

# Tory English nationalism

Out of touch with big capital, the Tories are seeking support through redefining British chauvinism, adding an extra reactionary twist

Last week's Conservative Party conference confirmed that for the moment the Tories have been relegated to the fringes of British politics.

Hardly anyone - not even the majority of conference delegates - believes they can win the next general election. More importantly, in order to unite the party majority, William Hague has been forced to adopt a policy towards the European Union diametrically opposed to the interests of the most international, most competitive and most dynamic section of British big capital.

It goes without saying that any party hoping to be elected in normal times must speak for 'the country' - ie, it must adopt the language and conventions of national chauvinism: claiming to defend the interests of those who live in Britain as against those of outsiders. Today however, the question is not so simple. Global capital, whose individual sections still define themselves in relation to one state or another, nevertheless requires regulatory intervention over and above that provided by those states. Not only is there an increased need for world economic and political institutions (the United Nations, the World Bank) - even the Tories would agree that much. But the economic and commercial blocs, into which bourgeois states have always formed themselves, now require an ever growing degree of pooled sovereignty.

European capital in particular, if it is to compete with the rival North American and east Asian blocs, must not only proceed towards the integration of its separate economies, but also begin to build a supranational state structure to oversee that convergence. Within each EU state there are of course sectors whose interests are not served by this process. They are the representatives of small and medium (national) capital, as opposed to big (international) capital. The Conservative Party, for so long able

to speak with authority on behalf of both wings, is now by and large articulating the views only of the former.

As a result it is in disarray. No wonder, one by one, media supporters have deserted it, to one degree or another switching to New Labour. *The Sun* appeared to sum up the situation with its headline, "Tories dead - official" (October 6). Only *The Daily Telegraph* remains loyal, but even its political correspondent seemed to cringe along with the rest, as he reported Peter Lilley's attempts to amuse the Bournemouth audience with his rendition of "the New Labour version" of *Land of hope and glory*.

If the Tories had been aiming to adopt a position which guaranteed their marginalisation, they could not have been more successful. Hague's line of ruling out the euro for the lifetime of the next parliament is so obviously out of touch with reality that it leaves his party marooned in irrelevance. As Kenneth Clarke pointed out, long before then the new EU coinage is likely to be circulating alongside sterling in everyday use.

Britain will be forced to adopt the euro if it wants to retain any chance of re-establishing London as a gateway to Europe for world capital. Hague may pretend to believe that his overwhelming majority in the membership referendum has "settled" the issue, and that the Tories can now unite around his leadership. Yet in less than three months time, on January 1 1999, 11 European states will make the euro legal tender within their borders. Life itself will mock his 'success'.

This untenable position ensures that the Conservative Party will remain deeply divided and leaves it susceptible to a split. The Clarke-Heseltine wing cannot be expected to quietly accept that the traditional 'preferred' party of British capital to which they have devoted most of their lives can no longer be its main political voice. Clarke's description of the ultra-chauvinist, inward-looking

majority as "unilateralist" is particularly apt. The term was widely used of the Labour Party in the 80s, following its adoption of the policy of nuclear disarmament for Britain. At that time it was Labour that was dubbed 'unelectable'.

Two decades later, Blair seeks to establish New Labour as the 'preferred' party of the British bourgeoisie in place of the Tories. The thinking of his government is completely in tune with the requirements of big capital on the central question of Europe. It is true that Blair is still parroting the 'wait and see' line which originated with the Conservative Party under John Major. But there is no doubt that for Blair the inevitable declaration of intent to join the single currency is just a matter of timing. He will come out openly for such a position once he believes he can win the referendum to which he is committed. The odds will build up in his favour as big business calls to adopt the single currency become a clamour over the next year or so. There will be a long, gradually intensifying campaign in which government institutions will be used to the full.

The Tories' more realist, pro-European wing understands all this only too well. But Clarke and Heseltine are unlikely to make any rash moves. They will certainly avoid a premature split. An institution with the weight and history of the Conservative Party will not easily be replaced. They will not follow the example of Europhile MEP, James Moorhouse, who last week resigned from the party. He defected to the Liberal Democrats, timing his move for greatest effect to coincide with Hague's conference speech. Moorhouse, 74, had already been deselected by his constituency and had nothing to lose.

Two other MEPs, John Stevens and Brendan Donnelly, also to be dumped for their pro-EU stance, commissioned a Mori poll on the eve of conference, which found that around 10% of electors would back a Euro-friendly Tory breakaway if it was headed by a figure such as Clarke. Of those questioned 82% thought Britain would have joined the single currency in 10 years time - a finding which only reinforces the Tories' predicament. In an

amazing 24-hour period the two were expelled, reinstated, resigned and then withdrew their resignations.

All this goes to show that the threat of a split will hang over Hague for as long as the present policy is retained. One man who will be watching developments very carefully is Tony Blair. He knows that Clarke and Heseltine will not move before the introduction of proportional representation, when 10% support could be translated into a block of MPs and the possibility of a seat in a coalition government - unlike under the present system when it would mean oblivion. As with his position regarding the euro, Blair's mind is already made up over PR. Again it is a question of timing to ensure a majority, both within his party and within the electorate as a whole, in order to implement this reform - one which looks certain to split the Tories.

Having turned their backs on the most obvious strategy to serve the interests of British capital, the Tories have nevertheless begun to sniff the possibility of an alternative means of carving out a place for themselves. Among the 22 mentions of "the British way" in Hague's keynote speech, there was an extra, particularly repugnant, reactionary ingredient.

The Conservative leader said: "We are not going to be English nationalists, but we are going to see that the voters of England are fairly represented ... For the first time we will have to become advocates of major constitutional change. It may be a change in the voting rights of Scottish MPs. It may be an English parliament in some form."

Such proposals would have nothing to do with the 'rights' of the English. The Scots, Welsh and Northern Irish may well be marginally 'overrepresented' at Westminster in proportion to their populations, but England still provides 80% of its MPs who in practice can decide everything. The Tory call for a royal English parliament does not reflect any progressive national aspiration. It represents a stoking up of irrational prejudices and, despite Hague's assurances to the contrary, the possibility of a sinister and necessarily reactionary incipient English nationalism.

Hague explicitly defined this *in opposition* to Scotland and Wales. He said of them: "We are not going to leave the battleground to the nationalist parties who want to *destroy our country* and a Labour Party which has played into their hands" (my emphasis). The logic ought to be as clear for us as it is to him. Scottish and Welsh national aspirations are positive in that their democratic content poses a threat to the UK monarchical system.

But for Hague English nationalism can be used to bolster the beleaguered Tories. According to former home secretary Kenneth Baker, the fact that Scots and Welsh MPs will continue to vote on questions concerning England alone, while English MPs will "have no say" on Scottish and Welsh issues, is "unfair to the English and inherently unstable" (*The Observer* October 11). His article appeared under the headline, "A democratic deficit south of the border". Yet Baker and Hague won support from an unexpected quarter for this crass populism. Showing the Tories' potential for the gaining of wide support for such a redefining of British chauvinism, *The Guardian* echoed Baker's words the following day: "There is an incipient deficit in the way the interests of the people of England get articulated ... It is time to create practical proposals for procedural reform" (October 12).

Not surprisingly Scottish and Welsh delegates to the Conservative conference voiced concern at this new turn. But that will not worry Hague unduly. His party has been wiped off the map in Scotland and Wales. While of course he would like to win back MPs and councils in those countries, the reality is that the Tories are at present a very English party.

Baker's *Observer* article drew the following conclusion: "The way to hold the UK together is for each country - Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and England - to have its own parliament."

