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In this issue:

The Communist Manifesto After 150 Years; Marx Versus Historical Materialism; The Uncontrollability of Globalising Capital; Towards a Revolutionary Programme; Mezaros on Lenin; Minimum Platform (MAS Argentina); Documents from Comrades in the Former USSR; Mezaros on Lenin; The Road to Praxiology; Islamic Fundamentalism; The Bosnian Miners' Conference; Eritrean-Ethiopian War

Contents:

The Communist Manifesto today

- 3 The Communist Manifesto After 150 Years**
Cyril Smith
- 12 The Place of the Communist Manifesto in the Elaboration of the Marxian Idea of the Post-Capitalist Society**
Paresh Chattopadhyay
- 16 Marx Versus Historical Materialism**
Cyril Smith
- 23 The Uncontrollability of Globalising Capital**
Istvan Meszaros

The Revolutionary Programme - discussion

- 28 Towards a Revolutionary Programme**
Cliff Slaughter
- 32 The Minimum Platform: Some comments to Start the Discussion**
Aldo Andres Romero & Roberto Ramirez
- 36 Meszaros on Lenin**
Cyril Smith
- 39 Discussion Documents from Comrades in the Former USSR**
- 51 The Road to Praxiology: Discussion on the necessity of investigation of praxiology through examination of C. Slaughter's proposal of 'a new party'**
Shin Tanuma
- 58 A Debate**
Simon Pirani & Cyril Smith

Struggles around the world

- 63 Islamic Fundamentalism**
Yasmine Mather
- 68 The Bosnian Miners' International Workers' Conference - "Defend Social Property" 14-15th March**
Bob Myers
- 73 Preliminary Analysis of Eritrean-Ethiopian War**
Alasdair Guest
- 78 Letters to the Editor**
- 80 Scream Towards Rome**
Federico Garcia Lorca

Cover picture: a Soviet poster: "To work, with a rifle at hand!"

The Communist Manifesto After 150 Years

Cyril Smith

How can a book written in one historical epoch have a meaning for another? If the author has tried to answer the questions posed by the way of life of the people around him, what can these answers mean for those living under changed conditions and facing quite different questions?[1] In the case of Karl Marx, we have yet another barrier to penetrate. At the end of the twentieth century, when we pick up a text like the Manifesto, we already have in our minds what "everybody knows" about it. Before we even glance at its pages, distorting spectacles have been placed on our noses by the tradition known as "Marxism". Even today, Stalinism's obscene misuse of the word "communism" colours everything we read.

The upholders of "Marxism" thought of it as a science, and at the same time declared it to be a complete world outlook. These claims, which clearly contradict each other, make it impossible to understand the task which Marx set himself, a task that, by its very nature, no body of "theory" could complete. For his aim was no less than to make possible "the development of communist consciousness on a mass scale". It was not enough just to prepare the overthrow of the ruling class. This particular revolution required

the alteration of humans on a mass scale... because the class overthrowing it [the ruling class] can only in a revolution succeed in ridding itself of all the muck of ages.[2]

So the first step was not a "political theory", not a "model of society", not simply a call for revolution, but a conception of humanity. What Marx aimed at was, simultaneously, a science that comprehended human development, an understanding of how that development had become imprisoned within social forms that denied humanity, and a knowledge of the way that humanity was to liberate itself from that prison. Indeed, only through the struggle for liberation could we understand what humanity was. In essence, it was that "ensemble of social relations" [3], which made possible free, collective, self-creation. He showed how modern social relations fragmented society and formed a barrier to our potential for freedom, while, at the same time, providing the conditions for freedom to be actualised.

If we want to understand the Manifesto, we must read it as an early attempt to tackle all of these issues, set within the framework of a political statement. More clearly than any other of its author's works, it contradicts the "Marxist" representation of Marx as a "philosopher", an "econo-

mist", a "sociologist", a "theorist of history", or any other kind of "social scientist". To grasp what he was doing, we have to break through all the efforts of academic thinking to separate knowledge from the collective self-transformation of humanity. Indeed, one of the tasks of the Manifesto is to lay bare the source of all such thinking, finding it precisely within humanity's inhuman condition. Marx's science situates itself inside the struggle to transform our entire way of living.

Of course, in the past fifteen decades, the forms of capital and the conditions of the working class have changed profoundly in innumerable ways. But we still live in the same historical epoch as Marx, and, if we listen to what he has to say, we shall discover him to be our contemporary. So let us attempt to remove those "Marxist" spectacles, which prevented us from seeing just how original was Marx's conception. Then, perhaps, we shall be able to confront this product of nineteenth-century Western Europe with the agonising problems of today's "globalised" society. The essence of the Manifesto is not merely relevant for our time; it is vital for us, if humanity is to grope its way forward.

The Communist League

The Communist Manifesto was written in a Europe that was on the eve of the revolutionary upheavals of 1848, and that also still lived in the shadow of the revolutionary struggles of 1789-1815. It is a response to both of these, the storm to come and the one that had passed. Between 1844 and 1847, in Berlin, Brussels, Paris and Manchester, Marx and Engels had encountered the ideas of the various groups of socialists and communists, and had also studied the organisations of the rapidly-growing working class. Hitherto, these two, socialism and the working class, had been quite separate from, or even hostile to each other. The achievement of the Manifesto was to establish the foundations on which they could be united.

From this work came a new conception of communism, situated within the historical context of their time. As the Manifesto puts it, communism was not "based on ideas or principles that have been invented or discovered by this or that would-be universal reformer." [4] It had to be seen as the culmination and meaning of working-class struggle, and this struggle itself provided the key to understanding the existing economic relations. The "Marxists" thought they found in the Manifesto a "theoretical" analysis of "capitalism" and a "theory of history". Actually,

Marx was scornful of all pretence of having a "supra-historical theory of history" [5], never used the word "capitalism" and spent his life writing a critique of the very idea of political economy.

Every line of the Manifesto is permeated with his conception of communism. This was not a plan for an ideal future social set-up, worked out by some reforming genius, to be imposed on the world by his followers. Instead, it was to be the outcome of the development of the working-class movement itself, and therefore arose within the existing social order. Marx had turned towards the ideas of communism in 1844, Engels preceding him by two years. For three years, they discussed - and argued - with the many socialist and communist sects in Germany, France, Belgium and England, but joined none of them. Then, in 1847 they decided to join together with some former members of one of these secret groups, the League of the Just.

The League, which was largely German, and which had mainly consisted of workers and artisans [6], had more or less disappeared by that time. Its old members had outgrown the ideas of their leading figure, the heroic founder of the German workers' movement, Wilhelm Weitling, and come closer to Marx's view of communism. Marx and Engels, on the basis of their new-found ideas, resolved to bring these people together in a new kind of organisation. On one thing they were quite determined: this was not going to be a secret society, like the conspiratorial sects that abounded throughout Europe. It would be an open organisation, with a clearly expounded programme and outlook. The Communist League was formed at a conference in London, in the summer of 1847. A newspaper, the *Kommunistische Zeitschrift*, issued by the London branch in September of that year, carried the slogan "Proletarians of all Lands, Unite!". In November, a second conference assembled. After ten days of discussion, Marx was instructed to prepare a "Manifesto of the Communist Party", based upon Engels' draft "catechism", the *Principles of Communism*. Marx's work was not finished until early in February, 1848. (As usual, he made slow progress in carrying out their instructions, and the delay brought forth an angry letter from the Committee.) Before printing was complete, the insurrection had broken out in Paris.

What role did the Communist League play in the revolutionary events of 1848-9? As an organisation, almost none. Its individual members, of course, were to the fore in many parts of Europe. Marx and Engels, in particular were leading figures in the Rhineland, where they produced the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*. But, as a body, the League itself did not function during those stormy years. In 1850, after the defeat of the movement, exiles in London made an attempt to re-form it, but soon a fierce dispute broke out among them. Willich, Schapper and others dreamed that the revolutionary struggle would soon break out again. Marx and Engels and their supporters were convinced that the revolutionary wave had passed, and that a long period

of development of capital would ensue. In 1851, leading members of the League in the Rhineland were arrested and tried in Cologne. After that, the organisation was allowed to disappear. Marx deliberately cut himself off from the exile groups, and did not resume active political involvement for the next twelve years.

The Manifesto and the Class Struggle

The first thing to note about this document is that it begins and ends with declarations of openness.

It is high time that Communists should openly ... publish their aims...

The Communists disdain to conceal their views and aims.

Marx was always totally opposed to the idea that social change could be brought about by some secret group, working behind the back of society. This tendency, identified with the heroic but ineffectual conspiracies of Auguste Blanqui and his friends, was also the target of Marx's much-misunderstood phrase "dictatorship of the proletariat", first used by him four years later. In "Marxism", the central meaning of this formula was badly distorted. Quite contrary to any modern connotation of tyranny, Marx wanted to stress that the entire working class must govern, as opposed to any secret group, however benevolent its intentions.

The history of all hitherto existing society has been the history of class struggles.

So runs the famous opening of the first section, *Bourgeois and Proletarians*. But what does this mean? (Engels' 1888 footnote, excluding pre-history from this statement, does not really help. [7]) As is well known, the idea of class struggle as a way of explaining history was not invented by Marx, but had been employed by French bourgeois historians in the 1820s. Marx gives it a totally different content. For him, class struggles are an aspect of alienated society, and communism implies their disappearance.

It is quite wrong to read this section as if it presented history as a logical argument, with a deduction of the communist revolution as a conclusion. Ten years later, Marx depicted human history in terms of three great stages:

Relationships of personal dependence (which originally arise quite spontaneously) are the first forms of society ... Personal independence based upon dependence mediated by things is the second great form, and only in it is a system of general social exchange of matter, a system of universal relations, universal requirements and universal capacities formed. Free individuality, based on the universal development of the individuals and the subordination of their communal,

social productivity, which is the social possession, is the third stage.[8]

Of course, in 1848, Marx was not able to put the matter so clearly, but already the essence of his point of view is precisely that expressed by these lines. The class struggle was for him a feature of the second of these "stages" only, and bourgeois society marked the end of this entire period. This was the phase of "alienated life", where individuals had no control over their own lives. Only in this stage could you speak about "historical laws", since individuals were not yet the governors of their social relations. The Manifesto's paean of praise for the achievements of the bourgeoisie refers to their (of course, involuntary) work, which prepares for the great advance of humanity to its "third stage", communism. This will see human beings living as "social individuals", "universally developed individuals, whose social relationships are their own communal relations, and therefore subjected to their own communal control." [9] Thus Marx's entire picture of the movement of history is bound up with his conception of a "truly human" society, and the obstacles to it within our existing way of life.

Marx does not present us with a static picture of bourgeois social relations, as a sociologist might try to do. Instead, he gives a succinct outline of the birth, development and death of an oppressive and exploitative social order. He shows how "the bourgeoisie ... has pitilessly torn asunder the motley feudal ties that bound man to his 'natural superiors', and has left remaining no other nexus between man and man than 'callous cash payment'." [10] The class struggle, which has raged over the centuries, has been simplified by the modern bourgeoisie.

Society is splitting up more and more into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other: Bourgeoisie and Proletariat. [11]

This opening section of the Manifesto is concerned with the joint historical development of these classes, including the struggle between them, and the stages of this process are related to the development of modern industry. Thus the huge advances of human productive powers since the eighteenth century have taken the form of the growth of "new conditions of oppression, new forms of struggle in place of the old ones." [12] The outcome is that "man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real conditions of life and his relations with his kind". Just as the development of these "means of production and exchange" outgrew the feudal relations within which they had developed, now, the powers of modern industry have collided with the bourgeois relations that have "conjured them up".[13]

Now, Marx describes the growth of the proletariat,

the class of labourers who live only so long as they find work, and who find work on as long as their labour increases capital. These labourers, who must sell

themselves piecemeal, are a commodity like every other article of commerce. ... Owing to the extensive use of machinery, the work of the proletarian has lost all individual character, and consequently all charm for the workman. He becomes an appendage of the machine.[14]

The account of wage-labour given here is far from the developed analysis Marx was able to make in *Grundrisse*, ten years later, and, after still another decade's work, in *Capital*, but it still gets to the heart of the matter.

What is unprecedented about this particular form of class struggle, Marx explains, is that it prepares the objective ground for the transcendence of classes as such, and of all forms of oppression.

All the preceding classes that got the upper hand sought to fortify their already acquired status by subjecting society at large to their conditions of appropriation. The proletarians cannot become masters of the productive forces of society except by abolishing their own previous mode of appropriation, and thereby also every other mode of appropriation. ... The proletariat cannot raise itself up without the whole superincumbent strata of official society being sprung into the air. [15]

Throughout the Manifesto, Marx stresses the "cosmopolitan character" of bourgeois society, reflecting the development of a world market. "The need of a constantly-expanding market for its products chases the bourgeoisie over the whole surface of the globe." It is because of this that the struggle of the proletariat, while national "in form", is international "in substance". [16]

Marx's account of bourgeois society as the objective preparation for the proletarian revolution is bound up with the emergence of the consciousness necessary for the transformation of the whole of world society. The "Marxists" attributed to Marx a philosophical outlook called "historical materialism", a way of "explaining" the world. This was sometimes presented as a mechanical model of history, in which "material conditions" caused changes in consciousness. But this directly contradicts what Marx himself was doing. After all, was he not engaged in the struggle for the development of consciousness, and wasn't communism precisely the way for humanity to take conscious charge of history?

Bourgeois society, the last possible form of the class struggle, had also to bring forth the subjective elements needed for its conscious transcendence. Central to this is "the organisation of the proletarians into a class and consequently into a political party", and that means its self-organisation. But that is not all. In a vitally important paragraph, Marx describes how the break-up of the old order, and of the ruling class itself, has another consequence:

A small section of the ruling class cuts itself adrift and

joins the revolutionary class, the class which holds the future in its hands ... in particular a portion of the bourgeois ideologists who have raised themselves to the level of comprehending the historical movement as a whole. [17]

This is a remarkable passage. These "bourgeois ideologists" undoubtedly include Marx and Engels themselves. In 1847, how many others could there have been? Never before had an author been able to put himself into the picture in this way, explaining the origin of his own work in terms of the objective conditions it was investigating. Thus the objective, material development of modern industry is bound up with the development of the understanding of the need to emancipate these forces from the perverting power of capital.

When Marx speaks of the proletariat, he does not mean the members of a sociological category, the collection of those who can be labelled as "wage-earners". He is talking about a real movement, an objectively founded aspect of modern social life. People who sell their ability to labour find themselves involved in an antagonistic relation to the owners of capital, whether they like it or not, and whatever they may think.

The proletarian movement is the independent [18] movement of the immense majority in the interests of the immense majority. [19]

Obviously, many of the details of the picture of the world presented by Marx in 1848 are hardly to be found in the world of today. As Marx himself realised a short time later, his time-scale was extremely foreshortened. But, a hundred and fifty years on, it is amazing how many of its essential features are still at the heart of our problems.

The Role of the Communists

The second section, Proletarians and Communists, largely consists of an imaginary dialogue with a bourgeois objector to the idea of communism. It begins by situating the Communists in Marx's picture of the development of the proletariat. Many of its ideas are drawn from the doctrines of previous socialist and communist groups, and also from Engels' draft. But, from his standpoint, set out in the previous section, he transforms them into something quite new.

The members of the League gave their declaration the title Manifesto of the Communist Party. They could not anticipate how much misunderstanding this word "party" would cause for future decades, when it had so changed its meaning. For Marx and his comrades, it certainly did not mean the type of bureaucratic structure with which we associate it today, but a section of society, a social-political trend. Again stressing the open, anti-conspiratorial nature of communism, Marx declares

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. They do not set up any sectarian principles of their own by which to shape and mould the proletarian movement. ... The immediate aim of the Communists is the same as that of all the other proletarian parties: formation of the proletariat into a class, overthrow of the bourgeois supremacy, conquest of power by the proletariat.... The theory of the Communists may be summed up in the single sentence: Abolition of private property. [20]

Objects have been privately owned for millennia, so that individuals have been able to say of something, or even somebody, "this is mine". But the latest form of private property is different. Capital is "a collective product", set in motion only by "the united action of all members of society ... not a personal, but a social power." [21] Abolishing this power, capital, is the only way to ensure that "accumulated labour becomes a means to widen, to enrich, to promote the existence of the labourer."

Marx goes on to summarise the communist critique of the false bourgeois conceptions of freedom, individuality, culture, the family and education, attacking in particular the oppression of women within bourgeois society. After this, he outlines the nature of the proletarian revolution, "to raise the proletariat to the position of the ruling class, to win the battle of democracy", and identifies the resulting state with "the proletariat organised as the ruling class". [22]

The 10-point political programme for the first steps of the revolution with which this section ends, is interesting mainly for its surprisingly mild character. Clearly, Marx does not consider revolution as a sudden overnight transformation, resulting from some kind of coup d'état, however violent it might be. He refers to the situation following a prolonged historical transition, when

in the course of development class distinctions have disappeared and all production has been concentrated in the hands of a vast association of the whole nation. [23]

Then, he anticipates, "the public power will lose its political character". The proletariat will have "abolished its own supremacy as a class".

In place of the old bourgeois society, with its classes and class antagonisms, we shall have an association in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all. [24]

This sentence summarises a world of ideas which Marx has extracted and negated from the history of philosophy and political economy. It embodies his entire conception of what it means to live humanly. Potentially, humans can be free, but only when the freely created life of the whole of society is completely and visibly bound up with the

growth of each individual. Private property stands as a barrier to such freedom.

The third section of the Manifesto deals scornfully with most of the previous socialist doctrines, all of which have by now long disappeared from history. However, its final pages refer to "Critical-Utopian Socialism and Communism" with great respect. Marx attributes the limitations of the work of Saint-Simon, Fourier, Owen and others to the - unconscious - reflection of the "early undeveloped period ... of the struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie". While being "full of the most valuable materials for the enlightenment of the working class", they could see the proletariat only as "a class without any historical initiative or any independent political movement", as "the most suffering class". Because, in their time, "the economic situation ... does not offer them the material conditions for the emancipation of the proletariat", they could do no more than "search after a new social science, after new social laws, that are to create these conditions". That is why they could be no more than "Utopians", who merely painted "fantastic pictures of future society". [25] In contrast to them, Marx insists that communism is a "real movement", not a dream.

The Subject of History

Marx's problem was to discover the possibility for humanity, individually and collectively, to take conscious charge of its own life, and to find this possibility within bourgeois society. Communism would mean that humans would cease to be prisoners of their social relations, and begin purposively to make their own history. In other words, we should cease to be mere objects and start to live as subjects.

But how can history have a subject? The course of the twentieth century, especially its last decades, makes the idea seem quite ludicrous. The world presents the appearance of pure chaos, without the slightest sign of conscious direction or purpose. The lives of its inhabitants are evidently quite out of their control. At the same time as they are ever more closely bound together, they appear more and more like a collection "of single individuals and of civil society" [26], at war with each other. In other words, they are objects rather than subjects. People living under capital, both bourgeois and proletarians, are governed by it; people are treated as things, and things have power over people. Capital, not the human individual, possesses subjectivity. Marx starts from the conviction that this way of life is not "worthy of their human nature". [27]

The notion of the "subject" had been central for the work of Hegel. For him, a subject was at the same time a thinking consciousness and a will. It created objects which stood in opposition to it. Then it tried to find itself in them. In this effort, it changed its relationships with them, and so made itself what it really was. This was what Hegel understood by freedom: something was free only if it pro-

duced its own conditions of existence, and was not governed by external presuppositions. Overcoming the opposition of the objects it had produced, the subject could recognise itself in a world it had made for itself. Subjects, when their individual purposes clashed at a particular phase of development, revealed that their modes of being were deficient. From knowledge of this deficiency, a new set of relations arose, and so a new subject at a higher level.

The efforts of each individual to realise his or her purpose led to results quite different from what they had intended. A higher subject called "History" played cunning tricks upon them. From civil society, that war of property-owners against each other, sprang the State, whose subjective activities reconciled the warriors on this "battlefield of private interest" [28]. All of this was the work of Spirit, "the subject which is also substance", described as "'I' that is 'we', 'we' that is 'I'" [29]. Here is the starting point of Marx's debt to Hegel, as well as Marx's critique of Hegel.

Marx saw that Hegel's notion of subjectivity was an upside-down reflection of something else: although humanity made itself in the course of social labour - "in changing nature, man changes his own nature" [30] - under the power of capital, this took place in an upside-down world. That is, we develop our physical and mental capacities as social beings in the process of production itself, but we do so only as prisoners of our alienated social relations. Trapped by the power of capital, the actual producers are prevented from comprehending or controlling either what they produce, or their own productive activity. Capital is the subject, not the individual, whether bourgeois or proletarian.

This insight into the nature of bourgeois society, and the position of the producers within it, enabled Marx to go beyond Hegel's understanding of history. The conscious, united action of the workers against capital would lead to the abolition of private property. They could become conscious of their own humanity, and break out of that inhuman situation in which it was denied. Transforming itself from a class "in itself" into a class "for itself", the united proletariat would become the subject of history, and in this it differed from all previous, propertied, classes. The cunning which enabled Hegel's History to play tricks on humanity could be defeated. The way would be opened to a human society, where life would be made consciously, by individual humans who no longer clashed with the collective will of humanity as a whole.

These conceptions are hostile to any form of dogmatism. However, what "Marxists" used to call "theory" was no more than dogmatic assertion, for it could never explain its own origin. Even during Marx's own lifetime, he saw his ideas being reduced to dogma, and later things became much worse. In the hands of the Stalinist bureaucracy and its devotees, "Marxism" became a kind of state religion. Even those who fought against Stalinism, nota-

bly Leon Trotsky, found themselves trapped inside this conception of the "Marxist Party", which was equipped with a set of correct theories or "doctrines". [31] They were led, often unconsciously, to see "revolutionary leadership" as the substitute for that "development of communist consciousness on a mass scale", which was Marx's aim. As we have seen, the Manifesto explicitly opposes the conception of such an organisation.

Thus the famous formulation of Kautsky and Lenin, that "socialist consciousness" had to be brought into the working class "from without", was a barrier to the central meaning of the Manifesto. But even those who did not accept this formula lost sight of Marx's starting-point for the movement of the proletariat, the standpoint of "human society or social humanity". [32] Marx argued that the communists, participating in the real movement, could become its mouthpiece, illuminating the self-activity in which the class will "become fitted to make society anew".[33]

The conception that the revolution was the work of a party was closely bound up with the way the "Marxists" viewed state power. For them, the first step was the "seizure of power" by their "party". They tried to portray Marx as a "state socialist", just as his enemy Bakunin claimed he was. They often remarked that, in the Manifesto, Marx's understanding of the state was "incomplete". (Marx would have agreed with this, at any rate, for, as we have seen, he regarded his own ideas on any subject as essentially incomplete.) His remark that "the first step in the revolution by the working class is to raise the proletariat to the position of the ruling class, to win the battle of democracy", was certainly troublesome for many "Marxists". In fact, Marx came to envisage the rule of the proletariat as operating through local communes, not through a centralised state power. This conception, reinforced by the experience of the Paris Commune of 1871, was essential to his notion of communism as the self-movement of the proletariat. [34]

Thus "Marxism" came, in effect, to treat both the workers' state and the revolutionary party as if these were the subjects of history. They were thought of as moral agents, operating independently of the individuals whose life-activity actually comprised them. This outlook was directly opposed to the view for which Marx fought. For him, only the proletariat, united as a class, could become conscious of its own historical situation, and consciously transform it. No other social formation could take its place - not the nation, not any earlier class, not the Party, not the family, and certainly not the individual genius. Such entities purported to be self-creating subjects, but Marx showed that these were illusions, which necessarily arose out of alienated life itself. In particular, living under bourgeois private property, isolated individuals were not the independent subjects they appeared to be and the state was not the community.

This, then is how Marx sees the question of subjectivity.

Private property breaks up the community, and this renders it impossible for individuals to control their own lives. But, in its struggle against capital, the proletariat can transform itself into a self-conscious subject. After class divisions have been abolished, the proletariat will transcend itself, and dissolve into humanity as a whole. Then we shall have a free association of social individuals, that is, individual subjects, each of whom directly embodies the whole community, in which, the Manifesto says, "the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all".

Look again at this famous phrase, which so clearly expresses Marx's fundamental notion of humanity. It was a symptom of the widespread misunderstanding of Marx, that it should have been read back-to-front, as if it made the connection between individual and collective precisely the other way round. Communism means that the well-being of the individual, the possibility for him or her to develop freely all their human potential, is the condition; the good of the whole community is the consequence. While Marx criticised the political economists for their celebration of the "single individual in civil society", his critique did not merely reject this entity. The overthrow of the power of capital will open the way for the flowering of true individuality, but now in a shape where it no longer precluded collective well-being, but made it possible. The individual subjects who live in a human world will not be "isolated individuals" but "social individuals".[35]

That is why Marx's work, both scientific and practical, was not a matter of propounding a new form, one which the world had then to adopt. Instead, it concerned the removal of the inhuman covering [Hülle] which encased a truly human life. Communism was not a new "mode of production", to replace the existing one, but a release of individuals lives from the straightjacket of private property.

Private property has made us so stupid and one-sided that an object is only ours when we have it. ... In the place of all physical and mental senses there has come therefore the sheer estrangement of all these senses, the sense of having.... The abolition of private property is therefore the complete emancipation of all human senses and qualities. [36]

Thus this emancipation, spearheaded by the subjective action of the proletariat, the "universal class", implied rather more than "the overthrow of capitalism", or a new economic and political system. It meant a new way of living, in which individual and universal no longer collided.

Marx in the Twenty-first Century

Today, millions of people await the new century with apathy, fear or despair. A deep malaise grips world society.

Science and technology bound forward, bringing new marvels at every stride, but the outcome is mass unemployment, environmental destruction and the ever-present menace of nuclear war. Those shrill cries about "the End of History" and "the New World Order", which filled the air only a few years ago, have all died away. Soon, I hope, their authors will be forgotten.

If Marx wrote when Europe was still coming to terms with the French Revolution, we live in the shadow of the Russian Revolution. Millions expected this great event to begin the socialist transformation of world society. But in its aftermath of civil war, bureaucratic degeneration destroyed these aspirations. Finally, the Soviet state collapsed into the chaos of modern capital. Unsurprisingly, the assertion that "Marxism is dead" has become a cliché. However, the chief result of the disappearance of the "Cold War" situation is something quite different. We used to be presented with the false choice between two alternatives: either rigidly-centralised state control, or the exploitative anarchy of the market. Now, we can break out of this false dilemma. The path has been opened for the renewed study of Marx's actual ideas.

Just look at the world at the end of the millennium. Every aspect of social, political and economic life is dominated by the dogmatic belief in the miraculous power of "market forces". Money and its surrogates rule supreme throughout the planet, not just in a few bourgeois states. The outcome of this development is clear for all to see. Millions of lives are spent in the shadow of poverty and insecurity, menaced by the constant threat of starvation and disease. Some of the poorest people in the world exist within sight of gleaming office buildings, which house the headquarters of transnational corporations and powerful financial institutions. The export of the latest high-tech weapons of destruction vies with the massive trade in illegal narcotics as the chief sustenance of this soulless structure. The mass media, a major part of the profit-making system, broadcast images of famine and war around the globe, carefully integrating them into the profitable business called "entertainment".

No doubt, the world has passed through similar social crises before. One thing which distinguishes this "New World Disorder" from its predecessors is the way it is intellectually and culturally reflected. Whether the idea is put into words or not, there is a widespread belief that "there is no such thing as society". The conception of humanity itself has been perverted. Auschwitz, Hiroshima, Bhopal are accepted as symbols of homo sapiens in the twentieth century. Truth, Goodness and Beauty have not merely vanished: they are loudly proclaimed to be illusions. The possibility of a world where "the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all" has, we are often told, become utterly unthinkable. The hopes of the Enlightenment, the nineteenth century certainty of Progress, the struggle for world revolution after 1917, the dreams of the student revolutionaries of 1968, all are dismissed as outmoded juvenile nonsense. To people whose

horizons are limited by "market forces", the corruption we see around us is only an accurate expression of "the human condition", and there is nothing to be done about it.

We have seen the revival of a widespread belief that the present social relations are the only ones possible, and that the anticipation of "a free association of producers" is incompatible with human nature. But just what is that nature? Many answers are forthcoming. The practitioners of Artificial Intelligence explain that humans are nothing but rather complex machines. "Just a bundle of selfish genes, genetically-programmed talking apes", intone the high priests of socio-biology. "Self-interested atoms", gibber the economists. "Murderous, natural polluters of the planet, which was getting on quite well until you humans arrived", say the Greens.

Have the forms of capital not changed enormously? Yes, indeed they have, but only into shapes far more horrific and insane than those of Marx's day. The making of money out of money now appears to dominate those operations of capital in which use-values are actually produced, while these forms of capital suck the blood of the producers. During twenty-four hours of every day, billions of dollars are sent over powerful computer networks, bringing massive profits to speculators in foreign exchange. Productive capacity itself is moved rapidly to areas where labour-power is cheap. Meanwhile, in the older centres of large-scale production, factories lie rusting, and the communities who depended on them are broken up and left without hope.

Thus the main questions posed by the Manifesto face us more starkly than ever. How is it that human productive power - now expanded far beyond the dreams of Marx - can take forms through which humanity's environment is destroyed and its very future existence threatened? How can social relations like money or capital have power over the people they relate to each other? Why do the links that bind the entire productive potential of humankind into a unity simultaneously shatter it into fragments, setting individuals, classes and nations against each other, even against themselves? Chatter about "postmodernity", with its denial of humanity, cannot drown out such questions.

Of course, in 1848, and in a brief document like the Manifesto, Marx could do no more than point to such problems. Even his work over the subsequent 35 years did no more than begin to elaborate answers to some of them, while new dangers have shown themselves only in recent decades. When "Marxist" orthodoxy pretended that these beginnings were a complete theoretical system, it lost sight of its entire point. What Marx was looking for - not inside his head, but within the existing social forms themselves - was the way for humanity to begin its task of self-emancipation, of becoming what it really was. This is what the Enlightenment and the French Revolution had promised, but failed to deliver. Marx was able to transcend this outlook. He did not reject its promise, but revealed that the

world of capital, which political economy had portrayed as "natural", was in reality crazy [verrückte]. Looking at this same world today, who can deny its madness?

Many of those disillusioned with the socialist idea present their demand to "Marxism", as if they were historical debt-collectors. "You promised us a revolution - where is it? The Manifesto told us that the proletariat's victory over capital would open the road to freedom. We have been cruelly disappointed." We must totally reject this manner of looking at history. Those who are disillusioned are obliged to investigate how they came to acquire illusions in the first place! In any case, there is no way we can evade the problem of how to live together on the planet. This is not a problem for a set of doctrines to solve, or for a political tendency to answer, but for billions of human beings to tackle for themselves.

The working-class movement has certainly gone through huge changes since 1848, especially over the past few decades. After the Second World War, the advanced industrialised countries set up systems of state welfare, together with a certain amount of state ownership. Sometimes this was associated with the name of John Maynard Keynes, and occasionally - and quite misleadingly - it was called "socialism". After the period of unprecedented economic growth had come to a shuddering halt in the 1970s, the so-called "neo-liberalism" became the prevailing mood of many governments. There was an idea that state-ownership of industry, or state intervention in the economy, would provide a way to raise the standard of living. By the early 1980s, it had vanished with astonishing speed. Of course, the identification of socialism with state ownership was always false. For Marx, the state was "the illusory community" [37], a bureaucratic structure which, within the framework of the fragmented, money-driven society, falsely impersonated the community.

A major feature of the world today is the fragmentation of the international working class and its organisations. During the 1980s, many sections of the workers' movement retreated into purely defensive actions. The movement of capital in search of higher profits led to the decline of large-scale manufacturing industry in the older capitalist countries, considerably weakening the trade unions there. This process has led some observers to imagine that "the proletariat no longer exists", or that we are living in the epoch of "post-capitalism". Of course, such ideas are absurd. The substance remains: capitalist exploitation of labour; only its forms have changed.

New sectors of industry have opened up in what was once called the "Third World". There, the widespread employment of women and children, under the harshest working conditions, have brought back many features of economic life that had been long-forgotten in the older centres of industry. At the same time, in these older countries, the work-force has been split into two increasingly contrasted sectors. On the one hand, there is a relatively well paid group, employed in high-tech industries. On the other, a

large section is forced into poorly-paid jobs, or frequently unemployed. They and their families have been pushed to the margins of society, condemned to falling standards of housing, health and educational provision.

As these changes unfolded in the 1970s and '80s, new working-class struggles began in Asia, Latin America and Africa. New masses have been drawn into global battles against the power of capital. Important struggles to defend communities against the effects of changing technology have taken place. But how can the class be reunited? I think that the ideas of the Manifesto will prove to be vital in answering this question. When Marx looks at the struggles of workers for a higher price for their labour-power, or for a shorter working day, he sees this as a form, the content of which is the struggle of the dispossessed to be recognised as human beings. This demand, the essence of Marx's communism, is the only possible foundation on which to rebuild the working-class movement. In "Marxism", communism and the movement of the proletariat were torn apart, after the Manifesto had so brilliantly unified them. To heal this breach is the task facing us today.

It is clear that the difficulties faced by the world are bound up with the breakneck speed of technological advance, and its imprisonment with the constricting framework of capitalist exploitation. The Manifesto already compared "bourgeois society [which] has conjured up such gigantic means of production and of exchange" with "the sorcerer who is no longer able to control the powers of the nether world whom he has called up by his spells". [38] Today, this does not merely mean that capital is beset by economic instability. Far deeper problems have emerged as a result of the conquests of science and technology. Every advance in telecommunications, information technology, biotechnology or medical science sharpens the conflict between the requirements of capital and the needs of humanity. If these powers are not to destroy us, a complete transformation of social and economic life is needed, a total change in the way that human beings relate to each other.

The threat to the environment, a direct result of capital's uncontrolled expansion, can be answered only by the collective action of humanity as a whole. But what is this whole? Where can it be found? The "Green" movement has done important work in drawing attention to environmental issues. However, it often evades the question of just who is going to answer these dangers. Technology is not the enemy, but its perversion by the power of capital. Obviously, Marx could not have had much to say directly about issues which had hardly shown themselves in his time. But we will not be able to search for solutions without his conception of the potentiality of the proletariat to transform itself into a subject.

In organising itself to fulfil its historic destiny, the working class has to achieve the necessary knowledge of its situation, and face its tasks as a class with the highest de-

gree of consciousness. As the international workers' movement rebuilds and re-unifies itself, it must continually check its practices against the ideas of the Manifesto, not as a biblical text, but as a guide. The movement must also re-work and de-mythologise its past history, both its victories and its errors, while it grasps the changes in the way that capital organises itself. It must become aware of the latest technological developments, finding ways to answer the problems of working-class communities with knowledge of the most advanced conquests of natural science and technology. The working class movement must take the lead in fighting to halt the effects on society as a whole of capitalist exploitation of the natural environment.

But for all this, those of us who claim to be communists have to ask ourselves a question. How on earth did we, the "Marxists", so totally misunderstand Marx? Of course, it was not just a matter of intellectual inadequacy. It was really because we forcibly squeezed Marx's notion of what was truly human into an iron framework which was truly brutal. We examined writings like the Manifesto as if they were academic texts, expounding a total, complete, immutable doctrine. We thought that they provided us with a "model" of history, whose components were abstract images of Marx's categories. We were afraid to see them as the concrete expression of the lives of human beings. Only now, at the end of the century after Marx's, do the opportunities open up for a new generation to grasp their real significance. Only now is it time to read the Manifesto.

Certainly, the working class has still to "become fitted to make society anew". [39] That implies that, in the new millennium, the issues which found their first expression in 1848 face humanity with far greater urgency. Today we can say that we either learn how to live humanly, or we shall cease to live at all.

Notes

MECW = Karl Marx and Frederick Engels. Collected Works. London, 1975-.

[1] That Marx himself was interested in this question seems likely, even if he never had the opportunity to discuss it at length. See the closing pages of the 1857 Introduction to Grundrisse.

[2] The German Ideology, written a year earlier, but not published until the twentieth century. MECW, Vol. 5, p 53.

[3] Theses on Feuerbach. Thesis 6.

[4] Communist Manifesto. MECW, Volume 6, p 498.

[5] See the letter Marx wrote in November, 1877, to the Russian journal Otechestvennye Zapiski.

[6] Wilhelm Weitling had been a tailor, like Georg Eccarius and several others. Karl Schapper had been a student of forestry. Heinrich Bauer was a shoemaker. Joseph Moll was a watch-maker. Karl Pfänder was a painter of miniatures. Marx, Engels and Wilhelm Wolff seem to have been the only intellectuals. My account of the history of the League is based on that of David Ryazanov, which contradicts some of Engels' reminiscences. See Ryazanov's Edition of the Manifesto, (New York, 1930), and his lectures, Marx and Engels, (London, 1927).

[7] Engels' idea of "primitive communism", based on the researches of Haxthausen, Maurer and Morgan, was not really shared by Marx. See The Ethnological Notebooks of Karl Marx, edited by L Krader. (Assen, 1974.)

