

Workers' Liberty

The emancipation of the working class is also the emancipation of all human beings without distinction of race or sex

GLOBALISATION
THE WORKERS' AGENDA

IMPERIALISM
YESTERDAY AND TODAY

THE BATTLE AFTER
SEATTLE

FREE TRADE
AND RESISTANCE

THE NEW
ECONOMY

**GLOBAL
CAPITAL**

**Globalisation:
Special issue**

Workers' Liberty no.63. July 2000.

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A note to readers

THIS is a special issue of *Workers' Liberty*, focusing on the arguments about globalisation and global solidarity which have come to the fore since the great Seattle demonstration against the World Trade Organisation in November-December 1999.

As a special issue, it omits some of our regular features. We have included the Forum and Reviews sections to ensure that this magazine's policy of encouraging debate and responses to our articles remains operational and to keep up-to-date with important new books. We owe apologies to contributors whose articles we've had to hold over.

We have been working on two books, one, *In An Age of Barbarism*, on the left's response to imperialism, war, and national conflict, and another on Ireland. The work has caused some havoc with schedules, but we believe the eventual results will be worthwhile.

The movements for a society based on human solidarity and the free association of producers need everyday agitation based on stock socialist ideas — and we put effort into that, through workplace bulletins and papers like *Action for Solidarity* — but they also need more. The "stock" must be replenished. Vast gaps in socialist theory need to be filled. Marxist traditions buried for decades under Stalinist snowdrifts need to be dug out and updated. Those of us put out *Workers' Liberty* are trying to combine the tasks.

Please give us your support — by subscribing, by helping this magazine circulate, by contributing comments and articles, and by financial help.

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Global solidarity against capital

“CAPITAL,” wrote Marx, comes into the world “dripping from head to foot, from every pore, with blood and dirt.” Global capital is bloody still — but on a grander scale than ever before.

In the all-new globalised society the rich are massively richer. Yet 30 million people die each year from lack of food. In Africa, only 15% of people live in “an environment considered minimally adequate for sustainable growth and development”, according to the World Bank. At least 45% of Africans live in what the World Bank calls “poverty”.

War continues — in Chechnya, in Sierra Leone. Exploitation continues and grows. Capital continues its relentless march across the surface of the globe. To many it seems triumphant.

For millions of workers, peasants and poor, this is no triumph. The benefits of globalisation — such as they are — have passed by much of Africa. They have passed by much of the world outside the advanced countries and a few industrialised Asian and Latin American economies. The little “investment” a desperately poor African country gets from the multinationals is more likely to consist of building a hotel or an office of an international bank in its capital city than any project that will meet the desperate need of its people for land or bread or peace.

A society based on production for profit, with an innate drive to accumulate and expand capital, cannot meet human need.

Yet today’s global capitalist society certainly has the material resources to do that. Far more so than the “advanced capitalist” countries of western Europe in the early years of the 20th century, which the Bolsheviks believed to be ripe for socialism.

Share the world’s food production equally, and everyone would be well-nourished. Tax the 225 biggest personal fortunes in the world at a rate of just four per cent, and the money raised would pay for setting up access to food, clean drinking water, education and health care for everyone in the world.

But there is no profit to be made from such things. Only a socialist society, where the motivating force for production is human need rather than private profit, can stop the global round of hunger and illness and destruction.

Globalisation is not an external, superhuman force. It is the latest form of capital’s inherent tendency to expand across national and natural borders.

From the earliest silk and spice trade with the East through the horrors of the slave trade to its carving out of new markets

in post-Stalinist Russia — capital has never been contained by the boundaries of nations or nature.

There have been periods when capital’s drive across borders has been stalled or partially reversed, from 1914 to 1945 for example. There have been other periods, such as the 1990s, when it has speeded up. But in its fundamentals it is not a sudden new departure.

It can be overstated. The European Union, Japan and the USA each export 12% or less of their output. Almost all “multi-national” firms are nationally-based companies with offshoots in a few other countries. Almost all the multinationals’ invest-

ment is not in the lowest-wage economies, but in advanced capitalist countries and the higher-wage, more industrialised Third World countries. There they can find networks of services, suppliers, skilled labour, and market access — and competent capitalist states as guarantors of those conditions.

The globe has not become a uniform economic space, far from it. But exploiting classes across the world have reshaped themselves for the world market, in response to bruising economic crises — and taken their revenge for the working-class offensives of the 1960s and ‘70s. They have reaffirmed the fundamental drive of capital — brutal, crude, nihilistic — for short-term profit. The chief “social” control imposed by the nation-states in this new framework is their determined drive to push trade barriers down, to create broader arenas like the European Union, and to annex spheres previously governed by non-market public provision. The great transnational corporations have increasingly reorgan-

“Only a socialist society, where the motivating force for production is human need rather than private profit, can stop the global round of hunger and illness and destruction.”

Workers' Liberty

Incorporating Socialist Organiser



THE WORKING CLASS WILL RISE AGAIN!

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ised through global networks of production sites.

The new policies have meant dramatic change. The “classic” pattern of world trade — bulk raw materials from the Third World to the metropolitan centres, manufactured goods the other way — has been almost inverted.

Since the 1980s the USA, for example, has imported more manufactured goods from the ex-colonial world than it has exported to them, and exported more bulk raw materials than it imports. In agriculture, the picture is increasingly that the advanced countries control the bulk exports like wheat, while ex-colonial countries export luxury crops.

Global capitalism is not levelling out world inequalities. On the contrary. In 1960, the 20% of the world’s population living in the richest countries were 50 times richer than the 20% living in the world’s poorest countries. By 1995 that gap was 82-to-1. In the case of Africa, the increase in poverty is not just relative. Africa is getting poorer in absolute terms too. Prices for most of its commodities have fallen unsteadily but continually since the 1960s.

Within individual countries, too, inequality between classes is increasing. During the 18 years of Tory rule in Britain, from 1979 to 1997, the top 20% of the population saw their income increase by about 60%, while the bottom 20% saw their income fall. The USA has seen even sharper polarisation.

Capital creates its own gravedigger: the working class — the class whose labour is vital to capitalist society and which alone has the power to overthrow and replace its rulers. Global capital has created a working class that probably, for the first time in history, includes an absolute majority of the world’s population.

Although capital creates inequality between nations and regions, its central axis is not so much nation versus nation as class versus class.

The workers of a rich country like Britain are certainly much better off than those of Indonesia or Mexico, but the difference is not as large as it looks.

Humans are social animals, and poverty, above starvation level, is always relative. Low-waged workers in Britain avoid starvation. But so do workers — as distinct from the landless rural poor — in ex-colonial countries.

Even in Britain, in low-income families, one child in 10

What is Workers’ Liberty?

The Alliance for Workers’ Liberty organises to fight the class struggle on all levels — trade-union and social battles, politics and challenging ruling-class ideas. We are active in workplaces, in trade unions, in the Labour Party, in single-issue campaigns, in student unions and in debates and discussions on the left, aiming to integrate all these activities into a coherent effort for socialism.

“The emancipation of the working class must be the act of the working class itself”

— Karl Marx

If you want to know more about the Alliance for Workers’ Liberty write to: PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA, e-mail office@workersliberty.org or visit <http://www.workersliberty.org/>

under the age of five goes without enough to eat at least once a month and over half the children and parents regularly have “nutritionally poor” diets. Low-paid British workers may have phones, VCRs, Playstations and better housing, but they suffer the same sense of being pushed down below the level of society as do their Third World brothers and sisters.

There is no fundamental conflict of interests between the better-off British worker and the Indonesian worker — or the better-off and the worse-off worker in Britain itself. On the whole, any gains won by one group improve the bargaining position of the other. Almost everywhere, trade unions are first formed by more skilled, better-off, more secure workers, and then become a means for raising the standards of the whole working class, including the jobless, the disabled, and pensioners.

Between the British worker and the British boss, or the Indonesian worker and the Indonesian capitalist, there is, however, a stark clash of interests. Better wages for the worker, or better “social wages” for the working class, mean worse profits for the capitalist.

The answer is not complicated, but it is radical. The organised working class must establish conscious human control of the wealth of the great multinationals and their owners, of the international banks and financial institutions, and of landed property everywhere.

There is no need to nationalise every small business, or to plan in detail from the centre the whole world economy. Conscious, collective human control over the major investment decisions will do, for a start.

Where the rural areas are dominated by huge landholdings, as in Latin America, the landless poor should all get a plot of land and the equipment, the technical training, the credit and the access to supplies and markets to enable them to cultivate it. Every village and every shanty town should be supplied with clean water, sewage, roads, public transport, phone lines, electricity, a health centre providing free care, a school, an industrial training centre, and small-scale light industries, whose products should be protected from the competition of the big corporations.

Local workers should be trained in building skills and supplied with the materials necessary to build decent housing.

In the advanced countries, too, like Britain, there will be much to do to restore the Health Service, house the homeless, bring education up to standard, re-establish public transport — in short, to restore the principle of the welfare state and to extend it so that everyone is guaranteed a secure and (within the limits of what science can do to keep us healthy) comfortable life.

The other side of this programme, in both the poor and the wealthier countries, is that it will create decent and worthwhile jobs for everyone able and available to work.

Economist Amartya Sen has noted that: “One of the most remarkable facts in the terrible history of hunger is that there has never been a serious famine in a country with a democratic form of government and a relatively free press.” That is true, even though all Sen means by “democratic government” is the very limited parliamentary sort of democracy we have in Britain today. A genuinely accountable democracy, a working class democracy, with all representatives and officials on workers’ wages and subject to recall, would ban not only famine but any sort of material poverty.

Today, the struggle for that democracy takes place at a global level. As capital seeks to impose itself around the globe, the words “workers of the world unite” have never been more relevant.

The battle after Seattle

THE success of the demonstration in Seattle in November-December 1999 in shutting down the World Trade Organisation Conference inspired many. But a strategy of just trying again and again to repeat that feat — calling one demonstration after another to “shut down” the IMF, the World Bank, the World Economic Forum, and maybe the Democratic and Republican Party Conventions — has severe limitations.

To irritate the fat cats by demonstrations outside

their meetings may make a useful gesture, but it will not overthrow them or even stop them meeting. The slogans “end this” and “shut down that” contain no clear idea of what we’re fighting *for*. And the “shut it down” strategy is likely to lead the movement into a cycle of ever-more-violent confrontations with ever-better-prepared police. That is likely to narrow our base of support, rather than reaching out to workers currently hesitant and uninvolved. It promises no gain that would compensate for that loss.

The US trade union movement, the AFL-CIO, has launched a Campaign for Global Fairness, advocating “a new internationalism” based around four points: “We must first undertake a program of broad-based education with our members and our leaders, then extend it to our allies and to the general public.

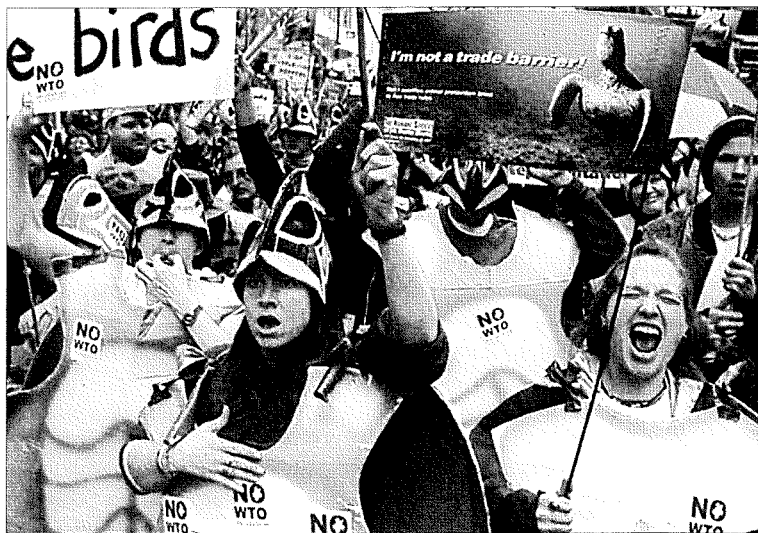
“Second, we must make workers’ rights and human rights a mainstay of our trade and investment agreements...

“Third, we must undertake major new efforts to build international solidarity with our brothers and sisters in emerging nations as well as in developed nations... We must escalate our support for their struggles to build strong unions...

“Finally, we must launch aggressive new initiatives to hold multinational corporations accountable... demanding that [they] disclose the location of their affiliates, joint venture partners and contractors internationally...” The AFL-CIO also insists: “We must free up indebted nations.”

It explains: “For the past 30 years, corporations have been waging war against working families, using the emerging global economy as a club to free themselves from regulation and responsibilities to their employees and communities, drive down working standards worldwide and ship American jobs overseas. They marched under the banner of free trade, but their agenda was much broader — bank and currency deregulation, privatisation of public services, dismantling of social supports and the freedom to organise here at home. They used crushing debt burdens to force Third World countries into a competition for exports that became a race to the bottom...”

“Today, the global economy is enriching corporate profiteers,



wealthy families and dictators, but it isn’t working for working families... If the global system continues to generate growing inequality, environmental destruction and a race to the bottom for working people — then it will trigger an increasingly volatile reaction from workers, farmers, human rights activists and environmentalists.”

There is much to be criticised here. The AFL-CIO leaders do not understand that growing inequality, environmental destruction

and a race to the bottom come from the very nature of capital and its exploitation of wage labour, not just from unfortunate policies of the last 30 years. They do not understand that the vast accumulations of financial and industrial capital which dominate the world today can be dealt with only by an international federation of workers’ republics. Their posture is that of people lobbying the powers-that-be to throw well-calculated sops and thus avert a “volatile reaction” from workers, rather than of people rousing and mobilising those workers to act with maximum independence and strength.

Many of the AFL-CIO demands are vague. They do not spell out ideas for workers’ control over the operations of the multinationals. All the limitations are summed in the fact that while criticising “the global system”, the AFL-CIO leaders are also going flat-out to support the Democrat Al Gore for President. As Vice-President Gore has helped to push through the capitalist “broader agenda” which, as the AFL-CIO rightly says, has gone hand in hand with free trade, and as President he will certainly continue to do the same.

Yet the new AFL-CIO line is a great, and very welcome, shift from the old AFL-CIO stance of “Buy American” and intense suspicion (or downright sabotage) of independent and militant trade-union movements elsewhere in the world on the grounds that they might be tinged with “communism”. All its elements orient in the right direction — if, sometimes, not very far in that direction — and provide many points of leverage for socialists active in the trade union movement.

The “New Voices” team now leading the AFL-CIO is broadly social-democratic, rather than having the narrower business-unionist orientation typical of AFL-CIO leaders for many decades back. AFL-CIO President John Sweeney is a member of the Democratic Socialists of America, an un-militant ginger group inside the Democratic Party.

Partly the leadership is reflecting some new moods in the US working class, shown in some fine recent struggles. As important, probably more important, is the AFL-CIO leaders’ own recognition that their old policy had hit a dead-end, and they must

find a new one or see their movement (and with it, their offices and their salaries) collapse under them.

With US capital increasingly organising its production on a global scale, and the US government increasingly unresponsive to union lobbying, they must find new alliances with unions in other countries. They must make the unions a sufficiently visible active force to recruit new members. And they must recruit energetic new cadres for the trade-union machine from rebellious and socially-minded youth. The AFL-CIO has been doing that on a large scale with its "Union Summer" initiatives, and continues to do so.

Socialists in the trade unions can build on those impulses, supplementing the AFL-CIO initiatives with specific policies: solidarity with particular workers' struggles, workers' control (rights to information and veto) over the operations of the big corporations, an international minimum wage, international charters for trade union and social-welfare rights.

In some other countries, like Britain, the trade union leaders, duller or simply more demoralised than in the USA, have failed to come up with any better answer to the new challenges of globalised capitalism than more and more abject attempts to sell themselves to the employers as "responsible" policemen of the workforce. Elsewhere, as in Australia, there are signs of a new approach paralleling the AFL-CIO's, with all its problems but with some of its possibilities, too. In all cases, however, the ideas of a new internationalism, of global solidarity, of international workers' charters of rights, and of demanding the multinational corporations "open their books", can be valuable guides for action.

What about the young activists, from environmentalist and other groups, who provided so much of the radical surge and spark in Seattle? Some of them are already seeking jobs as union organisers. This orientation to the unions is very welcome. But in the first place this cannot be a policy for the whole movement. In the second place, individual ex-radicals will come under strong pressure to assimilate them into the bureaucracy. That will certainly happen if no powerful radical rank and file movement provides a counterweight. It will happen to many even if there is such a counterweight.

Socialists must strive to offer the street-activist movement perspectives broader and more immediate than the hope that they can make progress as individuals by finding niches in the trade union movement and burrowing away there.

In the movement, there is some talk of turning to a "local" focus, and there is a strand which says "local good, global bad", "small good, big bad". In fact genuinely localised economic life — a return to the village communities of pre-capitalist societies — would stultify and impoverish. To get "outside" capitalist globalisation by "going local" is also unworkable. To make our resistance localised and atomised, when the enemy, global capital, is co-ordinated and mobile across the world, is to damage the struggle. We need global solidarity against global capital.

There is, however, a core of sense in the idea of going local. We cannot mobilise effectively against global capital just by standing in its foothills and hurling curses at its distant summits — WTO, IMF, World Bank and so on. We have to find ways of mobilising our workmates and neighbours, starting from their immediate circumstances, for a battle across the whole terrain. We have to find footholds.

Maybe the best immediate foothold can be found in struggles against particular transnational corporations. If we take our cue from the struggles of workers in the hearts of the beasts — and at any particular time, several of the giant transnational corporations will be facing workers' struggles somewhere or other in their operations, or in their networks of suppliers and sub-contractors — then there is immense scope to amplify and build on those strug-

gles by diverse actions across the world. If a group of workers in RTZ or Ford is on strike, then lobbies, pickets, leafletting and so on can send ripples right round the world, and help win real victories.

That campaigns be geared to specific workers' struggles is essential if they are not to drift into "ethical shopping", or side-tracked into efforts like the current friends-of-"socialist"-Cuba drive to get people to boycott Bacardi rum in favour of Havana Club rum (produced in Cuba by workers with no more, in fact probably fewer, rights to independent trade union organisation than those producing Bacardi). Unity and co-ordination between different campaigns is also essential. We need labour and community alliances for global solidarity.

In fact, we should aim for an organised international labour and community alliance for global solidarity. This would be something like an idea launched by the South African Marxist Neville Alexander — a recomposition of the independent and militant strands of the workers' movement worldwide on a roughly similar basis to the "First International" of the 1860s.

Among the street activists there is much "soft anarchism", a wish to steer clear of "parties" and "leaders". But in the same way as dispersed local action is inadequate against an enemy, global capital, which operates both locally and globally, so also an "anti-political" stance is inadequate in a struggle which, like it or not, proceeds on both economic and political fronts. The more new activists can be drawn into efforts like the new Labor Party in the USA or the Socialist Alliances in Britain, around papers like *Action for Solidarity*, or into organisations like the Alliance for Workers' Liberty, the stronger our fight will be.

Political party organisation is, in fact, essential if the movement is to become more democratic and define clearer positive goals. At present most participants are limited to turning up at particular places and dates, announced by we-don't-know-whom. We demonstrate on calls to "shut down" this or "end" that, proposed by we-don't-know-whom. Our involvement in debating any positive aims is limited to ad hoc talk in the course of the demonstrations, with no possibility of formulating definite decisions. So long as all that remains the case, the movement remains, despite all the "soft-anarchist" talk, very "top-down". In fact, the historical record is that anarchist organisations, wherever they get beyond the level of tiny discussion groups, are much more conspiratorial and elitist than Leninist organisations (meaning genuinely Leninist, not Stalinist or Stalinised-Trotskyist).

The activists need to organise ourselves so that we can systematically discuss aims and objectives, and decide priorities which govern our general direction while leaving room for dissident minorities to express their ideas and keep alternatives before our minds. We need to be sufficiently organised to pursue our general direction in a co-ordinated way on several fronts — through leaflets, pamphlets, papers, speeches, and individual conversation; through involvement with strikes and workplace struggles; and in elections and in political campaigns on issues like asylum and immigration laws, trade union law, publicly-financed health care and so on.

We need to be able to review our experiences on all those fronts, learn from them, and revise ourselves accordingly. We need to have people who specialise in the tasks of central co-ordination, but we also need them not to be "invisible dictators". They should be duly elected, identifiable, and thus open to criticism, censure or replacement when needed.

And when we have managed to develop all that, what will we have but a party? A revolutionary party. The immediate action we can take towards that end is to strengthen the best of the revolutionary groups that exist already, and to promote united efforts and genuine debate between them.

Capital writ large

By Martin Thomas*

IN many ways capital has been global since the 16th century, and there is a lot of exaggeration and hype in the talk about globalisation today. But there are four developments which are relatively new in the last 10 years or so.

