...At this point we rather invite [an invasion from the North]. It will give us target practice."

—B. Cumings and J. Halliday, *Korea: The Unknown War*

Gen. Roberts' confidence was misplaced. In the first weeks of fighting, the People's Army advanced quickly against the supposedly superior ROK forces. It turned out that the conscripted sons of workers and peasants felt no particular desire to fight for Syngman Rhee's capitalist regime nor to "do the shooting" for his imperialist patrons. The South Korean Army melted away as the North advanced. In the wake of the People's Army's bayonets came the extension of the North's deformed social revolution. In the three months when they occupied most of the South, the KPA redistributed land and confiscated the property of Rhee's government and its cronies, Japanese corporations and other monopolists. The mass of the population appeared to welcome the "invaders." U.S. General William F. Dean, writing at the height of the Cold War, observed: "To me, the civilian attitude [to the KPA occupation] seemed to vary between enthusiasm and passive acceptance" (W. Dean, *General Dean's Story*, 1954).

The American government was not prepared to tolerate Korean reunification under Kim Il Sung. Earlier in the year, Secretary of State Dean Acheson had speculated that the U.S. would not get involved in an intra-Korean dispute, a statement which heartened Kim and outraged Rhee. However, when hostilities erupted, Washington intervened militarily to protect neo-colonialism in Asia. On 12 April 1950, President Harry Truman had received a confidential memo from the State Department (NSC 68) advocating a change of policy from "containment" of social revolution to "rollback." The proponents of an Asian war in the so-called China Lobby were in the ascendant, and had the clear support of Douglas MacArthur, John Foster Dulles and other powerful civilian and military officials concerned with Far East policy.

Within hours of hearing of the North Korean advance, Truman decided in favor of intervention. On 29 June, UNTCOK determined that the war was caused by Northern aggression, and called for UN intervention. A U.S. motion was quickly passed in the Security Council, which the Soviet Union was boycotting to protest the refusal to seat Mao's China. The UN army was made up of units from sixteen countries besides the U.S., including Britain, Canada, Australia and South Africa. The megalomaniacal MacArthur was placed in overall com-

mand.

By mid-September, the KPA had the UN and ROK forces holed up behind the "Pusan Perimeter," in the southeast corner of the peninsula and military defeat for Rhee's forces loomed. But the imperialist coalition had control of the sea and air. On 15 September, MacArthur launched a massive amphibious assault at Inchon Bay, just to the west of Seoul, which was virtually unopposed. Within two weeks, the foreign expeditionary armies had chased the KPA back across the 38th parallel. The United Nations, its involvement ostensibly justified by concern for the sanctity of international borders, did not regard that line with undue sentimentality. MacArthur and Truman decided that this was a perfect opportunity to initiate the "rollback" of Communism they desired, and UN troops began their march to the Yalu River (the border between China and Korea).

UN Counterrevolutionary Terror

Counterrevolutionary terror is always vastly bloodier than social revolution, and the UN re-occupation of Korea was no exception. Unlike the KPA which had triumphed over ROK troops so easily because of its popular support in the South, the U.S.-led imperialist armies treated the entire population as enemies, whom they described in crude racist terms as "gooks in white pyjamas." According to a Japanese estimate quoted by McCormack, over 100,000 people were executed during the UN "liberation." This was to provide a model for the CIA's notorious Phoenix Program of assassination during the Vietnam War. As in Vietnam, the imperialists used their superior air and sea power to inflict massive devastation. As his troops moved northward in November 1950, MacArthur ordered his psychopathic subordinate Curtis LeMay (who later became infamous for his call to bomb Vietnam "into the Stone Age") to bomb "every installation, factory, city and village" between the front and the Chinese border, (Cumings & Halliday, *op cit.*). The wanton, racist brutality of the U.S. assault derived from the nature of the war—the Americans were not merely seeking to crush a hostile state, but to destroy a social revolution.

By November the imperialists clearly expected to reach the Chinese border without significant resistance. They howled with outrage when UN forces were counterattacked by 200,000 Chinese and 150,000 North Korean troops on 27 November. The entry of the People's Republic of China threw the imperialists once more on to the defensive. The UN sanctimoniously condemned China for "aggression," while Truman publicly stated that the use of the atomic bomb against China was "under consideration." The racist perpetrators of Hiroshima and Nagasaki threatened to strike again.

As the UN troops retreated southwards, they were subject to guerrilla harassment, and MacArthur began to openly call for World War III. In early 1951, the CIA organized clandestine raids on the Chinese mainland, while MacArthur argued that he could only win the war by nuclear annihilation of major Chinese cities.

However, something important had happened since 1945: the Soviet Union had acquired the bomb. Truman

might feel sanguine about the fact that the Soviets lacked the means to deliver it to the U.S. effectively, but his European allies were worried. British Prime Minister Clement Attlee flew to Washington to ask for assurances that nuclear weapons would not be used, and to demand that MacArthur be fired. This was not because he had any objections to the mass slaughter of Asians (Attlee had supported the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and Britain was waging a bloody war of repression against leftist insurgents in Malaya at the time), but because he felt a little nervous about the prospect of Soviet bombers flying over London. Truman indicated he appreciated Attlee's concerns, but refrained from making any commitments.

In fact, on 6 April 1951, Truman had signed an order granting MacArthur control of 26 atomic bombs, and it was only the fear of a total breakdown of the imperialist alliance that forced him to rescind his order and fire MacArthur five days later (Lone & McCormack, *op cit.*). Firing MacArthur did not end the consideration of a U.S. "nuclear option" in Korea. In 1953 Eisenhower publicly mused that nukes were "cheaper dollar-wise" than conventional weapons. There is no doubt that if it were not for the Soviet nuclear arsenal, the U.S. imperialists would have once again dropped nuclear bombs on Asian cities.

As it was, the USAF "conventional" bombing, which included 7.8 million gallons of napalm in the first three months alone, left North Korea a wasteland. Curtis LeMay recalled that, "over a period of three years or so...we burned down every town in North Korea and South Korea, too" (*Ibid.*). After the ground war reached a stalemate in the summer of 1951, the UN engaged primarily in aerial and naval bombardment of the Northern population. In addition to repeated attacks on cities, the USAF also launched a campaign in May 1953, just as the war was winding down, against irrigation dams in the North in a bid to destroy North Korean agriculture and starve the people into submission.

Talks opened up in July 1951, but despite the fact that it had become clear that neither side had the capacity to impose a military reunification, the war dragged on for a further two years. One key sticking point was the question of repatriation of POWs. Hoping to win a propaganda victory, the imperialists insisted on the principle of "voluntary repatriation," according to

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which POWs would get to decide on which side of the ideological divide of Chinese and Korean society they wanted to align themselves. Naturally, this choice was not all that “voluntary.” While wishing to encourage North Korean and Chinese POWs to defect, the U.S. military took a hard line on those who refused the blandishments of their captors. As General Ridgway, MacArthur’s successor, later recalled: “I was determined that if the Red POWs made any resistance, or attempted any delay in carrying out our demands, we would shoot, and I wanted the killing machinery on hand to do a thorough job of it” (Cumings & Halliday, *op cit.*).

Eventually an armistice was reached on 27 July 1953, and Korea was left divided, as it remains to this day. Some 3 million Koreans (over 10 percent of the population) were dead, along with as many as a million Chinese soldiers (*Ibid.*). There were also 33,500 U.S. soldiers killed. The end of the war led to a carnival of repression in the South. Rhee’s orchestrated “conspiracy trials” for his bourgeois rivals reached such a level that his colonial overlords toyed with the idea of overthrowing him (“Operation Everready”). In the North, Kim Il Sung’s party was purged of those thought not to be sufficiently loyal to the “Great Leader.” One victim of this purge was Park Hon Yong, the former SKLP leader, who was accused, among other things, of misleading Kim about the ease with which an invasion could be carried out. This accusation is strange on two counts: first, because the campaign did go smoothly, and secondly, because Kim’s regime always claimed that the war was started by a Southern attack.

Kim Il Sung headed the state created by the deformed social revolution that the Soviet Army had initiated for a further 41 years. North Korea is one of the most bizarre Stalinist dictatorships in history—certainly Kim Il Sung’s personality cult was the most grotesque. But the social transformation North Korea experienced represented important gains for its citizens, particularly in terms of women’s rights and the provision of food and shelter, day-care, healthcare and education for the population. Today, isolated in a hostile world, particularly after the collapse of the USSR and its abandonment by Beijing, North Korea’s economy is contracting and living standards are falling.

Nonetheless, the gains of the social transformation North Korea experienced remain, and must be defended. Today it is the task of the Korean working class to complete the unfinished business left by the War through the revolutionary reunification of Korea—proletarian political revolution to oust the Kim Jong Il regime in the North and social revolution to expropriate the capitalists in the South.

The Reaction of the International Left

The various currents in the workers’ movement reacted to the Korean War (which many took to be the opening round of World War III) in characteristic fashion. The Communist Parties opposed the war and expressed their solidarity with the North Korean regime; however, they did so on a pacifist basis, hoping to find a “progressive” wing of the bourgeoisie in their home

countries that would oppose the Cold War. They emphasized Pyongyang’s claim that Southern armies attacked first, and confined their agitation to pleas for “peace” and a negotiated solution.

The social democrats, for example the British Labour Party, parroted the line of their rulers, and applauded the imperialist intervention. This was to be expected, as the social democrats were acting as the chief agency of the capitalists inside the workers’ movement, and had, throughout Europe, knowingly taken money from the CIA, and enthusiastically spearheaded anti-Communist witchhunts.

Only the Trotskyists took a revolutionary position on the war. Before World War II, Trotsky had identified the Soviet Union as a “degenerated workers’ state,” whose social foundations were fundamentally antagonistic toward capitalism and which, as a result, should be defended in wars with capitalist states. By the time of the Korean War, the majority of the parties of the Trotskyist Fourth International recognized that the states created by the extension of the Red Army after the World War, including North Korea, were qualitatively similar to the Soviet Union, and called them “deformed workers’ states.” As a result, they concluded that the international working class had a side in the war, and backed the North against the imperialists and their allies.

Michel Pablo was the leading figure in the Fourth International during this period. His developing notions about the imminence of a global War/Revolution were largely shaped by the events surrounding the Korean War. Pablo’s conclusions were profoundly revisionist—he called for the dissolution of the Trotskyist cadres into the mass social-democratic and Stalinist parties. But while Pablo’s liquidationist impulses were based on a crudely objectivist view of historical development, manifested in this case as an overly optimistic assessment of the revolutionary capacities of the Stalinists, at the outbreak of the war he was still capable of projecting a revolutionary position. In an article published in the American Socialist Workers Party’s theoretical journal, *Fourth International*, in September 1950, Pablo wrote:

“The only possible revolutionary attitude is to participate in this movement of the colonial masses and to struggle within it against its exploitation by the Soviet bureaucracy. But the primary condition for realizing this possibility is the *unconditional defense of this movement against the native feudal-capitalists and above all against imperialism.*”

The leader of the Socialist Workers Party (at that time the leading section of the Fourth International), James P. Cannon, also took the right position in an open letter to Truman, published in *The Militant* on July 31, 1950:

“This is more than a fight for unification and national liberation. It is a civil war. On the one side are the Korean workers, peasants and student youth. On the other are the Korean landlords, usurers, capitalists and their police and political agents. The impoverished and exploited working masses have risen up to drive out the native parasites as well as their foreign protectors.

“Whatever the wishes of the Kremlin, a class war has been unfolding in Korea. The North Korean regime, desiring to mobilize popular support, has decreed land reforms and taken nationalization measures in the territories it has won. The establishment of people’s committees has been

reported. These reforms, these promises of a better economic and social order have attracted the peasants and workers. This prospect of a new life is what has imbued a starving subject people with the will to fight to the death. This is the 'secret weapon' that has wrested two-thirds of South Korea from U.S. imperialism and its native agents and withstood the troops and bombing fleets of mighty Wall Street."

—reprinted in James P. Cannon, *Notebook of an Agitator*

The British Workers Power organization, citing this letter, absurdly concludes that Cannon failed to take a defeatist position toward the imperialist assault: "While the SWP could not be justifiably criticised for not raising 'defeat' in *every* article, we are justified in castigating them for *never* doing so!" (*Permanent Revolution*, Spring 1988, emphasis in original). In his letter Cannon repeatedly emphasizes the fact that, "The whole of the Korean people—save for the few bought-and-paid-for agents of the Rhee puppet regime—are fighting the imperialist invaders." He concludes:

"The right in this struggle is all on the side of the Korean people. Like the colonial peoples everywhere in Asia, they want no part of U.S., or even UN 'liberation'."

This is clearly a call for the defeat of the UN/imperialist armies. Yet while correct on the fundamental question of which side to support, the political weaknesses of the SWP's aging cadre, exacerbated by the extreme pressures operating on American leftists at the height of the anti-communist witchhunt, were reflected in some serious political wobbles. Cannon's open letters to Truman, widely publicized by the *Militant* as the SWP's major popular statements on the war, contained pacifist and even patriotic passages. For instance, Cannon concluded his 4 December 1950 letter:

"This great and good American people abhor militarism and war. They love the ways of peace and freedom. They are trying to tell you their will: STOP THE WAR NOW!"

He even included an appeal to "the revolutionary and democratic tradition" of the American War of Independence!

Their more propagandistic materials evidenced the political disorientation of the SWP (in common with the other sections of the international) over the potential of the Stalinist parties to act as blunted instruments of workers' revolution. This confusion was to crystallize in Pablo's objectivist theory of a "New World Reality" in which there was no role for Marxist cadres besides acting as auxiliaries to the mass reformist social-democratic and Stalinist parties. The latter would, according to Pablo's theory, be compelled by the exigencies of history to outline a roughly revolutionary path.