In place of the democratic demand for a federal republic from below, the Tories appear to be moving towards the reactionary solution of a federal *monarchy* imposed from above ●

Jim Blackstock

## Taaffe's debacle

Like me, many readers will have been waiting eagerly to see how *The Socialist* - paper of Peter Taaffe's beleaguered Socialist Party in England and Wales - reported the creation of the Scottish Socialist Party on September 20. After unsuccessfully scouring successive issues of the paper for an item on it, I actually phoned the editorial office to check. I was assured that there had indeed been a "small report" and that "a larger one" was coming. Presumably, the penny then dropped with the nervy hack I was speaking to. He blurted out - a little belatedly, it must be said - "Er ... CPGB ... I'm not talking to you", and slammed the phone down. I almost felt sorry for him.

The report - if it exists - must be nano, not just "small" - I'm buggered if I can find it. It seems the editor of *The Socialist* - Ken Smith - has circumvented the tricky problem of putting a positive spin on this disaster for SPEW by simply not mentioning it at all!

Indeed, it is hard to see what SPEW could write about this debacle. Taaffe - the toweringly inept politician who has led his organisation into this fiasco - has managed to lose the entire Scottish section. His 'fight' against this nationalist split consisted of carping about the frequency of meetings or the number of full-timers required to maintain a viable 'Marxist' organisation. Deservedly, this miserable method was defeated crushingly by the Scottish Militant Labour leadership - Taaffe did not manage to win a single vote for his position in Scotland. And who can be surprised?

After all, Alan McCombes and the other opportunist leaders of Scottish Militant Labour at least offered some sort of political vision, a rationale for the creation of a new party that flowed logically from the rotten methodology lodged in the whole history of the Socialist Party, and Militant before it. Taaffe's technical complaints against their determination to split his organisation were thus doomed and - as I have written before - a little sad.

What on earth can he say now? Should this split be reported as a step forward? But then why have Taaffe and the Hepscott Road apparatus consistently opposed the move? How can they present the fact that Scotland has shown two fingers not simply to SPEW, but also to the Committee for a Workers International, as a positive development? After all, the SPEW executive committee wrote to its SML opposite number warning it that the decision to press ahead with the establishment of the SSP - prior to the SPEW special congress on October 3-4 and the CWI world congress in November - would be a move "unprecedented in the history of the CWI and a breach of the norms and especially the spirit of 'democratic unity' [Taaffe's fluffy euphemism for his version of 'democratic centralism' - MF]" (reprinted in *Weekly Worker* September 10).

Having witnessed this contemptuous flouting of CWI discipline, will Taaffe now just limply let the Scots stay in? If he does, what possible meaning can this 'discipline' have? What is to stop any section - like the increasingly strotty Pakistani group which is being circled by a hopeful Australian Democratic Socialist Party - essentially doing its own thing? A wimpish acceptance of the right of the 'SML' faction in the SSP to do exactly what it likes, when it likes, spells a quick and not very graceful end for the whole CWI project.

OK, so let us assume that Taaffe and his dwindling band of followers decide to stage a fight and agitate against the 'SML' split by organising a counter-split. Frankly,

it is probably too late. For a start, around what programme can such a fantasy struggle be organised? On the principled basis of fighting for working class organisational unity against the British state that oppresses us all, against the poison of splitting our historically united class along national lines?

But the politically vacant Taaffe has already conceded this principle, accepting that his Scottish organisation required "autonomy" because of the special circumstances created by the spread of nationalism in Scotland. He has already conceded that SML ought to propagate an "independent socialist Scotland". Indeed, it was the fact that Taaffe had already surrendered political principle that inevitably restricted the content of his 'fight' against the split to technical objections. Thus, Taaffe's number two - Lynn Walsh - could only write in the letter cited above that the "organisational proposals [from the SML EC] are completely inadequate from the point of view of maintaining a revolutionary Marxist organisation and a viable section of the CWI in Scotland" (my emphasis). The little political detail of how tailing and positively promoting nationalism would help to 'maintain' 'SML' as a "revolutionary Marxist organisation" has not warranted a mention in any of the criticisms emanating from London, however.

There is a reason for this, of course. What we are seeing in Scotland is essentially the revenge of 'Grantism'. Ted Grant - the founder and long-time leader of Militant - elevating the practice of tailing the existing consciousness of the workers to an art form, misnaming this 'Marxism'. In Grant's day, this translated essentially into a narrow Labourism.

Inside Labour, the intense atmospheric pressure generated by its hostile environment compacted Militant into a tight, cohesive little sect. Outside, the same method has seen the organisation - now guided by the monkey, Taaffe, after the revolt against Grant, the theoretical organ grinder - quickly become infected by black separatism, feminism, trade union economism and Scottish nationalism - to name just a few of the more pernicious maladies. Everything, it seems, has been queuing up to rip chunks out of the organisation, apart from Marxism.

Thus, when McCombes and the SML leadership rationalised their accommodation to the forces of Scottish particularism by the shallow method of opinion poll chasing they were positioning themselves unassailably in the rotten traditions of the organisation. Without a revolution in his political method, Taaffe is organically incapable of fighting this disintegration effectively. And who could seriously accuse Taaffe of being a "revolutionary"?

The positive lesson to be learnt - although whether Taaffe and his dismal leadership team are capable of absorbing it is extremely doubtful - is that of standing on political principle. This may not win you numbers immediately, but is the only way to ensure the long-term survival and growth of a political organisation and, more importantly, its actual use to the class. In contrast to what the majority of SPers have had drummed into them over the years, standing on principle is the only thing that makes you strong, not the opportunist chase after the latest trend.

Look at the negative example to prove this. What possible use to the workers is Peter Taaffe's crisis-wracked SPEW and its pink tartan offspring in Scotland? ●

**Mark Fischer**  
national organiser

## To do what?

Your article, 'Breaking from Labour' (*Weekly Worker* September 17), largely a polemic against the leaflet and article printed on its reverse, 'Should socialists stand against Labour?', picked out bits that suited your predetermined argument, and entirely ignored all references to our general programme - and to activity, organising people on a wide and ongoing basis, trade unions, hospitals, people, that sort of thing ...

Then Alan Fox's piece on the relaunch of Greenwich SA ('What kind of unity?' *Weekly Worker* October 1) reported only half of what I said in that meeting, again ignoring exactly the same areas. I have little problem remembering what I actually said, having used the front of the SA leaflet (which I'd written) as speaking notes.

Alan accused myself and another AWL comrade, for example, of only favouring "local" campaigning and of being "localists". This is absurd. As Alan pointed out, we advocated (seconded by the Socialist Party - something, strangely, not reported) the SA joining the Welfare State Network, a national campaign attempting to link up labour movement bodies and local initiatives into a mass movement for the defence and extension of the welfare state (a democratic campaign, furthermore, not, as stated in the article, a front for the AWL). Unless the CPGB comrades present consider Greenwich a nation and were thus confused, I fail to see how this makes us localists.

What upsets you so, Comrade Fox? That we favour any local campaigning at all? Yes, we admit it: as well as debating the class nature of the Soviet Union and Ireland, we are in favour of campaigning to save local services. We are even prepared to get up early on the odd Saturday to give out leaflets about such issues with people who supported the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and aren't even in the Labour Party! Oh, the shame!

But we are not just "localists". We exhibit "localist economism". What of our raising of the workers' government slogan as a key way of putting a political strategy at the centre of our work? It seems unlikely we were advocating simply a working class takeover of Greenwich Borough Council and, if I am not much mistaken, this being a slogan about the government of society, that's economism ruled out.

Socialist Alliances are a good idea and we encourage people to get involved in them, but they as yet amount to little, don't make the key political issues of the day disappear and are only ultimately useful insofar as they are part of an ongoing strategy for the labour movement and whole working class - much the same criteria as apply to standing against Labour.

