

# **Workers ACTION**

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No.4 – October 1998 – Price £1

## **Free market misery**

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**No.4 - September 1998**

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***Workers Action* welcomes  
correspondence and  
articles for publication**

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# Capitalism brings chaos to Russia

**R**ussia is in economic meltdown, its currency in freefall. Although still nominally in power, Boris Yeltsin is a lame duck president whose political obituary has already been written. The immediate cause of the collapse is a crisis of confidence: on August 13, currency speculator George Soros wrote his now infamous letter to the *Financial Times* arguing that the rouble was overvalued. In the context of growing fear among investors and speculators that the 'emerging markets' are a bad risk, Soros's letter was like a lighted match to petrol.

However, the fundamental cause is a crisis of liquidity. Russia cannot pay its bills. This is because of the fall in the price of oil, over-borrowing from foreign banks, and the lack of a real tax base. An all-powerful economic elite of gangsters and former state bureaucrats controls the oil and gas industries, the media, banking and finance, and much more. It pays no tax and does not see why it should. Journalists who have asked too many questions about its unorthodox business methods have paid with their lives. In the memorable description of one Russian political commentator, the new bosses are 'indulging in a carnal orgy of self-enrichment at the expense of the state budget and state property without any remorse or excuse'.

The political agreement reached on September 11, when the Duma voted to accept Yevgeny Primakov as prime minister, is designed to keep the same fingers in the till. Previously a strong president committed to fast-track free-market reforms was seen as an asset, so the 'bandit capitalists' supported Yeltsin's semi-autocratic rule. Now that the crisis threatens to cut their profits and undermine their control of vital industries they are looking to some form of state intervention to save their necks. Yeltsin has become a liability so some of the sweeping presidential powers acquired after his coup against parliament in 1993 are being withdrawn.

But forget any notion of a return to the days of the Soviet Union — Primakov has assured Western governments and financial institutions that market reforms are essential and that Russia remains part of the world economy. His government will attempt to stabilise and consolidate Russian capitalism by introducing a more regulatory regime. Having kick-started capitalism, the gangsters will be encouraged to give up organised crime and become respectable businessmen. No one should be deceived by the entry of Communist Party members into government. These 'left patriots' just want a piece of the action. The policies they are demanding are a change in tack, not a retreat from the market.

At first, the crisis only affected the small number of Russians with bank accounts. Most Russians would not have been unduly concerned by Visa's refusal to authorise payments for purchases made with credit cards issued by Russian banks. The long-term implications, however, are horrendous. Devaluation of the rouble has wiped out savings and made imported goods much more expensive. Already millions of miners, teachers and factory workers have gone for months without pay, or have only been paid in kind. They have survived by bartering and growing their own vegetables. The new head of the central bank has announced plans to increase the money supply in order to pay back wages, but this will inevitably boost inflation. The danger is that, without a strong democratic socialist movement, the disappointment and bitterness of millions may be harnessed behind the extreme right wing, and directed towards looking for scapegoats — in particular, Jews, national minorities and foreigners.

What will be the effects outside Russia? Some say that the relative unimportance of the Russian economy — which constitutes only one per cent of the global economy — and the small banking sector mean that the crisis can be contained. On the other hand, the Russian government and private firms owe between them \$194 billion to overseas creditors and the government says that it will not service \$40 billion worth of bonds. The threat of a wide-scale default has been enough to set stock markets around the world plunging, especially in Latin America where the withdrawal of funds by nervous investors has aggravated the situation. A mountain of bad debt will cause Western banks to tighten their belts and will deepen the recessionary tendencies already present in the European and US economies.

Russian workers are paying a terrible price for the degeneration and subsequent demise of the workers' state. Many now regret the passing of the Soviet Union, which at least guaranteed them jobs, education, healthcare and the basic necessities of life. But disenchantment with capitalism coupled with a naive belief that the Communist Party will 'turn back the clock', is not enough. The Russian working class has to transform its isolated, defensive actions (usually in protest at not being paid) into a generalised response to this crisis, demanding redistribution of wealth through the expropriation of the gangster millionaires, if only to prevent starvation this winter.

## Labour NEC election

# Vote for the left slate

**L**abour Party members have until September 25 to vote in the elections to the National Executive Committee.

Because of changes pushed through by Blair at last year's conference, MPs are no longer eligible to stand for election to the Constituency Section, the only part of the NEC that is directly elected by the members and where, in the past, Campaign Group MPs could hope to win seats. Last year, members had the audacity to elect Dennis Skinner, Diane Abbott and Ken Livingstone in preference to Peter Mandelson!

For the first election under the new rules, a joint left/centre slate of six candidates has been formed called the Grassroots Alliance. This slate is far from perfect. It was cobbled together behind the scenes without an open political debate. As well as the Campaign Group and Tribune, it includes the Labour Reform group — represented by one candidate, Andy Howell. We believe that the Campaign Group is looking in the wrong direction by linking up with Labour Reform, whose only obvious difference with the Blair leadership is on the question of party democracy. Instead of engaging in electoral manoeuvres, the Campaign Group should concentrate on mobilising Labour and trade union activists around a set of key demands.

However, there is extensive support for the Grassroots Alliance and the election of its candidates would deal a blow to the modernisers' project. It would be particularly pleasing to see the election of Liz Davies, whom the leadership de-selected as the parliamentary candidate for Leeds North East constituency.

**In the NEC elections we call for a vote for Liz Davies, Pete Williams, Christine Shawcross, Cathy Jamieson and Mark Sisson, while Andy Howell's probably should not be elected.**

**WA**

# Britain heads into recession

by Richard Price

Labour came into office last year without its traditional promises to improve the position of workers. Instead, Gordon Brown promised financial prudence, low inflation, wage restraint and an end to 'boom and bust'. There was going to be none of the old favouritism towards the unions, and no increases in taxation for the rich. The Iron Chancellor was going to be even handed to all sections of society in the drive for modernisation and efficiency. Key decisions about the economy would be handed over to the impartial Bank of England, which would not allow political considerations to get in the way of looking after the national interest. Labour's spin doctors worked overtime to create the image of a man at home with the business community, yet more careful with the public's money. Less than 18 months on, the image is already tarnished. Britain is slipping into a good, old fashioned recession, while top managers and executives fill their boots in the time-honoured way.

Almost every important economic indicator is pointing in the same direction. There is a high degree of consensus among analysts on the likely prospects over the next 18 months, and while they differ on the possible courses of action — whether interest rates should be raised, what to do about public spending, etc — all are agreed that it is wage earners who should take the strain. The Bank of England's Monetary Policy Committee openly advocates more unemployment to dampen down wage rises: 'Unemployment has reached a level likely to prove incompatible with price stability . . . As demand growth slows, unemployment is likely to rise, reducing cost pressures in the labour market.'

Statistics released in the past two months show that:

- ⇒ jobs in manufacturing are being lost at the fastest rate for over five years;
- ⇒ 12,000 engineering jobs were lost in the first quarter of the year;
- ⇒ industrial output fell by 1.2 per cent and manufacturing output by 0.4 per cent in May;
- ⇒ exports are declining quicker than at any time since 1980;
- ⇒ the rate of growth of the gross domestic product, 3.0 per cent at the beginning of the year, has fallen to 2.4 per cent, and is projected to

- ⇒ fall to 0.8 per cent next year;
- ⇒ there has been the first decline in domestic manufacturing orders since 1992;
- ⇒ high street sales fell in June for the first time in three years, down 1.1 per cent on May;
- ⇒ unemployment rose in May and June for the first time in two years, although the numbers of those claiming benefit fell by 26,000 in July.

While these figures don't add up to a full-scale slump, there is widespread agreement among economists, backed up by surveys of business confidence, that they indicate recession and a generalised slowing down of the economy. The month of July saw the publication of one after another pessimistic report. The Westminster Business School saw manufacturing slipping into recession, with business failures up by a quarter. The Midlands Chamber of Commerce reported West Midlands manufacturing industry sharply hit, while business confidence and manufacturing orders were at their lowest ebb since 1992. The National Westminster Bank saw recession not as something in the future but as already biting, while business optimism down at the Institute of Directors had suffered a dramatic collapse. The Confederation of British Industry's survey, mainly reflecting manufacturing employers, showed the lowest level of optimism since 1991, and the Chartered Institute of Purchasing and Supply's employment index stood at its lowest level for five years.

But it wasn't all doom and gloom for Britain's bosses. Directors' pay has been going up by twice the rate of inflation for the past three years, while top executives awarded themselves rises averaging between 12 and 18 per cent in the past 12 months. Massive bonuses for top people in the spring were credited with causing an interest rate rise which immediately hit millions of ordinary home owners. With the nation's fearless risk takers and wealth creators getting this level of increases in a recession, you shudder to think what those mysterious market

forces might have decreed they were worth in a boom.

The real culprits, however, according to those steering the ship of state, are surprisingly enough the greedy workers. Average earnings rose by about 4.4 per cent in the year to July. But this figure is not only artificially high, due to the level of pay increases for the rich. It also masks a big gap between the public and private sectors, with the government keeping public sector pay rises close to its target figure of 2.5 per cent while private sector pay rose by 6.2 per cent. In other words, public sector workers are being made to bear the brunt of the recession. It seems that the drastic decentralising of pay bargaining which took place under the Tories, and is supported by the Blair government, has had the unexpected effect of making it harder to put the brakes on across the

economy. The fall in unemployment until recently has created a tight labour market, with employers finding it difficult to recruit in some industries, leading to upward pressure on wages.

Those not so directly involved in politics have consistently pointed to two factors causing the recession — the strong pound and the

effects of the slump in the Far East. The most obvious effect of the high value of the pound has been to hit manufacturing exports, although there are also clear signs of recession in the domestic market. Britain's trade deficit rose from £1.37 billion in April to £1.85 billion in May. The service sector has also begun to feel the effects, although less severely.

Here and there, sectors of the economy have held up. Car production, for instance, was up by 7.3 per cent, with booming sales reported, while carpets and furniture manufacturers have had high profits in the past year. But even in these sectors there are contrary indications, with Rover cutting 1,500 jobs and putting three of its plants on a four-day week, and MFI sacking 15,000 workers — a quarter of all its retail staff.

Other redundancies announced have included 1,100 jobs at Siemens on Tyneside, 700 at Groves Europe in Sunderland, 600 at Fujitsu in Newton Aycliffe, 500 at a

## Things can only get better ...

According to Labour Market Trends, strikes in 1997 fell to their lowest ever level since records began. Industrial disputes cost a total of 235,000 working days in 1997, with pay disputes accounting for over half the total.

number of British Oxygen plants, 360 at Molins in Peterborough, and 40 at Halla in Merthyr Tydfil. More jobs are expected to go as a result of the merger of oil giants BP and Amoco. Farming has also shown signs of problems. Unemployment, which stood at 4.8 per cent of the workforce in June, is set to rise to 5.4 per cent by the end of next year. With jobs going fastest in the North and the Midlands, the North-South divide, so pronounced under the Tories, is reasserting itself.

The construction industry and housing market have traditionally been sensitive to changes in the economy. Growth in construction is projected to fall from 3.3 per cent this year to 1.0 per cent next year, while Halifax reported a slowing down of house prices, with repossessions up in the first six months of this year for the first time since 1995.

What then are the prospects? The National Institute for Economic and Social Research predicts that the economy will stall in the second half of this year, while the Cambridge Econometrics group says that economic growth will slow sharply between now and next year. The irony is that the Bank of England — Labour's chosen agency for critical interest rate decisions — has, along with Gordon Brown, been so obsessed with low inflation that it has seen the recession as not slowing the economy fast enough — hence its consistent pressure for rises in interest rates. Further rises would probably, in the words of one leading economist, 'crash-land' the economy in 1999. Brown's much-vaunted relationship with business leaders is turning sour, as his insistence on a strong pound threatens to put much of British manufacturing exports to the sword. Like the Tories, Labour leaders have trumpeted inward investment — estimated at £34.9 billion in the past year — as the hallmark of economic success. In reality, it represents nothing more than an enthusiasm on the part of overseas employers to guzzle development grants, benefit from the most repressive labour laws and exploit some of the cheapest labour in Western Europe. But there are signs that the flow of inward investment is slowing down as a result of the Far Eastern crisis.

But more importantly, the Thatcherite fetish for low inflation — still at only 2.8 per cent — and a strong currency is beginning to undermine Blair's extended honeymoon, not only with the millions of traditional Labour voters, but also with the Tory middle classes who turned to New Labour at the last election. The main asset Brown has at the moment is the absence of what is really needed — a solid class movement in defence of jobs and living standards, and a strong left opposition in the Labour Party and the unions. **WA**

## Islington council strike

# SWP adventurism leads to disaster for strikers

by Andrew Berry

In early July, the ballot to defend Housing Needs workers sacked by Islington Council (see the report in Workers Action No.3) was lost by almost a two to one margin on a very low turn-out.

While we completely condemn Labour councillors for supporting the sacking of workers for taking strike action, a high degree of responsibility for this defeat lies with the Socialist Workers Party, whose members led the dispute in a particularly inept and sectarian way. The effect of the SWP's actions goes well beyond the 12 strikers who are now jobless and also unable to claim benefit. After this defeat the chances for success in further struggles in Islington are greatly reduced.

Despite having a 70 per cent vote of the Unison branch for official strike action against redundancies, and in the face of a management clearly looking for a fight, the SWP led 16 workers out in a premature and adventurist unofficial action on May 18. Although they were warned by Unison that management intended to sack strikers, 12 remained out and were sacked two days later.

In the subsequent ballot for industrial action to demand the reinstatement of the sacked strikers, the SWP continued on its ultra-left course. Rather than follow a strategy of starting from the most militant sections and gradually escalating the action throughout the workforce, SWP members argued for immediate, indefinite strike action across the whole branch. They also showed massive irresponsibility by providing an out-of-date address list for the ballot which, if it had been used, would have disenfranchised a quarter of the branch

membership — and invited a legal challenge.

The only action towards a serious campaign to build a 'yes' vote came from members of the Campaign for a Fighting Democratic Unison (CFDU). They argued for and won two measures — first, a Unison letter was sent out with each ballot paper; second, a rally was organised at which two National Executive members were present.

While it is impossible to generalise from one dispute, the SWP has a history of putting its own needs ahead of those of the class. Recruitment to the SWP is the priority; uncompromising militancy, even if it leads to a glorious failure, will attract activists. Such tactics are effective in certain middle class circles, but workers, who are more likely to have dependants and face the problem of finding another job if they are sacked, take a more considered view.