The inroads that this revisionist methodology had made in the SWP can be seen in an article by J.B. Stuart (Sam Gordon), "Civil War in Korea," published in the September-October 1950 issue of *Fourth International*, which, after making several insightful criticisms of the Stalinists, concludes by quoting Kim Il Sung about the importance of the leadership of the working class and declaring:

"The force of the Asian revolution itself compels the native leaders to cast off their Stalinist miseducation and in contrast to Stalin's policy for decades, to seek out,



BLACK STAR

Ho Chi Minh with Viet Minh leaders, 1954

however hesitantly and confusedly, the great strategic concepts of the October Revolution."

This tendency to believe that the objective situation alone could force Stalinists and other petty-bourgeois elements to become "confused" Trotskyists was first manifested in the Fourth International's earlier short-lived embrace of the Titoite bureaucrats in Yugoslavia, and ultimately led to the SWP's complete abandonment of Trotskyism when they opted a decade later to become uncritical publicists for Castro's Cuba.

If the Fourth International was inconsistent in separating the necessity to defend the Stalinist-led movements *militarily* against imperialism from the question of giving them any kind of *political* support, other currents, which also claimed affinity with the Trotskyist tradition, refused, under the pressure of the Cold War, to defend the Korean revolution against imperialism at all. A loose international bloc of groups, which came together to support a "Third Camp" position of "Neither Washington nor Moscow," produced a steady stream of polemics against the Trotskyists for defending "Stalinist totalitarianism." Most of these tendencies have long since disappeared, but one of them, Tony Cliff's International Socialist tendency, has grown into a sizable group.

In the late 1940s, Cliff formed a faction within the British section of the Fourth International that held that the Soviet Union and the countries of Eastern Europe were "state capitalist," despite the absence of private ownership of the means of production. Cliff asserted that the Soviet bloc regimes were capitalist because they accumulated means of production and engaged in "military competition" with the West. This theory was based on the elementary confusion between means of production, which exist in every society, and capital, which is a social relationship, as well as on the absurd assertion

that military competition is specific to capitalism, when it is clearly a function of all states, regardless of social character. Cliff could never explain, for example, why the Soviet Union under Lenin and Trotsky should not also be considered "state capitalist," as it too engaged, as best it could, in the accumulation of means of production, as well as vigorous military competition with the imperialist armies and their White allies from 1918 to 1921. Cliff's notion about Soviet "State Capitalism" may have lacked theoretical rigor, but it had undeniable political advantages, as it removed the obligation to undertake the unpopular defense of the Soviet bloc during the height of the Cold War.

Cliff and his followers were expelled by the British Trotskyists when they broke discipline by publicly refusing to defend North Korea when war broke out. They remained in the Labour Party, where they published a journal called *Socialist Review*, which advocated "the earliest possible return of a Labour Government" committed to "a foreign policy based on independence of both Washington and Moscow." In the second issue of their journal, they published a statement from a Sri Lankan renegade from Trotskyism saying:

"So long as the two governments [North and South Korea] are what they are, viz., puppets of the two big powers, the Korean socialists can give no support to their respective puppet governments."

—V. Karalasingham, "The War in Korea", *Socialist Review*, January 1951

The invasion by the imperialist alliance, the murderous aerial bombardment, and the threats of nuclear attack did not change their minds:

"Korea is merely the cockpit where the two power blocs are testing their respective strengths in readiness for World War III. Whoever defends either side in this war, no matter how well-intentioned, is rendering no service either to socialism or the Korean people."

—"Korea: End this 'Liberating'!", *Socialist Review* November 1952

Socialist Review avoided commenting on the pre-war class conflicts that had rocked Korean society, or the progressive measures implemented by the Northern government, except to dismiss them as irrelevant.

A decade after the end of the Korean War, the U.S. was becoming embroiled in another major conflict in Asia, this time in Vietnam. As in Korea, the imperialists sought to maintain the arbitrary division of Vietnam and refused to hold national elections when it became clear that their unpopular puppet regime would lose a free vote. Both wars began with popular insurgency in the capitalist half of the country, which led to conventional war. In both countries the conflict pitted a Stalinist regime supported by a mass-based indigenous guerrilla movement, and backed by China and the USSR, against an unpopular neo-colonial client state supported by the U.S. and a coalition of its imperialist partners and vassals. In both cases, under the guise of defending freedom, the imperialists conducted a blatantly racist campaign of mass, indiscriminate extermination of people they regarded as sub-human "gooks." In both cases the strategy of massive indiscriminate bombing was designed to inflict maximum damage on the "enemy"

population, while minimizing imperialist casualties. In both wars the result was millions of civilian deaths.

The U.S. war came as a sequel to the struggle led by Ho Chi Minh's Stalinist armies to defeat Vietnam's French colonial masters. The January-February 1952 issue of Cliff's *Socialist Review* reprinted an article that pointed to the similarity between the struggles then underway in Korea and Vietnam against foreign imperialists, and refused to support either of them:

"In Vietnam likewise [i.e., to Korea], the war continues, and the people vomit with disgust at both Bao-Dai, the tool of the colonialists, and at Ho-Chi-Minh, the agent of Stalin."

An editorial note advised readers that *Socialist Review* "agree[s] entirely" with the article.

Yet fifteen years later, the Cliffites, who were then called the International Socialists (IS), and were operating outside the Labour Party, were actively building the Vietnam Solidarity Movement and supporting the victory of the Stalinists. In a retrospective published in the October 1993 issue of the new series of *Socialist Review*, Chris Harman reminisced:

"The International Socialists, as the SWP was then called, had three or four hundred members at the beginning of 1968. I remember going on demonstrations when 2,000 people would march behind our banner saying 'Victory to the NLF in Vietnam', singing the *Internationale*—something we'd never experienced before."

—*Socialist Review*, October 1993

Why did the IS take such a different approach in Vietnam? The Cliffite zigzag cannot be explained by any difference in the character of the contending forces, because there was none. What had changed was the mood in the milieu from which they hoped to recruit. In the early 1950s, when anti-Communist hysteria was at its height, the Cliffites were buried in the Labour Party. In the 1984 edition of the *Socialist Register* Jon Halliday recounts how during the war the Labour cabinet held a:

"discussion over whether or not to prosecute the *Daily Worker*—for treason—for publishing Alan Winnington's pamphlet, *I Saw the Truth in Korea* (which simply exposed crimes by Rhee's government, none of which had been disproved). There seems to be only one reason the cabinet decided not to prosecute—because if the verdict was 'guilty' there was only one sentence possible: death, which was mandatory."

In the early 1950s the "Third Camp" was a nice safe place to be. But by the late 1960s things had changed—there were tens of thousands of student radicals, and everyone to the left of Harold Wilson was for the victory of the NLF. Had the IS retained its "Third-Camp" position, it would have been isolated from the radical milieu. And so Tony Cliff & Co., never ones to let principles, even bad ones, get in the way of recruitment opportunities, hoisted the banner of Ho Chi Minh and the NLF.

We lay claim to a different tradition—that of the Fourth Internationalists, who, despite terrible pressures, and considerable confusion and disorientation, attempted to apply the principles of Trotskyism to the world in which they found themselves, and at least had the courage to take a stand in defense of the North Korean deformed workers' state against imperialism. ■

America...

continued from page 2

the local oil companies compete. In exchange for the excellent service, I have to pay a higher price for the petrol than a free market would charge. But when I fill my own tank so much more cheaply from a self-service pump back in the United States, there too four young men await—sometimes even in person but certainly by implication. I do not have to pay their wages through high petrol prices, because they are not employed by the oil company, or by anybody else for that matter. But in reality I still have to pay for the young men, by way of higher insurance rates caused by their vandalism and thefts, by way of my taxes that cover police, court and prison costs, even a little by way of welfare benefits.”

—*Times Literary Supplement*, 10 June 1994

A similar sentiment was expressed by Herbert Stein, former chairman of Richard Nixon's Council of Economic Advisers, who decried the “poverty in our public life” and suggested that America's capitalists should seek, “to improve the quality of life of the least advantaged among us and to reduce hostility and fear among the races” (*Wall Street Journal*, 25 October 1994). Such forlorn and melancholy daydreaming is all very well for has-beens and never-weres, but the Republicans' successful electoral assault was predicated on exactly the opposite—trampling the poor and fanning the flames of racial bigotry. And judging from the contributions pouring into Republican coffers, much of corporate America is enthusiastic about Gingrich's scorch-and-burn, take-no-prisoners approach to social policy.

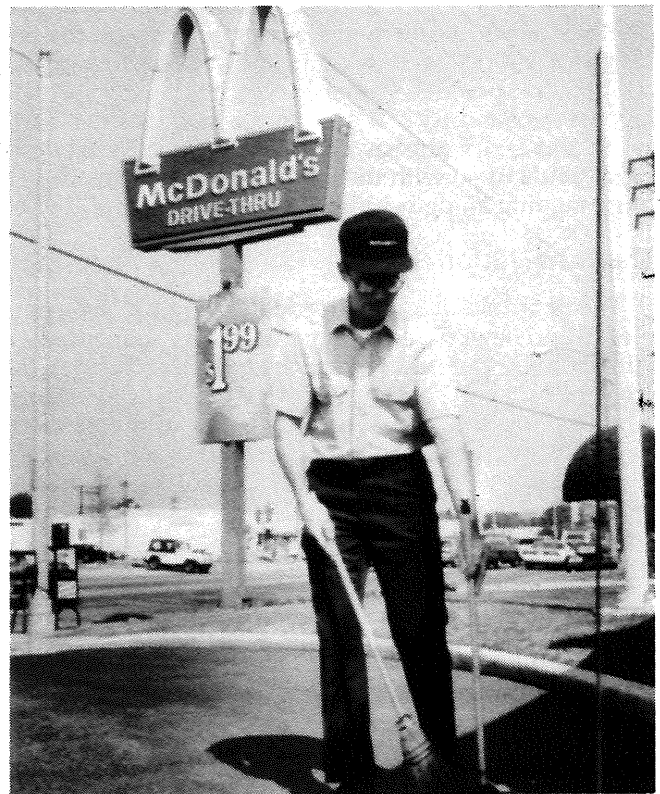
Democrats vs. the ‘Real Thing’

All the talk of economic globalization and the much-vaunted technological revolution, including the “information super-highway,” ballyhooed by Clinton, Gore and Gingrich, leaves many workers haunted by the fear of change, and the prospect that they will be left behind. Tens of millions of Americans are concerned that they have lost control over their lives.

Gingrich has seized upon this anxiety, demagogically fanning it, and in a brazen example of calculated irrationality, seeks to blame “the left” for the social decay of America. “The values of the left cripple human beings, weaken cities, make it difficult for us to in fact survive as a country,” he told a national Republican gathering in 1989. “The left in America is to blame for most of the current major diseases which have struck in this society” (quoted in *The Nation*, 5 December 1994). Gingrich has even started complaining that the corporate media is riddled with socialists! On 8 March the Associated Press reported that:

“Speaker Newt Gingrich said today that many newspaper editorial boards had ‘socialists’ on them and suggested that businesses reconsider advertising in papers that oppose their views....

“Mr. Gingrich...declined to identify by name those he referred to as socialists, but added, ‘I’d be glad to get you a collection of editorials that only make sense if people believe that government’s good and the free market is bad.’”



DER SPIEGEL

Laid-off McDonnell Douglas worker's new McJob

In 1992 Bill Clinton won the presidency with promises of cutting middle-class taxes, creating high-tech jobs and “ending welfare as we know it.” Two years later Gingrich campaigned on these same themes, but without having to worry about the sensibilities of unionists, blacks and women (historically the core of the Democratic vote); his message was simpler and more direct. The near unanimity of the two parties added to the Republicans' momentum. Many traditionally Democratic voters stayed home and when the votes were tallied, the Republicans ended up with 52 percent.

In early January, as the Republicans celebrated their victory with a lavish party in the midst of impoverished Washington D.C., Bill Clinton huddled with motivational gurus Anthony Robbins (a former janitor who got rich selling self-improvement on late-night television infomercials) and Stephen Covey, one of Gingrich's own pet therapists. They were busy “reinventing government.” Clinton's resulting State of the Union address echoed many of the themes of the Republicans—slashing welfare, scaling back government programs (except of course the military) and calling on the poor and underprivileged to take more “personal responsibility” and stop relying on government assistance.

As a rule in politics, the most consistent advocates of a given program are more likely to succeed than those who advocate the same policy inconsistently or half-heartedly. When Stalinists dress themselves up as social democrats, they tend to lose votes to the latter because people who want social democrats prefer the genuine article to an imitation. When social democrats present themselves as champions of the free market, many peo-

ple decide that they might as well vote for a *bona fide* capitalist party. And when Democrats agree on the necessity of ending "welfare as we know it," beefing up the military and pushing school prayer, it is hardly surprising that the minority of the electorate that bothers to vote at all, and is not already committed to the Republican right, tends to go with those setting the pace instead of those tagging along behind.

The New Victorians

The irrationality of Gingrich's program has perplexed and bewildered foreign capitalist commentators. Publications ranging from *Le Monde* to *Der Spiegel* to *The Economist* marvel that the American political spectrum now appears to extend from the right to the extreme right. The overtly reactionary character of the "Contract With America" includes a celebration of Victorian morality:

"Referring to Victorian England, Mr. Gingrich said: 'They reduced the number of children born out of wedlock almost by 50 percent. They changed the whole momentum of their society. They didn't do it through a new bureaucracy. They did it by re-establishing values, by moral leadership....'"

—*New York Times*, 14 March

Gingrich proposes to substitute religious sermonizing for social welfare, school prayer for school lunches, chastity for sex and the right to a speedy execution for the right to an abortion. The fact that there are no jobs for millions of people willing to work is something for which Gingrich thinks they should take "personal responsibility."