And what of the CPGB's perspective? In response to the idea that the SAs should not be "small organisations ... obsessed with polling small votes against Labour and little else", Don Preston replied: "In reality, the SAs should be 'obsessed' with challenging New Labour at the ballot box. This has to become the main strategic thrust of the left. The process of working together against New Labour can help overcome the very deep divisions which exist on the left."

But working together for what? To organise people on what ba-

sis, to do what? Stand in more elections? We all hate Blair! But what is your policy for the movement? How and when and where do we fight New Labour on all fronts - the political, ideological and economic? If you have no answers to these questions, you might at least fairly represent ours.

**Alan McArthur**  
Alliance for Workers' Liberty

## Pig in a poke

John Walsh states in his letter (October 1) that my views on the age-of-consent debate are facile and the result of deep-rooted prejudice. One would have more confidence in his judgement if he could display at least some comprehension of what I actually wrote (see my letters *Weekly Worker* September 3 and 24). His laughable summary of my position is that I am "worried" about incest and bestiality and believe that if you allow sexual activity below the age of 16 these two practices will follow. Eh?

Some advice, comrade: if you intend to engage in a debate with an opposing view or even pass comment on that view, attempt to understand what is being said. If the purpose of debate is the mutual pursuit of the truth, it is fruitless to simply ascribe an outlandish and ridiculous position to an opponent and then denounce it. That is demagogic, not democratic.

The essence of my position is that while I support the lowering of the age of consent (to 14 for instance) I do not support the abolition of the age of consent, as I believe it is a useful and necessary protection against the sexual abuse of children.

The CPGB position, as explained by Mary Godwin in the article, 'End state abuse' (*Weekly Worker* September 24), and included in the CPGB draft programme, is for the abolition of age-of-consent law and "its replacement with alternative legislation to protect children from sexual abuse". No specifics as regards this legislation are given, but Mary states that its aim is, among other things, to protect children from non-consensual sexual interference (Mary, the good news is that at present we all have legal protection from non-consensual sex).

But, comrade, that is avoiding the crux of the debate. The rationale for an age-of-consent law is that children cannot give real informed consent to sex with adults due to their immaturity. If you think they can, then the law is unnecessary and repressive. If you believe they cannot, then the law is sensible and the debate is at what age society recognises the ability of young people to give consent to sexual relations. If the age is too high, it restricts the right of youth to have a sexual life; if it is too low, young people can be damaged through sexual exploitation by adults.

It is not sufficient to state, as Mary does, that there is no correct age, as every individual is different. This is true of all laws restricting activity by age - eg, driving a car, taking on debt, voting, etc. If we don't have some objective criteria to determine when individuals are able to exercise certain rights and simply leave it up to the 'good sense' of the judges to decide in the given circumstances, then we really would be in danger of increased state abuse.



Letters may have been shortened because of space. Some names may have been changed.

Until such time as the CPGB specifies its proposed "alternative legislation to protect children from sexual abuse", I think Marxists should oppose its demand to abolish age-of-consent law. Why buy a pig in a poke?

**Sandy Johnstone**  
Glasgow

## IRSP Five

Five Irish Republican Socialist Party members were arrested a month ago in a wave of RUC publicity alleging that a Markets man who had been an RUC agent had been abducted.

These charges only came about when the RUC agent, John Bowen, revealed at an IRSP press conference that he had been encouraged by the RUC to instigate an operation that would have breached the Inla ceasefire which was called on August 22 1998.

The RUC have operated in a covert fashion to break the Inla ceasefire - this was admitted by one of their own agents. Having been found out, they then attempted to weave a convoluted conspiracy plot that would have explained their actions and would also have left five IRSP members imprisoned.

The RUC are totally unacceptable to the nationalist working class community and should be dissolved immediately. There is no place for a paramilitary police group hellbent on justifying its own existence. Democracy demands that a police force should confine itself to policing and not be involved in the political suppression of a valid opposition party.

**IRSP**  
Belfast

## New attack

The central bureau of the weekly *Kurtulus* (Liberation) newspaper was raided by the "anti-terror" branch of Istanbul police and, as far as we know, 24 workers have been arrested, among them Nurgül Azitas, who is the foreign correspondent of *Kurtulus* in Germany. During the arrests several of them were injured. Also the equipment in the bureau was destroyed.

The police have entered the building by opening a hole in the roof! This shows that the attack was pre-planned and the aim is to silence the voice of socialist opposition.

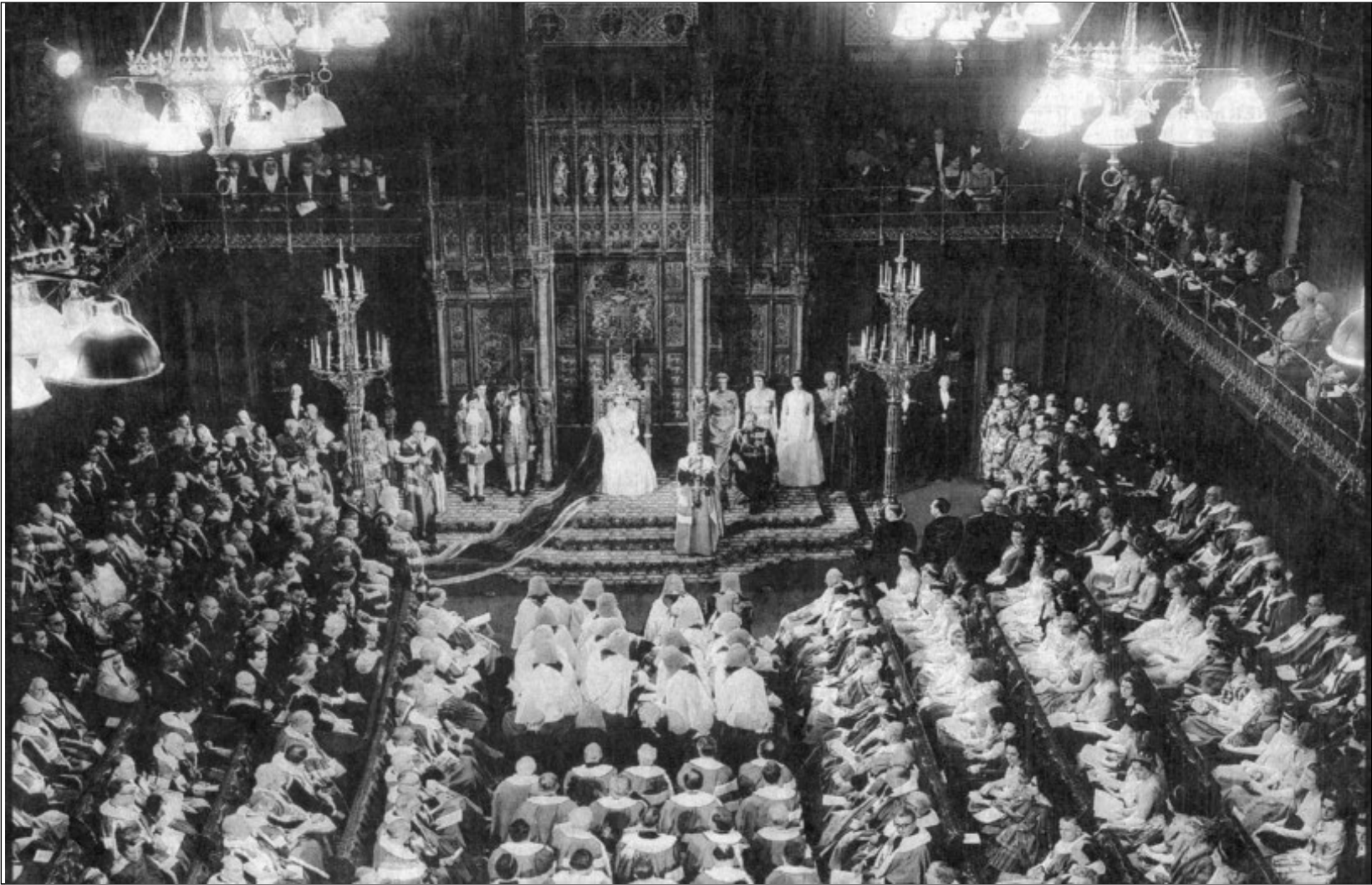
*Kurtulus* is a legally registered newspaper and has been subject to many similar attacks by the police. The most recent one occurred in February this year. The entire staff was arrested, tortured. Seven of them spent several months in prison and were then released without charge.