Working this way, the SWP is necessarily undemocratic. Once it has achieved a 'mandate' for the action it prescribes, it attempts to stifle further democratic debate in case a later meeting reverses the decision.

Revolutionaries do not oppose unofficial or illegal strikes. They are vital weapons against the anti-union laws and the conciliatory union apparatuses. But all proposed actions have to be assessed on the basis of how they take the struggle forward, both for the group of workers involved and for the wider class. And except in cases where there is a mass, spontaneous walk-out by a large section of the workforce, an unofficial strike has to be carefully prepared. The situation in Islington was clearly not one where an unofficial strike was appropriate. This sectarian attempt to build the SWP has failed and the consequences for Islington Council workers will be far-reaching. • *A fuller account of this dispute can be found in Socialist Outlook No.18 (September 1998).* **WA**

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## New anti-terror law

# Casting the net wide

by **Charli Langford**

**O**n September 2, MPs took a day out of their long summer holiday to enable Blair to railroad the latest, most draconian, emergency legislation through parliament on the back of the Omagh bombing. The Criminal Justice (Terrorism and Conspiracy) Act combines measures aimed at Irish republicans with an attempt to crack down on political activity in Britain aimed at overthrowing foreign regimes.

Under the act, the sworn testimony of a police superintendent or higher ranking officer will be sufficient to jail someone as a terrorist, providing this is 'corroborated' by the way the suspect responds to questioning. Both the presumption of innocence until proven guilty and the right to silence will be removed. The police will not even have to make public the basis of their belief that the person is a member of a banned organisation, or has engaged in terrorist activities, so it will be impossible for the accused to mount a legal challenge. The legislation also allows for the reintroduction of internment, although it will differ slightly from the internment without trial in force between 1971 and 1975 in that a court will be required to rubber-stamp the police decision.

But for MPs, the most controversial section of the legislation proved to be the clauses which make it a crime to conspire to commit an offence abroad, if the action would also be illegal in Britain.

If the new law had been operating in the past, the jailing of the Guildford Four, McGuire Seven and Birmingham Six would have been completely legal, since there would have been no need to fabricate evidence. It would also have meant that, for example, members of the ANC and the Anti-Apartheid Movement, and Mordecai Vanunu, the Israeli who was lured from Britain to Italy and there kidnapped by Mossad and jailed in Israel for treason (he published information about that country's nuclear programme), could have been jailed in Britain.

Perhaps the most ominous aspect of the law is that it could be used as a 'Catch 22' against asylum seekers. By definition, asylum seekers have broken the laws of the country from which they are fleeing; if they haven't, they don't require asylum. So the Home Office could throw out 'genuine'

asylum seekers if they maintain their opposition to their own government, and throw out the rest on the grounds that they are bogus. Certain kinds of political campaigns are also at risk, notably those against repressive regimes with which Britain has trading relations.

Of course, the law won't be invoked every time. The government has said it will prosecute 'only if it is in the public interest', and the legislation allows for the Attorney-General to refuse to prosecute. So if a RUC superintendent decides to swear that he has information that Gerry Adams or Martin McGuinness is a terrorist, the Attorney-General can rescue the Irish peace process. Robin Cook can also probably count on this clause to get him off the hook on the Sandline affair.

Back in June, we wrote that the British government had 'realised that by offering Sinn Féin a role in governing the north of Ireland, those committed to armed struggle could be marginalised and more easily liquidated'. This has proved to be the case, and the new legislation will make it easier to mop up the remaining 'physical force' republicans. But the law is attempting to achieve much more, as is evident from its international dimension. It is about reinforcing the barriers between Fortress Europe and the oppressed people of the 'third world', while at the same time making it easier to do business with their despotic rulers. Socialists must take every opportunity to campaign for the repeal of this reactionary law. **WA**

## Unison conference

## If he sounds like a class traitor ...

by **Andrew Berry**

**I**f it looks like a duck, if it sounds like a duck, if it walks like a duck, then it is a duck,' Rodney Bickerstaffe told this year's Unison conference. It was the general secretary's way of saying that the Campaign for a Fighting Democratic Unison (CFDU) was a 'faction'.

The leadership has made a massive attack on the right to organise within Unison. Back in October 1997, the NEC commissioned a report into the activities of the CFDU, apparently because the CFDU had campaigned against last year's pay proposals which gave the majority of Unison members in local government a measly 2.5 per cent rise.

As part of the report, legal advice on the constitution was obtained at a cost of around £100,000. The QC's opinion was that only the NEC had the right to campaign to change policy, and that branches could not donate money to, pay for delegates for, or fund a conference of the CFDU or any campaign. This is despite a rule in the constitution which allows mem-

bers 'adequate opportunity to participate in the initiation and development of policy making, through meetings, conferences'. However, the full implications of this ruling have yet to be realised.

The CFDU decided it would not let branches affiliate to it any longer. This was not a capitulation to the leadership as other left papers have suggested. It was a necessary precaution against the likelihood that the NEC would suspend left branches.

When two regions of Unison, North-east and London, jointly organised a conference on democracy in Unison, a regional official refused to sign cheques for payments related to the conference on the basis of the QC's opinion. Even some of the right wing saw this as bending the stick too far, and the Scottish Region leadership, supporters of Bickerstaffe and his cronies, produced a motion that allowed regions, branches and service groups to campaign for policy change, but continued to outlaw the CFDU, describing it, emotively, as a 'faction'. The leadership was forced to retreat from a full implementation of the QC's report, and went to conference behind the

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... sounds like a class traitor ...

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Scottish Region motion, which was won by scaremongering along the lines of 'these nasty people will steal your money', and general red-baiting by the leadership.

Conference did pass policy supported by the CFDU, but these decisions have either been ignored or delayed in the hope that they can be forgotten. A demonstration against the level of the minimum wage has been put off until March. Motions to take the Hillingdon strikers back into membership and to pull out of an IT contract with Capita, a company heavily involved in cutting members' jobs and conditions and union-busting, have been ignored.

However, it is absolutely clear that a union's rule-book is only as good as its leadership. This was pointed out in the conference edition of *CFDU News*: 'It is not what is in the rule book that will ultimately determine the direction of the union and in whose interest it is run. That will ultimately come about through the organising of the ordinary members and the taking of the leadership.' The CFDU must be careful not to fall into the trap of other broad lefts, whose only focus has been elections and who have propped up left careerists. There have been problems in this area — some individuals who have been elected to the NEC on a CFDU platform have then voted with the right. Many in the CFDU are aware of this danger and are striving to make it a genuine rank-and-file organisation, difficult though this is in a period of low levels of class struggle.

The attack on the CFDU has shown that the Unison leadership has made a considerable shift to the right, and that those who opposed standing against Bickerstaffe in 1995 were wrong. The leadership of Unison should now be considered in the same light as other unions, such as the TGWU, GMB and MSF.

However, this year's conference was qualitatively different from last year's, which took place six weeks after the election of the Blair government. The leadership was unable to derail issues like the minimum wage and the anti-union laws with the excuse that Labour had only just been elected and that we should 'wait and see'. The left made gains on the ground — some of its motions were won, others were only lost after Bickerstaffe and the right had made special appeals to the delegates.

The left of Unison organised in the CFDU will not easily be destroyed. While it has some political problems, the CFDU is well established and the most recent attack on it, although hitting its finances, has increased its membership. **WA**

The struggle for a united Ireland

## Republicans must change their strategy

by Charli Langford

The bombing of Omagh town centre by Oglagh na h'Eireann (the 'Real IRA') was a pointless act by a group of republicans who have no practical strategy for defeating British imperialism in Ireland. Far from advancing their cause it has led to a backlash against militant republicanism, an increased feeling of war-weariness and a strengthening of support for the reactionary 'peace process' among nationalists. It has delivered a huge propaganda gift to the British and to the loyalists. It has overshadowed and diverted attention from the Orange débâcle at Drumcree and the loyalist murder of the Quinn children, and is likely to be used by the Orange Order to lessen or even reverse the haemorrhage in their organisation.

Workers Action will always defend the right of republicans to struggle for a united Ireland, just as we will always defend them against the repressive apparatus of British imperialism and the Irish state, but we reserve the right to criticise the tactics they adopt. Our criticism of the Omagh bombing is not that it was illegitimate but that it was misjudged, badly executed and counter-productive.

We completely dissociate ourselves from the condemnations coming from Blair and other British and loyalist politicians. They and their predecessors set up the sectarian northern state and their comments are merely those of oppressors who are shocked that their victims are prepared to fight back. Privately, they were pleased

with the outcome of the murder of the Quinn children and the Omagh bombing, which bolstered their peace process. We also dissociate ourselves from Gerry Adams's condemnation, which marks another key stage in the sell-out by the Sinn Féin leadership.

After 30 years of war in the six counties it is clear that the overwhelming majority of the nationalist population believes that the urban guerrilla tactic has failed. In the circumstances, it is not surprising that they see the peace process as the only way forward — they have only ever been offered the choice between armed struggle or the ballot box. But the peace process and the new assembly cannot hide the fact that Ireland remains partitioned and the north remains an Orange state in which the nationalists are an oppressed minority.

Ceasefires have now been declared by all republican military organisations except the Continuity IRA — which has yet to engage in any serious military activity. Those who refuse to join the peace process will be hunted down by security forces armed with new powers to convict them. The danger is that the most committed republican militants will be dispersed or jailed, that arms will be decommissioned, and that in the event of a resumption of loyalist violence there will be no means of defending nationalist communities. It is time for republicans who reject the path of conciliation with British imperialism to re-assess their strategy. They must turn to the nationalist working class and seek to develop mass action against the attacks and betrayals that will inevitably flow from the peace process. **WA**

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As Serbian army steps up attacks on Kosova Albanians

# Greedy eyes on Macedonia!

by Nick Davies

**N**o one can say they weren't warned. The ethnic cleansing of Kosova is now in full swing. Towns are being torched, house by house, and 200,000 refugees are on the move. At the beginning of the summer, the Kosova Liberation Army (KLA) had liberated whole tracts of countryside. Its defeat by the Yugoslav army in the battle for Orahovac signalled the failure of its attempt to take the struggle into the towns. Now it is in full retreat on all fronts, seeking to regroup in the remote forests and mountains. The KLA may be given breathing space by the refusal of Milo Djukanovic, the president of Montenegro (Serbia's much smaller partner in the rump Yugoslav Federation), to provide military reinforcements.

In Workers Action No.3, we argued that Western governments had no intention of helping the Albanian majority in Kosova. This was for two reasons. They rely on Milosevic staying where he is — a local strongman with whom they can do business, and whom they trust to implement the Dayton Agreement which creates the polite fiction of independence for Bosnia-Herzegovina. Further, they don't want to set a precedent by agreeing to further alteration of Balkan frontiers. Now that Russia, an open ally of Serbia, is involved, the Kosovans haven't a hope, as the Western governments would be extremely reluctant to attempt any settlement which might irritate the Russian government, precisely because of this relationship. In the weeks before the Serbian offensive, Milosevic and the West played a cynical game of charades, the West pretending to do something by sending in 'Diplomatic Observer Corps', and Milosevic pretending to do nothing, but all the while biding his time.

The other side of the equation is this: genocide against Albanians in Kosova would create a huge refugee problem, destabilise Albania, and encourage separatism among Albanians in Montenegro and Macedonia. It was these dangers that prompted Liberal Democrat leader Paddy Ashdown, interviewed on the BBC on July 28, to give this succinct outline of Western policy: 'provide for some kind of autonomy for Kosovo, then stabilise Albania and Macedonia'. Attempts are therefore being made to broker

some sort of a deal involving autonomy for Kosova short of separation from Serbia. Key to the West's strategy is the promoting of the conciliatory Ibrahim Rugova, leader of the Democratic League of Kosova, who has in the past called for NATO and UN intervention. Significantly, at the same time as the KLA was in retreat, attempts were being made, principally by the US, to put together an Albanian negotiating team centred on Rugova, with the aim, presumably, of splitting, co-opting or isolating the KLA, which refuses to compromise with the Serbs and is openly cynical about the likely outcome of negotiations.

## West needs a stable Macedonia

The spread of the conflict to Macedonia is what the Western governments fear most of all. For this reason, the other element of the West's game plan is the maintenance of a 'stable' Macedonia. Already, there are UN troops stationed there. Macedonia has a large Albanian minority: about 20 per cent of the population, concentrated in the north and west. Their position is nothing like as bad as that of the Albanians in Kosova, and in fact the main Albanian political party, the Party of Democratic Prosperity (PDP), has five cabinet members in the ruling coalition government. However, there is discrimination. There is very little Albanian language higher education, and Albanians are under-represented in white-collar jobs, the army and the police, even in towns such as Tetovo and Gostivar which are 85 per cent Albanian. The response has been a split in the PDP and the formation of the rival Democratic Party of Albania, whose leader, Arber Xhaferi, criticises the West for supporting the Macedonian government, in the interests of 'stability', at the expense of the Albanians.

The state of Macedonia came into being when the ruling elite declared independence from Yugoslavia to protect its own interests. Since then the government of Kiro Gligorov has been trying to create a Macedonian national identity involving, for example, the creation of a Macedonian Orthodox Church, indifferent to the fact that Macedonia is a multi-ethnic state — in addition to the Albanian minority, there are also Serbs, Turks, Vlachs and Roma. The logic of this

process is the rise of Macedonian chauvinism, mainly directed against the Albanians, coming not only from the virulently nationalist VMRO, which wants all Albanians sacked from the government, but also from the government itself. In Gostivar and Tetovo the mayors are serving prison terms of seven and two years respectively for hoisting the Albanian flag over the town hall.

Why are Western governments so concerned about this tiny southern Balkan state? They displayed none of the same concern about Bosnia-Herzegovina, seeing partition between Serbia and Croatia as the most practical, manageable solution from their point of view. Macedonia is different. Divided between Serbia, Bulgaria and Greece, it has been at the root of the friction between these three countries over the past 100 years. Successive Greek governments of both right and left have always denied that the 300,000 Macedonian Slavs in Greece exist at all as a distinct entity. It is alleged that they have a 'Greek mentality' and, as such, need have no aspirations to self-determination. It was as a result of Greek pressure that Macedonia was forced to adopt the cumbersome prefix 'Former Yugoslav Republic of' to set it apart from Greek Macedonia, in which Greeks were a minority until it was seized in the Balkan Wars of 1912-13, but which Greek nationalist propaganda now identifies with the ancient kingdom of Macedon, birthplace of Alexander the Great.