The Republicans hardly bother with dissimulation when it comes to their racism and class bias. They are eager to punish the "undeserving poor" who, according to the logic of Social Darwinism, deserve their fate, while rewarding the "productive" activities of wealthy speculators. While the Gingrichites direct their fire at homosexuals, feminists and government bureaucrats, the race card is, as always for America's rulers, the most reliable one to play. This is why they have focused on so-called "welfare scroungers"—a thinly veiled reference to the black urban underclass. Yet Gingrich's welfare-bashing attacks are only an extension of a bi-partisan policy that has been operating for the past quarter century. Between 1970 and 1993 the average monthly family benefit check had almost been cut in half: from \$676 to \$373 in constant 1993 dollars (*New York Times*, 23 March). Both of these figures are far below the poverty line.

Virtual Eugenics

Until recently it was considered uncouth and tactless for politicians to express class and racial prejudices openly. For years the Heritage Foundation, a right-wing think tank favored by the Newtonians, has sponsored studies that explain the pervasiveness of poverty in the "land of opportunity" in terms of "behavioral poverty" and "lack of self-discipline."

But today eugenics is coming back into fashion with America's rulers. Eugenicists such as the late Richard J. Herrnstein and Charles Murray (authors of last year's

bestselling *The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life*) use pseudo-science to attack affirmative action, welfare, remedial education, and other programs intended to benefit the poor on the grounds that money spent on "inferior" social layers is money wasted. While denying any racist intent, the fact is that categories of race and class conveniently intersect among Murray and Herrnstein's "intellectually disadvantaged." The *Bell Curve* is, at bottom, an argument that America's "cognitive elite" enjoy their wealth and status by natural right and need feel no compunction about the plight of the "less fortunate."

From the premise that existing social inequality is genetically preordained, America's modern pseudo-scientists project a future where the elite withdraws into its own isolated enclave of privilege, while a "custodial state" assumes responsibility for containing a growing intellectually and physically impoverished underclass. This vision is merely an extrapolation from the current direction of social differentiation in America (and, to a lesser extent, the other imperialist countries) as the social structure increasingly comes to resemble that of a Third World society: a tiny wealthy elite on top, a layer of relatively secure professionals, entrepreneurs, technocrats and skilled workers beneath them, and, at the bottom, a huge mass of desperately poor people without access to decent jobs, housing, education, medical care or hope.

Racism, 'Family Values,' and Orphanages

Republican advocates of "family values" oppose abortion, support state censorship of books and movies, and flatly oppose sex education. They deplore the fact that the U.S. is the only industrialized nation on earth in which the birth rate for teenage girls is going up. Yet, as Planned Parenthood recently pointed out (4 April): "Countries with the most easily accessible contraceptive services for teenagers and the most comprehensive sex education programs have the lowest rates of teen pregnancy, abortion and childbearing." Currently in the U.S. annual birth rates for women under 19 are 53 per 1000, compared to only 6 in the Netherlands.

The most bizarre aspect of the Republicans' contract is the proposal to promote "family values" by taking babies away from welfare mothers and putting them into state orphanages. As Katha Pollitt pointed out in *The Nation* (12 December 1994), apart from the obvious cruelty, this notion hardly makes sense financially:

"The average family on welfare receives about \$500 a month, including benefits. The average orphanage costs about \$100 a day per child. Single mothers on welfare get nothing but abuse these days, but at least they're cheap."

Pollitt comments that the proposed "orphanaging of America" is "so obviously cruel, weird, impractical, expensive, legally dubious and socially (especially racially) inflammatory, it's hard to believe its proponents are serious." She suggests that what is involved is "symbolic politics":

"Even if we never see the actual orphanages, we are being taught to think of children who have living parents as 'orphans' just because those parents are young, female, unmarried and poor. We are thus also being taught to see

those women as having no rights and nothing to contribute—as being, in effect, dead—and to see their children as morally tainted by their mother's sexual 'sin' and therefore lucky to get whatever grudging help is doled out to them.

"Entitlements become handouts. Rights become charity. No one, even a child, deserves anything. That is what orphanages mean."

The 24 February *New York Times* reported that:

"House Republicans are rushing to repeal the Federal school lunch program, which provides free or low-cost breakfast and lunch to the nation's poorest youngsters. The program, which dates back to President Truman, has been a rousing success in boosting health and academic achievement."

These assaults, as Pollitt suggests, must be seen as primarily performing an ideological, rather than an economic, function. Attacks on black welfare recipients help hold the racist vote for the Republicans, while softening up public opinion for future incursions on more important "entitlements."

The Republicans would like to make deep cuts in Medicare (which pays some of the medical bills of retirees) and Social Security (which provides retirees with a modest pension). These two programs together account for over \$460 billion of the annual federal budget, compared to only \$14 billion for Aid for Families with Dependent Children. They know, however, that to advocate such cuts would mean political suicide. So for the time being they limit themselves to attacking mothers and children on welfare, and playing up notions of "individual responsibility" in an attempt to stigmatize social programs in general.

Virtual Capitalism: High-Tech Social Darwinism

Gingrich describes himself both as a "revolutionary" and as a "conservative futurist." As a keynote speaker at a January 10th conference in Washington of the right-wing Progress and Freedom Foundation (PFF—a sci-fi New Age think tank, which celebrates the Information Age revolution and advocates, in concert with LaRouchite crackpot "futuristic" reactionaries, an aggressive space program to colonize Mars), Gingrich expounded on his "futuristic" vision in a rambling speech whose formal subject was "From Virtuality to Reality."

Gingrich's art is that of a slick snake-oil peddler dressing up age-old reactionary precepts in New Age cyber-jargon. Newt's speech was riddled with the new code of cyber-reaction in references to "virtual America," "the Information Age," the "Third Wave of social development." In everyday parlance this means downsizing government, replacing the welfare state with an "opportunity society," privatizing school systems and unfettered free enterprise. But, of course, while enterprises may be free, Gingrich's "conservative futurism" also includes plenty of high-tech state censorship. As a first step into the future, the Republican-controlled Senate Commerce Committee endorsed a proposal last March to institute a "smut ban" on the Internet and to imprison for up to two years anyone transmitting "obscene, lewd, lascivious, filthy, or indecent" materials.



BOB GILMAN—UPI-BRETTMANN

Church and state: kindergarten prayer in 1955

A PFF conference panel on the "Information Age Economy" denounced government regulation of telecommunications and software giants such as AT&T, Microsoft and Bell as threatening to "stifle the Third Wave." One information age visionary, software entrepreneur Mitchell Kapor of Lotus Development Corporation, accused the cyber-Newts of "introducing a new rhetoric for social Darwinism." To which Heather Higgins of the PFF bluntly replied: "'Capitalism can never have a human face' and then went on to condemn progressive taxation and social program entitlements" (quoted by David Corn, "CyberNewt," *The Nation*, 6 February).

Parvenus On the Make

Gingrich and cohorts are open about their plans to reinvigorate American capitalism by using the state as a mechanism for the upward redistribution of income. Gingrich promises to eradicate the burden of social welfare and free the capitalists from the patchwork of 50 years of labor, safety and environmental regulations. At a March meeting conducted to brief the Senate Judiciary Committee staff on a Republican bill to gut health and environment regulations, lobbyists for power companies explained the details of the new bill (which they had evidently drafted) while its nominal authors sat by. The *New York Times* (31 March) commented that, "seldom in the past have Congressional staff members so openly and publicly embraced legislative outsiders with extensive interests in the outcome." Traditionally the lobbyists (who the Newtonians denounced so furiously during the campaign) sit by ready to offer advice if needed, as the legislators attempt to explain the intricacies of their new bill.

The environment has a substantial bourgeois and petty-bourgeois constituency, and rather than launch a frontal assault, Gingrich & Co. propose to get government "off the back" of landowners and developers by

adding layers of assessments, referrals, and various other bureaucratic procedures that must be completed prior to imposing any restrictions on the "right" of entrepreneurs to pollute the water and poison the air. Each new step provides an opportunity for appeals, litigation and delays. The Contract includes a provision for doling out billions of tax dollars to compensate landowners who can claim that environmental restrictions reduced their property values.

Among the other "reforms" pushed through the House during the Republicans' first hundred days were measures to protect corporations (and their executives, accountants and lawyers) from lawsuits over defective products or securities fraud. There was a measure designed to make fraud harder to prove. To tilt the playing field further in favor of the rich and powerful, the Republicans propose to introduce a "loser pays" provision to allow judges to force plaintiffs to pay the legal fees of successful defendants in fraud suits. Another bill set a maximum award of \$250,000 (or three times actual financial loss) for punitive damages. Under the Republican Contract, everyone will get as much justice as he or she can afford.

The Republicans are also interested in ideas about "reforming" the calculation of the rate of inflation. Last January Alan Greenspan, chairman of the Federal Reserve, floated the idea of shaving the official rate of inflation by one and a half percent:

"He suggested that a simple fix in the Consumer Price Index could reap big savings. How? Trimming the inflation numbers would mean lower payouts to Social Security beneficiaries, other recipients of Federal benefit programs and retired Government workers.

"Although the Fed chairman did not emphasize the point, lower consumer inflation numbers would also translate into higher tax bills because the annual inflation adjustments to income tax brackets and personal exemptions would be smaller."

"Mr. Greenspan's proposal was greeted enthusiastically by Republicans on Capitol Hill. He appeared to offer a way out of one of their biggest quandaries: how to cut spending on Federal entitlement programs without a specific vote that would clearly tamper with politically sacrosanct Social Security benefits. It would also allow Congress to increase tax revenues at a faster rate without requiring a vote to increase income taxes—a political death wish for Republicans.

"Indeed, House Speaker Newt Gingrich went so far as to threaten to withhold financing from the Bureau of Labor Statistics—responsible for compiling the monthly consumer price report since 1919—unless it changed its approach."

—*New York Times*, 22 February

So once again fearless Newt strikes a blow for the little guy against the malevolent federal bureaucracy.

Corporate Welfare Bums

The older money and wiser heads among the bourgeoisie have reservations about the competence of the noisy parvenu born-again now crowding round the troughs in Washington. Occasional articles in the serious press remind the corporate decision-makers not to be too categorical about getting the government "off their

backs." The front page of the 7 March *New York Times* business section carried a piece discussing the tens of billions of dollars in subsidies given annually to agribusiness, energy, transport, aerospace, construction and other sectors:

"According to the Cato Institute, the Washington-based free-market research organization, the total outlays on such programs will exceed \$86.2 billion this year.

"Moreover, this does not include tax breaks, which the Progressive Policy Institute, an arm of the centrist Democratic Leadership Council, contends are just as large."

The article discusses how the federal government builds roads in national forests for private timber companies and subsidizes electricity for ski resorts in Colorado and casinos in Nevada. It also touches on the \$333 million subsidy to the auto corporations (which are currently raking in record profits) for research and development "to help keep them competitive."

All the talk about "ending welfare as we know it" excludes, by bi-partisan agreement, any discussion of serious cuts in the complex system of corporate welfare. When a Republican freshman from Wisconsin called for privatizing the federally owned Bonneville Power Administration, which provides cheap electricity for the Pacific Northwest, a fellow novice Republican in the House of Representatives, Linda Smith from Washington state, came out in opposition. Smith is adamant about cutting welfare and arts funding, but draws the line at corporate welfare in her district:

"I've always supported privatization,' Mrs. Smith said, 'but not if it's going to destroy the economy of our region.' She said two-thirds of the basic industries and 80 percent of the residents of her district would be affected by the sale."

—*New York Times*, 3 March

The overt handouts and subsidies to corporations are simply the tip of the iceberg. The entire federal budget is devoted to protecting or advancing the interests of the American bourgeoisie. Naturally those with more clout get a bigger share. A prime example is spending on "defense," which consumes the largest portion of the national budget. In addition to providing the U.S. with the means to enforce its "vital interests" in every corner of the world against imperialist rivals, it also provides huge direct subsidies for core industrial sectors.

In the January issue of *Z Magazine*, Noam Chomsky summed up Gingrich's program as, "state protection and public subsidy for the rich, market discipline for the poor." Chomsky noted that the largest employer in Cobb County, Georgia (the rich, white Atlanta suburb that Gingrich represents) is Lockheed Aeronautical Systems, which is developing the new F-22 advanced tactical fighter, as well as other aircraft. Cobb County is among the top three counties in the country in terms of federal subsidies. As Chomsky observed: "It's remarkably easy for conservative entrepreneurial values to flourish while one is feeding happily at the public trough."

Reverse Robin Hoods

One of the highest priorities of the Republicans is the overhaul of the tax system to accelerate the redistribu-

tion of income. The Congressional Budget Office, Congress' research arm, released a report in March 1992, which estimated that 74 percent of total gains in personal income between 1977 and 1989 went to the top one percent of the population (cited in Linda McQuaig, *The Wealthy Banker's Wife*). Noam Chomsky quotes a U.S. Census Bureau report to the effect that median income fell 13 percent between 1989 and 1993.

The Gingrichites would like to eliminate the progressive income tax altogether; already some of them are talking about replacing it with a flat tax. Wages are declining, and with the weakening of the unions, many workers have concluded that a tax cut is the most realistic way of raising incomes. The Contract With America tax cuts are advertised as a break for the "middle class," but most of the benefits will go to the rich. Under the proposed plan, the average reduction for those making between \$30,000 and \$50,000 per year would be \$569, while those with incomes over \$200,000 would save an average of \$11,266 (*New York Times*, 7 April).

Bill Archer, the Republican chair of the House Ways and Means Committee, which is in charge of tax legislation, explained that:

"The engine that pulls the train must continue to be fueled.' What he meant, he explained in an interview later, was that affluent taxpayers must receive tax breaks because they are mainly the ones who invest money and create jobs for others."

—*New York Times*, 4 April

To aid the super-rich in their selfless struggle to "create jobs" (through property flips, currency speculation, leveraged buy-outs and similar investment strategies) the Republicans propose to lower the capital gains tax, raise tax exemptions for estates, increase investment subsidies and abolish the minimum corporate tax. Archer would like to abolish income and corporate taxes altogether and raise all revenues through sales taxes—the most regressive form of taxation: "Mr. Archer said he was not concerned that his tax plan might benefit rich people, who can afford to spend a smaller percentage of their income than others on the essentials of life." For the neo-conservatives, inequality is a virtue, poverty a sin.