Another attack was in the summer of 1997, but with the support of progressive organisations, the *Kurtulus* workers resisted police brutality and did not allow them to enter the building.

We are aiming to achieve the same victory. As democratic and progressive organisations and individuals we can prevent torture by showing our deep concerns about this matter.

**Committee Against Disappearances and Torture**  
London





The monarchy and the ‘second chamber’ - abolish the lot

# Lords a-leaping

Labour’s Lady Margaret Jay, leader of the Lords, strongly hinted on BBC1’s *Breakfast with Frost* last Sunday that a royal commission would soon be set up to deal with reform of the House of Lords, where she sits as a life baroness.

Tory peers are incensed. Their constitutional powers are to be taken away from most of them - ie, those who inherited their titles due to dubious connections with centuries-dead royalty or the patronage of Lloyd George and his like. Many hereditary peers thus want to delay any reform,

ostensibly only until there is a consensus amongst Westminster parties. According to the Tories, reform must go beyond mere abolition of the ‘hereditaries’. Tory constitutional spokesman Liam Fox is quoted as saying: “The government is still asking us to buy the removal of the hereditaries without setting out details of its stage-two reform” (*The Observer* October 11).

Labour is out to abolish the second chamber as a house of hereditary privilege with an inbuilt Tory majority. But this does not represent a blow for democracy. Blair wants to create a house of patronage with an inbuilt Labour majority.

The proposed royal commission will only start its work once a bill to abolish the right of hereditary peers to speak and vote in the House of Lords has been passed. This bill is to be introduced in the next queen’s speech. Labour’s ideas have included nominees from institutions like the Royal College of Physicians, as well as religious groups in addition to

those of the ‘established’ Church of England.

The Tory line is of course completely hypocritical and opportunistic. Having consistently opposed any reform of the aristocratic side of the constitution, they now say the proposals do not go far enough. Nevertheless, their changed position is an indication of the extent to which Blair has been able to gain hegemony for his agenda of far-reaching constitutional change from above.

However, New Labour favours a gradual pace of reform of the House of Lords. In that way the sight of Tory peers defending their indefensible rights can be exploited by New Labour to the full. The royal commission is not even expected to report until mid-2000. According to *The Guardian*, once the hereditaries’ powers have been removed, the government “would hold off further changes while other constitutional changes ‘bedded down’” (October 12). And *The Observer* (October 11) reported that Jay wanted the new chamber’s

role considered “in the context of an evolving constitutional settlement, including devolution, possible reform of the voting system for the Commons, increasing legislation from Europe and the growth of regionalism”.

In complete contradistinction to Blair’s repackaging of the United Kingdom constitution, communists insist that the constitutional monarchy system, however it is reformed, must go. It can never provide for genuine self-determination for Scotland, Ireland and Wales. People are not citizens, but *subjects* of the crown. The Blairite reforms are certainly not designed to change that basic situation. They are intended to shore up the monarchical UK state.

However, his reforms will inevitably call into question the foundations of the constitution - most notably that of the monarch. Once the disgusting spectacle of those holding inherited parliamentary positions, the hereditaries of the House of Lords, is removed, there can be no logical basis for the monarchy. The Tories are right to warn of a Pandora’s box.

Unlike some who consider themselves revolutionaries and refuse to address constitutional questions in the here and now, preferring that they be left until later (during the revolution or maybe after it), communists insist that all democratic questions are the concern of our class *from this moment*. Partisans of the working class need to be clear: we are in favour of a real democratic challenge to the royal status quo, not bogus reforms. We need to raise the banner of republican democracy at every opportunity.

We are for the complete abolition of the House of Lords and are opposed to the ‘checks and balances’ on democracy through any second chamber. We stand for a federal republic of England, Scotland and Wales ●

Tom Ball

## action

- **CPGB seminars**  
**London:** Sunday October 18 - ‘Boulangism: the politics of the third way’, using Hal Draper’s *Karl Marx’s theory of revolution* as a study guide.  
**Manchester:** Monday October 26 - ‘The sale and purchase of labour power; the labour process and the valorisation process’ in the series on Karl Marx’s *Capital*. For details, phone 0161-798 6417. E-mail: cpgb2@aol.com.
- **CPGB weekend school**  
Central London, November 7-8: ‘Against economism’.  
Saturday November 7, morning: ‘*Iskra* and economism’; afternoon: ‘Lenin versus imperialist economism’.  
Sunday November 8, morning: ‘Modern Trotskyism’s tendency to economism’; afternoon: ‘Lenin and the permanent revolution’.  
For more details call 0181-459 7146.

■ **Party wills**  
The CPGB has forms available for you to include the Party and the struggle for communism in your will. Write for details.

■ **London Socialist Alliance**  
To get involved, contact Box 22, 136-138 Kingsland High Street, London E8 2NS, or ring Anne Murphy on 0973-231 620.

■ **Glasgow Marxist Forum**  
Saturday October 24, 10.30am, Partick Burgh Hall, Glasgow.  
Public meeting - The legacy of the Russian Revolution.  
Speakers: Sean Matgamna, Hillel Ticktin, Willie Thompson.  
Co-sponsors: Alliance for Workers’ Liberty, Glasgow Marxist Forum.

Wednesday November 18, Partick Burgh Hall, 7.30pm.  
Debate - ‘Should socialists support the demand for Scottish independence?’ Speaker - Alan McCombes, SSP. All welcome.

■ **Hillingdon hospital workers fight on**  
The Hillingdon strikers in west London still need your support. Send donations urgently, payable to Hillingdon Strikers Support Campaign, c/o 27 Townsend Way, Northwood, Middlesex UB8 1JD.

■ **Support Tameside careworkers**  
Support Group meets every Monday, 7pm, at the Station pub, Warrington Street, Ashton under Lyne.  
Donations and solidarity to Tameside Unison, 29 Booth Street, Ashton under Lyne.

■ **Made in England**  
A new play by Parv Bancel. Billy India, at the zenith of his pop career, is haunted by the pull of the ghetto. To exercise the ghost, he visits his old friend and mentor, Kes - lead singer with 70s punk band Death Row. Has Billy sold out? Bancel deals with claims staked for a new England.  
Tuesday October 20 to Saturday October 24 - 7.45pm. Watermans Arts Centre, 40 High Street, Brentford - 0181-568 1176  
Tuesday October 27 to Sunday November 15 - 9.30pm. Etcetera Theatre, 265 Camden High Street, London NW1 - 0171-482 4857.

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through a programme of struggle for human self-liberation. Money well spent! Donations from comrades PK, RW and JG bring the October fund to £297 towards our £400 target. Not bad for half time! ●

Ian Farrell

Ask for a bankers order form, and/or send cheques, payable to CPGB

# Apologetics behind

## Jack Conrad replies to Phil Watson

Phil Watson takes me to task on the thorny issue of the USSR (*Weekly Worker* October 8). This is all to the good and very welcome. We communists do not fear sharp differences in the least. They are natural in any vibrant and healthy political organism. Through the clash of contending ideas and approaches we can strengthen and advance our collective knowledge and thus move further towards the truth.