[8] Grundrisse. MECW, Vol. 28, p 95.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Manifesto. MECW Vol. 6, pp 486-7.

[11] Ibid. p 485.

[12] Ibid. p 487.

[13] Ibid. p 489.

[14] Ibid. p 490.

[15] Ibid. p 495.

[16] Ibid. p 495.

[17] Ibid. p 494.

[18] A later edition inserted here the word "self-conscious".

[19] Ibid. p 495

[20] Ibid. p 498.

[21] Ibid. p 499.

[22] Ibid. p 504.

[23] Ibid. p 504.

[24] Ibid. p 506.

[25] Ibid. p 515.

[26] Theses on Feuerbach. Thesis 8.

[27] Capital, Volume 3. Penguin Edition, p 959.

[28] Hegel, Philosophy of Right, para 289.

[29] Hegel, Phenomenology of Spirit, p 110.

[30] Capital, Volume 1, Chapter 7. This is where the key opposition - and similarity - of Marx to Hegel, is located. The words "materialism" and "idealism" were used by "Marxists" in a quite misleading way. Marx had no concern with the "theory of knowledge", or with the "relationship of mind and matter".

[31] Karl Kautsky wrote a book, once very popular in the labour movement, entitled The Economic Doctrines of Karl Marx - but only after Marx's death. Plekhanov and Lenin followed Kautsky in this usage.

[32] Theses on Feuerbach. Thesis 9.

[33] German Ideology, MECW, Vol. 5, p 53.

[34] See Notes on Bakunin's State and Anarchy, 1875. See also The Late Marx and the Russian Road, edited Shanin.

[35] I am indebted to a discussion with Professor José-Carlos Ballón, of San Marco University, Lima, for this important point.

[36] Paris Manuscripts. MECW, Vol. 5, p 300.

[37] German Ideology, MECW, Vol. 5, p 46.

[38] Manifesto. MECW, Vol. 6, p 489.

[39] German Ideology, MECW, Vol. 5, p 53.

The Place of the Communist Manifesto in the Elaboration of the Marxian Idea of the Post-Capitalist Society

Paresh Chattopadhyay

In the text that follows we argue that the basic Marxian ideas concerning the type of society supposed to follow the demise of capitalism are contained in the **Manifesto** in a condensed form. Accordingly, the first section offers an outline of what type of society the **Manifesto** envisages for the future as well as the conditions necessary for its appearance; while the second section relates these ideas to Marx's other texts.

I

In this paper post-capitalist society signifies what Marx calls a "society of free and associated producers" — also, indifferently, "communism" or "socialism"[1] — based on the "associated mode of production." This "union of free individuals," the crowning point of the self-emancipation of the immediate producers, where individuals are subject neither to personal dependence, as in pre-capitalism, nor to material dependence, as in commodity-capitalist society, excludes, by definition, state, private ownership of the conditions of production, commodity production and wage labour. The **Manifesto** indicates, in a condensed and concise fashion, the essential elements of the envisaged new society as well as the objective and the subjective conditions of its realization.

The new society is an "association"; the whole production being in the hands of the "associated individuals" — where the free development of each is the condition of the free development of all. The "communist mode of production and appropriation" is based on the specific production relations. Once the domination of the accumulated or dead labour over the living labour is turned upside down, the accumulated labour becomes a means of enlarging, enriching and advancing the life of the labourers. Commodity production ceases to exist, the money form and the capital form of the product of labour disappear and wage labour vanishes along with capital. The ownership relations of the new society correspond to these new relations of production. Capital is transformed into collective property, class property in the means of production disappears yielding place to social appropriation. However, this social appropriation does not affect the personal appropriation of the products of labour with a view to the reproduction of the immediate life.

As regards the conditions of realising the post-capitalist society, the **Manifesto** asserts that the proletarian revolution, indispensable for establishing the communist mode

of production and appropriation, presupposes the existence of a developed and advanced proletariat and material conditions adequate for the emancipation of the proletariat. Now, these conditions are the product of the bourgeois epoch. The bourgeoisie has destroyed the pre-capitalist relations of production based on personal dependence of the individual. It has equally destroyed the old local and national autarchy and put universal exchange in their place. At the same time the bourgeoisie cannot exist without continuously revolutionizing the material productive forces. The bourgeoisie is the unconscious carrier of industry whose own product is precisely the proletariat, the "grave diggers" of capital. The power of organisation of the proletariat marches hand in hand with industry's development. Simultaneously the bourgeoisie is forced to bring the elements of its own culture to the proletariat thereby furnishing the latter with arms against itself.

The proletariat, the historical agent of the communist revolution, is the only class facing the bourgeoisie which is truly revolutionary. Constituting the immense majority of the capitalist society, having no property and no country, the proletariat is the universal class which carries the future in its hands. Consequently the revolution led by the proletariat is the most radical revolution which not only abolishes its own mode of appropriation but also all previous modes of appropriation, which implies not only the self emancipation of the proletariat but also the emancipation of the whole humanity mediated by the communist revolution. This revolution is not at all a momentary event. It is a whole process of development of which the rise to power of the proletariat — the "conquest of democracy" — constitutes the "first step." But in course of development of this revolution public power loses its political character along with the increasing disappearance of class antagonism and of classes themselves. At the end of this trajectory the old society with its classes disappears yielding place to a free association of individuals.

II

These ideas of the **Manifesto** Marx elaborates in his different texts both before and after to this composition. This can be conveniently discussed under two headings: (1) communist revolution and its conditions and (2) nature of the communist (socialist) society.

(1) The communist (proletarian) revolution, far from be-

ing a simple seizure of power by the proletariat, is a secular process. In his famous 1859 Preface, Marx speaks of the "beginning" of an "epoch of social revolution." The period of transition between the capitalist society and the society of free and associated producers is included *within* this revolutionary process which Marx calls, in the *Gothakritik*, the "period of revolutionary transformation" during which the capitalist society is revolutionized towards communism. During this whole period the immediate producers remain proletarians (whence the "dictatorship of the proletariat") and, as Marx insists in his critique of Bakunin, the "old organization of society does not yet disappear" (1874-75), (1973c: 630). Marx affirms the same idea in his address to the International on the Paris Commune. "The working classes know that the superseding of the economical conditions of the slavery of labour by the conditions of free and associated labour can only be a progressive work of time. They know that the present 'spontaneous action of the natural laws of capital and landed property' can only be superseded by the 'spontaneous action of the laws of the social economy of free and associated labour' in a long process of development of new conditions, as was the 'spontaneous action of the economical laws of slavery' and the 'spontaneous action of the economical laws of serfdom'" ("First outline") (Marx 1976b: 156-57).

The communist revolution has a universal character. This is because the proletariat, having no property and no country, is the expression of the dissolution of all classes and all nationalities. Moreover, because of the universal development of the productive forces (under capitalism) and the "world-historical" extension of capital — appearing as a power alien to the proletariat — the proletariat's subjection is universal. The proletariat can exist only as a world historical (*weltgeschichtlich*) force, in the same way as communism can exist only as a world historical reality. Another fundamental aspect of the universal character of the communist revolution is that the emancipation of the proletariat, the result of the communist revolution, does not mean that the emancipation is limited to the proletariat. It is universal, human (Marx 1973a: 34; 1965: 1538).

As a consistent materialist Marx insists that if, in the society as it is, the material conditions of production and the corresponding relations of circulation for a classless society do not already exist in a latent state, all attempts at exploding the society would be Don Quixotism (1953: 77).[2] Precisely it is capital which creates the material conditions of the proletarian (human) emancipation. In his different texts Marx returns again and again to one of the main themes of the *Manifesto*, namely, that the great revolutions effected by the bourgeoisie in the material productive forces along with the development of the "greatest productive force," the proletariat, the "revolutionary class" (1965: 135), are the indispensable conditions of the emancipation of the proletariat. In this we see a veritable demonstration of the "dialectic of negativity" which Marx discerns in Hegel's *Phenomenology*.

In an earlier text addressed to the workers Marx had clearly underlined what he called the "positive side of capital", that is, without the big industry, free competition, the world market and the corresponding means of production there would be no material resources for the emancipation of the proletariat and the creation of the new society, and he added that without these conditions the proletariat would not have taken the road of the union nor known the development which makes it capable of revolutionizing the old society as well as itself (1973b: 555). This idea is pursued in later texts. Thus Marx writes that capital, by its unceasing pretension to a universal form of wealth, pushes labour beyond the limits of the latter's needs and thereby creates the material elements of the development of a rich individuality (1953: 23). In the same way, to the extent that it is capital's disciplining constraint which forces the great mass of society to create surplus labour beyond its own immediate needs, capital creates culture and fulfils a social-historical function (1976a: 173). Marx in fact praises the "scientific honesty" of Ricardo against the "sentimentalists" like Sismondi — for Ricardo's insistence on the necessity of production for production's sake inasmuch as this latter signifies the "development of the human productive forces, that is, the development of the wealth of human nature as an end in itself (*als Selbstzweck*)." This development of the productive forces is an "absolutely necessary, practical pre-condition (of human emancipation) because without it only the penury and the necessity will be generalized and, with the need, shall also restart the struggle for necessity. On the other hand, only with this universal development of the productive forces can a



universal intercourse be posited."

In this connection Marx observes that this development, though effected at the cost of the majority of individuals and even of the entire classes, ends by smashing this antagonism (*diesen Antagonismus durchbricht*) (1959: 107; 1973a:33) Marx underlines that this type of development, namely "the development of the general humanity at the cost of the greatest waste of the development of the individual" takes place in the epochs *preceding* "the socialist constitution of mankind" (1976a: 327), [3] that is — in the language of 1859 "Preface" — in the "pre-history of human society." The domination of the worker by the capitalist, by violence and against the majority — writes Marx in another manuscript of the sixties — contributes to the "unlimited (*rücksichtslos* — reckless) productivity of social labour" which alone can create the material basis of a free human society (1969: 18), and in a letter: "Big industry is not only the mother of antagonism, but it is also the creator of the material and intellectual conditions necessary for resolving this antagonism" (to Kugelmann 17.3.68). As Marx writes in *Capital I*: "In history as in nature putrefaction is the laboratory of life." [4] In his last programmatic composition addressed to the French working class Marx wrote that the material and intellectual elements of the collective form of the means of production are constituted by the development of the capitalist class itself (1965: 1538).

(2) We arrive now at the nature of the of the new society, as envisaged by Marx. Communism is the real reappropriation of the human essence by the human and for the human, a complete return of the individual to oneself as a social and human being, a return which is realized while conserving all the wealth of the preceding development. The entire movement of history is the real process of its birth, it is also the movement of its own becoming, understood and conceived as such (*die begriffne und gewusste Bewegung seines Werdens*) (1966: 99).

Freed from material and personal dependence, the members of the new society, freely associated and masters of their own social movement, are universally developed individuals whose social relations are subject to their own collective control as personal and common relations (1953: 79; 1962: 92-93). Replacing the "false community" which confronted the individuals as an autonomous power in the "pre-history of human society," there arises in the Association the "true community" whose members are universally developed "social individuals" (1966: 252-53; 1953: 79).

Corresponding to the new associated mode of production there is now a new mode of appropriation. After the demise of *class property* — that is, "private property" in its fundamental sense — there appears the social appropriation of the means of production. Let us add that the (workers') state property over the means of production is not yet the *social appropriation* over the means of production. While it is possible to abolish individual or corpo-

rate private property juridically, it is impossible to "abolish" juridically *class property*, which continues to exist till the possessing classes disappear. A mode of production (appropriation) cannot be decreed away (*wegdekretieren*) (1962: 16). It is only at the end of the "period of revolutionary transformation," when the associated mode of production has replaced the old mode of production, when political power has ceased to exist, that private property in the fundamental sense of class property disappears yielding place to the collective appropriation by whole society. It is in this sense that the *Manifesto* speaks of the "abolition of class property" (*Aufheben des Klasseigentums*). The same idea reappears in Marx's address on the commune. Contrary to all the earlier forms of appropriation, where the latter's character was limited, the collective appropriation by the producers has a total character inasmuch as the dispossession of the producers in capitalism is total, and, secondly, the development of the productive forces under capitalism has attained a universal character such that they can only be appropriated globally by the entire society (1973a: 67; 1953: 387; 1976a: 148).

As regards the exchange relations of the new society, both the material exchanges (*Stoffwechsel*) of human beings with nature and the social exchanges among individuals — which are independent of any specific mode of production — continue to operate in the Association. Nevertheless, there are qualitative changes. As regards the first type of exchange, the associated producers regulate rationally their material exchanges with nature spending minimum force and in the conditions most worthy of and most conforming to their human nature (Marx 1964: 828). As to the second type, in the associated mode of production where the labour of the individual is posited from the start as social labour, the product of labour ceases to take commodity form, this form of "all-sided alienation." The old society's exchange of products taking the form of exchange values yields place to the "free exchanges of activities" among the social individuals, determined uniquely by needs and collective ends (Marx 1958: 54; 1953: 77, 78). Naturally, in the new society the allocation of resources among the different productive branches as well as distribution of products among social individuals cease to be mediated by the commodity from the product of labour. In a word, "within the cooperative society based on the collective ownership of the means of production, the producers do not exchange their products" (*Gothakritik*).

We thus conclude that the essential ideas concerning the society of free and associated producers — the post-capitalist society — as well as the conditions of its realisation, elaborated by Marx in his writings of different periods, are already found in the *Manifesto* in a condensed form.

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[A shorter (French) version of the paper was earlier presented at the "International Encounter" in Paris on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the Communist Manifesto (May 13-16, 1998).]

Notes

1. The distinction socialism-communism, absent in Marx, is of later vintage and was made familiar by Lenin.
2. The occurrence of 'Don Quixotism' in the name of socialist revolution in the twentieth century has been a telling confirmation of Marx's prognosis.
3. In English in the text.
4. This sentence appears only in the French version (1965: 955). About three decades earlier, in his Anti-Proudhon, Marx had written: "It is the bad side (in its struggle with the good side) which produces the movement that makes history" (1965: 89).

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Marx Versus Historical Materialism

Cyril Smith

(When the journal Historical Materialism was started, I submitted an earlier draft of this paper to the Editors. Two years later, it became clear that they were never going to agree to publish it. Eventually, one of them told me - quite correctly - that I hadn't discussed 'the secondary literature'. At this point, I gave up the unequal contest.)

This title is not merely intended to provoke. It also aims to draw attention to the direct opposition between the body of theory traditionally known as 'Marxism', and the essence of the work of Karl Marx. If you try to discuss what Marx was doing, without placing the struggle for his conception of communism as a 'truly human society' right at the centre of the picture, you surely falsify him. But that is precisely what 'Marxism' does. Elsewhere [1], I have discussed the significance of this contrast for Marx's work as a whole. Here, I concentrate on showing how far the 'Marxist' tradition has misread Marx's conception of history.

I believe it is vitally necessary for this discrepancy to be made explicit. The falsification deeply embedded in traditional accounts of Marx's ideas, particularly of his understanding of historical development, is a major obstacle to the regeneration of revolutionary socialism. 'Marxism' was an attempt to set up a philosophical doctrine, a philosophy of history, which would explain how society made transitions from one stage to another. This misunderstanding obscured what was crucial for everything Marx did: the necessity for social consciousness to break out of its existing, fetishised forms to the level necessary for communism. This was not a matter of replacing one way of thinking with another, for it implied what Marx called 'the alteration of humans on a mass scale'. [2] Instead of this understanding of the revolutionary transformation of humanity, 'Marxism' set up a system of thinking which assigns to special people - radical philosophers, or social scientists, or economists, or the Marxist Party - the task of 'interpreting the world in various ways' on behalf of the rest of us. In a quite separate operation, their conclusions could then be communicated to the benighted masses.

The basic notion of historical materialism is well known. Plekhanov, one of its chief founders, puts it like this:

(I)t is the economic system of any people that determines its social structure, the latter, in its turn, determining its political and religious structures and the like. ... (T)he fundamental cause of any social evolution, and consequently of any social advance, being

the struggle man wages against Nature for his own existence.... Marx's fundamental idea can be summed up as follows: 1) the production relations determine all other relations existing among people in their social life. 2) the production relations are, in their turn, determined by the state of the productive forces. [2]

The basic principle of the materialist explanation of history is that men's thinking is conditioned by their being, or that in the historical process, the course of the development of ideas is determined, in the final analysis, by the course of development of economic relations. [4]

So, whatever the details of the mechanisms proposed by any of its many versions, historical materialism claims to be a way of explaining history. It deals with the causes of social evolution, stressing that history is governed by necessary laws, that are as immutable as laws of nature.

When Plekhanov talked about 'materialism', he wanted to conjure up those eighteenth century French thinkers like Holbach and Helvetius, who argued that human thoughts and actions had their roots in material conditions of the lives of individuals. What they called 'matter', defined as 'what acts in one way or another on our senses', caused us to feel and think, and so to act, in specific ways. Plekhanov and Kautsky thought that Marx's 'materialist conception of history' was an extension of this outlook to the explanation of history. In his eagerness to extirpate all forms of idealism, one of their disciples, VI Lenin, was led to write about 'the analysis of material social relations ... that take shape without passing through man's consciousness'. [5]

Historical materialists 'explain' the transition from one stage of social development to another by the conflict between productive forces and social relations. Some practitioners here take productive forces to mean a discrete mixture: means of production plus labour-power. [6] The question they ignore is why? Here are the two aspects of social life, one the human power to produce, the other the social connections within which this power operates. But why are they separate? Why are they at war with each other?

If you explain something, you have to stand outside it. A 'materialist' explanation involves hypotheses about how some things external to the explainer cause other external things to happen. Here is the basic paradox: when the object to be explained is human history, it

includes the wills and consciousnesses of the historical agents, not to mention the will and consciousness of the explainer. In general, they considered historical forces as determining the changes in social forms, as though history had nothing to do with the strivings of living men and women. Many devotees of historical materialism believed strongly in a socialist future and devoted their lives to struggling for it. Did they stand outside the causal process they imagined governed history, somehow immune to its influences?

Some might think that Plekhanov's statement of historical materialism does not give a fair account of the theory. What about other, more sophisticated 'Marxisms'? However, I think that Plekhanov, for all his crudity, actually gets to the heart of the matter. At any rate, he has the not inconsiderable merit of stating clearly just what he means. Since his opinions formed the basis for the outlook of Lenin and his followers, and therefore came to predominate in the Communist International, their influence on all later work is undeniable. When Stalin produced his obscene caricature, *Dialectical and Historical Materialism*, in 1938, Plekhanov certainly provided him with his model, one well adapted to bureaucratic requirements.

So, while not everybody using the term 'historical materialism' means exactly the same thing by it, what they all have in common is that they each have in mind a way of explaining history. This also applies to the various schools of 'Western Marxism', who often use the expression, although, they lack Plekhanov's virtue of spelling out just what they think it means. (Karl Marx himself, let us recall, never used the term at all.)

Lukacs' *History and Class Consciousness*, the origin of all such thinking, contains his famous lecture 'On the Changing Function of Historical Materialism', delivered in 1919 to his Budapest 'Institute for Research into Historical Materialism'. Early in the lecture, he comes near to giving a kind of definition:

What is historical materialism? It is no doubt a scientific method by which to comprehend the events of the past and to grasp their true nature. In contrast to the historical methods of the bourgeoisie, however, it also permits us to view the present historically and hence scientifically, so that we can penetrate beneath the surface and perceive the profounder historical forces which in reality control events.[7]

But what 'forces' are these? How do they 'control events'? Why are they 'beneath the surface'? Although Lukacs goes on to relate this to his conception of 'proletarian class consciousness', (by which, do not forget, he does not mean the consciousness of the working class), he does not take issue with Plekhanov's ideas. But then, from the time he joined the Communist Party, Lukacs was incapable of disagreeing openly with Lenin and thus, on this topic, with Plekhanov. (Lenin did not feel the same way about Lukacs.)

The story of the Frankfurt School is more complex. Before 1933, when they considered themselves Marxists, they used the term historical materialism fairly frequently, although assuming its meaning to be too well-known to their learned readers to require elaboration. Later, as they moved to the right along their various trajectories, they expressed differences with the theory, but still without explaining exactly what they were disagreeing with.

In 1932, within a few months of the first publication of Marx's Paris Manuscripts, Herbert Marcuse's extraordinary essay on them appeared. It is one of his most brilliant works, and undoubtedly completely original, since nobody had yet commented on the Manuscripts.[8] But we would search it in vain for a direct reference to the topic announced in its title: 'New Sources of the Foundations of Historical Materialism'. When *Reason and Revolution* came out in 1936, Marcuse had just as little to say about the subject.[9] Nor is his 1958 *Soviet Marxism: a Critical Analysis* [10] any more helpful on this point. In that book he treats Stalinist 'theory' as a kind of Marxism, although he sometimes hints at its great distance from Marx himself. Marx's own ideas are not discussed in detail.

Finally, let us mention two of the later representatives of the Frankfurt School. Jurgens Habermas, who once wrote extensively on historical materialism, clearly assumed it to be a theoretical explanation of history. Significantly, he recommends Stalin's 1938 essay as 'a handbook of historical materialism'. [11] Alfred Schmidt's *History and Structure* is an attack upon Althusser's anti-humanist adherence to the Plekhanov story. He declares that his aim is to speak about 'the cognitive primacy of the logical over the historical, without abandoning the materialist basis' [12]. I cannot claim to have understood what this means. Maybe it is something like the view I am arguing for in this article, but I am not sure.

Marxism believed that it possessed a theory of history, a set of general explanatory ideas to 'guide revolutionary practice', while the theory's truth remained essentially outside any kind of practice. Of course, Marx himself was sometimes interested in explaining the world, but this was never his primary concern. His famous declaration that 'the point is to change' the world was not a recommendation to alternate a bit of thinking with some 'practice' (although that is the way some Marxists understood it), but an insistence that the objective truth of thinking was essentially bound up with the relations between human beings. [13] (See Aristotle's use of the word *praxis*.) That is what I mean when I argue, in *Marx at the Millennium*, that Marx did not have a theory.

Certainly, he was keenly interested in theoretical ideas. But when he examined a theory, it was to criticise its categories, and to investigate them as symptoms of social illness. Why does history need explanation? Only be-

cause it is not made consciously. Having given up the idea that the course of history is determined by God's will, and accepted that it can only be made by the willed acts of living men and women, we are faced with a problem: why are the outcomes of these acts so different from what any of the actors envisaged? History appears to be something that happens to us, not something we do. Historical theory thinks it can penetrate the mystery of historical development, but it does not explain the source of that mystery. Its own categories are taken uncritically from the existing set-up. Marx's task was not just to solve this riddle 'in theory', but to uncover the reasons for the mystery in which our way of life is shrouded, and to ask: what must we do to live otherwise?

In the light of the outcome of the French Revolution, the questions which Hegel asked also involved the relation between scientific thought and the world it tried to explain. He answered in terms of the cunning irony of History. Spirit, 'substance which is also subject', the "I" that is "we", the "we" that is "I", [14] worked out its dialectical logic, 'behind the backs' of individual consciousnesses. Although we have made society ourselves, it appears to us as if it were beyond ordinary thought, under the control of alien powers. Only philosophy can reveal what the human Spirit has achieved, and this only after Spirit's work is done, when it is too late for the philosopher to tell anybody what to do about it.

The old scenario about 'Hegel the idealist' and 'Marx the materialist', in which Hegel was dressed up as Bishop Berkeley, and Marx as Holbach, or even as John Locke, totally mystified the relation between Marx and Hegel. For Marx, it was precisely Hegel's idealism which enabled him to give an account of history, that is, history in its modern, 'alienated' form. This was because Hegel's account was itself 'alienated', set against its object.

... Hegel ... has only found the abstract, logical, speculative expression for the movement of history, which is not yet the real history of man as a given subject, but only the act of creation, the history of the origin of man. [15]

Marx agreed with Hegel that history had indeed operated blindly hitherto, but contended that this was because it was the history of a false, inhuman way of life. A 'truly human' life, communism, now coming into being, will be quite different. Our social relations - and, centrally, our own consciousness of them and of ourselves - will be transparent to us. This was where Marx's critique of Hegel's dialectic began. A theory, even one as powerful as that of Hegel, assumes that its object is inevitably just what it is:

For it is not what is that makes us irascible and resentful, but the fact that it is not as it ought to be. But if we recognise that it is as it must be, ie that it is not arbitrariness and chance, then we also recognise that it is as it ought to be.[16]

Marx's 'critique' - a word which occurs in the title of almost all of Marx's major works - turns questions of theory against the reality of the life which gives rise to them, demonstrating that this reality is inhuman. For him, the critique of philosophy, like the critique of religion,

ends with the teaching that man is the highest being for man, hence with the categorical imperative to overthrow all relations in which man is a debased, enslaved, forsaken, despicable being. [17]

Any attempt to describe this contradictory world in a theory is certain to run into difficulties. But these deficiencies may be taken as signals that questions had been raised which no theory is able to answer; to answer them would mean making actual changes in the world, not just in our heads. Then theory's equipment, the 'weapons of criticism', must be exchanged for 'the criticism of weapons'. Let us take two examples, frequently linked by Marx: first religion and then economics.

He did not devote any effort to finding out whether religious beliefs were 'true', but he was very interested in the question: why do people so obviously show a need to believe them? He concluded that society produces religion, 'an inverted world-consciousness', because it is 'an inverted world'. Religion is the heart of the world, so its very existence demonstrates that this is a world with no heart.[18]

Marx admired the political economists who strove to explain why economic life works in the way it does. But the very existence of political economy as a science pointed to a mystery at the core of those economic activities in which everybody is engaged, which nobody can control, and which therefore are at the foundation of all social life. Here is where Adam Smith's 'invisible hand' does its work, the counterpart to Hegel's Spirit. However, political economy cannot imagine the possibility of a human way of living. (Religion says it knows another way, but that it is not, unfortunately, to be found in this world.)

This is the starting-point of Marx's critiques of religion, of Utopia, of Hegel's dialectic and of political economy. A critique demands an explicit standpoint, a criterion against which to measure the object under criticism. Marx described his standpoint as that of 'human society and social humanity'. [19] In this, he differed from theorists, those whose main aim is 'explanation'. They can never evade the task of justifying their premises, and this always leads them into a never-ending spiral of explanations. Above all, they can never explain themselves. Marx starts off with the knowledge that humanity is socially self-creating, while it lives in a fashion which directly denies this. This standpoint does not itself need justification, for it is the condition for discussing anything at all. Marx knew a criterion against which to judge history, which he grasped as the process of struggle

through which 'socialised humanity' and its self-knowledge bring themselves into being. That is why he can say that 'communism is the riddle of history solved, and knows itself to be this solution.' [20]

Someone who attempts to 'explain' history, or, indeed, to do any kind of 'social science', tells us that some human action had 'necessarily' to take the form it did. But we, in turn, have the right to ask the scientist: 'how do you know?' If people's actions are 'determined' by some necessity outside them, are you not yourself, along with your 'objectivity', 'determined' by the same forces? Marxism insisted on calling Marx's conception of history 'materialist'. But Marx's materialism has nothing to do with 'matter' and 'mind', nor is it a 'theory of knowledge'. [21] Marx knew that the history he investigated was the process of alienated social life, in which consciousness was inhumanly constrained by social being. Knowledge of this process was not something external to it, but itself developed historically in the struggle of living men and women to break out of these constraints. Thus Marx's critical science was a part of the coming-to-be of real, human, self-consciousness, and presaged the coming-to-be of real, human, self-created social life.

Theoretical science, in the form of a particular scientific study, aims to explain some particular aspect of the world. Such a science cannot itself have a scientific explanation, any more than Utopia could explain itself. The great Utopians thought of themselves as scientific students of history. But their standpoint was that of 'the isolated individual', not situated within the actual world, but observing it from the outside. Utopianism told the world what it ought to be like. Thus their 'materialist doctrine must ... divide society into two parts, one of which is superior to society.' [22]

Once Marx had discovered the historic role of the proletariat, he could clearly set out his alternative to this attitude:

But in the measure that society moves forward, and with it the struggle of the proletariat assumes clearer outlines, they [the 'socialists'] no longer need to seek science in their minds; they have only to take note of what is happening before their eyes, and become its mouthpiece. So long as they look for science and merely make systems, so long as they are at the beginning of the struggle, they see in poverty nothing but poverty, without seeing in it the revolutionary, subversive side, which will overthrow the old society. From the moment they see this side, science, which is produced by the historical movement and associating itself consciously with it, has ceased to be doctrinaire and has become revolutionary. [23]

Science which takes immediate - inhuman - appearance as its given object cannot envisage a human kind of world. Its task is to show, by means of some mental image or

logical model, that this appearance has to be just as it is. Hegel's dialectic aimed to reconstruct within his system the development of the object itself, and of its relations with other objects. This was a huge advance. However, Hegel only saw these relations as ideas. Thus his dialectic, too, was limited, and later came 'to transfigure and glorify what exists (verklären das Bestehende)'. [24]

Marx's standpoint, 'human society and social humanity', enables him to do something quite different. He traces the inner coherence of his object - money, say, or the State, or the class struggle. Then he can allow its inhuman meaning, its hostility to a truly human life, to shine through the appearance of 'naturalness' and inevitability. Its own development lights up the road which will lead us to its abolition.

Look again at Marx's view of religion. People's belief in another, heavenly, world points to the inverted, inhuman character of this earthly one. That tells us about religion, but we still have to understand theology, the scientific activity of systematising and formalising this belief. Marx, following Feuerbach, grasped this activity as itself a symptom of alienation. Theology, like political economy and historiography, is an upside-down expression of socialised humanity's efforts to become conscious of its own self-creation.

Marx knew that human history was self-creation, 'the creation of man through human labour ... the emergence of nature for man'. [25] No theory of history whose horizons are limited by bourgeois society can know this. When it tries to describe the events of human self-creation, it remains imprisoned within a mental world which denies that such a process is possible. For communism, says Marx,

the entire movement of history, just as its actual act of genesis... is, therefore, also for its thinking consciousness the comprehended and known process of its becoming. [26]

Historians are spokespersons for the process in which humanity comes to be, creates itself and becomes conscious of itself, 'within alienation'. But this process can only be grasped in terms of humanity as a united whole, and that unity is beyond their horizons. Humanity in its inhuman form appears as a collection of incommensurable, mutually incomprehensible, mutually hostile fragments. That is why, imprisoned within alienation, historians cannot know what they are doing. The historical movements cannot be seen for what they really are: the life-activities of individual human beings, struggling to free themselves. The 'historical forces', which historical materialism thinks dominate their lives, are seen as subjects, while the individuals whose lives are so determined are treated as mere objects. This inversion characterises the way life is lived and the way it appears, but it is not in accordance with the nature of humanity.

Because he saw humanity as self-producing, Marx knew that productive forces are really the essential capacity of humans to act humanly, that is, to create their own lives. 'Man makes his life activity itself the object of his will and of his consciousness.' [27] These productive powers grow inside social relations which simultaneously promote and deny human creativity, which pervert and distort it, that is, which are alien to humanity. The successive forms of society are given to each generation, but the development of human productive powers make possible the overthrow of all such forms.

Thus the key conflict is between productive powers, which are potentially free, and social relations which appear in the form of alien, oppressive forces. In a human society, productive forces and social relations would be 'two different aspects of the development of the social individual'. [28] Today, however, the battle between them permeates every phase of human life. It secretes the poison which runs through the heart of every individual. Communism is the task of transcending this conflict, moving towards a society in which individuals will be able consciously to make their own social relations, so that 'the individuals obtain their freedom in and through their association'. [29]

There has been considerable controversy among Marxists about the stages through which history has passed. A dogmatic historical materialism fixes an agenda for the movement from slavery, to feudalism, to capitalism, and - only after the completion of this list - to socialism. Those who help to move the list along, are labelled 'progressive', while those who call for socialism 'before its time', like those classes or nations whose existence does not fit into the schedule, have to be crushed. Many people have pointed out that Marx himself has no such 'unilinear' notion. But what is not emphasised sufficiently is that, in that famous passage from the 1859 Preface to *The Critique of Political Economy*, which Marx described as the 'guideline' [Leitfaden] for his study of political economy, he was discussing human 'pre-history', history in its inhuman shape.

The Communist Manifesto famously declared that 'the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles'. But Marx never forgot that class antagonism is itself one of the manifestations of alienation:

Personal interests always develop, against the will of the individuals, into class interests, into common interests which acquire independent existence in relation to the individual persons. [30]

Every analogy between the proletariat and earlier classes is potentially misleading. The proletariat is unique among classes, in that its historic role is to do away with itself. It is 'a class... which has no longer any particular class interest to assert against a ruling class.' [31] It is the 'universal class', precisely because it is 'the complete loss of man, and hence can win itself only through the complete

rewinning of man'. [32] In the course of this upheaval, it could and must 'succeed in ridding itself of all the muck of ages and become fitted to found society anew'. [33] It challenges the 'laws of history' by forming itself into the historical subject.

Marx's famous 'base and superstructure' metaphor was distorted by historical materialism into a blind causal mechanism. However, on the single occasion when Marx used it, he referred solely to that 'prehistory', where economic activity dominated by self-interest fragments communal life. In 'civil society', 'the field of conflict ... between private interests and particular concerns of the community' [34], community is shattered. On the one hand, economic activities are perverted, from expressions of human creativity into forms of oppression and exploitation. Only illusory forms of life falsely purport to represent the community. So, for instance, Marx claims that the State is 'the illusory community'. [35] Law and politics, and institutions and ideological forms corresponding to them - religion, art and philosophy - exist as a 'superstructure' upon a fragmented economic basis.

Marx said that 'consciousness is explained by the contradictions of material life', that it was 'determined' by 'social being', and that 'the mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life'. Historical materialism thought that these phrases described immutable law of human development. Actually, of course, these were features of our inhuman life, its developing essence. While state, law, family, religion and all other antagonistic forms of life are our own work, these forms of our own social relations confront us as foreign powers, not merely 'independent of the will' of individuals, but dominating them as enemies.

All history is the outcome of conscious human action. But when human beings live inhumanly, their own social development appears as something outside their control. 'The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare [Alp] on the brain of the living.' [36] Alienated history, Hegel's 'slaughter-bench of nations' [37], can only appear as a nightmare.

Only if social relations were consciously made, opening up the space in which individual human creative potentialities can develop, would they be transparent to us. In such a 'true community', there would be no 'superstructure', and therefore no 'basis'. Humans freely associating could freely create their own social and individual lives. Living in such a world, individuals could begin to grasp that history was their own process of origin, just as they would see nature as 'their own, inorganic, body'. [38]

History has never been made by puppets controlled by 'laws'. Living men and women have always struggled to tackle the problems of their time. But, constrained by social forms which were both their own handiwork and alien to them, they were unable to see how these prob-

lems could be overcome. This is how Marx describes the resulting appearance of historical necessity:

This process of inversion is merely an historical necessity, merely a necessity for the development of the productive forces from a definite historical point of departure, or basis. In no way is it an absolute necessity of production; it is rather a transitory (*verschwindene*) one, and the result and (immanent) aim of this process is to transcend this basis itself and this form of the process. [39]

When society no longer appears as an alien 'second nature', whose laws seem to be immutable, we shall get to grips with the problems of living as part of 'first nature', that is, of nature. Natural necessity would remain, of course, to be studied by natural science, to be the collaborator with technology in satisfying human needs. But historical necessity would gradually be overcome and transformed. If this is 'materialism', it is certainly not the 'old materialism', whose standpoint was that of 'single individuals and of "civil society"'. [40]

In the bourgeois epoch, the possibility arose of creating a new way of living. Within the antagonistic forms of the alienated world, 'the productive forces developing within bourgeois society' have already created 'the material conditions for a solution of this antagonism', for a world of

free men, working with the means of production held in common, and expending their many different forms of labour-power in full self-awareness as one single social labour-force. [41]

In such a truly human world, a world without 'superstructure', without the distortions resulting from the clash between social relations and human forces of production, without the opposition of means of production to labour power, human life would be self-consciously self-created. We could increasingly learn how to talk over the conflicts which have always arisen as part of social life, and collectively make possible the free development of individuality. This movement towards freedom would mean that our social self-consciousness could increasingly 'determine' our 'social being'. Historical materialism only describes the movement of alienated life, but Marx views the whole of history as a process of overcoming alienation, and that, for him, is the point of studying it.

Relationships of personal dependence (which originally arise quite spontaneously) are the first forms of society... Personal independence based upon dependence mediated by things is the second great form, and only in it is a system of general social exchange of matter, a system of universal relations, universal requirements and universal capacities formed. Free individuality, based on the universal development of the individuals and the subordination of their communal, social productivity, which is the social possession, is the third

stage.[42]

Historical materialism transformed that page from the 1859 Preface into a 'theory of history', while in fact it refers only the 'second stage' of Marx's scheme. For him, the real importance of studying this stage of alienation, the prehistory of humanity, was to help us understand how it had prepared the ground for that 'third stage', the stage of human freedom, the beginning of our real conscious history.