After the wars of 1912-13 Greece shared most of Macedonia with Serbia, which regarded, and still regards, the Macedonians as 'really' Serbs. Bulgarian governments of whatever stripe have always seen the Macedonians as 'really' Bulgarians, and their language as merely a dialect of Bulgarian (it is in fact similar). All three have employed armies of historians, linguists, archaeologists, priests and, at times, soldiers, to try to 'prove' their case, and all three have historically denied the Macedonians the right to self-determination. They have succeeded in doing this because of the connivance of the great powers, the historic weakness of the Macedonian bourgeoisie and the small size and political inexperience of its working class. A plan was hatched between Tito and the Bulgarian Stalinist Dimitrov in 1946 for an independent Macedonian state, but it



was vetoed by Stalin. Thereafter, the Serb part remained a subaltern and impoverished constituent republic of Yugoslavia, created by Tito to prevent there being a large, united Serbia.

### Separatism

At the moment, most Albanians in Macedonia simply want more rights within the Macedonian state. If they don't get these, separatism may appear more attractive. A powerful separatist movement may result in Macedonia unravelling altogether, with Serbia and Bulgaria attempting to 'liberate' the Macedonians from their own state. Western governments are terrified of the threat to their New World Order posed by a full-scale war on NATO's unstable southern flank.

The prospect of the break-up of Macedonia presents revolutionary Marxists with something of a dilemma. In Workers Action No.3, we argued that the Albanians in Kosova had the right to self-determination, however they choose to exercise that right. So it must be for the Albanians in Macedonia. To say otherwise would be to play the same game as the Western governments, using a 'stable' Macedonia as a stick to beat the Albanian minority. The creation of the state of Macedonia was a product of the

collapse of Yugoslavia. This collapse took the form of the triumph of nationalist reaction over the interests of the working class of the region, amidst disillusion with Tito's Yugoslavia which to much of the population embodied the socialist project. Yet the unravelling of Macedonia under present conditions would represent a further retreat into petty nationalism, rendering even more distant the time when the working class of the former Yugoslavia could regroup, rebuild its organisations and begin to fight in its own interests, including workers' unity across recently erected national boundaries. Far from the Macedonian state being made obsolete by trans-Balkan workers' unity, the recovery by Serbia and Bulgaria of their 'lost' territory would be a bloody business. The Macedonians would find that they did not have the choice as to whether or not they were 'really Serbs', or 'really Bulgarians', or indeed whether they could exercise their right to self-determination. To quote Robin Blackburn, writing on Bosnia in *New Left Review* No.119, '... the discovery of identity in such a situation is not some sort of pure spiritual election, nor the welling up of an inner essence, but rather the assumption of an imposed social marker, imposed by pitiless repression and fear'.

While we defend the right to self-determination, we do not necessarily *advocate* separatism in any given case. Further, we are not concerned by abstract, general principles, but with the interests of the working class in any given situation. Revolutionary Marxists should have defended Bosnia-Herzegovina not because we took the side of the Muslims, or because we saw Bosnia as a nation (it is not), but because the defence of the multi-ethnic workers' centres of Bosnia-Herzegovina was the way in which the fight for workers' unity could most practically and concretely be realised. We did not argue for self-determination for the Bosnian Serbs and Croats, because in either case it could not be exercised other than by ethnic cleansing and terror. The situation in Macedonia is somewhat different, but there are similarities too. The Albanians are a large and compact minority; some would argue that they are an oppressed minority. We defend their right to self-determination, but we reserve the right to argue against separation, if the result would be a further nationalist feeding frenzy.

- \* Serbian forces out of Kosova!
- \* UN/Nato out of the Balkans!
- \* Self-determination for the Kosova Albanians!

WA

# Condemn US air strikes!

by Charli Langford

Revolutionaries must completely condemn the US air strikes on targets in Sudan and Afghanistan which took place on August 20. The main enemy facing the working class on a global scale is imperialism, and the US is its most powerful representative. The bombings are just another reminder — after the Gulf war and the threats against Iraq at the beginning of this year — that the US is a law unto itself. It will intervene in defence of its own interests anywhere in the world without any reference to the United Nations, and with a flagrant disregard for international law. And the advent of the cruise missile directed from spy satellites means that US troops don't even have to get their feet wet.

We hold no brief for those who bombed the US embassies in Nairobi and Dar-es-Salaam, and who mainly succeeded in killing and maiming hundreds of Kenyans and Tanzanians. It's hard to see how this can advance the struggle against US imperialism. But we reserve our greatest anger for the political and military establishment in Washington, whose attempts to control the resources of the Middle East

by military force are the source of the problem.

The US named Osama bin Laden as the person behind the embassy bombings, and Khowst, in Afghanistan, as his base. It is ironic that Bin Laden was originally supported by — and may have received some training from — the CIA to wage war against Soviet troops in Afghanistan.

The US attack on the chemical factory in Khartoum was a particularly vile act. This factory produces over half the human medicines and drugs used in Sudan and a large proportion of the veterinary medicine used in Africa. For a people regularly facing famine and war there could scarcely be a more devastating blow. As a direct consequence of the US attack there will be a huge increase in deaths among the people of Sudan and neighbouring countries. Bombing a major hospital would have had less of an effect on Sudan's health infrastructure.

Even if the US claim that the factory produced nerve gas were true, it would still not justify the bombing. But the claim is ridiculous. Various foreign luminaries who can usually be counted on to support the US, including the German ambassador, have confirmed that the Shifa pharmaceutical plant is just that — a phar-

maceutical plant. The report of VX nerve gas precursor chemicals being found in soil samples nearby should be discounted; in a building devoted to the production of various complex chemicals, and biochemical agents specifically designed to have an effect on humans and animals, it is probable that some substances or their decomposition products would give similar test results to VX precursors.

In the past, the US has used UN resolutions to justify its actions. This time, the decision to unleash the Tomahawk missiles was entirely unilateral, which Clinton explained was necessary on the grounds of security. Quite how the security of the most powerful nation on the planet is threatened by two car bombs in Africa was not explained. The real reason is that the US would have found it difficult, if not impossible, to gain support for such an action — except, of course, from Tony Blair. As was seen earlier in the year with Iraq, there is growing opposition to the aggressive tactics of the US-UK axis.

With the publication of the Starr Report, Clinton is currently fighting for his political life. If millions of workers and peasants in the Middle East had any say in the matter, he would be on trial for crimes against humanity.

WA

As the economic crisis spreads to three continents —

# Is the whole system about to crash?

by Jonathan Joseph

There is now no doubt that the world economy is in serious crisis. Indeed, some bourgeois commentators have even joined the majority of left groups in arguing that the system is on the verge of collapse. We feel that it is necessary to take a more sober analysis.

This is undeniably the biggest global economic crisis since the collapse of the Bretton Woods agreement and the OPEC oil crisis of 25 years ago — events which led to the deregulation of markets and currencies, and the dominance of the neo-liberal agenda pushed by Reagan and Thatcher. The new thinking was also reflected in the attitudes of US-dominated bodies like the International Monetary Fund and more recently the World Trade Organisation.

The current situation must therefore be understood within the context of developments since the late sixties and early seventies, when the post-war order of fixed exchange rates and regulated national economies began to break down. However, it is clear that the free-market, deregulated model, rather than being a long-term alternative to strong regulation, is in fact a reaction to the problems of regulation. The essential contradictions of capitalism remain.

Financial deregulation of the world economy has exacerbated the fluctuations in markets, currencies, shares and investment. The most extreme example of this has been in south-east Asia. The weakness of the Japanese economy and the devaluation of the yen has affected the whole area. The south-east Asian economies collapsed when the huge investment of Japanese capital slowed down. As their currencies came under attack, massive devaluations occurred. This in turn is leading to a severe contraction of these economies.

In some ways, the Asian crisis has been a significant factor in the collapse of the Russian economy, and

its effect is now being felt in Latin America where the over-valued currencies are coming under attack. In Brazil, interest rates have been raised to almost 50 per cent to stem the outflow of funds, while the fall in the price of oil is contributing to the problems in Colombia and Venezuela.

Currency devaluations and stock market crashes are a world feature. Already, four trillion dollars has been wiped off share values world wide, including \$300 billion in Britain.

Faced with this situation, the IMF is attempting to impose US policies of laissez-faire deregulation, but its strict austerity programmes for the Asian and Russian economies cannot be enforced — it is down to its last \$25 billion. As popular protest mounts on the streets, politicians from Moscow to Malaysia are increasingly compelled to denounce the IMF model and call for more state control over their economies.

The question now is how severe will the crisis be for the world economy as a whole? Undoubtedly, everywhere will be affected. But it is wrong to say that the whole world economy will suffer meltdown on the scale of the 1930s.

The crisis is as much political as economic. Capitalism has been in trouble since the 1960s and the period since then has been defined by a crisis of the system of international and state regulation. Given that we all accept the inherently crisis-ridden nature of the capitalist system, the point is, to what extent can the effects of this be counteracted?

Economic processes are firmly linked to social structures and political strategies. The conditions for economic reproduction are not given but are socially secured and politically advanced. It is no accident, therefore, that the current situation has developed in south-east Asia and Russia. In these countries the economic institutions (like the banks) are weak, while the political and state mechanisms of control are inadequate. In other words, the economic

crisis in these regions is exacerbated by political and historical factors.

Of the three main trading blocs, Japan, the world's second largest economy, is in most danger. Here too, politics is an important factor. The corporate model of state intervention has been reluctant to deal with a situation which has been developing throughout the nineties. Japanese capitalism is suffering from a classic crisis of realisation (increasing productivity but not realising the profits by selling the goods produced). While the Japanese government has reduced taxation to try and stimulate demand, it is politically reluctant to increase government spending.

However, the Japanese economy does have these kinds of levers that it can use to try and control the situation, as well as a substantial economic and manufacturing base. In contrast, the south-east Asian economies are entirely dependent on foreign capital and the current crisis only re-emphasises their semi-colonial status.

The United States and the European Union have far more protection from the crisis, based on the fact that their growth rates, currencies and political regimes are all more stable. There is no doubt that they will be seriously affected by the loss of markets, the cheapening of Asian imports, the decline in inward investment, the crisis in Latin America, the probable defaulting on debt repayments and the fall in share prices. The launch of the Euro could also be a problem in such a volatile economic climate. However, these are imperialist countries and they have more developed political and economic mechanisms which can be used to prevent a full-scale collapse. What is more likely is that we will see a period of stagnation and rising unemployment throughout Europe, the USA and Japan, during which there will be an intensification of political attacks on the working class and on the gains of the post-war period, particularly the welfare system.

The progress of the crisis is a confirmation of the Marxist theories of imperialism and of combined and uneven development. Russia and the semi-colonies face continued economic turmoil and social upheaval — workers and peasants will have to fight for even the most basic of economic rights. In the imperialist countries, the crisis can be better managed, but workers must be prepared to struggle against a rising tide of neo-liberal attacks. **WA**

Iran

# Moderates chase US investment

by Nick Davies

At first sight, there appears to be little to connect the trial of the former mayor of Teheran and the World Cup finals. Both, however, kept Iranians glued to the TV in June and July, and both go to the heart of the political and cultural ferment currently gripping the country.

Golamhossein Karbaschi was charged with corruption. It was alleged that he transferred money, apartments and cars to a number of his aides. He said that when he was first appointed as mayor he was told he could do this, principally to prevent senior city employees resorting to corruption to supplement their meagre salaries. Karbaschi maintained that the real reason for the charges and the trial was that he is an ally of President Mohammed Khatemi, the liberal Muslim cleric and landslide winner of last year's presidential election. Khatemi and his allies are locked in perpetual struggle with hardliners who still dominate the *Majlis* (parliament) and certain ministries. Karbaschi is popular in Teheran, credited with trying to improve the quality of life in the city. It is because of this, and its wider significance as part of a political trial of strength, that the trial proved such a media event. Although the trial was not a fair one — the judge was also the prosecutor — it was, remarkably, televised, and so millions of Iranians witnessed Karbaschi running rings round the judge-prosecutor as nimbly as Mehdi Mahdaviakia scamp-ered past a ponderous US defence in Lyon.

Iran's famous World Cup victory over the US (sandwiched between creditable defeats at the hands of Yugoslavia and Germany) was lauded by conservatives and liberals alike. The official media attributed the victory to divine intervention. However, Iran's relative success in the World Cup can only put the hardliners on the defensive. After taking part in the finals in 1978, Iran did not compete in 1982 and 1986 due to the Iran-Iraq war and the isolationist ethos of the Islamic Republic. Qualification for France prompted street demonstrations in which men and women celebrated together,

many women ripping off their *hejabs* (compulsory headscarves). Some 5,000 women broke down the barriers and forced their way into Teheran's Azadi stadium to greet the team when it returned from its final qualifying match in Australia. Whereas under the Ayatollah Khomeini women were barred from attending matches and men had to play in tracksuit bottoms, women are now permitted to play, watch and even report on football, and men can wear shorts. These developments have to be seen in the context of an ongoing struggle in politics and culture (particularly cinema) against the nightmare of repression and intolerance that is the Islamic Republic.

The hardliners are still strong. Recently, the commander of the Revolutionary Guards, Rahim Safavi, threatened to 'cut out the tongues' of those challenging the Islamic Republic, and instigated the closure of the liberal newspaper *Jameah*. In fact, a kind of dual power appears to exist between the two camps, dividing the ruling apparatus from top to bottom. In May of this year, a demonstration in support of Karbaschi, licensed by President Khatemi, was harassed and disrupted by Revolutionary Guards. At the end of June, parliament impeached the pro-Khatemi interior minister, Abdollah Nouri. Within an hour Khatemi had appointed him vice-president for development and social affairs!

We should keep the liberalisation programme of Khatemi firmly in perspective. It represents an attempt, within the state apparatus of the Islamic Republic, to overcome the economic isolation and stagnation of the last 20 years. The catalyst is the fall in oil prices, mainly due to the economic crisis in East Asia. In March, OPEC members announced a production cutback of 1.5 million barrels a day. Iran desperately needs to revitalise its huge energy sector, which accounts for 85 per cent of its hard currency earnings, in order to maintain its market share. However, attracting foreign investment is made difficult by US legislation which prevents companies from investing in Iranian oil and gas. Recently, the US firm Conoco was banned from completing a \$2 billion deal to develop the huge South Pars gas

field. (The French company Total stepped in instead.) This explains the recent charm offensive towards the US (and the huge bouquets given to each member of the US team before the World Cup match). The US is also under pressure from other Western governments to relax its trading sanctions with Iran. They are astute enough to recognise Iran's increasing strategic importance, given the development by Western companies of the Caspian Sea oilfields off Azerbaijan. The drop in oil prices is forcing the Iranian government to diversify the economy. Recently, the foreign ministry drafted a law supporting more foreign investment — which is likely to be challenged by hardliners in the *Majlis*. Again, it explains Khatemi's increasing warmth towards the US: a desire to reintegrate Iran fully into the imperialist world order.