The comrade quotes nothing more of mine other than a short passage, less than a paragraph, from my review of *The fate of the Russian Revolution*, a collection of articles in the main by Max Shachtman, published earlier this year by the Alliance for Workers' Liberty. This is it in its entirety:

"[With the first five-year plan] the bureaucracy finally separated itself from any proletarian vestiges, launching a 'second revolution' from above and forced industrialisation. Living standards plummeted. Millions died. The Communist Party was decimated and transformed into an organ which existed to promote the cult of Stalin. Here, in the first five-year plan, was the qualitative counterrevolutionary break" (*Weekly Worker* August 20).

Comrade Watson objects. It might all "sound blissfully straightforward" - but such a description of the USSR is "partial, one-sided and false". Not, it should be noted, that our comrade makes any attempt to present *his* argument in a straightforward manner, blissful or otherwise. Moreover he declines to provide any historical evidence in order to refute even my above quoted thumbnail sketch. Did the bureaucracy separate itself from "any proletarian vestiges"? Did living standards not "plummet"? Did millions not die? Was the Communist Party not thereby "decimated" and transformed into a Stalinite cult? Was not the 'second revolution' a qualitative "counterrevolutionary break"? Ignoring the actual overall picture which must be established in our minds theoretically with constant reference to events, comrade Watson substitutes a socialist palliation.

He appears to be preaching from the book of denial. The questions I raise are central and demand an unambiguous answer. They reach to the essence of the Soviet Union as a form of non-proletarian socialism. Wishing them away by feebly labelling them "partial, one-sided and false" gets us nowhere in terms of our collective knowledge. If they are "partial, one-sided and false", that needs to be shown and proven with hard facts. Sadly our comrade does his utmost to obscure these questions and almost everything else with philosophical evasion. He cannot tell us anything definite about the real history of the USSR and its laws and social contradictions. He deploys abstractions. The technique is old and thankfully discredited. Gerry Healy took it to a fine art. It is called turning Marxism on its head - what is a ruthless materialist and revolutionary criticism of everything that exists becomes an impenetrable, but hollow, apologia. To the ignorant, the credulous or the half educated it might appear that what comrade Watson is putting forward is the height of profundity. Actually, as we will show, it does not amount to a pile of beans. What the comrade writes is "partial, one-sided" and in the last analysis "false".

.....  
 "Philosophical phrases are no substitute for scientific knowledge. To describe the conservative, flabby and oppressive CPSU as 'revolutionary' to the "bitter end" is to shamefully kowtow before failure, KGB terror, censorship and a systematic history of lies"  
 .....

Comrade Watson has made a stunning discovery. Ideology. Apparently the "majority of CPGB members", including myself, have completely failed to take on board this question. We are seemingly to be numbered amongst those poor souls "mired in decades of mechanical epistemology" - that is, a mechanical theory of knowledge - whose logic inevitably "becomes circular and thus reified". Our intentions in theorising about the USSR, may be or may not be "honest" in "intent". Yet without taking account of the role of ideology - for example the "brief ascendancy of utopianism" that was unleashed with the launch of the first five-year plan - we can never "mediate or surmount the social whole": ie, our theory can at best only be partial and one-sided.

The role of ideology as a material force is hardly a new discovery. No one is trying to avoid the "fact that everything which motivates men must pass through their brains" (F Engels *MECW* Vol 26, London 1989, p373). On the contrary. From the most primitive of times people have acted - and therefore in one way or another changed material reality, on the basis of the most ignorant superstitions and beliefs. In its own unique way the same applies to the Soviet Union's leaders and its population. What is primary though? Materialists say that nature, objective reality and its contradictory laws, are in the last analysis primary. The laws that underdetermined Soviet society were more than a mere "blocked" mediation of the ideals of Marxism-Leninism. They exerted themselves as an external necessity as a series of apparent accidents - the product as waste, endemic shortage, worker sabotage, evaporation of the population surplus, production for its own sake, etc.

Let us do our best to set down comrade Watson's case against Jack Conrad (I shall answer or comment upon areas of disagreement and agree-

ment in passing but leave my substantive criticism to the end). There is a "paradox", says comrade Watson. Throughout most of its existence the Soviet Union "remained trapped inside a system whereby social and political hegemony had become alienated from the broad ranks of the proletariat". This is very anodyne stuff, not to say an alibi. Soviet workers lost far more than "social and political hegemony". Why not tell the *truth* and say the Soviet workers as a *whole* were with the first five-year plan reduced to an exploited slave class and subjected to a ruthless political repression which atomised them to a degree almost unparalleled in history? It is certainly beyond doubt that the Communist Party of the Soviet Union bureaucracy "continued to exercise control in the name of Marxism-Leninism". But for what purpose and in whose interests?

Comrade Watson places great, if not primary, emphasis, on this ideology. We have already mentioned the undeniable and well documented "brief ascendancy of utopianism" that accompanied the onset of the first five-year plan. The comrade quotes the historian, Sheila Fitzpatrick, vis-à-vis the role of the "iconoclastic and belligerent youth movement" which was "instinctively hostile to most existing authorities and institutions" (S Fitzpatrick *The Russian Revolution 1917-1932* Oxford 1982, p130). Frankly, he could have quoted Jack Conrad to the same effect. "The first five-year plan was launched on a short, though genuine, wave of popular enthusiasm among urban workers, especially the young" ..., etc, etc (J Conrad 'Genesis of bureaucratic socialism', part two *Weekly Worker* January 9 1997).

Armed with his Fitzpatrick quote, comrade Watson confidently takes his sling-shot at Jack Conrad. I am no Goliath. He is no David. Apparently the use of what passed for Marxism-Leninism by the bureaucracy, the "iconoclastic and belligerent youth movement", etc, "represents" for Jack Conrad "an enigma, [a paradox? - JC] or at best an empty formulation". My supposed "starting point" is the "Soviet product and its essentially alienated circuit through society". It therefore "seems methodologically acceptable" for Jack Conrad to "abstract this social content from its ideological form": ie, "a fundamental precondition for its *materialisation* into the Soviet Union". "Conrad's dualist beginnings stand exposed," announces a triumphal comrade Watson, "as the foundation for a partial, one-sided and *false* approximation of the USSR and its 20th century dynamic."

Jack Conrad has not been felled. He remains standing. The pebble was not even on target. I do not in the least deny the importance or the contradictory and evolving nature of ideology in the USSR. As indicated above, in human society the actors are all endowed with consciousness. Nothing happens without some intention, without some desired aim. People make history. Thus history is also a question of what individuals desire. There are, however, countless motives - naked ambition, survival, hatred, ideological enthusiasm, political mistrust, sex, caprice, etc. Individual wills are therefore a force active in history ... yet in terms of "total result" they constitute, argued Engels, something of "only secondary importance", because they come into conflict with each other and thus

tend to be subsumed (F Engels *MECW* Vol 26, London 1989, p388). Ends become contradictory and result in their *unintended* and *undesired* opposites. On the surface things appear totally chaotic, but events are actually governed by hidden laws that can be discovered. These determining laws find themselves variously reflected in the minds of the historical actors as motives.

The task is to investigate the underlying laws which - consciously or most often unconsciously - lie behind the motives of historic actors. The answer cannot be found in the head of a Stalin or a Gorbachev. Nor the party-state. Nor is the answer to be found in the ideologies which momentarily set in motion whole classes and nations. We must discover what fundamentally motivates leaders, parties, states and peoples. In the last analysis Marxism declares that what determines such active factors in history is the "development of the productive forces and relations of exchange" (F Engels *MECW* Vol 26, London 1989, p391). We must look beneath transient ideologies to lasting results. Everything which sets people in motion must pass through their minds. But what form it takes in the mind depends very much upon objective circumstances, the role of which must be derived from the facts, from history and society itself, not abstract interconnections sprung from the brain. Marxism put an end to the old speculative philosophy in the realm of history. Reviving it is as unnecessary as it is impossible.