Republicans and The Lunatic Right

While the Republicans are less inhibited than the Democrats about preaching austerity to the masses, they have the problem of turning the big campaign bucks they receive from corporations and wealthy individuals into votes on election day. And the capitalist class does not comprise a very large voting bloc. Traditionally the Republicans can count on the organized right to get out and vote: they do best when participation is low, as it was last November, when only 39 percent of the electorate actually bothered voting. The "landslide" endorsement of the Contract With America was secured with 52 percent of those voting—or about a fifth of the electorate.

The last presidential election showed the Republicans that, in times of economic decline and rising anxiety, it is hard to generate enthusiasm for the ruling-class agenda under the leadership of a complacent prep-school/country-club careerist like George Bush. To recoup their losses, they had in some way to engage popu-



LAUREN GREENFIELD—SYGMA

Congress cuts schoolchildren's lunch program

lar passions, which, among a people little noted for political sophistication, run to religious fanaticism, xenophobia, misogyny, homophobia and racism. What these various antipathies have in common is that they have as their objects everyone and everything except the people who are actually making life increasingly miserable—the capitalist class.

For many years there has existed in America a right-wing lunatic fringe, centered in the middle and far West. Its ideology varies from group to group, but generally consists of a combination of fascist ideology and nativist libertarianism. A component of this right-wing fringe is the armed vigilante groups, composed of America's displaced and disaffected, who seek refuge from a declining urban economy in the hardscrabble, gun-toting self-sufficiency of a mythical nineteenth-century American frontier. They are convinced that the federal government represents a Zionist and/or Communist conspiracy aimed at subordinating the U.S. to the dictates of some larger world government, and on taking away their precious guns and putting white Americans in concentration camps.

While most Americans, even in such right-wing backwaters as Idaho and Montana, probably look upon such groups as insane, their insanity nevertheless represents an extreme manifestation of an ideological vein that runs deep in American consciousness. The frontier was a formative influence in American history, and continues long after its demise to exert a hold on popular imagination and belief. This is one reason why the Republicans' hypocritical attacks on "big government" find resonance in the country at large. It is also part of the reason that greater numbers of Americans are responding to their worsening social and economic conditions by listening more intently to the lunatics of the far right.

While Republican politicians do not participate directly in far-right "civic militias," they do pander to their periphery. Right-wing talk-show hosts, many of whom

make Rush Limbaugh look like a liberal, are an important intermediary between "respectable" Republican politicians and groups like the Michigan Militia and others linked to the criminal and depraved Oklahoma City bombing. Hence, another Republican dilemma is that, once embarked on exploiting popular fears and prejudices, putting the genie back in the bottle can be difficult. In the wake of the Oklahoma bombing, various bourgeois commentators remarked upon the symbiosis between growing rightist hate groups and elected officials of the Gingrich stripe. Bill Clinton, in his homily to the nation, indirectly hinted at this and vowed to increase police activity against "extremists," both "right and left." (Naturally, an ultra-rightist bombing becomes a pretext for increased state persecution of the left.) Clinton is sponsoring an Omnibus Counterterrorism Act to criminalize political support to any organization designated "terrorist" by the U.S. (as the African National Congress was for many years). This has been correctly denounced by a variety of liberals and civil libertarians as a dangerous attack on democratic rights.

The Gingrichites denounced Clinton for "playing politics" with a national tragedy (as if the Oklahoma federal building had been struck by lightning). The 23 April *New York Times* reported that:

"Speaker Newt Gingrich of Georgia today angrily denied that the Republican attacks on government and government bureaucrats could in any way be tied to the attack.

"It is grotesque to suggest that anybody in this country who raises legitimate questions about the size and scope of the Federal Government has any implication in this...."

The Speaker doth protest too much. A month before the bombing, *Time* magazine (20 March) featured an article on the growth of the rightist crackpot wilderness militias, and noted that in many areas they enjoy the protection of local and state government officials in their rejection of federal authority and the burden of federal taxation and regulations. The article concluded by noting that:

"Even as the Westerners fight for local control, they are struggling just as hard to retain the huge federal grazing, farming, irrigation and mining subsidies that the Clinton administration tried to cut. Either way, they are as mad as hell at Washington."

Socialism or Barbarism?

While it has an unmistakable appeal for the lunatic right, the substance of the Republicans' Contract With America represents far more than a temporary derangement of the body politic. It is the particularly ugly American version of an offensive by the ruling classes now underway in every advanced capitalist country. It is the product of a social system in decline.

The social-democratic and radical-liberal left in the U.S. are virtually unanimous (if sometimes unenthusiastic) in their response to the Republican offensive; when all is said and done, they can propose nothing better than to urge everyone to vote Democrat. But the Democrats, precisely because they are committed to the same social system as their more aggressive Republican rivals, cannot oppose the logic of that system. They

therefore confine themselves to snivelling about "compassion" and "spreading the pain" more evenly. But one thing they will never do is point to the obvious fact that the most basic material interests of most Americans are directly counterposed to those of the country's rulers. Nor will they attempt to mobilize the majority on the basis of its own interests. The Democrats, in short, are another capitalist party; they are no answer to the Republicans.

But there is an answer. Those who think that the current reactionary wave is simply too powerful to resist should take a look at what happened in France only last year. First, Air France workers struck to beat back a government job-slashing scheme. This in turn inspired the students, who demonstrated in hundreds of thousands against a government proposal to lower the minimum wage for youth. With the trade unions threatening to enter the fray, the right-wing government of Edouard Balladur was forced to back down. It happened in France, and it can happen in the U.S.

The organized labor movement must be the central component of any successful resistance to capitalist attacks. Despite a steady decline in membership over the past twenty years, the trade unions remain by far the largest and most cohesive force whose interests are directly opposed to those of the ruling class. Concentrated in key industries like auto, mining, steel and transport, they—unlike students or the unemployed—possess the power to bring the country to a halt.

Yet this potentially mighty force is paralyzed by a bureaucracy that believes wholeheartedly in capitalism, is corrupted by material privileges, and is hostile to any attempt to initiate social struggle. Their answer to the assaults of the Gingrichites and the corporations is not to mobilize the union membership to strike back, but rather to bleat a bit and wait for the next chance to vote Democrat. These bureaucrats are, in the words of the pioneer American socialist, Daniel DeLeon, the "labor lieutenants of capitalism." They must be thrown out and replaced by a leadership ready and willing to bring the workers into struggle. Any serious attempt by the unions to fight back would quickly galvanize support from millions of other victims of the capitalist austerity drive—minorities, immigrants, welfare recipients as well as unemployed and unorganized workers.

A successful campaign to defeat the capitalist attacks requires a new kind of leadership in the unions—one committed to a program of class struggle rather than class collaboration. Such a leadership must be guided by the realization that the current profit-maximizing, budget-cutting mania is pursued in the interests of the tiny capitalist minority that owns and controls all the essential sectors of the economy and that is the principal beneficiary of the prevailing social order. Ultimately the attacks on the working class can only be ended through a revolution that breaks the rule of the privileged elite and abolishes the social order on which it rests. One must choose between the logic of capital—production for profit—and the logic of socialism—production for human need. In the epoch of capitalist decline, there is no middle way. ■

Exchange with l'Égalité

Marxism vs. Quebec Nationalism

Reprinted below is an exchange between Marc D., a supporter of the International Bolshevik Tendency, and Damien Elliott, the leading figure in the JCR-Gauche Révolutionnaire, the French affiliate of the Committee for a Workers' International. The first two items were originally published in French in the March 1994 issue of l'Égalité (No. 28).

Mail: l'Égalité in favor of Quebec nationalism?

" (...) I noted the article on the Canadian elections and the photo of the indépendantiste demonstration in the last issue (No. 26—Editor's note) of l'Égalité. Does this signify support for Quebec nationalism? (...) The weight of nationalist sentiment in the workers' movement represents a burden, and not a catalyst or an 'objective dynamic' in the development of revolutionary class consciousness."—M.D.

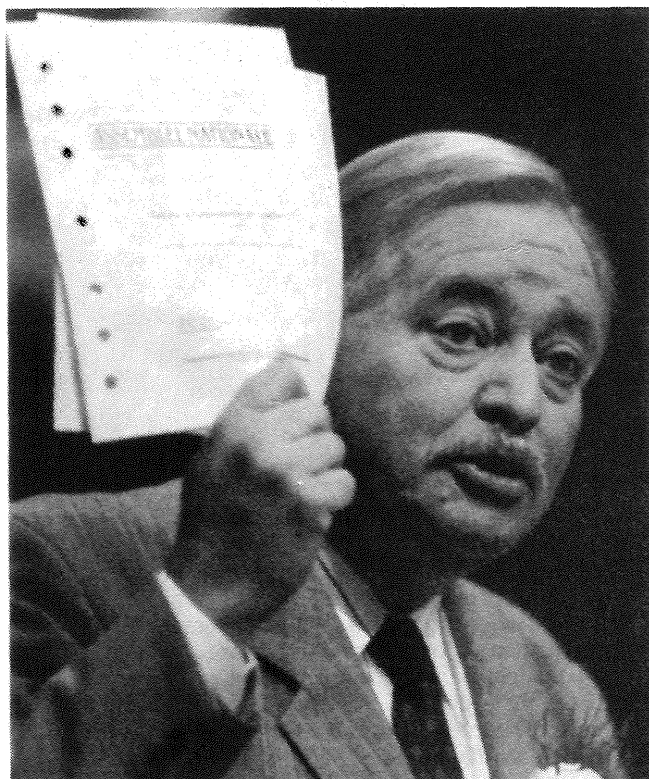
Debate on the National Question in Quebec For an Independent and Socialist Quebec!

by Damien Elliott

The article to which our reader refers gave some news on the breakthrough of Bloc Québécois nationalists in recent Canadian elections. To illustrate this, we chose—on purely "journalistic" grounds—a photo of an "indépendantiste" demonstration. The JCR-Gauche Révolutionnaire has not yet had the opportunity to address this question and to formulate its point of view. Nor has this debate been carried out with the editors of *Militant Labour*, a new Canadian newspaper, which we welcome in passing, sharing the views of this editorial board. *Militant Labour*, addressed to an anglophone public, has declared itself in support of "Quebec's right to self-determination." In the following article, Damien Elliott expresses his personal viewpoint, seeking to open a discussion indispensable for all who wish to build a revolutionary workers' party in Quebec.

* * *

Having a correct position on the national question is indispensable for whomever claims to defend workers' interests. This is evidently the only means of winning a hearing in countries where national conflicts exist. This has nothing to do with support to "nationalism" in general for there are two nationalisms: that of the oppressors (reactionary) and that of the oppressed (progressive). The demand for national independence by proletarian revolutionaries doesn't imply support to bourgeois nationalist leaderships. On the contrary, raising the demand above all is intended to fight them by removing the major obstacle to rallying workers to the program of socialism and internationalism. If the unity of nations is desirable, it cannot be achieved otherwise than in terms of strict equality. In the case of an oppressed nation, separation with the oppressor nation is



CLEMENT ALLARD-CP

Parlzeau waves PQ's sovereignty bill

often the first necessary step toward future unification. But let us start by stating clearly that Quebec is an oppressed nation within the Canadian State.

An Oppressed Nation

A publication of the LSO/LSA¹, a revolutionary organization no longer in existence, gave this subject some valuable guidelines:

"The Québécois constitute a nation sharing a common national language, French; a culture and a history which date from the former North American colony of France; and a common territory more or less delimited by the present borders of the province of Quebec....The background of the oppression of the Quebec nation goes back to the British conquest of the French colony in 1760 and the defeat of the revolutionary national uprising of 1837, which was an attempt at bourgeois democratic revolution, similar to that launched by the American colonists more than 60 years earlier....The Quebec nation is deprived of its democratic right to political self-determination. The Canadian constitution nowhere recognizes the right of the Québécois or of any other nationality to decide their own fate, extending to and including the right to separate and to form their own State if they so desire.... Francophones—who constitute more than 80% of the population of Quebec (Editor's note)—are subject to linguistic discrimination, which renders them second class



INTERNATIONAL SOCIALIST REVIEW

LSO's youth group in nationalist demo, early 1970s

citizens. English, the language of the oppressor nation, holds a privileged position. Francophone workers, among whom one notes a much higher rate of unemployment than among anglophones, are a source of cheap labour for the capitalists. The Quebec economy is dominated by large Anglo-Canadian and American corporations. The main instrument of domination is the imperialist Canadian State.¹²

Nationalism, Burden or Catalyst?

As long as the nationalist and "indépendantiste" movement obtains minority support among the members of an oppressed nation, defenders of workers' interests have to denounce this oppression and to recognize the right of the nation in question to self-determination. Such is the correct position with respect to Corsica or to the French Pays Basque. Things change the moment when the "indépendantiste" demand assists the development of the class struggle or if it shows signs of winning the support of the majority of the oppressed nation. In Quebec's case, support for the national movement has been on the rise since the early 1960's. One of its by-products has been the rise of the PQ (Parti Québécois) a bourgeois formation strongly rooted in all sectors of the population, including the industrial proletariat. But the national bourgeoisie, represented today by the Bloc Québécois, has shown itself to be incapable of consistently defending (Quebec's) national interests. The satisfaction of this demand however has an exceedingly progressive character as it directly challenges the central State, the heart of Canadian capitalism. As the LSO/LSA notes:

"Quebec nationalism is currently a major challenge to the governments of Ottawa and Washington, to Bay Street and to the rue Saint Jacques."