The premise of the Khatemi faction is that for things to stay the same, and the Islamic Republic to be preserved, there will have to be changes. Nevertheless, the situation is creating openings for women, youth and, possibly, the working class to express more openly their dissatisfaction. The working class has unfinished business to complete. In the revolution of 1978-79, it was the working class, in particular the oil workers, who played a leading role in the struggle against the Shah. In the months leading up to the insurrection of February 1979, almost all industrial establishments were on strike at some time or another. When the owners fled, workers, organised in *Shuras*, or councils, occupied and ran the factories. The *Shuras* came under attack from the first post-Shah government of Bazargan, which reintroduced one-man management, and from the clergy and its supporters based in the bazaars, which aimed at introducing Islamic corporatism based on non-independent Islamic 'workers' councils', and ultimately an Islamic Republic. This process culminated in waves of repression against the workers' organisations, involving mass executions of workers' leaders and the suppression of all opposition to the clerical regime, from liberals or the left.

Workers and socialists can have no illusions in Khatemi, but they can use the openings created by his struggle against the hardliners, and his aim to introduce a 'civil society', to regroup and recover. Most importantly they must learn from the terrible mistakes of much of the Iranian and international left, which took the 'anti-imperialist' rhetoric of the clergy at face value and therefore failed to fight for workers' independence from, and opposition to, the project of the clergy. History may give the Iranian working class a second chance. If so, they must seize it. **WA**

# Sri Lanka – Fifty years of fake independence

by **Workers Voice (Sri Lanka section of the Leninist-Trotskyist Tendency)**

Every year, both the United National Party (UNP) and the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) commemorate Ceylon's independence from Britain, which took place on February 4, 1948, claiming that we have won freedom from our colonial masters. It is our duty to understand clearly what actually happened in 1948.

It was in fact nothing more than a fake freedom – the handing over of Ceylon in 1948 from an imperial power to a section of our capitalist class. It was a transfer of power from a white-skinned set of imperialists to a dark-skinned set of capitalists, who ruled the country in the same manner as before.

As a counterweight to the left movement, which had grown very strong, the imperialists preferred to transfer power to their henchmen in the UNP. In line with their expectations, the UNP turned its attention towards controlling the working class. First they disenfranchised the Indian Tamil workers. This was a blow not only aimed against the working class, but also a specific move to sow disunity between different ethnic groups.

The UNP had no clear policy to solve the national language problem, which was causing discontent among both the middle class and the working class at the time. The result was a number of splits within the capitalist class. There was a split in the UNP, culminating in the formation of the SLFP in 1951, and a split in the Tamil Congress with the formation of the Federal Party – both on communal lines. This marked the entry of communalism into the body politic of Sri Lanka. The result was that the many unresolved national problems kept re-emerging. Many conflicts took place between the pro-imperialist and the 'national capitalist' wings of the bourgeoisie.

The year 1956 saw the growth of support for the 'national capitalist' wing. The SLFP, in alliance with the Mahajana Eksath Peramuna (MEP), won the elections, defeating the UNP. This served to strengthen the rise of communalism in politics. With the passing of the Sinhala Only bill, the question of the Tamil homelands also emerged, assisting the growth of communalism as Tamils and Sinhalese became increasingly suspicious of each other.

Since both the UNP and SLFP are capitalist parties, they tried to solve the burning issues of the time in a capitalist way. Problems of unemployment, landlessness and education became more acute daily and the poor sections of society became even poorer. Faced with the increase in poverty, the political parties whipped up communal passions among the people in order to distract their attention from the main economic problems facing them.

For some time, the left, with its links on both sides of the communal divide, was able to dispel the suspicions of the minorities. But in 1966, the Lanka Sama Samaja Party and the Communist Party supported the SLFP in opposing the enactment of sections of the Special Language Provisions Act of 1958 which contained concessions to Tamils. This was a severe blow which paved the way for the civil war currently being fought between the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam and the army.

In the field of Sri Lankan politics, the more far-sighted sections of the capitalist class gradually aligned themselves with, and became partners of, multi-national concerns. The national capitalist class as a whole became weaker and weaker. In turn, a section of the SLFP became increasingly pro-imperialist, with the result that some Sinhalese capitalists deserted the SLFP to join the Sinhala chauvinist MEP.

The People's Alliance, led by the SLFP, took office in 1995 with the aim of

proving that it could resurrect the fortunes of the Sri Lankan capitalist class in alliance with imperialism better than its rival, the UNP, especially after the failure of the UNP-sponsored Indo-Lanka accord.

With the fall of the Stalinists in the Soviet Union, the capitalist classes of semi-colonial countries have been compelled to follow the line of the imperialists directly and implement their policies. This is what has happened in Sri Lanka with the SLFP-led government. Its main policy is to safeguard imperialism and its supporters.

We should understand these developments in the light of changes internationally, including globalisation and privatisation. As a result of these changes, the working class faces attacks and ever greater burdens placed upon it – for example in the so-called Free Trade Zones, where cheap labour will be exploited to the maximum. Similarly, subsidies and social welfare measures will be steadily eroded. Malnutrition, poverty and famine will flourish among the working class. The distribution of wealth will radically alter, the gap between rich and poor will grow, and workers will face virtual enslavement.

From these facts it is clear that 50 years after independence we have still not won our freedom, but only exchanged colonialism for other burdens. Only when these fetters are removed will workers be able to commemorate independence – without this, the independence celebrations are a fraud. ■

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Workers Voice is published monthly in Sri Lanka  
To contact Workers Voice, please write to Workers Action

## The Multilateral Agreement on Investment

# A speculator's dream come true

by Mike Calvert

With the world economy spiralling into another crisis, a discussion about the latest round of deregulation is timely. The IMF and other Western financial institutions blame the problems of south-east Asia and Russia on the fact that these economies are not sufficiently 'open'. Their remedy is harsh austerity measures for the masses combined with the removal of all barriers to foreign investment and ownership. Yet the crisis in these regions, as well as in certain parts of Latin America, was precipitated by a sudden outflow of speculative capital, which was facilitated by the lack of regulation.

In 1995, negotiations began at the OECD, the Paris-based grouping of 29 of the world's richest countries, on a new agreement to end tariff barriers and protectionism. The Multilateral Agreement on Investment, or MAI for short, only became public knowledge in June 1997, at a meeting of the International Labour Organisation in Geneva. The reason it had been kept quiet is not hard to see. A similar agreement was slated for inclusion in the Uruguay round of the GATT, forerunner of the World Trade Organisation, but the developing countries opposed it. The USA, backed by the trans-national corpo-

rations, pushed for an agreement to be negotiated at the OECD.

The scope of the MAI is considerable. A logical extension of the GATT agreements, its aim is to create a world where capital can move about at will, unhampered by 'restrictive practices'. 'We are writing the constitution of a single global economy,' said Renato Ruggiero, director-general of the World Trade Organisation.

Three principles underpin the MAI: no discrimination, no entry restrictions, and no conditions. Foreign companies and investors must be treated in the same way as those based in the home country. All sectors of a country's economy, except defence, must be opened up to foreign investment and ownership. This must include the media. Governments cannot impose performance requirements on companies for any reason. There must be no restrictions on the movement of capital, or on the export of goods, intellectual property or profits. Companies attracted to a country by government grants or other forms of financial inducement will not have to pay back the money if they decide to locate elsewhere.

An international tribunal will be set up at which companies can sue governments deemed to be in breach of these provisions for damages equivalent to their estimated past and

future lost profits. Compensation will have to be paid for any seizure of assets, expropriation or other forms of state intervention. Once a country has become a signatory to the MAI, it cannot withdraw for five years, and is bound by its code of conduct for 15 years.

The regime created by the MAI is intended to consolidate the domination of the planet by a handful of powerful imperialist nations and multi-national corporations. National governments will be unable to use many of the traditional methods by which they have defended their economies in the past without being heavily penalised. But if they don't sign up to the agreement, inward investment will dry up. The implications for national sovereignty and culture are enormous, and even countries like France, Canada and New Zealand have expressed reservations about aspects of the MAI. But at least they have been included in the negotiations – for developing countries it has been a case of take it or leave it.

For the working class, it will be another major attack on living standards. It will wipe out the last vestiges of job security, putting workers at constant risk of losing their jobs as multi-nationals shift their operations, or as capital is transferred. It will place a question mark over the continued existence of state education and healthcare. Certain kinds of union activity – for example, campaigning against privatisation – are likely to be in breach of the MAI regulations.

The Labour government is committed to 'a comprehensive, legally binding and multilateral agreement providing a high standard for the liberalising of investment' – in other words, the MAI. Labour movement activists must wake up to the danger of the MAI, and start organising against it. **WA**

## Turning a blind eye

by Charli Langford

Scott Ritter, the chief UN weapons inspector in Iraq, has resigned because Britain and the US have made a 'mockery' of his role. Over the summer, US and British diplomats have been arguing *against* searches of

several sites in Iraq, and have also withdrawn intelligence information from the weapons inspectors.

It seems that the Iraq issue is losing even nominal support among the allies of the US and Britain in the UN. Huge numbers of Iraqis have died due to the UN sanctions and there is little international support for

a confrontation which might lead to another war. Actually finding a nerve gas factory in Iraq would force the US's hand – particularly after the bombings in Afghanistan and Sudan – and the subsequent air strikes would massively increase hostility to the US in the UN.

This has seriously demoralised the weapons inspectors, who had naively swallowed all the propaganda and believed their sacred mission was completely to rid Iraq of all the weapons the US reserves for its sole use. **WA**

Indonesia

# Workers must take the lead!

by Jonathan Joseph

The uprising in Indonesia has so far been the most dramatic political consequence of the east Asian economic meltdown. It is by no means the only important development and more can be expected to follow. South Korea verges on the brink of a showdown between the IMF-backed government of Kim Dae Jung and the trade union movement. Already workers have occupied car plants and are in running battles with riot police. Food riots continue across Asia. Meanwhile, the Japanese economy continues its plunge into crisis, bringing the political establishment down with it and forcing the resignation of Liberal Democrat Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto.

Underlying all else is the current precariousness of the world economy. This has been more intensely felt in Asia, where factors like the failing economic institutions,

bad loans and contracting credit, while not exclusive to the area, have hit particularly hard. There has been a massive loss of value of the Asian currencies against the dollar.

The specific intensity of the Asian crisis can be attributed to a combination of two factors. First, the massive economic boom and large economic growth rates based, in part, on currency advantage and Japanese investment. Second, the relation between the economies and the political and state mechanisms which attempt to promote and regulate them. Quite simply, the latter were unable to cope with economic slowdown and currency speculation. Contrary to popular myth, the Asian economies were not shining examples of flexible, laissez-faire deregulation. Japan and Korea are based on strong corporatist models, while Indonesia represents more blatant cronyism.

## Indonesia collapses!

In just a year the value of the Indonesian currency, the rupiah, has fallen by 80 per cent against the dollar while inflation is running at 70 per cent. The collapse of the rupiah has almost halted trade and there have been at least six million job losses so far.

As a result of the initial economic collapse, the IMF imposed an austerity plan in return for a \$43 billion loan. This included the setting of interest rates at 50 per cent, the shutting down of 16 banks and the forced end of government subsidies on items like food and fuel. The IMF plans are clear; to bolster the banks and other economic institutions at the expense of the poor. Reining in the wealth of Suharto and his cronies was never considered. Instead, the poor are left to live on less than a dollar a day.

The wealth of Suharto and his family is estimated at \$30 billion. He came to power in a bloody coup in 1965 and was responsible for the massacre of over half a million members of the Communist Party. Since then his power and wealth have been defended by an army of 500,000 soldiers.

It was the actions of these soldiers which finally caused the eruption. As students began to protest against the political and economic conditions, the army was sent in to crush them. The most significant mo-

ment occurred when troops shot dead six student protesters at Trisakti University on May 12. The university itself is hardly a radical base; indeed, it is recognised as an elite institution for the privileged. However, these events prompted larger mass rallies and brought the poor onto the streets.

There has been little co-ordination between the students and the masses and little in the way of a clear programme. Rather, the students have looked to the more radical sections of the bourgeoisie. However, the mass rioting which set the country ablaze was enough to force Suharto to go. This has allowed the ruling class time to regroup and try to reorganise from above in order to stabilise the regime.

This was done by replacing Suharto with his second in command, Jusuf Habibie. A new cabinet was appointed containing the same stooges and military leaders. Wiranto, the most powerful military leader, became defence minister. Habibie himself is an arch crony, having over 80 companies in family possession. Given this nepotism, he will obviously be unwilling to implement even the mild economic reforms demanded by students and bourgeois opposition leaders.

But although there have been continued protests, Habibie knows that if the masses are kept off the streets, he can incorporate the opposition movements. After quickly announcing a package of minor reforms, he is winning over oppositional bourgeois figures.

## The weakness of the opposition

Habibie is appealing to the so-called 'People's Council' of prominent figures who at the last moment left the establishment in order to ensure that there was no revolutionary crisis. The most prominent figure from this body is the respectable Muslim leader Amien Rais who heads the 30 million strong Muhammadiyah organisation.

'Opposition' figures like Rais are pro-Western and pro-IMF and have as their main aim the revival of Indonesian capitalism. Their objection to the regime is half-hearted and is based on opposition to Suharto's political involvement in the economic system rather than anything more principled. Rais called off the planned demonstrations against Suharto in May and, so far, has gone along with the Habibie regime.

Likewise, the demands of the students, although important, do not go much beyond calls for democracy and political and economic reform. Although many students do oppose Habibie, they lack any clear radical programme, and have failed to link up with the working class.

Indeed, an organised intervention by the working class has been sorely missed. After the wiping out of the world's largest

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Communist Party and after suffering years of brutal dictatorship, the working class has so far proved unable to take the stage.

It is true that there have been some small protests by the unions, whose main body is the now 'legalised' SBSI (Indonesian Prosperity Labour Union). There has also been some support for the People's Democratic Party (PRD), a new left organisation, but one that is still influenced by Stalinism. Many of its leaders, as well as those from Fretilin (East Timor resistance), remain in jail. On the occasions that the PRD has raised more radical demands, it has encountered opposition from some student bodies and 'democracy' groups.