If comrade Watson has evidence that I dismiss the cause and *effect* of ideology he would surely locate some suitably representative statement - as opposed to this or that phrase plucked out of context - and bring it forth as damning evidence. He cannot find any such thing. Neither in my short review of *The fate of the Russian Revolution*. Nor in my 30,000-word 'Genesis of bureaucratic socialism' supplements published in our press over the weeks December 19 1996, January 9 1997, February 12 1997 (itself constituting the seventh draft chapter of volume one in what is envisaged to be a six-volume study). So he is reduced to fabrication and unfounded assertion ... a rather unrewarding and sad method of polemic.

Having complained about comrade Watson's lack of hard evidence as prosecutor, let me present in my defence the three concluding paragraphs from the first part of the 'Genesis of bureaucratic socialism':

"Though still within the vestigial framework of a workers' state the bureaucracy could now [in the 1920s - JC] govern for itself. Hence the state machine displayed a 'relative independence' unheard of under capitalism or any other classic western European mode of production, where the rulers rule, due to culture and wealth, despite maintaining a bureaucracy for the purposes of administration. With capitalist industry nationalised and the workers politically inert, the Soviet bureaucracy - ie, political power - could break free from its social base and Bonapartistically balance between the workers and the NEP classes and strata. The Soviet labour bureaucracy thus came to be the 'master of society'.

"To justify itself a mystifying ideology was needed. By definition that could not be genuine Marxism nor could it be pro-capitalist reformism.

Soviet centrism was invented. It justified adaptation to Russia's backwardness and legitimised the bureaucracy's monopoly of power. Soviet centrism stood between reform and revolution in its own particular way; that made it centrism *sui generis*.

"Three features immediately distinguish it from Kautskyite 'classic' centrism. Firstly, it reflected extreme economic and social backwardness - hence lack of debate and a leadership cult, the crude and cavalier attitude towards truth. Secondly, it served a social stratum which gained its privileges to the detriment of socialism, yet at the same time owed those privileges to a socialist revolution - hence the contradictory ideology that denied the existence of an antagonistic bureaucracy and its privileges, and portrayed an imminent realisation of utopia. Thirdly, despite its 'extreme poverty and even dishonesty', it reflected and actively moulded, as Herbert Marcuse pointed out, 'in various forms the realities of Soviet development'. This was because it was an ideology which both justified and served a caste, if not a class, that was running a world power - hence though sharing the unstable, transitory features of 'classic' centrism, it was in comparison far more durable and solid."

Comrade Watson quotes and briefly discusses various propositions and insights advanced by Louis Althusser and Raymond Williams. Having done so, the gist of comrade Watson's non-argument with me is that ideology can under certain circumstances become not only a material force through which people express their lived relations between themselves and their conditions of existence, but (in certain specific instances) a primary material force that must be situated within the complex of other forces, including those "abstracted" as 'labour' and 'production'. Yes, in the Soviet Union official ideology "actively moulded" certain specific realities of development.

István Mészáros is called upon as the next - unlikely - witness against Jack Conrad and his "mechanical epistemology" (Mészáros maintains that the Soviet system was post-capitalist but not post-capital - it was, we both agree, exploitative). One of the reasons the bureaucracy could not fragment and atomise the labour-capital relation along the lines of the "capitalist labour process", suggests Mészáros, was the *negative* power of Marxism-Leninism as the ideology of the state in the Soviet Union. With its legitimising rhetoric of 'building socialism', 'dictatorship of the proletariat' and the 'leading role of the party', "it had to exclude quite explicitly the possibility of capitalist restoration and the subjection of labour to the alienating fetishism of commodity" (I Mészáros *Beyond capital* London 1995, p668).

Again Jack Conrad can only but agree ... but with the qualification that what was previously a material force inevitably became unreal in the course of development, because it steadily lost connection with necessity and thus rationality. Engels, in discussing the close of Hegel's philosophy, makes this generally applicable point: "[A]ll that was previously real becomes unreal, loses its necessity, its right of existence, its rationality. And in the place of moribund reality comes a new, viable reality - peacefully, if the old has enough common sense to go to its death without a struggle; forcibly, if it resists this necessity.

# fog of philosophy

Thus the Hegelian proposition [that what is real is rational - JC] turns into its opposite through Hegelian dialectics itself" (F Engels *MECW* Vol 26, London 1990, p359).

The CPSU "proved", states comrade Watson, to be "ultimately an unwieldy instrument for the realisation of Marxist-Leninist ideology in the totality of material social processes". In fact "under the rule of the bureaucracy its ideology suffered an endless blocked mediation becoming ever more atrophied as the USSR neared extinction". So although "Marxist theory bore its practical fruit with the leadership of the Bolsheviks in the 1917 revolution" as the Soviet Union and the CPSU "became subject to distinct bureaucratic distortions, this point of mediation became blocked". Marxism-Leninism lived on, in the phrase of Georg Lukács, as an "abstract and utopian strain". In other words, one could say, official Marxism-Leninism was unreal in the sense that in the course of its development reality proved it to be unnecessary (a material fact of some significance). In 1991 the Soviet state and its ideology was so unreal - that is to say, so drained of all necessity, so irrational - that it was effortlessly destroyed by the Yeltsinite counter-coup. Official Marxism-Leninism was the unreal and the peaceful, and democratic counterrevolution was the real. Here was the counterrevolution in the counterrevolution.

Yet for all that, insists comrade Watson, the CPSU "still represented a revolutionary movement and the USSR remained the world's revolutionary centre until the bitter end of August 1991". For Leninists, it should be stressed, the designation of a country as the "world revolutionary centre" has only the a tangential relationship to the ideology of this or that party. The world revolutionary centre is an "objective question based on uneven development" (J Conrad, 'Genesis of bureaucratic socialism', part one *Weekly Worker* December 19 1996). It is a category that refers to the country where the proletarian struggle has reached its highest stage. First located in Chartist Britain, the world revolutionary centre shifted to France and, after the bloody suppression of the Paris Commune in 1871, to Germany. In 1882 Marx and Engels rightly believed that Russia was destined to become the "vanguard of revolutionary action in Europe" (K Marx, F Engels *MECW* Vol 24, London 1989, p426).

What of the CPSU "still" representing "a revolutionary movement" to the "bitter end"? This strange, not to say metaphysical, claim is based not on any concrete theory of necessity or empirical evidence of what is and what is not revolutionary. It is crudely, and ham-fistedly, lifted from a reading of Lukács's critique of the pre-1914 Second International under the *centrist* leadership of Rudolf Hilferding and Karl Kautsky. Though they theorised eloquently and penetratingly about the revolutionary nature of the epoch, they declined to organise the "concrete mediation of that theoretical insight: the revolutionary party". On the basis of this correct observation Lukács is then cited: "The upshot was that for the proletariat these differences of opinion" - ie, the struggle against the revisionism of Eduard Bernstein *et al* - "simply remained differences of opinion *within* the workers' movements that were nevertheless revolutionary movements" (G Lukács *History and*

*class consciousness* Cambridge Mass 1975, p302). Comrade Watson has his 'proof'.