The national movement has allowed the Québécois to obtain a number of rights but the central state refuses to

delegate further government prerogatives and to admit the idea of "asymmetric federalism," which would give more powers to Quebec than to the other nine provinces, because of its national distinctiveness. With the deepening of the economic crisis, nationalist sentiment continues to grow and, given the serious threats of the federation's explosion, the national struggle is one of the most likely channels for the working class to take power. If a workers' government seized power in Quebec, an event this important would immediately have gigantic repercussions and would shake not only the rest of Canada but all of North America from top to bottom.

An Objective Dynamic?

The struggle for Quebec's national liberation, like all similar processes, contains a certain dynamic which pushes toward its transformation into socialist revolution. On the other hand, it is obvious that this cannot be produced spontaneously, without the national movement passing at one moment or another under the leadership of a class party having a clear consciousness of its goals. This is even truer today, after the disappearance of the USSR and the "Soviet bloc." It is thus hardly a question of extending the least confidence in the Bloc Québécois, a priori hardly susceptible of winning Quebec's independence and certainly incapable of guaranteeing a real independence, that is to say a break with the Anglo-American trusts, NATO and international financial institutions. In Canada, the principal workers' party is the NDP, a Social Democratic organization which never succeeded in winning support in Quebec because of its refusal to support even self-determination. But a Canadian workers' organization which seriously wants to take power to introduce socialism will never achieve this by turning its back on the national aspirations of Quebec's working population. In this field, it would become the champion of national independence and would try to lead the national movement by placing it under the flag of socialism. In English Canada, it would work to counter the chauvinist prejudices of anglophone workers, explaining to them that their own emancipation depends in large measure on their capacity to support Quebec's right to self-determination.

* * *

Notes

1. Ligue Socialiste Ouvrière/League for Socialist Action, Canadian section of the IVth International ("United Secretariat")
2. La question nationale au Québec, in *Pour un Québec indépendant et socialiste* (éditions d'Avant-Garde. Montréal. 1977)

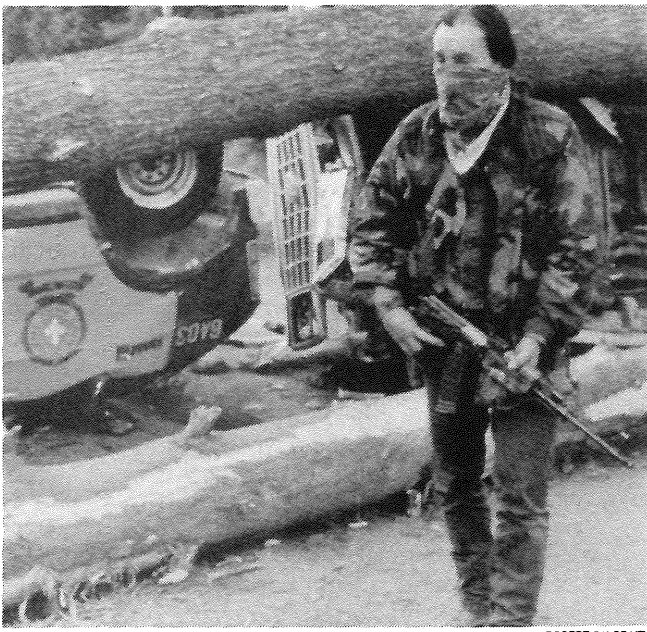
1 March 1995

Montreal

Reply to *l'Égalité*

Dear Comrades:

Damien Elliott, through taking issue with some views I expressed (see the reply to "a reader" in the March 1994 issue of *l'Égalité*—No. 28) opened a debate on the national question in Quebec. I welcome the opportunity to respond, as this raises many important questions for revolutionaries that are quite timely, given the recent election of a Parti Québécois government and the pending referendum on Quebec sovereignty.



ROBERT GALBRAITH

Mohawk Warrior at Oka, 1990

movement from its infancy—that only an independent state created for and by French-Canadians can assure the survival of the French language in Quebec.”

—Hubert Bauch in *The [Montreal] Gazette*,
22 October 1994

That same week *La Presse* columnist Marcel Adam observed that:

“because an ethnocentric sovereignist enterprise is philosophically indefensible, and destined to failure when it claims a territory with a heterogenous population, today’s sovereignists have had to find another justification for their project.”

An ethnocentric sovereignist enterprise is viewed as “philosophically indefensible,” i.e., politically undesirable, by the mainstream bourgeois nationalists of the BQ/PQ. The PQ could attempt to pull off a referendum victory with a solid majority of francophone voters. Hard-core nationalists such as Pierre Bourgault actually advocate such a course. Parizeau prefers to court the soft ethnic vote, which is perceived as wavering between affinity with Quebec and Canada. Ultra-nationalist demagogues such as Guy Bouthillier of the *Mouvement Québec français*, who sought PQ nominations in Quebec’s September 1994 election, did so against PQ leader Jacques Parizeau’s wishes. In some instances they displaced the official “ethnic” candidates, and thereby sabotaged the PQ’s efforts to win the non-francophone ethnic votes largely concentrated on the island of Montreal. Parizeau managed to win the general election despite heavy losses among immigrant voters, but in the forthcoming referendum on sovereignty such votes will be crucial.

The question of immigrants, many of them from impoverished Third-World countries, is becoming as hot an issue in Montreal as it is in Paris. At the beginning of the 1994 school year, 12-year old Emilie Ouimet was expelled from Montreal’s Louis Riel high school for

wearing a hijab, a traditional Muslim headdress for women. Bourgeois nationalists, from *péquistes* to *Société St. Jean Baptiste* (SSJB) xenophobes, have been demagogically denouncing the “dangers” posed by the concentration of immigrant children in the French-language schools of Montreal.

“Seventeen years after the French Language Charter began channelling ethnic and immigrant children into the French school system in Quebec, a kind of panic has blown up around the very presence of these children in French schools.

“The island’s French schools have become overwhelmed with immigrants and can no longer even hope to integrate them into mainstream Quebec society, the Montreal Island School Council [*Conseil scolaire de l’Île de Montréal*] charged this spring.

“As francophone families leave the island for the lower taxes and bigger homes of off-island suburbs, fewer than half the students in Montreal’s French schools now have French as their first language.

“Integration is not just the ability to speak a language,” said Jacques Mongeau, head of the Island School Council. “It’s also a shared value system, a shared culture.”

—*Gazette*, 15 October 1994

Quebec nationalists condemn the children of immigrants, not for failing to learn French, but rather for failing to become perfect *Québécois de vieille souche* with the “shared value system” of the French Catholic *Mouvement Québec français* and the *Société St. Jean Baptiste*.

Winning a Hearing

We do not seek to march at the head of the St. Jean Baptiste procession. We do not seek to lead the struggle for a French Quebec. We do not support Quebec’s language laws. Unlike comrade Elliott, we are not concerned about “winning a hearing” among the hard-core nationalists, and have no need to pander to their backward prejudices or to repeat what demagogues would have them believe. The duty of revolutionaries is to say that which needs to be said, irrespective of one’s prospects in popularity polls.

The adoption of the slogan of “independence and socialism” by the Quebec left in the 1960s was based on the assumption that the struggle for independence against the Canadian state would spill over into working-class revolution. The higher level of class struggle and leftist/nationalist political activity in Quebec appeared to verify this perspective. In 1970 Pierre Trudeau invoked the draconian “War Measures Act” and sent the Canadian Army in to occupy Montreal. Hundreds of leftists, nationalists and trade unionists were interned on the grounds that they were all part of an “apprehended insurrection” led by the terrorist Front de Libération du Québec. Two years later the jailing of three labor leaders touched off a massive general strike, which for a few days put the unions in control of some towns.

The Canadian (and American) governments were deeply disturbed by such developments, and viewed the prospect of an independent Quebec headed by petty-bourgeois nationalists with alarm. While the *péquistes* (who originated as a split from the Liberal Party) held regularly scheduled talks with the U.S. State Depart-

motion in favor of Bernonville to [Prime Minister] St. Laurent."

—*Ibid.*

In August 1951 the Canadian federal government allowed de Bernonville to leave for Brazil to avoid deportation to France. In Brazil de Bernonville was assisted by the *Bruederschaft*, an organization which helped Nazis get out of Europe. De Bernonville is reported to have eventually met his fate at the hands of the *Bruederschaft*, and was:

"found strangled in his Rio de Janeiro apartment on April 27, 1972, with a gag in his mouth and his hands and feet bound. An autographed portrait of Marshall Pétain hung on the wall. Two weeks later, the *Diario Popular*, a Sao Paulo newspaper, suggested that Barbie was behind the murder since Bernonville threatened to reveal Nazi secrets."

—*Ibid.*

De Bernonville's friends in the Société St. Jean Baptiste and the Parti Québécois may have mourned his passing. We promise not to mourn theirs. In my days as a student activist at l'Université Laval in Quebec City *la Société St. Jean Baptiste* was jokingly referred to as "*la Société St. Jean Fasciste*." The pro-fascist sentiments of *la Société* and the other xenophobes are generally ignored, denied or swept under the rug by pseudo-Trotskyist advocates of "consistent nationalism."

Yet a look at the historic record demonstrates that the nationalists' xenophobic attacks on immigrants (as well as the surviving remnants of the aboriginal peoples) are deeply rooted in the past. Robert Rumilly's official history of the SSJB in Montreal, published in 1975, proudly pointed to the group's role in a massive 1944 petition campaign in Quebec against wartime immigration, as having helped Québécois workers avoid "exploitation" by Jewish refugees! Today it is Asian immigrants, particularly Hong Kong Chinese, that are the targets, but the arguments against the presumed "enemies" of the "Old Stock" Québécois remain the same.

The 'Oppressed' Can Do No Wrong

Pseudo-Trotskyist proponents of the supposed revolutionary character of Québécois nationalism naturally seek to buttress their position by making this dynamic historically retroactive. The LSO document quoted by Elliott mentions the defeat of a bourgeois democratic revolution in Quebec in 1837, but readers of *l'Égalité* might not be aware that this uprising was paralleled by a similar attempt in Ontario (Upper Canada). If the bourgeois revolutionaries of 1837 could unite in joint struggle against the British crown, why dismiss the possibility of joint class struggle between the Québécois and English-Canadian workers today?

The English-Canadian bourgeoisie, the inheritors of British colonial rule, have oppressed the Québécois nation for well over 200 years. Anti-Quebec chauvinism (today expressed as advocacy of "national unity") has been a central pillar of bourgeois reaction since long before Confederation. Forging class unity across national lines in the Canadian state requires that the English-Canadian proletariat unconditionally uphold Quebec's right to separation, and aggressively oppose every

manifestation of discrimination against francophones.

For three decades there has been a very high level of common class struggle (usually sparked by the more militant Quebec workers). The bulk of Quebec workers in manufacturing and mining as well as government services belong to common unions with their English-Canadian counterparts. From the point of view of revolutionaries, this connection is a good thing. It is conceivable that at some point in the future we may be obliged to concede that national antagonisms between workers in Quebec and English Canada require political separation in order to remove the constant tension and squabbling from the political agenda, as Lenin supported the separation of Norway from Sweden in 1905.

Whether or not Marxists advocate independence depends on how the struggle for international working-class unity can best be advanced—within one state or two. If relations become so poisoned that it is necessary to call for separation, we are perfectly prepared to do so, but any such development could only be viewed as a setback—not a revolutionary leap forward. Given the present lack of political class consciousness in the Quebec working class, and the deeply entrenched chauvinism in English Canada, the danger of a nationalist, as opposed to a *class*, solution is very real indeed.

Yet, for the moment, unless the *péquistes* gain assistance from the federalist camp in the form of an outpouring of chauvinist sentiment in English Canada, and/or renewed assaults by anglo-chauvinists on the meager gains acquired by francophones outside Quebec, it seems that the sovereignists will have difficulty winning a majority in their planned referendum on independence. At this time there is certainly no reason for Marxists to support the call for independence.

Canadian Imperialism's Left Defenders

Comrade Elliott's advocacy of Quebec nationalism is not the only conceivable political deviation on the question. Some leftists in both Quebec and English Canada appear alarmed at the prospect that Quebec independence could result in the dismemberment of the remainder of the Canadian state. The Trotskyist League (TL), the Canadian branch of the Spartacist League/U.S., recently wrote that:

"Earlier in the summer Lucien Bouchard mused, in a private speech to the Chamber of Commerce in Ottawa that Western Canada could end up being annexed to the U.S. following Quebec secession from Confederation. Indeed, Quebec independence could well be a prelude to the dismemberment of the entire country. As working-class internationalists we of course have no interest in propping up the current artificial and oppressive Canadian capitalist state. But we recognize that the break-up of English Canada at this time could only strengthen the power of U.S. imperialism against the workers of North America and the world, and would oppose this as contrary to working-class interests."

—*Spartacist Canada*, September/October 1994

We can agree that working-class internationalists "have no interest in propping up the current artificial and oppressive Canadian capitalist state" and moreover that they must support Quebec's right to separate. But it

hardly follows that in the event of Quebec separation Marxists should take up the banner of Canadian unity.

The TL argument recalls the classical centrist mudblings of the Austro-Marxists—lots of pseudo-radical phraseology, with a conclusion that negates the premise. In the mouth of Otto Bauer the argument might have run something like this:

“We of course—of course—have no interest in propping up the artificial and oppressive Austro-Hungarian empire. But we recognize that the dismemberment of the Austro-Hungarian empire could only strengthen the hand of rival, even more oppressive empires such as Czarist Russia or French or British colonialism, and jeopardize the hard-won gains of the Austrian workers’ movement. We therefore must oppose the dismemberment of the Austro-Hungarian empire as contrary to working-class interests.”

We don’t share the Robertsonites’ anxiety over the prospect of Canada’s breakup, nor, in the event of Quebec separation, will we be found in the camp of those attempting to prop up what’s left of the imperialist Canadian state. At the same time we, needless to say, do not imagine some revolutionary dynamic unfolding from such a breakup.