The first is that we have a world made up almost entirely of capitalist states integrated into the world market. In the whole of the previous history of capitalism there have been many countries which have been dominated by pre-capitalist ruling classes and pre-capitalist modes of production, and tied into the capitalist world market in very limited and specialised ways. And, of course, for much of the 20th century there was the Stalinist bloc. But now, in almost all countries, there are true-blue capitalist states well integrated into the world market.

Secondly, almost all countries are integrated into the world market in complex ways. They include substantial sectors integrated into complex production networks stretching over several countries. For a large part of the history of capitalism, the pattern of world trade was one of raw materials being exported from less capitalistically developed countries to the metropolis in Western Europe or the USA, most of manufacturing industry being based in the metropolis, and manufactured goods being exported back to the less capitalistically developed countries. That pattern has pretty much broken down. Manufactured goods predominate in world trade, and in the exports of less capitalistically developed countries. The biggest exporter of bulk raw materials is the USA, the most developed country.

Thirdly, there has been an enormous cheapening and speeding-up of transport and communications. Almost anything that can be traded, can be traded internationally. There are very few items for which the cost of transporting them internationally is prohibitive. This is also the era of mass international air travel, mass international telephone communication, and the Internet.

Fourthly, the wage-working class, defined as those who sell their labour-



Daewoo workers demonstrating against layoffs clash with Korean riot police, December 1999

power to capital and are exploited by capital, together with the children and retired people of that class, is probably the majority of the world's population for the first time ever. It is difficult to say precisely, because in many countries many people are "semi-proletarian" who have bits of jobs or casual jobs and subsist partly on wage-labour and partly on begging or petty trade. Nevertheless, there has been a tremendous expansion of wage-labour. Indonesia, which is one of the less capitalistically-developed countries in the world, a country where many people live not far from malnutrition and starvation, has probably a higher proportion of wage-labour than Germany did in 1918, when the Bolsheviks would cite it as the epitome of a highly-developed capitalist country.

How did all this happen, and what does it mean for us? It did not happen all at once. Capital did not suddenly flip over into new forms in 1990, or at any other particular date. All the developments I've listed are culminations of tendencies which go back a very long time. For example, I talked about the speeding-up of communications. One major technology is the fax machine. It was invented in 1842! But in the 1990s the four developments I've mentioned reached a sort of "critical mass". That happened mainly through two processes.

Firstly, the economic crises of the 1970s and '80s. The period from the Second World War to the early 1970s was one of the gradual knitting-together of world trade, the gradual development of autonomous capitalist centres in many of

the ex-colonial countries, and the gradual rise of transnational corporations. From the early 1970s there opened up an era in which the relations of capitalist states to the world market became a cause of tremendous economic crises for them. The ruling classes were faced with options. They chose the option of reorganising their affairs to attune them better to the gradually-more-powerful world market, instead of the one of raising economic barriers and erecting siege economies on the model followed by capitalist states in the 1930s.

The interests within the ruling classes who looked towards the world market turned out to have hegemony, and to be prepared to pay a high price, not only in working-class suffering but also in the ruination of large sections of capital. In Britain, about one quarter of manufacturing industry was trashed in a few years, in the early 1980s. Those "globalist" sections were able to establish their outlook as the new "common sense" of capital. One representative development here was the response of what was then the European Economic Community from the early 1970s

Worldwide, around 27 million workers labour in "Export Processing Zones", often in hellish conditions. These are walled-off industrial estates, near airports and ports, where manufacturing assembly plants work for export. The bosses are exempted from the country's taxes, tariffs, and, often, labour regulations.

* Martin Thomas was speaking at the *Workers' Liberty* 2000 summer school

to the increasingly troubled state of world capitalism. It was not to fall apart, but on the contrary to strengthen its links and even to push through measures like the single currency in what was, from many capitalist points of view, a very reckless way.

Another was the response of governments in less capitalistically-developed countries to the Third World debt crisis after 1982. Instead of defaulting on the debt and turning to a self-centred course of economic development, instead of emulating the economic nationalism of the 1930s, they responded by privatisations, anti-inflation policies, welfare cuts, deregulation, export drives — whatever was necessary to restore their credit with the international banks.

Alongside the response to economic crises of governments in West and South, the other essential process was the collapse of the Stalinist bloc and of the Stalinist model for industrial development. That in turn was very much tied up with the involvement of the East European states, in particular, in the world market from the 1970s onwards.

Through those two processes we had the speeding-up, and the achievement of a “critical mass”, by the four developments I have listed. Also important is that all this happened in a period of working-class setbacks. It happened when the ruling classes had regained the initiative after the big working-class struggles of the late 1960s and the early 1970s. In some countries there were big set-piece defeats for the working class — in Britain, the miners’ strike of 1984-5 — and, in other countries, simply a petering-out of the struggles of the

1970s in disarray and disillusionment. The capitalist classes were eager and able to take their revenge. And that has shaped a lot of the detail of how “globalisation” has proceeded in the 1980s and 1990s. A push towards inequality, destruction of social provision, ecological damage and mass pauperisation is endemic to capital, but the working-class setbacks allowed the capitalist classes to add extra bite and sharpness. Although almost all capitalist countries are now complexly integrated into the world market, that is by no means true of all the world’s population. From the point of view of global capital, vast millions of people are simply disposable surplus.

The unit cost of sea freight fell 70% in real terms between the beginning of the 1980s and 1996.

Capitalist globalisation is capital writ large. It is not a number of other things which it is said to be. It is not capitalism turned financial. The financial markets have expanded enormously, but all the essential developments I have talked about were well in train before that expansion of the financial markets. They have proceeded in the last 20 years in close intertwining with the expansion of financial markets, but that is not to say that finance was the essential driving force. Evidence here is the European Union’s push — reckless, as I have said, from many capitalist points of view — towards a single currency. The single currency eliminates many financial markets, and reduces the disciplinary effect of world financial mar-

kets on individual countries in the European Union. Nevertheless the capitalist classes of Europe thought it worthwhile in the higher interests of international capitalist integration. It is not capitalism turned stateless. It is not a capitalism where the nation-state is withering away and markets, or transnational corporations, decide everything. Although it is a capitalism much more attuned to the world market, that attuning is carried out by the nation states. Capitalist globalisation is a

process largely carried out by capitalist states. A precondition for its development is the emergence in less capitalistically-developed countries of capitalist states of a weight that they did not have previously, which have the power and confidence to carry through the policies of globalisation.

It is not capitalism turned American. It is not a world where instead of the old European empires we have semi-colonial rule by the United States. The USA is the biggest capitalist power. But the long-term trend, operating since 1945, for the USA’s relative dominance to decline, has not been reversed fundamentally. The USA does not have the same position in today’s world order as Britain had in the British Empire.

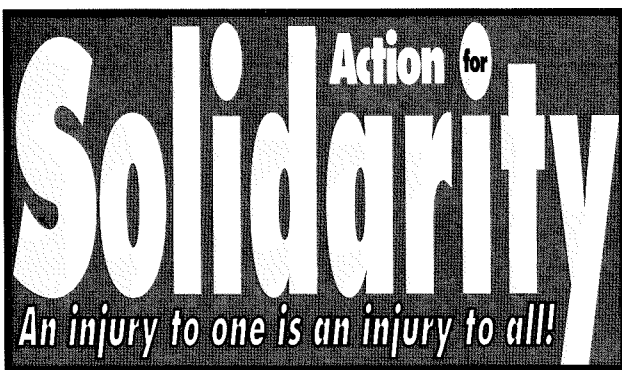
Capitalist globalisation is capital writ large, capital raging across the world. The challenge for us, in response, is to rewrite working-class struggle on an equally large scale — to rewrite it on a scale which matches the new outreach of capitalism.

We have difficulties, in that we face now a broader and in some ways more intangible enemy. One of the problems in the “new anti-capitalist movement” after Seattle is how to go beyond demonstration after demonstration against one after another symbolic world capitalist organisation — WTO, IMF, World Bank and so on. How do we go beyond the symbols to hit the substance of global capital?

We have advantages in the expanded size and scope of the world working class, and in the fact that almost everywhere in the world workers are now face-to-face with capital in a sense they were not even 20 years ago. We also have advantages in our expanded ability and facility of communication between different sectors of the world labour movement, so that when there are big strike movements in Korea, for example, we can hear about them immediately, directly from the strike organisers, through the Internet.

Our problem is to try to recompose an organised movement of global working-class solidarity out of the moods and the one-off actions now emerging across the world. To that we have to rediscover the ideas of internationalism, of consistent democracy, and of the political independence of the working class. And, like every rediscovery of old ideas in a new context, our redevelopment of those principles will in part be a development of new ideas, to match up to the new developments of capital world-wide.

In 1990 there were only about 300,000 people linked to the Internet. In 1995, 26 million. Today about 300 million. The volume of Internet traffic doubles every 100 days.



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Enclosure and integration

By Massimo De Angelis*

TO outline my view of what globalisation is today, I must first explain what capital is for the tradition of Marxism I come from. I am an autonomist Marxist. Capital has always been global, from the very beginning. Capital has always subordinated labour, and human beings, everywhere in the world. Its nature is self-expansion. That means boundless imposition of abstract labour. That is what profit is — the continuous accumulation of capital through subsuming exploited labour on an increasing scale. The way it does that is always through struggle, at a micro level or a macro level. That is why I don't like the term capitalism, which, by the way, Marx never used. "Capitalism" means essentially a social system, and doesn't give any idea of something other than itself. It is a word to denote a claustrophobic condition of living from which there is no escape.

In fact there are always struggles, acts of resistance at the micro level or an organised level, and capital has to deploy a particular strategy, or set of strategies, in the given historical conditions, to pursue its goal of the boundless imposition of work. In the last 200 years the capitalist mode of production has gone through many historical forms. There have been many sets of strategies, applied either to crush struggles or to bypass them or to co-opt them. The struggles occur in different forms in the history of the capitalist mode of production, with different organisations, with different cultures, with different needs expressed by the people who come together and fight.

The character of the strategies implemented by capital at any particular moment depends on what kind of class composition is there as a basis on which the working class is fighting back. What we call globalisation today is a particular kind of capitalist strategies. Some of them could be contradictory. But, broadly speaking, they form a more or less coherent whole.

These strategies, I believe, come from capital's reaction to the breakdown of the Keynesian era of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. The Keynesian strategies responded to struggles based on a particular composition of the mass worker — big Fordist factories with workers who got organised

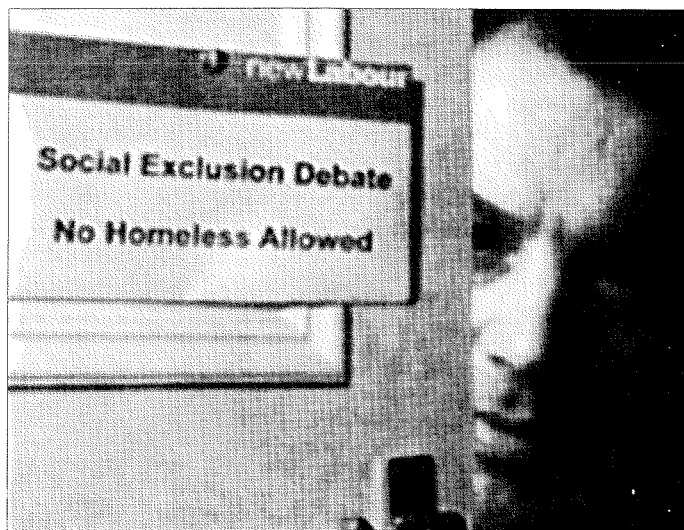
in industrial unions. They broke down because of a new wave of struggles, of a new kind, which brought in not only a new generation of factory workers but also spread to other territories of our society. The Keynesian strategies started to collapse, and a new set of strategies started to form. This is what people call neo-liberalism.

Neo-liberalism is essentially a combination of capitalist strategies at the global level. Both the state and big transnational corporations are active agents in implementing those strategies. The state is an active agent of the process of globalisation.

One main component of neo-liberal strategies is what we can call enclosures. I use the word enclosures in a general sense, not simply in the sense that Marx used it to refer to the enclosure of common land in Britain. Enclosure essentially means the separation of people from commons — from direct access to social wealth. One form of those commons — with all the contradictions which I would not dispute — was entitlements in the welfare state. Some of those commons have been enclosed, through privatisations, etc. The commons gave people rights to access social wealth without going through the market and therefore without going through selling their labour-power.

Another main component of neo-liberal strategies is integration. Once you increase the space for the market — once you commodify increasingly spheres of life — then you can integrate them within the accumulation process, the M-C-M' process. The integration is done through the expansion of the market, and there are three forms; through the financial markets and the management of debt; through trade liberalisation; and through the globalisation of production.

I agree that globalisation today is not capitalism turned financial. Of course not. But we also have to recognise that the financial markets are not just a question of a casino economy. The financial markets



and the increased mobility of capital have an effect as a disciplinary device against any possible concessions to people struggling to expand the realm of entitlements. Any national government can claim it is powerless because any concessions will be punished by these huge masses of mobile capital.

Trade has always been important for capital. But in the old imperial policy of capital, there was a specialisation of the North, or the imperial powers, in manufacturing, and of the South in raw materials for each colony's imperial power. The imperial powers were struggling for resources, and that was the struggle for colonies. The same sort of division of labour was reflected in the neo-colonial period after the Second World War and the various struggles for national liberation. What is happening now, with the increase of manufacturing production, and the clustering of production processes in world-wide commodity chains rather than just on a national level, is that trade becomes a disciplinary device. Mechanisms of competitiveness are used to keep in check wage rates, efficiency, etc. The threat of shifting production from one country to another — not just actual shifts, but also the threat — serves as a disciplinary device.

Both enclosure and integration are strategies imposed to make competitiveness the horizon of human interaction. There is also an element of capitalists attempting to learn from strategic mistakes. They are striving to continuously displace the class composition. The capitalists know that they cannot run away from the conflict which

* Massimo De Angelis, author of *Keynesianism, Social Conflict and Political Economy* and other works was speaking at the *Workers' Liberty 2000* summer school. This is an unedited transcript.

is inherent in capitalist production, and so what they are trying to set up is a mechanism through which to control it by facilitating capital mobility. Capitalist production is developed in sectors where workers are unorganised, there is a culture which is not a trade-union culture or can be easily subsumed in the capitalist process. It does not take long, as the case of South East Asia demonstrates, before those workers start to get organised. Capital strives to set up a mechanism, a system of global production, in which as soon as those workers, with that particular composition, working in those particular sectors, get organised and start to put pressure on capitalist valorisation, they can shift production, or part of it, to another area, where new work practices can be put in place on the basis of a different class composition. This is what economists call the flying geese paradigm. Capital also strives to impose the market as the mechanism of our social metabolism and to generalise the market principle as the natural form of social interaction. This is a sort of colonisation of our dreams, or of our possibility of imagining other forms. It is a big problem for all progressives.

What are we going to replace the market with? In the Seattle demonstration the slogan was "No new round — WTO turn around". The unity was on the idea of stopping the WTO and new round. The big question mark was "WTO turn around", which means not so much where should the WTO go as where are we going. One of the big battles that we have to face is to constitute a different horizon, a different perspective, of where we are going and where do we want to go. It is not just what has traditionally been considered "the economy" that has been subordinated to the drive to com-

petitiveness and accumulation, but also what has traditionally been called "society". We know that "economy" and "society" are not really divided. They are part of the same thing. But there is a lot of literature around the idea that the state and the government must ensure "social cohesion" for the sake of competitiveness. For example, a document from the International Labour Office talks about "competitive societies", and states that a competitive society must find a "dynamic equilibrium between wealth-creation on one side and social cohesion on the other".

Everyone is aware that the current strategies of enclosure disrupt the social fabric. In the South, the Structural Adjustment Programs set the context in which wars are breaking out everywhere. In the North, as well, with increasing polarisation of wealth, there is a problem of social cohesion. When we talk about the current historical form of capital, we have to think not only of the factories and the offices — and then the rest of life — but in terms of a more integrated whole, in which the accumulation process depends on capital's ability to mobilise the social cooperation of labour. Social cooperation of labour here means not only the cooperation of the workers in the factories, but social cooperation of labour in general, including in the sphere of reproduction of labour-power. Competitiveness means social competitiveness. The social consensus is managed around the internalisation of the market principle — getting us to accept the market as the only way for us to relate to each other. We must be able, as radicals or progressives or revolutionaries, to disrupt that internalisation.

The problem of infrastructure is an old

one — the roads, the trains, etc., which can increase the turnover and reduce the circulation time of capital, and thus increase the social rate of profit. It is a big issue in the European Union. And it is linked to the environmental problem, and environmental struggles. However confused the environmental struggles, within the global strategies which attempt to subsume society as part of the valorisation process the environmental struggles are important struggles, and part of the class struggle.

Education is crucial for capital if it wants to rely on a strategy of continuous displacement of the class composition. An educated worker in today's paradigm is a worker who is able to adapt — who is able to take one job one day and another job the next day — who is engaged in life-long learning as a continuous process, which means updating their skills to suit the market. That is essential to maintain social cohesion in a context in which there is continuous displacement of the class composition, of what kind of work is done.

When I talk about the strategies of capital, it is important to remember that the world out there is a net result of those strategies and the struggles and limits we can impose on them. The problem for us is to recognise the changes in the class composition, and to intervene in the broad spectrum of struggles and pose the question of what we are for — though without giving answers, because even within Europe the word "socialist" has lost any meaning. Don't tell Italians that you are a socialist, because they will reckon you are a friend of Craxi. The question is what are we for, not ideologically, but concretely, starting from the needs and aspirations which are coming forward in the struggles of today, like in Seattle.

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Nightmares of globalisation

By Bob Carnegie*

THIS short article attempts to deal briefly with the impact the global economy has had and is having on the agriculture and food industries in the Third World and uses the experiences of India as being both a major and a typical example.

Recently, as part of the BBC's Reith 2000 Lectures, the noted Indian scholar Vandana Shiva spoke on globalisation and poverty. In a thought provoking and wide ranging lecture Vandana Shiva outlined the undeniable facts that vast tracts are being laid to waste as the "global economy" devours the traditional Indian agricultural and food economy. Vandana Shiva described how farmers in the Punjab, formerly India's most prosperous agricultural region, are being driven to suicide by debt and despair. Where farmers once grew millet, pulses and rice, they were lured into growing cotton by seed merchants acting for transnational agricultural corporations. These corporations promised the farmers that they would become wealthy. It has instead created poverty on a massive scale. The hybrid cotton seed is vulnerable to pest attacks. In some areas pesticide use has increased 2000%. Farmers are now drinking this pesticide to kill themselves. They are doing this so they may escape their mounting and unpayable debts. It is the same transnational agricultural and pesticide corporations such as Monsanto (the producer of the herbicide Round Up) which in Australia are developing genetically modified foods.

In exposing the exploitation of farmers in Canada, the Canadian Farmers' Union released a report which stated in part that whilst corporations such as Kellogg's, Quaker Oats and General Mills had an average return of 140% on equity, Canadian farmers sold a bushel of corn for less than \$4, whilst a bushel of corn flakes sold for \$133!

In Vandana Shiva's lecture he outlined how these enormous US-based transnational food-processing corporations are unleashing an almost unimaginable economic and social disaster on India's farming and agricultural communities.

Vandana Shiva said: "It is not that we Indians eat our food raw. Global consultants fail to see that 99% of India's food processing is done by women at household level or by small cottage industry



Clinton is greeted at a women's co-operative in India. Meanwhile hunger, insecurity, and ecological damage snowball.

because it is not controlled by global agribusiness. Ninety-nine per cent of India's agro-processing has been intentionally kept at the small level. Now under globalisation things are rapidly changing. In August 1998 small scale processing in India was banned through a packaging order. The takeover of the edible oil industry has affected 10 million livelihoods. The takeover of flour by packaged branded flour will cost 100 million livelihoods. It will also create an ecological disaster."

I felt almost physically sick when I read Vandana Shiva's lecture. People, with hopes and dreams, are having their lives destroyed, quite deliberately, by the tens of millions. This is the globalisation process unmasked. Put simply I believe it can be summed up as "If you are not wealthy enough to be a consumer you have no place in this world".

The wealthiest 1% of the earth's population are richer than the poorest 60%. Our current Western consumer society has duped most of us into a "more is good, much more is better" type of outlook on life. A four year old child would almost break your arm for the latest Pokemon card. Last year 59 million cars were produced worldwide, more than in any previous year!

Not only is the Western consumer model unsustainable, it is destroying the backbone of ancient cultures such as India.

Orwellian double-speak has reached new heights. Vandana Shiva points out that whilst he was participating in the United Nations Bio Safety Negotiations, Monsanto was claiming that Roundup "prevented weeds from stealing sunshine". What Monsanto did not state was that what it called

weeds were green fields of rice which provide vitamin A and prevent blindness in children. Transnational corporations like Monsanto are accusing bees of stealing genetically modified pollen. They are backed up by World Trade Organisation (WTO) rulings.