Herein lies the direct opposition of Marx to historical materialism. The theorists of Marxism wanted to explain the past or predict the future. But Marx was not chiefly interested in either of these. Instead, he studied history, as he studied everything else, to illuminate the struggle between a way of life which required explanation and one which would be 'worthy of our human nature'. [43]

Notes

- [1] Marx at the Millennium (Pluto, 1996)
- [2] German Ideology. Marx-Engels Collected Works (MECW), Volume 5: 53.
- [3] Plekhanov, Selected Philosophical Works, Volume II, p 617.
- [4] Ibid., Volume III, p 45.
- [5] Lenin, What the 'Friends of the People' Are. Collected Works, Volume 1, p 140.
- [6] For example, GA Cohen, Karl Marx's Theory of History: a Defence, p 32.
- [7] Georgi Lukacs, History and Class Consciousness, (Merlin, 1971) p 224.
- [8] Reprinted in H Marcuse, Studies in Critical Philosophy, NLB, 1972.
- [9] Reason and Revolution, OUP, 1936.
- [10] Soviet Marxism: a Critical Analysis. Routledge, 1958.
- [11] J Habermas, 'Towards a Reconstruction of Historical Materialism', in Communication and the Evolution of Society, Heinemann, 1979.
- [12] Alfred Schmidt, History and Structure: an Essay in Hegelian, Marxist and Structuralist Theories of History, MIT Press, 1981. p109.
- [13] Second Thesis on Feuerbach.
- [14] Hegel, Phenomenology of Spirit, p 101.
- [15] Paris Manuscripts. Marx-Engels Selected Works (MECW), 3: 329
- [16] Hegel, The German Constitution. In Hegel's Political Writings, Knox and Pelczynski, p 145.
- [17] Marx, Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law: Introduction. MECW 3: 182.
- [18] MECW 3: 175.
- [19] Tenth Thesis on Feuerbach.
- [20] Paris Manuscripts, MECW, 3: 296-7.
- [21] Neither Hegel nor Marx can have a 'theory of knowledge'. They both know that knowledge is a socio-histori-

cal movement. A 'theory' of this movement would have to include a 'theory' of itself, and that is impossible for any 'theory'..

[22] Third Thesis on Feuerbach.

[23] The Poverty of Philosophy, MECW, 6: 177-8.

[24] Capital Volume 1, Afterword to the Second Edition, p 103.

[25] Paris Manuscripts, MECW, 3: 305.

[26] Ibid., 297.

[27] Ibid., 276.

[28] Grundrisse, MECW, 29: 92.

[29] German Ideology, MECW, 5: 78.

[30] Ibid, 245.

[31] Ibid., 77.

[32] Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law: Introduction. MECW, 3: 186.

[33] German Ideology, MECW, 5: 53.

[34] Hegel, Philosophy of Right, para. 289, Z.

[35] German Ideology. MECW, 5: 46.

[36] Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon, MECW, 11:103

[37] Hegel, Philosophy of World History, Introduction.

[38] Paris Manuscripts. MECW 3: 275-6.

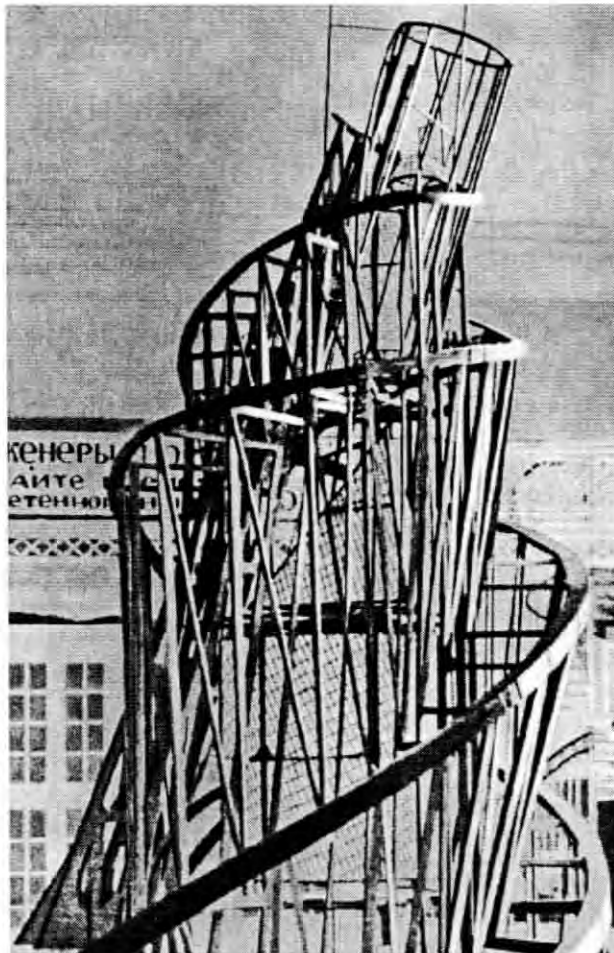
[39] Grundrisse, MECW, 29: 210.

[40] Ninth Thesis on Feuerbach

[41] Capital Volume 1, p 171.

[42] Grundrisse, MECW, 28: 95.

[43] Capital, Volume 3, p 959.



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The Uncontrollability and Destructiveness of Globalizing Capital

Istvan Meszaros

We live in an age of unprecedented historical crisis. Its severity can be gauged by the fact that we are not facing a more or less extensive cyclic crisis of capitalism as experienced in the past, but the deepening structural crisis of the capital system itself. As such this crisis affects — the first time ever in history — the whole of humankind, calling for quite fundamental changes to the way in which the social metabolism is controlled if humanity is to survive.

Constitutive elements of the capital system (like monetary and merchant capital, as well as original sporadic commodity production) go back thousands of years in history. However, for most of those thousands of years they all remained subordinate parts of the specific systems of social metabolic control which historically prevailed at the time, including the slave-owning and feudal modes of production and distribution. Only in the last few centuries, under the bourgeois capitalist form, could capital successfully assert its rule as an all-embracing organic system. To quote Marx:

It must be kept in mind that the new forces of production and relations of production do not develop out of nothing, nor drop from the sky, nor from the womb of the self-positing Idea; but from within and in antithesis to the existing development of production and the inherited, traditional relations of property. While in the completed bourgeois system every economic relation presupposes every other in its bourgeois economic form, and everything posited is thus also a presupposition, this is the case with every *organic system*. This organic system itself, as a totality, has its presuppositions, and its development to its totality consists precisely in subordinating all elements of society to itself, or in creating out of it the organs which it still lacks; this is historically how it becomes a totality. [1]

In this way, by extricating its age-old organic constituents from the shackles of earlier organic systems, and by demolishing the barriers that prevented the development of some vital new constituents [2], capital as an all-embracing organic system could assert its rule in the last three centuries as *generalized commodity production*. By reducing and degrading human beings to the status of mere costs of production as necessary labour power, capital could treat even living labour as nothing more than a marketable commodity, just like any other, subjecting it to the dehumanising determinations of economic compulsion.

Earlier forms of productive interchange of human beings among themselves and with nature were on the whole oriented toward production for *use*, with a large degree of *self-sufficiency* as their systemic determination. This imposed on them a great vulnerability to capital's sharply contrasting reproductive principles which were already operative, even if at first on a very small scale, within the confines of the old systems. For none of the constitutive elements of capital's dynamically unfolding organic system was ever in *need* of, nor indeed *capable* of, confining itself to the structural constraints of self-sufficiency. Capital as a system of social metabolic control could emerge and triumph over its historical antecedents by abandoning all considerations of human need as tied to the limitations of non-quantifiable *use-values* superimposing on the latter — as the absolute pre-requisite of their legitimation to become acceptable production targets — the fetishistic imperatives of both quantifiable and *ever-expanding exchange-value*.

This is how the historically specific form of the capital system: its *bourgeois capitalist* variety, came into being. It had to adopt the overwhelmingly *economic* mode of extracting surplus-labour as strictly quantified *surplus-value* — in contrast to both the *precapitalist* and the Soviet type *postcapitalist*, primarily *political*, forms of controlling the extraction of *surplus-labour* — as at the time by far the most dynamic way of realizing the *expansion-imperative* of the victorious system. Moreover, thanks to the perverse circularity of capital's fully completed organic system — in which 'every economic relation presupposes every other in its bourgeois economic form' and 'everything posited is also a presupposition' — the world of capital could also assert its claims to being a forever rustproof "iron cage" from which no escape could be — nor indeed should be — contemplated.

However, the absolute necessity to successfully meet the requirements of unconstrainable expansion: the secret of capital's irresistible advance, had brought with it an insurmountable historical limitation as well. This it did not only for the sociohistorically specific form of bourgeois *capitalism*, but altogether for the viability of the *capital system* in general. For this system of social metabolic control either had to succeed in imposing on society its ruthless and ultimately irrational expansionary logic, no matter how devastating the consequences; or it had to adopt some rational constraints which directly contradicted its innermost determination as an unrestrainable expansionary system. The twentieth century had witnessed many failed attempts that aimed at overcoming the systemic limi-

tations of capital, from Keynesianism to Soviet type state interventionism, together with the political and military conflagrations which they gave rise to. And yet, all that such attempts could achieve was only the hybridization of the capital system, compared to its classical economic form — with extremely problematical implications for the future — but no structurally viable solutions.

It is highly significant in this respect that, as a matter of fact the capital system could not be completed as a *global* system in its proper *capitalist* form. This happens to be the uncomfortable truth, notwithstanding all triumphalism which celebrated in recent years both the mythical virtues of an idealized 'market society' — not to mention the apologetic propagandistic use to which the concept of a totally fictitious 'social market' had been put — and the 'end of history' under the never again challengeable hegemony of liberal capitalist principles. In other words, global capitalist developments failed to make the overwhelmingly economic mode of extraction and appropriation of surplus-labour as surplus-value *universally* prevail.

Capital in the twentieth century was forced to respond to ever more extensive crises (which brought with them even two formerly unimaginable world wars) by accepting *hybridization* — in the form of an ever greater intrusion of the state into the socioeconomic reproduction process — as a way out of its difficulties, ignoring the longer term dangers of the adopted remedy for the viability of the system. Characteristically, attempts to turn back the clock (even as far back as the age of a grossly misrepresented Adam Smith) are prominent among the uncritical defenders of the capital system. Thus the representatives of the 'Radical Right' continue to fantasise about 'rolling back the boundaries of the state', although in reality the opposite trend is clearly observable, due to the inability of the system to secure capital-expansion on the required scale without the administration of ever greater doses of 'extra-neous help' by the state in one form or another.

Capitalism may now have gained the upper hand in the former Soviet Union and in Eastern Europe; but it is quite wrong to describe the present state of the world as successfully ruled by *capitalism* everywhere, even though it is certainly under the rule of *capital*. For in China, for instance, capitalism is forcefully established in coastal enclaves only, leaving the overwhelming majority of the population (that is, well over one billion people) outside its framework. And even in those limited areas of China, where capitalist principles prevail, the economic extraction of surplus-labour must be propped up by heavy political constituents, so as to keep the cost of labour artificially low. Similarly India (another country with an immense population) is only partially under the successful management of the capitalistically regulated socioeconomic metabolism, leaving the overwhelming majority of the population in a very different predicament so far.[3] Even in the former Soviet Union it would be quite inaccurate to talk about the successful restoration of capital-

ism everywhere, despite the complete dedication of the ruling political bodies to that task in no less than the last twelve years. Furthermore, the failed 'modernization' of the so-called 'Third World', in conformity to the prescriptions propagated for decades by advanced capitalist countries, underlines the fact that vast numbers of people — not only in Asia but also in Africa and Latin America — could not be brought into the long promised land of the liberal capitalist Millennium. Thus, capital could succeed in adjusting itself to the pressures emanating from the end of its historical ascendancy only by turning its back to its own progressive phase of development, abandoning altogether the liberal capitalist project, despite all self-serving ideological mystification to the contrary. This is why it should be even more obvious today than ever before that the target of socialist transformation cannot be *capitalism* only, if it is to be of a lasting success; it must be the *capital system* itself.

This system in all of its capitalist or postcapitalist forms is (and must remain) *expansion-oriented* and driven by *accumulation*. [4] Naturally, what is at issue in this regard is not a process designed for the increasing satisfaction of human need. Rather, it is the expansion of capital as an end in itself, serving the preservation of a system which could not survive without constantly asserting its power as an extended mode of reproduction. The capital system is *antagonistic* to its inner core, due to the hierarchical structural subordination of labour to capital which totally usurps — and must always usurp — the power of decision making. This structural antagonism prevails everywhere, from the smallest constitutive 'microcosms' to the 'macrocosm' embracing the most comprehensive reproductive structures and relations. And precisely because the antagonism is *structural*, the capital system is — and must always remain — *unreformable and uncontrollable*. The historical failure of reformist social democracy provides an eloquent testimony to the systems unreformability; and the deepening structural crisis, with its dangers for the very survival of humanity, puts sharply into relief its uncontrollability. Indeed, it is inconceivable to introduce the fundamental changes required for remedying the situation without overcoming the destructive structural antagonism both in the reproductive microcosms and in the macrocosm of the capital system as an all-embracing mode of social metabolic control. And that can be achieved only by putting in its place a radically different form of social metabolic reproduction, oriented toward the qualitative redimensioning and the increasing satisfaction of human need; a mode of human interchange controlled not by a set of fetishistic material determinations but by the associated producers themselves.

The capital system is characterized by a threefold fracture between .

- (1) production and its control,
- (2) production and consumption, and
- (3) production and (both internal and international) circulation of the products.

As a result, it is an irremediably centrifugal system in which the conflicting and internally antagonistic parts pull in very different directions.

In the theories formulated from capital's standpoint in the past, remedies to the missing cohesive dimension were on the whole wishfully conceptualized. At first, by Adam Smith, as 'the invisible hand', which was supposed to render political interventions by the state and its politicians — explicitly condemned by Smith as most harmful — quite superfluous. Later Kant offered a variation on Adam Smith's 'Commercial Spirit', advocating the realization of moral politics and (rather naively) expecting from the agency of the 'Commercial Spirit' not only universally diffused economic benefits but also a politically commendable reign of 'perpetual peace', within the framework of a harmonious 'League of Nations'. Later still, at the peak of this line of thought, Hegel introduced the idea of the 'cunning of Reason', attributing to it the fulfilment of a very similar function to Adam Smith's 'invisible hand'. However, in complete contrast to Smith — and reflecting the much more conflict-torn predicament of his own times — Hegel had directly assigned the totalizing/universalistic role of Reason in human affairs to the nation state, scornful of Kant's belief in the coming reign of 'perpetual peace'. Yet he also insisted that 'the Universal is to be found in the State, in its laws, its universal and rational arrangements. The State is the Divine Idea as it exists on Earth', [5] since in the modern world 'the State as the image and actuality of Reason has become objective'. [6] Thus, even the greatest thinkers who conceptualized these problems from the standpoint of capital could only offer some idealized solutions to the underlying contradictions, i.e. to the ultimately irremediable threefold fracture mentioned above. They have, nevertheless, acknowledged at least by implication the existence of such contradictions, in contrast to the present-day apologists of capital — like the representatives of the 'Radical Right', for instance — who would never admit the existence of anything in need of a substantive remedy in their cherished system.

Given the centrifugal internal determination of its constitutive parts, the capital system could only find a — most problematical — cohesive dimension, in the form of its national state formations. The latter embodied the comprehensive/totalizing political command structure of capital, which proved itself adequate to its role throughout the system's historical ascendancy. However, the fact that this remedial cohesive dimension was historically articulated in the form of the far from mutually benevolent and harmonious nation states, with no desire whatsoever for conforming to the Kantian imperative of the coming 'perpetual peace', meant that the state in its actuality was indeed 'infected with contingency' [7] in more ways than one.

- First, because the forces of destruction at the disposal of modern warfare have become absolutely prohibi-

tive, depriving thereby the nation states of their ultimate sanction for resolving the most comprehensive international antagonisms in the form of yet another world war.

- Second, because the end of capital's historical ascendancy had brought into prominence the system's irrational wastefulness and destructiveness also on the plane of production, intensifying thereby the need for securing new outlets for capital's wares through hegemonic/imperialist domination under conditions when the traditional way of imposing it could no longer be considered a readily available option; not only for strictly military reasons but also on account of the grave implications of such steps for a potential global trade war.
- And third, because the up to relatively recently veiled contradiction between the unconstrainable expansionary drive of capital (tending toward full global integration) and its historically articulated state formations — as competing nation states — had broken out into the open, underlying not only the *destructiveness* of the system but also its *uncontrollability*.

No wonder, therefore, that the end of capital's historical ascendancy in the twentieth century had carried with it also the insurmountable crisis of all of its known state formations.

Nowadays, as an automatic solution to all of the encountered problems and contradictions, we are offered the magic wand of '*globalization*'. This solution is presented as a complete novelty, as if the issue of globalization appeared on the historical horizon only in the last decade or two, with its promise of universal benevolence at par with the once similarly hailed and revered notion of 'the invisible hand'. Yet in actuality the capital system was inexorably moving toward 'globalization' from its inception. For given the unconstrainability of its constitutive parts, capital could not envisage successfully completing itself in any other form than as an all-embracing global system. This is why capital had to attempt to demolish all obstacles that stood in the way of its full unfolding; and it must continue to do so for as long as the system survives.

That is where a massive contradiction becomes clearly visible. For whereas capital in its productive articulation — in our own times primarily through the agency of giant *national-transnational* corporations — tends toward global integration (and in that sense truly and substantively toward globalization), the vital configuration of 'total social capital' or 'global capital' is to the present day totally devoid of its proper state formation. This is what sharply contradicts the intrinsic determination of the system itself as inexorably global and unrestrainable. Thus the missing '*state of the capital system*' as such demonstrates capital's inability to carry the objective logic of the system's unrestrainability to its ultimate conclusion.

It is this circumstance that must put the sanguine expectations of 'globalization' under the shadow of grievous failure, without removing, however, the problem itself — namely the necessity of a truly global integration of humanity's reproductive interchanges — to which only a socialist solution can be envisaged. For without a socialist solution the necessarily growing deadly antagonism and hegemonic confrontation of the principal competing powers for the required outlets can only result in a catastrophic threat to the survival of humankind. To take only one example, within two or three decades the economy of China (even at its present rate of development) is bound to far outweigh the economic might of the United States, with a military potential to match it. And, in the good old tradition of 'strategic thinking' in the U.S., there are already 'theories' anticipating the necessary solution of that immense economic and political challenge by some 'pre-emptive strike'.

The structural crisis of capital is the sobering manifestation of the system's encounter with its own intrinsic limits. The adaptability of this mode of social metabolic control could go as far as the 'extraneous help' compatible with its systemic determinations allowed it to do so. The very fact that the need for such 'extraneous help' surfaced — and despite all mythology to the contrary continued to grow throughout the twentieth century — was always an indication that something rather different from the normality of capital's economic extraction and appropriation of surplus-labour had to be introduced in order to counter the severe 'dysfunctions' of the system. As it happened — in contrast to what is in store for the future, due to the unfolding systemic crisis — for the greater part of our century capital could digest the administered doses of remedy. Indeed, in the few 'advanced capitalist countries' — but only there — it could even celebrate its most obviously successful expansionary phase of development under the postwar decades of Keynesian state interventionism.

The severity of the *structural* crisis of the capital system confronts socialists with a major strategic challenge, and it offers at the same time also some vital new possibilities for meeting that challenge. What needs to be stressed here is that no matter how abundant and how varied the forms of twentieth century 'extraneous help' — quite unlike the early phases of capitalist development, when absolutist political 'extraneous help' (as pointed out by Marx with reference to Henry VIII. and others) was instrumental, nay vital, in establishing capital's normality and healthy functioning as an all-embracing system —, all such help in our times proved to be *insufficient* for the purpose of securing the permanent stability and unchallengeable vitality of the system as a whole. Quite the contrary. For twentieth century state interventions could only intensify capital's hybridization as a social reproductive system, thereby piling up troubles for the future. In the years ahead of us the structural crisis of capital — asserting itself as the *chronic insufficiency of extraneous help* at the present stage of development — is bound to get deeper. It is also bound to

reverberate across the globe, even in the most remote corners of the world, affecting every aspect of life, from the directly material reproductive dimensions to the most mediated intellectual and cultural concerns.

To be sure, historically viable change can only be a truly *epochal* one, setting the task to go *beyond capital* itself as a mode of social metabolic control. This means a move of much greater magnitude than the supersession of the feudal system by capital's own. For it is impossible to go beyond capital without radically overcoming the hierarchical structural subordination of labour to any alien controlling force whatsoever, as opposed to simply changing the specific historical *form* in which the extraction and appropriation of surplus-labour is perpetuated, as it always happened in the past.

The personifications of capital can assume many different forms, from the private capitalist variety to present-day theocracy, and from 'Radical Right' ideologues and politicians to postcapitalist party and state bureaucrats. They can even present themselves as political transvestites, donning the attire of Labour — as the 'New Labour' Government in Britain, for instance — so as to spread mystification in the interest of capital's continued rule with that much greater ease. All this, however, cannot resolve the system's structural crisis and the need for overcoming it through the hegemonic alternative of labour to capital's social metabolic order. This is what puts on the historical agenda the task for the radical rearticulation of the socialist movement as an uncompromizing mass movement. To end the tragically self-disarming separation of labour's industrial arm (the trades unions) from its political arm (the traditional parties), and to embark on politically conscious direct action, as against the meek acceptance of the ever worsening conditions imposed on the producers by the pseudo-democratic rules of the parliamentary game, are the necessary orienting targets and transitional moves of a revitalized socialist movement in the foreseeable future. The continued submission to globalizing capital's globally destructive course of development is truly no option.

Notes

[1]. Marx, *Grundrisse*, p.278.

[2]. Above all by overcoming the prohibition on the sale and purchase of both land and labour, securing thereby the triumph of alienation in every domain.

[3]. Vast numbers are just surviving (if they do) from hand to mouth in the traditional economy, and the number of those who remain completely marginalized, even if still hoping — mostly in vain — for a job of some kind in the capitalist system, almost defies comprehension. Thus, 'While the total number of unemployed persons registered with employment exchanges stood at 336 million in 1993,

the number of employed persons in the same year according to the Planning Commission stood at only 307.6 million, which means that the number of registered unemployed persons is higher than the number of persons employed. And the rate of percentage increase of employment is almost negligible.' Sukomal Sen, *Working Class of India: History of Emergence and Movement 1830-1990, With an Overview up to 1995*, K. P. Bagchi & Co., Calcutta, 1997, p. 554.

[4]. The chronic crisis of accumulation as a grave structural problem has been highlighted by Paul Sweezy and Harry Magdoff on several occasions.

[5]. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, p. 39.

[6]. Hegel, *The Philosophy of Right*, p. 223.

[7]. Hegel, *The Philosophy of Right*, p. 214.

[8]. Schumpeter used to praise capitalism — rather self-complacently — as a reproductive order of 'productive destruction'; today it would be much more correct to characterise it as ever-increasingly a system of *destructive production*.

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Towards a Revolutionary Programme

Cliff Slaughter

(Based largely on a paper introducing a discussion at the International Socialist Forum, March 1998.)

I. Introduction: some elementary considerations

1. A great deal of work and collaboration is needed for the elaboration of a programme adequate to the situation in which the international working class finds itself at the end of the century. No one has such a programme.
2. The programme must be specific, concrete. In order to make any progress towards it, work is necessary to clarify a common theoretical and methodological basis: the concrete is not arrived at except through abstractions and analysis.
3. In beginning this work, it is unfortunately necessary to state the obvious: that we need a sober understanding of where and who we are, namely not a party (let alone a 'mass party') with majority or even significant minority following in the working class, putting before it our programme. Rather, we are at the point of clarifying as far as we can the problems faced by the vanguard which comes forward in the working class as it is forced to break from reformism (the Labour Party, in Britain).
4. Programme, in the sense we are working for it here, means not a list of demands, minimum and/or transitional. It must be a demonstration of the necessity of socialism arising out of the structural crisis/contradictions of capital and out of the prerequisites prepared by the socialisation of production under capitalism. It must, as part of this demonstration, indicate the main lines of an answer to the basic questions of how the working class will carry out its historic task, and what obstacles it must overcome.

II. Theoretical considerations

Without thinking this through theoretically, there will be only a fruitless and unfortunately all too familiar exchange about revisions or modifications of existing programmes, e.g. the 1938 Transitional Programme, instead of a real development from the Communist Manifesto and subsequent programmes.

1. Often quoted is Marx's aphorism: 'Theory becomes a

material force as soon as it grips the masses'. It has too often been understood as: 'the "theory" which we have must be grasped by the masses'. Instead, it is necessary to read a few lines later in Marx's text, and take heed: 'Theory must reflect the needs of the masses'.

Marx is here writing about the need of the masses to liberate themselves, to make their own revolution. And he includes in this all the felt needs of workers to defend themselves, to prevent their degradation at the hands of capital, to ensure the minimum standards of human existence, to have a measure of human dignity.

It must be stressed at this point that defence against degradation and decadence is surely even more necessary than it was in Marx's day, when capitalism was still in the ascendant, still carrying forward the development of humanity's productive forces. However, this defence takes place today under conditions where the existing, essentially defensive, organs of the working-class movement are not only inadequate but have been incorporated into the mechanisms of capitalist control. This consideration has as its true context the historical nature of the period in which we are living.

2. With reference to some of the campaigns now being conducted, it should be said that programme cannot be confined to an assertion of working-class or human 'rights' which cannot in itself challenge the system as a whole. While the work of socialists must address all the demands and struggles of all sections of the working class, the guiding principle of our organising work and political line must have as its content and must express the historical nature, role and destiny of the proletariat in putting an end to class society and thus abolishing itself as a class.

This basic discovery of Marx's, that class society in its self-movement itself brought into existence the class which must overcome the most developed form of alienation and exploitation, is the fundamental basis of any revolutionary programme. This of course entails the content of Marx's rejection of idealism and of 'contemplative' materialism, and his consequent assertion of praxis, conscious revolutionary-practical activity: the overcoming of alienation not in the head and not as individuals, but through the self-emancipation of the proletariat, which in abolishing classes emancipates humanity.

- 3 Marx's first use of the term 'permanent revolution' was not in his writings following the revolutions of 1848 but much earlier, in his essay 'On the Jewish Question' (1843).

His purpose was to emphasise that the proletariat is the class whose revolution goes beyond the taking of political power to 'permanent' (ongoing) transformation of the foundations of social life, of man's whole social being. We have too often seen the theory of 'permanent revolution' as nothing more than the (highly important, it goes without saying) refutation of the 'two-stage' theory, i.e. the 'theory' (most systematically advanced by the Stalinists) that proletarian leadership and the proletarian revolution can become the perspective of the working-class movement only after the 'bourgeois-democratic' revolution is achieved. Instead, it is necessary to strive to grasp the implications of this social revolution. This mistake was undoubtedly part and parcel of the tendency of Trotskyists to give an over-political, over-historical emphasis to the tasks of Marxists. This tendency was understandable, perhaps even inevitable, in the conditions of isolation and repression imposed by Stalinism; but it was also harmful, and not to correct it would be fatal. It affects directly this question of programme.

We have tended to discuss programme (including the 1938 Transitional Programme of the Fourth International) exclusively from the standpoint of the conquest of political power by the working class and the transitional demands which can help advance the consciousness and organisation of the working class from its present state towards that conquest. Now, learning from experience as well as from these abstract considerations, we must surely take on board what Meszaros has recently stressed: that the fundamental division of labour imposed by capital must be challenged and must begin to be broken in the course of the revolution.

And here we reach the most crucial, and at the same time the most difficult, questions of programme, in every country, and not only as they did in Russia when capitalism broke 'at its weakest link'. There, the penalty paid by the Russian people for the isolation of a relatively backward capitalist country is clear for all to see, as is the exaggerated form it gave to the reactionary utopia of 'socialism in a single country'. But the question of a real transfer of power to the social body, to the masses, goes beyond the conquest of state power. This question, a fundamental one if the state really is to begin to 'wither away' from the day of the proletarian revolution, has to be addressed by all who seek to develop a truly revolutionary programme.

III 'Inroads into the domination of capital'?

Creative thinking about programme, and the work based on this thinking, must therefore have as one of its main objectives the study of how the domination of capital over the very lifeblood of society can and must be challenged by the working class itself (that is what social revolution means) and not only how class-consciousness of the need to take state power develops in ideas and practice.

Now, this difficult question of 'inroads into the domination of capital' (Meszaros) inevitably provokes the rejoinder: how could such 'inroads' avoid the fate of being mere utopian islands doomed to defeat, since the economy as a whole, with its international division of labour, remains capitalist? Of course, the idea of defending communities from destruction (for example by schemes of 'mutual aid' or the use of alternative technology), or of imposing social control or workers' control on jobs, etc, etc, must on no account be counterposed to the revolutionary struggle for state power. But it is a more difficult and important question than can be dealt with by that simple posing of alternatives. In a letter of Istvan Meszaros (1992) he uses the phrase, 'transfer power (in the course of the conquest of power) to the social body'.

Thus, (a) forms of resistance and initiative must be developed and nurtured which, as the conditions of severe social and political crisis mature, giving rise to mass struggles which raise the question of state power, can be transformed by the working class itself into organs of social control. From the other side of the question, as it were, (b) the political struggle in preparation for these conditions of major crisis must be conducted in full awareness of the vital importance of the forms of struggle in (a) above and in intimate connection with them. The organs of struggle for power and of workers' state power - so far as we know, workers' councils - will in this way be enabled to be at the same time organs of social control in production and distribution.

Especially in view of the bitter experiences of the working class with Stalinism's 'command economy' and bureaucratism, as well as with the reformist 'nationalisation' and 'state control', this aspect of the programme must be central for the new party which the working class will have. That is, the programme will not be some abstract formula promising god knows what but must strive to express how and why the working class itself undertakes its self-emancipation. This is what Rosa Luxemburg means in *Reform and Revolution*, when she writes: 'If our programme contains the formula of the historic development of society from capitalism to socialism, it must also formulate, in all its fundamental characteristics, all the transitory phases of this development, and it should, consequently, be able to indicate to the proletariat what ought to be its corresponding action at every moment on the road towards socialism.'

It is in this fundamental sense that still today, as Marx put it in 1851, the 'battle-cry' of the working class is 'the permanent revolution'. So deep and insoluble are the problems thrust forward by capital's structural crisis that we should by no means assume that we are decades away from major class confrontations. Take the problem of unemployment: Francois Chesnais has rightly raised the question of perspectives for the movement in France today, asking: how can it develop without a broader development of working-class democracy? Democracy is not meant abstractly here. The question arises in the sense:

how can the separate regional and local protests, however militant (occupations, etc.), go beyond protest, how can they be coordinated with each other, nationally and on the European scale? How can they be coordinated with the struggles of the employed and organised workers, who are led by union bureaucrats who actively oppose and use the trade union organisations against any such coordination? Here are workers without a voice, without a place in the famous 'civil society', either through unions or through the 'Socialist' and 'Communist' Parties in parliament which claim their allegiance. Some form of coordination leading to a type of workers' councils regionally and nationally suggests itself naturally. This is surely the question which should be being discussed by socialists in the unemployed movement.

IV. The implications of 'structural crisis'

It is certainly true that, in all informed discussion concerning the 1938 Transitional Programme, it has been recognised that, as Trotsky was at pains to point out, a programme is much more than the immediate programme of transitional demands. The latter are, naturally, attuned to the particular current phase of development of the working class and its struggles. In those discussions it has rightly been emphasised that the nature of the historical epoch we are in is fundamental (in this case 'the epoch of imperialist decay'). However, Trotsky's formulation¹; 'the world situation is chiefly characterised by the crisis of working-class revolutionary leadership', was too often interpreted in such a way as to take for granted the objective situation of capitalism. (See International Socialist Forum No.2, 1998.) The 'orthodox' position among Trotskyists has tended and still tends to be that it remains enough to say 'we are in the epoch of imperialist decay', 'we are still in the epoch of wars and revolutions', and

even 'Lenin's list of defining features of imperialism serves best to characterise our period' (as in the resolution of the 1998 LIT Congress) - and anyone who says different is a revisionist or a 'disenchanted intellectual'. I have been obliged to answer that it is the enchanted ones who worry me.

It cannot be too often repeated that the programme must be clearly and definitely situated in the actual stage of capitalist society's development. When Bernstein revised the revolutionary programme, he based himself on an impressionistic comparison of new and older surface forms, concluding that capitalism had shown itself able to adapt to historical change: disappearance of general crisis, development of credit, employers' organisations (cartels), wider means of communication and information services, together with growth of the middle classes and betterment of working-class conditions of life. He also argued that the price of labour-power would increasingly be controlled by strong trade unions in such a way as to isolate the price of this commodity from the market as a whole. Rosa Luxemburg answered (Social Reform or Revolution) with an analysis of the mounting historical contradictions of capital, and predicted: 'Once industrial development has attained its highest point and capitalism has entered its descending phase on the world market, the trade union struggle will become doubly difficult'.

The stage called imperialism began over a century ago (remember, 'a week is a long time in politics'). It is surely perfectly clear that there are great changes in the world and that it would be foolish, entirely abstract, to think that programme, strategy and tactics can be deduced from the character of imperialism in general, or in terms of Lenin's list of its characteristics. The question now of capital's structural crisis, brought forward above all in Meszaros' *Beyond Capital*, needs a whole separate discussion. But it must be said that those seeking to develop the revolutionary programme need to say yes or no to this thesis. This



draft is based on its acceptance.

It is 28 years (1970) since Marx's Theory of Alienation was published, in which Meszaros referred to 'the present phase of socio-historical development, when for the first time in history capitalism is being shaken to its foundations as a world-system (whereas all the past crises of capitalism were partial and localisable, the "transcendence of labour's self-alienation" is "on the order of the day")'. It is this seminal idea of a universal structural crisis that is later developed in *Beyond Capital*. But in the same passage we find the germ also of the point developed above about the taking of political power in relation to the social revolution as a whole: '...in the contemporary world situation it is no longer possible to conceive even the immediate tasks of socialist movements in terms of the political conquest of power - not as when the world-historical task was the breaking of the first and "weakest link of the chain" - but in terms of strategic socio-economic alternatives, with far-reaching global implications.'

This is surely, however difficult, the great challenge in the fight for a programme.

Any serious Marxist study today has to recognise that in the 1970s, with the end of the so-called post-war boom, capital's historical crisis became truly structural, universal; not only geographically but in the vital sense of permeating all mechanisms of political, social and ideological control as well as the economy. This universalisation does not eliminate uneven development but on the contrary exacerbates it. Furthermore, we have come to understand that not 'soviet communism' but on the contrary the crisis of Stalinism, which began before the 1970s, was the major political threat to capital's own domination politically and ideologically as well as constituting an enormous accelerating factor of its economic structural crisis. The collapse of Stalinism in 1989-90 was surely a qualitative change in the relationships and parameters of the class struggle internationally. The challenge is to go beyond the programme which preceded this qualitative change (and this means going beyond what has now become the commonplace that particular demands in the 1938 Programme are out of date: 'drive the bureaucracy out of the soviets'? 'political revolution'?)

The main point here is that the character of the period as one of structural crisis is fundamental to all discussion on programme. Meszaros has rightly made much use of Marx's letter asking if our revolution in Europe, 'this little corner' will not be crushed so long as capital remains in the ascendant on the world stage. It is no longer in the ascendant. And the force which has been its principal political and ideological support in surviving until now, Stalinism, is no more.

Critique No. 30-31

A journal of socialist theory

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The Minimum Platform: Some comments to Start the Discussion

Aldo Andres Romero & Roberto Ramirez

[This is a translation of an article written by comrades Aldo Andres Romero and Roberto Ramirez, members of the Movement to Socialism (MAS) of Argentina. It appeared in the journal Debates, No. 1, August 1998.]

The Minimum Platform put forward for discussion by Iranian revolutionary socialists (see ISF No.1) touches a wide range of theoretical, political, organisational and also historical questions, which are, of course, on the table for discussion by all revolutionary Marxists.

In these comments, of course, we do not pretend to go into a deep consideration all those subjects, but to analyse schematically the full text. We will give our initial opinions about some of the points raised. This we believe can help to organise later a more profound discussion about the more important questions. To simplify things, we will follow the same order as the document, leaving to the end some comments of general character.

To begin with, we must establish the basis to start the discussions. We see the Minimum Platform as a positive proposition, which we see, initially, as convergent with objectives and methods sustained by ourselves.

The text has a characteristic which seems to us very positive and differentiates it from many "programmes" that in reality are no more than a list of slogans with more or less explanation. It proposes a certain balance-sheet of the experiences of the revolutionary movement and looks for the establishment of bases that can allow the establishment of "a common understanding of experiences and tasks".

Also, we think the text is unequal in the areas it covers. We see some solid sections, like the "balance sheet" of Stalinism in the section on Democracy and Socialism. But we find other parts more confused, and even contradictory with other parts of the same document.

As an example of the latter, in the section on Revolutionary Theory, the "evolutionism" and "determinism" of the Second International is correctly rejected. But this is in open contradiction with the idea, advanced in the section on The Meaning of Socialism, that the struggles stemming from this awareness will inevitably lead to the establishment of a workers' state and eventually a socialist society.