Knowing Friends From Enemies

Yet while there is no reason to champion the Anglo-Canadian junior imperialists against their vastly stronger American sibling, there is no basis for imagining that there is also some “revolutionary dynamic” inherent in Quebec nationalism. The Quebec bourgeoisie remains weaker than the English-Canadian capitalists, but this is a question of degree rather than quality. An independent Quebec would begin life as a minor imperialist power, a Norway, not a Mexico.

It is perhaps worth noting that the same revisionist “optimism” that sees an “objectively” revolutionary dynamic in Quebec’s bourgeois nationalist movement also claimed to detect a “revolutionary” dynamic inherent in the reactionary destruction of the deformed and degenerated workers’ states of the former Soviet bloc. The Soviet Union did not simply “disappear,” as comrade Elliott so euphemistically put it. In August 1991 the “Committee for a Workers’ International” joined Ernest Mandel’s USec in heralding the triumph of Yeltsin and the imperialist-backed forces of counterrevolution arrayed behind the banner of “democracy” as a step forward. Yet the results have been disastrous—a resurgence of reactionary nationalism, precipitous falls in living standards, the collapse of production and social services and the immiseration of tens of millions of people.

The nationalism pushed by the Quebec labor bureaucracy has served to deflect class struggle. The struggle against the *république de banquiers* and toward the *république de travailleurs* must begin with a resolute struggle against nationalist illusions within the labor movement. The talk about conspiracies of Anglo-American capital is essentially a bogeyman with which to cow the Quebec labor movement by dredging up memories of past oppression, while obscuring present class oppression by Quebec capitalists under a torrent of nation-



MONTREAL STAR

Quebec students in 1960s: leftist nationalism in vogue

alist demagoguery. It is quite evident who the major architects of Quebec independence are, and who the major beneficiaries of Parizeau’s *république de banquiers* will be.

The relatively more combative Quebec workers can play a role of immense strategic importance in the North American revolution—but only if they are won to an internationalist perspective. An insurgent Québécois workers movement would not long retain power if the imperialists remained in the saddle in the rest of North America. The fate of the Quebec proletariat is ultimately dependent on the victory of socialist revolution across the North American continent. The future for the Québécois working class consequently lies in uniting with immigrant, Anglo-Canadian and American workers in struggle against their common capitalist oppressors, rather than identifying with their “own” rulers on linguistic and cultural grounds.

Comrade Elliott’s desire to “try to lead the national movement by placing it under the flag of socialism” is not a short cut to social revolution, as he so fondly imagines, but, as the living experience of the Quebec labor movement for the past couple of decades demonstrates, the path to the subordination of the proletariat to the national bourgeoisie. The social emancipation of the Quebec proletariat begins with the recognition that the owners of Quebec Inc. are class enemies, not nationalist allies.

Marc D.
for the IBT

Former SYC Member Joins IBT Getting Russia Right

The following letter was distributed at a Partisan Defense Committee event in New York in December 1994.

December 9, 1994

To the *Workers Vanguard* Editorial Board:

Dear Comrades,

The Spartacist League makes the point in a recent bulletin they published (*Yugoslavia, East Europe, and the Fourth International: The Evolution of Pabloist Liquidationism* by Jan Norden) that one of the historical precedents that led to the rise of Ernest Mandel's revisionism was the inability of the Fourth International to understand the social transformations in post-war Eastern Europe. Yet, more than three years since August 1991, the SL still can't say when the USSR ceased to exist as a workers' state.

The SL writes that Yeltsin carried out a "piecemeal consolidation of a capitalist state" (WV No. 564). In practice that could mean that Russia was 80% a workers' state and 20% a capitalist state, then 40% a workers' state, 60% a capitalist state, etc. This is ridiculous! Revolution and counterrevolution are not piecemeal processes. To say they are goes against the Marxist teachings on the state. Only one class can hold state power at any one time, the working class or the capitalist class. The SL once understood all this: in "The Genesis of Pabloism" it wrote of Ernest Mandel's theory of revolution that "the 'revolution' was implicitly redefined as a metaphysical process enduring continuously and progressing inevitably toward victory, rather than a sharp and necessarily time-limited confrontation over the question of state power, the outcome of which will shape the entire subsequent period" (*Spartacist*, No. 21, Fall 1972).

In the 1960s, Joseph Hansen and the Pabloites said that countries like Algeria had "Workers' and Farmers'" governments presiding over bourgeois states, which would, they implied, gradually be transformed into proletarian dictatorships. In the 1980s the Socialist Workers Party used this phrase to describe Nicaragua. Years earlier, Jim Robertson correctly observed: "we should be clear what is meant by a workers government. It is nothing other than the dictatorship of the proletariat" ("On the United Front," *Young Communist Bulletin* No. 3, 1976). Is the SL now implying that, in a similar fashion, the USSR under Yeltsin was initially a workers' state with a bourgeois government, which was gradually transformed into a bourgeois state at some unknown later point?

If, as the SL says, program generates theory, what program could have generated the theory of "piecemeal" counterrevolution in the USSR? Trotsky would have denounced this as "reformism in reverse." The answer is in August 1991, when counterrevolution really triumphed, the SL abstained from the showdown between Yeltsin and the Stalinist coup makers, i.e., did not



ALEXANDER NATRUSHKIN—REUTERS

Yeltsin's 1991 victory— triumph of counterrevolution

support either side militarily. Their theory tries to cover this up by denying the significance of Yeltsin's victory, but they themselves wrote in their recent international conference document, "The August 1991 events ('coup' and 'countercoup') appear to have been decisive in the direction of developments in the SU," adding, "but only those who are under the sway of capitalist ideology would have been hasty to draw this conclusion" (*Spartacist* No. 47-48, Winter 1992-93). That means that the SL knows it's wrong but refuses to admit it. What makes it so difficult for the SL to admit to being wrong is the fact that one of their main competitors in the workers' movement, the International Bolshevik Tendency, was right in siding with the Stalinist coup in defense of the gains of October, and recognizing its defeat as the death of the Soviet workers' state. Trotsky called the SL's position "prestige politics." Any organization that puts the prestige of its leadership above telling the working class the truth has lost its revolutionary purpose.

What was the basis for this mistake? In the above-cited pamphlet on Yugoslavia and the Fourth International, Jan Norden makes the correct point that, while it was a strategic task for the Trotskyist movement to defend the USSR, its strategic line was world socialist revolution. The idea that the strategic line of the workers' movement should be the defense of the USSR is a Pabloist or Stalinist conception. Yet this implicit two-worldist conception tended to color the SL's view for much of the 1980s. From this they drew the conclusion, as was written in a recent issue of *Spartacist Canada* (No. 100) that what you had was a "bipolar world—polarized between the imperialist powers and the Soviet bloc." That polarization, though, was only a reflection of the general class struggle between workers and capitalists,

and did not replace it. The SL, though, started seeking revolutionary virtue in the Stalinist bureaucracy. This was shown when, for example, they proclaimed themselves the "Yuri Andropov Brigade" and then later wrote a eulogy for Yuri Andropov, butcher of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution, claiming, among other flattering things, that he made "no overt betrayals on behalf of imperialism" (WV No. 348, 17 February 1984).

While correctly recognizing the dual character of the Stalinist bureaucracy, and rejecting the view that it was counterrevolutionary through and through, the SL also in practice rejected Trotsky's analysis that the Stalinist bureaucratic caste was "in essence representative of the tendency toward capitalist restoration" ("Against Pabloist Revisionism," as quoted in Norden's "Yugoslavia and the Fourth International"). The SL's conception of the Stalinist bureaucracy was evolving toward seeing them as subjective communists with an insufficient program. In truth, they were for the most part a bunch of cynical careerists who defended the Soviet Union only to defend their privileges, not out of principled belief in an egalitarian, classless society. The SL's strategy was oriented not so much to the working class, but to the "Reiss faction" within the Stalinist bureaucracy, which they thought would emerge spontaneously. Thus in the DDR (East Germany) they looked to a section of the Stalinist bureaucracy to lead a non-existent "political revolution," raising the slogan of "unity with the SED." When, rather than being a bulwark of Soviet defensism, the Stalinists all over Eastern Europe either participated in, or capitulated without a fight to, capitalist restoration, the SL felt burned. The Stalinists' actions shouldn't have come as a surprise to genuine Marxists; after all, Trotsky himself wrote that "a bourgeois restoration would probably have to clean out fewer people (from the state apparatus) than a revolutionary party" (quoted in *How the Soviet Workers State Was Strangled*). When, in August 1991, a section of the Stalinist bureaucracy finally did rise up in defense of their privileges, the SL abstained.

While I was in the Spartacus Youth Club, I was told by SL members, in response to some of my arguments, that "piecemeal consolidation" of state power was not meant to be a historical prognosis, but merely described what happened. One is reminded of those Trotskyists in the 1950s who had a theoretically incorrect description of Stalinism as being counterrevolutionary through and through. Under changed historical circumstances, they came down on the wrong side of the Cold War. Likewise, under changed historical circumstances, the SL's theoretical error could lead them to start talking about "structural reforms," just like Ernest Mandel. If uncorrected in the long run, bad theory leads to bad program.

Despite what Michel Pablo, Joseph Hansen and Ernest Mandel said, there are no unconscious Marxists. The crisis of mankind is the crisis of revolutionary leadership, but the ICL cannot be the basis for that leadership. As a former member of the Spartacus Youth Club, I now support the Bolshevik Tendency.

For the Rebirth of the Fourth International,
Semeon G.

Ireland...

continued from page 32

The independence struggle was prefigured by the armed rising of Easter 1916, in which an alliance of the Irish Citizen Army, a workers' militia led by the island's foremost Marxist, James Connolly, and the larger Irish Volunteers, led by Padraic Pearse and other nationalists, tried to spark a mass insurrection against British rule. In the immediate sense they failed. But the bloody response of British imperialism, executing the insurgents without mercy, triggered an anti-colonial uprising immediately after the war, and forced British imperialism to accede to a limited form of Irish independence. The Irish bourgeoisie was anxious to get the whole dangerous business over with as soon as possible. After signing a treaty that swore loyalty to the British crown and sanctioned the partition of Ireland into two states—a mainly Catholic neo-colonial "dominion" in the south, and a British-ruled, majority Protestant statelet in the north—the Irish bourgeoisie, armed by the British, fought an even bloodier civil war to suppress the more radical nationalists who refused to accept the treaty. It is in this period that the foundation was laid for the conflict that erupted in the late 1960s and has lasted to the present day.

James Connolly warned that the partition of Ireland would lead to a "carnival of reaction" that would long cripple the Irish working class, North and South. That is basically what has happened over the ensuing seventy-plus years. On both sides of the border, the unresolved national question has acted as a lightning rod diverting class antagonisms into the dead end of national hatred.

The consolidation of a sectarian Protestant statelet in the North meant the systematic oppression of the Catholic population. Catholics were historically discriminated against in employment and housing. Education was segregated, with the state schools reserved for Protestants, and Catholics attending state-subsidized church schools. Electoral districts were gerrymandered to prevent Catholics from gaining control of municipalities, even where they predominated. Pogroms by police and Orange thugs have always been an important instrument for keeping the Catholic minority in line. To this day there is not even a deformed expression of working-class political independence. The Protestant working class largely supports one or another wing of the reactionary Unionists, while the Catholic working class either supports Sinn Fein, the "radical" party of petty-bourgeois Republican nationalism, or the Social Democratic and Labour Party of John Hume, which, despite its name, is not a working-class party at all, but rather the party of the upwardly mobile Catholic middle class in Northern Ireland.

The six-county Orange fortress state has its complement in the clericalist 26-county state in the South. There, Catholic doctrine is written into a constitution that forbids abortion, divorce, and, until recently, even contraception; the Church exerts enormous influence on what in other societies would be regarded as secular affairs. The Labour Party is small by the standard of European bourgeois workers' parties, and when it does get a taste

of office, it is as a junior partner to the hegemonic parties of the Irish bourgeoisie, Fianna Fail and Fine Gael, both derived from Republican organizations of the twenties.

The Revolt Against the Union: 25 Years of War

The revolt against the Northern Ireland "Protestant state for a Protestant people" in the late 1960s was part of the international wave of student and working-class radicalism. The civil rights movement centered on basic democratic questions of equal rights to vote, equal access to jobs, housing, etc. But the radical students who first organized the civil rights campaigns, although vaguely socialist and anti-sectarian in outlook, possessed no clear political program. When the Orange reactionaries used their traditional method to combat "uppity" Catholics—the mobilization of sectarian hatred—the civil rights movement was thus programmatically incapable of making a serious attempt to shatter the Unionist bloc from within by appealing to Protestant workers on the basis of common class interest.

The result was a wave of pogroms against Catholic working class ghettos, most notably the "Battle of the Bogside" in 1969, in which police systematically attacked the main Catholic area of Derry, and its residents fought back with great courage. In response, the Labour government of Harold Wilson sent British troops onto the streets of Derry and Belfast to restore "order" and put the lid firmly back on. After a short period in which the Catholic population greeted the British troops as saviors, the inevitable clashes between soldiers and the Catholic working-class led to the re-emergence of traditional Republicanism as the only force that seemed able to defend the Catholic population against the state and the murderous Orange pogromists.

The old, "Official" IRA had in the preceding years come under the ideological influence of the British Communist Party, and thus de-emphasized armed struggle in favor of a more standard Stalinist reformism. Hence, when Belfast's Falls Road Catholic ghetto came under attack in 1969, the "Officials" were unprepared—and nowhere to be found. (Many walls in the Falls Road bore the legend, "IRA = I Ran Away.") As a result of this humiliating failure, the "Officials" were soon eclipsed by the Provisional IRA, which had split in August 1969 from the parent organization in opposition to the latter's new-found "Marxism." Pledged to uphold the historic nationalist and "physical force" traditions of Irish Republicanism, the Provisionals became the dominant group among radical Catholics in Northern Ireland for the next quarter century.