Sometimes I feel like the tall, gaunt spirit of George Orwell is nodding his head saying "I told you so..." What can we do? How do we of the First World help the dispossessed of the Third? We need to re-evaluate what we want out of our lives. Do we want more, or do we want a better world? If the answer is a better world we need to combine and we need to fight.

The present holders of political office nearly all chant the same mantra of how wonderful globalisation is. They need to be brought to account or voted out of office.

Some trade unions have done some good work on the globalisation issue. However much more needs to be done. Many unions are caught up in promoting massive growth in the economy when they should be examining sustainability. A shorter working week does a lot more to promote sustainability than overtime at double-time rates.

The conservation societies need to expand their vision and utilise their high standing in society to expose the myths of globalisation being good for our economy.

There is so much needed to be done and answers to be found.

However one thing is certain. As Gandhi said: "The earth has enough for everyone's needs, but not for some people's greed."

* Bob Carnegie is the former South East Queensland organiser of the Maritime Union of Australia

Free trade and resistance

By Rhodri Evans

CAPITALISTS have long used migrant workers and the unemployed to beat down employed workers. Work harder, longer, and cheaper, or the capitalist will find someone else, cheaper and more pliant, to replace you — on the streets or off the boats! Or, now, with globalisation — *in another country*.

In labour history, one answer to the capitalists' use of the unemployed and migrants has been crony-unionism (reserving jobs for a chosen section of the working class). Another has been support for anti-immigrant legislation. Both were self-defeating in any but the short term and destructive of socialist politics in any term at all. The solid answer always was and is united organisation of the employed and unemployed, and of native workers and migrants, to demand improvements for both sections. The battles in France since 1995, where unions and unemployed organisations have combined — sometimes by staging "invasions" of the unemployed into workplaces — to demand shorter hours with a guarantee of new hirings, are a recent example of the feasibility of that socialist response.

The same goes for the capitalists' use of other countries. The answer is not reimposed trade barriers, or "going local", but *internationalism, united organisation of workers in different countries*. Of course it will take much discussion and debate to work out exactly what this global solidarity and new internationalism mean, and how they can be organised. They are not tasks of a few minutes, any more than uniting the employed and unemployed, or natives and migrants, ever have been. Yet preconditions exist, and the organising has begun.

"Internationalism" is not the whole answer to every particular struggle. If capitalists threaten to move jobs to another country — or to sack the whole workforce and replace them with recruits from the unemployed — the appropriate immediate answer may be to call their bluff, or to seize the workplace and the machinery and use them as bargaining counters. The long-term program of uniting workers, employed and unemployed, native and migrant, and across national borders, is not dispensable, but it is not to be counterposed to immediate struggles either.

Governments in countries with lower wages, restricted trade-union rights and fewer social guarantees use those as selling



points to attract multinational investment. Not only Third World governments do that, but also, for example, Ireland and Britain, "selling" themselves as lower-cost production sites in Europe. How can labour be internationalist if we do not demand levelling-up of standards, and as much legislative force as can be achieved for that levelling-up? Maybe rich-country labour movements demanding international guarantees of labour standards will seem to be, or actually be, "covering for" rich-country protectionism. The antidote is to ensure that trade unions in the poorer countries are seen to take the lead in the demands for "levelling-up", and to link the demands with calls for a transfer of funds from the richer countries to the poorer ones to reduce the "comparative disadvantage" of the latter in infrastructure, education, and so on.

Such a transfer actually exists — in a very corrupt, bureaucratic form — in the European Union. In fact, over the decades of European integration, on the whole labour movements in Europe have proved strong enough, even despite lamentably feeble international coordination, to make the "levelling" of wages consequent on that integration more a levelling-up than a levelling-down. Spanish wages have risen much closer to German wages, and not by German wages being beaten down in the same way as US wages.

Those US wages have been beaten down by US capitalists, not by Korean or Chinese workers, and mainly by the employers' offensive within the US, where wage rates for jobs which cannot be moved to Third World countries — janitors, retail workers, etc. — have been pushed down just as much as those for those which can. World-wide, there has not been a levelling-down of wages. There has not been a levelling at all. Workers in some previously low-wage countries have won big improvements thanks to strong and courageous union organisation (South Korea being the prime example), but, overall, averages of income have become more unequal between countries, rather than more equal.

It is not true that industrialisation must follow low wages. The *Australian Financial Review Magazine* (April 2000) reports on how over the last 25 years hundreds of thousands of textile, clothing and footwear jobs have been moved from Australia to China and other south-east Asian countries. "Chinese factories pay workers at 69 cents an hour when the hourly rate in Australia is \$11.50." But the calculation is not as simple as it seems. Most capitalists do not go where the wages are lowest. Most industry is still in relatively high-wage countries. Very little multinational industrial investment goes to the lowest-wage countries. Taiwan, Korea, Mexico and Brazil, with their relatively higher wages and stronger unions, have faster-growing industry than Africa. Availability of skilled labour and nearby markets, and networks of transport, communication, supply, services and distribution, are generally much more important for capitalists in choosing production sites than wage levels alone.

Naturally, multinational capitalists would not like it if Chinese

The flows of investment

In "low-income" and "middle-income" countries, the proportion of capital investments coming from abroad increased in the 1990s. By 1997 10.8% of investment in "middle-income" countries was foreign direct investment, and 6.0% in "low-income". The more developed ex-colonial countries are exporting more capital, but the bulk still comes from the USA, Western Europe and Japan.

workers' wages doubled, their hours were shortened and their factories made safe, or if they gained legal freedom to organise trade unions. It does not follow that the multinationals would cease to invest there. If the improvements for workers went together with a clear-out of bureaucratic corruption, a cutback in China's huge military establishment, and the establishment of a more-or-less clear and reliable rule of law, then investment might well even increase. And if it didn't? The resources currently siphoned off by China's bureaucratic and military establishment are ample to generate a continuing rapid expansion of Chinese industry.

There is no way to pursue working-class struggle without annoying or disturbing capital, or risking reprisals. Improvements in one workplace — or in one country — may be met by "strikes of capital". But by fighting for improvements, workers increase their confidence, organisation and solidarity, increase their chances of making general political and social gains, and push the capitalists into technical and social investments they would not otherwise make. This argument — necessary against "give-backs" in every workplace — is surely even more true for improvements won or defended in whole countries than for those won or defended in particular workplaces.

A general rise in wages in Brazil, for example, could not conceivably happen without a great strengthening of the labour movement in Brazil and huge knock-on effects (not just in Brazil). It would create conditions for a more successful international resistance to the rules of profit, even if it did trigger a "strike of capital". And it is not at all certain that capital would find it feasible or advisable to respond by a "strike". Trade-union militancy has won huge increases in wages in South Korea — it must have been one of the fastest wage-upswings in any country at any time in world history — and capital has not stopped investing there.

Aid and debt relief are not sufficient for the industrialisation of poorer countries. By themselves they can well lead to nothing much but the enrichment of a government and crony-capitalist elite, and the expansion of military establishments and prestige construction projects. Wider benefits depend on the development in those poorer countries of labour and popular movements strong enough to shift government policies. At the best the benefits from aid and debt relief are by-products of a process driven fundamentally by the self-interest of capitalist states (military alliances, construction and supply contracts, straightening out international banks' balance-sheets, etc.). The details are decided at so great a distance from any democratic processes that it is foolish to imagine that lobbying and petitioning from below can change that fundamentally within a stable capitalist regime. Even the meagre by-products, however, may be very important for some of the poorest countries. Korea and Taiwan owe their dramatic economic lift-off in large part to "aid" militarily-motivated from the United States. And any socialist world policy must include massive, democratically-controlled aid from the richer countries to the poorer. The fundamental socialist answer remains not to petition the billionaires to please invest some of their wealth in this place rather than that one, or to dispense a little more in philanthropy, but to take the billions from them and put them under democratic social control.

Transitional demands along those lines might include: opening the books of the multinationals; information and veto powers for international shop stewards' committees over multinationals' investment plans; action by international shop stewards' committees to demand "levelling up" of wages and conditions; aid from rich countries to poor ones under the control of workers' and community organisations in those countries, and along the lines of workers' reconstruction plans worked out by those organisations; taxing the rich in countries where industry is shutting down to finance workers' reconversion and reconstruction plans there; and so on. All these, and others, flow from a general

approach of working for workers' control over social wealth, rather than petitioning the World Bank, IMF, WTO or whomever to act more charitably.

"Fair trade, not free trade" is nonsense (even if good ideas are sometimes proposed beneath that nonsensical banner). As Karl Marx demonstrated long ago in *The Poverty of Philosophy* and *On the Question of Free Trade*, a system based on trade cannot be made non-exploitative by pleading for fairer and more equitable exchanges. It must be replaced by democratic social provision for human need. To free trade we counterpose not protectionism, but working-class resistance and solidarity.

Further reading

From *Workers' Liberty*:

59-60: *Workers in global capitalism*. Includes Bruce Robinson, "Is this the 'information age'?"; Eric Lee, "The Internet is changing politics"; Moshé Machover, "The 20th century in retrospect"; Colin Foster, "Looking forward from 2000"; Chris Reynolds, "The working class in the 21st century".

55: Tony Brown, "Getting to grips with post-modernism".

53: "Europe and the left"; Alan Thornett and Martin Thomas debate "The socialist answer to the euro".

50-51: Murray Kane, "Marx's Grundrisse and the 'post-modern' era"; Martin Thomas, "Globalisation and its discontents".

49: Martin Thomas, "Globalisation and its analysts".

45: Tony Brown and Janet Burstall, "The critique of capitalism".

44: Sean Matgamna, "The Communist Manifesto after Stalinism".

42: Martin Thomas, "The New Rules of Big Money".

31: Martin Thomas, "Social Democracy in the 1990s".

28: Martin Thomas, "Marxism and Imperialism".

6: Martin Thomas, "The new working class in the Third World".

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The continuing nation

By Alan McArthur

ANY discussion of globalisation and internationalism raises an obvious question: what about nations? With the rise of globalisation, are nations, and nationalism, still relevant? If so, what do we say about them?

From Tibet through Kosova, Ireland, Bosnia and Israel-Palestine, nations and nationalism remain big issues right across the world. Indeed, there could even be said to have been something of a revival of nationalism in the 1990s.

Global capital can be tackled only by the unity of workers across national boundaries. Does that mean we see national struggles as irrelevant or necessarily something we cannot ever support? No.

Only on the basis of supporting national rights can we enable workers to overcome national boundaries. The national question is a question of political democracy. National "self-determination" means that a nation may democratically decide, without being threatened with blockade or invasion, whether to form a separate state or to remain in a political union with another nation. International unity is possible only with recognised rights of self-determination — just as genuine intellectual agreement is possible only through free discussion and the right to disagree.

The Marxist commitment to international working class unity implies consistent support for the right of all nations to self-determination and for the struggles of every nation oppressed by another.

Whether we *specifically* support, for example, one nation breaking away from another is a practical question, the basis being whether or not it benefits the working class and international working class unity. But we support absolutely every nation's *right* to secede.

We support, for example, the right of Scotland, if the majority so wish, to become independent of the UK. All things being equal, however, we would be against that option, as it would tend to disrupt working class unity without lifting any major oppression.

The general principle of the right of nations to self-determination has been (mis-)used by some socialists to draw "campist" conclusions. Some socialists have divided the world into an imperialist and an anti-imperialist camp. The anti-imperialist camp supposedly included all the Stalinist states. Resistance by the peoples of Eastern Europe and by the Afghans to the imperialism of the former USSR was then opposed on the grounds that it would weaken the struggle against imperialism! We reject that approach.

Similarly, in the recent Kosova conflict, most of the left supported the Serbian regime against the West, refusing to acknowledge Serbia's primitive imperialism, and attempted genocide, in Kosova and the Kosovars' right to self-determination. The issue for most of the left was only one of "imperialist" states bombing a "non-imperialist" state. We did not support NATO, but we rejected the explicit or implicit pro-Serbian (anti-Kosovar) bias of the "stop NATO" left.

Our policy must be decided by how we defend the democ-



Russia's war in Chechnya has left the people homeless, destitute and oppressed

atic rights of all peoples, and how, therefore, we can best unite workers across national boundaries.

We believe that the only solution to the British-Irish conflict,

for example, is a free united Ireland which recognises as much regional autonomy for the distinct Protestant Irish community as is compatible with the right to self-determination of the Irish-majority Catholic people. In practice, we believe, this means some sort of federal Ireland.

We urge workers to unite around the idea of guaranteeing the rights of each of the peoples

involved and thus removing communal conflict as a barrier to working class unity.

To take another example, we are for a socialist United States of the Middle East, with self-determination for minority nations like the Kurds and the Israeli Jews. We of course support the struggle of the Palestinian Arabs against the Israeli occupation in the West Bank and Gaza, and against discrimination inside Israel. But we reject calls (supported by much of the left) for a "secular democratic state in all Palestine", because this desirable ideal solution is impossible until *after* the current Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been resolved and relegated to history. As an immediate proposal the slogan can only be camouflage for a programme for the subjugation of Israel by the surrounding Arab states.

Our aim is to unite all workers irrespective of nationality. But the only way to do this is to recognise national antagonisms — and promote consistent democracy to remove them as a barrier to unity.

Imperialism yesterday and today

By Jay Lewis

THE colonial imperialism of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th brought some of the elements of capitalist development to the South. But such features of capitalism as mark it out as an advance on previous societies — literacy, education, scientific health care, individual liberty and dignity — scarcely reached the mass of the people in the colonies. Sometimes they faced the opposite: destruction of their cultures, racism, genocide.

Such was colonialism. In Spanish America, independence (in the early 19th century) brought little advance. The independence struggles in the rest of the Third World, generally between World War Two and 1975, were significantly different.

From the 1950s to the 1970s, in many countries, under both right-wing and left-wing governments, large sections of industry were nationalised, and protective tariffs were set up. Despite the rise of the multinational corporations in that period, the percentage of local ownership in the economies of the Third World increased markedly. Even after falling in the 1990s, it still remains much higher than in the colonial or semi-colonial era. Industry grew fast — and that included manufacturing industry, not just the traditional Third World industries (mining, plantations, railways to serve the mines and plantations, etc.).

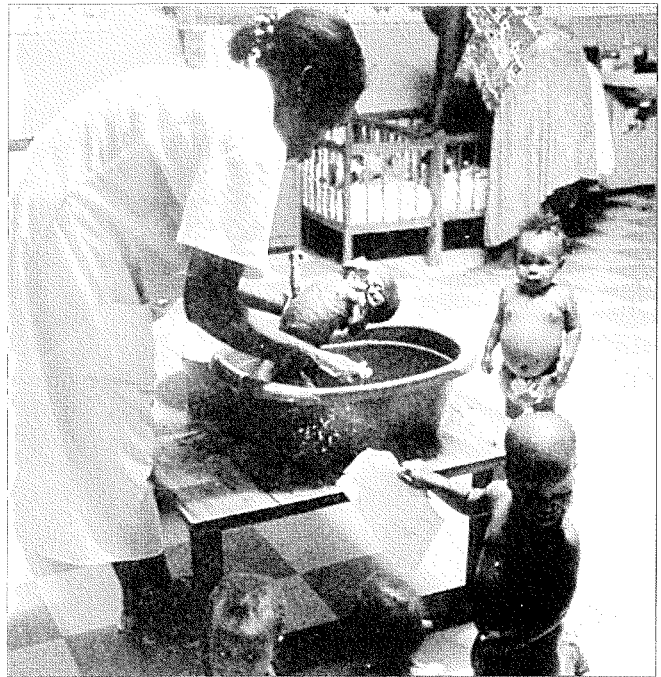
“The colour of the revolution which I have seen in one area after another of India in the 1960s is steel-grey,” wrote Daniel Thorner. “I call it an industrial revolution.” Manufacturing output in the Third World grew by around 6% a year, and output per head by about 3 to 4% a year, between 1950 and the early 1980s.

Land reforms were proclaimed practically everywhere in the Third World. They were effective more rarely. Nevertheless, several countries — from South Korea through Egypt and Algeria to Mexico — saw dramatic changes in their structure of landholding. Elsewhere, capitalist relations in agriculture developed more gradually but nonetheless inexorably.

Different paths of national economic development did prove possible, in the decades after colonial independence. Their success was always precarious and patchy. And even the most “successful” variants meant national economic development on the back of the working class, where the workers had to fight fiercely even to gain the right to express an opinion or to secure some portion of the economic gains. But there was a “grey revolution”.

IN the 1990s new patterns have emerged. Their immediate roots go back to the 1970s. In 1973, the major oil-producing states forced a big increase in oil prices. Among the big capitalist powers, the oil price rise hit the US less hard than others. It even made some of the US's own new oilfields profitable. Britain, too, would gain from the oil price rise, when North Sea oil production boomed in the early 1980s. But in essence the increase was a signal of the end of the colonial era. States like Iran, Iraq, Libya, Venezuela, and even Saudi Arabia, had their own capitalist ambitions. They were no longer willing just to serve as platforms for the ambitions of US or British oil companies.

Oil-producing states stashed a lot of their vast new revenues with the international banks, who in turn lent the cash to industrialising ex-colonial states. When the big capitalist economies lurched into slump after 1979-80, trade contracted, interest rates rose, and credit got tighter: those borrower states could no longer



Global misery continues. In Africa war and famine has made an orphan rate of 2 percent “normal”.

pay yesterday's debts from today's profits and new loans. In 1982, Mexico's failure to meet debt repayments signalled the start of a global Third World debt crunch. Third World capitalists who had put large slices of the loan money into safe US or European property or bank accounts now co-operated with the banks in making the workers and peasants pay the cost of the crisis, on a scale which made British Tory austerity look gentle.

The crunch was not just a sudden crisis. Third World capitalists and governments did not respond to the debt squeeze by shifting into their old mode of having their own national states as the main financiers for development, as some of them had when they became unable to meet debt payments in the 1930s. They made a new permanent regime out of heavy indebtedness, sharpened austerity and a drive for exports to cover the costs of debt. Their industrial development had reached a level requiring substantial imports — and thus international credit — to continue. Some of the costs of keeping internationally creditworthy were irksome to the Third World wealthy, but most of those costs they could offload onto the workers and peasants — and most of the benefits of the borrowing they could pocket for themselves. The US and other big economies recovered after 1983. Though the recovery has been sluggish, and interrupted by a new crisis in 1990-2, it has provided sufficient markets for the Third World capitalists to pursue their new strategy. In the 1980s, the Third World, in total, started to export more manufactured goods to the US than it imported from there.

The debt burden has increased for every Third World region except Latin America, and even there it remains heavy. Under the “Uruguay round” of trade negotiations, average advanced country tariffs on manufactured imports will be cut to less than 4%. Tariffs

of Third World states are set to fall from 34% (in 1984-7) to 14%. World merchandise exports have increased 137% between 1987 and 1997 — much faster than world output — and the merchandise exports of countries classified by the World Bank as “low and medium income” have almost tripled, increasing by 187%. The ratio of trade (imports plus exports) to output (GDP) doubled for “low and medium income” countries between 1970 and 1997. It increased from 18% to 40% in low-income countries and from 25% to 50% in medium-income.

Investment in Third World countries by companies which buy or construct facilities there (called foreign direct investment, as distinct from just buying shares or making bank loans) sagged in the 1980s but has increased fast in the 1990s.

Local private capitalists have also figured more largely, displacing the Third World states from their previous centrality in capital investment. Even states still run by “Communist Parties”, like Vietnam, Cuba and, most spectacularly, China, seek foreign investment and encourage private enterprise. Telecoms, other utilities and basic industries have been privatised in many countries since the 1980s. The Chilean state started privatising in 1973, and has sold off 95% of its state-owned enterprises. Mexico sold off or shut down 80% of its 1,500 state-owned enterprises between 1982 and the end of 1992, cutting 200,000 jobs in the process. South Korea started a new wave of privatisations in 1987, following previous sell-offs in 1962-66 and the early 1980s. In Pakistan, which started privatising in 1991, 43% of workers in the sold-off enterprises were laid off within the first year after privatisation, and many workers elsewhere have lost jobs, or job security, through privatisation.

Town and country

Although Indonesia today is one of the world's poorest countries, 38% of the population live in cities. Thirteen per cent live in cities of more than one million. Forty per cent of the labour force is in agriculture, 56% in industry and services. The agricultural labour force are mostly wage-workers on large estates (rubber, sugar, palm-oil, tea, tobacco) or small land-owning farmers. Before the 1997 economic crisis, there were some 86 million employed workers out of a population of 200 million in Indonesia.

Compare Rosa Luxemburg's Germany — the country which Marxists of the time cited as the epitome of high industrial development. Only 3% of Germany's 65 million people (around 1910) lived in the one city with over one million people, Berlin. If we take 300,000 as the minimum size for a big city since Germany's population in 1910 was one-third of Indonesia's today), then 11% of the German people lived in big cities, still fewer than Indonesia's 13%.