Introduction

We agree with the characterisation of the existence of a serious crisis, which necessitates the search for a reunification "across the broad spectrum of left revolutionary socialists". A journal such as the one proposed by our comrades can be one of the tools with which to work for that purpose – although it would be wrong to propose it as an absolute and self-sufficient rule. Also, we agree that "the revolutionary socialist tendencies must attempt to distinguish themselves from reformists, revisionist and opportunist currents on the basis of some basic or minimum positions" from which would be possible to develop an effort together to elaborate a program.

The Meaning of Socialism and the Transitional Society

Our discussions related to the levels of degeneration in USSR and the nature of the state of the wrongly called "real socialism", and some of the theoretical and programmatic consequences deriving from this historic experience, seem to us convergent with those of our Iranian comrades.

"The present state must be removed and a state of a new kind established. In this way, according to Marx, there is a period of transition between capitalist and communist society identified by the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat based on all the oppressed and toiling masses. This dictatorship does not imply a despotic form of government, but a necessary phase to allow the working class to establish its rule and start the transition period through the abolition of private property. This will be in reality the first truly democratic form of government based on the will of the majority of the population and is therefore a new form of state which from its onset is trying to pave the way for its own dissolution. [...] one cannot talk of a transitional society when this power has been taken away from the proletariat. Such a society can only return to capitalism [...] In the same way that a workers' state in its struggle against the old order must deepen the socialist revolution, it must never forget that in its efforts for the construction of socialism the only way to a conclusive victory is indeed the international extension of the socialist revolution. [...] Relations of production constantly change during the transition period; hence its name. To nationalise is not the same as to socialise. Social ownership only starts with state ownership of the essential means

of production. However, its qualitative growth and the transformation of the first to the second continues only gradually. One cannot therefore determine the nature of such a society according to its constantly changing relations of production. Those tendencies who have argued that according to the high percentage of growth of state ownership, due to the increasing role of the state plan in the economy or because of low inflation or low unemployment this or that country is closer to socialism, forget that in the period of transition to socialism, the priority lies with politics. What guarantees this transition is not the percentage of state ownership but the rule of the organs for the self-government of the producers, i.e., the soviets."

We believe than these concepts coincide a great deal with our own vision, developed in the book *Despues de Stalinismo* (After Stalinism) and also in the articles published in the magazine *Herramienta* (Nos. 1 and 2: *Debates Sobre "Despues de Stalinismo"* and *"El socialismo y el estado"*). This is a very important point, because, for various reasons, among Trotskyists and the revolutionary left there predominated an "economist" vision of the transition, which identified the "workers' state" simply and only with the state ownership of the means of production, making secondary more important questions, such as: in whose hands is the state? What are the nature and the direction of the changes at the level of production relations and the forms of expropriation? The road followed by the ex-USSR and road to restoration followed by all the supposed "workers' states" put these old conceptions in doubt. We think, therefore, it is very positive that the Iranian comrades started the Platform by considering what happened to the late "socialist camp". Today, it is not possible to establish a platform of socialist struggle for the future, if the lessons of the "socialist" experiences of the 20th century are not taken seriously into account.

Democracy and Socialism

The positions developed by our comrades in this respect are very important, and in great proportion coincide, as we have said, with those developed by us in the above-mentioned articles in *Herramienta* and with the article by Jean-Philippe Dives published in [the French discussion journal] *Carre Rouge* No.7, *The Black Book of communism: a preventive operation of ideological warfare*). As our Iranian comrades said: "During the period of transition, state ownership must gradually and consciously move towards social ownership. The level of this growth is directly related to the level of democracy in the councils. Without the widest democratic rights in the councils state ownership will not only fail to show any signs of transition to socialism but it will strengthen a collective bureaucracy. If the producing masses who form the vast majority of society are not allowed to democratically control and supervise the planned economy, no other authority in that society will have the willingness to produce for social needs". [...] the leading role of the party should not

be confused with the political power of the state during this period of transition. Democracy within the councils is inversely proportional to party dictatorship. The one party system is no more than a denial of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Freedom of political parties must be the epigraph of the Soviet state."

Together with these fundamental positions that we agree with, there are others which need discussing, as the comrades themselves noted. For example, to propose parliamentary representative bodies forces a previous study about the problems of political delegation and effective participation of the masses in the "democracy of the new order". The socialist transition is inseparable from the direct growth of democracy from the base, the predominance of social over political and the progressive withering away of the state.

Also, the affirmation that during the transition period, the material incentive to increase production cannot be economic profits, but only a reduction in the working day, seems to us unnecessarily rigid. In our opinion, it is only possible to advance the idea that planning can not impose a purely economic logic of maximisation, but democratic and flexible guidelines to give priority to social and cultural progress of the masses and the qualitative reduction of the working day.

The Revolutionary Party

The Platform insists with particular emphasis on the relationship that must exist between the construction of the party, the development of the programme and the real union with the workers' vanguard. This seems to us correct, but not enough. The size of the theoretical, programmatic and organisational problems that we are facing when tackling the relation masses-vanguard-party, is underestimated by simply stating "the revolutionary party of the working class is in fact the vanguard workers party. It is a party combining the revolutionary socialist program and the vanguard layers of the workers movement [...]" The vanguard party is in fact the accumulated consciousness of the class. Here the vanguard party combats bourgeois illusions and guards the collective consciousness gained."

We also feel that the programme question is treated with banality and is impoverished when the comrades refer to, "a programme arisen from inside the specific class struggles and already crystallised in the mind of the vanguard of these struggles" and, "the revolutionary socialist programme is no more than a concentrated generalisation of the experiences of the vanguard (on the international scale) and its comprehension. Marx did not make the workers movement socialist, it was the working class that converted the liberal Marx to communism."

Such formulations can lead to confusions and mistakes. For example, it can be understood as a lack of awareness

of the great need to make a specific effort in the elaboration of theory and programme. Also, it leaves gives room for a purely workerist interpretation of the programme question.

We also consider the attacks in the text against “the intellectuals” is unilateral and lacking equilibrium. The history of the workers’ movement history is full of notorious examples of bureaucratic, petty-bourgeois and even bourgeois leaders, who, taking positions in the organisations created by the workers, boycotted the interests and positions of the workers, without having much “intellectual” about them. Historically, it is not true than in the workers’ movement “the most important sections of the bureaucracy” have been born from the ranks of the intellectuals. On the other hand, analysing specifically the question of the revolutionary organisations, what comes to light is numerous examples of condemnations of “the intellectuals” – condemnations which served not to promote genuine working-class cadres, but the domination of “the practical men”, the aparatchiki as Lenin called them. It is also worth remembering that the bureaucratic counter-revolution in the USSR caused not only the extermination of millions of workers and peasants, and of hundreds of thousands of revolutionaries, but it also massacred the best of the scientific and artistic intellectuals.

Democratic Centralism

The document is right to declare the need for a debate to clarify the concept of “democratic centralism”, emphasising that it is not a question of “administrative regulations”, and highlighting the importance of recognising the right to form tendencies and factions. But experience shows us that this is very far away from exhausting the problems of democratic centralism on the theoretical and practical levels.

But it is not only a question of the party “regime” and the revolutionary party as an institution. In that sense, although what is said in the text is in general correct, the elaboration of this subject and conclusions seem to us insufficient; we do not believe than guaranteeing an ample democracy (tendency rights, etc.) is enough to sort everything out.

We are not dealing just with organisational schemes and abstract working rules, but with the real relations that, in this or that concrete circumstance of the class struggle, the party establishes with the vanguard, the masses; the policy of the party; its relations with other parties and organisations than declare themselves revolutionaries; the relations of the militants between themselves and with the leadership; the criteria and mechanisms of cadre selection, the conditions for, and problems of, the turning of militants into “professional revolutionaries”, etc.

The problems of building revolutionary organisations and of their internal “regimes” have turned out to be much

more complex and difficult than initially thought. A radical reconstruction is necessary.

Revolutionary Strategy

The Minimum Platform text, declaring that Trotsky’s and Lenin’s positions were revolutionary, states the need to improve them, but fails to clarify what the Iranian comrades mean by it. To propose that such improvement would be something like returning to “Marx’s classical position” overlooks the fact than in relation to the character and dynamism of revolutions, there were different moments and positions in Marx’s own development. Marx urged different strategies according to the situation and circumstances. We can, for example, find concepts ranging from permanentist to stage-ist. A simple “return to Marx” sorts out nothing, especially because many things have happened since. The experiences of the revolutions of the 20th century must be a fundamental element in this necessary reconstruction. It cannot be avoided the need of an actualisation of the revolutionary strategy integrating theoretically all the experience of this century.

We are not pretending to bring a finished, elaborated answer to this discussion, rather an attempt to critically examine the contributions from our current, as part of the necessary clarification. The comrades are right when they say that today it would be difficult to find a “pre-capitalist state” like the one in the Russia of the Tsars, to apply the formula of “uninterrupted revolution” (Lenin) or “permanent revolution” (Trotsky). Practically all the states are bourgeois and capitalist relations dominate them all. But this does not prove that Lenin and Trotsky’s revolutionary theories cannot be reconstructed for the particular present-day context. Neither does it justify hurried and unbalanced political conclusions. For example, in relation to the validity and importance of the democratic and anti-imperialist tasks in the process of the socialist revolution – although practically, nowadays, there are no states like the Russia of the Tsars, this does not deny the existence of democratic tasks that in a new context acquire great importance. Also, the globalisation of capitalism has not reduced the asymmetries, the dominant and exploitative relations between the metropolitan countries over the backward peripheries, and this is something not considered in the text.

The comrades’ position seems to be very influenced by the disastrous experience of the capitulation to Khomeini by the Iranian Communist Party and also many sections of the Trotskyists, because the authors of the Platform have developed it in a struggle against that terrible adaptation to “bourgeois nationalism”. But the necessary rejection of following the bourgeois a nationalist direction is theorised in a way than seems confusing to us. For example, it could be understood than the concepts of “uninterrupted revolution” of Lenin and the “permanent revolution” of Trotsky gave excuses, years later, to justify capitulations to the bourgeois in Iran and other countries, and this seems

wrong to us. Independently of the need to develop revolutionary theory – since Lenin's and Trotsky's do not fully answer, nowadays, new problems – let us not forget that their political conceptions were mainly directed against the bourgeoisie.

The Revolutionary Program

Earlier we have criticised some formulations related to the programme. On the other hand, we agree with points raised in this section, such as highlighting the central importance of the programme, the rejection to the division between minimum and maximum programme, as well as the reduction of programme to "transitional programmes" or "action programmes" – which, by the way, Trotsky never intended. From here, obviously, there remains the need to develop a really up-to-date programme.

The Organisation of Socialist Revolutionaries

We sympathise with the central idea inspiring this chapter. Any proposal of revolutionary regrouping has to start from the recognition of reality and the need of experiences, positions and diverse contributions. If it was not so, the very idea of alliance or regrouping would be questionable.

Political Struggles

This is directly applied to the view our comrades have of the situation and tasks for Iran; we can not take position about them.

Revolutionary Theory

We share the view of the need to restore and develop Marxist theory, as well as the recognition of its current crisis. The comrades have a view of the historical direction of Marxist theory that is necessary to consider: "The deviations of the Second International transformed this revolutionary theory into a dogmatic and deterministic system of belief that replaced the central role of revolutionary critical practice with a mechanical social evolutionism. The Third International, influenced by the experience of Bolshevism and the First World War paved the way for a revival of this revolutionary theory. However, during the Stalinist degeneration of the Comintern not only was this process blocked but under the backward spiral of the ideology of the ruling bureaucracy of the degenerated Soviet state the very same social democratic deviations deepened considerably. The different organisations which came out of the Left Opposition, having played a major role in resisting this degeneration and in

safeguarding the revolutionary tradition have proved eventually to be incapable of developing this theory in correspondence with the new changing situation. A thorough review of this experience, the fight to liberate revolutionary theory from decades of decline and a serious effort in developing it in accordance with present day conditions must be in the forefront of the tasks of all socialist revolutionaries."

We agree about the importance, that theory has "in the present situation". But precisely for that reason, this subject requires a further development.

Summary

We have considered the text, mentioning issues of agreement, differences and questions related to them. To finish we want to point other important matters hardly discussed or even not mentioned. For example, there is nothing about important questions of the present day, like the appreciation of the objective and subjective changes in the world working class, the crisis and degeneration of the "old workers' movement", the strong need to become an active part in the complex process than can lead to what has been called the "refounding", "reorganisation" or "reconstruction" of the workers' movement, etc. Also – by not putting sufficient emphasis on the necessity for theoretical development to take into account the new realities of the world class struggle – the Minimum Platform appears to present us with some simplifications and/or ideas that, instead of been laid as hypothesis open to debate, appear as "normative" formulations with little foundation.

In summary, we find in the Iranian comrades' Platform an approach and fundamental ideas convergent with our own, and therefore, we see the possibility to find ways to discuss and collaborate, to develop agreement, to clarify differences and work together looking for answers to the numerous and important questions that the totality of the revolutionary Marxists have not tackled, or have tackled insufficiently. For that purpose, both a common publication and the establishment of bases to take forward a constructive debate from different publications can be of use.

June 1998.

[Translated by Elia]

Meszaros on Lenin

Cyril Smith

[A contribution by Cyril Smith to the International Socialist Forum Seminar on "Beyond Capital", by István Mészáros, 28 June, 1998.]

Istvan's book opens up vital questions about the transition to socialism that will take us many years of work to consider. However, because of the way the book is written, what he has to say is not always immediately obvious. His low-key exposition of particular important issues seems to call for amplification. Of course, this brings with it the danger of distortion, which I hope I have avoided.

I shall concentrate on three points: (a) Lenin sometimes asserted that the Russian revolution, breaking the 'weakest link in the imperialist chain', was 'the model' for revolutions everywhere; (b) he introduced the idea - not to be found in Marx, but central for the work of Trotsky - that, after the revolution, what emerged in the Soviet Union was a 'workers' state'; and (c) Lenin's conception of the 'vanguard party', and its relation with the working class, which has moulded the outlook of revolutionaries ever since, should be re-evaluated. *Beyond Capital* is important, among other reasons, because it demonstrates the link between these three characteristics of Leninism.

On the first of these issues, Istvan contrasts Lenin unfavourably with Rosa Luxemburg:

That is why Lenin's remarks in the aftermath of the Russian revolution, depicting the latter as the model and as the 'inevitable and near future' of the capitalistically advanced Western countries, had to turn out to be so hopelessly optimistic, whereas Rosa Luxemburg's words that 'In Russia the problem could only be posed; it could not be solved in Russia' stood the test of time. (BC, p 317.)

A footnote to this paragraph is important:

It is true that Lenin asserts in the previous sentence that 'soon after the victory of the proletarian revolution in at least one of the advanced countries, a sharp change will probably come about; Russia will cease to be the model and once again become a backward country (in the "Soviet" and in the socialist sense).'

He continues his article immediately after the sentence just quoted like this:

'At the present moment in history, however, it is the

Russian model that reveals to all countries something - and something highly significant - of their near and immediate future.'

Thus, the adoption by the Third International of the perspective according to which the Russian revolution and its aftermath represented the 'near and immediate future' of even the capitalistically advanced countries, cannot be dissociated from Lenin. (BC, p 500, n 68)

I want to quote another important passage at length:

It was Lenin, as we all know, who worked out the strategy of revolution 'at the weakest link in the chain', insisting that the dictatorship of the proletariat must be considered as the only viable political form for the entire historical period of transition that precedes the highest stage of communism, in which it becomes possible to implement the principle of freedom. The most significant shift in his analysis was envisaging the that the 'material foundation' and the supersession of 'penury' will be accomplished under the dictatorship of the proletariat in a country which sets out from an extremely low level of development. Yet Lenin saw no problem in suggesting in December 1918 that the new state will be 'democratic for the proletariat and the propertyless in general, and dictatorial against the bourgeoisie' only.

There was a curious flaw in his usually impeccable reasoning. He argued that 'thanks to capitalism, the material apparatus of the big banks, syndicates, railways and so forth has grown' and 'the immense experience of the advanced countries has accumulated a stock of engineering marvels, the employment of which is being hindered by capitalism', concluding that the Bolsheviks (who were, in fact, confined to a backward country) could 'lay hold of this apparatus, and set it in motion'. Thus the immense difficulties of transition from one particular revolution to the success of a global revolution (which is beyond the control of any one particular agency, however class-conscious and disciplined) were more or less implicitly brushed aside by voluntaristically postulating that the Bolsheviks were capable of taking power and 'retaining it until the triumph of the world socialist revolution.' (BC, pp 903-4.)

With the failure of the world revolution to materialise after 1917, the contradictions in Lenin's conception manifested themselves. Lenin, says Istvan, 'simply could not

envisage the possibility of an objective contradiction between the dictatorship of the proletariat and the proletariat itself'. With this remark, Istvan puts his finger on the key question, and forces us to reconsider the entire tradition, common to the Third and Fourth Internationals, which declared that the Soviet state was a 'workers' state'. The book refers to 'the difficulties and contradictions of postrevolutionary societies' which 'cannot be overcome by perpetuating, and in an important sense - so far as the relationship between party intellectuals and workers is concerned - even aggravating, the structural divisions of the inherited social order.' (BC, p 395.) It goes on:

For after the revolution, when the party holds the reins of power and social control, there can be no longer any such thing as plain 'from outside'. The so-called from outside - vis-à-vis the masses of workers - becomes simultaneously also the hierarchically self-perpetuating from above... Under the changed circumstances, by contrast, 'intellectual leadership' becomes institutionalised political control of the masses, exercised from above and enforced with all means at the disposal of the postcapitalist state.

Increasingly, even before the Stalinist degeneration set in, the 'workers' state' came to be counterposed to the working class. From 1920, this idea of a 'workers' state' became so much the norm in the Comintern, that I, for one, was astonished to discover, seventy years later, that it had been a Leninist innovation. Thus the disappearance of Soviet democratic power could be regarded as a 'bureaucratic deformation' (Lenin, 1921) of an ideal type, sometimes called a 'healthy workers' state', which could be taken for granted, with out further discussion. Everybody forgot that Marx's term 'dictatorship of the proletariat' had nothing to do with the modern use of the word 'dictatorship', but implied free self-determination by the masses. Discussing what Lenin called 'the dictatorship of the proletariat in the economic sphere ... the dictatorship of the workers in economic relations' (BC, p 632), Istvan underlines the change in Lenin's understanding of state power:

Thus on some vital issues, concerning both the exercise of state power and its relationship to the proletariat, he radically altered his position after the October revolution, with far-reaching consequences for the working class. In contrast to the pre-revolutionary intentions which predicated the identity of the 'entire armed people' with state power, there appeared in Lenin's writings a separation of state power from 'the working people', whereby 'state power is organising large-scale production on state-owned land and in state-owned enterprises on a national scale, is distributing labour-power among the various branches of the economy and the various enterprises, and is distributing among the working people large quantities of articles of consumption belonging to the state'. The fact the 'distribution of labour-power' was a relationship of structural subordination, did not seem to trou-

ble Lenin, who by-passed the issue by simply describing the new form of separate state power as 'the proletarian state power'. (BC, p 633.)

This brings us back with a shock to the most fundamental notion of Marx: the proletariat must emancipate itself. The job could not be left to some other force, called 'the Party' or 'the State'. Istvan is absolutely right to quote with approval the words of Rosa Luxemburg's Spartakus pamphlet:

Socialism will not be and cannot be inaugurated by decree: it cannot be established by any government, however admirably socialistic. Socialism must be created by the masses, must be made by every proletarian. Where the chains of capitalism are forged, there must the chain be broken. That only is socialism, thus only can socialism be brought into being... The masses must learn how to use power by using power. There is no other way. (BC, pp 398-9.)

Now we can see more clearly the profound significance of Lenin's 1902 formulation, that 'socialist consciousness' has to be 'brought into the working class from the outside'. As Istvan says, in a characteristically understated remark, this thesis 'proved to be historically unviable in the course of twentieth century developments'. (BC, p 25.) Eighteen years later, when the Soviet state, now bereft of anything worthy of the name 'Soviet', was left in a precarious isolation, Lenin's party found itself ruling a state which had to defend itself against the working class. Istvan expresses the problem like this:

(E)ven in basic organisational terms the 'Vanguard Party' was constituted in such a way that it should be able to defend itself against the ruthless attacks of a police state, under the worst possible conditions of clandestinity, from which inevitably flowed the imposition of absolute secrecy, a strict command structure, centralization, etc. If we compare the self-defensively closed structure of this Vanguard party with Marx's original idea of producing 'communist consciousness on a mass scale' - with its necessary implication of an inherently open organisational structure - we have some measure of the fundamental difference between a defensive and an offensive posture. When the objective conditions implicit in such an aim are in the process of unfolding on a global scale, only then may one realistically envisage the practical articulation of the required organs of socialist offensive. (BC, p 675.)

For those brought up in the tradition of Trotskyism, this understanding of Lenin's fundamental ideas is shattering. If the working class is going to develop that 'communist consciousness on a mass scale', which is the essence of Marx's notion of revolution, we must stop trying to reconcile Bolshevism with Marx's conception of 'mass communist consciousness'. The two are diametrically opposed. That is why it is so vital that we tear ourselves away from the idea that Lenin's work gave us a 'model' for all revo-

lutionary activity. Lenin's idea of forms of party organisation changed with the political context in which he fought. But that is not the basic issue. These changes themselves were decided by 'the Vanguard Party', always lagging behind the changes in the class movement. It is neither a matter of correcting Lenin's 'mistakes', nor of deciding whether 'Lenin planted the seeds of Stalinism'.

What underlies every aspect of the history of the Bolshevik faction and the Bolshevik Party is Lenin's conception of consciousness. As is shown most clearly in his dreadful book *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, Lenin combined a mechanical 'theory of knowledge' - very much like that of John Locke - with a voluntaristic understand-

ing of political leadership. In the *Notebooks on Hegel*, he begins to question this stuff, but never gets to the heart of the problem. (Of course, Lenin was not able to read some of the key text of Marx, which were not available until after his death.)

In our insistence that the October revolution broke imperialism 'at its weakest link', and that Bolshevism showed how a determined leadership could break through the enormous problems which resulted from this relationship to the rest of the world, we cut ourselves off from the essence of Marx's idea of communism. That is why I believe that the issues dealt with in *Beyond Capital* give us the starting-point for a development of Marx's ideas, vital for the working-class movement today and tomorrow.

International Socialist Forum

We come from various revolutionary socialist traditions, whose struggle for a communist leadership we see as the starting-point for future struggles. However, this does not mean we are satisfied with the theoretical framework within which that fight was conducted. The collapse of Stalinism as a dominant power in the world labour movement, opens the possibility of re-examining the whole of that framework, and that must be our most pressing task today.

The power of capital still oppresses and exploits the world. Its continued existence presents a still greater threat to the future of humanity. Its overthrow by the working class and its replacement with a communist, human way of living throughout the globe is more urgent than ever. Drawing on the history of revolutionary struggles, we must clarify its meaning in the light of the situation in the class struggle today.

Here are just a few of the questions whose answers are no longer as obvious we once imagined:

a) What was the significance of the Russian revolution? Was it the start of the world socialist revolution? How should we understand the Chinese revolution of 1949?

b) What is the relation between the revolt against imperialism in less-developed countries and the struggle for a socialist world?

c) What form of political power does the working class require in its fight for socialism? Are the formulae "dictatorship of the proletariat" and "workers' state" adequate? What do they mean?

d) In the light of the experience of the Third and Fourth Internationals, what kind of organisations are required by the working class? How are they related to the 'spontaneous' movement of the class?

e) What is the relation between communism and trades unionism today?

f) Is there something called "Marxist economics"? If it exists, what does it have to say today? If it does not, should it?

g) What should revolutionaries think and do about ecological and environmental issues?

h) What is the relation between communism and feminism?

i) Is there a "Marxist philosophy"? If not, should there be?

These are some of the issues which must be clarified in the process of developing revolutionary leadership for the inter-national working class.

Discussion Documents from Comrades in the Former USSR

[These are the main points of a discussion that has been taking place between a group of comrades in the former USSR. Until August 1997, they were working as the Socialist Workers Union. They then withdrew from the Workers International to Rebuild the Fourth International, of which they had been part, and subsequently wound up the SWU. But they have continued activity and discussion, and have kept contact with comrades in Britain and elsewhere, two of whom have also contributed to the discussion.]

1. Declaration of principles by independent socialists: Draft Alexeii Gusev

The necessity of struggle

Present-day society is split into two parts: those who by their labour produce all material and spiritual value, and those, who, having control of the means of production and the state machine, appropriate the fruits of the labour of others. The interests of the class of working people [see note at end] and the ruling class are opposed to each other and struggle between them is inevitable.

The social-economic reforms in the countries of the former USSR are only modifying the forms of domination by the ruling class, not putting an end to it. "Liberalisation" of the economy, privatisation, etc, serves exclusively the interests of the former nomenklatura and the semi-criminal structures. From the division of the bureaucracy's collective property between various of its representatives the working people have gained precisely zero. Their material conditions have worsened and continue to worsen. The growth of real unemployment, the non-payment of wages, the attack on the rights of wage workers - all this is the inevitable result of the bureaucratic-bourgeois "reform".

To achieve the life which they deserve, the working people must recognise their interests and join the struggle against exploitation and social oppression. Otherwise the class of wage workers will remain a passive, formless mass, slavishly putting up with every kind of humiliation. The first signs of a struggle starting can already be seen. But for this struggle to be successful, it is vital to clearly formulate its aims and to see clearly the real alternative to the existing system.

Against capitalism

The bankruptcy of the USSR's state-ised economy has given rise to the illusion that society can prosper and social harmony be achieved on the basis of private property and the market. But in reality private property means the concentration of society's wealth in the hands of a narrow financial-industrial oligarchy, which cares only about increasing its profit — at any cost. Under capitalism the functioning of the market is subordinate to the enrichment of the masters of capital, not the satisfaction of consumers' needs. In its attempt to accumulate effectively, present-day transnational capital transfers its operations to countries where labour power is cheap, where poverty compels people to work for a pittance. In the traditionally industrial countries this leads to the destruction of industry, gigantic increases in all forms of unemployment and a slump in living standards. This in turn is leading to sharp social conflicts on an ever-greater scale, which are shaking the capitalist states. "Harmony between the classes" exists only in capitalist propaganda, which is just as mendacious as "communist" propaganda.

In the former USSR, privatisation and "market reforms" have brought nothing to the working people except all-pervasive poverty and the impudent, arbitrary rule of the bosses. Instead of competing with each other for crumbs from the rulers' table, the wage workers must unite in struggle for the destruction of the system under which a parasitic minority lives at the expense of the deprived majority.

Against "communist" totalitarianism

While the private capitalist order is based on the suppression and exploitation of the working people, this is true to an even greater degree of the system which existed in the USSR and which, with monstrous cynicism, called itself "socialist". The totalitarian regime, which assumed a finished form in the late 1920s and early 1930s, was not a "proletarian dictatorship" at all but a terrorist dictatorship of the ruling bureaucratic class. Having destroyed all that was gained by the people in 1917, this regime turned the working people into a mass without political or economic rights, deprived of any possible means to defend its interests. The bureaucratic system combined the most brutal exploitation of wage workers with elements of feudalism and slavery. All this served the requirements of [economically] reproducing the bureaucracy and developing the military might of the imperialist state. Socialists, who saw

in this Stalinist-Brezhnevite monster the bankruptcy of a repulsive caricature of socialism, considered its final fall a fact of enormous progressive significance.

The many "Communist" parties who stand today for the restoration of the "pre-perestroika" order, in one form or another, are essentially organisations of the most reactionary elements of the bureaucracy, who were not able to establish a place for themselves in the new [post-Soviet] system. They leech on social discontent; they want only to return to the time when the nomenklatura ruled, the KGB was all-powerful and the working people had no rights. Whatever wonderful slogans they shout and whatever phrases they use, these are the most dangerous enemies of the working people. There can be only merciless struggle against them. The movement forward to real socialism is unthinkable without us being completely freed from the legacy of Stalinism, whose place is in the dustbin of history.

Against nationalism and "great-power-hood"

One of the most dangerous weapons in the arsenal of the ruling class is nationalism (chauvinism). Preaching "national unity", nationalism declares that all social layers of one nation have allegedly common interests, which make social differences secondary. But the subordination of social interests to "national" ones in class society can mean only the subordination of the exploited to the exploiters. And it is to this end that nationalist propaganda sets out to confuse the working people, turning their dissatisfaction with their real opponents, who share "their" nationality, against artificial and imaginary enemies in the form of foreigners, Jews, "the West" etc. In the struggle for the "great nation" the working people will just end up as cannon fodder, to be wiped out in military adventures such as the Russian state aggression against Chechnia.

Just as absurd from the standpoint of the working people's interests is the ideology of 'great-power-hood' and 'stateism'. The state is an administrative-political and military machine belonging entirely to the ruling class and serving to hold down the oppressed class. The mightier the state, the greater the burden on the people's back and the fatter will grow the parasitic bureaucracy that lives on the fruits of others' labour.

To nationalist and 'great power' demagogy socialists counterpose international solidarity in the struggle against capital and its servants — the present-day bureaucratic state. The working people of different countries and nationalities have nothing to separate them. They have the same enemies: the capitalist and bureaucrats. They have the same interests: liberation from oppression and exploitation.

The socialist alternative

The alternative to the present-day capitalist order, with its

exploitation, injustice, oligarchical rule and wars, is the rebuilding of society in the interest of the working majority — socialism. Socialism means the transition from a system where the economic and political power is concentrated in the hands of a parasitic minority to a system where the producers themselves will take control of and distribute the product of their own labour, and state compulsion will gradually give way to free self-management in society. This transition will itself transform the very aim of social production — from the extraction of profit in the interests of the few, to the direct satisfaction of people's needs. The abolition of the division of society into rulers and ruled, and the realisation of the great principle of social equality, is at the same time a necessary condition for real economic effectiveness. Free labour, the product of which is not appropriated by an almighty master (be it a private capitalist or a bureaucratic state), but belongs to associations of workers themselves, can not fail to be many times more productive than alienated wage labour.

Socialism implies replacing the arbitrary rule of monopolies in the market by democratic planning, on the basis of the interests of the organised producers and consumers, at all levels. But until such time as society's material development reaches a level which can make possible distribution according to the needs of all, socialists advocate the use, within the framework of the new system, of market mechanisms which will guarantee consumers the freedom of choice and control over the quality of what is produced.

To private property in the means of production, bureaucratic projects for their statisation and utopian ideas of collective ownership, socialists counterpose a plan for the socialisation of the economy, that is equal representation in the management of enterprises and branches of industry of trade unions, consumers and the democratic state. Such a system will to the greatest extent ensure a balance of social interests.

Socialism by its very nature is unthinkable without democracy and the full realisation of the rights and freedoms of the individual. And likewise genuine, complete democracy can be achieved only under socialism. Present-day "democracy", even in the most liberal countries, amounts to nothing more than passively filling in a ballot paper once every few years. This "democracy" is by definition oligarchical, since it does not extend to the decisive sphere of relations in society — the social-economic sphere. As long as real power over the economy, over production, is concentrated in the hands of the ruling class, that class will also dominate politically, however scrupulously the "democratic" procedures are observed.

As opposed to this, socialist democracy is above all economic and social democracy. This democracy does not stop at the front door of the factory or workplace. And only this socialist democracy can fill the empty shell of formal "popular power" with real content.

The road to socialism and immediate tasks

Since the ruling class will never voluntarily give up its power and privileges, the transition to socialism can not be carried out by means of reform within the framework of the capitalist system. Consequently, socialist transformation is a revolutionary process. Following Marx, we understand social revolution not as the seizure of power by one or other political group, but as the achievement of democracy, that is the concentration of control over society in the hands of the organised class of working people.

History has shown that there are no other roads to socialism except the democratic road. The dictatorship of a minority (parties, "vanguards") over the majority — whatever the noble motives by which the dictators are initially inspired, whatever "liberating" and "socialist" aims they declare — inevitably gives birth to the most brutal tyranny and exploitation. The events of the 20th century confirm without reservation: the liberation of the working people can only be the task of the working people themselves.

The first step on the road to socialist transformation is the formation by the working people themselves of independent organisations of their class — genuine, not bureaucratic and lifeless, trade unions; workplace committees; councils [soveti] of representatives. Having developed structures of grass-roots counter-power [kontrvlast'] these organisations will be able to destroy the political monopoly of the ruling class and deprive it of its ability to manipulate elections at its discretion. The combination of universal, equal and direct voting rights, and democratic control by the class organs of the working people, will produce the political system which will open up the possibility of moving forward to socialism.

The socialist transformation, carried through as a process of collective self-liberation by the working people, can be understood only as a conscious movement of the masses themselves, understanding and accepting its aims as their own. Decades of totalitarian dictatorship in the USSR, which suppressed in embryo every attempt at independent activity and self-organisation of the working people, has destroyed their class consciousness. The objective situation is such that, for the majority, the acquisition of a class identity, the development of solidarity and unity, the recognition of their real social interests, the assimilation of the ABC of class struggle, all lie ahead. Therefore at present every attempt to summon revolts, "pogroms of the rich" etc, is adventurism of the worst sort. Spontaneous destructive mass uprisings, which have not achieved the necessary level of consciousness, can lead only to the victory of the most thorough reaction.

Only in the day-to-day practice of struggle for their rights, in the practice of self-organisation, will the wage workers develop the necessary consciousness for their own liberation. For this reason the socialists' principal aim is to contribute in whatever way possible to this practice, to give it

a radical and conscious character. Another, no less important, aim, which in the present conditions takes on primary importance, is the refoundation of socialism as an alternative idea to the existing order and to its Stalinist, fascist and other similar varieties. Only by winning minds will socialism be able to become a powerful material force, able to take the movement of the working people forward to victory.

The struggle for a socialist perspective demands the unification of its participants. It would be utopian today to put on the agenda the question of forming a socialist party; a genuine party will grow only out of the mass movement of the working people, which as yet does not exist. But the creation of organisations, bringing together the — admittedly not numerous — active, conscious elements of the class, is necessary. Such organisations must develop on new foundations their basic ideas, taking into account historical experience, synthesising all that is best in our movement — that is, the traditions of the First International, of the international left wing of social democracy, of Russian revolutionary socialism, and of anti-authoritarian and anti-bureaucratic currents in communism.

Through unity and struggle — to the democracy of working people and socialism!

2. Amendments to the draft declaration

V. A. Evstratov

Title

Amend to "Declaration of principles by the Socialist Workers Union"

Section on Against capitalism

In the first sentence, after "The bankruptcy of the USSR's". Delete "state-ised". Insert "state-bureaucratic".

Section on Against "communist" totalitarianism

In the second sentence, after "a terrorist dictatorship of". Delete "the ruling bureaucratic class". Insert "the counter-revolutionary bureaucracy".

Section on The socialist alternative

In the second paragraph, first sentence. Delete "the organised producers and consumers". Insert "all working citizens in society".

In that same paragraph, delete the whole second sentence (which starts "But until such time" and ends "the quality of what is produced"). Insert: "But for a certain historical period, the state of the working people will use as instruments of economic management not only administrative measures but also market mechanisms (the necessity and possibility of the dialectical combination of two means, contradictory by their nature, has been shown by the history of the Soviet state in the period of its genuinely soviet and working-class character, that is up until the mid-1920s: the introduction of NEP, which was liquidated by the counter-revolutionary bureaucracy's state)."

In the third paragraph, after "representation in the management of enterprises and branches of industry". Delete "of trade unions, consumers and the democratic state". Insert "of the democratic state, trade unions and other social organisations".

Section on The road to socialism and immediate tasks

At the end of the second paragraph, after "the working people themselves", add: "achieved by means of a long and stubborn struggle for the destruction of the exploitative bureaucratic police state and the construction of a genuinely democratic workers' state, which step by step gives way to free self-government of society".

In the third paragraph, first sentence. Delete "on the road to socialist transformation". Insert "in the struggle for their own liberation".

In the third paragraph, second sentence. Delete "Having developed structures of grass-roots *counter-power* these organisations will be able to". Insert "The self-organised working people, using their organisations as instruments, will strive to".

In the third paragraph, delete the third (final) sentence (starting "The combination of universal, equal and direct...").

3. Notes on the draft Declaration Cliff Slaughter

1. While such a document must of course concentrate on Russia and the ex-USSR, it is surely essential that the international nature of the capital system, of the class struggle, of the working class, and the international nature of the history of class society, of the class struggle, of the working class and the working-class movement, is the starting-point. For this, it is not enough to refer to the international operations of transnational companies.

2. One of the most important examples of the consequences of failing to start in this way is the totally one-sided presentation of the Stalinist bureaucracy and its historical role in the declaration. (I don't refer to the comrades' differences with Trotsky's "degenerated workers' state" theory,

which are well known.) I believe the document would be enormously strengthened by showing Stalinism's consequences for the working class as a whole, and not only in the Soviet Union. If this is not seen, then the task of reconstruction of the workers' movement which these comrades set themselves in the document can not begin to be comprehended in its real scope. The counter-revolutionary work of the Stalinist bureaucracy and its instruments all over the world, and not only Stalinism's oppression of the working class in the USSR, is what has to be grasped, *especially if we are to understand the content of the collapse of Stalinism*. Thus the document rightly says that the collapse of the Stalinist system was "a fact of enormous progressive significance". But it is impossible to understand *why*, if the overall role of Stalinism as the principal force maintaining capitalism is not explained. Without this, the real prospects of reconstruction of the international working-class movement, including in the ex-Soviet Union, can not be perceived. Stalinism's fall was indeed "a fact of enormous progressive significance", but not only because Stalinism consisted of "a repulsive caricature of socialism".