Twenty-five years of "armed struggle" have proved that, while British imperialism has been unable to defeat the nationalists, the IRA cannot defeat the British either. Throughout this period, the Northern Ireland statelet has been unstable. In 1971, the province's prime minister, Brian Faulkner, abridged the right of *habeas corpus* and introduced the hated policy of internment, under which individuals could be imprisoned without trial merely for having been accused of Republican activity. Amidst an international outcry after British troops shot fourteen civil rights marchers dead on "Bloody Sunday"

in January 1972, the Protestant-sectarian administration that had governed the province for half a century was abolished, and replaced by direct rule from London. An attempt to restore home rule in Northern Ireland on the basis of "power sharing" between Protestants and Catholics, called the Sunningdale Agreement, was sabotaged in 1974 by a reactionary general strike of Protestant workers.

In 1981, repression against the IRA backfired badly. Republican prisoners in Belfast went on hunger strike in response to an attempt by Margaret Thatcher to deprive them of their political prisoner status and reduce them to "common criminals." The "Iron Lady" sat with arms folded while ten IRA prisoners died. The result of her policy, echoing the executions of 1916, was to provoke a huge outpouring of support for the prisoners. The leader of the hunger strikers (and the first to die), IRA volunteer Bobby Sands, was elected shortly before his death to the British parliament at Westminster in a by-election. Other hunger strikers were elected to the Dail (Republic of Ireland parliament). This dramatic demonstration of massive sympathy for Republican aims (if not always their methods) among the Catholic population compelled the British government to seek a way out of the Northern Ireland impasse.

Their first attempt was the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985. Thatcher signed this treaty with the rabidly anti-Republican Fine Gael government of Garrett Fitzgerald; the intention was to increase co-operation between London and Dublin in suppressing "terrorism." A permanent body, the Anglo-Irish Conference, was set up for this purpose. But it was basically ineffective. It became increasingly clear in the late 1980s and early 1990s that, in order to find any kind of "solution" to the continuing conflict, the British government would have to find some way of conducting discussions with the Republican movement itself.

The opportunity for this came with the new international situation arising from the collapse of the Stalinist regimes. Deprived of a major source of material and moral support by the fall of the USSR, petty-bourgeois guerrilla movements in various hot spots around the world, from the Middle East to South Africa to Central America, signed "peace" deals with their oppressors in return for a semblance of power. The force of this example, combined with considerable war weariness among the Catholic population, put enormous pressure on the IRA leadership to seek a "solution" to the conflict. The result is the current highly unstable "peace process."

Changes in the Political Landscape

The political situation in the Irish Republic has undergone considerable change in recent years. The hold of the Catholic Church and the reactionary nationalist bourgeois parties, Fianna Fail and Fine Gael, has been considerably weakened. The high birth rate of Catholic Ireland, and the decline of emigration—a major safety valve, which in the past meant Ireland's "surplus" youth generally went abroad—has led to an increasingly young population. Over 50 percent is under the age of 25. Irish youth look enviously at the greater rights en-

joyed by their counterparts in other European countries; the domination of Irish cultural life by medieval clerics has become more and more intolerable. This has caused major political convulsions: the growth in support for the reformist Labour Party at the expense of the traditional Irish bourgeois parties, which, in turn, led to the election of a well-known Irish social democrat and feminist, Mary Robinson, as President of the Republic in 1990. (Although the position is largely ceremonial, it has great symbolic significance.) Then there was the election of November 1992, in which Labour doubled its representation in the Dail, and became a major component of the government coalition.

Struggles against the Irish Republic's oppression of women have played a major role in changing the political climate in the country. The anger of young Ireland exploded in 1992 when the Irish Attorney General, Harry Whelehan, ran to the Irish courts to get an injunction to stop a 14-year-old rape victim from traveling to England to get an abortion. This abomination unleashed a wave of anger and protest throughout Ireland, so much so that the Supreme Court was forced to overturn the lower court's ruling and allow the victim to travel. This, the famous "X case," shook the Irish clerical state to the core. In the sequel, a referendum upheld the right to travel abroad for abortion and the right to information about abortion services abroad, though abortion is still illegal in Ireland. But, by a combination of rulings from the European Courts and protests in the street, the Irish bourgeois state has been forced to legalize homosexuality and make contraceptives broadly available. A referendum on divorce, also illegal in Ireland, is probably inevitable in the near future.

It was the brazen attempt last autumn of Fianna Fail to appoint Harry Whelehan, the tormentor of "X," as President of the Irish Supreme Court, that propelled the Tanaiste (deputy prime minister), Dick Spring, and his Labour TDs (members of parliament) out of the coalition. This defection brought down Albert Reynolds' government right in the middle of his "peace process."

The Irish Labour Party, while acting as the main political magnet for the aspirations of youth, has nevertheless been instrumental in holding them back, regularly participating in coalitions with the very same bourgeois parties that have enforced Catholic doctrine for decades. Governments containing Labour ministers have engaged in mass layoffs and privatizations of state industries. After bringing about the collapse of the Reynolds coalition, Spring took his party into yet another coalition, this time with the more blatantly reactionary Fine Gael party. Joining him in this new coalition was Ireland's other smaller reformist party, the so-called Democratic Left, a product of the evolution toward Stalinism, and now Eurocommunism, of the old "Official" IRA. Thus the so-called left parties in Ireland display a complete lack, even in a reformist sense, of any impulse to stand up for the independent class interests of Irish workers.

The social and political landscape of the North has also altered dramatically over the past twenty years. Old patterns of anti-Catholic discrimination have been partly broken down as sectors that were once reserved

for Protestants have been opened up. The new and increasingly assertive Catholic middle class is composed of shop owners, professionals and public-sector bureaucrats. The situation of the Protestant working class has worsened as the province's industrial sector has contracted. This, combined with Britain's desire to extricate itself, has partially eroded confidence in the future of Unionism. While the Loyalists' "hard men" retain a considerable base, particularly among sections of the traditional Protestant petty-bourgeoisie threatened by competition from Catholics, in recent years there have been signs that Loyalist prejudice may be losing its grip on the Protestant working class. On several occasions Protestant workers have demonstrated against sectarian attacks on Catholics. The most famous incident occurred last year when shop stewards at the Harland and Wolff shipyard (traditionally a bastion of Orange bigotry) walked out to protest the murder of a Catholic welder by the Ulster Volunteer Force. Events like this, isolated as they are, demonstrate the possibility of transcending the sectarian divide and developing class-based, rather than communal, politics in Northern Ireland.

National and Social Questions

The starting point for Marxists in dealing with Ireland has to be unconditional opposition to British imperialist intervention. We are for the immediate, unconditional withdrawal of British troops from Northern Ireland. Marxists stand for the military defense of the IRA in conflicts with the British and NI state forces, and we oppose criminal prosecution and imprisonment of Re-

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Unionist hardliners burn 'peace process' document

publicans by the imperialists and their allies. Moreover, the existing order in Northern Ireland, with its marginal privileges for Protestants and systematic discrimination and repression of Catholics, is something that the workers' movement is obliged to struggle against by all possible means. We are unconditionally opposed to the whole apparatus of Loyalist terror: the Royal Ulster Constabulary, the Royal Irish Regiment, the Loyalist paramilitary murder gangs. But this is only the beginning of wisdom. The question is: what program can lead a united working class to smash the entire state regime and take power in its own name?

The national question in Ireland remains a major obstacle to class struggle and social progress. While there has been a partial self-determination of Irish Catholics in the South, particularly since the twenty-six counties became a republic after World War II, the national conflict in the North still has a major impact on Irish politics. The Northern conflict is not, as Republicans and their guilty liberal apologists on the left pretend, a simple one of an oppressed colonial people fighting against an imperialist occupation. There is a major component of that, to be sure. But the existence of one million Protestants who comprise 60 percent of the population of the six counties means that any attempt to unite the island forcibly will inevitably ignite a sectarian conflict of Bosnian proportions.

The situation is one of *interpenetrated peoples*: two peoples living together on the same piece of land. Any attempt by one or the other of the peoples to exercise its right to self-determination, that is, to create its own political state, will necessarily lead either to forced population transfers ("ethnic cleansing"), or conquest and subjugation.

The Protestants are not actually a fully developed nation. Rather, they are a half-formed quasi-national grouping, whose political consciousness and identity exists as if in a time warp: they still think they are fighting the battles of the Reformation and the "Glorious Revolution" of seventeenth-century England. The ideology of Loyalism is a grotesque anachronism. But it has not been abandoned by the Protestant population. Marxists must frame their demands on the national question to undermine this consciousness, a product of the "car-

nival of reaction" of which Connolly spoke, and not drive the Protestant working class into the arms of the Paisleyites (or worse) by echoing the Republicans' demand for "self-determination of the Irish people as a whole." There is no such thing as "the Irish people as a whole;" the Protestants do not feel themselves to be part of any such people. If there is to be any hope of uniting Catholic and Protestant working classes, it cannot be demanded of the Protestants that they accept Catholic nationalist aims as a condition for participating in common struggle. While opposing the imperialist presence, Marxists must also oppose the reunification of Ireland against the wishes of the Protestants.

The aim of the IRA/Sinn Fein is the incorporation of the six counties into the existing Irish Republic. The Republicans know that the conflict in Ireland is extremely expensive for the British ruling class, whose power in the world has been declining for most of this century. They aim to maneuver the British into abandoning the Protestants, if necessary over a period of years. It is possible they will succeed in the long term; the British ruling class is not keen on continuing the war indefinitely. The then British Northern Ireland Secretary, Peter Brooke, stated the position of the bulk of the British bourgeoisie quite baldly in a rather sensational speech in 1991. He said:

"in no event will Northern Ireland or any part of it cease to be part of the United Kingdom without the consent of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland. We stand firmly by that solemn declaration and assurance. But in so doing we acknowledge that there is another view, strongly held by the nationalist minority within Northern Ireland. That is the aspiration to a United Ireland, not simply to the Republic of Ireland which exists today, but to a 32-county state covering all the territory of the island, and worthy in their view of the support of all the Irish people. It is possible to take either view with integrity. It is acceptable to uphold the one or advocate the other by all legitimate peaceful and democratic means....

"The obstacle to the development of a new and more inclusive Irish identity if people want this for themselves is not to be found in Great Britain. Partition... is an acknowledgment of reality, not an assertion of national self-interest.

"In Northern Ireland it is not the aspiration to a sovereign united Ireland against which we set our face, but its violent expression.... The British Government has no selfish strategic or economic interest in Northern Ireland: our role is to help, enable and encourage."

—quoted in Brendan O'Brien, *The Long War: The IRA and Sinn Fein 1985 to Today*, 1993

This speech is obviously full of cant, coming from an Anglo-Irish aristocrat representing a ruling class responsible for countless acts of violence against the Irish people. But it was a startling statement nevertheless, designed to encourage the IRA into talks. The "evenhandedness" in Brooke's speech, its condemnation of "violence and coercion" from either community, was seen by sophisticated Republican strategists as a broad hint that, if the IRA embraced constitutional politics, Britain might in some future situation be prepared to abandon the Loyalists. It thus drove the Paisleyites into a frenzy.

Similar language is used in the Downing Street Dec-

laration of December 1993; the Anglo-Irish "framework document" of February 1995 attempts to put this into practice. Its centerpiece is a call for the setting up of a new all-Ireland body, with components from the Dail and a new "power sharing" assembly in the North, with "meaningful functions at executive level" (i.e., the power to give orders) particularly over economic questions. Although such a body would not have control over the repressive apparatus of the NI state, there is a rider in the document that:

"It would also be open to the North-South body to recommend to the respective administrations and legislatures for their consideration that new functions should be designated to be discharged or overseen by that body; and to recommend that matters already designated should be moved on the scale between consultation, harmonisation and executive action."

—Anglo-Irish framework document,
Times (London), 23 February

The British government undertakes to amend or replace the 1920 Government of Ireland Act, which incorporates NI into the "United Kingdom," and the Irish government in turn undertakes to amend its constitution, in particular articles 2 and 3, which contain a territorial claim to the North.

Actually the main impact of these proposals would be to create, over a period of time, a "harmonized" all-Ireland capital market. The intent appears to be to use "market forces" to drive the two parts of Ireland closer together. Economic "harmonization" would undoubtedly create the demand from business for a common currency at some point. It could also have disastrous effects on the North's aging industries. Northern Ireland, unlike other regions of the "United Kingdom," receives subsidies to its industries from Westminster that in the past were large enough to shelter the province from the hurricane of mass sackings, cuts, privatization and deregulation that has swept through Great Britain over the last decade and a half. The Tories did not do this for altruistic reasons; they did it to avoid pouring petrol onto smouldering tinder. To the Tories, the "harmonization" of an all-Ireland market is (they no doubt hope) a means of gradually divesting themselves of an embarrassing and expensive problem handed down to them by previous generations of their class.

But this is a dangerous game. It may lead to a new communal war if the Protestants think they are being short-changed by the British. History suggests that the Protestants will fight if they are confronted with incorporation into the South. Despite all the short-term illusions about the "peace process," which are strong in both communities, attempts to share out the pie more "equally" within the framework of capitalism mean that the Protestant workers, who, despite their privileges, have one of the worst standards of living in Europe, will suffer. And so the "peace process," far from leading to a new era of harmony between Protestant and Catholic, brings with it the threat of aggravated communal hatred and war.

While the bulk of the British ruling class is committed to the "peace process," there is also a vociferous minority, with close links to the Loyalists, who seek to sabotage

it by provoking Republicans into breaking their ceasefire. This is shown by the noisy campaign of the right-wing media to free one of only two British soldiers ever convicted of murdering a Catholic (a teenage girl). It would also appear to have been a factor in the riot instigated by British fascists at the Dublin England-Ireland football game in February.