### Not another Philippines!

As was argued at the start, the crisis in Asia, while undeniably a product of world economic conditions, has a specifically regional character based on a crisis of the politico-economic structures of these countries. For the moment the crisis will be felt hardest in these areas.

It is certain that the economic crisis will spread across the whole world economy, but this will have uneven results. Each part of the world economy needs to be considered in its own right. Most important at the moment are the *political* effects in Asia and Russia (and possibly Latin America). The class struggle is on the rise in Japan and Korea. Riots continue in other countries. But in countries like Indonesia the problems are more difficult. Lacking an organised working class, the mass protests have no clear programme and on more than one occasion have been directed at the Chinese minority. Into this vacuum have stepped bourgeois and petty-bourgeois forces who are trying to engineer a smooth transition in the Philippines mould. Many protesters and commentators have likened the removal of Suharto to the ousting of Marcos. The urgent task for socialists is to intervene into the mass movement with a programme of transitional demands.

- \* For the removal and trial of all Suharto's cronies
- \* Reject the IMF plans
- \* Cancel all debt
- \* For a mass programme of nationalisation and economic planning
- \* Maintain subsidies on food, fuel and other basic needs
- \* Disband the armed forces
- \* Free parliamentary elections
- \* Repeal all repressive political laws
- \* Release all political prisoners
- \* For an independent trade union movement
- \* Self-determination for East Timor
- \* Full democratic rights for the Chinese minority

## No more arms exports

# Stop the genocide in East Timor!

by Nick Davies

In 1975, East Timor declared its independence from Portugal. For the Timorese, independence was to be brutally cut short. Invasion by Indonesia in December 1975 was followed by annexation in 1976. Since then, over 200,000 Timorese, about one-third of the population, have been killed, and many more have been tortured, imprisoned or exiled.

The Indonesian military, spear-headed by the Kopassus death squad, has carried out bloody massacres of civilians. Often, death is preceded by mutilation or rape. To show support for Fretilin, the national resistance movement, invites summary execution. Fretilin leader since 1981, Kay Ralo Xanana Gusmao frustrated the military, staying on the run for over ten years. In 1994 a kangaroo court sentenced him to 20 years in prison. In the meantime, the Indonesian government is trying to eradicate the distinctive, latinised, Catholic Timorese culture.

Up to their necks in the genocide in East Timor, and the appalling human rights abuses in the whole of Indonesia, are the governments of Britain and Australia. In fact, they form a sinister double act: Britain arms Kopassus, and Australia helps train it. Britain has been selling arms to Indonesia since the last Labour government. Of course, the Tories loved the arms industry, lavishing it with subsidies that workers in the coal or steel industries can only dream of.

In 1978, a young Labour MP wrote in the *New Statesman*: 'the current sale of Hawk aircraft to Indonesia is particularly disturbing, as the purchasing regime is not only repressive, but is actually at war ... in East Timor where it confronts an indigenous liberation movement'. This MP's name, of course, was Robin Cook. Now ensconced in the Foreign Office, the ethical Mr Cook has announced that it is 'not realistic or practical to revoke [arms export] licences which were valid and in force at the time of our election'. Actu-

ally, the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1994 states that a licence granted by the Secretary of State 'may be revoked or varied by the Secretary of State at any time'. It's just that New Labour doesn't want to annoy the arms industry.

At least Britain had the diplomatic finesse, or hypocrisy, for Cook to meet with Nobel Prize-winning Timorese human rights activists José Ramos-Horta and Carlos Felipe Ximenes Belo. Australian support for Indonesian genocide in East Timor has always been cruder and more blatant. Australian governments always liked the pro-Western, anti-Communist stance of Suharto, especially when the Vietnam war was on. Having argued that an independent East Timor was 'not viable', Australia, together with Indonesia, concluded the 1989 Timor Gap Treaty, dividing up the marine oil reserves, estimated at seven million barrels, of the 'unviable' East Timor.

Suharto has gone, but will this bring any hope for the Timorese? The new strongman, Habibie, offered only 'special status' and recognition of Timorese customary laws, and the trading of Xanana Gusmao's freedom for recognition of Indonesia's right to occupy the country. The resistance declared that its demand for a referendum on independence was non-negotiable. In the capital, Dili, there are daily demonstrations in favour of independence, and against police and army brutality.

At the beginning of August, a joint communiqué by the Indonesian and Portuguese foreign ministries stated that there would be talks about autonomy for Timor. This is a limited step forward, as until now Indonesia has maintained that no other government can play any role in East Timor. However, it remains to be seen whether this will come to anything. Until there is self-determination for East Timor, the battle for human rights, and for the interests of the working class in Indonesia as a whole, is yet to be won.

In Britain, Constituency Labour Parties and affiliated trade unions should demand that the Labour government calls an immediate and unconditional halt to arms sales to Indonesia.

WA

WA

# The Testament of Nikolai Bukharin

This year marks the 60th anniversary of the last of the three infamous Moscow Trials. Its chief defendant was Nikolai I.

Bukharin, who along with most of the other defendants was shot shortly after the trial.

## To a future generation of party leaders

I am leaving life. I bow my head, but not before the proletarian scythe, which is properly merciless but also chaste. I am helpless, instead, before an infernal machine that seems to use medieval methods, yet possesses gigantic power, fabricates organised slander, acts boldly and confidently.

Dzerzhinsky is no more; the wonderful traditions of the Cheka have gradually receded into the past, those traditions by which the revolutionary idea governed all its actions, justified cruelty towards enemies, safeguarded the state against any counter-revolution. For this reason, the organs of the Cheka won a special trust, a special honour, an authority and respect. At the present time, the so-called organs of the NKVD are in the main a degenerate organisation of unprincipled, dissolute, well-kept functionaries who, enjoying the former authority of the Cheka, seeking to satisfy the pathological suspiciousness of Stalin (I fear to say more), pursuing rank and glory, perform their foul deeds without, incidentally, understanding that they are simultaneously destroying themselves: history does not tolerate the witnesses to dirty deeds!

These 'wonder-working' organs can grind any member of the Central Committee, any member of the Party, into dust, turn him into a traitor-terrorist, saboteur, spy. If Stalin doubted in himself, confirmation would follow in an instant.

Storm clouds hang over the Party. My head alone, guilty of nothing, will implicate thousands more of the innocent. For, after all, an organisation must be created, a 'Bukharinist organisation', that in reality not only does not exist now, when I am in my seventh year without a shadow of disagreement with the Party, but did not exist then, in the years of the Right Opposition. I knew nothing about the secret organisations of Ryutin and Uglanov. Together with Rykov and Tomsky, I expounded my views openly.

Since the age of eighteen, I have been in the Party, and always the goal of my life has been the struggle for the interests of the working class, for the victory of socialism. These days the newspaper with the hallowed name *Pravda* prints the most contemptible lie that I, Nikolai Bukharin, wanted to destroy the achievement of October, to restore capitalism. This is an unheard-of obscenity. This is a lie that in its obscenity and irresponsibility towards the people could be matched only by the story that Nikolai Romanov devoted his entire life to the struggle against capitalism and the monarchy, to the struggle for the realisation of the proletarian revolution.

If I was more than once mistaken regarding the methods of building socialism, may my descendants judge me no more severely than did Vladimir Ilyich. We were the first to pursue the same goal by an as yet untrodden path. The time, the mores were different. *Pravda* would print a page for discussion, then everyone debated, sought the right path, argued, and made up and proceeded onward together.

I turn to you, the future generation of Party leaders, on whom will fall the terrible mission of clearing the monstrous cloud of crimes that in these terrible days is growing more and more grandiose, spreading like wildfire and smothering the Party.

I address myself to all Party members!

In what may be the final days of my life, I am certain that sooner or later the filter of history will inevitably wash the filth from my head.

I never was a traitor; I would have unhesitatingly traded my own life for Lenin's. I loved Kirov and never undertook anything against Stalin.

I ask the new, young, and honest generation of Party leaders to read my letter aloud at a plenum of the Central Committee, to vindicate me, and to reinstate me in the Party.

Know, comrades, that the banner you bear in a triumphant march towards socialism contains a drop of my blood, too! ■

Born in 1888, Bukharin came into contact with Marxism while still at high school, took part in the 1905 revolution, and formally joined the RSDLP the following year. An accomplished theoretician at an early age, he had written two significant books while still in his mid-20s. During the Russian Civil War Bukharin stood on the ultra left of the party, a leader of the Left Communists who were opposed to signing the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk.

Lenin's suppressed *Testament* described him in carefully balanced terms. Bukharin and Pyatakov were 'the most outstanding figures (among the youngest ones), and the following must be borne in mind about them: Bukharin is not only a most valuable and major theorist of the party; he is also rightly considered the favourite of the whole party, but his theoretical views can be classified as fully Marxist only with great reserve, for there is something scholastic about him (he has never made a study of dialectics and, I think, never fully understood it)'.

By 1924 Bukharin had emerged as the chief theoretician of 'socialism in one country'. He was, after Zinoviev and Kamenev, Stalin's chief ally in the struggle against the Trotskyist Left Opposition and replaced Zinoviev as president of the Comintern in 1926. But by 1928 Bukharin's usefulness to Stalin was at an end. Bukharin's policy of appeasing the richer peasants had reached an impasse with the threat of a widespread kulak rebellion. Stalin abruptly switched to forced collectivisation and industrialisation, while internationally the ultra-left politics of the Third Period were imposed upon the Communist parties. Together with the other leaders of the Right, Rykov and Tomsky, Bukharin launched a period of public struggle against Stalin, only to capitulate, convinced that open warfare could not succeed. From that point on Bukharin was a political shell, tolerated as director of *Izvestia* and on the drafting



commission for the 'Stalin Constitution' of 1936.

Bukharin bore a heavy responsibility for Stalinism – something frequently minimised by those claiming him as the forerunner of 'socialist humanism' – having lent his political popularity and theoretical weight to many key episodes in its consolidation. On a personal level, however, he refused to debase himself to the level of many of his erstwhile collaborators. Subjectively he remained a communist to the end – and this is at odds with those on the left who have portrayed him as merely an agent of capitalist restoration. He used his trial, so far as he was able, to conduct an elaborate and macabre game of cat and mouse with the prosecutor, Vyshinsky. His confessions were made in such a way as to subvert the entire proceedings, while he unexpectedly departed from the GPU's prepared text to deny other allegations.

The following document is reprinted from *This I Cannot Forget*, the memoirs of Bukharin's widow, Anna Larina, which were finally published in Moscow in 1988 and in Britain five years later. She committed his words to memory, only writing them down after her release from a labour camp in 1945. She spent another decade under surveillance in Siberia, only returning to Moscow in 1959. **Richard Price**

### Further reading:

Works by Bukharin which are reasonably accessible include: *The Economic Theory of the Leisure Class* (Monthly Review, 1972); *Imperialism and World Economy* (Merlin, 1972); (With E.A. Preobrazhensky) *The ABC of Communism* (Penguin, 1970); *Imperialism and the Accumulation of Capital* (Monthly Review, 1972); *Historical Materialism* (Ann Arbor, 1969); *Selected Writings on the State and the Transition to Socialism*, ed. Richard B. Day (Spokesman, 1982); *The Politics and Economics of the Transition Period*, ed. K.J. Tarbuck (RKP, 1979).

Studies on Bukharin include Stephen F. Cohen, *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution* (Oxford, 1980) and Kenneth J. Tarbuck, *Bukharin's Theory of Equilibrium* (Pluto, 1989), while his trial is dealt with in George Katkov, *The Trial of Bukharin* (Batsford, 1969) and Ken Coates, *The Case of Nikolai Bukharin* (Spokesman, 1978). **WA**

## Eileen Gersh 1913 – 1998

Over 50 people attended a memorial meeting for comrade Eileen Gersh on July 4 at Conway Hall in London, organised jointly by Workers Action and *Socialist Outlook*.

Although Eileen was a member of Workers Action and had joined our precursor organisations the Committee for Revolutionary Regroupment (CRR) and the Workers International League (WIL) in 1996, she had spent most of her political life as a member of organisations affiliated to the United Secretariat of the Fourth International.

The first speaker was Dianne Feeley from the US organisation Solidarity, who spoke about Eileen's work on the question of women's rights in the US Socialist Workers Party (which she joined in 1970 and was expelled from in 1985).

Marion Brain from *Socialist Outlook* then spoke about Eileen's work in Socialist Action in Britain (from 1985 to 1987) and later *Socialist Outlook*. Again, Eileen had been very active around women's issues, but also had done a lot of work on health and environmental questions.

Charli Langford from Workers Action told the meeting what he had discovered about Eileen's early political life in Britain in the 1930s, when she had been active in the Labour League of Youth and had campaigned against fascism and for support for the Spanish revolution. He also covered her time in East London in the 1990s, first in *Socialist Outlook* and later in the CRR, the WIL and Workers Action.

There were several tributes from the floor of the meeting. Among those present were activists from the Labour Party, the National Abortion Campaign, *Revolutionary History*, the organisations of which she had been a member, and independent comrades who had worked with her on various campaigns.

Comrades spoke of Eileen's dedication to the fight for a socialist world, her particular commitment to women's liberation, and her serious and methodical approach to theoretical questions (she was by training a biologist). But the most frequent observation was concerning her complete lack of self-centredness and self-aggrandisement.

Tributes from Steve Bloom (Solidarity – US) and Chris Faatz were read out and the meeting closed with the singing of the Internationale. **WA**

### From Steve Bloom:

I never knew Eileen when she and I were both in the SWP. That says something, about her, I think – because I knew a lot of people from a lot of branches. But Eileen never made much noise the way others did. She was just there, giving support to the party and its work.

When she was expelled, shortly after those of us who formed the Fourth Internationalist Tendency were expelled, I did find out who she was, and what her support and encouragement were worth. Even though she did not stay long in the US after that, her quiet but resolute commitment to what we were trying to do reached across the Atlantic on a regular basis, when there was a special activity or a special need.

You are gathered to celebrate Eileen's memory on July 4, the day when we in this country remember an important revolutionary event in our history: the Declaration of Independence which marked the beginning of the first American revolution. That revolution, one of the great bourgeois-democratic revolutions, still left much undone, and so in the 1860s a Civil War was fought which constituted the second American bourgeois-democratic revolution. But that war, too, left a lot unfinished – even in the context of winning basic democratic rights for all citizens of this country. So we still have some work to do – in terms of finally winning democratic rights for all, not to mention uprooting the power of the US bourgeoisie which was consolidated in the course of those two revolutions.