Regardless of the important question of differences over the class nature of the Soviet Union, it surely can't be denied that the origins of the degeneration of the Soviet Union and the Bolshevik party lie in the project of "socialism in a single country" (even if the Russian comrades think this is only one part of those origins, or only an ideological reflection of the underlying origins.) Therefore in the important section on what socialism is, surely emphasis must be placed on this question of socialism in one country versus socialist internationalism. This would also strengthen the document's point about revolutionary and not reformist roads to socialism, since after all the origins of "socialism in one country" lie in social-democracy.

Again, to put some of this in another way: regardless of how the Russian comrades see the nature of the Soviet state, it was the conviction of millions in the capitalist countries that socialism was being constructed in one country, the Soviet Union (and then in several others), and that the CPSU led the world struggle to extend the "socialist camp", that made possible the international counter-revolutionary role of the Stalinist bureaucracy. Thus it is not enough only to explain the exploitative and oppressive nature of Stalinism and the dangers of neo-Stalinism.

3. Capital and capitalism are not about capitalists who "care only about increasing their profit". While it is absolutely true that the "impudent, arbitrary rule of the bosses" is imposed on the working class, and that "a parasitic minority lives at the expense of the deprived majority", this does not take us far beyond a populist agitation. And it is an unhistorical version of what capital and capitalism are. In my opinion it is essential to start from the understanding that capital is a mode of social and economic metabolism which is beyond the control and wishes of anyone, including the bosses. The worker is subject to the

consequences of capital as a whole, as the mechanism through which the whole relation of humanity to nature and to itself is mediated. When this document explains the limits of formal democracy by saying (among other things) that it stops at the factory gate, it is giving only a very limited explanation. The capital system, by virtue of the necessity of accumulation (involving the contradictions scientifically explained by Marx) evolves historically to its present phase of structural crisis, where either the increasing socialisation of production comes under conscious collective control, or uncontrolled capital will destroy the planet. An argument against capital from this Marxist standpoint (the work of Meszaros is essential) will facilitate a much stronger case against the present tendencies in Russia, and against the iniquities of the former regime, than will an explanation which is too much only in terms of the working people rebelling against wage-slavery. (For example the Stalinist "peaceful competition", including the "cold war" devotion of resources to military and nuclear research and manufacture, was an "accelerator" of this destructive historical tendency of capital.)

4. The other point which I think needs more clarification is state, democracy, and what the document calls the "democratic state". Unless this is explained more, in Marxist terms, then it will attract people with in reality very different views about the state and socialism. In general, I agree with comrade Evstratov's amendment, "achieved by means of a long and stubborn struggle ... free self-government of society".

25 September 1997.

4. Letter to A. Gusev (parts) V., Novosibirsk

[...] I have to admit, that the draft declaration surprised me. This was not so much because of the content, but because of the form. Perhaps I just have not understood you, but some of the formulations in the draft and the accompanying letter lent themselves to misunderstanding. I will quote some passages to show you what I mean.

[A quotation from a letter by Gusev ...] "The movement to socialism signifies not the liquidation of democracy and freedom, but their consistent growth ... The dictatorship of a minority (party, industrial workers, or whatever it is) can lead only to a historical dead-end. This understanding ... implies the necessity for much rethinking ... We must discuss Leninism, the nature of the Bolshevik dictatorship, the October 1917 overturn etc."

[A quotation from the draft:] "History has shown that there are no other roads to socialism except the democratic road. The dictatorship of a minority (parties, 'vanguards') over the majority ... inevitably gives birth to the most brutal

tyranny and exploitation."

How is this to be understood? Do you mean by "the dictatorship of a minority", the dictatorship of the proletariat? Does this mean that class dictatorship and class democracy are, for you, no longer two sides of the same coin? Does this mean that you regard the October revolution as simply a military coup?

It would be absurd to reject a point of view without discussing it, but discussion requires that points of view are well understood and clearly formulated. Expressions used in your letter give the impression that you are moving in the direction (partly, at least) of social democracy – although at the same time, that is not said in so many words.

[V. urges a meeting to be arranged when possible to allow for thorough discussion. ...] In the meantime, could you answer by letter the following:

1. Do you counterpose class democracy to class dictatorship?
2. Do you reject the need for dictatorship of the proletariat?
3. Do you deny the positive role of the October revolution?
4. Do you think the October revolution was a military coup?
5. Do you see yourself as standing in the tradition of the Fourth International? [...]

Now about terminology. I agree with you that to speak of the class of industrial workers [klass promyshlennykh rabochikh] is not quite correct. But in my view the expression "the working people" ["klass trudiashchikhsia"] is also unsatisfactory, since that would presumably include not only workers and the intelligentsia, but also the great mass of small traders, [? word I couldn't read] and peasant-smallholders.

The phrase "the class of wage workers" ["klass naemnykh rabotnikov"], which you use, is an improvement, entirely scientifically correct, although strictly speaking even this phrase is inaccurate. Legally speaking, directors and managers of big companies would also be included in the definition of "the class of wage workers", to say nothing of the state bureaucracy, including the army and police. But at least there is less possibility of confusion with this term, since in any case the fact that these terms are necessarily artificial would be absolutely obvious to workers.

But there is another term, which completely accurately corresponds to the understanding of a class which owns no property and which has the historical mission of putting an end to exploitation: "proletariat". Here no ambiguity is possible, and at the same time – in contrast to the term "working class" – there is no exclusion of the intelligentsia.

But maybe your views have already changed to such an

extent, that for you the industrial workers, craftsmen, small traders and peasants are all part of one class of working people [klass trudiashchikhsia]? This is not clear from your letter [...]

I propose to use in theoretical work the word "proletariat", although I would have no objection to the use in propaganda of "the class of wage workers". It goes without saying that I am convinced that in revolutionary events the main role will be played by the industrial workers. And that will apply notwithstanding scientific and technical development and the consequent heightening of the importance of the intelligentsia among wage workers. [...]

5. Democracy, dictatorship and the road to socialism: an answer to VV (parts)

A. Gusev

[Re. VV's question 1.] To answer this, it is necessary to clarify concepts. What is "class dictatorship"? Is modern-day American or Swedish democracy the class dictatorship of the bourgeoisie? We may of course, in this case, speak about a *social* dictatorship, inasmuch as the working people remain a socially oppressed class, subjected to exploitation. However the existence of such a social dictatorship in no way excludes the existence for the working people of political and civil rights and freedoms (of speech, of assembly, of coalition, of the press, participation in elections etc). That is, this bourgeois "dictatorship" proceeds without any direct dictatorship in the political sphere. It is another matter, that this type of democracy (and this is mentioned in the draft of the declaration) is *limited, cut back* – in the first place because it is not extended to the social and economic aspects of life.

Now let us consider the *democracy of the working people*. In our view, it is distinguished from bourgeois democracy above all because it supercedes the limitations of the latter, taking shape not only as political democracy but also as social and economic democracy. Inasmuch as this *real, genuine* democracy signifies a restriction of the interests of the former ruling classes, it may theoretically be considered to include an element of *social* dictatorship. But does this "dictatorship" signify the denial of democracy, understood as the self-rule [samoupravlenie, sometimes translated as self-management] of the great majority of people? The answer is clear: no it does not. Why should the thought of the democracy of the working people frighten even bourgeois political groups, if they are really loyal to democratic principles? The real political strength of bourgeois parties stems precisely from the control of the bourgeoisie in the social-economic sphere. If this control is undermined, then bourgeois politicians will be weakened [...]. It is another matter if any bourgeois group tries to impose its will on the people by *vio-*

lent means and takes a stand against democracy. In that case, of course, it is correct to use force – but that in itself must in no way become a replacement of democracy by dictatorship. *In a word, we consider that political "dictatorship" must be used by the working people only for the defence of the democracy that it has won.*

You ask about our attitude to the "dictatorship of the proletariat". You will hardly meet this phrase in the vocabulary of present-day Marxists (I do not speak of course of such "revolutionaries" as the Stalinists or the "Spartacists"). To demand the concentration of power into the hands of industrial workers who expend physical labour (the traditional understanding of "proletariat") – is just a huge anachronism in the present conditions, when the social structure of society has changed radically from that of the last century. If you understand by "dictatorship of the proletariat" the power of all hired workers in unity with other non-exploiting classes, then what does "dictatorship" mean anyway? Because we are talking about the overwhelming mass of the people, and self-rule of that mass is ... democracy.

[...] How did Marx and Engels see this issue? Yes, they used the term "dictatorship of the proletariat" a number of times. But the context is important. There is a wide literature devoted to an analysis of their understanding of the "dictatorship of the proletariat". [...] And this analysis shows, that Marx used the term "dictatorship of the proletariat" with a particular aim: to counteract the ideas of the dictatorship of revolutionary leaders that were popular at that time (the "Paris dictatorship" of the Blanquists). The democratic power of the class, and not the power of the "revolutionary vanguard" *over* the class – that is what Marx wanted to emphasise. And Engels quoted as a practical example of the "dictatorship" the Paris Commune, which could hardly be accused of dictatorial tendencies. [...] Marx wrote that the Commune had to become the type of political organisation everywhere, right down to "the last village". [...] The dictatorship of the proletariat was for Marx and Engels tantamount to the "victory of democracy" (the term used in the Communist Manifesto).

For Lenin and Trotsky things were quite different. [Gusev stresses that the following is his opinion alone, Yevstratov does not agree.] By an irony of fate, the Bolsheviks led by Lenin and Trotsky brought to the concept of "dictatorship of the proletariat" ideas quite opposite to Marx's. If the latter protested against the "dictatorship of revolutionary groups", the Bolsheviks turned the "dictatorship of the proletariat", both practically and theoretically, into the dictatorship of the Communist party leadership – and in that way took themselves closer to the tradition of Blanquism and the "Russian jacobins" (Zainchevskii, Tkachev).

[This leads to V's questions 3 and 4.] Of course, the October revolution was not a "military coup" [...]. Proclaiming the power of the soviets, the Bolsheviks were without question basing themselves essentially on the support of

the popular masses. However the Leninists themselves – as Trotsky admitted, cynically enough, in *Lessons of October* – strove on this basis not at all for the power of the soviets, but for the power of their own group. When the soviets got in the way of party dictatorship, they were simply destroyed (already in the spring of 1918 it means nothing to speak of the existence of “soviet power” in Russia). And this was not unexpected: Lenin had earlier proposed to seize power in September 1917, *a month before* the congress of soviets. His pre-revolutionary work was carried out with the unambiguous slogans: “Can the Bolsheviks (not the soviets! AG) hold on to state power?”, “the Bolsheviks (not soviets! AG) must take power” etc.

The subsequent development of events is well known. In my view, the whole post-revolutionary evolution of Bolshevism indisputably bears witness to what is written in the draft: “The dictatorship of a minority (parties, ‘vanguards’) over the majority – whatever the noble motives by which the dictators are initially inspired, whatever ‘liberating’ and ‘socialist’ aims they declare – inevitably gives birth to the most brutal tyranny and exploitation.”

[On question no. 5. on the FI]. To this we answer in the negative. We do not consider ourselves continuators of the Trotskyist tradition with its ambiguous attitude to the Stalinist state on the one hand and to the democracy of the working people on the other, the fetishisation of the “party leadership” and so on. This of course does not mean, as you suspect, that we adopt the position of present-day social democracy, which is little different from the “traditional” bourgeois parties. Our attitude to traditions is reflected in the draft [in the last paragraph]. As you see, we have no intention of throwing out that which is positive in Trotskyism. But as a whole we consider the legacy of Trotsky (and I would add – of Lenin) must be subject to a radical critique.

[On whether the socialist struggle is revolutionary: yes it is ...] But of course revolution can mean different things to different people. For us revolution is not the seizure of power by parties, promising to “take” the people to a shining future, nor is it blind rebellion inspired only by negative emotions. We understand by socialist revolution the conscious *construction by the working people themselves* of a new type of democracy – systems which will open the road to the formation of qualitatively new social relations, and freedom from oppression and exploitation.

6. Letter to A. Gusev (parts) O., Ukraine

[O. declares he is opposed to publishing the declaration by “independent socialists”, since this would apparently imply the winding-up of the Socialist Workers Union.] If it is a choice between the Union of Independent Socialists, and the Socialist Workers Union, I would of course

vote for the latter. “The name must reflect the character of the organisation” [you say]. I agree! The character, but not necessarily the social status of the majority of members. [...] The name must reflect the aims of the organisation [...]

It’s not for me to read you a Marxist lesson about the objective social role of industrial workers in industrial society. If we remain within the Marxist framework, then we may say that the significance of each of the exploited classes has long ago been discussed, researched and written about – and until society supercedes the industrial mode of production, the Marxist propositions about the particular significance of the industrial working class in society may be upheld.

It’s strange to hear from an educated Marxist like you all this discussion about the class of the “working people” [trudiashchikhsia], of some sort of “discrimination against workers who do non-physical labour” in the separation of industrial workers from the general mass of the “working people”. I am not going to go into theoretical issues of which you are already obviously aware. I just remind you that it is a long time, even in this country, since the majority of the industrial proletariat swung a hammer. Workers are served by a variety of machines [...] One sits on a stool in front of a fabric-producing machine controlling the flow of thread and the lines of stitches; another, like me, stands up to his ears in machine oil and has tonnes of [steel] pipes passing through his hands for recasting. But we are all served by machines. In the class itself, internally, the division between physical and non-physical labour is being eroded, for [these jobs require considerable skill and a level of education.]

[On democracy.] It is strange to hear the discussion about freedom and democracy “in general” in class society. It is as though you have forgotten that in class society, that type of “freedom” is a propaganda fiction; that “democracy”, “dictatorship” and any other social-political category in this society can not have a non-class character. You clearly disagree with those who first developed as a category of revolutionary marxism the “dictatorship of the proletariat”. Surely it is not necessary to explain to you that in industrial society a dictatorship of the proletariat will be a dictatorship of the majority, and not the minority, as was the case – for a whole series of objective reasons – in Russia at the beginning of the century.

“We reject Trotskyism” [you say]?! [In our 1994 theses] we [the Socialist Workers Union] rejected the dogma of orthodox Trotskyism [on the class character of the USSR.] But is that dogma the be-all and end-all in which Trotskyism is trapped?! I believe that Trotskyism, an independent and vital revolutionary doctrine, was formulated in the approach of Trotsky to the aims of the 1905 revolution and existed as such, before the question of the class character of the post-October regime came up.

7. Draft Declaration of principles of the Socialist Workers Union (parts) O., Ukraine

[Comrade O submitted a draft declaration, an alternative to Alexeii's, entitled Declaration of principles of the Socialist Workers Union. O's draft addresses the same issues as Alexeii's and follows the same section headings. The following excerpts show the main differences.]

[On **The socialist alternative**]

[O. proposes to rewrite the start of the first paragraph as follows:] The alternative to the present-day capitalist order, with its exploitation, injustice, oligarchical rule and wars, is socialism. Socialism means a system in which the social division of labour has been overcome, where the direct producers take control of and distribute the product of their own labour, and state compulsion has given way to free self-management in society. [He proposes only minor changes to the rest of the first paragraph.]

[For the remainder of that section he proposes the following:] Socialism implies replacing market mechanisms by democratic planning, on the basis of the interests of the organised producers and consumers, at all levels. But until such time as society's material development reaches a level which can make possible distribution according to the needs of all, it is inevitable that distribution will be carried out on the basis of an equal share of the product for an equal amount of work. To the extent that the productive forces develop on a socialist foundation, so the sphere in which bourgeois norms of distribution "for equal work" apply will be constantly eroded. But as long as the necessity for such norms of distribution persists, the socialists will urge the exercise of control over labour and consumption, that is, the preservation of definite power functions by self-organising structures of the former wage workers. And we will continue to urge this, even when there is no-one whom this power needs directly to suppress. As the need for distribution "for equal work" dies away, so will the need for such control. Workers' control will finally give way to free association.

[The section on **The road to socialism and immediate tasks** to be redrafted as follows:]

Since the ruling class will never voluntarily give up its power and privileges, the transition to socialism can not be carried out by means of reform within the framework of the capitalist system. It will inevitably take the form of a *social revolution*, which will tear the power and property from the hands of the oppressors. This social revolution is above all the general arming of the proletariat, the destruction of the exploiters' state and the expropriation of the ruling class and the transformation of the proletariat into the subject [subyekt, i.e. in control of] of property in the means of production.

The social domination of class society by yesterday's exploited, keeping their arms in hands, can be nothing but a *political dictatorship*. Socialists reject "democracy in general", understanding that democracy is only the form by which one or another class maintains its dictatorship. Therefore the victory of the proletarian revolution means the liquidation of bourgeois democracy and the coming into being of the dictatorship of the proletariat, which in form can mean only the widest and fullest democracy for the hired workers of yesterday.

Workers' democracy is the self-rule [samoupravlenie] of the direct producers. By means of the dictatorship of the proletariat the alienation of the majority of society from the state will be overcome. The workers' state is a commune-state, the state of the armed masses, in which there will be no class of professionals carrying out functions of power and control. The nationalisation of the means of production in these circumstances will become their socialisation. In the enterprises, belonging to the ruling class, i.e. yesterday's proletariat, the workers will carry out the functions of owners, managers and direct producers.

As for those who stand for the restoration of the order of exploitation, the workers' democracy will take on the role of a dictatorship, that is, it will not guarantee them the full rights and freedoms of the individual. Socialists consider the dictatorship of the proletariat the necessary political form of the social transformation of society. The events of the 20th century confirm without reservation: the liberation of the working people can only be the task of the working people themselves.

The first step on the road to socialist transformation is the formation, within the confines of market capitalism, of the proletariat's own class organisations, its instruments of class struggle: genuine workers' trade unions, committees at the workplaces, councils [soveti] of deputies etc.

[A passage follows on the lessons of Stalinism and the necessity for self-organisation, using the words "workers" and "proletariat" in the place of "working people", but otherwise similar to the second and third paragraphs from the end of Gusev's draft, i.e. from "Decades of totalitarian dictatorship ... to the words "forward to victory". Then ...]

Constantly criticising and exposing bourgeois parliamentarism with its fiction of a general, equal and direct right to vote, the socialists consider it necessary in the interest of the proletarian class struggle not only to use bourgeois democracy to the fullest possible extent (freedom of speech, of the press, of assembly, freedom to demonstrate, strike, etc), but also to resist in every possible way its reconstruction by the exploiters' state. Further, the socialists believe that in the period in which the proletariat is still not ready to take power, bourgeois democracy must be defended from assaults by the "saviours of the nation", "emergency situations" and other attempts

now being made by the ruling class to institute direct dictatorship.

[This last paragraph is similar to Gusev's draft, with the important difference in the last sentence.] The struggle for a socialist perspective demands the unification of its participants. It would be premature today to put on the agenda the question of forming a socialist party; a genuine party will grow only out of the mass workers' movement, which as yet does not exist. But the creation of organisations, bringing together the — admittedly not numerous — active, conscious elements of the class, is necessary. Such organisations must develop on new foundations their basic ideas, taking into account historical experience, synthesising all that is best in our movement — that is, the traditions of the various tendencies of the Fourth International.

8. Letter to O., Ukraine (part)

A. Gusev

19.9.97

[...] Now let us look at another of your ideas, of the dictatorship of the proletariat as "the necessary political form of the social transformation of society". I have already put forward some ideas on this issue in my letter to VV, of which you have a copy. I repeat the basic one: I believe that we need to distinguish between the *social* rule of the proletariat (or working people) and *political* dictatorship. The present day bourgeoisie in the developed countries, and even in many underdeveloped ones, maintains its social dominance without needing to resort to political dictatorship. So why, in your view, should the proletariat — which, unlike the bourgeoisie, comprises not the minority but the great majority of the population! — not be able to do the same? And how do you imagine there will be *political dictatorship* in a society, where the "widest and fullest democracy" will exist for the majority of "the hired workers of yesterday"? Does this mean that the supporters of capitalism will be deprived of civil rights? But why then has nobody in France or the UK deprived the supporters of socialism of their rights? Do you really already imagine, in advance, that the power of the victorious proletariat will be so weak and unpopular, that it will be threatened by agitation by an insignificant minority of defeated and discredited exploiters? In that case, one can only sympathise with such a power ... Do you really think that the proletariat, having taking into its hands control of social life (and this itself will require a gigantic development of the *consciousness* of the majority) will be so stupid as to swallow the bait of bourgeois demagoguery and destroy its own gains? Nonsense! Or, perhaps, are we talking about the suppression of the advocates of restoration, who take up arms against the democracy of the working people? Then, of course, harsh measures will be inevitable — but these can perfectly well be taken by the most democratic of states. For this, political dictatorship is not necessary,

not at all! In setting out your understanding of the dictatorship of the proletariat, you also write about the need to limit the economic and political activity of the petty bourgeoisie. I have already said why I think "political limitations" are meaningless. As for economic limitations, it is again unclear why political dictatorship should be necessary to carry these out. If the working people's organs of power decide, by democratic means, to impose this or that limitation, they will be able to do so. Even now, under capitalism, there is not unlimited freedom of economic activity anywhere in the world. But what has this to do with political dictatorship? [...]

I would like to say something on your attitude to the freedoms which exist in modern-day bourgeois society. You write that these freedoms are nothing more than a "propaganda fiction". But in your draft declaration you yourself call on the proletariat to defend them? What for? Why should the proletariat defend a "propaganda fiction"? The fact is, of course, that these freedoms and democratic rights are something more. Not for nothing were they forced out of the ruling class precisely by the workers' movement, which fought for them since the days of Chartism. You admit that bourgeois democracy, with its freedom of speech, of the press, of assembly, of the right to demonstrate and to strike, creates the most favourable conditions for the class struggle of the proletariat — and you call for its defence "in the period in which the proletariat is still not ready to take power". And then? Should these rights and freedoms be liquidated? Your formulations leave room for such an interpretation.

I believe that the victory of the working people (proletariat) will signify neither the liquidation nor the limitation of those democratic elements that already exist in bourgeois society, but their great expansion — above all, on account of the fact that democracy will spread to the social-economic sphere. The cut-down, oligarchic democracy of capitalism will turn, in all spheres of social life, into the self-rule of the proletariat majority. Socialism, in my understanding, is nothing else than democracy, brought into all spheres of life. [...]

9. Notes on the draft and the discussion (part)

Simon Pirani

The Moscow comrades' aim is absolutely right: to present socialism not as a repetition of dogmas, still less as a continuation of Stalinist rottenness, but as a real, necessary perspective in present-day conditions. For this we need to rework our ideas and theory in a serious, considered way. [...]

There needs to be further discussion on the important disagreements between comrades regarding the relationship

of socialism and democracy. In his letter to VV, Alexeii quotes Marx and Engels. He argues that Marx used the term "dictatorship of the proletariat" in order "to counteract the ideas of the dictatorship of revolutionary leaders that were popular at that time". Further: "The democratic power of the class, and not the power of the 'revolutionary vanguard' over the class – that is what Marx wanted to emphasise."

Inasmuch as the Stalinists (and those "Trotskyists" who replace the movement of the working class by the activity of their own sectarian groups) use the term "dictatorship of the proletariat" to defend the power of bureaucracies and "leaders" over the working class, I completely agree with Alexeii: we need to emphasise that, as far as Marx was concerned, the emancipation of the proletariat was *self-emancipation*, the conscious act of the masses themselves, the most democratic possible act. But such a rejection of dogma is only the start. We need to study Marx further in this respect. Alexeii has already referred to the example of Marx's attitude to the 1871 Paris Commune, and I will quote what he wrote in the first draft of the pamphlet *Civil War in France*:

"The commune is the reabsorption of the state power by society as its own living forces, instead of as forces controlling society and subduing it, by the popular masses themselves, forming their own force instead of the organised force of their suppression – the political form of their social emancipation, instead of the artificial force (appropriated by their oppressors) (their own force opposed to and organised against them) of society wielded for their oppression by their enemies."

What did Marx mean by "the political form of the social emancipation" of the masses? That the commune was only a transition, only the start of the movement to communism. Later in the same draft Marx wrote:

"Just as the state machinery and parliamentarism are not the real life of the ruling classes, but only the organised general organs of their dominion, [...] so the commune is not the social movement of the working class and therefore of a general regeneration of mankind, but the organised means of action. The commune does not do away with class struggles, [...] but it affords the rational medium in which that class struggle can run through its different phases in the most rational and humane way. It could start violent reactions and just as violent revolutions."

And further: "Once the communal organisation is firmly established on a national scale, the catastrophes it might still have to undergo would be sporadic slaveholders' insurrections, which, while for a moment interrupting the work of peaceful progress, would only accelerate the movement, by putting the sword in the hands of the social revolution."

Marx's conception is clear. The commune is the start of the movement towards communism; the superceding of

the state-separated-from-society; the reappropriation of state power by the masses; the establishment of the power of the masses themselves.

[...] Marx well understood that this movement meant the repression of the former ruling classes, the defeat of "slaveholders' insurrections", the victory of "violent revolutions" over "violent reactions". [Simon quotes Marx's argument with Schapper, during which he said the communists had to warn the workers, that "you will need to live through 15, 20, 50 years of civil war" to learn how to exert power ...] Of course I do not propose to include warnings of that kind in declarations addressed to present-day Russian workers. I just want to emphasise this side of Marx's understanding of the transition to communism. Apparently Alexeii wants to avoid this. Answering VV's question, "Do you counterpose class democracy to class dictatorship?", Alexeii answers with a second question: "If you understand by 'dictatorship of the proletariat' the power of all hired workers in unity with other non-exploiting classes, then what does 'dictatorship' mean anyway? Because we are talking about the overwhelming mass of the people, and self-rule of that mass is ... democracy." In answer to that, I could pose a third question to Alexeii: "Do you really not understand that Marx's conception of the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' means *both* the development of democracy through the self-emancipatory activity of the masses, *and* dictatorship against 'slaveholders' rebellions'?" For Marx, these were two sides of the same coin.

Since Marx wrote all this more than a hundred years ago, how do we need to rework his conception of socialism and democracy today? I think we have to think further about how in the transitional period the "dictatorship of the proletariat" would relate to the other oppressed classes (peasantry, urban petty-bourgeoisie etc). That is one of the questions that the Iranian comrades have raised in our discussions here. As for "slaveholders' rebellions", I would argue that in future revolutionary struggles they will be no less violent and no less dangerous to humanity than they were in Marx's time.

About a methodological question. Alexeii writes: "We need to distinguish between the *social* rule of the proletariat (or working people) and *political* dictatorship" (in his letter to O). In my opinion this is a false distinction, which runs opposite to Marx's understanding. This is why:

First, because for Marx the transition to socialism consisted precisely of *the superceding of the division between the state power and society*. (The difference between this and Alexeii's approach is clear.) Already in *The Jewish Question* (1843) Marx wrote about this: "Only when the real, individual man reabsorbs in himself the abstract citizen [...] only when man has recognised and organised his 'own forces' as social forces, and consequently no longer separates *social* power from himself in the shape of *political* power, only then will human emancipation have been accomplished." (End of Section I). Marx and Engels

clearly expressed the same aim in the Communist Manifesto, looking forward to the time when "in the course of development class distinctions have disappeared, and all production has been concentrated in the hands of a vast association of the whole nation", when "the public power will lose its political character" (penultimate paragraph of the chapter "Proletarians and Communists"). It is clear from the above quotations from *The Civil War in France* that Marx continued [through his life] to believe that the transition to socialism would destroy the division between state and society.

Second. When Marx considered the beginning of the process of superceding the rule of the state, he saw the political activity of the working class as an inseparable part of the class's social movement, not something separate (that is, he saw the commune as the "political form of social emancipation" of the masses.) Marx used the term "dictatorship of the proletariat" to describe this beginning of the transition to socialism.

[About the transition period] We may warn, clearly, that in the transition period bureaucracy and authoritarianism will not easily disappear; we need to declare that we, socialists, will fight against such tendencies. But I think we can not promise something in advance to "the supporters of capitalism" or the "minority of defeated and discredited exploiters". Alexeii says (in his letter to O.) that this minority will be "insignificant". I don't share his great optimism. What if this minority is "significant"? What will we do then? Answer: do not invent in advance a "political democracy" that exists separate from social movements.

As proof of his idea about the distinction between social domination and political dictatorship, Alexeii points to the example of capitalist countries like Britain, where the social domination of the bourgeoisie exists but not political dictatorship. But does he really not understand that the relative freedom of political activity, as well as the relatively high standard of living of the working class, in the imperialist countries, depends on dictatorship, repression and poverty in the poor capitalist countries? Political compromise with social-democracy and the "aristocracy of labour", the concessions to the workers' movement, the rights to press freedom, freedom of speech and so on – all this would be unthinkable in Britain, the US, etc, without a system of brutal repressive regimes in Africa, southern America, etc, without the economic oppression of the majority of humanity. From this point of view, notwithstanding the fact that democracy in the rich countries is extremely important for the working class and socialists, at the same time it really is a "fiction"; that is, it exists, but not for the majority, not continuously, etc. This emphasises that the state regime is nothing but the political form of the rule of capital, not something separate and independent of it. In the same way, a future workers' state will be only the "political form of social emancipation", as Marx emphasised. The idea of a separation of "political" from "social" is artificial and wrong. [...]

[About economic measures in the transition period.] I agree with V. Evstratov's amendment [to the section on The socialist alternative.] Here Alexeii uses the same false logic with which he approaches the question of democracy. Looking forward to a situation under working-class rule, in which "society's material development" has yet to reach "a level which can make possible distribution according to the needs of all", he proposes to resolve this problem by the use of "market mechanisms which will guarantee consumers the freedom of choice and control over the quality of what is produced". Here is a big contradiction. If the development of society has not "made possible distribution according to the needs of all", does this not mean, that people's needs can not be satisfied *by any means* ... and, consequently, there can be neither freedom of choice nor control by consumers over the quality of what is produced. If society can give the "freedom of choice" to consumers, is it not obvious that this society is one which has already "made possible distribution according to the needs of all"?

[About the FI.] VV and O have raised the question of how today we relate to the tradition of the Fourth International. Alexeii, answer VV's question, writes: "We have no intention of throwing out that which is positive in Trotskyism." But in my opinion in the very same paragraph Alexeii shows very clearly his ability to throw out what is positive in Trotskyism, when he writes about "the Trotskyist tradition with its ambiguous attitude to the Stalinist state on the one hand and to the democracy of the working people on the other, the fetishisation of the 'party leadership' and so on". Here there is no serious consideration of the historical role of Trotskyism as a tendency which fought against Stalinism on an international scale and made decisive steps forward in the development of revolutionary theory against its degeneration under Stalinism. I am not in any way proposing that the theory or policy of Trotskyism of the 1930s, or even of the 1970s, is sufficient for today. The need for it to be developed is clear. But to carry through such a development and "subject the legacy of Trotskyism to a radical critique" as Alexeii proposes, we need a more serious consideration of its historical role than he has given.

Note

The phrases "the working people" and "the class of working people" appear frequently. This is how I have translated *trudiashchiesia* (often also translated as the labourers or the toilers). It has a broader meaning than *rabochii* (worker, industrial worker) or *rabochii klass* (industrial working class).

"Great-power-hood" is how I have translated *derzhavnost'*, literally, the state of being a great power and a great state. It is a favourite idea of the nationalists and Stalinists.

(ends)

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The Road to Praxiology:

Discussion on the necessity of investigation of praxiology through examination of C. Slaughter's proposal of 'a new party'

Shin Tanuma

In this article the author refers to Kan'ichi Kuroda's work Praxiology: Philosophy of Inter-Human Subjectivity in discussing Cliff Slaughter's article 'A Contribution to Discussion on "Revolutionary Socialism: The Minimum Platform" in International Socialist Forum Vol. 1, No.2.

The Japanese finance-monopoly bourgeoisie and its political committee, the Hoshimoto regime, are threatened by the financial crisis unparalleled in their post war history, influenced by the reaction from the currency and economic crisis in ASEAN countries. In fact, it is clear that a financial and economic crisis on a world scale, starting in Japan, has become a real possibility. At the same time, they are also threatened by the "Japan bashing" of the American imperialist regime and its finance monopoly bourgeoisie, who now intend to rule the Japanese finance market having provoked the currency crisis in the ASEAN countries. For a long time, the recession having deepened more and more, the Japanese government is forcing all of the sacrifices on the workers and people in order to reconstruct the economic base for surviving the coming 21st century as one of the biggest economic and military states of the world.

However, the leaderships of Japanese Trade Union Confederation (JTUC) and "Zenroren" (National Trade Union Federation) led by Japan Communist Party are leading the "spring wage struggle" to defeat by neglecting to organise a real counterattack against the attacks on the workers and the people by the capitalist class and its government. Japanese militant and revolutionary workers throughout the nation are fighting to develop the "spring wage struggle" leftwards through overcoming the leaderships' abandonment of the dispute and their parliamentarism. At the same time, the militant and revolutionary workers are fighting with the following slogans, based on the concrete situation of each union: "Against the change for the worse of the principal laws of labour and employment"; "Against the change for the worse in the welfare system"; "Against the investment of public funds to rescue the agents of finance capital"; "Against the development of a system of US-Japan co-operation for the execution of war". They advance these slogans in order to create powerful working class forces which will be able to smash down the government's policy of building up the Japanese imperialist state as a big military armed state and its neo-fascist reactionary attacks on the working class, in the midst of this "spring wage struggle".

This militant and revolutionary workers' fight is for the development of the struggle on the basis of the trade un-

ions and, based on this, for the construction of the vanguard party of the working class, which those workers, led by the Japan Revolutionary Communist League (JRCL), create at the same time through theoretical clarification of their own praxis. The militant and revolutionary workers led by JRCL draw lessons from their own disputes through theoretical review of their own praxis, and apply the lessons to their concrete praxis as a theoretical guide of their praxis. This theoretical clarification of praxis is essentially based on philosophical analysis of Praxiology, which has been explored by K. Kuroda, the founder of the Japan Revolutionary Communist League.

Before my discussion of praxiology, it is necessary to refer to the current tendencies of some Trotskyist comrades in Britain in order to make clear the points in my discussion. Not a few comrades among ex-WRP / WI members correctly point out their tendency as that "we have a tendency to jump about from one campaign to the next never drawing the lessons from success and failure and, more importantly, forgetting or ignoring previous collaborations." However, the response as an organisation to these questions tends to be always almost absent. Here I will critically examine the article Revolutionary Socialism: The Minimum Platform written by Cliff Slaughter in ISF journal vol. 1, no. 2, published January 1998. This is because the style of this article formally looks like an analysis of the ex-WRP and the broader European Trotskyist movement, and proposes his group's new line. I will especially examine Slaughter's method of analysis and the theoretical problems related to praxiology underlying his 'new party' line. Through this, I will discuss why the theory of praxis is so important.

1. Some fundamental problems in C. Slaughter's article "Revolutionary Socialism: The Minimum Platform"

A typical example of a lack of review and analysis, falling into pragmatism:

As already mentioned above, Cliff Slaughter's Revolutionary Socialism: The Minimum Platform is written in a style which looks like a "review" or analysis in a very formal sense. To be sure, he points out the failure in the ex-WRP's praxis, especially in party-building, but he does not analyse the failure itself at all. What enables me to say this? The following will prove my claim:

(1) Slaughter admits that “(we) did not built parties” and “WRP fell into ...opportunistic position in relation to the national bourgeoisie in colonial and ex-colonial countries.” (p.5) However, he does not mention the reason why the WRP did not build the party through a concrete analysis of the Healy period and of the period after Healy. Especially, after Healy, how did the WRP leaders try to overcome the methods and conception of Healy’s party construction? And why did they not build the party even though they intended to transcend Healyism? Slaughter never mentions this.

(2) He characterises the conception which caused the failure of party-building by the Trotskyist groups as “merely replacing one leadership by another (that other was us)”. (p.5) In place of this, he proposes the following as a new conception: “Only in and through...reconstruction of the class movement of the proletariat...could a new revolutionary leadership be forged”. Here, he draws a picture as if the worker members in the WRP did not act in the class movement at all. Was it not the case that the Workers’ Aid for Bosnia campaign was organised on the basis of the statement “the relationship between the party and the class movement must be clarified”? And was it not the case that the WRP dissolved itself in the midst of the WAB campaign because they recognised that “we did not build the party”, even though WRP started to act in WAB based on this statement? Therefore, Slaughter, first of all, must analyse this process concretely from the aspect of party construction itself and also, based on this, from the aspect of how revolutionaries construct the class movement. Without an analysis of this process, he proposes a new conception of party construction as described above as if it were a major “new” development.