There is no doubt that militant German workers in the Social Democratic Party were convinced that their movement was the very model of a revolutionary party ... but comrade Watson is wrong to equate or conflate what is subjective with what is objective. That would make the Labour Party of Michael Foot a vehicle for socialism and World War II a crusade against fascism. Millions believed these ideological claims. It is foolish in the extreme to dismiss what people think as irrelevant - not least if they proceeded to act on that basis. However, the task of a science of society is to lay bare what is real in terms of underlying laws and categories that exist outside the consciousness of people, and yet shapes, determines and drives that consciousness.

From the time of Stalin onwards the CPSU should be designated as a counter-revolutionary party, albeit of a special type. What was irrational predicates its opposite. In 1924 the bureaucracy enshrined as official doctrine the self-defeating notion of 'socialism in one country': ie, national socialism. Was this not a utopian attempt reminiscent of the 19th century communist experiments in America but on the grand scale? Was it not a fundamental break with genuine Marxism-Leninism? Is not scientific socialism necessarily internationalist to its core?

Four years later the bureaucracy had become its opposite. The Stalinite bureaucracy substituted for the bourgeoisie and objectively constituted itself a *collective* entity of exploiters whose aim was to maximise the surplus product pumped out of the direct producers. It thereby forfeited any historical right to exist. With the first five-year plan the bureaucracy terroristically crushed the workers and peasantry - "the revolutionary proletariat of Europe's first self-proclaimed workers' and peasants' state were turned into Europe's most quiescent working class" (S Kotkin *Magnetic mountain* Berkeley 1995, p198). The CPSU "tried to impose in a most authoritarian form - including imprisonment and mass labour camps - the most severe labour discipline, holding workers criminally responsible as individuals for their failure to conform to the norm laid down for them" (I Mészáros *Beyond capital* London 1995, p668). The workers who exercised individual negative control over the productive process were the actual 'enemy within', mythologised by the bureaucracy's 'Marxist-Leninist' ideology as the Trotskyite 'enemy without'.

Gorbachev did earnestly proclaim perestroika on countless party platforms as the salvation of "socialist assemblage" in the USSR. Needless to say, there existed a profound bifurcation between his rationalisation and the actual goal which was to save the USSR as a great power. This was to be done by switching from political to economic methods of surplus extraction through the introduction of the market mechanism - crucially through disciplining the workers by establishing "a fully effective labour market" (*ibid* p669). Evidently, as proven by the post-1991 ideological spectrum, there were very few people in the USSR that actually believed official ideology. It had become a non-ideology (even in 1941 Stalin turned to the pre-revolutionary ideology of 'mother Russia' in order to mobilise

the masses against the invading Germans, not proletarian internationalism or socialism).

The Yeltsin counter-coup exposed what was real by ushering in a form of democracy where people at least feel relatively safe in expressing outwardly what they think inwardly. No significant 'communist' grouping or faction in today's Russia adheres to a Krushchevite, Brezhnevite or Andropovite ideology. True, showing what existed residually under the seamless surface of unanimity, there are Stalinites. But even those who nostalgically carry portraits of Stalin in Red Square advocate an eclectic red-brown mix of anti-western nationalism, anti-semitism and populism. Not even Nina Andreyeva's All-Union Bolsheviks propound a pristine Stalinism. Was the bifurcation that existed in the late 1980s a novel feature? Surely as a social phenomenon it owes its origins to the terror *system* under Stalin where workers, not least those in the CPSU, learnt to speak 'Bolshevik' in public, "only to express their anger and frustration" over the "privacy of the kitchen table" (S Kotkin *Magnetic mountain* Berkeley 1995, p236). Terror and conformity with the general secretary's latest encyclical also negatively moulded the bureaucracy - as a ruling stratum it too was unable to outwardly express counterposed self-interests or freely organise around them. Under Stalin's monocracy the bureaucracy existed merely as a shadow class.

As with all ideologies - christianity, islam, nationalism, democracy, anarchism - official Soviet 'Marxism-Leninism' could be laid hold of by all manner of different class and social strata. Workers in the Soviet Union under certain particularly favourable circumstances turned it *against* their managers - during the great purges it was an excellent way for slaves to exact vengeance. Abroad 'third world' intellectuals adapted Soviet 'Marxism-Leninism' for their own purposes and wielded it splendidly to make peasant-based national revolutions - China, Vietnam, Cuba, etc. Western communist parties used it prosaically to justify and map out reformist, parliamentary roads to national socialism. In Africa and the Middle East army putschists proclaimed themselves Marxist-Leninist in the future hope of emulating Stalin's *imagined* path to industrialisation and more immediately in order to secure Soviet economic and military aid. The point is, of course, that whatever the formal rationalisations and inner beliefs of these historical actors, they did not propagate nor practise Marxism-Leninism in any genuine sense. Theirs was a bastard or pidgin Marxism that might have embalmed or robbed phrases appearing in the works of Marx, Engels and Lenin - eg, the 'dictatorship of the proletariat'. Nevertheless in terms of content what we had before us was a reversion to the pre-Marxist utopianism and elitism preached by the likes of Proudhon, Blanqui, Lassalle and Bakunin and thus different ways of dominating the working class.

Marxism is real not because of the formal adherence of this or that big party or state (German social democracy abandoned its 'Marxism' in the 1950s; China still formally holds to it). Marxism is, and will become real, because it is scientific: ie, rational, true, dynamic and revolutionary. Marxism recognises and proclaims in

theory and practice the international self-liberation of the proletariat as a historical necessity. "Marx was before all else a revolutionist," said a mourning Engels in his celebrated graveside speech. "His real mission in life was to contribute ... to the liberation of the modern proletariat, which *he* was the first to make conscious of its own position and needs, conscious of the conditions of its emancipation. Fighting was his element. And he fought with a passion, a tenacity and a success that few could rival" (F Engels *MECW* Vol 26 London 1989, p468).

Philosophical phrases are no substitute for scientific knowledge. To describe the conservative, flabby and oppressive CPSU as "revolutionary" to the "bitter end" is to shamefully kowtow before failure, KGB terror, censorship and a systematic history of lies. Revolution did not lurk behind its empty promises of communism and living dead leaders. Presumably then comrade Watson would also call for the defence of the August 1991 State Emergency Committee coup. Our trend did no such thing at the "bitter end". Instead we argued for a "real political revolution" from below against the counterrevolutionary bureaucracy *as a whole*, and therefore opposed Gorbachev, Yeltsin and the State Emergency Committee. The CPGB's Provisional Central Committee accurately warned that "the State Emergency Committee takeover could mean that the restoration of capitalism in the USSR, while *delayed*, will at the end of the day be *facilitated*" ... the mass are thrown into the arms of counterrevolution (J Conrad *From October to August* London 1992, p250).

So Jack Conrad does not consider the paradox of official protestations of fidelity to Marxism-Leninism and the alienation of workers under the Soviet Union system as something which is "at best, of secondary importance, or, at worst, a reactionary diversion". We are - yes - "duty-bound to consider the manner in which ... developments were rationalised in the Soviet Union". The verifiable and tragic fact that millions of workers throughout the world, including in Russia, still consider the Soviet Union post-1928 an example of 'living socialism', and therefore reject socialism in horror and disgust, is of cardinal importance. Not though our comrade Watson. His is not a fully Marxist criticism of the Soviet Union and Stalin, but a defence ... his logic is indeed circular and alienated. What begins as criticism from the left returns from the right as apologia.

The "methodological outline" drawn by comrade Watson is in his own words specifically designed to correct "one-sided and at times hysterical denunciations of the USSR and JV Stalin". Such unattributed and unspecified "worrying formulations" - presumably statements to the effect that Soviet workers were exploited and politically subject to terrorism - are, he informs readers of the *Weekly Worker*, the "unambiguous product of tawdry theoretical beginnings, whereby dialectical reticence appears as the only unifying feature". The positions defended by the majority of CPGB members are for our comrade "tortured narratives" and a "hideous symphony of one-sided truisms", where "radical phraseology becomes the substitute for serious revolutionary theory".