Thirty-five per cent of the German labour force was in agriculture. There were 5.4 million small-holdings of less than 20 hectares, on which must have worked a substantial proportion of the 34% of the labour force reported as self-employed or working for their families. Although economic relations on the large landholdings were moving towards the norms of capitalist wage-labour, many of those employed there worked under the *Gesindeordnung* — abolished only in 1918 — which put them in semi-feudal subjection to the landlords, the Junkers.

In many countries, tariff reductions, a drive to make exports and attract foreign investment, and privatisation have been tied together with cuts in whatever minimal welfare provision existed — such as food price subsidies — through “Structural Adjustment Programs” negotiated with the IMF or the World Bank as the price for further loans. Fifty-five countries borrowed from the IMF under Structural Adjustment Facilities between 1986 and April 1998.

This “globalisation” has brought an increase in inequality both within and between nations. Millions have been pauperised. Since 1960, the gap between the richest and the poorest fifth of nations has doubled. Yet the development of an industrial base in the Third World continues. Power production increased 170% in “low income” countries between 1960 and 1990, and 370% in “middle income” countries. The number of telephone lines, the amount of paved roads, the extent of drinking-water supply and irrigated land also increased fairly fast. Between 1990 and 1997, manufacturing production increased 49% in “low income” countries, 57% in “middle income” countries (and 15% in “high income” countries). Countries like Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Mexico and Brazil now export relatively high-tech goods. Even in the poorest Third World countries, there is generally some increase in the preconditions for industrial production, although that increase is outpaced by a parallel rise in misery and poverty. The proportion of illiterates has dropped fairly fast between 1980 and 1995 — from 30.5% to 22.6% — though the world's total illiterate population has increased from 877 million to 885 million.

Trade has changed in structure as well as increased. Manufacturing as a percentage of Third World exports has increased from 20% in 1960 to 60% in 1990. Within the reduced share of world trade due to agriculture, a new pattern has emerged “where the South specialises in exports of labour-intensive luxury crops... and the North [especially the USA] specialises in exports of capital-intensive ‘low-value’ raw foods” (McMichael and Myhre).

The “globalist” path has been followed by virtually all Third World governments, not only those pushed into it because their debt burden obliges them to do the bidding of the IMF or the World Bank. Although no doubt the governments would prefer to be able to choose their own tempo rather than obey the international bankers, the basic strategy suits their class interests. They impose the welfare-cutting, privatising, foreign-investment-seeking plans primarily because they are capitalist governments, not because they lack national independence. They queue up to join the IMF, while in the 19th century the peoples of Africa and Asia often fought hard to avoid “joining” colonial empires. The IMF today has 182 members, as against 130 in 1975.

Despite the rapid rise of foreign direct investment in the 1990s, the economies of most Third World countries today are dominated by local capitalists. Those Third World states able to provide infrastructure and educated labour for enterprises competitive in world manufacturing and services — and they include some with vast hinterlands of absolute poverty, like India and Indonesia — are doing so not because their states have been weakened, but because they have been strengthened, because they are now established capitalist states, with local capitalist classes behind them of some substance and bulk, rather than what they often were, proto-capitalist states run by a thin middle class layer anxious to use all the levers of state protectionism to build a base and ward off big outside capital. “Transnational capital may be more effective than was the old-style military imperialism in penetrating every corner of the world, but it tends to accomplish this through the medium of local capital and national states... it depends on many local jurisdictions — on, say, the Indian or Chinese state — to maintain the conditions of economic stability and labour discipline which are the conditions of profitable investment” (Ellen Wood).

Full-fledged capitalism has spread much more widely than ever before. But as the gleaming skyscrapers reach upwards in the

cities of the Third World, the grim shanty towns spread outwards. Hundreds of millions of people suffer hideously — peasants pushed out of subsistence farming by the drive towards higher-priced world-market cash-crops; workers who lose their jobs in privatisations or debt crises; the urban poor, hit by cuts in food subsidies and increases in public transport fares and utility charges; and whole peoples in those ex-colonial countries still dependent on bulk raw material exports. But in the 1990s there is one thing worse for a poor nation than being integrated into the global economy — that is, to be excluded from it. Cuba suffers that plight. Real wages went down 39% between 1989 and 1996, and there is now open unemployment of 7%.

HISTORIANS have called British imperialism in the early and middle 19th century “the imperialism of free trade”. In South America, for example, Britain did not need to establish its own colonial rule in place of Spain’s. The competitive supremacy of its industry gave it economic dominance, and with that political influence.

An “imperialism of free trade” is also the main form today. This is so partly because the great metropolitan capitalist interests can afford it. For example, exclusive control by their “own” nation-state over sources of raw materials is less important to modern big capitalist concerns — often organised in transnational companies with substantial operations in many countries outside their home country — than to the big capital classes of earlier eras.

The central reason, however, is nothing to do with the metropolitan profiteers “mellowing”. The social and political awakening of the peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America, their transformation from populations with dispersed and illiterate peasant majorities into nations with big cities, substantial working classes, autonomous bourgeois classes and some industry of their own, has made the risk and expense of colonial or semi-colonial rule generally too great for the metropolitan powers.

Some Marxists have concluded that this amounts to the death of imperialism and the rise of a new “post-imperialist” era. But capitalist imperialism has seen many forms since the 16th century. Often — for example, at the time Lenin wrote his famous pamphlet on imperialism, in 1916 — many different forms co-exist and intertwine at the same time.

It is dogmatism to insist that the world today is a replica of the picture painted by Lenin in 1916; and equally pedantic to claim that because the modern “imperialism of free trade”, led by the IMF, the World Bank, the big commercial banks, the transnational corporations and the military power of the US and NATO, does not conform to Lenin’s picture (insightful, but not entirely accurate and complete even for 1916¹), therefore it is *not* a form of imperialism.

The new order is a “lesser evil” than old “High Imperialism”, or imperialism-of-conquest, to the extent that it bears the impress of the victories of the colonial liberation movements. It still destroys and oppresses, and maybe on a larger global scale than its fore-runners. It is a system which conveys the choicest fruits of the world’s labour to the billionaires in “highly concentrated command points in the organisation of the world economy... a new type of city... the global city... New York, London, Los Angeles, Tokyo... The more globalised the economy becomes, the higher the agglomeration of central functions in a relatively few sites, that is, the global cities” (Saskia Sassen). Despite all the relative capitalist advance in the ex-colonial world, and some significant advance in commerce within Latin America, the proportion of “low and middle income” countries’ trade done with the “high income” countries, rather than with each other, increased between 1987 and 1997. The producers of the Third World still mostly have to do their haggling in trade with bigger, richer, more powerful concentrations of capital, cen-

Multinationals

Hundreds of thousands of companies are now “multinationals” in the sense of operating in more than one country. They and their subcontractors account for a large proportion of world output, and an even larger proportion of world trade, especially in manufactured goods. Between a dozen and 20 of them (according to a *Financial Times* survey, 8 October 1997) are now true global companies, organising complex production processes on a global chessboard of production sites, with the whole world market in view, as distinct from nationally-based companies with offshoots in other (usually neighbouring) countries.

tred in the rich countries.

The pillage of the workers and peasants of the Third World continues, but in different form — the urbane international banker replacing the colonial soldier and tax collector. This is a domination of rich over poor, and richer nations over poorer nations, achieved primarily, to use a phrase from Marx, by “the dull compulsion of economic relations... Direct force, outside economic conditions, is of course still used, but only exceptionally”.

The difference of form has political significance. Battles to “regain” or “increase” national independence are today generally a snare. The ex-colonial states mostly have as much political independence as they can have in a dog-eat-dog capitalist world. No extra measure of “independence” can undo economic dominance arising from the fact that the international banks have the dollars needed for international trade, and the big transnational corporations the technologies needed for world-competitive production. Imperialism can be fought only by working-class struggle, which must tackle the local capitalist classes as the most immediate enemy. If those capitalist classes, or factions of them, call on the workers and peasants to rally behind them in the cause of “anti-imperialism” or “national independence”, then generally (though not quite always) they are lying, or promoting downright chauvinism.

For the old-style colonial, semi-colonial or military-conquest imperialism is practised today most often not by the big powers, whose capitalist classes find the “dull compulsion of economic relations” cheapest and most effective, but by newer “sub-imperialist” powers who have to resort to such risky methods for lack of economic strength. The last of the European colonial powers to relinquish their empires were the economically weakest, Portugal (in 1975) and Russia (in 1989-91). Today some ex-colonial or ex-semi-colonial countries have some military means to dominate their neighbours, but relatively little economic clout. They promote themselves as “policemen” and local big powers in their regions — Nigeria in West Africa, for example, India in South Asia, or Brazil in South America, which was the case for which the term “sub-imperialism” was first coined by the Marxist writer Ruy Mauro Marini. And sometimes they go for outright military domination: China in Tibet, Turkey in Kurdistan, Serbia in Kosova, Iraq in Kurdistan and Kuwait, Indonesia in East Timor...

This military “sub-imperialism” is a small-scale parody of the high imperialism of the late 19th century. It is not anti-imperialist. It is not a progressive alternative to the economic domination of the big powers. It does not show a way out of underdevelopment, or towards a fairer and more equal world.

Only independent working class struggle can do that. And the working class which can wage that struggle is growing in numbers, and often in organisation, all across the ex-colonial world.

● A fuller version of this article is available on the web at www.workersliberty.org

1. See Martin Thomas, “Marxism and Imperialism”, *WL* 28.

Globalising the labour movement

The New Economy

By Eric Lee

WHETHER there really is a "new economy" is debatable, but regardless of what one wants to call it, high-tech capitalism in the first years of the 21st century offers up both problems and prospects for the labour movement.

Let's start with some of the problems. I can think of seven off-hand.

1. The high-tech economy is making unions weaker. Workers are moving from sectors which were previously highly organised (such as manufacturing) to sectors which are notoriously difficult to organise (such as software publishing). Those new manufacturing jobs which are being created have moved from regions with traditionally powerful unions (Western Europe, North America) to regions where they are often illegal and suppressed (Latin America, Asia) or in historic decline (Eastern Europe).

Unions persist in efforts to organise both the new high-tech sector (notable examples including the Communication Workers of America's organising campaigns at Microsoft and IBM as well as MSF's Information Technology Professionals Association here in the UK). Unions are also putting increasing pressure on governments to create a better climate for independent trade unions in those very same countries to which jobs have fled.

But so far, both the new high-tech sectors and the "emerging

markets" remain largely union-free.

2. The new communications technologies create severe difficulties for unions in the new, wired workplace. For example, the issue that is coming to be known as "online rights". As more and more work is done online, the denial of electronic access in the workplace (using corporate intranets) to trade union representatives cuts unions off from the workforce and gives employers means of communicating with workers that unions do not automatically have. Persistent employer monitoring of workers online (including listening in to their phone calls) will have a chilling effect on organising campaigns and on day-to-day trade union issues (such as handling grievances, in particular sensitive ones like bullying and sexual harassment). Unions are bewildered by these new issues and cannot yet even reach agreement on what they aspire to. For instance, do they call for a complete ban on monitoring in the workplace or do they support allowing selective monitoring?

3. The emergence of a culture of extreme individualism even among ordinary workers and particularly among those in the high-tech sector is not a culture conducive to the growth of traditional trade unions. Given stock options worth (on paper) millions, they may be reluctant to look at collective action as a source of social mobility. (Though with the recent collapse of new economy share prices on the NASDAQ and elsewhere, workers in the high-tech sector will have to look elsewhere for benefits.) Those workers are also increasingly mobile, moving from company to company, making traditional forms of organising by workplace difficult. Unions need to think creatively, and one solution for some may be the old model of craft unions (or even guilds), which might work among highly-skilled and mobile workers. But this model has not yet been tested successfully and old-style unions based on industrial-era capitalism seem unable to engage in meaningful dialogue with, let alone successfully organise, workers in the new economy.

4. A lot of work has been done on the question of whether being connected to the net isolates people from each other. The evidence is not conclusive. My own experience shows that the net allows me to find those people who share my own peculiar interests, thereby actually increasing the quantity and quality of my friendships — and the scope of my political activity. For small political organisations, this should prove to be hugely advantageous. For unions, proper use of the net might even increase participation in things like branch meetings, though I have seen no evidence of this yet. Still, the threat of social atomisation is a real one.

5. The New Economy is a global one, making the formation of new, global trade unions essential. But these are nearly impossible to organise, and in the 30 years since Charles Levinson of the international chemical workers trade secretariat called for a trade union "countervailing power" to multinationals, little has changed. Barriers to such global unions have traditionally included travelling costs (now moderated somewhat by the use of the net and generally lower airfares) and language issues, which I will touch on later. But on the whole, we seem no closer now to global unions than we did a generation ago, when transnational capitalism was just beginning to flower.

6. The increasing dominance in the New Economy of a small,



Using new communications technologies, unions can respond much faster than ever before to workers' struggles around the world — for example in Korea (above and top right)



well-financed group of mega-corporations is creating a media monopoly that is very difficult to overcome. The fact that every child can create his or her own website doesn't mean that they are able to create true alternatives to the traditional media monopolies. That concentration of power means that in Europe, for example, the vast majority of the top-drawing websites remain in American corporate hands; indeed all of them, globally, are controlled by corporations and none by non-governmental organisations such as unions. Websites of such institutions as the 125-million member ICFTU or the 7 million-member TUC don't come anywhere close to the top of the list.

7. Finally, every time it becomes necessary for unions to move forward, change, adopt a new way of doing things, this is going to pose problems. Unions are finding it extremely difficult to adapt to the new economy and are largely clueless about how to use the new technology to their advantage. There are many examples I could offer, some quite humorous, illustrating this point, but one doesn't wish to embarrass the unions concerned. (Though the story about the trade union general secretary who lifted up his mouse and pointed it at a computer screen as if it were a television remote control remains a classic.)

AND yet in spite of all that, there are grounds for optimism. The fact that the new communications technologies are so much cheaper than the old ones is compelling some unions to adopt them when they would not have done so had cost been an issue. The efficiency of the New Economy — the cost of mass emailings for example, or daily publication of news on the web — is spreading even to our movement.

The speed of the net means that we are able to react rapidly to events which previously we found out about only weeks after they took place, if at all. Recent examples of this included the very rapid reaction of unions around the globe, and most notably the highly-

wired Australian unions, to events in East Timor and Fiji. The role of LabourStart as a central provider of news to the unions cannot be overstated.

The biggest technical obstacle to international solidarity and the formation of a new International is language. There are literally thousands of languages spoken in the world today and fewer than one in four people understands English. In a global economy, this is not a problem for capitalists, who can simply compel anyone who wants to do business with them to speak whatever is currently the dominant imperialist language (English since 1945). For a long time it seemed as if the only possible solution to the language barrier was the use of an auxiliary language, such as Esperanto. And indeed there was a strong movement which supported Esperanto among both trade unionists and socialists, particularly during the inter-war years. Today, however, thanks to the new communications technologies there is another solution just over the horizon which will allow us to move towards true international communication in our movement: machine translation (MT). There is some very interesting use of MT taking place even now in the unions. These include the International Transport Workers Federation's use of translation software on a regular basis to cut translation costs, another project to create real-time English/German translation for trade union discussion over the net which is being proposed by postal and telecom unions in the UK and Germany, and even LabourStart's own efforts in this direction, being the first labour website which can be translated online, instantly, into 24 languages.

The tools created by the new economy allow for the possibility of an intensification of trade union democracy — meaning both online discussion and decision-making (online voting). The latter has already happened in a few unions, most notably in allowing a swift resolution of the recent Boeing strike in the USA, but was also used

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in an internal battle in a British union by a leadership eager to get around the rebelliousness of elected union bodies. There are many examples of successful online discussions taking place in the labour movement, and one which springs to mind was set up by the New South Wales Teachers Federation on the LabourStart website (which offers free forums to any union which asks). The NSWTF forum has had hundreds of messages posted and involved a very large number of teachers in that Australian state.

Trade union education can also go online, allowing the delivery of courses to far larger numbers of union members via online distance learning. This remains, however, largely a possibility as unions have moved very slowly in this direction.

Organising campaigns are also aided by the new technology — right up to the actual signing up of new members online, which is done by the Communication Workers of America in their campaigns at Microsoft and IBM. The web has been used by organising campaigns to bring pressure on companies which do not respect the rights of workers to union representation, and a very successful example of this is the "Respect at LAX" campaign which used banner advertising on Yahoo! to bring pressure to bear on employers at Los Angeles International Airport.

I think that communication itself can be a transformative experience. Ask anyone who reads the LabourStart website every day. It changes the way we look at the world when we start our day with trade union news from Germany, Korea and South Africa rather than what the monopolistic media corporations think is news (celebrity gossip, mostly).

This is a period of enormous opportunity for us, comparable to the early days of the Industrial Revolution with the telegraph, railroad and steamship, from which the first unions grew. It is not yet clear whether unions and the left will embrace the new technologies and use the tools provided by the new economy for our ends. Progress has been painfully slow. If we do move forward we should aim to create what Peter Waterman has called a "global solidarity culture" whose organisational expression will consist of something new and wonderful — global, networked unions.

● Eric Lee coordinates
www.labourstart.org

EUROPE

For a workers' United States of Europe!

By Violet Martin

"In place of the old local and national seclusion and self-sufficiency, we have intercourse in every direction, universal interdependence of nations".

CAPITALISM was binding the world together into a closely-linked international economic system, wrote Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in 1847.

The EU is fundamentally a reflection of this drive by capitalism to knit together the world into larger economic units. But why did it come into existence only 110 years after 1847?

Capitalism first created the big nation-states in Western Europe. The next stage was not harmonisation between those states, but sharpening competition between them for economic territory and colonies on the other continents and in Eastern Europe.

Towards the end of the 19th century tariff walls were built higher and higher. The process culminated in the First World War.

After that war, and especially after the Great Crash of 1929, the rivalry between the big capitalist states only became sharper. Tariff walls rose yet higher. After a new World War, it was not until 1950 that intra-European trade (trade between one European country and another) recovered to its level of 1913.

Forward-looking capitalist thinkers had been proposing a United States of Europe since early in the century. The harsh competitive conflicts between national capitalist classes made this impossible. After 1950 two factors made a halfway house towards it possible.

Those were the unprecedented capitalist boom of the 1950s and '60s, which lubricated the frictions of integration, and the unparalleled dominance of the US in the capitalist world.

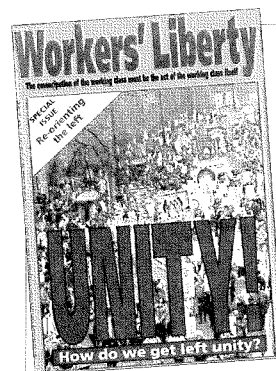
The US provided the umbrella under which Western Europe was semi-integrated. The starting points were the Marshall Plan of US aid — in connection with which the Organisation for European Economic Co-operation was set up in 1948 — and the post-war US/UK/French control over West Germany.

The Allies had to allow West German capitalism to grow and flourish to provide a bulwark against USSR-occupied Eastern Europe. But they wanted to avoid a competition for supremacy in Western Europe between West Germany, France and the UK. The solution was a partial integration of the West European economy under US hegemony.

As the US/UK/French control over West German coal and steel was ended, the European Coal and Steel Commission was proposed and eventually set up in 1951. It was a "common market" in coal and steel, with the same six members — West Germany, France, Italy, Belgium, Netherlands, Luxembourg — as eventually formed the full Common Market in 1957.

Britain refused to join — mainly because its trade was still heavily directed towards the Empire, or ex-Empire. (In 1957 only 15% of the UK's trade was with the Common Market).

The aim of the Common Market was to create a unified home market for West European capitalists, with free movement of goods, labour and capital, with common policies for economic infrastructure — transport, basic industry, energy, agriculture — and with harmonised



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economic laws and regulations. It would be a home market on the scale demanded by the huge productive power of the modern technology.

In that aim the EU has been half-successful. A customs union was established in 1968, a "single market" in 1993, a single currency in 1999. Trade within the EU has grown tremendously. US multinational have poured in investment for this wider market. The paradoxical result has been to make the EU today a challenger to the US's supremacy in the capitalist world.

Britain's trade with the EU grew, to 31% of its total trade by 1972, and the UK, Denmark and Ireland joined the EU in 1972-3. Greece joined in 1981; Spain and Portugal in 1986; Austria, Finland and Sweden in 1995. Thirteen further countries are negotiating to join the EU.

Even from a capitalist point of view, the EU is still a very limited form of international integration. "Cross frontier" mergers of companies have mostly flopped: many barriers between nations remain. At each economic or political jolt, the EU is thrown into crisis and only long, wearisome negotiations between different states can patch together a compromise to keep going. Nevertheless, it has kept going. Capital has united Europe to a considerable degree.