(3) He admits that “Trotskyists ...failed to give.... The historical analysis of the objective world (as if we were in a revolutionary situation).” because of “(Trotskyists’) concentration on ‘the subjective factor’”, that is, on the question of “the crisis of working class revolutionary leadership” (p.6, p.8) Instead of the analysis of the position that “we were in a revolutionary situation”, he proposes the analysis of “social reality” which Meszaros has been doing (p.7). From these sentences I have quoted, the following is revealed: Slaughter intends to say that the Trotskyists concentrated on the question of the replacement of the leadership, on building traditional parties, and that therefore, they ignored the new situation which Meszaros had analysed. The new situation requires of the Marxist, he continues, a new concept of party construction. This statement thus shows that his new conception of the party comes merely from the notion of the new situation. Slaughter reduces his analysis of the ex-WRP’s attempt at party construction to the failure of its notion and analysis of the world situation.

(4) Ultimately, Slaughter explains what caused the above failure as that “we did not by any means make the necessary thorough-going review of our experience and of the outlook which had kept us in the Stalinist movement”,

and that “(our) outlook was surely itself an unrecognised product of the pressure of Stalinist ideology”. However, he does not bring in the contents of “thorough-going review” at all. He does not even concretely present what are the “our experience and outlook which had kept us in the Stalinist movement” at all. Rather, he concludes that his or their outlook is an **unrecognised** product of the pressure of Stalinist ideology. (My emphasis) Thus, he reduces the reason for his own failure and that of Trotskyists to the pressure of Stalinist ideology. That is to say, he reduces the reason why they “did not build a party” to a very objective and outer condition, Stalinism. He seems to believe that all that is wrong is Stalinism! Following this, he says, “Stalinism is no more!” Does he want to say that he will never fall into failure because Stalinism is no more?

(5) Thus, it must be concluded that this article is a declaration of his and his group’s transfer to Meszaros’s line without a thoroughgoing review of the past.

From the above, Slaughter’s method of analysis is characterised as:

- (1) *Objectivism*: to replace the reason for inner problems by an objective outer condition, thus none of the serious lessons are drawn.
- (2) *Falling into pragmatism*: to reduce the reason for change of organisation’s principle to the change of the situation, thus the principle is distorted. This is a simple reverse of dogmatism.
- (3) *Transfer-ism* (in Japanese ‘*norituri*’): to review the past from an aspect of an idea held in the present. What he has done in the review is only to transfer an old idea to a new idea which is borrowed from someone else without thorough examination. Thus, no theory is produced.
- (4) *Self-justification*: to review the past only on behalf of justification of what he is doing at present.

Such methods of review and analysis are not unique to Slaughter. A change in the principles of the party is crucial for the party if it intends to essentially represent the interests of the working class. The leadership of the party must present a clear reason for the change. In this context, Stalinists’ common trick is carried out through using “change in the situation”, pointing out the objective outer condition, then proposing to transfer to a new line as a dogma, finally self justifying the new line. This conceals their own lack of review of their failure. Such methods only produce zigzags in practice. For example, Khrushchev’s criticism of Stalin, the theory of “social fascism” and turning it into the theory of popular front, the Japan Communist Party’s strategic change from Chinese style violence revolution theory to Khrushchev parliamentarism and so on. Slaughter uses this common trick.

Theoretical reasons for falling into pragmatism

Why does he fall into using such a Stalinists' common trick? This is of course because:

(1) He has never seriously confronted Stalinism. He has been unable to put his feet into the shoes of Trotsky, who confronted Stalinism and therefore precisely proposed "the crisis of the world situation reduced to the crisis of the leadership of the working class". When one adopts Trotsky's theory without confronting Stalinism oneself and without this confrontation leading, in turn, to a thoroughgoing review of the practice and theory which had kept in Stalinist movement, the adopted theory becomes a dogma. Therefore this theory does not work in practice. Slaughter now reproduces a similar example to his past in a new style. That is, without thoroughgoing review of the practice and theory of the WRP, he is adopting Meszaros's theory. We call this a **lack of materialist subjectivity**. The concept, materialist subjectivity, may be unfamiliar to comrades in Britain. When one confronts Stalinism, or capitalists, or whatever external objects, one must regenerate oneself through criticism of the external. Throughout this process one must carry it out based on materialist subjectivity. Materialist subjectivity is based on one's internalisation of materialism and ceaselessly applying it to one's praxis. (See *Praxiology*, p.278) (2) One of the theoretical reasons for his falling into using Stalinists' common trick is revealed in the following his statement in his article: "Marxists are obliged to strive to review the experience of revolutionary movement and their own practice. This involves resisting the temptation to ignore the weight of objective changes" (p.7) To review one's own practice must be carried out in a way in which one must analyse the problems in one's practice concretely and grasp the theory which has been applied to the practice. Based on this theoretical review, one can properly apply the theory to the present new situation. When one tries to change the new situation, one must take account of objective changes. Therefore, one must analyse the changes. Therefore, analysis of the objective changes is not directly included in the review of one's own practice. Both to review one's own practice and to analyse objective changes require 'analysis' but the object of analysis and therefore the theory which is applied for analysis are different between the former, to review of one's practice, and the latter, to analyse objective changes. The object of analysis in the former is one's own practice and the theory to be applied is movement=organising theory, essentially praxiology. In contrast, the object of analysis in the latter is the world situation, or the situation in class movement and the theory to be applied is the theory of analysis of a particular situation, essentially epistemology. **Slaughter confuses the question of practice, praxiology with the question of analysis, epistemology.** (I will discuss praxiology and epistemology later.) Based on this confusion, he always shifts the question of the review of his or his group's practice to the notion of the objective change. Thus he falls

into pragmatic transfer from one to another.

Pragmatism is related to the 'alternative' thinking method

The pragmatic attitude towards a new situation or change of principle of the organisation is firmly related to the 'alternative' thinking method. As I have already mentioned above, in Slaughter's review of his or his group's "practice and experience of the class movement" there is no concrete reality to be seen. He presents as an object of his review only the idea of "replacement of the traditional parties by a revolutionary party". He then proposes a new idea: "in and through a wholesale necessary reconstruction of the class movement ... a new revolutionary leadership be forged". That is, all what he has done is to *transfer an idea (concept) to another idea (concept)*. This is called the "alternative" thinking method. What is lacking here? The *materialist analysis of the reality* which has been caused by him and his group's practice. The typical present example of the "alternative" thinking method is seen in Gorbachev's policy of "Perestroika" (see. The Message from the JRCL to the Conference of the Movement for Socialism November 1997). Even though one intends to truly revolutionise the reality, if one looks for some "alternative" idea instead of the old idea, only new concepts are reproduced. Why does Slaughter falls into such "alternative" thinking method? The reason for this must be said to be that he confuses the real process with the theory or the perspective that has developed in his mind. That is, when he grasps an idea or perspective which is for him a new belief, he thinks as if the idea or the perspective were or would happen to be the real process



if he and his group would act in accordance with his new idea. We can see a lot of such confusion in his article. For example, "Only *in and through a wholesale necessary reconstruction and regeneration of the class movement of the proletariat, achieved in the course of the growth of a mass socialist movement, could a new revolutionary leadership be forged in the vanguard of the class*" (p.6), "the revolutionary party which is necessary *will play its part of striving to learn from and give direction to the mass movement... This is the path along which the 'crisis of leadership' will be resolved*" (p.7). (All italics are mine). These sentences describe Slaughter's new idea of party construction. Reading the italicised sentences, we see that all are written with the words "new party (or leadership)" or "movement" or "crisis of leadership" being posed as subject of these sentences and written with subjunctive mood or future mood. With no existing party or attempt to build one, the concepts such as "new party or leadership" or "movement", or "crisis of leadership" themselves could never do anything. However, Slaughter describes them as if in the future it would happen to be. Thus, he describes a picture in which "party" or "movement" would happen to be in the future and at the same time he assumes it happens as a real process in the future. With such a picture, one cannot clarify the theoretical guidance for one's present practice. Therefore, Slaughter can only draw a picture but is unable to pose the question of how to realise it. In the first place his picture is not rooted in a materialist analysis of reality. This confusion of the real process and the idea which might describe the future reality is a product of objectivism / subjectivism in dialectic materialism and a lack of praxiology. I will discuss this later.

Slaughter reduces the question of the 'crisis of the leadership' (party construction) to the 'reconstruction of the class movement and joint work in it'

As I have already mentioned, the article written by Slaughter is a declaration of his or his group's transfer to Meszaros' proposal. He opposes the idea that the task is "to replace the bureaucratic apparatuses of the existing parties by another". Instead of this, he proposes "a wholesale reconstruction of the class movement" through which a new revolutionary leadership will "be forged in the vanguard of the class". If the core question of the revolutionary movement is grasped as the question of reconstruction of a wholesale class movement instead of the question of party-building, this statement denies Trotsky's term 'the crisis of leadership'. Slaughter conceals this by saying "the weight of objective changes". Meszaros merely thinks about Stalinism as a pillar of capital. Therefore he does not grasp that the core question of the revolutionary movement is the distortion of the working class movement by Stalinism. Slaughter does not mention about this point (concerning the question of analysis of the present world situation). Therefore, Meszaros does not grasp that the core question of the revolution movement is overcoming of Stalinism. When we grasp 'core question of the

revolution movement is overcoming of Stalinism' from the aspect of the substance (i.e., the bearer), it is expressed as 'the crisis of leadership'. Meszaros is not a Trotskyist. Therefore, he does not refer to this. In the first place, in Meszaros's theory, the concept of vanguard does not indicate the positive. He never develops the theory of revolution in which the issue of how to revolutionise the reality is clarified. He only mentions socialism as a theory of future society. Slaughter leaves Meszaros's problem untouched. On the basis of this, Slaughter proposes that we must understand the 'crisis of leadership' not as 'replacement of the Stalinist parties by the Trotskyist parties' but as 'reconstruction of the class movement and joint work in it.' However, the core question must be party-building instead of anything. The point why the conception of "replacement the Stalinist party by the Trotskyist party (WRP)" is wrong is that there is a lack of perspective for dismantling the Stalinist party, that is a lack of theory of organisation, of organising tactics as a theory of how to construct the organisation. Slaughter neglects to discuss this point, that is, how to build the party, and moves the question to "in and through reconstruction of the class movement". This means that he leaves the task of party-building untouched. In such a way Slaughter resolves the question of 'the crisis of leadership'.

Slaughter's claim is a mistake by means of that he logically confuses the question that one must objectively clarify the relationship between the party and the class with the question that the party organises the class movement towards left-ward. He reduces the former question to the latter. In this case, his understanding of the relationship between the party and the class movement is so monotonous that the party is a part of the class movement. Kuroda maintains this relationship that "Our league organisation and the vanguard (party) organisation in general, is not created in a vacuum. It is through the refining of our organising tactics for the revolutionary dissolution of existing left-wing parties, especially the Stalinist parties, together with through our organising of the ceaseless struggles for making them left-wing or revolutionary transcending of the labour movement and mass struggles led and unfolded by those parties, that is, through the medium of organising the mass movement on the basis of the carrying-out of these organising tactics, that the League or party organisations are organisationally established. In other words, our League organisation which has been formed not only makes up the *precondition* for creating struggles for transcending the existing labour movement and mass movement, but at the same time is strengthened and expanded *mediated by* these struggles." (What is revolutionary Marxism? p.191) This is the logic of movement=organisation building, that is, the concept of the spiraling circular structure of the 'organising of the movement' and the 'organising of the organisation'. Based on an understanding of this logic, we must concretely clarify the theoretical guidance of our practice to act in the struggle. As a result of that the party or organisation carries out such a practice based on the theoretical guidance applied by organising tactics, the party can exist, if

you want to put it thus, as a part of the class (movement). When the term "the party is a part of the class movement" (by Slaughter) is referred without such a clarification as the above, this means nothing but a desire or, the worse, a recommendation, in which the party is reduced to only the mean for mass movement construction. Thus, Slaughter never is able to grasp the party as being constructed as essentially illegal in order to smash down the state power. Nor does he grasp that the basis of the construction of such a party is the Materialist Subjectivity of the party members as communists. Indeed, in this article the criterion of the new party is not mentioned as being even at least Marxism. His fundamental problem is rooted in his failure to clarify the relationship between the party and building the class movement. He merely deals with the two concepts in an objectivistic and separate way seeing them from outside, and then combines the two concepts ontologically, such as 'party is a part of the class movement'. The reason for this failure is, needless to say, a lack of the theory of practice, praxiology.

2. The road to the theory of praxis, Praxiology

I have discussed above the defects in Slaughter's article Revolutionary Socialism: The Minimum Platform and revealed the fundamental problems which caused the defects in his review of the past practice and in his proposal of 'a new party'. The pragmatistic and alternative proposal of 'a new party' is not based on an analysis of the reality which has been produced by him and his group, nor is it based on the development of his and his group's theory of revolution, and especially not on organising theory. This is fundamentally caused by the neglect of theoretical investigation of Dialectical Materialism, i.e., praxiological Materialism, especially, of overcoming of the Stalinists' mechanical Materialism, objectivism.

Overcoming of Stalinist dialectic materialism: The logic of the topos

Marxist philosophy is based on dialectic materialism. Since Stalin, dialectic materialism has been distorted into a method which views materialism and dialectic separately and connects them mechanically. Stalin's *Dialectical materialism and historical materialism* (1938) is composed of 'dialectics' — 'materialism' — 'historical materialism'. In his theory, 'dialectic' and 'materialism' are referred in separate chapters. Thus the Stalinists' materialism is understood without dialectic and dialectic is explained without materialism. Materialism without dialectic is thus distorted as mechanical materialism and dialectic without materialism is reduced to the explanation of four of dialectical laws of the nature. Thus dialectics is explained as mere movement of-laws of nature. The four laws of dialectics are described in Stalin's theory as follows:

- (1) Dialectics views things and phenomena as an integrative whole within which they conflict or rest to each other.
- (2) Dialectics views nature as a movement and change.
- (3) Dialectics views the process of development as that quantitative change develops to qualitative change.
- (4) Dialectics begins with that the natural things and phenomena are inherently composed of inner conflict.

Then the two are connected as the laws of the dialectical movement-of-matter. However, we must grasp the inner structure of the dialectical movement of matter. This has not to be reduced mere explanation of the laws of the movement of the nature. (In fact, Stalin confused dialectical materialism with dialectics of the nature. In his system of philosophy, dialectics of the nature is omitted.) This is the theoretical presentation of the objectivism of Stalin's philosophy.

The fundamental reason for this distortion is a lack of the investigation of material praxiological human nature, which is the highest form of nature. Nature includes humankind within itself and is first cognised and changed by human beings as the historically highest form of the material movement of nature. The inner structure of this highest form of material movement of nature must be investigated and through this, the origin/entity of the material world in which humankind exists as subject and therefore, the world external to the human being as the object, must be further investigated as a principle of materialism. In so doing, based on Marx's theory of the human labour (*Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* 1844), which is a basis of the integrative theory of naturalism and humanism, dialectical materialism must be developed. Marx's *Theses on Feuerbach* is an essential philosophical presentation of his theory of human labour. In this sense, dialectical materialism and praxiological materialism are essentially identified.

Based on this view, Kuroda develops dialectical materialism, i.e., praxiological materialism. In his *Praxiology*, Kuroda maintains how these two terms, 'dialectical' and 'praxiological' which are used to qualify 'materialism', are related to each other as follows:

- (1) Our starting point is always the **topos** in which we exist in reality, the topos in the active present. We make up the topos together with the material objects, which oppose us. So, we constitute the subjective moment of this topos. When we unfold the theory of praxis or cognition, our starting point is ourselves as a praxising=cognising Subject. It is a premise that we as the praxising=cognising Subject constitutes the

subjective moment of the topos in which we exist. And we obtain self-awareness of the topos in which we exist on the basis of our thinking, which is mediated by our cognition of material objects. Dialectical materialism or praxiological materialism is precisely the clarification of the *processive structure* of praxis and consciousness in the topos in which we exist. (p.183)

- (2) Praxis or activity in the material world is the interaction between these two moments, namely, ourselves as the material subject (S) and the material object (O) opposed to us. This interaction between the two moments of the topos is also reproduced inside our consciousness. The activity of cognition=thinking in the topos of consciousness is carried out as the interaction between the two moments of the subject (s') and the object (o') in our consciousness. Therefore, in the immediate sense, the > logic of the topos < is the logic of praxis. (p. 184)
- (3) To reconstruct this ontologically, the topos in the active present is a cross section of the social stage of development in the historical process of Nature. The topos of reality in which we exist and praxise is precisely the historical world in which time and space are unified. In this sense, the *logic of the topos* is, at the same time, the logic of the historical process of Nature, i.e., the *dialectic of process*. Materialist dialectic hence has a toposical-qua-processive, logical-qua-historical structure. (p.184)

Kuroda confronted the objectivistic distortion of dialectical materialism by Stalin and through this, he clarified the logic of the topos. Introducing the logic of the topos, we can grasp dialectic materialism as being identified with praxiological materialism.

Praxiology and epistemology

Praxis and cognition have been discussed by Stalinists as 'cognition as a criterion of praxis' or as stressing the cyclical scheme 'praxis - cognition - re-praxis'. That is, these are merely discussed the relationship between the two concepts. Concepts themselves alone do nothing. The inner structure of the two and of the relationship between the two must be clarified.

Kuroda discusses praxiology and epistemology as follows:

- (1) First, he defines the relationship between praxis and cognition as that praxis has cognition as its moment. Then he defines praxiology and epistemology. "We consider the theory of 'praxis which has cognition as its moment' (and not of 'cognition which has praxis as its moment') to be praxiology. We regard epistemology as a moment of praxiology". (p.183)
- (2) When we clarify praxiology and epistemology, we must confirm the topos of reality and topos of con-

sciousness in the relationship between the two, because we praxis and cognise in the topos. Kuroda says that "We cannot exist without existing in the topos of reality in which we are actually posited. The topos in which we exist in reality consists of two essential moments, namely, ourselves as the material subject and the material object opposed to us. This topos of reality means the material world. As a matter of course, it is not the *topos of consciousness*, or the topos of the activity of consciousness. While we, the human praxising Subject, constitute one of the two moments of the topos of reality as objective reality, the topos of consciousness can be considered to be a *reproduction* of this topos in our consciousness." (p.183) Thus, we must consider our praxis or our consciousness in relation to the topos of reality and topos of consciousness, that is, the logic of the topos.

- (3) Based on the logic of the topos, Kuroda defines the praxis and the cognition. "Praxis or activity in the material world is the interaction between these two moments, namely, ourselves as the material subject (S) and the material object (O) opposed to us. This interaction between the two moments of the topos is also reproduced inside our consciousness. The activity of cognition=thinking in the topos of consciousness is carried out as the interaction between the two moments of the subject (s') and the object (o') in our consciousness. Therefore, in the immediate sense, the > logic of the topos < is the logic of praxis. We as



the material subject of praxis cognise our object and ourselves at the same time. This cognising=thinking activity of ours is, as a matter of course, the necessary product of our praxis, namely, the interaction between the two moments which make up the topos, while this activity in our consciousness also, conversely, determines our praxis itself." (p. 184)

Here I return to the problems in Slaughter's article. When he reviews the reality, '(we) did not "build parties"', Slaughter gives as the reason for this only the error contained in the idea of the task as being to 'supply a new party'. He does not mention his or his group's actual practice at all. He points out the fact that the old WRP analysed the world situation as 'we were in revolutionary situation'. I will refer to the two strands in Slaughter's argument as (I) and (II). He finds the reason for the failure of party-building only in his or his group's idea (I) and yet, his review of this idea (idea of practice) reduces to the analysis of the world situation (II). Considering (I), He confuses actual practice with consciousness. (II) reveals that he reduces the question of praxis to the question of analysis (cognition). What he deals with is only the idea (consciousness) or the analysis (cognition). Thus, we can confirm that the way of his discussion of the real practice (i.e., the way of review of the old WRP's practice) is far from praxiological, dialectic materialism. Furthermore, his conception of cognition or consciousness is therefore distorted. I will discuss this next.

The logic of cognition: Epistemology and Ontology

I have already confirmed the logic of the topos, and praxis and cognition in the topos. Based on this, I will further discuss the logic of cognition. When we consider the logic of cognition, first of all, we must distinguish between the *form* of cognising=thinking activity and the *content* of our thought. Kuroda defines the dialectic of cognition as that:

- (1) It is "the unification of the logic of being (the dialectic of *ontos*, ontology) grasped through our objective cognition, and the logic of the cognising=thinking form *itself* to grasp this logic of being."
- (2) "The *dialectic ofontos* is to be called 'objective dialectics' and is the universal logic of the historical process of Nature. The historical process of Nature of course refers to a process that consists of astro-historical, bio-historical, and socio-historical stages. In this sense, the dialectic of *ontos* is processive dialectic as a moment of toposical dialectic. This dialectic, namely, objective dialectic, is a reproduction in our consciousness of the logical-qua-historical structure of this historical process of Nature on the level of universal abstraction."
- (3) "On the other hand, the logic of cognising=thinking *form* can be defined as the dialectic of cognition in

the narrow sense, or 'subjective dialect'. It can be described "On the one hand, the core of this logic is the descending / ascending dialectics. on the other hand, it is the logic of the structure of the concept, judgment, and inference, which are applied to our cognition of objects." (p. 187~188))

Stalinists ignore or omit the latter, the logic of the cognising=thinking form itself in their theory of cognition. The logic of cognising=thinking form is the logic of the way of how to cognise the reality and of the processive structure of the cognition. Therefore, we call Stalinists' cognition as mirror-like reflection. At the same time, they view the former, the dialectic of *ontos*, ontology as that it is the one with the material law governing or determining objects to be cognised (i.e., *Gesetzlichkeit*). We call this 'upside-down Hegelianism'. That is, while Hegel absolutised the consciousness which absorb the real existence, Stalinists directly identify the consciousness (thinking) with the real existence. We must confirm that when we consider cognition, it is the unification of thinking form itself and contents of thinking. And the content of our thinking is the result of our thinking, therefore, it cannot be directly viewed as the real process itself.

As I have already mentioned, the 'alternative' thinking method is based on the view in which an alternative idea is viewed as if it would happen as a real process. This thinking style is precisely based on the confusion in which the dialectic of *ontos* is directly identified with the real process. At the same time, this is based on ignoring subjective dialectic, epistemology.

I have briefly discussed how the investigation of praxiology which has epistemology as a moment of it, is closely and deeply related to our actual practice (and our thinking in practice) through examining Slaughter's article. The question of party building or of how the party organise the class movement to make it left-ward are clarified only when we seriously consider the theory of praxiology since the party or the movement are never constructed without practice. The theory of organisation is precisely in the area of Praxiology.

A Debate

Simon Pirani & Cyril Smith

This edited correspondence between two comrades who have participated actively in the International Socialist Forum will hopefully highlight some of the issues that have come up at the forum. The first letter was sent by Simon Pirani to Cyril Smith in April 1996, after the publication of Smith's book Marx At The Millenium. The second is Smith's response.

[part of a letter from Simon to Cyril, April 1996]

Now to the main point - comments on Marx At The Millenium.

I thought Chapter 3 was excellent, a real development, a real clarification. Your insistence that the essential question is "what do humans have to do to live humanly? ... how can humanity make itself what it is in essence" (p.63) etc, is cause for thought. We will no doubt disagree on the answer to this question, but it is really a question without which other questions do not make sense. I think we began to touch on these issues in the post-1985 discussions, and I would imagine that part of the present problem of the WRP is that these matters have been forgotten by some comrades.

I have spent time thinking about - what is a "principled" way to live in the 1990s? This was never a problem in the 70s, when we believed that revolution was imminent. But now I think I will have to live under capitalism for some time, the question is, how? In 1985 much was said about the "wrong" answer, which we had given to this question, which was: spend your life selling papers and organising YS meetings. But what was right? It seems to me that many comrades have sunk into a relatively quiet existence, unable to see quite what to do. Also NB the end of Harry Ratner's book, which (30 years after the event) said that he left politics because he couldn't hack doing it full-time the Healy way - the implication being that there was no other way. I was very sad to read that.

Incidentally. In 1987, you wrote in Workers Press, with reference to Healy's sexual abuse and to the "Torrance machine", about the reproduction inside the party ("second time as farce") of the most depraved relations in capitalism. This is surely part of your argument and could have been included in the book?

Back to the text. The material on humanity being trapped inside an inhuman shell (capital, the state, etc) is good. Likewise on the relationship of the individual to society, etc.

I am not sure how all this relates to what I say below, but I

think it revolves around what I think is your wrong approach to history. I think you apply a normative standard to the "Marxists", instead of investigating and criticising their activity as Marx would have done.

I strongly disagree (as you know from our discussions) with what you say in Chapter 2, especially about the Russian revolution. Here are some points:

1. Re. the last three paragraphs (p.165): you say the Russian revolution was a "detour", a "cul de sac". This is the heart of what is wrong. It suggests that we tried that way, it was no good, now we have to look for another; when you advise against "bemoaning the time that we lost", the implication is that it WAS "lost", but that there is no point in crying over spilt milk. Wrong. The Russian revolution CHANGED the world and compelled people to change the way they thought about the world. It posed problems of understanding that Marx did not and could not have dealt with. Those who today think Lenin or even Trotsky answered all the problems posed by the Russian revolution are promoting a monstrous deception - but the job is to continue the work that they DID start, not to keep telling everybody that Marx did not mean things to be as they were. Of course he didn't.

This is not a semantic discussion. It is a central point. You once said to me (in a letter, I think) "Lenin was too busy making a revolution to develop Marxist theory" or something like that. I replied, and I still think I was right, that by making a revolution he DID develop Marx's work.

2. The Russian revolution changed life. It compelled tremendous changes in thought. Thought could NOT be the same afterwards. If this was not THE way to take Marx's work forward, what was? You compliment Lenin and Trotsky on their ability to break with orthodoxy (p.62). But was not the fact that they argued for a workers' revolution in 1917 the substance of their break from orthodoxy? If the work done around the call for "all power to the soviets" was not THE answer to Kautsky and Plekhanov, what was? You avoid this question, mixing it up with the issue of "vanguard parties" and people making revolutions "for the workers". It is absolutely clearly documented (I can draw up a book list for you) that the October revolution was an act by the majority of urban workers, supported to one degree or another and in one manner or another by vast sections (we can't say "majority", you can't quantify a whirlwind like that) of the peasantry. Leaving aside the issue of "vanguard party" for consideration below, and acknowledging that this was a WORKERS' revolution, surely we must then con-

cede that that act was NOT a "cul de sac" but a continuation of what was started by the Paris commune.

3. You make much of the fact that Marx never used the term "workers' state", that his conception of "dictatorship of the proletariat" was something quite different, etc. But because you limit yourself to a simple comparison, showing that his ideas and the reality of 1917 were different, your argument flops.

"The 'dictatorship of the proletariat' had been transformed into a kind of spiritual force directed by the party and its leadership, independently of the will or knowledge of the human beings actually struggling to live in those terrible days" - p.29. I do not understand this business about "spiritual force". Circumstances dictated that the first task of the proletarian dictatorship as envisaged by Marx - the violent suppression of the bourgeoisie - could only be begun in 1918-1919 in the form of a war waged by a regular army (something Marx certainly didn't believe in, and nor did anyone in the Second International for that matter). This regular army was put at the centre. The strength of the self-governing workers' organisations was sapped (not least, by Lenin's decree of 1918 abolishing workers' control) until they virtually disappeared. (You know all this, don't you?) But where was the "kind of spiritual force"?

The Bolshevik leaders constantly referred to their rule as a type of "dictatorship of the proletariat". That they were aware of its contradictions is demonstrated, for a start, in the quotations you yourself repeat from the trade union discussion. You have contrasted the conception Marx had with the reality as it appeared in 1920. But that is easy, and useless. I could do better - I could compare passages from "State & Revolution" to the reality in 1920 and show how unlike they were. Your remark (p.159) that Lenin "glimpsed [the nature of the state] after the collapse of the Second International - and then forgot about it" is an evasion. What actually happened was that, having taken power by virtue of a workers' revolution, Lenin and co. found themselves stuck at the head of a "bourgeois state without a bourgeoisie" (also Lenin's formulation).

You say; "behind the thinking of the Bolsheviks stood notions of the state and of the party which blocked the path to any understanding of what was happening" (p.27). I don't think so. Lenin's insights on this question, which Trotsky tried to develop in *Revolution Betrayed*, OPENED the path to an understanding. I don't say more than "opened the path", I don't say they provided all the answers ... but "blocked the path"? No. What is remarkable is the frankness with which they tried to get to grips with these matters while fighting a civil war with the other hand.

You quote from *Terrorism and Communism* and complain that in the 30s Trotsky gave no "warning signs". But of what should such a warning sign consist? I would say, an explanation of the concrete circumstances under which this work was written. But you are in a poor position to criticise Trotsky for neglecting to place these things in their circum-

stances, because that is precisely what you fail to do.

The essence of Bolshevik policy in 1920 was an extreme (one might even use the word fanatical) optimism in the rapid spread of the revolution, and the conviction that by defeating the Whites and hanging on to power, the road would be opened to rapidly solving the problems that had cursed them in 1918 and 1919. What happened? Bloody, brutal, widespread peasant revolts; workers' protests; the disastrous failure of the invasion of Poland. The result was NEP. Again, Lenin was remarkably conscious of what was going on (see the remark quoted by Victor Serge - and, I understand, by Jacques Sadoul - to the effect that the Bolsheviks were going to damn well make Thermidor themselves, and not end up getting guillotined as the Jacobins had).

When you ask the question "what happened after this [trade union] dispute" (p.32) you don't try to answer it concretely by discussing NEP, you just rush on. Some young communists, hearing news of the NEP, despaired of "living humanly" and committed suicide. We have to deal with these concrete realities, because they were the result of superhuman efforts precisely to "live humanly" made by that generation. If you wanted to say that, confronted with a new phenomenon that their generation had created, many of them too easily lapsed into using words like "workers' state", "dictatorship", "the iron laws of history" etc, many of them did not listen carefully enough to that discussion between Bukharin and Lenin or contribute to it, many of them fought on without deepening their understanding of what was happening, then I might agree with you. But that is NOT what you say. You only tell us that they said different things from Marx, and you slur THIS together with the complete perversion of Marx's ideas which, although it may have started with Zinoviev and Bukharin and co, only assumed the form in which we recognise it today under Stalin. This was a whole process, and it needs following carefully (like Marx followed the political economists), but you bundle it all together as "Marxism" and put up a sign saying "cul de sac". Is this how to educate the next generation?

Far from "blocking the road to understanding", the Bolshevism of 1919-1920, super-optimistic as it was, unleashed a torrent of intellectual energy. At that point, when the state machine was becoming more and more centralised, and the economy was collapsing faster and faster, inspired discussion about how to "live humanly" was developing. NB the work of Kollontai, of Lunacharsky's commissariat of the enlightenment, discussions on religion and law, discussions among artists, etc etc. The Comintern was built.

Much of this was more or less lost shortly afterwards. But you appear to suggest that since it all goes under the heading of "Marxism" it is not worthy of study.

3. Trotsky was not ready in the 1930s to say everything that he might have thought about 1920. But he did write *Revolution Betrayed*. You quote (p.25) the first paragraph of "Stalinism and Bolshevism", and you say "defence of

an established set of ideas ... proved to be quite inadequate". But *Revolution Betrayed* (not to mention writings on fascism, art, Spain, philosophy, etc) clearly DID go beyond the defence of established ideas. It did attempt to say what a workers' state, or a degenerated workers' state, was or was not. It did not take these things for granted. I would be the last to suggest that this was the final word on the subject, or that it was sufficient, or that the Trotskyists do not bear a grave responsibility for failing to take this discussion an inch forward for many years. They do bear such a responsibility. In developing this discussion, it is ESSENTIAL to go back to Marx, to see what he DID say about the Paris commune, to see what he did NOT say about a workers' state etc. But that can not be the end of the matter.

For example, you have yet to convince me that the fact that Marx never used the phrase "workers' state" was any more significant than the fact he never used the word "computer", i.e., in both cases, he never saw one.

Your reader is left with NO idea of what YOU think existed in Russia in 1917-1921. You have not shown me that the formulations mentioned above, by Lenin, and what Trotsky had to say in *Revolution Betrayed*, did not OPEN THE WAY to understanding this. There is a SEPARATE discussion about how the phrase "workers' state" became MISused, which is surely part of the discussion about how the word communism (which certainly was Marx's word) became misused. But you slur the two together.

4. You say, Luxemburg went further than Kautsky against Bernstein but "nowhere did she approach the philosophical basis of the problem" (p.36); Lenin "never published a word which challenged [Kautsky's and Plekhanov's] PHILOSOPHICAL outlooks" (p.47); the Trotskyists "never had the theoretical resources to penetrate to its [Stalinism's] philosophical core. The best that they could do was to show [that Stalin's policy was contrary to Lenin's]" (p.25). I do not think that the "basis" of reformism, or the "core" of Stalinism, were philosophical. Surely the "core" of reformism and Stalinism is that they represented, and represent still, the pressure of capital on the workers' movement and (forgive me for using the term, and tell me what else to call it) the workers' state. Surely Lenin, Luxemburg and co saw it as their task to inflict defeats on reformism in the realm of practice, as did Trotsky in fighting Stalinism.

I am NOT saying that the fight against reformism and Stalinism does not have to be carried on in the sphere of philosophy; especially the corrupting influence of Stalinism on all that goes under the heading of Marxism does need to be unpicked, examined, superseded, etc. That is perhaps the most important task NOW. But to "live humanly" in the period straight after the first world war meant to participate in the Russian revolution. Didn't it? You seem to suggest otherwise, that if the revolutionaries of that time had concentrated on rediscovering the "philosophical core" of Marx's work, in order to expose the "philosophical core" of reformism and Stalinism, their time

would have been better spent.

Of course the point is not to say what they should have done. But what should we do? I do not think a search for Stalinism's "philosophical core" is the issue. Stalinism as an ideological corruption and Stalinism as a material force which did imperialism's dirty work (up to and including Cambodia) must surely be taken in the context of all the questions you raise in Chapter 5 about the 21st century.

5. Party/class. In conclusion, you say: "Marx never belonged to a 'Marxist party' or anything like it" (p.164). On *What Is To Be Done*, you say: "Nothing like this is to be found in the writings of Marx or Engels. All their lives, they fought against those who built sects which aimed to show the world what it should be like" (p.37). You are evading issues.

The Bolshevik party was clearly NOT "a sect". Many many subsequent parties claiming to be Bolshevik may have been, but IT was not. Furthermore, when Lenin talked about bringing socialist consciousness into the workers' movement from without, let us separate out the history of how those words were interpreted later by sects, Stalinists and others ... and recall that this was Lenin's description of Marx and Engels' own activity. I do not see why you get so worked up and excited about it. Marx did try to bring a "socialist consciousness" into the workers' movement, first through the Communist League, then through his connections with the First International, through his correspondence with German and French social democrats. You refer to his dislike of many of the German and French leaders - but what were his disputes with them about? Is it really so unreasonable to describe these as attempts to "divert the working-class movement from this spontaneous striving to come under the wing of the bourgeoisie"? Marx quite clearly DID believe the workers' movement was under such pressure, and all the derogatory things he said about the British "aristocracy of labour" bear this out.

I am NOT saying there is NO discussion to be had about the way that Russian conspiratorial traditions were reflected in Lenin's party. I am NOT saying there is no discussion to be had about the way that *What Is To Be Done* was, at a later point in history, used as the justification for building sects. But again you slur things together. This is NOT the same as the question about whether there is any need for socialists to consciously bring their ideas to bear on the workers' movement. In the first paragraph of page 106, you yourself clearly imply that they do need to do so. This, to my mind, was the starting point of what Lenin was trying to do. Yes, in his party he had a fair share of conspiratorially-minded daredevils who had little to do with "living humanly"; J. Stalin is probably the example whose psychology we all know best. But instead of working through this history to show in what sense there was a development of Marx's work and in what sense there was a negation of it, you lump all these things together.

6. A very good (or rather, bad) example of the muddle - in Chapter 3. "Ideas about 'bringing socialist consciousness into the working class from outside', 'vanguard leadership' etc, were the result [of not thinking hard enough about the Theses on Feuerbach]. We surely know today, and should have known before, that nobody can be forced to be free ... Moreover, how are those who 'bring' the 'correct' consciousness to the masses supposed to have got hold of it themselves" (p.72-73).

You clearly imply here that people who talk about working-class vanguards end up by "forcing people to be free" in some Orwellian nightmare. In a world where 90 per cent of books on the subject directly attribute responsibility for Stalinism to Leninism, this is just not good enough. Similarly, you declare: "It is easy to see what is NOT to be done. There have been too many attempts at 'social engineering' - people who know what is good for us trying to impose answers on us" (p.153). One hears this sort of statement at least once a week from some reactionary Russian politician, or American academic, with reference to the Russian revolution. And in a book where you talk about the Russian revolution at length, your reader will assume you are joining in the chorus. Why put yourself in this position? Do you think you are in a vacuum where there are no Russian politicians or American academics? I am afraid that you are not.