This reality seems rather simple when it is stated as concisely as this. But it is a simple truth that so few seem able to comprehend. Eileen did comprehend it: We have some work to do. She understood what that meant in terms of how she should live her life. She never wavered in her conviction that a third American revolution – the socialist revolution – would come if we just did the work we had to do, and that this revolution would finally lay the basis for a world where human solidarity and dignity, not money and power and commodities, would define relations between people. She knew that there was no other cause in life which was more important.

Eileen will be missed by all of us who live on to continue the struggle, and who can only hope in the end that it will be said we lived our lives as well as Eileen Gersh lived hers. **WA**

# Socialist revolution and ecology

The following article was written by Eileen Gersh at the request of Bulletin in defense of Marxism and appeared in early 1995. It is a synopsis of a 1991 resolution of the World Congress of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International. This text is Eileen's original and therefore may differ slightly from the version that appeared in BIDOM.

Workers Action has some differences with the political line of this article, the most important being that the leading role of the working class is omitted. Neither do we accept that the United Secretariat's claim to be 'the Fourth International'. Although we do not agree with the article's conclusions, it raises important questions on which revolutionaries have to intervene into the ecological movement and campaign within the working class.

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by Eileen Gersh

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Survival of the human species is threatened by various kinds of environmental damage. 'Acid rain', 'destruction of the ozone layer' and 'the greenhouse effect' have become commonplace terms. They threaten the death of forests, increases in deaths from cancer and other diseases, crop failures and famine.

Except by 'green parties' and ecological groups, not enough attention has been paid to these dangers. While their roots can be discerned in the industrial revolution of the nineteenth century, it is only since World War II that quantitative and qualitative changes in industrial processes have resulted on the one hand in huge cumulative changes in the environment, and on the other in the risk of catastrophic accidents. Either way, dire and irreversible consequences for humanity can result. The air we breathe, the skies above us, the water we drink and need for our crops, and the resources of the earth and the seas are all affected. The problems are not confined to any one area of the globe.

Recognising all this, the Fourth International adopted a 19-page statement under the above title at its 13th World Congress in 1991. This article gives the gist of it.

## Environmental hazards

Automobiles and industrial processes cause most atmospheric pollution. The water of rivers and lakes is polluted by acid rain and industrial wastes, and by excessive use of fertilisers in agriculture. Oil spills and sewage effluents pollute the seas.

Oceans, wetlands and forests have been great reservoirs of wildlife, providing foods and many other natural resources. They are being destroyed or poisoned, and their productivity is dwindling.

Added to all these threats to our well being is the chance of large-scale industrial accidents from chemical factories or nuclear power plants (for instance, Three Mile Island, Chernobyl and Bhopal, not to mention

accidental or deliberate exposure of populations to nuclear weapons. On top of this are unforeseen long-term effects of new technologies in industry and medicine, such as the use of asbestos for insulating buildings, or thalidomide for medical treatment.

Some of the damage is reversible, though in some cases only in the long run of hundreds of years. Some is irreversible, permanently impoverishing our lives and demanding strict measures to prevent it from going further.

## Environment and capitalism

If we had organised our social life in a manner compatible with preserving the environment, these changes would not be taking place. For the last two centuries, our social life has been organised predominantly on a capitalist basis. The capitalist mode of production has dominated all countries of the world, even including the non-capitalist countries of Eastern Europe, East Asia and Cuba, and the countries of the 'third world'.

The essence of the capitalist economy is private ownership of the means of production and the production of commodities that are sold for profit. In relation to the conservation of resources, this system results in vast contradictions. Take energy as an example. We cannot create or destroy energy, but the second law of thermodynamics tells us that energy tends to be dissipated. We cannot reverse this process, so we should obviously use energy as sparingly as possible. High level sources of energy, such as coal, oil or wood, take enormously long periods to build up. There is no way that we can produce them as fast as we are now consuming them. As long as profit can be made out of privately owned sources of energy by selling energy as a commodity, however, the incentive is to sell as much as possible. There is little incentive to invest in research into ways of using renewable sources of energy such as wind, waves and sun, as alternatives to fossil fuels.

The logic of the capitalist mode of production, which maximises profit through each of a series of steps from raw materials to saleable commodity, has had the follow-

ing results:

1) The effect on the planet of depletion of raw materials has not entered into the reckoning. It is irrelevant to the processes of production and profit making.

2) By-products that pollute the environment have been equally irrelevant, except in cases where unions have succeeded in winning health and safety measures. It is usually cheaper to throw away waste products than to find ways of using them or breaking them down. Dumping wastes creates innumerable problems.

3) The reinvestment of profits means a constantly expanding production and the creation of new needs: two cars instead of one, six kinds of detergents for different purposes, where one used to do.

4) In order to sell his products, the capitalist must convince consumers that they need them. Vast sums are spent in advertising to create new needs or convince consumers of the superiority of one brand over another. These costs are included in the cost of production and therefore paid for by the consumers, though the ads have little value for the consumer, only for the producer. In the end, they constitute an additional mass of waste.

5) Uncoordinated development of urban and surrounding space for industrial zones, residential areas and dormitory towns, shopping centres and tourist or recreation zones, has resulted in transport problems which are solved with maximum profit by the proliferation of automobiles. This in turn gives rise to further problems: progressive covering of green space areas with new highways and parking spaces, with ever-increasing atmospheric pollution. This is the main cause of the greenhouse effect, as the polluting gases trap the sun's rays so as to increase temperatures at the earth's surface. Unless checked, this will result in (a) a rise in sea level which will threaten millions of people now living near the sea; and (b) a change in climate which will make it impossible to keep on growing crops in their present areas of distribution.

6) Twentieth century agriculture ('agribusiness') has followed the trends of capitalist production: mechanisation and factory farming on a scale with which the small family farm cannot compete, so that the small farmer becomes an 'endangered species'. The use of chemicals instead of organic fertilisers and crop rotation results in deterioration and erosion of soil. Chemical fertilisers, pesticides and weed killers drain into streams and lakes and pollute the water.

## The 'third world'

If all this environmental damage is attributable to the capitalist system, however, we may ask: How come there is as much,

if not more, damage in the 'third world'; and in 'post-capitalist' countries?

In the 'third world', capitalist exploitation takes the form of the mining of minerals, wholesale destruction of forests for timber, and wholesale use of land for cash crops instead of growing foodstuffs needed by the local people.

Destruction of rain forest deprives the planet of a carbon dioxide 'sink' which counteracts the greenhouse effect. Agribusiness leads to all the abuses mentioned above. It also leads to a drift of workers to the towns, where multinational industries employ some of them. The im-

perialists gain a double advantage — first, to have a work force which accepts much lower wages than prevail in the first world countries; and second, to export whatever pollution their industry may cause, and so avoid hostility and/or the cost of reducing pollution in factories in the home country.

### Post-capitalism

The record of the ex-Soviet Union and its satellites, of China, and of the smaller post-capitalist countries, is another matter. From the beginning of the 1930s, Stalin's declared goal was to overtake the capitalist countries in industrial production. This was also

the declared goal of the Soviet Union. The only country that has tried to make a revolution and do everything it could to preserve and improve the environment is Nicaragua under the Sandinistas, where 'the revolution [was] also for the lakes, rivers, trees and animals'. Unfortunately, the Sandinistas considered it necessary to continue producing crops such as coffee and cotton for export, in the same way that Cuba continued to concentrate on its sugar crop. As it turns out, now that the Soviet Union's support has been withdrawn, it might have been better for these revolutionary countries to concentrate on self-sufficiency in basic foodstuffs.

### Environment is a class issue

We can see that it is the capitalist pattern of expanding production that is responsible for degrading the environment all over the world. The solution therefore lies in the struggle against capitalism. As much as exploitation of labour, oppression of women or racism, this is a class issue, and one that can only be solved by the intervention of the working class, albeit an issue that, like nuclear weapons, has a wide appeal outside of the working class.

The ecology movement has presented a challenge to the bourgeoisie. The assumption that capitalism is endlessly progressive is questioned from a new angle. The bourgeoisie has responded by studies such as *The Limits of Growth*, produced by the Club of Rome in 1972, and the Brundtland Report, *Our Common Future*, adopted by the United Nations in 1988. Capitalist tycoons occupy prominent positions in the ecology movement. Maurice Strong, secretary-general of the 1992 Conference on Environment and Development, is head of the Canadian national oil company, Petro-Canada. The co-editor of *The Economist* magazine, Edward Goldsmith, belongs to a millionaire family.

Governments have established limits for environmental pollution (of air, soil and water) and proposed methods of limiting pollution by individual companies, such as imposing fines for polluting or taxes on the use of natural resources. New (capitalist) industries are arising, making profits from a whole range of products from biodegradable detergents to catalytic converters, to 'scrubbers' for industrial machinery. None of these programmes envisages a radical change in the structure of society; nor do they offer even temporary solutions for the 'third world' countries where capitalist profits depend on exploitation of labour and the environment, including pollution of the latter.

### Demands

- \* A radical break with the exploitative system of agricultural export production in the dependent countries which produces famine and poverty.
- \* An immediate ban on the entire nuclear power cycle.
- \* An immediate ban on the production and use of toxic and dangerous substances such as chlorinated fluorocarbons and asbestos.
- \* No economic exploitation of the Antarctic.
- \* No to the destruction of the tropical rain forests and to the fatal pollution of the forests in the industrialised countries.
- \* Stop all agricultural practices which destroy the soil in the industrialised countries.
- \* Stop dumping waste into the seas, rivers and lakes.
- \* Prevent dangerous — and in the 'third world', with the slaughter of the Amazon Indians, even genocidal — nuclear power projects such as Kararao (Brazil) and Sardars Sarovar (India).
- \* Ban all toxic waste transports and the transfer of hazardous production processes to the dependent countries.

### Alternatives

- \* A system of agriculture in dependent countries that is primarily oriented to securing the basic necessities of the population.
- \* Production of goods for civilian instead of military use.
- \* Useful and planned use of energy instead of over-exploitation of non-renewable energy sources: development of alternative energy sources such as solar and wind energy, energy from biological sources etc.
- \* Ecological farming
- \* Development of public instead of private, individual transport systems, especially local transport and railways.
- \* Filters and sewage works, etc, are insufficient. What is required is a fundamental industrial conversion which forbids environmental pollution right from the start.
- \* A policy of recycling and radical avoidance of waste.

### How can the alternatives be put into practice?

- \* Thoroughgoing land reform in the dependant countries.
- \* Total cancellation of the debts of the countries maintained in a state of underdevelopment, and of the transitional societies.
- \* Development of alternative energy plans by the environmental and workers' movements together with progressive scientists.
- \* Elimination of business secrets, which serve, for example, to disguise real emission levels of chlorinated fluorocarbons; compulsory introduction of records detailing materials involved in production and right of access to them.
- \* Programme of public works for the conversion of production.
- \* Set up 'ecological dual power' via workers' control of production; workforce to have the right to veto production that is hazardous to health and the environment.
- \* Transfer of the key areas of the economy to public property under the control of the workers, consumers and environmental movement.
- \* Set up ecologically compatible production based on the principle of satisfying needs instead of the profit principle or the rule of the bureaucracy.
- \* Fight for a free, democratic, pluralistic, self-managing socialist society.

**The 'green' parties**

It is to the credit of the 'green' movement that many of its participants have recognised the need to organise on a broad basis, forming national Green Parties which aim to co-ordinate different interests such as nature conservation, clean air and water, preservation of the ozone layer, the use of sustainable energy sources, etc. The Green Parties tend to see themselves as classless, and to have a revolutionary programme without recognising the revolutionary weapon (the working class) that is essential to carrying the programme through. Some members of the working class tend to side with the capitalist industries that employ them, because their jobs are at stake. As a result, sectors of the ecology movement have become polarised against sectors of the working class.

To some extent the movement has been successful in introducing reforms, perhaps the greatest of which have been the virtual stoppage of building new nuclear power plants; and the fifty-year moratorium on mining in the Antarctic. All the same, nothing that has been done so far has stopped the ever-increasing global damage.

**For international working-class action**

Revolutionary Marxists have been aware of a number of ecological issues for a long time and have recognised that they arise from the capitalist system; but it is only since the early 1970s that we, like others, have realised the scope of the threat to life on our planet. It was the mass movement against atomic energy, a world-wide phenomenon, which got us involved (resolution of the 11th World Congress of the Fourth International, 1979).

It is important for us to develop relations with the Greens for two reasons: they have scientific knowledge and expertise which few of us can claim, and they must obviously be a component of united front action on ecological issues. These issues are of international concern and demand internationally co-ordinated action. Our demands are a challenge to capitalism and can only achieve maximum effectiveness with the involvement of the working class. Our task is to enlist workers behind our demands, as outlined in resolutions of the 12th and 13th World Congresses of the Fourth International.

We cannot expect to achieve a 'clean' capitalism, yet it is clear from experience in the non-capitalist countries that a revolution which socialises the means of production provides no assurance of a green revolution. Our perspective must therefore be, as it is for women's liberation, to build an autonomous movement, independent of political parties, which will continue after the social revolution to safeguard the environment for the benefit of future. ■

# Restating the United Front

*'The Communists do not form a separate party opposed to other working-class parties. They have no interests separate and apart from those of the proletariat as a whole . . . The Communists fight for the attainment of the immediate aims, for the enforcement of the momentary interests of the working class . . . [they] ally themselves with the Social-Democrats . . . But they never cease for a single instant to instil into the working class the clearest possible recognition of the hostile antagonism between bourgeoisie and proletariat . . . The Communists disdain to conceal their views and aims. They openly declare that their ends can be attained only by the forcible overthrow of all existing social conditions.'* (Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, **The Communist Manifesto**, 1848)

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by **Charli Langford**

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The theory of the united front was developed by the third and fourth congresses of the Communist International (Comintern) in 1921 and 1922, but its roots are much older, as this quotation from the *Communist Manifesto* shows. The actions of the Bolsheviks against the attempted Petrograd coup by Kornilov in late August 1917 were another important precursor.