From a socialist point of view, there is a lot to be said against the EU. It has all the vices of capitalism writ large. It faces the Third World as an imperialist consortium. The Common Agricultural Policy means not only high food prices in the EU for the sake of fat profits for capitalist farmers, but also massive surpluses while millions starve, and high tariff walls round the EU for agricultural producers in the Third World wishing to export to it.

The EU, however, is not a particular "bad policy" of capital which can be amputated from the system to provide better conditions for the working class to fight in. It is a reflection of the most fundamental economic trends of capital.

The economic integration of Europe began before the EU; the EU is only a set of arrangements to accommodate and accelerate it.

No amount of calls for "Britain out" will turn the economic clock back and abolish the huge scale of modern capitalist industry and its interconnections. If capitalism did not have the EU, then it would inevitably have another arrange-



The Rover workers faced job losses but their unions failed to make links with workers affected in Germany. European capitalist integration demands Europe-wide workers' unity.

Photo: Molly Cooper

ment differing only in details — or it would have a murderous battle between the big capitalist states of Western Europe over which of them would integrate the region in the form of making the other states its vassals.

To call for countries to withdraw from the EU is as foolish and reactionary as calling for the great capitalist multinational corporations to be broken up into smaller units, or for globalisation in gen-

eral to be halted in favour of returning economic life to a local or national scale.

We need an international working class fight against international capitalism.

We need the economic and social reconstruction of Europe in the interests of the working class — by way of building on the integration of the European economy, seizing control of it rather than seeking to unscramble it.

The working class in the 21st century

The working class worldwide is larger than it has ever been before. The world today has over 2.8 billion wage-workers today (2,806 million in 1997, according to the World Bank). Of those, about 550 million work in industry, and 850 million in services.

Of the 1.4 billion in agriculture, an increasing number work under more-or-less modern capitalist social relations, rather than in archaic or semi-feudal relations, but exact figures are unavailable. Forty per cent of the population of the "low and middle income" countries live in cities now, and 77% of the population of the "high-income" countries.

The figure of 2.8 billion includes not only the wage-working class proper but also, surrounding it, and shading off at the edges into it, a class, maybe

equally large, of "semi-proletarians" — people who scrape a living by varying combinations of petty trade, self-employment, theft, begging, domestic work, and straightforward wage-work. But probably today, for the first time in history, the wage-workers and their periphery are a majority, or near a majority, of the population. This is a tremendous shift.

At the time Karl Marx published *Capital Volume 1*, in 1867, the total employed in more-or-less modern capitalist industry in England and Wales (textiles, clothing, metalworking, mines, railways, gas, etc.) was just 1.7 million — 17% or less of the population of working age. Other countries were far less industrially developed.

Today there are 164 million trade-unionists world-wide (latest International Labour Organisation figures, dated 1995). In 1869, two years after Marx published *Capital*, there were only 250,000 trade-unionists in Britain, and hardly any in other countries.

New forces and passions

Notes on re-reading Lenin's *The Development of Capitalism in Russia*

By Chris Reynolds

TO TODAY'S capitalist globalisation there, are fundamentally, two possible working-class responses. One is proposed, for example, by Robin Hahnel in his book *Panic Rules* (amidst much clear and valuable critique): "We must act like Lilliputian Luddites first and stop corporate-sponsored globalisation by any means necessary. After corporate hegemony and the present system of global pillage have been defeated, our Lilliputian movement can cease to act like Luddites and begin to build a system of international equitable co-operation from below."

The other is expressed, for example, by Michael Hardt and Toni Negri in their book *Empire* (amidst much obscurity and nonsense): "The strategy of local resistance misidentifies and thus masks the enemy. We are by no means opposed to the globalisation of relationships as such... The enemy, rather, is a specific regime of global relations that we call Empire [*"Empire"*, not *"an empire"*, to distinguish today's world order from the old imperialist system of rival colonial empires and spheres of influence]. More important, this strategy of defending the local is damaging because it obscures and even negates the real alternatives and the potentials for liberation that exist *within* Empire. We should be done once and for all with the search for an outside, a standpoint that imagines a purity for our politics... The multitude, in its will to be-against and its desire for liberation, must push through Empire to come out the other side."

The second approach is, I think, essential if we are not be-ensnared in giving "left cover" to nationalist politics, or in vain attempts to turn the clock back. It indicates that "Empire", or capitalist globalisation, is a *step forward* in a certain sense — in the same sense as Marx argued that "the bourgeoisie, historically, plays a most revolutionary role". This idea shocks most socialists. And yet, by Marxist criteria, the facts bear it out. On those Marxist criteria, to say that the development of capitalism is progressive has never been to say that we should support it. It is, on the contrary, to say that capitalist development expands the range, the scope, and the potentialities for working-class struggle.

Rosa Luxemburg can scarcely be suspected of supporting the imperialism of the First World War. Yet she wrote, in the *Junius Pamphlet*: "This brutal victory parade of capital through the world, its way prepared by every means of violence, robbery, and infamy, has its light side. It creates the preconditions for its own final destruction. It puts into place the capitalist system of world domination, the indispensable precondition for the socialist world revolution. This alone constitutes the cultural, progressive side of its reputed 'great work of civilisation'... The capitalist victory parade and all its works bear the stamp of progress in the historical sense only because they create the material preconditions for the abolition of capitalist domination and class society in general. And in this sense imperialism ultimately works for us... Proletarian policy knows no retreat; it can only struggle forward. It must always go beyond the existing and the newly created."

It is in the same sense that today's capitalist globalisation — also saturated with "violence, robbery and infamy" — bears "the stamp of progress in the historical sense".

The Development of Capitalism in Russia, published just over 100 years ago, was Lenin's only full-length book written for long-term theoretical clarification. In it, Lenin insisted, more bluntly and

explicitly than any other Marxist writer, on the progressive role of capitalism — while condemning "people who from the general truth... deduce... the need for socialists to support the liberals" (*Development*, p.32).

Lenin's insistence had immediate polemical purpose. Capitalist development in Russia before 1917 was progressive as against the remnants of feudal order which dominated before the legal abolition of serfdom in 1861. Under the 1861 reform, the government granted peasants more-or-less equal plots of land — for which they had to make "Redemption Payments" to the landlord — and kept them tied to the village commune. The commune had collective responsibility for taxes, and was the legal owner of the individual plots tilled by the individual peasant families. Peasants could not move away from their communes without special permission.

The populists (Narodniks), who were still the most influential strand of socialist thought in Russia, wanted to preserve the village communes, as a basis for future socialism and as a bulwark against a capitalist development which they reckoned was harmful and in any case could not amount to much. Lenin replied that capitalist development was substantial; that it was proceeding despite and within the framework of the commune, and would continue to do so; and that socialists should demand the removal of all the old legal obstacles to the quickest and most free development of capitalism.

As ever, this approach did not diminish Lenin's insistence on working class political independence from bourgeois reformers and liberals. After the shock of the 1905 Revolution, the Tsarist government under Stolypin introduced land reform. It abolished the Redemption Payments. Peasants were allowed to leave or move away from the commune without its permission; grants were paid to help the better-off peasants buy land from landlords or settle in new areas. Lenin had written in 1899: "The village community (i.e., collective responsibility [for taxes, redemption payments, etc.] with no right to refuse land) becomes more and more harmful to the peasant poor." In the 1907 edition of his book, he added not applause for Stolypin, but condemnation: "It goes without saying that still greater harm will be done to the peasant poor by Stolypin's (November 1906) breaking up of the village community. This is the Russian 'enrich yourselves'... Black Hundreds — rich peasants! Loot all you can, so long as you bolster up tottering absolutism!" (*Development*, p.157) To both the preservation of the village community, and Stolypin's "wager on the strong", the Bolsheviks counterposed confiscation of the church, state and lords' land; nationalisation of the land (after, and only after, the establishment of a democratic republic); and then the repartition of the land, or the cultivation of large estates in common, under the control of peasant committees.

Does progress stop?

ONCE all important remnants of feudalism or pre-capitalist economy are cleared away, the immediate political import of the idea that capitalist development is progressive diminishes drastically. It would be incongruous or even politically false for socialists in a developed capitalist economy to place the same stress on the progressive role of capitalism as Lenin did in 1899.

However, the question does not disappear.

“The progressive historical role of capitalism,” writes Lenin, “may be summed up in two brief propositions: increase in the productive forces of social labour, and the socialisation of that labour” (*Development*, p.596). Those developments do not automatically stop once feudal remnants have gone; on the whole, they then go forward more quickly. Yet the orthodoxy of the Marxist movement for the last 80 years has been that the progressive role of capitalism did end around the time of the First World War. Since then capitalism has been reactionary. It has ceased to do the progressive work it did before 1914. A forerunner of this magazine, *Workers’ Fight*, put it like this in a brief policy statement we used to carry in every issue in the early 1970s: “Having once been progressive, in that it at least developed, in the only way then possible, the productive resources of mankind, [capitalism] is now a totally reactionary force in history. Its expansion after World War 2 gave it merely the appearance of health; in reality the boom was like the flush on a sick man’s face.” In a manifesto published in 1977, we repeated the thought: “Once-progressive capitalism has reached the stage of decline.”

Were we right? I think not.

In *The Development* Lenin made a point-by-point list of the progressive work of capitalist development.

1. Expansion of technology and productive resources.
2. Capitalism “destroys the scattered condition of small economic units... and draws together the small local markets into an enormous... world market”.
3. It replaces scattered production (small plots of land or workshops) by concentrated production.
4. It “eliminates the forms of personal dependence... of preceding systems of economy” — serfdom, slavery, etc.
5. Capitalism “creates mobility of the population”.
6. It draws people together in large industrial centres.
7. It “increases the population’s need for association, for organisation...”.
8. “All the above-mentioned changes effected in the old economic system by capitalism inevitably lead also to a change in the mentality of the population” (p.596-9).

In points 7 and 8 Lenin describes, elliptically enough to pass the Tsarist censorship, the creation and expansion of a working class both increasingly collective (organised) and increasingly individual (desiring liberty, enjoyment, civilisation). Lenin also noted that capitalist industry destroys “the economic dependence of the woman on the family... and on the husband... At the factory, the woman is the equal of the man...” (p.547). And he claimed that capitalist development raised the “cultural standards”, the “standard of requirements”, of the population, though it might also increase poverty by increasing the gap between what people actually got and the higher “standard of requirements” (p.372 and *passim*).

Marx had described how feudalism led to its own downfall: “New forces and passions spring up in the bosom of society, forces and passions which feel themselves to be fettered by that society” (*Capital Vol.1* p.928). Likewise with capitalism — “new forces and passions”.

The thought here is certainly not what used to be called the Whig idea of progress — that things get better, evenly, steadily, bit by bit, all the time. Lenin’s and Marx’s idea is that capitalist development is progressive because it creates “new forces and passions” which sharpen contradictions; we take sides within those contradictions (for the working class) and not “for progress” as a whole. “For Marx, this label [‘progressive’] never achieved the all-sanctifying power it later had in some parts of the socialist movement; above all, he did not assume that progressive meant to be supported politically” (Hal Draper, *Karl Marx’s Theory of Revolution, Vol.2*, p.284).

With this thought in mind, let us look at the question: does progress stop? Is the Marxist “orthodoxy” right to claim that capitalist development was progressive only until 1914, and has become reactionary since then?

Facts and reinterpretations

A FEW figures. Between 1990 and 1997 — one of the slower, worse periods for world capitalist development since 1945 — manufacturing production increased 21% overall, 49% in “low income” countries, 57% in “middle income” countries and 15% in “high income” countries. (Source: World Bank). Total economic output increased 18%. For comparison, the growth of manufacturing and extractive industry in the great powerhouse of the Industrial Revolution, Great Britain, over the 19th century, averaged 2.9% a year, or 22% per seven-year period (Bairoch, *The Economic Development of the Third World*, p.67).

Power production increased 170% in “low income” countries between 1960 and 1990, and 370% in “middle income” countries. Urbanisation, the number of telephone lines, the amount of paved roads, the extent of drinking-water supply and irrigated land, also increased fairly fast. Even in the poorest Third World countries, there is generally some increase in the preconditions for industrial production, outpaced though it may be by the rise in misery and poverty and the rapid rise in global inequality over the 1990s. The proportion of illiterates has dropped fairly fast between 1980 and 1995 — from 30.5% to 22.6% — though the world’s total illiterate population has increased from 877 million to 885 million.

On none of Lenin’s eight points has development ceased or gone into reverse. Lenin had to spend hundreds of pages listing Russian economic statistics, uncovering errors in their collection and classification, and analysing them, in order to prove his case about the development of capitalism in Russia against the populists; but we do not need to fill more pages of *Workers’ Liberty* with statistics now. No-one really denies that production has increased, the working class has expanded, and so on. Instead, the defenders of the view that capitalist development has become reactionary uphold it by *reinterpreting* it.

The easiest, but weakest, reinterpretation, is to slide from the proposition that “all capitalist development is now reactionary, and has been for decades past”, to “capitalism today is cruel, disgusting, and crisis-ridden”. To point out the ulcers and sores of capitalism does not resolve the question of whether those are ulcers and sores on a larger body, with more “new forces and passions”, or a smaller one.

Four other reinterpretations are also common.

1. Socialism is now possible (technology is adequate, the working class is big enough and concentrated enough), and capitalist development is reactionary *compared to socialism*.

2. Capitalist development used to be progressive because it swept away feudal and other pre-capitalist social forms. Now those forms are largely eliminated, it is no longer progressive.

3. Since the early 20th century capitalism has departed decisively and increasingly from its free-market norm — the state, finance-capital, etc. have played larger roles — and thus it has assumed increasingly aberrant forms, testifying that it has been in decline or “transition”. (This view is argued particularly by Hilleg Tickin, but also, more loosely, by other writers).

4. The mass of means of production has increased. But so also has the mass of means of destruction (armaments). Capitalism increasingly produces means of destruction, hence is reactionary. (This recycling of the “permanent arms economy” theory of the “Shachtmanite” T N Vance is proposed by the “Lambertist” school of neo-Trotskyism).

On 1: This substitutes a comparison of actual capitalist devel-

opment with a hoped-for future or might-have-been present for a comparison of today's actual development with yesterday's. It therefore evades (not answers) the question posed by Lenin and Marx: does the actual development create more raw materials for socialism? In *The Development* Lenin insisted that actual capitalist development in Russia was progressive even though it was "reactionary" (slower and more painful) compared to a democratic capitalism, let alone to a hypothetical socialism (p.600).

In this reinterpretation there is an echo of the argument whereby pre-1914 socialist writers like Karl Kautsky reconciled ultra-cautious tactics for the present with revolutionary principles for the indefinite future. Capitalist development is progressive, they said, and so gives ever-improving conditions for our struggle. It is foolish to try to jump the gun by radical tactics. Postpone big battles if you can. Conditions for them will be better in future. At some point capitalist development will be halted by a cataclysmic crisis — and then power will fall into the hands of the working class. Do not come to close quarters with the capitalist beast, advised these wary hunters, until you are sure that it has died a natural death.

Against that argument, Leon Trotsky wrote: "Capitalism must 'exhaust itself' before the proletariat can take state power [so argue the cautious socialists]. What does this mean? Develop the productive forces to a maximum? Bring the concentration of production to a maximum? But if so, what is the maximum? What are its objective characteristics?" Trotsky showed that capitalist development created an increasing mass of small, backward enterprises as well as the big, advanced ones, and remonstrated against the cautious: "When they appeal to 'objective social development'... they are forgetting that this development includes not only economic evolution, which they understand in a superficial way, but also the revolutionary logic of class relationships, which they cannot even bear to think about." (*On the Paris Commune*, pp.16-17).

Workers do not have to delay revolutionary struggle until capital dies of old age. And why should capitalist development stop, or go into reverse, once it has reached a level sufficient to make working-class socialism materially possible? Trotsky argued emphatically that working-class socialism was materially possible (though in fact defeated) in the France of the Paris Commune

(1871), long before any Marxist had thought of claiming that capitalist development had become reactionary.

Sadly, the further development of capitalism beyond the minimum prerequisite for working-class socialism does not necessarily make socialist revolution easier. As well as augmenting the raw material for socialism, the development also augments the wealth, power, resources and skill of the ruling class. It increases the bulk of the social contradictions, but it does not automatically resolve or soften them. There is good reason to suppose that the higher capitalist development will make our tasks of socialist construction easier and quicker after the revolution — but that is a different matter.

On 2: Apart from the fact that capitalist development has been eroding substantial pre-capitalist forms in most of the world for many decades since it supposedly became reactionary around 1914, and still does so, the argument here rests on confusing two different ideas, that "capitalism is no longer to be supported (against pre-capitalist forms)" and that "capitalist development is no longer progressive".

Remember, "progressive" and "to be supported" are not the same. And it is not even accurate to say that Marxism mandates support for capitalism when it clashes with pre-capitalist forms. Recall that Lenin condemned the Tsarist state's Stolypin land reforms, although they undoubtedly dispelled pre-capitalist remnants. He never undertook to support the development of capitalism, but only to recognise its progressive role and to support the removal of obstacles to its most democratic, free and rapid development. (Likewise, today we support the removal of barriers between states in Europe, even under capitalism; we do not support the existing European Union.)

Such independent politics are doubly important after a century in which most "progressive" revolutions have taken the form of erecting autocratic states to push through forced-march national industrialisation. (The pattern is widespread even if you do as most contributors to *Workers' Liberty* would wish, and try to define away part of it by calling the Stalinist systems not state capitalism but "bureaucratic collectivism".) Capitalist development is progressive as against pre-capitalist forms because it creates more potentialities for emancipation. The job of working-class socialists is to promote and develop the potentialities, not the process "as a whole". We have to recognise both the objectively progressive work of capital, and the need for independent democratic and working-class politics.

Capital does not cease to produce new potentialities once it stands on its own feet — on the whole, it produces them faster and more abundantly. (Quite a lot of *The Development* was about how more advanced forms of capitalism were replacing more backward forms — large-scale factory industry replacing hand-production in collective workshops, which in turn was replacing small handicrafts and "putting-out" — rather than about capitalism in general ousting pre-capitalist relations.)

On 3: Here again, the analysis of actual reality is replaced by a comparison of capitalist development with an "ideal". The method is all the more off-beam since Marx showed long ago that capitalist development *could not* proceed in line with that ideal of democratic small enterprise, perfect free markets, minimal unproductive overhead expenses, and so on. Argument no.4 also evades the question by comparing actual capitalist development with an ideal (non-militarised) capitalism.

Lenin, Trotsky and the Comintern

THE reinterpretations give emotional as well as intellectual protection, in the minds of Marxists, to the proposition that capitalist development has become reactionary. They seem to show that anyone denying that proposition will support cap-

A divided world

The world's top 200 billionaires have a combined wealth of \$1,135 billion in 1999. The total income of the 582 million people in all the poorer countries barely exceeds 10% of that: \$146 billion.

In sub-Saharan Africa life expectancy is 48.9 years, falling to 39.1 years in Malawi and 37.9 years in Sierra Leone.

The gap between the incomes of the richest and poorest countries was about 3 to 1 in 1820, 35 to 1 in 1950, 44 to 1 in 1973, 72 to 1 in 1992 and even wider today.

Between 1990 and 1998 per capita income fell in 49 non-OECD countries.

1.2 billion people — a fifth of the world's population — are living on less than \$1 (66p) a day. 100 million children are estimated to be living or working on the streets.

Even in the world's richest countries (OECD) 8 million children are undernourished, and in the US, 47 million people are not covered by health insurance and one in five adults is functionally illiterate.

italism, or at best postpone any decisive struggle against it to that point in the future when capitalist development finally does become reactionary. But what makes Marxists strive so hard to “save the theory” on this point?

The Stalinist parties had their own reasons for upholding the idea that capitalist development had become reactionary. It made Stalinist development look better by comparison. It enhanced the idea that salvation could not be sought from (democratic, liberty-seeking) forces generated within capitalist development, but only from an external “liberator” (Russian tanks). The false equation “progressive” = “to be supported” helped persuade workers that if only they admitted that the industrialisation, literacy and mass (pauper) welfare programs of Stalinist states were progressive, then they were obliged to support those Stalinist states.

Stalinist influence explains a lot. But the story is more complicated. The idea of capitalist development changing from progressive to reactionary about 1914 was not invented by Stalinism. It was advocated by Lenin and Trotsky. The very first of seven brief programmatic points in Trotsky’s letter of invitation to revolutionaries worldwide for the first congress of the Communist International (1919) was: “The present period is that of the decomposition and collapse of the entire world capitalist system, and will be that of the collapse of European civilisation in general if capitalism, with its insurmountable contradictions, is not overthrown” (Alix Holt and Barbara Holland [trans.], *Theses, Resolutions and Manifestos of the First Four Congresses*, p.1; Trotsky, *First Five Years of the Comintern*, Vol.1, p.37).