The Left and the 'Peace Process'

No faction of the IRA or Sinn Fein leadership stands for socialism. The most left-wing among them are social democrats who offer "reunification" as a panacea for all social ills. In this they are tailed by most of the British and Irish "far left," who accuse the IRA of having "sold out" for entering into the "peace process." The British and Irish sections of the League for a Revolutionary Communist International (LRCI), Workers Power and the Irish Workers Group, respectively, tend to focus their attack on the IRA and Sinn Fein for "retreating" from their position of forcible reunification of Ireland. Thus they write:

"The IRA has called off its 23 year long guerrilla struggle without forcing the British army to leave Ireland and without achieving national self-determination for the Irish people or the revolutionary destruction of Protestant privilege enshrined in the Orange state. Their endorsement of the idea that a peaceful road to unity exists through negotiations with the British state, the Southern bourgeoisie and the Unionists marks an historic betrayal of Irish revolutionary democracy by Sinn Fein and the IRA...."

"The IRA have sanctioned the first steps on a road that leads to complete capitulation before the oppressor and will in time see them take responsibility for imposing bourgeois order on their supporters. The IRA have signalled in their declaration that the revolutionary, anti-imperialist threat from petit bourgeois nationalism is at an end.

"Ideologically and politically, the possibility of a betrayal of this nature has always been lodged in the confused, utopian, petit bourgeois programme of Sinn Fein and the IRA."

—"After the IRA ceasefire," LRCI statement, in
Workers Power, October 1994

The IRA's program is a lot worse than merely "confused" and "utopian." It is flatly counterposed to the interests of the working class; it advocates the creation of an all-Ireland bourgeois state, irrespective of the wishes of the Protestant minority on the island. Perhaps Workers Power (WP) thinks the programs of the Hindu and Muslim communalists who carried out the bloody partition of India, killing many thousands of the "wrong" nationality in the process, were "confused" and "utopian." After all, many of these were "anti-imperialists" too. Marxists defend bourgeois and petty-bourgeois nationalists against imperialism in situations of colonial oppression, but without giving them *one iota* of political support. WP's strictures about the IRA's "historic betrayal" of "revolutionary democracy" signify in reality that the only thing the IRA has "betrayed" is WP's illusions in petty-bourgeois nationalism.

Workers Power tries to formulate a program of transitional demands to address the question of how to break



DER SPIEGEL

Sinn Fein leader Gerry Adams

Protestant workers from Loyalism. The LRCI statement calls for “jobs for all, decent housing and social services, education and recreation,” and “building organs of workers’ democracy in struggle, workers’ control of the economy and the fight for a workers’ government.” They formulate a series of demands against the twenty-six-county clerical state, as well as the Protestant bigots:

“Total separation of Church and State. The Church must be separated from the Constitution, the universities, schools, hospitals and social services. Not a penny of state finance to any Church. For free and legal contraception and abortion on demand. For free divorce on the consent of one partner.”

This is all completely supportable, indeed obligatory for Marxists. But WP’s position of forcible reunification (and denouncing Sinn Féin as “betrayers” for in reality seeking a more roundabout way of getting to the same goal) contradicts the whole purpose of transitional demands. Transitional demands in the context of a divided working class are a means of enabling the class to transcend its national divisions and make clear to *all* sections that they have *nothing to fear* by uniting with their class brothers and sisters of other nationalities or communities in the fight for proletarian state power. The demand for forcible reunification is the opposite. It is an *anti-democratic* demand that can only drive a stake into any prospect of working-class unity. It proposes, as a condition of working-class struggle, that one section of the working class abandon its communal identity and embrace the aspirations of the other community—which it has historically seen as the enemy. A “united Irish workers’ republic,” which WP calls for, would indeed be the optimal solution. But it cannot and should not be imposed upon the Protestant working class.

The stance of rejectionism and “hard” nationalism, attacking the Republicans for “betraying” their own program, is by no means confined to Workers Power. The self-styled “orthodox Trotskyists” of the International Communist League (Spartacist League of Britain and Dublin Spartacist Group, respectively), when they are not engaging in impotently brutal neo-Healyite polemics against their more conventional centrist/refor-

mist opponents (“pimps for imperialism” seems to be a favorite epithet), actually tail after this “ultra-rejectionist” sentiment. For instance, an article written at the time of the Major/Reynolds Downing Street summit contains the following blood-curdling warning:

“Sections of the bourgeoisies in London and Dublin, together with their Labour and social-democratic lackeys, have seized upon the widespread fear, revulsion and despair over sectarian violence as an opportunity to foist an imperialist-imposed ‘peace’ deal on Northern Ireland. Any imperialist ‘deal’ will be bloody and brutal and will necessarily be at the expense of the oppressed Catholic minority. And it would not do any good for working-class Protestants either.”

—*Workers Hammer*, November/December 1993, emphasis in original

Workers Hammer denounces the IRA ceasefire with headlines like “IRA/Sinn Féin opt for imperialist ‘peace’ fraud” (September/October 1994) and generally posture as the most intransigent opponents of the ceasefire. It would be almost impossible to tell from the SL’s press of today that it was from their organization (in its healthier days) that the International Bolshevik Tendency derived its approach to the question of interpenetrated peoples in general, and to the Irish question in particular. Of course Marxists oppose imperialism’s “peace” plans just as much as we oppose their wars; the aim of all such projects is to further the interests of imperialism. But to say that whatever “settlement” is eventually cooked up will “necessarily be at the expense of the oppressed Catholic minority” is not “necessarily” true. It could be at the expense of the Protestants. The bulk of the British bourgeoisie regards the Protestants as a liability, and would be quite happy to wash its hands of them, and even allow the terms of oppression to be reversed, provided this does not create a Bosnia on Britain’s doorstep. This is basically what the Loyalists are screaming about. In the days when James Robertson’s international Spartacist tendency (now the International Communist League [ICL]) could still think politically, such a “solution” was regarded as quite likely. Indeed it has already been attempted once. Reuben Samuels, speaking of the Unionist general strike of 1974, observed:

“The 1973 [sic: 1974 in fact] Ulster general strike, a 14-day general strike that totally shut down Northern Ireland, demonstrated that the social power and the social weight of the proletariat is there, even if in this particular case it was used for reactionary ends. It was also an entirely anti-British strike. The British had set up the Council of Ireland, which was a scheme for a peaceful, if forcible (through economic pressure) reunifying of Ireland and dumping Northern Ireland, which has become a liability for British imperialism”

—*Spartacist* No. 24, Autumn 1977

What has changed—the political situation in Ireland or the SL? We see no fundamental change in the former, and the Robertsonites have given no indication that they do, either. Could it be that these ever-so-steadfast opponents of Green nationalism, now in a period of organizational and political senility, are getting a little green around the edges?

Such opportunist deviations show the SL its future. Like the members of Gerry Healy’s Workers Revolution-

ary Party, once the bureaucratic shell bursts, for much of their deeply cynical cadre, there will not be much "Trotskyism" left. A straw in the wind is the fusion of a couple of leading ICL cadre in Canada with the fairly run-of-the-mill centrists of the (ex-Healyite) Workers International League/Leninist Trotskyist Tendency, who, of course, share the mainstream centrist affinity for tailing nationalism, in Ireland and elsewhere. It is worth recalling that the rightist trajectory of the split led by Alan Thornett in the mid-1970s from the Healyites was an *anticipation* of what happened to the rest of the WRP when the organization finally blew up.

Marxism and the National Question in Ireland

The IRA's current dilemmas—as to what mix of "armalite and the ballot box" is appropriate, or whether or not to give up the gun altogether—are not our dilemmas. Because we do not share the IRA's aims to begin with, we do not dispense tactical advice on how best to accomplish them. We oppose their indefensible and criminal attacks on civilians, while we defend their attacks on the repressive forces of the state. But we are opposed to their whole bankrupt nationalist program, which in the end amounts to the creation of a unified bourgeois state under the tricolor flag.

The cessation of sectarian killings for the time being by both Loyalist paramilitaries and the IRA appears to have improved the possibilities for unity between Protestant and Catholic workers around class questions. But class struggle could easily be submerged beneath a new wave of nationalism.

Only a revolutionary program derived from Lenin's method of addressing the intricate national questions in the former Czarist empire can provide the means for resolving the conflicting communal/national aspirations of the two peoples of Ireland. Such a solution requires a concrete transitional program, with demands directed at both economic and national questions. For instance, the elementary demand for equal access to employment and housing for Catholics in the North, if carried out in the framework of accepting the capitalist status quo, could give Unionist bigots an opportunity to paint it as a demand that the Protestant workers take a cut in their slice of a shrinking pie. This would only fan the flames of communal antagonism. A revolutionary organization has to be committed to the fight for *more* for the working people of *both* communities—a massive program of public works to eliminate unemployment and rebuild the infrastructure, jobs for all through work-sharing at full pay within the context of an end to discrimination.

Linked to this is the need to prevent a new epidemic of sectarian killings. The working class, Protestant and Catholic, must form its own integrated defense guards to protect the workers' movement against Loyalist gangs, and any extremist Republicans who would stoop to sectarian murder, to derail an integrated working-class struggle. Each unit would have to contain *both* Protestants and Catholics to make its non-sectarian character clear to all, and would have the responsibility of defending both communities against sectarian attack. Such formations would also have a key role in combat-

ing British imperialist attacks on the workers' movement. An integrated workers' militia would naturally take a leading role in any mass insurrection against British imperialism and Orange/Green capitalism. Such a development could only come about through the successful intervention and growth of a revolutionary Marxist party, sinking roots deep into the proletariat of both communities.

Authentic Trotskyists, while fighting uncompromisingly against British colonial rule in the six counties, seek to defend the democratic rights of both communities. Our attitude is derived from the earlier period of the international Spartacist tendency, when it was a healthy revolutionary Marxist organization:

"Ireland, like other situations of interpenetrated peoples as in the Middle East and Cyprus, is a striking confirmation of the Trotskyist theory of permanent revolution. The inevitable conclusion is that while revolutionists must oppose all aspects of national oppression, they must also recognise that the conflicting claims of interpenetrated peoples can only be equitably resolved in the framework of a workers state. We struggle for an Irish workers republic as part of a socialist federation of the British Isles. While the establishment of a united workers state of the whole island may be preferable, the above demand is algebraic, leaving open the question of where the Protestants fall. This recognises that the nature of the Protestant community has not yet been determined in history. As such, it is counterposed to calls for a 'united workers republic' or for a 'united socialist Ireland' (where this demand is not simply an expression for left/nationalist or Stalinist two-stage theories). Placing the demand in the context of a socialist federation has the additional advantage of highlighting the essential relationship of the proletarian revolution in the whole area and the virtual impossibility of the resolution of the Irish question on a working-class basis outside this framework. This, and the strong representation of Irish workers in the working class in Britain, points to the demand for a British Isles-wide trade-union federation as a method of promoting joint struggle and cutting across the divisions in the working class in Ireland."

— "Theses on Ireland," *Spartacist*, No. 24, Autumn 1977

This perspective could be realized in various ways. The early Soviet state under Lenin and Trotsky used a variety of methods of giving expression to the right of small nations and semi-national groupings, from fully fledged republics to autonomous regions to tiny *oblasts* (these were later emptied of their democratic content with the bureaucratic degeneration of the Soviet state). There could be a loose confederation between the different communities, with redrawn borders. Or even a unitary workers' state, if it comes about by consent. But such things can only be solved democratically by negotiations between workers' representatives of the two communities.

A permanent solution to the tangled national conflicts that centuries of British imperialist rule have bequeathed to Ireland can only be achieved through the revolutionary overthrow of both British imperialism and the Orange and Green bourgeoisies, and the creation of a federation of revolutionary workers' states in the British Isles, in the broader context of an all-European struggle for socialism. ■

An End to the Troubles?

Irish 'Peace Process'

LEONARD FREED—MAGNUM



Twenty-five years of guerrilla war and repression appeared to cease in Northern Ireland at the end of last summer. In August 1994, the leadership of the Provisional Irish Republican Army (IRA) declared a "complete cessation of violence" against the British imperialist state. Two months later, the leadership of the Protestant Loyalist paramilitary groups, the Combined Loyalist Military Command, declared its own indefinite ceasefire, to last as long as the IRA refrained from hostilities.

These events, unthinkable just a short time ago, were the result of years of maneuvering between the British government and the IRA. Talks between Gerry Adams, President of Sinn Fein, and John Hume, the leader of the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) became the catalyst for a series of maneuvers by the British government and the government of the Irish Republic, aimed at coaxing the IRA into abandoning the armed struggle in return for a place at the negotiating table. This in turn gave birth to the Downing Street declaration of late 1993, signed by British Prime Minister John Major and then Irish Taoiseach (Prime Minister) Albert Reynolds, in which the struggle for a united Ireland was declared to be a "legitimate political goal." It also repeated an earlier statement of the British minister for Northern Ireland, Peter Brooke, that Britain has "no selfish strategic, or

economic interest in Northern Ireland."

Since Northern Ireland is officially designated as an integral part of the "United Kingdom," this is quite a startling admission. The British ruling class apparently now regards the sectarian mini-state, which it was instrumental in creating in the early 1920s, as a liability. The obsolescence and decay of the industries—shipbuilding, textiles and engineering—that were once strategic to the British economy, and the growth of investment from other European Union states, as well as the U.S. and Japan, in the Irish Republic, have made Northern Ireland much less important to British imperialism. With the end of the Cold War, the province also lost much of its military value as a naval outpost. Thus, the main thing keeping Britain in Northern Ireland at present is the refusal of its million and a half Protestants to join the Irish Republic, and the fear of a sectarian bloodbath if British troops were to withdraw.

The current conflict in Northern Ireland began in 1969, with the defeat of the civil rights movement of the Catholic minority. But it has its roots in more than half a century of systematic discrimination and vicious sectarian repression against the Catholic population of the province. Northern Ireland was created as a result of a treaty viewed by the Irish Catholic bourgeoisie as a way to end the War of Independence that erupted in 1918.

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