In 1921, the German Communist Party (KPD) published the 'Open Letter', which Lenin described as a model of a united front orientation to the Comintern at its third congress. The context in which the letter was proposed was a massive onslaught on workers' living standards. The unity proposals it made to the other workers' organisations included:

- \* Workers' control over food supplies, fuel and raw materials;
- \* Control over growing and marketing of food by peasants' councils and farm labourers' organisations;
- \* Higher pensions;
- \* Full employment; reopening closed enterprises;
- \* Disarming of bourgeois military; establishment of workers' self-defence;
- \* Amnesty for political prisoners;
- \* Re-establish trade and diplomacy with USSR.<sup>1</sup>

**Winning the masses from reformism**

The third congress of the Comintern had to deal with the ebb of the post-war revolutionary wave, and the continued allegiance of large numbers of workers to the reformist parties of the Second Inter-

national. The task was how to relate to these workers and draw them into united class resistance to the attacks of the bourgeoisie. The resolution entitled 'On Tactics', passed at that congress, could be summed up as a need for Communists to strive for maximum workers' unity in action on class demands, and to fight for the leadership of the non-proletarian oppressed. In December 1921, the Executive Committee of the Comintern passed the 'Directives on the United Front'<sup>2</sup>, which covered the need for the Communist parties to propose agreements with reformists and centrists on the key questions of the time, but to retain the right to express opinion on the policies of other working-class organisations at all times.

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The united front as envisaged by the early Comintern was a party-to-party tactic at a time when the Communist Parties in France, Germany, Italy and a number of other countries were mass parties. However, the situation of the smaller CPs was also considered. Parties such as the British were too small to realistically propose united fronts directly to the mass workers' parties in their countries, so a range of other tactics was devised. In Britain, for example, Lenin proposed that the Communists enter the Labour Party — a tactic Trotsky described as the 'united front from within'. They also sought to exert mass pressure on the reformists through CP-led organisations such as the Minority Movement, and through their work among the unemployed.

The emphasis in 'On Tactics' was for the Communists 'to participate directly in the struggle of the working masses', but its aim was the defeat of the existing leadership. The section on Britain put this particularly clearly: 'For many thousands and millions of workers the strength of the strike movement is the test of the reliability, perseverance and good intentions of the trade union apparatus and its leaders . . . Party criticism from outside is less effective than the persistent daily efforts of the Communist cells in the trade union to show up and discredit the hypocrites and traitors of the union movement . . .'<sup>3</sup> The resolution understood the dialectical unity of united struggle with the reformists while coming into conflict with the labour movement bureaucracy.

### Moves within the Comintern

The moves which the Comintern made away from infantile ultra-leftism, particularly at the third and fourth congresses, had little chance to be tested out in practice. By 1924, the first phase of Stalinism was underway — the so-called 'Bolshevisation' of the Communist parties. Opposition, particularly from the left, was tolerated less and less; CP leaderships were removed at the whim of Moscow, and the politics of the Comintern degenerated in an opportunist direction, exemplified by the rotten alliances with the TUC General Council in Britain and the Kuomintang in China. These rightist leanings were combined with 'leftist' demagogy from Comintern president Zinoviev. The method of the united front was lost in this welter of opportunist manoeuvring and leftist posturing. These mistakes

only served to assist the reformist leaders in getting off the hook and rejecting the united front. The Comintern was becoming more and more an arm of Soviet foreign policy, in which the defence of the Soviet Union was paramount and all other considerations of the international workers' movement secondary.

### The German experience

The KPD had made important progress through its use of the united front after 1921. Even though the SPD leaders had collaborated with the proto-fascists of the Freikorps in murdering the Spartacus leaders, Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, and suppressing the 1918-9 revolution, the KPD correctly turned back towards the reformist workers in their organisations. The German situation at the time differed markedly from that of the other major Western European powers; Germany had been defeated in the First World War and its economy was being destroyed by plunder from the victors — France in particular was to occupy the Ruhr, the industrial heartland, in 1923 and appropriate all the wealth from there.

If anyone had the moral right to refuse unity in struggle with the reformists, then surely it was the revolutionary workers of Germany, whose leaders had been assassinated by forces hired by the SPD leaders, Noske and Scheidemann. This response of the KPD — to link in struggle the reformist workers through their organisations despite the fact that these same organisations had been complicit in assassinating KPD leaders — was a mature one, and in consequence the KPD grew dramatically in the period until the debacle of 1923. There remains a great deal of controversy over to what extent a revolutionary situation existed in Germany in late 1923.<sup>4</sup> One consequence, however, of the scapegoating of the Brandler leadership and the installation of the 'leftist' Fischer-Maslow leadership was a shift away from principled united front work.

### Stalinism's rejection of the united front ...

By the beginning of the 1930s, the failure to grasp revolutionary opportunities and the impact of the world crisis had allowed fascism to emerge in Germany as a serious contender for power. Trotsky and the international Left Opposition (both inside and expelled from the CPs) put their main emphasis on the need to return to the united front tactic.<sup>5</sup> The policy of the Comintern at the time was that the main danger to the

workers was social democracy — labelled 'social fascism' by the Stalinists. The only united front possible, according to this ultra-left lunacy, was the 'united front from below'. In other words, the communists would fight alongside the reformist workers provided the latter accepted the CP's programme and repudiated their own leaders in advance. Trotsky aptly described it as a policy of 'bureaucratic ultimatism', and it contributed in large part to Hitler's bloodless seizure of power in 1933.

The lessons of Germany were not lost on the French working class. Confronted by violent demonstrations by royalists and fascists in 1934, a powerful current of anti-fascist unity temporarily overcame the reluctance of the CP and Socialist leaders to mobilise jointly, and forced them to call a general strike and propose an anti-fascist united front.

### ... and degeneration into the popular front

However, this united front was short-lived. The 'front' was enlarged to become the so-called 'People's' or 'Popular Front', including supposedly anti-fascist bourgeois parties. This destroyed the 'united front of the workers' organisations', and subordinated the demands of the class to the interests of a wing of the bourgeoisie.

This policy was outlined by Dimitrov at the seventh congress of the Comintern in 1935. The Comintern and the CPs outside the Soviet Union were negotiating tools for soviet foreign policy, the aim being to make alliances with the 'anti-fascist bourgeoisie'. The problem with these alliances was that the bourgeoisie only made them if they saw it as being to their advantage, and therefore the Stalinists had to restrict workers to the programme of the liberal bourgeoisie in order to bring about the alliance. Thus the French CP supported the Blum government in France, which took office in the middle of the June 1936 strike wave and proceeded to roll back the gains workers had made through their militant action. In Spain, the Popular Front proved even more disastrous. The Spanish CP worked to undermine the mighty revolutionary uprising of June 1936. It allied itself with bourgeois parties, defended bourgeois property and used Russian military and financial aid to destroy the gains of the revolution, not least through the physical suppression of its revolutionary opponents.<sup>6</sup> In the final analysis, this counter-revolutionary policy permitted

the triumph of the fascist Franco by dividing and disarming the opposition.

Handing over power to a fascist government and moving outside the norms of bourgeois democracy in order to repress the working class carries considerable dangers for the ruling class. It is a desperate throw, and one which scarcely has a good track record in historical terms for capitalism. Not the least of the bourgeoisie's problems is that it puts the reigns of political power and the coercive forces of the state into the hands of the fascist petty-bourgeoisie, whose interests are far from identical with the big bourgeoisie.

Fascism is by its nature an unstable regime of crisis, and the working class should seek to take advantage of the splits in the ruling class that a rapidly growing fascist movement brings. The goal of the united front is not ultimately the defence of bourgeois democracy, but the preparation of the struggle for working class power.

The Popular Front has a completely opposite aim. In contrast to the united front, it seeks to shore up one section (the 'anti-fascist', 'peace loving', 'progressive' wing) of the bourgeoisie, in the hope that it will defend bourgeois democracy and workers' rights. But if the struggles of the 1930s proved one thing, it is that capitalism, for all the problems that fascist dictatorship creates, will prefer it to a successful workers' revolution.

### **Revolutionaries after the Second World War**

After the Second World War, Stalinism

formalised its accommodation to capitalism. At the Yalta conference, Stalin, Churchill and Roosevelt laid the basis for the post-war division of the world into spheres of influence. The CPs (which joined coalition governments in France, Italy and Belgium) dropped even their formal commitment to revolution, and openly embraced parliamentary reformism. Although the onset of the Cold War in 1947 led to a short-lived and thoroughly stage-managed left turn, this was only a prelude to further adaptation by the Western communist parties to their own national arenas. While they had much in common with social democracy, the CPs' main distinguishing features were their loyalty to Soviet foreign policy and their hostility to critics of Stalinism. Since in many countries they retained a mass working class base, bolstered by the prestige they had gained through wartime resistance movements, the CPs had to be considered by the remaining revolutionary forces as targets for united front agitation.

Only the Trotskyists could claim to be the inheritors of the transitional method as outlined by the early Comintern. Where the Stalinists spent their time wooing social democrats, liberals and pacifists into peace fronts and Soviet friendship societies, the Trotskyists at least retained some understanding of the necessity of placing fighting demands on the leaderships of the working class. That being said, under pressure from a hostile environment the sections of the post-war Fourth In-

ternational made many mistakes, involving serious adaptations to the dominant forces – both social democratic and Stalinist – within the workers' movement.

In most countries, the Trotskyists' forces were too small to make party to party united front tactics, as theorised by the early Comintern, realistic. The tactics suggested for smaller CPs in 1921 were more in line with what was possible, even though most Trotskyist groups were even smaller than the British CP in the early 1920s. The countries in which the Trotskyists had genuine mass influence, at least for a period – including Ceylon/Sri Lanka, Bolivia and Vietnam – were not imperialist countries with the type of reformist workers' parties and trade unions that the Comintern considered in 1921.

The failure, with a few exceptions, to build mass revolutionary parties since the Second World War has been due to a number of factors. The repellent Stalinist model of 'actually existing socialism', with its poverty, repression and betrayals, coupled with the huge US-led ideological offensive of the Cold War, greatly assisted the survival of reformism as a mass force. The post-war boom provided near-full employment and improved living standards for workers in the imperialist countries. The shift from direct colonialism to neo-colonialism, marked by 'independence' for many countries, provided an excuse for the claim that colonial exploitation was disappearing.

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### The new political situation

After two decades of boom, the first major crack appeared in the events of May-June 1968 in France. The dollar crisis of 1971 and the oil crisis of 1973 ushered in a period of considerable instability throughout the capitalist order internationally. In Britain, a Labour government took office in early 1974 on the back of a miners' strike and the three-day week. But as the radical rhetoric of its manifesto was revealed to be so much hot air, workers began to resist cuts and wage controls, culminating in the winter of discontent of 1978-9.

The pay off for the weakness of revolutionary leadership internationally was a bourgeois neo-liberal offensive led by Reagan and Thatcher, although its test bed had been in Chile under Pinochet's military dictatorship. At the centre of this strategy in Britain was the carefully staged attack on the miners, and the wave of privatisations starting with Telecom. The closures of basic industries, including mining, shipbuilding and steel, drove unemployment up rapidly and had the effect of intimidating other sections of workers from taking action.

The response of the dominant sections of the trade union leadership was to retreat under the banner of 'new realism'. This in turn contributed to preventing workers from resisting the bosses' offensive.

All this was combined with (in fact, was part of) an ideological offensive against welfarism in its widest sense — full employment and social provision as well as health and education — and in favour of the 'market economy'.

The collapse of Stalinism in 1989-91 has caused these tendencies to accelerate and extend. The reversal of eastern Europe to capitalism dealt a major blow to socialists, not just to the apologists for Stalinism. It gave the bourgeoisie added confidence in its onslaught, and encouraged the social democratic leaders to shift their parties even further to the right, openly accepting the desirability of market economy.

Although there are gathering storm clouds over the world economy, there is at yet no revolutionary crisis. Nor are there anywhere revolutionary parties at the head of significant numbers of workers. Revolutionary forces are very small and generally isolated and need to de-

velop tactics which will gain us a hearing from workers.

### United front work in the present situation

Some on the left have deduced from this situation that what is needed is a reversion to pure socialist propaganda. While it is true that the ebb in workers' consciousness has meant that in many circumstances, revolutionaries will need to return to many basic educational concepts, it does not mean that they are somehow exonerated from proving in practice to those who remain loyal to reformist and Stalinist parties that it is necessary to make their organisations fight for their class interests. And this means applying, at least in some form, united front-type tactics. Even in the revolution of 1917, the Bolsheviks directed their main intervention into the soviets, which were by origin, mass spontaneous united front bodies representing not only the workers' trade unions but also their various political leaderships.

The question of how to operate the united front tactic depends on the balance of forces. With a relatively large revolutionary party it would be possible to propose united front work directly to the reformist parties, using our own press and propaganda to ensure that the mass of workers knew about our proposals for joint action. Provided we used appropriate demands — class demands, designed to appeal to the mass of workers yet able to operate as a bridge to a higher level of consciousness — the inclination of the workers towards unity would create huge pressure on the reformist leadership to mobilise its forces at least partially, for fear that inaction would expose it. But this kind of pressure from below tends to lever open differences within reformist parties, because action proposals — demonstrations, occupations, strikes, etc — to achieve our demands encounter uneven levels of consciousness within the various levels of the reformist party. Among the base, there would be at least localised support for carrying out of our proposals. Attempts by the reformist leadership to hold struggle back, and discipline those taking part can act as important means of raising the awareness of reformist workers of the true nature of their leadership.

But revolutionary forces are far too small to do this at present, so we have to take as our guide the tactics suggested by the Comintern for the small CPs of the early 1920s. We can at

least develop tactics derived from the united front — what we have called united front-type work. However, we must take care not to get confused between the relatively small tasks that we can take up and the genuine united front of workers' organisations.

By initiating united class struggle activity, revolutionaries aim to approach workers not simply in ones and twos — as we would for instance when selling papers on the street — but through the organisations to which they are actively or passively loyal. While it is legitimate to question the relative weight given to the two types of work, to counterpose them is to misunderstand that they are both necessary components of revolutionary work. Without a nucleus of convinced revolutionaries, it is impossible to conduct a serious intervention into the class. But without a correct orientation to the working class through its organisations, revolutionary activity degenerates into sect-like preaching. That is not to say that our work has failed if we prove unable to create a sufficiently large campaign to force a relationship with the leaders of the mass organisations of the class. We are still through smaller campaigns conducting a political dialogue with those whom we fight alongside.

### The 'party front' error

The united front is so important for us because it is at the intersection of the three components of our work — the fight for working class independence, for working class unity, and for the transitional method. These three components throw into sharp relief the errors of the left in understanding and applying the united front tactic.