The idea was repeated again and again by the leaders of the Communist International in its early, revolutionary years. Rosa Luxemburg’s Spartacus program of December 1918 put it like this: the World War had destroyed much and left “economic chaos” in its wake. “Millions of workers were slaughtered. Those left alive, upon returning home, will receive the mock welcome of poverty and unemployment. Starvation and disease threaten... Financial bankruptcy... is inevitable. Only socialism can save the people”.

The Comintern’s Third Congress in 1921 established — after considerable argument — that occasional economic upturns were possible in this general period of decline. But the basic message was simple and straightforward: productive forces and civilisation would decline, or any slight growth would be offset by huge convulsions.

Lenin, Trotsky and Luxemburg did not believe that this capitalist economic chaos would produce revolutionary workers’ uprisings as an automatic reflex, without long-term preparation, organisation and education. In Europe there was a powerful workers’ movement, built up and educated in Marxist ideas over many decades. During the war the “government socialists” had kept a grip over the majority in most countries; but in the post-war convulsions a large part of the movement could be regrouped around the revolutionaries. So they reckoned — and so it was. In France, the communists won the majority of the old Socialist Party; in Germany, the majority of the 800,000-strong Independent Social Democratic Party.

The Comintern’s basic concept was not that the economic laws of capitalist development had reached a stage in their workings which blocked off any further progress. In the Third Congress’s theses, Trotsky spelled this out: “If, of the two main classes in society — the bourgeoisie and the proletariat — one of them, the latter, renounces the revolutionary struggle, then the former, the bourgeoisie, would undeniably in the final analysis establish a new capitalist equilibrium — one based on material and spiritual degeneration — by means of new crises, new wars, progressive pauperisation of entire countries and the steady dying out of millions of toilers”. (Holt and Holland, p.198; Trotsky, *First Five*, p.307-8). “A new epoch of capitalist upswing”, or “a new chapter of a general capitalist progress” was possible (*First*

Five, p.263, *Third International After Lenin*, p.61).

Exactly that happened. The working class was disabled by Stalinism, there were crises, wars, pauperisation and millions of deaths, and through them capitalism finally re-established conditions for a long swing of expansion. The Comintern was right to denounce the post-1918 chaos and condemn illusions that the capitalists were likely to fix that chaos any time soon or without huge human cost. We are wrong if we quote those condemnations and denunciations today as apodictic truths to “prove” that all capitalist development since 1918 must have been reactionary.

Now — what about Lenin’s claim that his economic analysis of imperialism showed it to be “moribund capitalism”, “the highest stage of capitalism”? (We discussed this in *WL28*.)

What about Lenin’s insistence, in his wartime writings, that his revolutionary anti-war position was based on identifying the current period as “the epoch of the reactionary, obsolete bourgeoisie” whereas a different attitude was correct in “the epoch of the progressive bourgeoisie”? (*Socialism and War*. I think Hal Draper gives the right answer to this question in chapter 2 of his book *War and Revolution: Lenin and the Myth of Revolutionary Defeatism*. Despite myths promoted by opportunists in World War One and taken for good coin by Lenin, the basic approach of Marx and Engels on wars in their time was the same as the internationalists’ in World War One.)

What about the idea, made much of in Lukacs’ book *Lenin*, that the concept of a tight, politically-sharp revolutionary party depends on the view that we are in an epoch of capitalist collapse? (False, I think, but it needs another article).

And what about the indications in the writings of Marx and Engels that socialism depended on capitalism coming to the end of its rope economically? (There are plenty of counter-indications. Simon Clarke’s book *Marx’s Theory of Crisis* is very useful on this point).

All these questions require further articles. But worry about “what does this imply?” or “does this put us into conflict with what Marx or Lenin wrote?” should not be allowed to obscure the facts. There was little progressive capitalist development between the 1920s and 1945, though even then there was some. There has been a lot since.

Trotsky in the late 1930s

THE hold on revolutionary socialists of the idea of the “epoch of reactionary capitalism” has been greatly strengthened by some of Trotsky’s writings in the late 1930s. In the *Transitional Program* of 1938, he wrote: “The economic prerequisite for the proletarian revolution has already in general achieved the highest point of fruition that can be achieved under capitalism. Mankind’s productive forces stagnate. Already new inventions and improvements fail to raise the level of material wealth... The objective prerequisites for the proletarian revolution have not only ‘ripened’; they have begun to get somewhat rotten.” And in his much-reprinted article of 1939, “The USSR in War”, Trotsky further stated: “Under conditions of decaying capitalism the proletariat grows neither numerically nor culturally”.

The terrible economic chaos of the 1930s, and the horrors of the World War which started just before Trotsky wrote “The USSR in War”, explain well enough why Trotsky wanted to restate the early Comintern’s bold, straightforward ideas about capitalist decay. But two things had changed by 1938-9.

The mass Marxist-educated workers’ movements had been corrupted and crushed by Stalinism and fascism. Trotsky still hoped that their fragments could, under the huge pressure of World War, be rapidly regrouped into mass revolutionary parties. As it turned out, he was wrong about that. Even in 1938-9, this perspective was edging into a mystical hope of a sudden apoca-

lyptic coming-together of elemental mass working-class rage and a revolutionary leadership prepared by pure willpower. Recycled after 1943, it became a mandate for a lot of sectarian posturing.

Also, Trotsky's earlier qualifying comments about the possibility of a new surge of capitalist development — if and when the capitalists could make the workers pay the cost of clearing the ground for it — had faded away under the pressures of the exigencies of his arguments on the USSR. Increasingly he based those arguments, not on any straightforward case for considering the USSR to be a workers' state, but on the claim that it was economically progressive as against an economically reactionary capitalist system.

Since Trotsky conscientiously noted the narrow limits of such economic progress as had been achieved in the USSR, and the unlikelihood of the autocratic regime yielding much more, his argument pushed him into painting the blackest, most absolute, and most unqualified picture of the real economic chaos in the West. And since he could ascribe no merit to the Stalinist USSR other than economic progressiveness, the argument pushed him into blurring the distinction between "progressive" and "to be supported". He had to argue for supporting, or at least "defending" the USSR, on grounds of economic progressiveness alone.

Proposed with force and eloquence — as they were — and echoing the writings of Lenin and Luxemburg — as they did — Trotsky's ideas about the "death agony of capitalism" acquired an axiomatic status in the Trotskyist movement out of all proportion to their context. It is no wonder that later Trotskyists preferred to reinterpret them prudently — on the lines discussed above — rather than reject them. That preference, however, caused theoretical and political harm, discussed and analysed in Sean Matgamna's introduction to *The Fate of the Russian Revolution: Lost Texts of Critical Marxism Vol. 1*, especially pp. 63-4 and 78.

Breaking the spell

I ACCORDING to the Russian populist-socialists against whom Lenin argued in *The Development*, the village community had to be supported because: "The community principle prevents capital from seizing agricultural production" (p.323). "Should some Anglomaniac aristocrat" — commented Lenin — "happen to offer a prize for the best work on the introduction of capitalist farming in Russia, should some learned society come forward with a scheme to settle peasants on farmsteads, should some idle government official concoct a plan for 60-dessiatine [large, 66 hectare] holdings, the Narodnik hastens to throw down the gauntlet and fling himself into the fray against these 'bourgeois projects' to 'introduce capitalism' and destroy that Palladium of 'people's industry', the village community" (p.324).

Lenin replied, first, that the elements of capitalism were constantly forming within the community (p.173), and, secondly, that the state-enforced structures of the community, with its enforced semi-pauper quasi-equality, made the development of capitalism slower and more painful (p.157).

Stalinism, too, supposedly "prevented capital from seizing production". But it too had the elements of ordinary capitalism forming within it — we can see this now in China on a huge scale — and it too had state-enforced structures which made the development more painful. By its autocracy, by its national autarky, and by its strong tendencies to enterprise autarky (housing, health care, holidays, etc. all provided by the employing enterprise rather than by general public authorities), it hindered personal independence, mobility of the population, the drive for citizen and working-class self-organisation, and the drive for individual culture and enjoyment. While no better than roughly parallel to bourgeois capitalism in the development of the productive forces, it grossly obstructed several important aspects of the "socialisation of labour" held by

Lenin to signify progress brought by capitalist development.

To support capitalism against Stalinism would be as false as supporting Stolypin in Russia. But, in a comparison between Stalinism and bourgeois capitalism, Stalinism was the more reactionary.

2. The first time our tendency came across the idea of the "epoch of capitalist decline" being used to guide specific political conclusions was on Europe. In 1971, as Britain prepared to join the European Union (then called EEC), the SWP (then called IS) switched from a line of "In or out, the fight goes on" to one of opposing British entry and later, in 1975, advocating withdrawal. Trying to justify the switch, Chris Harman wrote: "We are against anything which rationalises or strengthens capitalism in an epoch in which the productive forces have developed sufficiently to make socialism an objective possibility."

In the 1960s the SWP had pointedly not been crisis-criers. Yet the idea that capitalist development had become reactionary still ranked among their theoretical axioms. It played a big role in the argument of their major text, Tony Cliff's book on the USSR. (See Sean Matgamna's article in *WL56*). Now it was pulled off the shelf again.

Replying to Harman, we conceded the general axiom, but deployed specific arguments which deprived it of all force: "Marxists do not oppose the development of capitalism as such, rather they oppose capitalism within its development... Of course we agree that in general the epoch we live in is one of decaying capitalism... But at the same time capitalism will always be able to expand on the basis of a working-class failure to seize power, and a 'never mind the facts, I've got my method' approach won't will this away... Abstractions about the nature of the epoch cannot invalidate the attitude Marxists must take to the development of capitalism. The only time when we could oppose the [European Union] or any rationalisation of capitalism in itself is when the concrete alternative is workers' power and a workers' state". (Sean Matgamna and Phil Semp, "IS and the Common Market", July 1971, reprinted in *Permanent Revolution* no.3, summer 1975).

Having stripped all the clothes and crowns from Emperor Epoch Of Decay, it is time to say that he is no Emperor at all. European capitalist integration is progressive, in the sense already stated. That this does not mandate political support for the European Union, its bureaucracy, its treaties, or its rules, should be obvious by now.

The "anti-European" slant still common on the left is also connected to the idea of the "epoch of decay" by a more indirect route. From the mid-1930s the Stalinist parties sought alliances with "progressive capitalists". Where should such creatures be found, if capitalist development had become reactionary? The Stalinists solved this conundrum by decreeing the most advanced capitalists to be the most reactionary. National, or nationalist, capitalists were progressive against those more oriented to the world market. Small capitalists were progressive as against big (despite Lenin, in *The Development*, declaring flatly that "the worker is particularly oppressed by small capital. The big employer is forced by sheer commercial considerations to abstain from petty oppression, which is of little advantage and is fraught with considerable loss..." — p.245). The Communist Parties had the slogan of the "anti-monopoly alliance" in domestic politics, and a similar approach, directed against the USA, Germany, and the emerging European Union, in particular, in international politics.

Revolutionary Marxists of all stripes did, of course, oppose the "anti-monopoly alliance" and the CPs' flagrant nationalism. Many of the underlying ideas, however, remained uncriticised, to reappear later.

3. The more advanced, the worse? Then the most advanced capitalism, the USA's, is "the Great Satan". Any social formation

counterposed to it, any “anti-imperialism”, must be better. Hence support for Stalinism, for Islamic fundamentalism, or for Milosevic’s Serbian Stalino-gangster state — irrespective of whether there is any real national-liberation issue involved.

Paradoxically, the idea of the Epoch Of Decay led Max Shachtman, once the foremost champion of Third Camp politics, to the converse position of supporting US capitalism. As late as 1961 he insisted on the idea of capitalist decline in a flat, straightforward sense by then unusual among Marxists: “The famous ‘dynamism’ of the Stalinist world... appears... only in contrast to the unarrested decline and helplessness of the capitalist world... [Therefore] so long as the choice before the world is only between these two [capitalism and Stalinism], it is Stalinism — totalitarian collectivism — that will gain, at one or another rate of speed”. Capitalism was “nearing the end of its historical rope”, whereas Stalinism was not. (*The Bureaucratic Revolution*, p.3, 2, 293).

Stalinism, with its totalitarian control over the working class and its ability to “solve basic social problems” in its own way (p.338), cut off the possibility of socialism, whereas, so long as this half-dead capitalism survived, the chance remained that its ever-worse decay would be resolved by working-class socialism rather than Stalinism. The socialist movement was weak. From this gloomy perspective followed not just politically-independent joint action with bourgeois forces to defend democratic rights against Stalinism — which might have the immediate result of preserving bourgeois capitalism, but made working-class sense — but *de facto* critical rallying to the bourgeois camp.

Oddly, Shachtman’s former comrade Hal Draper, who defended a continuing revolutionary socialist perspective against him, never so far as I know explicitly rejected or tackled the idea of capitalist decline.

4. Suppose capitalist development is now reactionary. Over time it generally diminishes the basic raw materials for socialism (the working class, science and technology), rather than augmenting them. Then what future turn of events can favour socialist revolution? Only crisis. By throwing the capitalist classes and their states into disarray, and by driving the workers to consider desperate measures, crisis can give a fillip to revolution sufficient to offset the shrinkage in the raw materials for socialism.

Hence the pattern of revolutionary socialists “waiting for the crisis” — or forever hopefully seeing “the crisis” in every economic trouble or disturbance.

Despite its caricatures, the idea contains some sense. Economic turmoil may well spur revolutionary action. If capitalism developed smoothly, so that the growth of the “new forces and passions” inside it was constantly and evenly matched with a growth in the resources of the ruling class, then revolution would be hard to imagine.

In particular, it made sense in the 1960s, a formative period for many of the more experienced activists of today’s revolutionary left, to look forward to economic crisis triggering revolution. The working class in the advanced capitalist countries was confident and, in many of those countries, well-organised. So long as workers could make social and economic gains relatively smoothly (note: only relatively), that confidence and organisation would remain within reformist limits. Shaken up by a crisis, there was a good chance of the confidence and organisation transforming itself into something sharper and more radical, rather than into dismayed retreat.

In fact the economic crises of the 1970s did stir up the labour movement and help fairly rapid growth of the revolutionary left. That labour movement upheavals like the rank and file Labour Party revolt of 1979-81 finally subsided in confusion, and that many of the biggest revolutionary groups of the 1970s collapsed in the 1980s, was due to the weakness of previous political organisation

(so that, for example, the biggest far-left groups in Italy, Germany and Portugal were Maoist, and doomed to dismay), rather than lack of opportunities.

By now, however, after so many years of millions unemployed, and thousands homeless on the streets, revolutionaries must reflect that more and more crisis does not necessarily mean more revolution! If what we need is more crisis, well then, how much more can it take? How much more can we take?

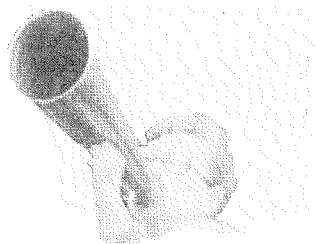
Actually, as Trotsky argued long ago, sometimes the best economic circumstances for a growth and radicalisation of the labour movement are those of capitalist boom. Our rational hope for the future is not “more crisis”, but the combination of the long-term trend of capitalism to augment the raw material for socialism with the certainty of sharp economic ups and downs.

Further: the Comintern’s notion of the “epoch of decline” assumed that much of the preparatory bulk rough-hewing work of building a socialist labour movement had already been done. The revolutionary activists’ job was to pull themselves together into an organised force. They could then marginalise the reformist upper crust of the labour movement, regroup the majority of the organised workers, rally unorganised workers behind them, and be ready for revolutionary action at the next sharp turn. In the early 1930s, Trotsky summed it up in a vivid phrase when he described the task of the German Marxists as being to “switch the points” for the locomotive of the workers’ movement and redirect for effective struggle against Hitler. “As the switchman, by the timely turn of the switch, shifts a heavily laden train onto different tracks, so the small [Trotskyist] Opposition, by a strong and sure turn of the ideological switch, can compel the train of the German Communist Party, and the still heavier train of the German proletariat, to go on in a different direction” (*The Struggle Against Fascism in Germany*, p.252).

Recycled on down the decades, this approach became, for some revolutionary groups, in the 1970s especially, one of “building the alternative leadership” in single combat with the incumbents over the heads of a rank and file assumed to be bursting with militancy. This magazine has argued that in fact we need a wholesale bottom-to-top “renovation of the labour movement”. This perspective puts more of the preparatory, bulk, rough-hewing, “Second International” work ahead of us than the old “crisis of leadership” approach. It does not mean going back to the pre-1914 “Marxist orthodoxy” of “slow but steady”. It does not imply losing a sense of urgency. It requires revolutionaries to organise on “Leninist” lines (coherently, on a sharp political basis). It involves different problems from those of the first building of mass workers’ parties from a raw working class. But it is a shift from the conventional neo-Trotskyist approach of the 1970s and previous decades.

The general argument for “renovating the labour movement” is not at all unique to our tendency. The LCR in France talks a great deal about the “recomposition of the labour movement”. Our arguments for rebuilding labour representation in Britain, or in the 1980s for a workers’ party based on the trade unions in South Africa, have many close parallels. All the main revolutionary groups in France propose the perspective of a new broad workers’ party there (in one way or another — and sometimes, I think, very inadequately — but they propose it). Many revolutionary groups take part in the Brazilian Workers’ Party as factions, but as factions seeking the broad and more-or-less gradual development of the whole party and its associated trade unions. The necessity for this sort of orientation has impressed itself on many revolutionary tendencies — probably all the tendencies of any size other than the one centred on the British SWP.

Nevertheless, to put it on a sound basis we should register explicitly that it involves a break from our old orthodoxies about the “epoch of decline”.



The SSP and the Cuban “socialist republic”

“Is Cuba Socialist?” was the theme of a Scottish Marxist Forum meeting held in Edinburgh at the end of May.

Organised by a number of the tendencies in the Scottish Socialist Party (SSP), and also attended by members of the Revolutionary Communist Group (RCG), the debate was a response to events at the SSP’s annual conference earlier this year.

Cuba’s Ambassador to Britain had been invited to the conference. His speech to the conference provoked, as *Pravda* used to put it, “stormy applause and prolonged ovation”. The conference also passed a resolution supporting the “socialist republic” of Cuba.

Although the Marxist Forum debate brought together the more critical elements in the SSP, there was little support for the argument that Cuba had nothing to do with socialism.

The Cuban Revolution of 1959, it was agreed, was not a socialist revolution. But it was Lenin himself, in his articles on the Irish 1916 Easter Uprising, who had written that there would never be a “pure” socialist revolution, with the workers all on one side of the barricades and the bourgeoisie on the other.

True enough. But the argument that there will never be a “pure” socialist revolution does not mean that anyone should be allowed to get away with arguing that a guerrilla struggle in the countryside in which the working class played no independent role can therefore be equated with something akin to the start of a socialist transformation of society.

It was also agreed that a revolution is not just a one-off event but an ongoing process. Again, it was Lenin himself who had written that class struggle continues rather than ceases after a revolution.

True enough. But what was the evolution of Cuba after 1959? Industry and land were nationalised. Trade unions were re-incorporated into the state structures. The anarchists and Trotskyists were

repressed. All channels of expressing dissent were shut down. And a one-party state was erected.

This was no process of proletarian revolution crushing the remnants of bourgeois rule. It was a process of atomisation of the working class.

Most of those attending the debate sought to draw a distinction between the health services and education system in Cuba (good) and the nature of the trade unions and the political structures in the country (not so good). Some criticism regarding the latter would therefore not be out of place.

But this is to miss the whole point about both Cuba itself and socialism in general.

Like any Stalinist regime, Castro’s rule is based on the atomisation of the working class. While the level of repression in Cuba cannot be compared with the Stalinist terror of the 1930s in Russia, Castroite Cuba is inherently opposed to any form of working-class political independence.

And working-class democracy is not some kind of an optional extra for a socialist society. Socialism means that those who produce the wealth of society are those who govern society. Socialism is not a pair of scales in which one weighs up a welfare state and nationalisation against working-class democracy.

Cuba’s anti-imperialism was another theme in the debate. Had not Castro sent troops to fight in Angola against CIA-financed and South-African-backed rebels, and thereby also contributed to the overthrow of apartheid in South Africa?

True enough. But Castro never criticised the imperialism of the former Soviet Union and its essentially colonial relationship with its Eastern European satellite states. And when the Soviet Union invaded Czechoslovakia in 1968, Castro supported the invasion.

Castro’s anti-imperialism has always been a rather one-sided affair: imperialism was bad if it was American, but progressive if it

emanated from the “socialist” bloc.

If the Marxist Forum debate was essentially a re-stating of previously held positions, it was nonetheless a useful exercise in bringing such positions out into the open. At times it was the political equivalent of a walk down Memory Lane.