7. Marx and the Russians. I do not understand your point. Marx liked the narodniks just as he liked the Fenians - because he had a revolutionary soul. And so? He made some dismissive remarks about the Geneva group - but as you point out, he didn't know much about who they were. For somebody who gives Lenin a very hard time for not going deeper in his struggle to transcend Plekhanov, you will yourself have to offer us more than this.

Incidentally, the picture is incomplete without some mention of Chernyshevsky and how his work related to that of Marx.

There are other things I would like to say about Chapter 4. I hope you go further against "AI" and sociobiology; what you have written is a good start. I do not agree with the point you make about "theory"; you seem to ignore the fact that many many Marxists use the word in a much wider, and a much more sophisticated sense, than the very narrow sense which you specify for it.

All the best,

Simon.

27 February, 1998

Dear Simon,

When you wrote me that letter from Petrozavodsk, getting on for two years ago, I'm afraid I just couldn't be bothered to answer. The gulf between us seemed unbridgeable. This was wrong of me. So when we had that exchange at the International Socialist Forum meeting recently, I realised that I ought to make amends. It is clear that the issues are still not resolved, although, perhaps we might have grown up enough now to begin to tackle them. After all, it is only twelve-and-a-half years since the Healy explosion illuminated all of our experience in that group, and only now are we beginning to be able to grasp some of the implications of our chief discovery at that time: the struggle for communism has itself to be communist.

Let's begin with your suggestion that I regard the new ground broken by the Bolsheviks in 1917-21 as "not worthy of study". There, you are certainly quite wrong. However, what I do think is that, in order to carry out this important study, we must separate two aspects of "Marxism". On the one hand, we have the history of centuries of working class struggle, which was taken to new levels, first by Marx, and then by the experiences of the Revolution and the Civil War. On the other hand, there is the body of ideas elaborated by the Marxists in the course of their efforts to comprehend that history.

Our argument, which has gone on for a long time, always seems to go like this. I say: "Lenin's Materialism and Empirio-Criticism is a rotten book" and you declare: "the call for 'all power to the soviets' was ... THE answer to Kautsky and Plekhanov". I attack the formulations of What is to be done? and you tell me that the Bolsheviks were not a sect. I say: "The concept 'workers' state' contradicts Marx's notion of the communist revolution" and you answer: "Lenin's insights on this question, which Trotsky tried to develop in Revolution Betrayed, OPENED the path to an understanding". Obviously, we are not talking about the same things.

Yes, of course the October Revolution was not a coup. It was a massive action by an important section of the international proletariat, and a huge social upheaval. Certainly, the Bolshevik Party of 1917 was not a sect, but a powerful organisation of workers. Yes, Lenin and Trotsky did break with the politics of the Second International. But you insist that "the job is to continue the work that [Lenin and Trotsky] DID start". I am arguing that the theoretical categories with which "Marxism" tried to understand the twentieth century were (a) not those of Karl Marx and (b) false. What we mustn't do is just "continue" in the same theoretical direction. For people like us, who have spent decades fighting for precisely those ideas, this change of direction is very hard. We have to retrace our steps, recognising that we were stuck in a theoretical cul-de-sac.

Then, critically and openly, we can re-examine the entire body of doctrine. Otherwise there can be no regeneration of revolutionary socialism.

Of course we have to study the history of October and of the Communist International with great care. This is both to uphold the aims of the struggle they embodied, and to investigate where their understanding of that struggle was wrong. The break from the orthodoxy of the Second International in 1914-19 was only partial. The early Congresses of the CI laid down a body of analysis which broke politically with Kautsky and Plekhanov. But underlying it was an outlook, and especially a picture of the relation between Party, State and class, derived largely from that same Kautsky and Plekhanov. Of course our hatred of Stalinism is not primarily about philosophy. But our fight to free ourselves from its influence - and in 1985 we found that influence went much deeper than we had suspected! - must include penetrating to its philosophical core.

Look again at those twin notions: workers' state and democratic centralist party. Not only have these ideas no place in the work of Marx. They are directly opposed to his contention that the proletariat is the subject of history. Marx found that the way to transcend capital, state, family, law, etc., did not lie in anybody's programme, nor in any organisation, nor in any theory, but in the ability of the proletariat to form itself into a subject.

"Marxism" - and especially "Marxism-Leninism" - sometimes paid lip-service to the idea that the proletariat was the subjective factor, but actually we saw the Party and the Workers' State as the "subjective factor". This was fundamental to the thinking of the Third International and was taken over into the Fourth. Look again at a work like *Their Morals and Ours*, and see how Trotsky bases his conception of morality on the Party, not on the proletariat. It was the Party which was the decisive factor in modern history, we all believed.

This was in contrast with the idea of Marx, who grasped, in opposition to all previous and subsequent socialism, that the communists have to become "the mouthpiece" of a "real movement". This movement within the working class expressed the essence of the struggle of that class for its humanity, and thus the meaning of capital itself, for labour was the subjective side of the antagonism within capital. Any other way of seeing the world seeks make socialism into the imposition of a new form on reality, in theory and in practice. (In opposition to Istvan, but in line with KM, I don't want to talk about socialism as a new social formation, or a new mode of production; it is a removal of obstacles to truly human life, rather than the construction of something else.)

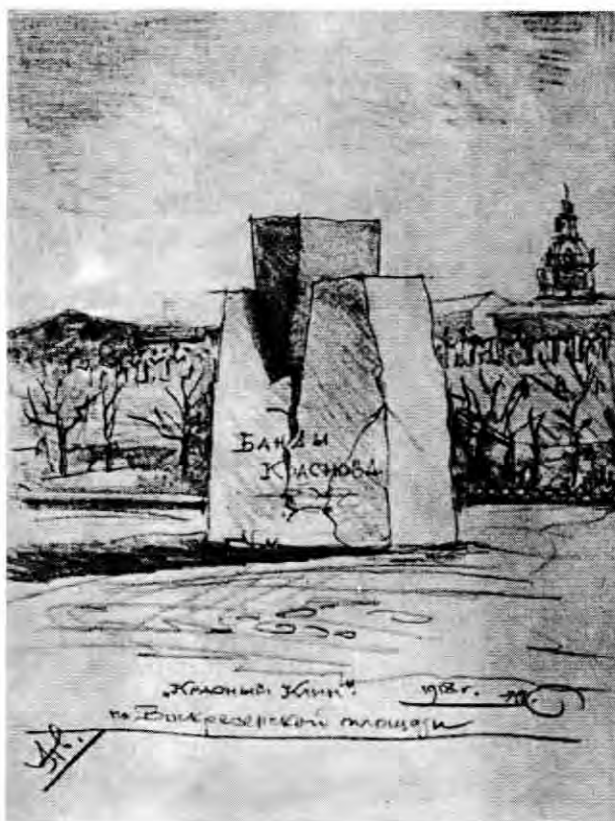
The emancipation of the proletariat is the work of the proletariat itself. Anything in Marxist theory or practice which is not permeated with this idea must be combated, and that includes the idea of "bringing consciousness from without". Communism was not a "doctrine", but "the

movement of the immense majority". There is no going beyond capital without "communist consciousness" and "the alteration of men", both "on a mass scale". And that means a self-alteration. What the Third Thesis on Feuerbach calls "revolutionising practice" refers, not to the activity of a "vanguard" armed with a "correct" programme, but to "the coincidence" of the changing of circumstances and human activity or self-change".

You make some kind noises about my assertion that Marx's question concerned "living humanly". But the basic conception of Bolshevism, which made the Party and the Workers' State into subjects, transformed this into a dream of the future, and thus a state of affairs which contradicts the struggle to attain it. If "revolutionising practice" is not already "living humanly", it is a lie. We tried to fight for the liberation of humanity, while ourselves living with the mentality of Party-slaves. I am not certain whether everything Marx wrote is compatible with this, but I think he wanted it to be.

Lenin and Trotsky were very great revolutionaries, but neither of them had the slightest idea about any of this. (Serge gets a lot closer.) They saw the revolution as an unfortunate necessity; living humanly came later. We must study their work, to see how the conditions under which they fought made it almost impossible to see it any differently, even for them. Now, it becomes possible, though difficult. That is why I shall continue to fight against every tendency to cling to old formulas, categories and habits of thought.

Best wishes,
Cyril



Islamic Fundamentalism

Yasmin Mather

Over the last few years Islamic fundamentalism has been portrayed by some in the West, especially the US administration, as a major world threat. The atrocities committed by a number of Islamic groups, such as the GIA in Algeria, fundamentalists in Egypt or the Islamic states in Iran or Afghanistan, have been used to whip up a sense of hysteria against Islam. In this article we will try to explain the diverse and often contradictory nature of Islamic fundamentalism, both in Iran where an Islamic state came to power in 1979 and among Islamic movements in the Arab world. We will argue that fundamentalism – contrary to the propaganda of its supporters and its enemies alike – has only strengthened capitalism in Islamic countries, and that, since it poses a diversion to the development of revolutionary movements in these countries, it can only reinforce the status quo. We will further argue that as Islamic fundamentalism is not a monolithic force, and because most of the Islamic world is an integral part of world capitalism, twentieth century Islam is unlikely to threaten “The West” as some want us to believe. In this respect it is important to note that the financial backers of some of the most barbaric Islamic groups, such as the Taleban, are Saudi Arabia, the Gulf states and Pakistan, all amongst the staunchest allies of the United States in the region. Others, such as the GIA (Algeria) and the Egyptian fundamentalists responsible for recent bombings, are by-products of the Afghan war paid by Saudi money or CIA funds in Pakistan – although at present some of these groups might be out of the control of their pay masters.

Why Fundamentalism?

The sociological reasons behind Islamic fundamentalism have been discussed by many writers and analysts. Industrialization and the rural exodus that started in the 1960s in most Middle Eastern countries saw the creation of shanty towns around many cities. The state in these countries was incapable of dealing with this demographic change. Poverty, unemployment, cultural differences and lack of social mobility all played a part in the alienation of shanty town dwellers from the rest of urban society. At the same time, the rate of literacy increased and state education allowed sections of the petty bourgeoisie access to higher education. Many of the cadres of Islamist parties came from this section, while their rank-and-file support is mainly from the lumpen youth of the shanty towns. The rise of Islamic fundamentalism in the Middle East coincided with disillusionment with Marxist, secular ideologies and the failures of Stalinist parties. In Egypt, Algeria

and Iraq the popularity of fundamentalism was a reaction to the failures of Arab nationalism and Baathism, and in Afghanistan it was a direct consequence of the failure of the Stalinist state. Contrary to popular belief, neo-fundamentalism is not simply a reaction against modernisation, but a by-product of modernisation. As a result it is often a nationalist movement dominated by the cultural and political aspirations of various nation states, rather than a monolithic Islamist movement.

Contradictions and Impasses of Islamic Fundamentalism

There are many reasons, inherent in Islam, why it cannot become a world threat, unifying Muslims in tens of countries. First and foremost is the division between Sunni and Shia sections of Islam, which is at times more profound than divisions between Muslims and followers of other religions. Shias mainly live in Iran, parts of Iraq, and as a minority in Lebanon and Afghanistan; the rest of the Islamic world is predominantly Sunni. The establishment of the first Shia state in Iran has led to some virulent anti Shia propaganda by Sunni clerics and Sunni fundamentalists of the Islamic Brotherhood. Second, the divisions within either of these sections regarding essential theological issues, as well as arguments regarding the role of political Islam, the position of women and economic issues have constantly fragmented and weakened Islamic movements. As there is no single Islamic culture and no single Islamic nation or language, Islamist movements are primarily divided along national and regional lines.

The Iranian Revolution of 1979

If the Iranian revolution was the beginning of the rise of fundamentalism – albeit in a non Shia state – the failure of “political Islam” in Iran, and the gradual yet consistent transformation of the Islamic state in Iran to “civil society” marks the beginning of the end for the dream of an Islamic state based on Sharia (religious law and practice). The Iranian uprising was a direct result of the failures of the Shah’s regime to respond to the economic crisis that followed the economic boom of the early 1970s. Most skilled workers faced a drop in their living standards in 1976. The White Revolution had left massive numbers of peasants landless and penniless, going in search of seasonal jobs in major cities. Recession in the Iranian economy left them unemployed and destitute in shanty

towns. In addition to the above two groups, the small independent producers had been forced out of business (made bankrupt) with the help of Iran's Chamber of Commerce, to rescue the already privileged position of big industrialists. Corruption and the rule of a clique around the Royal court meant that many traditional merchants, often associated with the bazaar, were deprived of large profits available to the more privileged sections of the ruling class. The clergy, which had survived the repressive measures of the Shah's dictatorship by compromising with the regime, was in a much better position to benefit from political discontent than secular, socialist groups who had lost many in their ranks through execution and imprisonment.

Historical Background of Shia Clergy in Iran

Historically, Iranian intellectuals are responsible for portraying Shia Islam in Iran as a "progressive force". This concept, encouraged in the 1950s-1980s by Stalinist ideology, is based on the myth that Shia clerics were absent from political power during the rule of various dynasties in Iran, and therefore were part of the movements against absolute monarchs. In fact religious Shia leaders were functionaries of the court (in the Safavid/Qajar dynasties), lived in the court and were part of the establishment and the state. During the Constitutional Revolution, the main aim of the clergy was to stop radical movements and, at best, sections of the clergy sided with constitutional monarchists (e.g. Ayatollah Behbahani), while the majority of the clergy was mainly concerned with defending feudalism. During what became known as the "tobacco uprising" most of the Shia clergy ended up in the gardens of the British Embassy supporting one colonial power (Britain) against another (Russia). During the oil crisis of 1953 a minority within the Shia clergy originally supported the limited demands of the nationalists – but as the balance of forces changed in favour of the Shah, they suddenly moved back to support the Shah. The role of the clerical leader of the time, Ayatollah Kashani, is well documented. In 1963, at the time of the Shah's White Revolution, a reform from above aimed at transforming Iran to a modern capitalist state, the opposition of the clergy led by Khomeini was completely reactionary. The main planks of his main opposition were two issues: firstly, on the expropriation of the land of feudal land owners, Khomeini's objection was based on the sanctity of property in Islam; secondly, he opposed vehemently the reform to give women the right to vote. On both counts this opposition to reforms was clearly reactionary.

Contradictions of Sharia (Islamic Laws) – the Case of Shia Islam

One of the principle pillars of Shia ideology is the con-

cept of the return of the 12th Imam, who disappeared 13 centuries ago and will only return to earth when corruption, injustice... have reached unbearable levels. In his absence any government is deemed to be unjust and corrupt. In fact as many clerical delegates of the Iranian parliament have repeatedly reminded us over the last few years, any attempt by government, even a religious government, at improving social conditions, reducing corruption, reducing poverty or narrowing the gap between the rich and the poor can only delay the arrival of the 12th Imam and therefore contradicts Shia theology. Such ideas are useful when the clergy is in opposition, as they were in the early history of Islam in 7th and 8th century, but it is a serious hindrance to them when in power. The Shia state is further based on the cult of personality of its martyred imams and innocence of these imams. Again this worked fine as a historic concept, when stories of the bravery of long-dead imams could inspire devotion martyrdom. It is more difficult with a living imam (in this case Khomeini) in the last decades of the 20th century, when a minor (or major) indiscretion such as the Irangate scandal can tarnish the image of the supreme cleric overnight. Rule of Sharia in a country where the capitalist mode of production and urbanisation are so advanced is doomed to failure.

However the principle cause for the failure of political Islam is that once it takes power, it institutionalises itself and in the absence of any Islamist economic policy (i.e. an alternative to capitalism or socialism) it inevitably becomes another third world capitalist state, with all the limitations of such a state. Let us remember that the rise of Islamic fundamentalism had a lot to do with the envy of the merchants of the bazaar who could never match the colossal fortunes gathered by the industrial bourgeoisie around the court and the state in the previous regime. This envy of "monopoly" capital led them to back the clergy, their traditional ideological representatives. Yet once in power, in order to survive and prosper in an international capitalist order, this bourgeoisie inevitably had to replace the very capitalists they despised. In some cases, where expertise and international capital were necessary, the Islamic state invited the previous capitalists to return. In other cases they themselves tried to replace the old capitalists. The very people who argued against Western consumption and accumulation became the consumers, and indeed as modernity is irreversible and universal, the bazaar merchants of Iran who so vehemently were anti-Western in the late 1970s, have become pro-Western in the late 1990s. A reflection of this, which can also be seen in the "Hezbollah" (supporters of the clergy), is described by Olivier Roy as the neo-fundamentalism of Iran with a schizophrenic approach: a hatred of one self for wanting Western consumption (therefore under the influence of Western culture) and a long battle to possess it.

The economics of a capitalist state necessitate a "civil society". Most of the internal battles of the Islamic regime in Iran over the last 9-10 years are indeed part of this struggle. On the one hand those who still believe in

the rule of Sharia and those (religious forces) who have decided that the only way to survive is the establishment of the rule of law in a truly capitalist state. The current president of the Islamic regime best portrays this position – but even as early as 1979, despite all the religious rhetoric, the constitution of the first Islamic Republic is far more law-based than many people have been led to believe, with a role for the parliament, the legislative and executive centres of power in the day-to-day running of the state, and religion in all senses taking very much a secondary role. Many have seen this as a clear reflection of the poverty of Islamic thinking on the issue of political institutions. Olivier Roy suggests that, despite many books and essays written by Islamic theologians on details of the rule of Sharia, Iran's policies over the last 19 years can be described as the policies of the crown (the previous order under the Shah) being pursued under the turban (a reference to the clerical hat worn by Shia clergy) ("la couronne sous le turban"). Many arguments typical of capitalism have been aired in the Iranian parliament, the Majles – the battle between the statist reformers and defenders of the free market being a primary example. It has been argued that until 1989 and the death of Khomeini, those favouring state ownership dominated the Majles, whereas it is quite clear that since 1989 defenders of the free market have had the upper hand.

In summary, both in economic and political spheres, the first Islamic state has been predominantly, and is increasingly becoming, a capitalist state with "nationalist" overtones rather than religious ones.

International Politics

Another pillar of the Sharia deals with the concept of Islamic "Ummah" or the Islamic nation. In many nations, including Iran, examples of Islamic forces in power and in conflict with fellow Muslims over land or oil can be seen. Thus the concept of the Islamic nation is no more than a myth, with nation states fighting for "national" or "regional" interests far more aggressively than they do in defence of the so-called Islamic nation. The eight year war between Iran and Iraq clearly demonstrated this, where both countries relied heavily on Arab and Persian identities.

Contrary to those who believe that Iran's foreign policy was third worldist, one could argue that it was never more than a continuation of the Shah's policies of becoming a regional power. The real policy of Iran has been dominated by competition with Turkey, Pakistan, Iraq and Saudi Arabia with strong nationalist overtones. In order to become a regional power, Iran pursues a pragmatic foreign policy rather than an Islamist policy, despite all the rhetoric we have heard from its leaders. For example in pursuit of a fierce competition with Turkey, Iran supported Christian Armenia versus Muslim Azerbaijan, simply because Turkey backed the latter. Iran opposed the Taleban advances in Afghanistan; its propaganda talked of the

Taleban giving a bad name to Islam. But in reality the defenders of Hezbollah in Lebanon can't be too concerned about the public image of Taleban, rather the main concern was that Taleban were supported by Saudi and Pakistani money, competitors with Iran in the battle for domination of Afghanistan. Iran has kept contacts and reasonable relations with Israel, mainly because the enemy of its enemies (the Arabs) must be a friend.

Of course Iranian leaders have made a great deal of their support for the deprived Muslims of the world. But in practice, given their total mistrust of Sunni groups, this has amounted to support for a handful of specific splinter groups of the Shia community in Lebanon (under Hezbollah) and a minority of the Shia community in Iraq and Pakistan, most of whom are of Iranian descent. In fact the Islamist rhetoric of the Iranian regime is very much coming to an end. The recent interview of the Iranian president with CNN signals a significant shift in this policy; he not only expressed great admiration for the American civilisation and its struggles for independence but went further and expressed regret at the takeover of the US embassy in 1980.

The only issue that remains of Iran's Islamist international rhetoric is the Fatwa on Salman Rushdie, and in this the fundamentalist regime is in a dilemma. Economic needs require better relations with European countries, yet Khomeini's word cannot be contradicted and Iran's competition with Saudi Arabia as the defender of the faith depends on this.

Women and Islamic Fundamentalism

For over 19 years Iranian women have been victims of the patriarchal laws of the first Islamic Republic.

Both under the current regime and the previous regimes Iranian women have been deprived of many of their basic human rights and have suffered from both patriarchal ideologies that treat women as irrational and immature, and from widespread discrimination which affects their lives from birth to death. There is no doubt that since the establishment of the Islamic Republic in 1979, the plight of women has become worse. During the years of modernisation in the 1970s, a large number of Iranian women found work in factories and offices. Many clerics argued that "the honour and dignity accorded women by Islam" had vanished. One of the first acts of Ayatollah Khomeini was the enforcement of the veil on the 8th of March 1979, less than a month after the establishment of the Islamic regime. The refusal of many organisations of the left to defend women's rights on this day led to catastrophic consequences: the Iranian regime started a systematic attack on women's rights, and the left lost credibility as a defender of women's rights and a supporter of democratic rights.

The policy of enforced hejab (veil) and segregation was

subsequently used to limit women's access to education and recreation facilities, and to institutionalise women's confinement to the limited career and life opportunities available to them, thus ensuring they become second class citizens. The new government also launched a campaign to drive women out of office jobs and to discourage them from any careers other than nursing and education.

Government propaganda openly talked of the "shame and dishonour" of working in an office and school hours were changed to make life more difficult for working mothers. All government-funded nurseries and day care centres attached to offices and factories were closed.

Some Iranian feminists have since argued that Islamic laws including those on the hejab (veil) have had a liberating effect on Iranian women. But in reality the veil was used to ensure that Islamic moral order is not defied and the veil became an institutionalised practise of Islamic patriarchy.

Behind it all was a strategy of ensuring a return to traditional roles. The emphasis on motherhood as an essential feminine character forms a pillar of Islamic gender ideology. The heroine of Shia ideology is Fatmeh, a daughter of the prophet who married Ali (the first Shia Imam) at a very young age, gave birth to his three sons and died at eighteen.

The majority of Iranian muslim girls live in a world dominated and manipulated by their male relatives. They can be given away in legal marriage without their knowledge or consent while still in their childhood. The process, in effect, paves the way for selling families to sell their under-aged girls in return for financial gains.

The law of Hodud and Qesas (the law of tallion and physical punishments) treats women as half-human (or nothing) even in their honesty or observation power, valuing a woman's testimony in courts as half of a male's testimony (or even as nil when it comes to testifying against murderers; according to article 33 of this law, no woman's testimony is ever admissible in murder cases).

The laws governing marriage are among the most regressive in the world in terms of the discrimination against women. While males are allowed to marry up to four wives at a time in permanent marriage and an unlimited number of women in what is known as "temporary" marriage, strict monogamy is expected from women. Any woman who deviates from this set-up may be brutally and savagely punished by publicly, by being stoned to death – the officially-sanctioned, and frequently executed, punishment for extra-marital affairs.

Inside marriage, the man is given almost a free hand in controlling his wife or wives. Rape inside marriage is sanctioned (as no consent is required for sexual relations inside marriage); wife-beating is tolerated and even encouraged by the Koran: women who disobey their men should

be beaten up (soura 30).

A woman's movement may be restricted by her husband, and his permission is required for getting official travel documents. The law gives very few (if any) rights to women in sharing decisions in married life and/or in regards to the custody of children. Moreover, there are no proper provisions in the law to prevent men from transgressing their rights and/or abusing the extensive power they have inside marriage.

When it comes to divorce, again, the man has almost a free hand, while the woman has a very limited recourse to the law. The grounds on which a man can divorce his wife are almost unlimited, while only in very unusual circumstances can a woman file for divorce. The extent of this gross and utterly discriminatory law was best exemplified by a report last year that an Iranian court has taken fourteen years to approve a divorce request from a woman who complained she was tortured by her husband, regularly reporting new incidents of abuse to the court; she finally agreed to drop all financial demands against her husband, and had to contact Iran's Prosecutor-General to get her divorce. In another case, the process took eight years.

The divorce law also inflicts huge financial and emotional blows to the woman. The woman has to forfeit almost all financial claims if she files for divorce, while the settlement she receives if the divorce is initiated by the man is still very limited. The emotional loss is much greater and



more hurtful: the woman is deprived from the custody of her children (some as young as two); custody is usually awarded to the man. Within and without marriage, even the father's father is given priority over the mother in custody matters.

The extent of discrimination against women in marriage goes still further. A virgin woman (whatever her age) has no right to marriage without the consent of her father (or her father's father, in the absence of her father). A Muslim woman has no right to marry a non-Muslim, (a right her male counterparts have, with some limitations).

Discriminatory laws against women have created favourable conditions and a suitable environment for widespread abuses and atrocities against women. Women have no effective recourse to the law in case they are abused, beaten or raped. Even many incidents of rape outside marriage go unreported because of the justifiable fears of the victim from being "dishonoured", cursed or even murdered by members of her own family and friends, or being prosecuted by the State and brutally punished by a large number of lashes or stoned to death if she was judged by the court as being a willing partner.

Many of the common laws such as the law of Hodud and Qesas, in conjunction with the discriminatory laws mentioned above, work directly against women. As another example, if someone commits homicide in an all-female environment (the frequency of which is itself a consequence of sexual segregation inside and outside the house), it will be impossible to get a conviction based solely on the testimony of the women present (no matter how many of them). According to article 33 of the law of Hodud and Qesas, no homicide case may be proved in court solely on the basis of women's testimonies.

Defiance of the hejab code is punishable by 74 lashes (as very few women will ever dare walk out without a head scarf this often means showing a fringe) and, "since the crime is self-evident", punishment does not require a court decision and enforcement of the punishment can be immediate. Women are either arrested or given verbal warnings. Those who are caught showing a fringe under a hejab are accused of "flaunting their naked bodies in the streets" and denounced as "corrupt, seditious, dangerous and destructive of public honour and chastity". Others face the 74 lashes. Some women have had paint splashed on their faces by patrolling Islamic squads.

Iranian women have been fighting hard against these injustices, but have had limited success in the face of the overwhelming power of the State and its institutions. The privileged position of a handful of token women, mainly close relatives of senior clerics, in higher echelons of the Islamic government, should not deceive anyone.

At a time when many Iranian feminists in exile have become apologists for the Islamic regime, it is up to the revolutionary left to defend and support the struggles of Ira-

nian women with commitment, determination and as a major part of the struggle against the Islamic regime.

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The Bosnian Miners' International Workers' Conference - "Defend Social Property" 14-15 March

Bob Myers

This conference raises some important questions for Marxists. First a short report. (A full report of discussions available from Durham NUM, fax 0191 386 6824, is worth reading.) Attendance - about 90 people in total: national and local trade union leaders from: Russia - engineering workers (two miners were blocked by the Russian authorities. Hungary - teachers and miners, Balazs Nagy (leading activist in the 1956 uprising). Turkey - communications workers. Greece - Athens Labour Union. Serbia - energy workers, Independent Trade Union Federation, Journalist from Metal Workers Union, Radoslav Pavlovic (first proposer of the Workers' aid convoys to Bosnia). Bosnia - miners, electrical supply workers, teachers, food and distributive unions, President of Bosnian TUC, mine directors, economists, a government representative, journalists from TV, radio and papers. Austria - union activists involved with LabourNet. France - teachers, energy workers. Spain - railway workers and Workers' Aid. Sweden - SAC trade union. Scotland - Scottish TUC, Edinburgh and Aberdeen TUCs. England - Liverpool Dockers, General and Municipal Workers Union, Durham and Northumberland NUM, UNISON, TGWU, BECTU and Workers Aid. South Africa - miners. Two Kosova miners were unable to travel due to new wave of repression in Kosova. Bosnian miners proposed a message of solidarity to Kosova workers, condemning repression of the Albanian population.

Conference took place in the Bosnian miners' hotel. Delegates were able to spend time together outside conference sessions to make closer personal contacts - particularly useful for the delegates from ex-Yugoslavia.

Conference opened with a short statement by the Bosnian miners' president explaining the miners' fears concerning privatisation of mines which they expected the government to push through at some point. Privatisation was already proceeding in many industries without consulting workers.

Then came a long, slick presentation from a representative of the Government's privatisation board outlining how their "model" of privatisation would lead to job losses in the "first stage" but eventually to growth.

The President of the Bosnian TUC made a demagogic speech attacking government corruption but went on to say privatisation was inevitable and he only opposed the government's methods.

A Bosnian economist, the only member of the Bosnian

government who opposed laws in 1994 that transferred social property to state property, spoke. He made a damning indictment of the robbery taking place of workers property. He said that privatisation was inevitable but that the property should be privatised into the hands of the workers.

For the rest of the conference there was open discussion. 37 delegates spoke. The Northumberland miners' president outlined what had happened to British miners. Most of the delegates from different countries passed on similar information about how privatisation had devastated the working class. Some said that privatisation must be fought, others thought that the Bosnian miners might have to accept it but fight to minimise the damage. The Turkish delegate brought the only news of how militant workers had fought and defeated a proposed privatisation. Some of the Bosnian miners wanted more information - as they saw it, to avoid the mistakes made by others in the privatisation process - while other miners, particularly the working miners, wanted a categorical rejection of privatisation. The South African NUM representative outlined the Tripartite talks in which the NUM were involved with Government and Mine owners to solve problems, but also agreed that private ownership of mines was not good for miners. The Scottish TUC and General and Municipal Union delegates both outlined various aspects of the attack on the working class that had gone on under privatisation and urged the Bosnian miners, if they did choose to accept privatisation, to make sure that legislation was in place first to stop the worst aspects of destruction of workers' standards and employers' enrichment.

A Serbian delegate touched on the war, refusing to accept collective guilt for a war he had never supported. Milosevic was attacking the Serbian working class. A Hungarian miner described the great problems facing the working class. His union leaders supported privatisation and had tried to stop anyone coming to the conference. He stressed the importance of this and future conferences to exchange information and to begin to develop a leadership that could fight for the working class. He was sure that the contacts made at the conference would not be broken.

The miners proposed a statement (see below) which was not voted on when some delegates explained that they were not mandated by their unions and would have to take it back to their members. Conference delegates, especially the Bosnian miners, felt that the conference had been very useful. The miners felt very proud that their

union, despite the ravages of war, had been able to hold an international workers conference in Bosnia. Workers' Aid prepared Bosnian and English versions of a pamphlet containing 12 articles on the experiences of privatisation of workers in mines and other industries in Britain, Russia, Greece and Kosovo. It also contained an article by the socialist economist, Keith Gibbard, outlining the history of the global privatisation campaign. Cliff Slaughter wrote on the question "What kind of capitalism is coming to Eastern Europe". 100 copies of the Bosnian version were distributed to all the mines in Bosnia and to other unions.

****The conference was financed by British workers through appeals by Durham NUM and STUC.**

**** Some delegates remained in Tuzla for a public meeting on the Monday night launching a new book Taking Sides Against Ethnic Cleansing in Bosnia - the Story of the Workers Aid Convoys. The meeting was packed out. The first person to speak from the floor was a Serbian journalist from Belgrade who asked Bosnians to forgive Serbs for what had been done in the name of all Serbs and which Serbs had been unable to stop. He hoped Bosnians would be able to help Serbs as fascism had to continue its attack on the working class, now against Kosovo and Serbian workers. The Tuzla citizens, proud defenders of multi-ethnic society (workers' unity) welcomed this anti-nationalist Serb with their hands and their hearts. Other speakers from the floor spoke of the working class solidarity carried out by Workers' Aid during the war. The miners President explained how this internationalism had helped them to see the way forward and explained to the audience about the weekend's conference with its representation from so many countries. The teachers' president reported that Workers' Aid had helped them organise the first post-war meeting of teachers representatives from across ex-Yugoslavia in 1997 and that the teachers were going to follow this up with an international teachers conference in Bosnia.**

**** Both the conference and the book launch were featured on television, radio and in the press. TV coverage also went out on satellite channels to the refugee community in Europe.**

**** On reaching home the Russian delegate gave a report to the Russian miners representatives who were blocked from travelling and they have sent an invitation to the Bosnian miners to visit Russia.**

Comment on the Conference

The Iranian comrades responsible for initiating this journal made a big contribution to the Marxist movement in their analysis of the Iranian revolution. The terrible defeat of the Iranian revolution forced them to confront the inadequacies of the entire revolutionary movement. Many of those who pass for Marxists are still happy today to

wander through the "struggle" with the same bits of dogma that proved so useless to the Iranian working class. A willingness to confront this theoretical poverty is the starting point for collaboration, but it would be wrong to believe that because our past mistakes were so great and our efforts to overcome them are still so inadequate that to occupy positions of leadership in the class struggles will simply add to the list of disasters. The working class is pushed into struggles and tries to resolve its problems. The greatest disaster for Marxism is to stand aside from those class battles and learn nothing from them. Could the working class respond to the rise of fascism in Yugoslavia? Did we know nothing?

Marxism had been fought for decades in a struggle against Stalinism, establishing its counter-revolutionary role. In its final act against the working class, Stalinism in Yugoslavia allied itself with the open fascists and attacked the working class. Most of the left internationally fell silent, all tied in one way or another to the Milosevic's claim to be "defending socialist Yugoslavia". Marxist had to fight this accommodation to Serbian nationalism. Starting with a comrade inside Serbia this was done.

Did the break up of Stalinism open up a new opportunity for the working class to organise itself as an international class - in Europe, above all, to overcome the fifty year east/west division? You could not answer yes to this question and then see the working class in Yugoslavia smashed to pieces. Marxists had to work to find a way that the working class could organise itself to intervene against the counter revolution. The Workers' Aid campaign, while making many mistakes and completely inadequately theoretically prepared, did find a way to begin to do that.

The perspective that the death of Stalinism opened a qualitatively new period for the working class, and therefore for Marxism, was tested out in the Yugoslav war. Despite the military attack that the dying remnants of Stalinism and the UN unleashed against the Bosnian workers their unity has not been completely destroyed. What a different outcome than to Spain in 1936. And in the midst of the Bosnian workers' self defence Workers' Aid was able to bring the international working class onto the scene, not in large numbers but in sufficient force for elements within the Bosnian working class to begin to develop a perspective of turning towards the international self-organisation of the working class as the solution to their problems.

This is the statement the miners union proposed at the end of the 14-15th conference:

* Analysing the discussion and experiences at the conference from workers around the world we have become convinced that privatisation is against the interests of workers and especially the miners of Bosnia and Herzegovina whose union organised this conference.

* As a direct response to the globalisation of capital it is

necessary for workers to organise themselves on an international basis to oppose the privatisation process which is also internationally organised.

* Following this conference we call for all workers' and trade union organisations who share our views to contact us and let us know their views. We will then organise a second international conference for everyone who has contacted us (time and place to be decided) at which we would propose the establishment of an international campaign for trade union solidarity with a committee to implement conference decisions.

* We appeal to trade unions internationally to support the miners trade union of Bosnia and Herzegovina morally, politically and materially to enable us to continue to lead the fight against privatisation and to achieve our demand that our mines stay as public property, organised as a single public company. In this way miners and their union will have the biggest possible influence to defend the rights and social conditions of workers and their families.

To many "learned revolutionaries" this resolution will not seem very dramatic - they knew and understood these things years ago. These "revolutionaries", however, never have to deal with the problems that the working class has to confront.

A few weeks before the conference the Citizens Association of Lukovac, a mining town near Tuzla, organised a public meeting to discuss the Bosnian government's privatisation plans. 400 miners and their families attended. Workers attacked the government for failing to send any representatives to answer questions. The leader of the new Bosnian Socialist Party attacked the government for corruption but said he thought privatisation was inevitable. The President of the Bosnian TUC agreed with this. Miners then angrily attacked the TUC leader for having no plans to fight privatisation.

Behind the workers' anger was not just the future of the mines. Many factories have mysteriously ended up in the private hands of previous directors or people connected with government. Housing is also being privatised. Most workers live in apartments built with money from their companies, ie their money. These are now being sold and people are being evicted.

The miners at the Lukovac meeting echoed the anger and frustration of working people across Eastern Europe. The Bosnian miners' newspaper carried an editorial announcing the 14-15 March conference under the slogan "Let the voice of the workers be heard". (Not a small question for the Marxist movement which has, for the most part, been concerned only to make its voice heard). When the conference opened the chairman repeated this slogan. However, the first session of the conference showed the ideological and material pressure on the working class to prevent it finding its voice. The government spokesman's

speech was really prepared by international capital after all its experiences of privatisation over 20 years. The Bosnian TUC president's speech was really prepared for him by the big international TU Federations who have rushed into Bosnia, as they have done across Eastern Europe, to support the privatisation process (see the Workers' Aid pamphlet *How the International TU Organisations Supported the Ethnic Division of Bosnia and the Transfer of its Social Property to Control of Western Banks*). The attack on the working class in Bosnia is organised internationally by both the direct and indirect representatives of capital while the Bosnian working class is isolated and fragmented by four years of war and with access to information very limited.