A major error is to junk the need for working class unity, and instead demand that the class rally round your own banner. And if few on the left in recent times, outside of a few crazed Maoists, have employed the 'social fascist' rhetoric of the Third Period, many have used at least part of its method.

One of the most common sectarian errors, repeated by every major formation on the left at one time or another, particularly in the trade unions and in anti-racist work, is to operate through 'party front' organisations. While it is of course likely that a particular group will have played the main role in launching a given campaign, the attempt to impose pre-selected unaccountable leaderships on campaigns is all too frequent. This contempt for workers' democracy has nothing in common with a genuine united front,

in which political differences will be openly debated in front of the class. Indeed, it owes more to Stalinism than to Bolshevism.

The various attempts of the left groups to operate in the trade unions through front organisations – including the WRP's All Trades Unions Alliance, International Socialism's Rank and File and Militant's Broad Left Organising Committee – all failed to build genuine rank-and-file movements because they were in one group's pocket. Why should a non-aligned worker strive to build a body over which he has no control or real input? The effect of party fronts is essentially to ring-fence advanced workers away from other militant co-workers with whom they should be united.

It is no accident that the SWP rejects the classical united front method, and instead swings between maximalist propaganda and minimalist demands on the reformist leaders. Most of the activities of the SWP – based as they are on 'building the party' – fall into this sectarian mode of operating, by putting the perceived needs of the party ahead of those of the class. But attempts to get rich quick by short circuiting the need for workers to learn through their own experience of the inability of the reformists to achieve the workers' needs are unlikely to yield anything other than temporary results. Members won on this sectarian basis are easily demoralised by unfavourable conditions, and if they realise their error it is often only to abandon not just the sectarian organisation that won them, but the revolutionary struggle in general.

### The 'maximalist' error

A second, and closely related, error is to junk the transitional method. Despite the key element of the workers needing to go through their own experience of learning that the reformist leaders cannot defend them, many ultra-lefts

see a united front as a body not to build, but merely to intervene into. They measure the success of their intervention by how far they can drive the body to the left in propaganda terms, and whether they recruit anyone from it. But of course these are tenth-rate considerations for the workers, youth and oppressed minorities caught up in real struggles. Artificially driving a campaign to adopt a maximalist platform without winning significant support for it in the class may temporarily 'isolate' workers from their reformist leaders who will not willingly support the platform. But the fact that these leaders feel no pressure to support the campaign usually means the withdrawal of official labour movement support and marginalisation for the campaign. In other words, it succeeds in letting the reformist leaders off the hook. And while 'revolutionary' campaigns may win a recruit or two, they often do not lead to lessons being drawn among broader groups of workers, since the artificial separation of the rank and file from their leaders removes the opportunity to experience and fight the betrayal in action.

One example of how such an intervention can prove counter-productive comes from the anti-fascist struggle in East London. In 1992, the 'Stop Tyndall, stop the fascists' campaign was established at a time when John Tyndall, then leader of the fascist

British National Party (BNP), was standing in the general election. BNP support in the local white working class was growing at the time, and in September 1993 Derek Beackon won a council seat on the Isle of Dogs. The aim of the campaign was to address this base and persuade it to vote for a workers' party.

The Revolutionary Internationalist League (RIL) targeted the campaign with the aim of 'winning it to a consistent anti-racist position', and in particular of winning it to a position of opposition to all immigration controls. While those that established the campaign agreed with this demand – and this is a situation often found in small united front-type bodies – it was generally agreed that making this the central demand of the campaign would not help in minimising the fascist vote. The campaign attempted to link with local workers' leaders in clear opposition to the fascists. But the Labour candidate, Peter Shore, was able to denounce us as hopelessly unrealistic because the RIL had managed to force the demand through a meeting at which they held a temporary advantage. A key aim of the campaign – to get the Labour candidate to endorse the need to deny the fascists democratic rights as part of an education process for the class, was destroyed by ultra-leftism.

Confronted by the real danger of the fascists building a base, the RIL chose to make its stand on a propaganda point of principle, rather than take up clear, class-based agitation which could hope to break confused and backward workers from the fascists. Presenting such workers with an ultimatum to become exemplary anti-racists was highly unlikely to alter the balance of forces.

### The 'best builder' error

The errors mentioned above are based in ultra-leftism. The other type of error – which comes from junking working class independence – is an opportunist and right-wing error. In the imperialist countries the full-blown

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popular front is a rarity today, partly because of the weakness and ineffectiveness of the CPs (which are the organisations most likely to propose them) but mainly because of the hostility of the bourgeoisie to the left organisations.

But there is a methodological error that some organisations – particularly AWL but to a lesser extent Socialist Outlook – are liable to. This is to treat the two facets of the united front – the maximum unity of the class in action, and the discrediting of the pro-bourgeois labour movement leadership – as if they are separated from each other and redefined as primary and secondary aims. This allows organisations to see themselves as the ‘best builders’ of a campaign, while permitting the politics to be controlled by the Stalinist or left reformist forces attracted to the campaign, and is marked by accusations of ‘sectarianism’ and ‘ultra-leftism’ against organisations attempting a correct united front application within the campaign. The organisations that practice this method cannot be judged popular frontist themselves, but the method militates against fighting the CPs and left reformists who will try to turn the campaign into a popular front. The popular front danger in the Euromarch campaign did not become an actuality because the Redwood-led Anti-Maastricht Alliance did not respond to the CP’s invitation to join – but nonetheless this does not excuse ‘leaving the door open’ to the anti-European bourgeoisie.

### Single-issue campaigns

The 1921 KPD letter is instructive even today. The breadth of the demands it contains gives the lie to a modern-day argument that a united front should be on a single issue only. The size of the revolutionary forces today limits our capacity to intervene into the class struggle. Much of our work is in single-issue campaigns where we build an alliance of forces, some with a specific interest in the issue, others with a more general outlook. We have recognised that in the present period it is often counter-productive to extend the basis of a campaign for fear of losing activists and supporters. Examples of such campaigns are the Troops Out (of Ireland) Movement – where we ally with many whose reason for wanting an independent united Ireland are very different from our view that it is a prerequisite for achieving socialism in Ireland and Britain. We work with pacifists in CND and with greens on some ecologi-

cal questions. Our basis for working within these campaigns – where there are strong elements of non-proletarian forces – is that the demands of the campaign are in the interests of the working class.

As with all our work with non-proletarian forces, we have to be striving to win the campaigns to orient to the labour movement and to understand the role of the working class in revolution. The root cause of the issues that motivate these single-issue campaigns is invariably some facet of capitalism. We should be looking for opportunities to educate campaign activists and to broaden campaigns where we can do so with little penalty. But there is no principle that says campaigns should be about single issues; our decision whether or not to try to broaden such campaigns is purely tactical.

One particular area where restricting united front-type work to single issue campaigns is a huge error is within the mass workers’ parties. Even in today’s British Labour Party there are large numbers of reformist workers whom we need to relate to, but most of the campaigning work there takes as its starting point the structures of the party rather than the needs of the working class. As an illustration, following the defeat of the Clause 4 campaign (the old Clause 4 committed the Labour Party ‘to secure for the workers by hand or by brain the full fruit of their labours . . . upon the basis of the common ownership of the means of production’) there was discussion on where to take the campaign next. AWL argued against extending the campaign into the area of opposition to the anti-trade union laws on the grounds that first, the campaign was a single-issue campaign, and second, that the campaign to retain Clause 4 was ‘defending existing party policy’ while opposing the anti-union laws was not. It is extremely unlikely that among the political activists in a reformist political party with a large trade union component, founded by the trade unions, there would be a mass loss of support if a campaign devoted to defending and ex-

tending Clause 4 were to take up opposition to the anti-union laws (this is even more the case when the alternative – disbanding after having lost the fight – is sure to lose all the activists!). A quasi-religious attitude to the single-issue nature of the campaign led to this error. More importantly, the line of ‘defending party policy’ ignores the fact that the Labour Party plays a specific role in Britain, that of a bourgeois workers’ party, a party which is of the workers, but that defends the bourgeois order. Party policy is defined by the touchstone of seeking to obtain reforms for the workers within the constraints of bourgeois democracy and capitalism. To oppose a demand to campaign for more power to the working class on the ground that it is not ‘party policy’ is popular frontist.

### Conclusion

The mass organisations of the working class seek to ameliorate the conditions of the workers under capitalism. This tactic is doomed to failure because capitalism’s prime aim is the realisation of profit for the bourgeoisie and any workers’ gains will be clawed back if this aim is threatened.

The working class has an instinctive understanding of the need for unity in order to win its demands, flowing from the its experience of collective action through trade union and other struggles in the past.

Most of the revolutionary organisations have little understanding of the united front. They build ‘party fronts’ and see a genuine united front as a propaganda opportunity and a recruiting ground.

United front-type work is now absolutely essential for revolutionaries. It is by far the most effective way to gain a hearing before the masses. It allows us to demonstrate our absolute commitment to the working class and it is also the most effective way of demonstrating in practice to the masses the misleadership and limitations of the reformist and Stalinist parties.

### Notes:

1. *Revolutionary History*, Vol. 2, No. 3, Autumn 1989.
2. Ed. J. Degras, *The Communist International 1919-1943*, Vol. 1, Oxford, 1956, pp.309-316.
3. Ed. A Adler, *Theses, Resolutions and Manifestos of the First Four Congresses of the Third International*, Ink Links, 1983.
4. See *Revolutionary History*, Vol. 2, No. 3 and Vol. 5, No. 2.
5. See L. Trotsky, *The Struggle Against Fascism in Germany*, Pathfinder, 1971.
6. See L. Trotsky, *The Spanish Revolution 1931-39*, Pathfinder, 1973; F. Morrow, *Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Spain*, Pathfinder, 1974; ‘The Spanish Civil War: The View from the Left’, *Revolutionary History*, Vol. 4, Nos. 1-2.

# The politics of the United Left in Spain

**D**ear comrades — I would like to make some comments on the article by Jim Padmore which appeared in the third issue of Workers Action. In this article the author examined the Spanish Izquierda Unida (United Left). He made several criticisms of IU, in particular because of its confused political position on the national question in Spain. However, he concluded that 'IU remains a broad-based organisation of hundreds of thousands of working class socialists, into which Marxists can, and should, intervene'.

In my view, there are several points which have been forgotten in the article — points which raise doubts about the necessity of Marxists to intervene into IU. An organisation constituted around the Stalinist Communist Party (PCE), IU behaves today as the left flank of the governmental Partido Popular with its unitary programme directed against the rights of the Basque and Catalan nationalities.

On the other hand, it pays no attention to matters of fundamental importance to the working class such as the programme of labour 'reforms', the massive increase in part-time working, and the cut-backs in agriculture, fishing and mining imposed by the European Union. It refused to mount a political campaign against Spain becoming part of the military structure of NATO, making only a symbolic protest.

IU leaders no longer mention socialism in their speeches, preferring to make diffuse and non-political calls for the defence of democracy and the country, and for 'ethical' policies. In the IU programme, references to the class struggle and the working class have been replaced by abstract concepts like 'the struggle against neo-liberalism' and 'citizens'. IU calls for a less formal and more participatory democracy, as well as for a more progressive interpretation of the Spanish constitution. To sum up, it supports the utopian idea that all people could be equal in a capitalist system with a human face, showing that it does not have important programmatic differences with the Socialist Party

(PSOE) or the New Left split from IU, which together are working to build a Spanish version of the 'Olive Tree' electoral bloc.

As far as IU's political practice is concerned, this has been completely adapted to the neo-liberal and anti-socialist campaign launched by the bourgeoisie after the fall of the Berlin Wall. For IU, as for any bourgeois party, the only feasible framework for political action is parliament. Furthermore, in the cities where it controls the council, IU has made sharp attacks on the working class.

I think that Jim Padmore's statements about IU's attitude to the national question are somewhat superficial. Many years ago, the PCE decided to make an appeal to Spanish nationalism in an attempt to recover from the battered state it was in. It has not hesitated to use the worst kind of populist demagoguery against the most basic rights of the oppressed nationalities. Although the IU programme speaks of the need for a federal Spain, this is only brought out on high days and holidays. The day-to-day practice of the leadership is to support the forced hispanicisation of the historical minorities.

In fact, the terrorism of ETA, the petty-bourgeois Basque separatist organisation, is used by IU as an excuse to pour scorn on the right to self-determination, and to justify support for the monarchy. According to Julio Anguita, the main leader of IU, the central aim of the Spanish people is the defence of the Spanish state against terrorist violence. At the present time, IU does nothing to defend national rights in Euskadi (the Basque country) or the right of expression allowed by the Spanish government.

Last February, the entire leadership of Herri Batasuna (HB), ETA's political wing, was sentenced to seven years in jail for trying to practise their right of expression during the 1996 general election. HB campaigned in favour of the 'democratic alternative' — negotiating for peace — proposed by ETA. In July, *Egin*, the Basque daily newspaper founded 20 years ago, was closed

down because of its support for the political ideas of HB. This was an escalation of repression, not only against HB but against the whole Basque people. While IU has criticised the sentences imposed on HB leaders, it has not moved a finger to overturn them. On the contrary, it is conniving with the repression and has actively participated in all the demonstrations organised by the government against ETA.

These latest events are further evidence that IU has become an instrument of order, passivity and submission to capitalism. Unfortunately, this is not the end of the story — IU goes from bad to worse. In addition to its collaboration with the Spanish ruling class in the oppression of the other nationalities, IU rushes to defend capitalism whenever the masses take direct action, as happened with the Asturian miners this year and the Cádiz shipyard workers in 1994.

In spite of all this, one might consider the possibility that the problem is with the leadership of IU but not its rank-and-file militants. However, at the last IU congress, the existing leadership was supported by a large majority. There are some revolutionary militants inside IU, but no more than there are outside. The fact that IU gets considerable support in elections should not confuse Marxists, given that most of these votes come from the middle-class, particularly from university and state functionaries. The majority of the working class still supports the PSOE.

The tasks facing Marxists in Spain are the elaboration of a proletarian programme rooted in existing conditions and the regroupment of left-wing militants who are scattered in different small propaganda groups. In order to do that, it is mandatory that Marxists build up their own organisation. The tactics of this organisation towards the left sectors of IU should be those of the United Front — i.e., developing together specific activities related to the demands of the working class, but always criticising mercilessly the class-collaborationist character of IU. This is the best way in which Marxists can help the IU left-wingers to see that the politics of their organisation can only lead to demoralisation and failure.

I hope that my comments on this article will be useful in giving a clearer picture of the present situation of the left in Spain.

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Germany

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