The RCG member recently returned from Cuba did not actually use the phrase so popular with the fellow travellers who visited the Soviet Union in the 1930s — “I have seen the future and it works” — but that was certainly the essence of his contribution.

A person who described himself as a “libertarian socialist” — but who quickly turned out to be anything but libertarian — provided an endorsement of George Orwell’s claim of the 1930s that socialism attracts all kinds of cranks and faddists by arguing that the prevalence of trolleybuses and organically grown cabbages was a measure of a society’s advance towards socialism.

And the one supporter of Scottish Militant Labour who turned up for the debate provided a reminder of what an appalling semi-Stalinist sect Militant was at the height of its influence.

In the 1930s, he pointed out, Trotskyists in Cuba were murdered. Under Castro, however, they were merely imprisoned and then released (provided they promised to refrain from further political activity). This, surely, was progress and a measure of the “socialist orientation” of a government which had “established the preconditions for socialism”.

As for calling for the overthrow of Castro, he explained, this would be like calling for the overthrow of Scargill in the middle of the miners’ strike of 1984/85.

How long Stalinism will survive in Cuba is open to debate. But, judging by the Marxist Forum debate, illusions in it will unfortunately be around for a lot longer than Castro himself.

Stan Crooke

Workers’ Liberty and the Northern Ireland referendum

THE resolution put to the 1999 Conference of the Alliance for Workers’ Liberty by John Bloxam and Pat Murphy was a well-reasoned defence of the decision by the AWL National Committee to recommend a “yes” vote in the 1998 Northern Ireland referendum. It was therefore surprising to see Conference reject this resolution so decisively. The tenor of the opposing resolution accepted by Conference added to the surprise. The preamble asserts: “The May National Committee [of the AWL] jettisoned our long-held democratic and transitional programme for Ireland.” The authors presumably scorn rotten liberal concern to accurately state the opposing view! Fortunately, there was still enough rotten liberalism around for the

Bloxam-Murphy resolution to be published in the magazine (*WL* 54).

The preamble then berates the National Committee for not changing policy in a “Marxist fashion”. As the National Committee view was that they hadn’t changed policy, this rebuke relies on and compounds the original misrepresentation. The even wilder charge is made that the National Committee position was contrary to the principle of independent working class politics. Yet it is the Bloxam-Murphy resolution which approaches the question at issue from an independent consideration of working class interests. The preamble to the opposing resolution is more concerned with organisational advantage (maintaining a consistent tradition, education of

Petty point scoring on the poll tax

I FOUND the article, "Poll tax hits and misses" (WL62) a rather depressing and clichéd assessment of events, more misses than hits I'm afraid.

As a former member of the Militant Tendency, brought up on a diet of myths, dogmas and lectures labelling other left groups as being sects on the fringes of the labour movement, this extremely negative attitude and other rather odd ways of looking at the world should rightly be condemned and learnt from.

However that organisation's tactics and approach, which were sometimes wooden, were unfairly treated in the article.

Militant, through its leadership of the All Britain Anti-Poll Tax Fed-

eration, did not oppose the policy of non-implementation, nor oppose taking the campaign into the unions and the Labour Party. Militant supported the non-implementation policy at union conferences and branches and the few councils where it was taken up as a real campaigning option (Lambeth, etc.). In the Labour Party numerous Militant comrades were elected as local councillors on an explicit anti-poll tax ticket and a well established tactic to bring in anti-Poll Tax activists into the Labour Party (not solely the LPYS either) was greeted with a series of expulsions of well known Militant supporters. I personally can remember spending countless hours in ward, GC, EC and Campaign Group meetings and

recruiting people to the Party (in retrospect maybe it could be argued too much work was put into this sphere of activity).

The truth of how the campaign developed was that non-implementation was defeated. It would have been far preferable for the organised labour movement to have beaten the tax. However, following the defeat of the miners, printers and the lurch to the right in the Labour Party, this did not happen. What defeated the poll tax was non-payment. We have to look soberly at reality and see things as they are, not as we would have liked them to be, nor how the textbook says it should have gone.

Also blaming Militant and the "naming names" fiasco (admitted

now as a mistake) for the lack of political action by young people over the last decade, the rise of single-issue campaigning and lack of labour movement action is a bit rich. Likewise the insinuation of culpability for Labour's 1992 election defeat is barely worth commenting on.

There is a lot you can lay at the door of the Militant/CWI stable. However, nonsense like this is more likely to be viewed as at best unbalanced, at worst petty point scoring misinformation. It will do little to guide those who have questioned its politics and sectarianism towards a more genuine revolutionary socialism.

Laurie Coombes

cadres), and the resolution itself is more concerned with saying "no" where the British state says "yes". Trotsky observed that if such a rule were always correct then "every sectarian would be a master strategist". It is hard to believe that experienced Marxists could make the blunder of confusing this rule with working class independence, but the evidence that they have is on paper in black and white. The majority resolution says, "Voting 'yes' to this British state project was wrong in principle". If it was wrong in principle because it was a British state proposal, then the "principle" is automatic negation of the British state.

Would it also have been wrong in principle to have voted "no"? The original draft of the majority resolution answered: "Whether or not to vote 'no' was a question of tactics. Voting 'no' would not have been wrong on principle." It becomes crystal clear that the "principle" is indeed opposition to any British state proposal. Furthermore, the sentences quoted are the absurd consequence of this "principle". The conference majority must have sensed something had gone wrong, because the final section was amended. The amendment reads: "We believe that a 'no' vote would also have been incorrect, not merely because it would have made it impossible to address the legitimate concerns of those supporting the Agreement because it brought peace, or because it would align us with Paisley and the Republican ultras. Crucially, a 'no' vote

would have signified, both programmatically and practically, a vote for the *status quo* of polarised division between the two working class communities and a continued campaign of sectarian violence".

Well said! But would voting 'no' have been wrong in principle, or just a tactical mistake? The amendment carefully avoids this question by just saying that it would have been "incorrect". No doubt this evasion helped the amended resolution to be passed, but what happened to the concern for political consistency and education of cadres? Is the tradition to now be understood as saying that, on principle, we never vote for the lesser evil, but we may sometimes, for tactical reasons, vote for the greater evil?

Of course it makes far more sense to say that "a vote for the *status quo* of polarised division between the two working class communities" would be wrong on principle. But then the whole argument against a "yes" vote collapses into advocating abstention. Occasions have arisen (the Common Market referendum, for example) where abstaining was arguably the best option, but the Northern Ireland referendum was not such a case. Faced with a choice between voting for a continued campaign of sectarian violence, or for some possibility of defusing the conflict, abstention would have been almost as wrong as voting "no". The principle here is not the rule of thumb of opposing the British state, but the principle of seeking the unity of

the working class, which, as Gramsci observed, is a "categorical imperative" (universal principle) of Marxism.

Thus a stance chosen for reasons of consistency of tradition and education of comrades, achieved neither of these objectives. The tradition of advocating working class unity as the highest principle has been seriously compromised, and cadres have been offered slogans ("we do not choose the lesser evil") in place of a coherent analysis. It would have been far better to concentrate on answering the question correctly and letting consistency of tradition and education of cadres follow as a consequence. This may be a "case by case approach", but the alternative is to force every issue into consistency according to some pre-determined rule of thumb.

Hopefully, this awful lapse in political judgement by the Conference majority will be corrected. Understanding why the lapse occurred is a necessary part of making such events a rarity in the future. In this connection it is worth noting that even Lenin sometimes produced written material of poor quality. In some interesting articles on *Lenin and Ireland* in WL 22 and WL 23, Sean Matgamna demonstrates that "Lenin's writings on Ireland were only casual journalism, worthless and worse if taken as paradigms for socialist politics". Sean suggests that Lenin's writings on "Ireland" were really homilies for Russian workers on the treachery of bourgeois liberals. Here in Australia we have a similar prob-

lem. In 1913, Lenin wrote a lightweight piece on the Australian Labor Party, which sectarians have for decades used as a justification for refusing to participate in the ALP. A similar explanation fits for Australia as well — Lenin's article was written as an answer to European advocates of peaceful reformist trade unionism. Perhaps the explanation for the superficiality of the Matgamna-Osborn resolution is that these authors were likewise overly concerned with didactic simplicity, instead of with estimating the consequences, for the Irish working class, of acceptance or rejection of the Good Friday Agreement.

Another cause of the lapse may be deduced from the preamble. It explains the "error" of the NC as due to "an over-reaction against the demagogic, denunciatory, 'maximalist' — essentially anarchist — politics current in some of the far left". However, there are powerful pressures towards maximalist politics that act on all of the far left. The AWL has countered these pressures more effectively than other groups, but it is far too complacent to assume that the counter was so effective that it achieved an over correction. The pressures still exist and still need to be countered, if the demagogic, maximalist approach to Northern Ireland, approved by the Conference majority, is not to become the normal AWL approach to other issues.

Roger Clarke, Brisbane, Australia

Abstraction, reductionism and dialectics

BOOTH Jon Pike in his review of John Rees' book on dialectics and Les Hearn in his contribution to the discussion of evolution (both in *WL* 61) raise issues about scientific method, Jon in attacking dialectics, Les in defending the traditional methods of science.

First, Jon. It is undeniably true that some Marxists see the invocation of dialectics as a substitute for thinking about the world. Nobody but a blind, dogmatic idiot — and there are some around on the left — could deny that advances in knowledge take place as a result of non-dialectical forms of thinking. What advocates of dialectical method do claim is that it gives a richer, more systematic view of the world, or as Trotsky puts it in the "shockingly bad" *ABC of Materialist Dialectics*: "Dialectical thinking gives to concepts, by means of closer approximations, corrections, concretisation, a richness of content and flexibility; I would even say 'a succulence' which to a certain extent brings them closer to living phenomena."

This occurs primarily through the recognition of the pervasiveness and extent of change, interconnection and contradiction in reality. Dialectical thought (if done well...) avoids one-sidedness, static descriptions of constantly changing phenomena and the confusion of partial explanation with the whole story. However it is not a mysterious key to perfect knowledge — human knowledge will always remain limited and develop in a specific historical and social context.

To deal with Jon's and Les' arguments it is necessary first to talk about abstraction. Abstraction is the process that arises because we cannot deal with the world as a whole, but rather begin to break it down into pieces that are meaningful for us in our activity and appear to encapsulate true distinctions in the world. The concepts we create to describe the pieces do not capture their object in every respect: we are always selective in forming concepts.

Abstraction is a human activity, which may be carried out consciously or unconsciously. Its content shifts in relation to our purpose. Yet it has also got to have an objective content — in the words of the Marxist psychologist Vygotsky: "To every ultimate concept, even

to the most abstract, corresponds some aspect of reality which the concept represents in an abstract, isolated form." Some abstractions serve better than others may for particular purposes and some may simply give a misleading view of the world.

Abstraction is therefore central to the relationship of human subjects to the world. When we grasp or appropriate the world in thought, we establish the boundaries that distinguish one thing from another by selecting and focussing on some properties and relationships and ignoring or rejecting others. This clearly affects how we see and what we see. The drawing of boundaries serves to define what we see as integral to the behaviour of the part of reality we have bounded and what appears as chance or contingent.

Richard Levins points out that in science "the objects of study are themselves intellectual constructs. The investigator chooses the system and specifies its boundaries. Thus 'inside' and 'outside' are not properties of nature but of science". He mentions the absence of social causes such as poverty from models of disease in epidemiology, putting this down to the established division of labour between academic disciplines rather than any natural division of the world.

This process of selection and the consequent creation of abstractions originates in a number of different types of process, both conscious and unconscious. It is built into our perceptual mechanisms, such as sight and hearing; learnt in the process of socialisation, in particular through our mastery of language; unconsciously undertaken through participation in certain social activities that involve reducing things to a limited subset of their properties (e.g., monetary exchange); and, as in experimental science, consciously undertaken in order to achieve certain goals.

We can now return to Trotsky's assertion that "A is never equal to A" and Jon Pike's assertion that "A does equal A if I stipulate that in

order to abstract common properties from individual entities". Trotsky does not deny that it is possible to create abstractions that correspond to one another — but asserts that they can only do so as abstractions, that is as partial and imprecise descriptions of the world.

He writes: "The axiom 'A' is equal to 'A' appears on one hand to be the point of departure for all our knowledge, on the other hand the point of departure for all the errors in our knowledge. To make use of the axiom of 'A' is equal to 'A' with impunity is possible only within certain limits." In other words, the dialectician will always be able to go beyond abstractions by adding back elements that have been excluded so as to find that at the same time as identity there is always difference.

(Whether this proves Russia was a workers' state in 1939 is of course a different matter!) Jon both misses the point of what Trotsky is actually saying and falls into the idealist view that to "stipulate" that two things are equal in the realm of

thought makes them so in reality. The biologists Lewontin and Levins deal with this: "We can hardly have a serious discussion of a science without abstraction. What makes science materialist is that the process of abstraction is explicit and recognised as historically contingent with the science. Abstraction becomes destructive when the abstract is reified and when the historical process of abstraction is forgotten, so that the abstract descriptions are taken for descriptions of the actual objects."

There is then a real contradiction here between our abstractions — including both common sense and formalised systems like logic and mathematics — and, on the other, the way the world really is. In the field with which I am most familiar (computer science and information systems), this explains a number of common problems, particularly those relating to the translation from real world situation to a formalised model and from the model to the computer system.

For example, however accu-

rate the translation from the formalised model to software is, it can never overcome the limited nature of the formal model as an abstraction. Despite the efforts of many computer scientists, it is therefore impossible to create a computer system that can be proven to work correctly in its real world environment, given that what has been left out of the model may then wreak revenge on the limitations of the system.

Dialectical method helps us to become aware of this gap, explain it and minimise its effects by providing us with tools to cut away some of the problems this causes. Particularly important here is the insistence on looking at "wholes" (or in dialectical jargon, "totalities"), which enable us to grasp the essence of objects. Having cut the world up through abstraction, we can, if not completely, put it back together into units where the essential relationships between the pieces become something inherent to what we are studying rather than accidental.

One aspect of these "wholes" is that they exist at a number of levels simultaneously. For example, it is possible to describe a computer system in terms of the basic physical principles governing its operation; the workings of its components; the instructions it executes (at several different levels); its embeddedness in forms of human activity; and its role in a system of social relations. Each of these descriptions taken alone would be partial; each would be true, though taken in isolation contradict the others; each would serve certain purposes. They cannot all necessarily be mapped onto one another in a meaningful way as each more complex level cannot be reduced to a less complex one.

To describe the role of, say, a computer system in a bank's activities in terms of the principles of physics is a mismatch of levels between what is being explained and what doing the explaining. It is only possible to understand the interaction and scope of the levels adequately within the context of the system taken as a whole.

Against this background, it becomes apparent how it is possible for orthodox scientific method to be both useful and limited and why reductionism is both a necessity

"Particularly important is the insistence of dialectics on looking at wholes, or totalities..."

(something that Steven Rose does not deny) and a danger.

The scientific method of the last 300 years is in large part a form of conscious abstraction designed to provide a systematic way of looking at nature. Vygotsky comments: "Even the most immediate, empirical, raw singular natural scientific fact already contains a first abstraction. The real and the scientific fact are distinct in that the scientific fact is a real fact included into a certain system of knowledge, i.e., an abstraction from the inexhaustible sum of features of the natural fact. The material of science is not raw but logically elaborated, natural material which has been selected according to a certain feature. Physical body, movement, matter — these are all abstractions."

Experimental science seeks to create the conditions whereby an hypothesis can be demonstrated or disproved. In order to do this, it is usually necessary to manipulate nature into a form in which the relationships being considered become apparent and testable. There is often a gap between the experimental abstraction and the typical environment in which the process occurs. Scientists spend much time trying to minimise or account for it.

Following from this, Levins draws the distinction between "reduction as a research tactic" where "the detailed examination of parts in isolation has a legitimate role within a broader research strategy" and "reductionism as a philosophy, the belief that a detailed study of the smallest parts in isolation will lead to a sufficient understanding of the whole and that the behaviour of complex systems are epiphenomenal to the properties of parts". Rose makes a similar distinction. Reductionism as philosophy results in the mismatch of levels discussed earlier.

In this context, Les' insistence that the best theories are those "which explain the facts most economically" is at best ambiguous. Does "economy" itself necessarily make for a theory of greater explanatory adequacy? Only if one accepts the principle that the parts tell us all we need to know of the whole. Levins argues that the most economical explanation may not be the best one, rather an adequate explanation may require us to "examine a larger system than is generally thought relevant".

Secondly, Les seems to assess whether theories hold or not by whether they can or cannot conform to formalisation according to the rules of mathematics. The mathematics works for Selfish Gene

theory and for socio-biology's explanation of altruism (see his review of Susan Blackmore's book), therefore they must be true.

While I don't know how the maths relates to these cases, the same problem arises here as with proving computer programs correct — it is possible to make the maths fit the model or hypothesis and show it is mathematically consistent without showing that it necessarily corresponds to reality. Mathematical precision can be a substitute for either asking the right question or being able to demonstrate a causal relationship. It may also be a mystification of science to prove an ideological point.

Both Rose and Lewontin and Levins point out that the use of sta-

tistical correlation (e.g. to link IQ to race and class) allows the smuggling in of all sorts of hidden assumptions which are obscured by the demonstration of a statistical relationship. Lewontin and Levins comment that "correlations may be the consequence of causal processes, but they cannot reliably be used to infer those processes... any statement about the real world must come from the content imported into the analysis". The invocation of mathematics cannot necessarily be the end of the argument.

Les is right that we should not choose to believe particular scientific theories just because they correspond to our political views. We should also not accept scientific findings purely because they con-

form to orthodox scientific method or see that method itself as something beyond criticism.

Dialectical method provides us with some tools for that critique and for the development of an alternative without requiring us to throw out the undoubted gains that mainstream science has made.

Bruce Robinson

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Saving the Earth

THE WL pamphlet *We Only Want the Earth: Global Capitalism and the Environmental Crisis* is a wide-ranging exposition of the socialist approach to the crisis of the environment.

It opens with a survey of general and particular crises and disasters, showing how these are not "natural", but intimately linked to the capitalist mode of production and the unequal relations between rich and poor. Thus, the recent floods in Venezuela killed not 30,000 capitalists but 30,000 poor people — and their cause may have been the global warming that the vast majority of climate scientists believe is happening. A large part of this warming is being caused by vehicle emissions from richer countries, set to continue rising sharply, but its effects will be felt by low-lying islands in the southern oceans. It is not simply a north-south conflict, as some Greens believe: in the US, some 30,000 people die each year from illnesses related to car pollution. Meanwhile, in the present and former Stalinist lands, environmental safety continues to be ignored: China contains five of the world's 10 most polluted cities. And attempts by capitalism to "green" itself fall far short of its own immediate goals.

There follow short articles on a selection of issues: the future of nuclear technology, GM foods and asbestos. The first is a continuation of a debate that has been running for some time but remains relevant: the second is a contribution to a debate that has just started; the

third reveals that, despite stringent laws now in place (at least in the West), the death toll from asbestos is set to rise for another 20 years.

Next comes a section on how working people have resisted environmental destruction, with the work of Chico Mendes and the rubber tappers' union in Brazil and the struggle of the Ogoni people of Nigeria against Shell. Later, the alliance of trades unionists and environmentalists that fought the Battle of Seattle around the conference of the World Trade Organisation is described.

The political response to the environment is examined, with New Labour's record receiving close scrutiny. The Labour Party has historically been hostile to environmentalism but things began to change through the 1980s. The Socialist Environment and Resources Association (SERA) gained influence at the highest levels, with Chris Smith and Robin Cook heading a growing band of MP and MEP supporters. However, Smith's appointment as Shadow Spokesperson on the Environment was not carried over into government and prominent promises have not been fulfilled, particularly on transport.

The breakthrough of the Green Party in European, Scottish and London elections requires a closer look at their politics, though Workers' Liberty were debating with the Green Party long before this. The German Greens are examined and found to have been easily sucked into conventional party poli-

tics, and socialists who joined them have not prospered. Meanwhile, in Britain, the Greens have tended to ignore the labour movement that had the power and the interest in defending the environment. The more recent development of the Reclaim the Streets movement has some promising features, in that it sees the problem as capitalism.

An important article in the pamphlet looks at the role of science and technology under capitalism. There is a stark contrast between the ways that capitalism seeks to profit from the knowledge of our fundamental genetic basis and the priorities that a socialist science would have. However, the author perhaps goes too far in confusing the work of scientists with the interpretation put upon it by others. The existence of a barter system exchanging food for work among capuchin monkeys is surely not evidence for capitalism among the primates, whatever some journalist says, and research into primate behaviour is not equivalent to the use of IQ testing to reinforce oppression. The message comes across that socialists cannot reject science, as some environmentalists do, but must redirect it.

Finally, the pamphlet shows that the environmental crisis that has its roots in the inequalities fostered and exacerbated by capitalism needs a socialist solution.