The miners at Lukovac expressed their anger but how do they turn their basic understanding that they are being robbed into a coherent, organised, class voice? This was the central task for the conference. Does Marxism, even our very inadequate Marxism, have anything to contribute to this? Well, for a start the miners, concerned about the future of their mines, had called an international workers conference to discuss it. In other words, through our collaborative work, we had helped to start the discussion at the international level - the only serious basis for such a discussion.

The conference came about for many reasons but important amongst them were:

*The surviving connection between the working class and the legacy of the partisan revolution made by their parents, a legacy expressed both in the opinion that the factories and mines belong to the workers and in the spirit of unity and solidarity in sections of the Yugoslav working class. It was this unity that the Stalinists bureaucrats had to destroy to push through privatisation. Their violence failed and the resistance to their attack, especially in the multi-ethnic mining communities, has actually sharpened the working class spirit.

*The war time Workers' Aid convoy campaign began to restore, in the minds of some Bosnian workers, the idea of practical international solidarity.

*Workers' Aid helped the miners visit workers in Britain to see for themselves the effects of capitalism. They visited destroyed mining areas of Britain and saw what privatisation had done. They visited Liverpool Dockworkers and saw what casualisation had done.

At the conference solidarity became a very practical sharing of experience and problems. Few people made the kind of speeches, full of noise and little else, that are usually found at conferences. This was a meeting of workers (some of them Marxists) trying to deal with big problems. A working miner, fresh from the pit, made the planned attack against the Bosnian miners very clear. The Bosnian authorities have decided that a natural gas pipeline from Russia will be extended to Tuzla and Zenica -

the two main coal producing and consuming areas.

The picture of privatisation given by the President of the Northumberland miners destroyed the image created by the government spokesman. As more and more reports were given the perspective put forward by the president of the Bosnian TUC - privatisation is inevitable so try to get the best deal - also began to be pushed aside. (Even though most Bosnians had cheered the TUC president when he attacked the government spokesman for corruption they all noted that when the government spokesman suddenly withdrew from the conference in the middle of the first afternoon, the President of the TUC got up and left as well, and they could be seen outside setting of together back for Sarajevo.)

By the morning of the second day the miners' leaders, who through their visits to Britain had already formed their own personal ideas of opposing privatisation, were ready to read out their statement from their whole union committee opposing privatisation as not in the miners' interests.

The conference and the processes of collaboration leading up to it had succeeded in giving the miners their voice, a working class perspective for a fight against the restoration of capital and the exercise of their own control over their mines..

The miners are already leading a campaign inside the trade union movement in Bosnia for a new democratic, independent leadership. Last year a miner stood for election against the President of the TUC. He was not successful at that point but the conference, televised across the country, will help other workers in other industries stand up against the robbery that they see taking place but which they had felt powerless to stop.

So the conference not only enabled the Bosnian working class to begin to find its voice, it also helped a section of the working class to raise a beacon of international organisation in its appeal to trade unionists world wide to contact them to develop a solidarity campaign. There were conference delegations from many countries but there were also messages from unions that could not come. One was from the Pakistan Trade Union Federation supporting the miners fight against capitalism. The appeal of the miners, an appeal for help and at the same time a message of internationalism, can become a pole of attraction for militant trade union organisations. It is vital that everyone fights in their own organisations for a response to the miners' proposal. Financial support for the Bosnian miners' union is also needed to enable them to lead this fight. They have been invited to Russia where hundreds of thousands of miners have not been paid for many months. This kind of coming together of workers is essential. Without it there can be no successful movement against capital.

The miners have said "no" to privatisation but with the natural gas pipe line on the drawing board this is not

enough. Capital would only buy the mines to close them. Resistance can be met by isolation and a freezing of investment. The need for a "workers plan" becomes acute. Such a plan requires concrete technical, economic and scientific knowledge.

One Bosnian has pointed out the need for producing glass in Bosnia which is in great demand. Tuzla has the raw materials. The question of "co-operatives", even on an international scale, comes up just as it has for the Liverpool dockers and other workers who capitalism deems "excess" to requirements. Such a strategy, however, can only be accomplished through the mobilisation of the working class against capital and capitalism. The miners' cannot make alternative plans without a fight for control over their resources.

But the way this "debate" arises is significant. The miners, with close allies amongst some economists, technical experts, etc., start to confront their problems, not with their eyes fixed on parliament, but on "their" resources. In the midst of social devastation there are natural resources, machines and human skills. Why shouldn't these come together for social benefit? Isn't it possible to see in this the necessary, intimate relation between the social(ist) and political revolutions? Solutions are not to be found "up there" in parliament which only presents itself as more and more an obstacle to doing what obviously needs to be done by working people themselves.

Both before and after the conference there has been a discussion about the nature of "social property". Yugoslavia's history is clearly different from the rest of the post WWII "socialist" states. The elimination of the capitalist class in Yugoslavia came about through popular mass mobilisation in opposition to Stalin's dictat unlike the imposition of Soviet rule through the Red Army in Poland, Hungary etc.

This imprint of the deep social movement in Yugoslavia in WWII, despite its political limitations and the subsequent incorporation into the Soviet bloc, was clearly seen in the different property relations that existed in Yugoslavia. Unlike the rest of Eastern Europe there was no state ownership. Instead there was "social ownership" with control formally exercised through workers self management. In reality the workers did not exercise control. This was taken over by the Communist Party, claiming to speak on their behalf. In 1994 this process of destroying the inner content of social property was taken a step forward when the Bosnian government nationalised most social property in order to "define ownership" - in reality in order to prepare for privatisation.

The Sarajevo economist told the miners they could not defend social property as it was already nationalised. Other people from the left have queried the miners' defence of social property on the basis that it was never really under workers' control.

These arguments miss the point. It could be seen at the Lukovac meeting and at the conference that miners feel the mines belong to them and in the present fight, in attempting to stop themselves being robbed, they are defining their relationship with the mines. But the challenge facing the miners' union, which until a few years ago was more a part of the administration of the mine than a representative of miners, is can it now turn to its members and to the wider working class. A campaign to defend social property can only advance if it is turned over to wider and wider sections of the class. Again, that is not something for us to simply speculate about. A campaign in the working class internationally to support their stand will encourage and strengthen the hand of the Bosnian working class to exercise growing participation and control over the campaign that has been launched at the conference.

Now, more than ever, Marxists have to confront our theoretical weakness, the lack of an adequate programme in the working class, the lack of answers to the problems such an international mobilisation of the working class requires if it is to be developed and sustained. But if we have begun to restore Marxism to its true relationship with the revolutionary class (not the revolutionary, thinking, "party" and the passive class) then clearly this work on programme cannot be done just by those who designated themselves as 'Marxists' or separate from the rebuilding, by the class itself, of its own international organisations including its trade union federations and its international.

Bob Myers. A member of Workers' Aid for Bosnia and Movement for Socialism

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8

JUIN 1998 - N°8 (DOUBLE) - TRIMESTRIEL - 80 F

Le socialisme est le seul but qu'une intelligence contemporaine puisse s'assigner.
(Siniavsky devant ses juges)

Preliminary Analysis of Eritrean-Ethiopian War

Alasdair Guest

How unreal it seems to onlookers that former comrades in arms, who rid their countries of the brutal military dictatorship of Mengistu Haile Mariam, should now be engaged in a bitter and bloody war over the precise position of the Eritrean-Ethiopian border. A month of fighting has disrupted the lives of farmers and pastoralists, who should have been preparing for planting and shifting their herds before the annual rains. Tens of thousands are once more refugees facing hard times that they thought were behind them. Hundreds of civilians, including many children, have been killed or wounded, and casualties among the troops involved are, as usual, either unspoken or distorted. To the world at large the Eritrea - Ethiopia war came as a sad surprise, but conditions for its outbreak have been building almost since the victories over the Dergue in May 1991.

To a visitor, it is hard to see any difference once the border is crossed: the same soils, rocks, vegetation and people, and the same hardships of a peasant life where rains are uncertain, farming methods very primitive and the land has been devastated by years of neglect and abuse. The only outward sign is that in Tigray most people live in isolated farmsteads, whereas in Eritrea they cluster in villages surrounded by fields. That is a legacy of two different forms of land tenure. Centuries of feudalism in the Ethiopian empire forced families to eke a living from small holdings, from which as much as a half of produce went to their local lord or *ras*. Eritrea historically was not ruled from the Amhara heartland, and land was held communally and shifted from family to family through local agreement, hence the focal point of villages.

Like most borders in Africa, that between Ethiopia and Eritrea is a relic of colonialism, following major rivers, arbitrary straight lines and salients around major population centres. Italian invasion of Eritrea in 1890 was halted in its tracks by defeat at the hands of the feudal army of Emperor Menelik at the battle of Adwa in 1896. A series of treaties in the early 20th century, dominated by Italy and Britain, with its presence in the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, drew the border that appears on maps commissioned by Haile Selassie and made by the US Defense Mapping Agency in the 1960s and 70s. Before these treaties and Italian colonization, no such entity as Eritrea existed. The area was a constantly changing mosaic of local domains and partial control by the Ottoman Empire and British dominated Egypt. Following the removal of Italian colonialism from Eritrea in 1941 by joint British and Ethiopian forces, an eleven-year British mandate gave way in 1952 to semi-autonomy in loose federation with Ethio-

pia. Manipulation of the Eritrean assembly by Haile Selassie ended with the complete annexation of the territory as a province within his empire in 1962.

Eritrea's existence today stems from the eventual unity of most peoples of the area against the exploitation and barbarism, first of Amhara feudalism and then the Bonapartist Dergue regime that emerged from the revolutionary overthrow of Haile Selassie in 1974. The Dergue established its hegemony after the physical liquidation of all opposing left-wing parties and trades unions in the misnamed "Red Terror" of 1976-7. Although it was supported by the former Soviet Union, and instituted wide-reaching reform of land tenure and feudal taxation in Ethiopia, the Dergue was in no sense a left-wing or socialist force. It was a militaristic and corrupt bureaucracy, forced into reform by the popular uprising of the dominant peasant population. A long and bitter internal struggle between several Eritrea liberation movements, with different ethnic and political orientations was resolved in the form of the Eritrean Peoples' Liberation Front. The EPLF, although dominated by a leadership drawn mainly from christian Tigringna-speaking people from the highlands, formed a non-sectarian front that unified opposition forces.

The other central participant in the eventual victory over the Derge was the regionalist Tigray Peoples' Liberation Front, founded by ultra-left survivors from the "Red Terror". Partly under the tutelege and material support of the EPLF, itself deadlocked in the later stages of the war against the Dergue, the TPLF formed a loose alliance with other ethnic and regionalist groups in Ethiopia in the form of the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front. It was the rapid advance on Addis Ababa by the EPRDF, partly armed, tactically advised and supplied by the EPLF, that resolved the 30 year struggle in mid 1991. The Dergue was already in disarray and directionless following a series of major defeats in Eritrea by the EPLF, and the collapse of its Stalinist backers in the former Soviet Union. Although formal separation of Eritrea awaited the overwhelming support of Eritrean voters in a referendum in 1993, it was a de facto reality after the flight of Mengistu from Addis Ababa.

Many of the leaders of the EPLF and TPLF, notably their Secretaries, Issaias Afeworki and Meles Zenawi, are Tigringna and were politically and militarily trained in China during the 1970s. In the TPLF this training took a peculiar direction, many voicing allegiance to the ultra-bureaucratic regime of Enver Hoxha in Albania, even after his death and the collapse of Albania's tragi-comic

Stalinism. Perhaps its attraction was a relentless inward-looking orientation, which indeed characterises the leadership of the EPLF (now Peoples' Front for Democracy and Justice - PFDJ). Unlike Hoxha, the EPLF/PFDJ and TPLF, have not voiced any socialist conviction whatsoever, at least since the early 1980s. The EPLF programme, adopted at a congress in 1987, was little different from those of many other national liberation movements. It promised the widest democracy, social equality (including gender equality) and freedom of association, speech and political organization. Economic measure included the conversion of agrobusiness to state farms and equitable distribution of land to peasants, programmes of appropriate agricultural modernization, special attention to the problems of nomadic pastoralists (its main means of transporting supplies during the early stages of the war), nationalization of larger industries with worker participation in management, state regulation of banking and rents, a national programme of low-cost housing, the encouragement of capital inflow from expatriate Eritrean businessmen and so on.

To attempt to build anything approaching socialism in a small country, devastated by war, with a population dependent on food aid and with no developed material resources of any kind would be doomed to failure in isolation. To its credit, the EPLF sustained its forces during the liberation struggle by a fierce self-sufficiency, funded mainly by expatriate Eritreans. However, it failed to build any kind of links internationally with its natural allies in the labour movement. This aloofness made it impossible to work through an understanding of the nature of its adversaries, particularly Stalinism, to discuss the great dangers of nationalism, however resourceful and courageous, nor to grasp the pressures of imperialism that a future state of Eritrea would face. The EPLF showed a clear accommodation to imperialism during the Gulf War in 1991, just before its final victory over the Dergue, by support for US-led atrocities against the Iraqi people. It rationalized that position by simply equating Saddam with Mengistu, even saying it would welcome similar support. In the seven years since 1991, Meles and Issaias, along with Musaveni of Uganda have been lauded by successive US administrations as a "new type" of African leader. Former Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Countermeasures and Information Security, William Clarke, the US Ambassador Designate to Eritrea, emphasized Eritrea's central place in US strategic planning for control of the Red Sea in his statement to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on 16 June. The capital Asmara was in Haile Selassie's time the site of a major US satellite tracking and communications monitoring base, which shows signs of recently being re-equipped.

Liberated Eritrea faced great problems, devastation and theft of its communications and industrial base, no potential for export earnings and years of agricultural neglect after hundreds of thousands of peasants had fled repeated terror bombing. The new regime in Addis Ababa, a loose alliance of regionalist forces dominated by the TPLF, while

welcomed by the majority of Ethiopians faced growing unrest. One of the largest countries in Africa, Ethiopia's 60 million people are among the most diverse culturally, linguistically and ethnically. Previously it was dominated by feudalists and militarists drawn from the Amharinya-speaking minority of the central highlands, Tigrigna. Many smaller groups in the south-west and especially the Oromo demanded a greater measure of autonomy. The Oromo, previously existing in semi-slavery, constitute around 50% of the population and its most disadvantaged section. However, their wide distribution means that they do not constitute a majority in any one region of Ethiopia. The EPRDF's eventual response to growing regional dissent was an attempt to federalize the country on dominantly ethnic lines. This placed the Oromo in a minority in every semi-autonomous region, so fuelling their grievances. Of the new regions only Tigray has to some extent begun reconstruction, with accusations from other regions of being favoured with capital input by the dominantly Tigrayan leadership of the EPRDF. Moreover, Tigray's boundaries were re-drawn to include its western neighbour Begembder. In other words many other Ethiopians believe they are witnessing Tigrayan expansionism to swallow material resources, both agricultural and mineral, on a large scale. Many also saw collusion between the PFDJ and the former TPLF to create an axis of economic expansion in the north.

The border war superficially seems to stem from the Tigray administration's commissioning a high-quality map of the region from a major German firm of cartographers. This redrew the border with Eritrea, extending it to include in its central part several thousand square kilometres beyond that decided by imperialism and appearing on all previous maps. This annexed on paper some of the most potentially fertile land in a high rainfall area and also the site where seemingly rich goldfields had been discovered by local people and the Eritrean Department of Mines in a zone known previously to extend into Tigray. While the new survey was being conducted, Ethiopian authorities placed an embargo on sales to Eritrea of maps and aerial photographs of the whole country, which are held in Addis Ababa. Ostensibly to improve communications to the Tigrayan part of the new agricultural area in the Badme Plain, the Tigray government built a new road linking Axum to the main border area. The border dispute had been simmering since 1993, but negotiations to resolve it had made no headway by the end of 1997. The PFDJ maintained that although the border had its origins with imperialism, long usage had established it in international law. The EPRDF's position was that it had been established under duress and had been unchallenged until the separation of Eritrea. In early 1998 Ethiopian forces began harassing local farmers and administrators on the Eritrean side, to the extent that locals attempted to build a wall along the previous border.

In March 1998 Ethiopian troops occupied a small farming area below sea-level in the torrid Danakil depression 300 kilometres away at the eastern end of the disputed

boundary. Eritrea's counter was to move 9000 troops and 13 tanks into Badme, which eventually occupied the disputed area in early May after small skirmishes. By early June Ethiopian troops had moved in force to Badme, the Zela Ambessa area on the main Addis-Asmara highway and to the southern border near the port of Assab on the Red Sea. Major fighting broke out on all three fronts, with heavy losses on both sides, although unbiased reporting from the actual battle zones is lacking. War in earnest began with a pre-emptive strike by Ethiopian MIGs on Asmara military airport on 5 June, followed immediately by counterstrikes on the military airfield at Mekele, the capital of Tigray region. Conducted by inexperienced pilots flying small jet trainers, this Eritrean attack also bombed civilian areas in Mekele, resulting in 51 dead and 132 wounded, many of whom were school children. Later bombing of Asmara and the forward base of Ethiopian forces at Adigrat resulted in further civilian casualties. Italian diplomatic efforts fostered a moratorium on air strikes on 14 June, and at the time of writing ground hostilities have lessened with Eritrean forces still occupying the disputed areas. The EPRDF is threatening all-out war, claiming the Eritrean positions amount to invasion of its territory, albeit based on arbitrary new maps.

Both sides have expelled large numbers of resident civilians from their respective capitals, and have detained several hundred suspected of espionage. Upwards of 300,000 refugees have fled the battle areas, placing severe strains on already overstretched supplies of food aid. Despite a flurry of racist and near-fascist hysteria on the Internet from individuals in expatriate communities of both nationalities, there have been no reports of civilian hostility to nationals of either side remaining in urban areas. The electronic ravings that have overwhelmed an Eritrean forum on the world-wide web (<http://www.asmarino.com/asmarino/>) are embarrassing to follow. They reflect a resurgence of nationalism in Eritrea and resentment in Ethiopia at the loss of access to the Red Sea among isolated and powerless, yet highly privileged, petty-bourgeois elements who played no role except as donors during the liberation struggle.

Beneath the hostilities, the war of words and a barrage of rationalization and dissimulation from both sides lie fun-

damental issues. Both regimes in Asmara and Addis have proved powerless to satisfy the clear needs of ordinary people. The PFDJ continues to preside over a one-party state without a constitution, with no free press, independent political parties or trades unions, and continually puts back the date of pluralistic elections, despite the US State Department's willing and open assistance! By nationalizing all the land it has removed the one incentive for farmers, previously owning land communally, to modernise their agriculture and improve soils and irrigation for future generations. It has drawn in transnational capital - mainly from the Pacific Rim and Arabia - with the most generous fiscal conditions in any African country. It has further encouraged investment by free hand outs of prime agricultural land for the construction of industrial estates to manufacture luxury goods - a source of considerable resentment among recently dispossessed farmers. Those industries placed under state control after liberation are scheduled for privatization a la Thatcher. While there has been a building boom, financed in part by royalist Iranian and Korean funds, this is at the top end of the market to encourage the return of Eritrean expatriates and their capital. Building of basic housing is at a far slower pace, centring on establishing small private brickworks so that locals may build their own housing. While low-paid government employees have set up credit unions to overcome the awful housing shortage, poorer people have little chance of decent dwellings. The 1987 EPLF programme has been largely abandoned.

The PFDJ failure to improve the conditions of the large number of nomadic and semi-nomadic pastoralists by a crash programme of well drilling in the arid lands that they inhabit, and failure to improve communications in those areas so that they might more easily have access to food aid and markets, has created the conditions for splits on religious grounds. Long known for the peaceful co-existence of many ethnic and religious groups, Eritrea now has a terrorist problem in those areas most neglected. Most of the pastoralists are Muslim, and there are regular incursions by fundamentalists of Islamic Jihad, sponsored by the fundamentalist regime in the Sudan. The PFDJ, dominated by highland Christian Tigrigna speakers, has made vain attempts to corral desert peoples into fixed settlements to take up farming, with little sensitivity to their



ancient culture and clear preference for freedom of movement. More generally, the basic provision of safe water for domestic and livestock consumption is far from resolved, even villages close by Asmara having to depend on trucked-in supplies. A recent study to make a national inventory of potential water supply for irrigation, funded to the tune of 4.4 million *ecus* by the EU and managed by a transnational consortium of commercial consultants, appears to be in complete disarray. On this depends the sustainable expansion of agricultural production to make the country self-sufficient in staple grains.

Around 70% of Eritreans are to some degree dependent on imported food aid, many selling part of their rations as a means of generating cash. This forces down the market price of staples and depresses the incentive for surplus production by ordinary farmers. The only noticeable growth sector in agriculture is self-financed, small-scale pumped irrigation to produce vegetables and fruits. The vegetable market in Asmara has almost doubled since 1993. Prices are depressed and there is much waste. While this favours urban Eritreans, it further drives down the lot of peasant farmers. Although unemployment has fallen from the level of almost 70% in 1993, much work is casual, low-paid and not full-time. Since 1995 all Eritreans between 16 and 40 face conscription for 6 months military training in the arid wasteland on the Sudanese border, followed by a year's unpaid hard labour on major projects such as land clearance, reforestation and reconstruction of the Massawa to Asmara railway up the precipitate Red Sea escarpment. To its credit, the PFDJ has widened access to education in rural areas and established basic medical services across the country.

The EPRDF government in Ethiopia is faring no better, and there is justifiable resentment over failed promises in many rural areas, particularly those where life is hardest, such as the arid wastes of Afar bordering Eritrea's SE salient along the Red Sea. There banditry is on the increase and local leaders are pressing for separation from Ethiopia. By far the greatest suspicion is over the clear expansionary aims of the Tigray region, popularly regarded as being directly fostered by the Tigrayan leadership of the government. To some extent the scale of investment in Tigray is hidden from the rest of Ethiopia because of its remoteness and by supplies of materials and heavy equipment being imported through the Eritrean port of Massawa and along Eritrean roads, but more of that shortly.

It is difficult to see the present war as anything other than the material expression of jingoism by both EPRDF and PFDJ regimes, no matter which side provoked the action. Both are finding their original programmes impossible to carry out and face growing popular resentment. In Eritrea this is dominated by the high level of urban unemployment, especially among young people, the reluctance of expatriates to return and contribute their skills to reconstruction, and among the 50% of the population who have Islamic beliefs, principally those in rural areas. Ethiopia is on the verge of Balkanization, which in many respects

Eritrea's declaration of independence began. Neither that nor a fully centralized state can satisfy the aspirations of its majority Oromo population. Jingoism is a universal response by regimes whose limited scope for action has run its course, but the devastation of peoples' lives so soon after 30 years of war must mean that it is no avenue for escape. Much more powerful forces than either EPRDF or PFDJ are at play in the area and globally, which show that each country is far from independent.

Eritrea claims 5% annual economic growth in the last 5 years. Economic activity is dominated by two sectors, both have which have collapsed in the last 6 months. The first is cross-border trade with Ethiopia. On the one hand is supplying manufactured goods to one of the world's poorest countries, but nevertheless one with a population of around 60 million. On the other is importing both the traditional staple grain of the highland area, teff, and produce for re-export including coffee, one of Ethiopia's largest sources of foreign exchange. From 1991 to 1997 Eritrea used Ethiopian currency, the birr. Like many African currencies, the birr was grossly over-valued by a fixed exchange rate against the US dollar. However, in Eritrea the government openly and directly sold birr at a rate significantly below the rate in Ethiopia and that in commercial banks in Eritrea. It also permitted a thriving parallel exchange market operated by hordes of old men clustered around Asmara's central post office. Consequently Eritrea gained a significant trade advantage over Ethiopia, thereby encouraging smuggling of Ethiopian cash crops, particularly coffee, and enabled the government to buy gold mined by local people for birr and sell it at its dollar price internationally. A complex web of "illicit" cross-border trade sprang up. Foreign exchange from sales of these goods fed into what had become a form of economic parasitism. The PFDJ rationalized these activities as the only means whereby it could get war reparations from Ethiopia, in the absence of substantial support from international sources, while also demanding that Eritrea's reconstruction must be based on its human resources and self-sufficiency. In 1997 Eritrea introduced its long delayed national currency, the nakfa. Within Eritrea it was exchanged at par with the birr, but was fixed at a lower rate against the dollar, thereby maintaining the trade advantage. Claiming that the introduction of the nakfa made the country truly independent, the PFDJ was in fact "having its cake and eating it", or so it appeared.

The second major source of Eritrea's income were Ethiopian imports and exports through the Red Sea ports of Assab, and particularly Massawa, which commanded port dues. It was through Massawa that both food aid and imports for reconstruction flowed to Tigray. Assab has no significant Eritrean hinterland, being at the arid southern tip of its 700 kilometre long coastline and unconnected by serviceable roads to the rest of the country. Indeed, any goods landed at Assab that were destined for Eritrea had to be moved by road via Addis Ababa. Before Eritrea's secession from Ethiopia Assab was the main port for central Ethiopia and its major centres of population. Djibouti,

connected by rail to Addis, charges port dues in hard currency. The loss of Assab was a major blow to the Ethiopian economy in 1991, and in a seeming gesture of neighbourliness Eritrea continued to charge port dues in birr, thereby making its ports more attractive than facilities at Djibouti, despite their rail link to Addis. Until 1997, some 70% of all Ethiopia's foreign trade went through Massawa and Eritrea. Through its control of favoured Red Sea ports and the better terms of trade, income from port dues fed into the economic "engineering" of the birr in Asmara. Eritrea thereby effectively held the Ethiopian economy hostage.

In 1997 the EPRDF government in Addis, faced by the competing nakfa and Eritrea's engineered economic parasitism declared that bilateral trade should henceforth be in dollars. It also issued a new birr [printed incidentally in Britain] in an attempt to render Eritrea's birr reserves and therefore the nakfa valueless. They also demanded repayment of Eritrea's 1 billion birr debt, incurred with the EPRDF's willing encouragement in the early period of reconstruction, in hard currency. This effectively annulled Eritrea's debt, rebounding on the EPRDF measures. Ethiopia began to shift its trade to Djibouti, thereby depleting its hard-currency reserves. The new birr fell sharply to dollar-rate parity with the nakfa, destroying the advantage in illicit cross-border trade for merchants. Eritrea's response was to shift imports to cheaper sources, including Egypt. However its economically parasitic dependence was effectively at an end having lost the ability to manipulate terms of trade, with both economies under severe strain. Eritrea's hard currency reserves were shifted into "high-yield" foreign investments, including Djibouti, to profit further from increased Ethiopian usage of that port, thereby seeking to fund activities from interest. A large chunk of Eritrea's economy is therefore at the whim of volatile international money markets, at a time when the US is attempting to prop up the yen among other far-eastern currencies, and the dollars exchange value is falling. One outcome of this economic fantasy game is that the dilapidated oil refinery at Assab, on which both countries depended for fuel, has been closed through lack of investment! This throws into question the viability of possible oil supplies indicated by exploration in the southern Red Sea off Eritrea's coast, a new refinery being needed if they are to benefit Eritrea's economy instead of being shipped at a currently depressed price to the spot market in Rotterdam. Eritrea's short-lived, but successful skirmish in 1994 with Yemen over the Hanish islands ensured that these potential reserves were in Eritrean and not International waters.

Internally, the bulk of capital inflow to Eritrea's reconstruction programme stems either from the recession-wracked Pacific Rim or from Gulf States. Its inflow can only have been guaranteed by the assurance of high rates of profit and therefore exploitation of Eritrea's large pool of unemployed workers. The relentless nature of the global crisis of capital in general means that continuity of this inflow cannot be guaranteed. The PFDJ claims its

goal is establishing a mini-"tiger" economy in NE Africa, but as currencies in the Pacific rim collapse, establishing the high-tech infrastructure and a willing, highly skilled workforce to compete for dwindling markets seems a far-off, if not impossible dream. Many Eritreans living abroad combine these skills, but seem reluctant to return while conditions of life are poor, except as tourists. There are no immensely wealthy expatriates to form an independent source of capital. The US gives Eritrea a high profile, not because of the esteem in which its extraordinary people are held internationally, but because of its strategic position. The region's severe economic difficulties, exacerbated by the border war with no foreseeable way out of the disruption that it has caused, may constitute additional pressure for World Bank intervention. That being the case any residual notion of independence will soon be revealed as a sham. Because of its globally important position, that seems inevitable, and Eritrea in particular becoming a client state of US imperialism, a sort of mini-Israel, is on the cards if not already established.

Letters to the Editor

Dear Comrades,

Just a short note. First of all, I want to thank you for your efforts in analysing political history and for sending me the first two issues of your Forum. There's a cheque in with this letter. I support whole-heartedly your criticism of capitalism and I applaud your aim to unite the left on a revolutionary platform for revolutionary socialism.

To be frank, I have been unemployed for a year now, and as I already subscribe to Socialist Worker and Socialist Review (both from the Socialist Workers Party), I do not have the time or money to subscribe to many of the circulars that I'd like to. If I am to subscribe to the ISF I feel a responsibility to engage with you.

I understand that academic discussions on politics have an important role in this world where social consciousness is not what it could be, reflecting the early stages of struggle against globalisation. Still, it is not enough for a group of socialist simply to discuss. They must be active in struggle to give a modern context for those ideas, for healthy feedback. I want to ask you who are your audience? Have you considered how you are going to relate to workers in struggle when you are not engaging with people outside factory gates, in union branches and in market squares all around the UK, as the SWP do?

Fortunately, our farce of a democracy gives us the chance to openly engage with workers without a direct state backlash that would perhaps make necessary underground activity in the early days of struggle under dictatorships like the one in Iran. Still there is a green generation in every corner of the world So let's take the bull by the horns while we can!

May I suggest we need to get out there and engage with workers. Join in SWP activities, bring up your points at their meetings well-rooted within the class, where our politics of working people should take place.

In solidarity,

Michael Taylor

Dear Comrades,

I thank you for ISF, and note that you got my address

from New Interventions. (Indeed, I also note the overlap of writers.)

I read NI because it strikes me that they made a serious attempt to re-examine the policies the FI adopted after the War, and the neglect of Trotsky's Testament, and that it's possible that it might finally break with the mistakes that the FI made then.

I fear I cannot see evidence, despite the overlap of writers, that you are making a similar effort. I may be wrong, a future issue may make a more serious re-examination of the degenerated workers' state theory, and may understand that the Vanguard Party was designed for the particular situation of Tsarist Russia and should not be made an universal fetish.

I enclose a pamphlet of my own, 1917, in the hope that even a hostile review of it would spark more serious debate in your circle.

Fraternally,

Laurens Otter.

PS Since all you people first became Trots at least ten years after I left the RCP, I'd better explain that, after being expelled from CP fronts in 1946 I joined the RCP. (Because my mother was CP, I used an assumed name, made up of an aunt's stage name and an anagram of my initials). I became influenced by Mme Trotsky and (de facto) left the Party after six months, though I remained nominally a member and so was a signatory of the "Two Sams" document a couple of months later.

Dear ISF Comrades,

I received the first issue of ISF and enclose a cheque for £50 as a token of support. I lived in London from 1964 to 1990, and was a member of London Solidarity group, so I'm familiar with the RCP, IS, SLL saga.

As you may know, Solidarity began as a break-away from the SLL, back in 1962. Eventually, it broke away from Trotskyism and Leninism, but also from Marxism. It was a sister group of the Paris group Socialisme ou Barbarie. I'm aware that you are enchanted neither by Socialisme

ou Barbarie nor Solidarity, but as I can read in - and between - the lines of ISF; you are treading the same path - at least, some of you are. Questions you raise today, you didn't dare to raise a decade ago. This indicates a direction.

Of course, many of you will not go beyond Marx, but that doesn't matter. Today doubt reigns where previously Certainty ruled; the dam of Certainty has been breached, and this is irreparable and has specific consequences.

I enclose a pamphlet I wrote two years ago, in full awareness that you will hate it! Just file it somewhere for the record. We'll discuss it a decade from now. I'm not saying this with arrogance or cynicism, but with much sympathy.

Fraternally,

Aki Orr.

Dear comrades,

I read only a few weeks ago in ISF No.1 the two articles dealing with Iran - Revolution and Counter-revolution in Iran and Revolutionary Socialism (the latter was also recently published in French, in the last issue of Carre Rouge, a publication for which I have some sympathies.) Many aspects of the article Revolution and Counter-revolution in Iran, written at the beginning of 1983, give a very accurate analysis of the dreadful Islamic regime in Iran ("clerical dictatorship ... a lot more repressive than an ordinary capitalist dictatorship"), of the criminal attitude of the Stalinist Tudeh, of the huge errors of the leftist organisations during the Iranian revolution ... I had thought, I must say, that all the Trotskyist groups in Iran, as here in western countries, had lost their honour in support of the clerical power, on the pretext of the "anti-imperialism" of Khomeini. I am glad to see I was wrong.

But a question remains obscure for me in this text - and pushes me into asking you for further explanations: the question of secularism, and of the fight for secularism, in relation to the revolutionary and Marxist struggle. Although in his article of 1983 Saber Nikbeen pointed out that "the separation of the mosque from the state ... has been the most elementary demand of the movement for democracy for over a century", this demand does not appear as such neither in his article nor in the more theoretical one in the same issue (see page 13, the demands one "should have concentrated on" after 1979). As I have personally been interested for a long time by Iran and the political situation of that country, I can't help thinking that the fight during the Iranian revolution, before and after the Shah's collapse, should have been at first the fight for a "secular republic". No doubt that in this way, tactical alliances should have been necessary with groups

far from a socialist point of view (but in his article, Saber Nikbeen courageously noted that "as far as the fight for democracy was concerned, bourgeois liberal opposition or even the monarchists appeared to be more radical than the Stalinist left"); on the other hand, one may think that the perspective of such a "secular republic" in those circumstances (saying this, I do not want to deny the legitimacy of the socialist programme as such) should have found large echoes among women, whose movement should perhaps not have been so easily isolated, and then crushed, by the mullahs. And I regret that, so far as the problem of the fight against the present government of Iran is concerned, your articles give no clear indication on the place of the issue of the separation of religion from the state in your approach to the political fight for Iranians today.

So is it possible that you can give me further indications on your point of view on this issue? And as I am interested, from the theoretical and historical point of view as well as political, by the question of the relationship of Marxism and secularism, I should be very pleased if you could send me any document (recent or older) about the way you conceived in the past, and you conceive today, this problem (for example, your opinion about Khatamy, who so many people in the French left - and even the radical monthly *Le Monde Diplomatique* - want to support as a "moderate" against the "hardliners" of the regime.

Yours faithfully,

Benoit Mely.



Scream Towards Rome

Federico Garcia Lorca

Mildly hurt apples,
By small silver swords,
Clouds rip by a coral hand
Which carries in her back an almond of fire,
Fish of arsenic like sharks,
Sharks like drops of tears enough to blind the crowds,
Roses that hurt
And needles installed in the pipes of blood,
Enemy worlds and loves covered by worms will fall
over you...

They will fall over the great dome which military
tongues spread with oil
where a man urinates over a spectacular dove and spits
processed coal
Surrounded by thousands of fairies.

Because there is not anymore anyone to distribute the
bread neither the wine,
Neither anyone to open the lines of rest,
Neither anyone to cry for the wounds of the elephants.
There is nothing but a million metalworkers
Making chains for the children to come.

There is nothing but a million carpenters
Making coffins without cross.
There is only many people nagging
than open the clothes waiting for the bullet.

The man looking down on the dove should talk,
Should scream naked between the columns,
And take an injection to acquire lepra
And cry such horrible tears
That would dissolve his rings and his telephones of
diamonds.

But the man dressed in white
Ignores the mystery of the spike,
Ignores the scream of the parturient,
Ignores that Christ can still give water,
Ignores that the coin burns the kiss of prodigy
And gives the lamb's blood to the idiot beak of the
pheasant.

Teachers show to the children
A marvellous light coming from the hill;
But what arrives is a meeting of sewers
Where the dark nymphs of the cholera scream.

Teachers show with devotion the huge domes;
But under the statues there is no love,

There is for sure no love under the crystal eyes.

Love is in the bodies tear by thirst,
In the minute shanty fighting with the flooding;
Love is in the ditches where the Hunger snakes fight,
In the sad Sea swaying the seagulls corpses
And in the darkest sharp kiss under the pillows.

But the old man of translucid hands
Will say: Love, Love, Love
Acclaimed by millions of moribunds;

Will say: Love, Love, Love,
Within the lame shackled by tenderness;

Will say: Peace, Peace, Peace
Within the shivers of the knives and watermelons of
dynamite;

Will say: Love, Love, Love,
Until his lips turn of silver.

In the meantime, in the meantime, ay! In the meantime

The blacks that take the urinals out,
The boys that shake under the pale terror of the direc-
tors,
The women suffocated in mineral oil,
the multitudes of hammer, of violin or of cloud
Must scream even if they splash their brains in the Wall

Must scream in front of the domes

Must scream mad of fire

Must scream mad of ice

Must scream with the head full of shit,

Must scream like all the nights together

Must scream with a voice so torn
until the cities shake like little girls
and break the prisons of oil and the music,
because we want our daily bread,
alder flower and perennial torn tenderness,
because we want Earth Will to Be
She gives her fruits for All.

[Translated by Elia]