Les Hearn

"We Only Want The Earth" is £1.50 plus 35p postage from AWL, P O Box 823, London SE15 4NA.



The new capitalism blights life

The Corrosion of Character: the Personal Consequences of Work in the New Capitalism, by Richard Sennet. W W Norton & Co.

CHANGE in the workplace and the world of work (the "new work order" as James Gee called it) has occupied considerable attention in the sociology, industrial relations, management, business and adult education literatures.

What has characterised much of the debate has been a basic conflict of two views of the introduction of new technology and new work arrangements.

The "optimists" portray the modern workplace as one which is being released from the constraints of traditional work practices and rigid organisational structures. These accounts of post-industrial society suggest that we are becoming the flexible multi-skilled workers of more democratic, technologically informed post-industrial workplaces. And typical of this writing is that the general points are illustrated by snapshot anecdotal case studies of organisations or individuals to back up their point.

Sennet's book is somewhat different. He looks at the downside of flexibility, re-engineering, teamwork and many of the clichés (loyalty, co-operation, win-win common interests) associated with these changes through the use of interviews with sacked IBM workers in New York, bakers in a Boston bakery, a barmaid turned advertising executive, and Rico, the son of Enrico, a hard-working janitor who was a central character in Sennet's 1972 book *The Hidden Injuries of Class*.

The contrast between the working and family lives of Enrico and Rico provide the opening case study that sets

the context for the book. It contrasts the personal and organisational values, the working patterns and attempts to control time (something that Sennet recognises as a gain by organised labour) that have changed in 25 years.

Whereas the optimists proclaim the opening up of individual (consumer's) choice, the liberation of employees' (not workers') potential and the freeing up of time restraints, Sennet sees increased alienation from work and family, much less job security and a new set of dominant values which elevate the individual and destroy the ties of co-operation, not to mention solidarity. For him the destruction of loyalty erodes character.

He accepts that there are employers who genuinely believe in the new managerial ethos of loyalty, teamwork and reduced hierarchy. But those employers, mostly found in the growing small and medium enterprise sector, are often confronted by a contradiction between their theoretical commitment to loyalty while remaining subject to the essential, and overriding, driving forces of competition and the market.

Sennet's attempt to focus on the particular examples of the impact of the new work order is important. We are able, through smaller scale case studies, to identify with the subjects' plights and the stories are expressed in a more personal way than dry, macro labour market statistics and figures convey. This is valuable work.

Yet there is also something missing here. The attempt to "go deeper" is most satisfying when it can also be located within a larger economic or political framework. And Sennet's framework is

that what has been lost in the headlong rush into restructuring, downsizing and flexibility is a world of work where loyalty was valued and rewarded by the employer and where the idea of honest labour was passed on through the family.

He admits that the old work ethic "can hardly claim our affections". The old patterns would be a disaster today and for many people the changes have led to working arrangements that are better than the old.

To reassert those lost values, it seems, will require a step back from neo-liberalism and the discovery of a more consensual work environment where there is genuine teamwork and respect. It sounds a lot like a post-industrial third way.

If respect, loyalty, careers, employee-determined

flexibility, job security and decent pay without givebacks were generally possible, and not just for the winners in the polarised labour market at the beginning of the 21st century, it might be desirable. But the question remains, if it isn't possible — and there is little evidence to show that it is — then what alternatives are left for both the workers remaining in the squirrel cages and those who have been put out of work?

Sennet concludes by saying he isn't sure of the political programs necessary to meet his subjects' inner needs. What he is sure of though is that "a regime which provides human beings no deep reasons to care about one another cannot long preserve its legitimacy".

Tony Brown

Critique or programme?

The New Military Humanism: Lessons from Kosovo, by Noam Chomsky. Pluto. *Ethical imperialism (Spokesman No 65)*, edited by Ken Coates. Spokesman/Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation.

NOAM Chomsky is one of the foremost Western intellectuals, a major figure in linguistics, and a blistering critic of the politics of the powerful. Condemning "intellectuals" for justifying the oppressive actions of, in particular, his own governments in the USA, he has seen his role as to redress the balance. *The New Military Humanism* is typical of his work, annihilatingly denouncing the hypocrisies of the US and British governments and NATO, and their apologists.

The focus, then, is on US/UK/NATO policy during

the Balkans war, comparing it, and the justifications of its spokespeople, to other policies elsewhere. Particular fire is levelled at the quite different attitude taken to Turkey's brutal war against the Kurds, comparable in scope to Serbia's towards the Kosovars (at least before the onset of bombing). Turkey is a member of NATO, therefore a "friend"; not only has no action been taken to prevent slaughter of the Kurds, it is effectively supported through the military aid and weapons sales Turkey receives from its NATO allies. Other atrocities of comparable scale (East Timor, Colombia, Laos; for some reason he doesn't mention Rwanda) condemn the Western powers. Either they have done nothing, or made the problem much worse.

There is no "double stan-

dard" here, Chomsky says: it's the same standard, determined by the interests of the big powers and their military alliance. The war against Serbia was conditioned at least in part by the need to preserve NATO's "credibility", as well as geopolitical concerns.

Written in Chomsky's typical, exhaustively researched style, polemically sarcastic in tone (he refers throughout to the "enlightened powers", but without quote marks), the book is a powerful indictment of Western policy throughout the world.

Chomsky's focus on the violence and hypocrisy of the big powers (countries where he and we live) is honourable enough. But as an exclusive focus it has led him into difficulties before, as when he was famously uncritical of Pol Pot in the 1970s, reserving his anger for Henry Kissinger. Here, also, the limits of this approach are evident.

Chomsky is by no means an apologist for Milosevic; he details how earlier US opposition to the KLA was interpreted by Belgrade as a "green light" to step up ethnic cleansing. Yet a balanced study would focus far more than this does on the brutality of the Milosevic regime, both in Kosovo and earlier in Bosnia. He mentions these facts, but in passing, and there is no sense of outrage towards the crimes of Serb nationalism comparable to his outrage at NATO. Thus there is an irksome one-sidedness to the analysis and the politics which flow from it. And despite dealing in turn with every other pro-war argument available, he signally fails to address the two most powerful, namely (except in a sub-clause) that the Kosovars seemed to support the bombing, and that after the war the situation in Kosovo was improved.

Indeed, he is all but agnostic on the matter of what should have been done to prevent genocide of the Kosovars (although, unlike some anti-war writers, doesn't question that terrible things were happening), relying on the "Hippocratic principle" that "first, do no harm". Underlying Chomsky's view, in reality, seems to a more ambivalent attitude, but his focus prevents

him from drawing this out.

Chomsky appears again in Ken Coates' *Spokesman* special on "ethical imperialism". In fact the article is a cut-and-paste job on extracts from the book, but so bowdlerised and mutilated that either Chomsky had nothing to do with the editing and never saw the proofs, or it reveals an underlying train of thought far worse than shown in the book itself. For instance, a passage in the book which compares numbers of deaths and refugees in Colombia with Kosova before the war is edited to delete the word "before".

After Chomsky's, the articles gradually get worse, until we are confronted with a truly appalling piece by Zhores Medvedev which not only refers to Milosevic's Serbia as "an island of independence and socialism", but appears, in so far as I can understand it, to rail against Albanian "illegal immigrants" swarming across Europe to a degree that can only be described as racist.

The Chomsky book, despite its flaws, is a valuable account of the world's injustices to which the West turns a blind eye, or actively encourages. Chomsky is right that sharp criticism of the institutions and practices of international power is a vital task; his problem is that he has no agenda of building a socialist movement (he has described himself as some kind of anarchist), and so the critique remains that of an isolated intellectual commentator, spelling out no programme, and resulting in a reformist preoccupation with diplomatic solutions.

Clive Bradley

Different Protestants

Northern Protestants: An Unsettled People, by Susan McKay. Blackstaff Press.

"THEY hate us because they can no longer use us as a threat. I'm being honest. The DUP had no trouble sitting down with UVF men when we were killing taigs and that is being blunt about it. The UUP had no problem organising the Ulster Workers' Strike with us. When we stopped, the venom was really aimed at Davey (Ervine) and Hutchie (Billy Hutchison), the ones who brokered the ceasefire, the ones providing the analysis. We've sheathed the sabre and they can't rattle it any more.

"In many ways we were the social manifestation of your bigotry".

That is Billy Mitchell, an ex-UVF prisoner, describing the relationship between mainstream and paramilitary unionism.

I have always been sceptical about the vox-pop style of journalism. However, Susan McKay's intriguing study of Northern Irish Protestants is a vindication of the form. Her 60 interviews with a variety of Northern Protestants shows a wide range of ideas competing for influence here.

This is a community whose image to outsiders is one of dour homogeneity. It matters little whether the outsiders are Irish nationalist foes or British unionist friends. We know only what they are against. Whatever the question, we expect them to say

No, and the highpoint of their culture is a marching season which meanders uneasily between Laurel and Hardy comedy and racist redneck terror. As an enemy they are a gift, as an ally they must be torture. It has long been fashionable on the left to bracket them with South African whites. Fashionable, but very misleading, and Susan McKay's book helps to remind us why.

The attitudes, fears and experiences of the Protestant community are presented in regional chapters. It is soon obvious that a powerful sense of place has shaped the precise kinds of unionism which exist in Northern Ireland. The fearsome and backward-looking loyalists of Portadown and the border areas, for example, insist that their northern kin do not understand what it is like to experience "ethnic cleansing" in action. There are examples here of people who feel that they and their co-religionists have been gradually forced to move out of nationalist areas as part of a concerted and mostly violent campaign.

There is a good deal of exaggeration in this, and McKay gently exposes it, but there is, on the other hand, enough impressionistic evidence to suggest that it is more than paranoia. And the perception is as important, in political terms, as the reality.

The working class leaders in Belfast bring a different baggage with them, including shipyard trade unionism, memories of mistreatment by "big house" unionism before the troubles and in some cases a leaning towards socialism. From them has come the ceasefire and the clearest and most politically confident Protestant support for the 1998 Good Friday Agreement.

Within the geographical divisions Susan McKay brings out a wide range of social and political difference too. There are fundamentalists and liberals everywhere, and in the working class an irrepressible, albeit beleaguered, tradition of socialism. The best known of the socialists, like Ivan Cooper or Inez McCormack, were

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attracted during the heyday of the civil rights campaign. They rarely found comfortable homes in left nationalist politics. Cooper spent the '70s in the SDLP as an ally of what he called its "socialist wing" with Paddy Devlin. McCormack is one of the North's best known trade unionists. Older socialists, like Sam McAughtry, are acutely aware of how the conflict of the last 30 years has marginalised independent class politics.

In leafy North Down there is a distaste for the loyalist paramilitaries and a yearning for stable bourgeois politics, and yet their MP is the militantly anti-Agreement Bob McCartney. McCartney's constituency office manager was until recently Jeffrey Dudgeon, who is Northern Ireland's most prominent out gay figure, having almost singlehandedly forced the government to extend equal rights to the province. As his boss began to work more closely with Paisley's DUP in opposition to the Good Friday Agreement, the contradictions



Power-sharing, last time round

between communal and wider politics were exposed in new and interesting ways. Paisley led the opposition to Dudgeon's efforts under the now legendary slogan "Save Ulster from Sodomy". Dudgeon was in his younger days sympathetic to the Northern Irish Labour Party.

This book is in no way an apology for Unionism. The writer, a journalist from a Northern Protestant background, lets the more unsavoury and irrational side

of Protestant politics speak for itself, and generally no further comment is necessary. She provides careful and methodical counter-evidence to refute some of the wilder claims made against Catholics. She is very perceptive on the pervading sense of victimhood and the schizophrenic attitude to violence exhibited right across the community.

The overall impression is of a people struggling to come to terms with the world as it has changed since 1969. They

are keenly aware too that their Catholic neighbours are as confident about the future as Protestants are defensive about the past. It isn't said, but the impression given is that the only viable future for this community lies in their relationship with the rest of the people in the North and, ultimately, on the island, and that the old dependence on the link with Britain serves only to postpone this.

A socialism that can make no sense of this debate can offer nothing to those working class Protestants who are beginning to rethink their relationship with their old Unionist tradition. The story of socialism in Ireland is one of failed opportunities to create cross-communal unity, and ignorance of the Irish minority has played a major part in that failure. Susan McKay's book is an antidote to that ignorance, and a thought-provoking introduction to the current complexity of Protestant identity.

Patrick Murphy

Bosnia: Faking Democracy After Dayton, by David Chandler. Pluto Press.

SOON it will be five years since an international administration was established for Bosnia following the Dayton Agreement of November 1995, which in turn ended three years of horrific war. The international administration is supposed gradually to create conditions for Bosnia to re-establish its own democratic self-rule. Chandler's conclusion is that it is doing just the contrary.

As the administration continues, it becomes more heavy-handed, more overweening, and more convinced that the peoples of Bosnia are nowhere near ready for democracy. Its impatient contempt for the peoples of Bosnia becomes self-reinforcing, because it converts politics into a game of jockeying for position and favour with itself as arbiter. Its desire for stability and security translates into an unwillingness ever to be satisfied that it is time to slacken

New rulers

its grip.

Chandler documents the process in minute detail. Exactly what viewpoint he argues from, I don't quite know. He makes no claim that free rein for the drives for a Greater Serbia — or for a Greater Croatia — would be the desirable "anti-imperialist" alternative. As far as I can understand, he would favour a "reformist" easing of big-power control. But whatever his political preferences, his sober, low-key factual account compels attention.

Bosnia looks like being no exception to the process documented. Already in East Timor, UN district officials and Timorese leaders — unconcealedly anxious though they are to keep the favour of the big powers — are criticising the heavy-handedness of a UN high command which runs the desperately poor territory from a luxury hotel moored

just offshore.

In Kosova there is no near prospect of big-power political control being eased.

In a famous book, *Africa and the Victorians*, Ronald Robinson and others showed how British imperial rule in Egypt, for example, in the late 19th century, was driven crucially by the logic of processes within Egypt. The British government wanted not to rule Egypt themselves, but only to have an Egyptian government which would secure good conditions for trade. As imperialist economic penetration released its acids into Egypt's body politic, the British government was drawn into intervening more and more to secure the sort of independent Egyptian government they wanted — until finally they had no independent Egyptian government at all, but semi-colonial British rule.

What may be happening

in East Timor, Kosova and Bosnia is not exactly analogous. The old politics broke down not because of economic acids but because of local small imperialisms, Indonesian and Serbian. The "temporary" administrations serve not one national state, but rather the nearest approximations that exist to "imperialism-in-general" — the United Nations, NATO, the IMF, the World Bank, the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe. In fact, so Chandler argues, a large part of the motive in the Bosnian administration is not so much anything specific to Bosnia at all as a desire to cohere those international institutions.

Nevertheless, there are clear parallels. Chandler's book warns all of us, myself included, who saw Indonesian and Serbian imperialisms as the "greatest evils" in East Timor, Bosnia and Kosova, of how short-sighted we would be to give any political endorsement to the "lesser evils" of big-power intervention.

Colin Foster

Part of the picture

Figments of Reality: the Evolution of the Curious Mind, by Ian Stewart and Jack Cohen. Cambridge University Press.

SO-CALLED evolutionary psychology is enormously popular. Regular public lectures at the London School of Economics, for example, delve into every aspect of modern human behaviour allegedly caused by mental "hard-wiring" fixed at the time of our forebears scavenging in the African savannah. So Stephen Pinker, in *How the Mind Works*, the best-selling popularisation of this theory, can tell us without blushing that people prefer savannah landscapes on their walls because it's the typical vista of our ancestors, a perplexing claim to anyone fond of Swiss mountains.

Figments of Reality is an antidote to such nonsense. Written by a mathematician and a biologist (both well-known science writers; Stewart is the author of the bestselling *Does God Play Dice?*), it adopts an entirely different evolutionary approach, and holds "evolutionary psychology" in healthy scorn. "In an organism," they tell us, "nothing is truly hard-wired." They are equally dismissive of the related "genes for" school, which sees alcoholism, aggression, sexuality, etc., as the result of certain genes.

It's a wide-ranging discussion, whirligigging breathlessly from human history to quantum physics, rich in ideas. Its main theme is that human behaviour, while based on biological origins, is cultural — what they call "contextual", and "complicit" (interactive, both simple and complex).

One example. Language, Pinker argues (in his first, much better book), following Chomsky, is an innate "instinct" in human beings. Stewart and Cohen reject this view, proposing instead that while we need the mental apparatus to develop it, language itself is a learned, cultural product (proven by the inability of children who have reached, say, the age of 12,

without speaking, then to do so with any facility). Our conscious, self-aware intelligence is reproduced culturally, becoming what the writers cutely call "extelligence", the interaction of individuals with the knowledge and behavioural patterns of the surrounding society. They usefully point out that the human mind is therefore not much like a computer, another popular metaphor (for example with Pinker).

Where certain philosophers see the world as a figment of the imagination, Stewart and Cohen regard the mind — the result of a physical thing, if not reducible to it — as a processor for "figments of reality". The mind doesn't simply mirror the outside world, but interprets it, looking for "features" which are important to our senses. Which features we consider important are shaped by evolution, biological and cultural.

In describing this development, they are anxious to avoid the "reductionist nightmare", in which everything is ultimately understood by its simplest physical component. The trouble with reductionism, they argue, is that it can't negotiate "ant country". "Ant country" is a typical phrase of theirs, wittily expressing a complex idea simply; there's a reason it's about ants, but the gist concerns that space between the simple and the real which is impossible to describe because it is too vast an area. In other words, they insist on the complexity of the mediation between physics or biology and culture, a complexity entirely ignored by "evolutionary psychology".

Evolution moves through what they call "phase space", shaped by possibility. This is not the same as quantum indeterminacy (about which they are tantalisingly sceptical), because the possibilities in phase space are not infinite. They compare it to a snooker game, in which a "break" must be maintained for the species to survive, but the break does not have only one possible course.

The book has its problems. The chapter "We wanted to have a chapter on free will, but we decided not to, so here it is" approaches the question of genetic determinism entirely through a discussion of the individual's choice in his or her destiny. But the objection to such determinism is not only that it lets people who do bad things off the hook. It is also that it fails to look for other, social, explanations for why people do "bad things". Stewart and Cohen seem uninterested in this side of the question.

Their quasi-fictional account of the history of human civilisation is irritatingly ahistorical, apparently proposing a feudal village as the starting point for the emergence of towns and cities (barons, castles and all), which turns real history on its head. And they seem to think their imaginary alien visitors ("Zarathustrans") are a lot more insightful and entertaining than they are (and the joke, the Zarathustran Theory of Everything — E=8 — is a rip-off of Douglas Adams).

The writers touch on the ideas they are criticising, but on the whole the critique remains implicit. Given the prevalence of "ultra-Darwinist" psychology, it would have been useful to have a more direct, explicit account of them (Pinker's book has been out for ages, but not a word is said about it). As a result, for this reader at least, the book seems oddly unfocused. Perhaps my tastes are just too polemical.

And, most disappointingly, there is little attempt, except speculatively and through semi-fictional "narratives", to describe how the human mind historically did evolve. Other books have attempted to do this, most notably Steven Mithen's excellent *The Prehistory of the Mind*, which is not referred to.

Still, a readable, thought-provoking book which deserves to be read as widely as the biological determinist literature that is so disturbingly vague.

Edward Ellis

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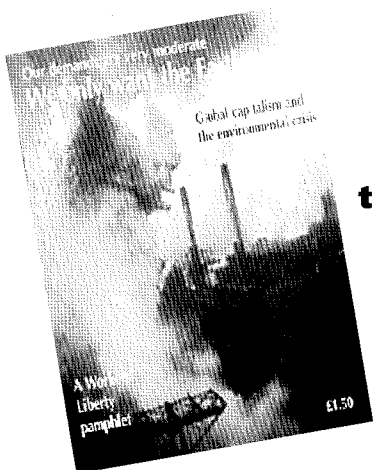
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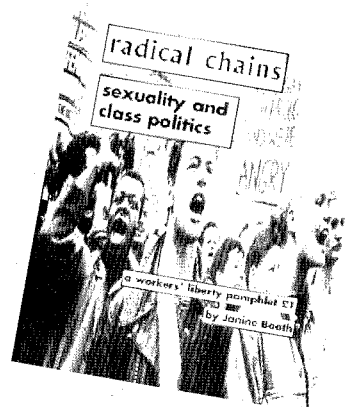
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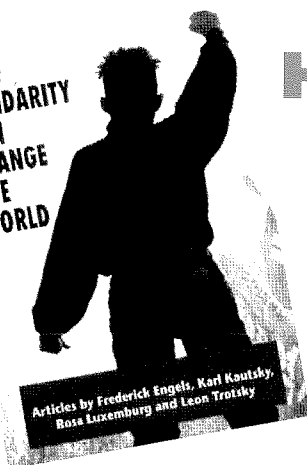
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