In his final peroration comrade Watson issues a battle cry: "It is only

through the conscious application of the dialectic that the Communist Party of Great Britain can counter this revisionist ulcer." It ought to be said that such shrill language could be mistaken for a declaration of civil war. But, as it comes from a comrade who has been a CPGB member for barely a few months, we surely have nothing more than an eagerness to enter debate and arrive at clarity. Anyway, let me reiterate, not least for the benefit of new readers - the agreed position of those organised under the banner of the Provisional Central Committee is that our project of reorganising the CPGB is designed to rally all partisans of the working class. Necessarily that will involve continuous political struggle. But it equally involves a toleration of different shades and trends among communists, not least theoretical differences over the USSR. We positively want to win Trotskyites, Cliffites and advocates of the Soviet Union as a form of bureaucratic collectivism to CPGB membership.

What of Jack Conrad's method? Everything must be studied - history, ideas, theories. But in terms of *presentation* and *investigation* it is true that Jack Conrad does start with the alienated Soviet product and its *interconnected* and *contradictory* movement through society and into new, higher and ever more impossible forms. These are not "dualist beginnings". On the contrary I consciously, openly and unashamedly follow the logic and method of presentation employed by Marx in *Capital* - which has a universal applicability.

Marx began with the commodity and a thorough analysis of value. He concentrated on this single relation and to begin with intentionally ignored other higher forms of the capital relationship, such as wages, profits, exploitation, extended reproduction, banking, interest, international trade, the state, ideology, etc. The analysis yields the whole, as a result of testing and developing the elementary category through its actual manifested historical emergence and movement to more complex categories and forms ... these results are then summed up by means of dialectical thinking. Hence the "dialectic of concepts is merely the conscious reflection of the dialectical motion of the real world" (F Engels *MECW* Vol 26 London 1989, p383).

"Here, as everywhere else, the concrete universal concept registers a real elementary form of the existence of the entire system rather than an empty abstraction" (EV Ilyenkov *The dialectics of the abstract and concrete in Marx's Capital* Moscow 1982, p225). More, this method of analysing the mode of existence of the "elementary protean body" is, states Ilyenkov, the "only way of obtaining a real definition and of revealing the essence of the matter" (*ibid* p224). It is not therefore an arbitrary decision to start with the product, but a logical necessity. Those who proclaim the need for a general theory but refuse to adopt such a Marxist approach are the ones doomed to one-sidedness. Instead of moving from social reality to theory, the likes of comrade Watson attempt to idealistically derive social reality from theory. The world constitutes a whole. But in the last analysis ideas are not and cannot be primary.

The real point of departure is not the idea, not the ideology of what should be: rather the actual state of things as they are ●



# End of triumphalism

Despite the global financial crisis, capitalism will not collapse of its own accord, argues **Michael Malkin**

**A**fter hubris comes Nemesis. What price now the facile triumphalism of 1991 - the empty boasting about the victory of capitalism in economics and of bourgeois democracy in politics; the ignorant crowing of bourgeois intellectuals about "the end of history"? The period of reaction through which we are living has entered a new phase, in which all the comforting 'certainties' that bourgeois ideology derived from the collapse of the USSR are now exposed as mere will-o'-the-wisps.

The existence of a *global* financial crisis has been confirmed by the highest authority - Alan Greenspan, the chairman of the US Federal Reserve, international capitalism's spokesman-in-chief. This gentleman's utterances are normally of Delphic obscurity, so it is significant that he has recently spoken in explicit terms about the acute *crisis of liquidity* and the *credit crunch* which now threaten to undermine the foundations of the capitalist system.

It is, of course, premature to talk about the 'collapse of capitalism' - a phrase sensibly qualified by a cautionary question mark on the front cover of the latest edition of *Socialist Review*, the Socialist Workers Party's monthly (October). Certainly, the capitalist system is undergoing what president Clinton has correctly called its most severe crisis for half a century. Whatever the outcome, there is no doubt that recent weeks have seen the destruction of capital on a momentous scale. According to estimates from the US Federal Reserve, for example, the net loss of wealth thus far amounts to around \$1.5 trillion in the United States alone, and equates to some 20% of US GDP. On the other hand, it is quite possible that in a few years time investors will look back on the present time as the best buying opportunity in a generation.

The period since Greenspan's speech to business economists on October 7 has been marked by astounding volatility in all the major markets: the prices not just of shares, but also of bonds and currencies have been lurching to an unprecedented extent, rising one day on a tide of irrational exuberance; falling the next under the weight of apparent despair. These moves betoken fundamental uncertainty and have what the *Financial Times* has referred to as an "epoch-making feel" about them (October 10). The Byzantine language of the markets is telling us that a sea-change is underway. But the precise nature, direction and extent of that change are not yet known.

Our primary concern, as always, is with the *political* consequences of the present turmoil - consequences that are already affecting the political and social fabric of Malaysia, Indonesia, South Korea and Russia. In order to evaluate the potential for similar political repercussions in the main imperialist countries, we need first of all to understand the *economic* and *financial* forces underlying the present situation. What interplay of factors can possibly account for the massive devastation of wealth that has already occurred?

The key to the crisis lies in the globalisation of capital. Technological advances in telecommunications and

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 "... prices have been lurching to an unprecedented extent, rising one day on a tide of irrational exuberance; falling the next under the weight of apparent despair"  
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computing have made it possible for capital to be moved around the world almost instantaneously. This development of the 'productive forces' of finance capital has opened up undreamed of opportunities for parasitism, epitomised by the activities of the so-called 'hedge funds'. The *raison d'être* of these unregulated, secretive institutions is to deploy supposedly 'scientific', mathematically sophisticated trading strategies in order to make quick profits. Drawing their primary investment capital exclusively from super-rich individuals and institutions, the hedge funds exploit the sheer volume of their capital resources (often running into billions) in an attempt to manipulate market movements in their favour. Leaving aside the hype, they essentially constitute gigantic pots of gambling money sloshing in and out of markets, not on a daily, but an hourly basis, chasing a quick return wherever it can be found.

The roots of the current crisis of liquidity can be discerned in the near collapse late last month of the splendidly misnamed Long Term Capital Management hedge fund. Headed by a legendarily successful veteran Wall Street bond trader, and with two Nobel prize-winning economists responsible for its investment strategies, LTCM was a particularly prestigious fund with a reputation for a conservative, risk-averse investment policy. Yet LTCM would have gone bust had it not been for the unprecedented intervention of the Federal Reserve. The Fed called an emergency meeting of leading bankers and presented them with a stark choice: stump up £2.1 billion to keep LTCM afloat, or risk allowing the fund's £60 billion of 'unclosed investment positions' (ie, bets on market movements) to initiate a potential systematic failure of the US and European banking system. Needless to say, the banks accepted an offer they could not refuse and they are now effectively the lucky owners of LTCM.

Given its record and prestige, LTCM had no difficulty in borrowing around 30 times its shareholders' funds from the investment arms of many leading banks, who were keen to share the spoils of an investment strategy so complex that neither they nor anyone else could really under-

stand it. This naivety is symptomatic of relations between the banks and hedge funds in general. The generalised culture of greed and the desire of investment managers to earn fat bonuses by producing above-average returns conspired, not for the first time, to create a disaster. In the immediate aftermath, a few banks have admitted to significant losses attributable to their involvement with LTCM, but the full extent of the damage to banks' balance sheets will not be disclosed until they publish their results.

The failure of LTCM initiated a fascinating vicious spiral in the markets. Banks that had happily been prepared to 'invest' billions of their customers' money in what was little more than a casino operation suddenly became ultra-cautious. Lines of credit to hedge funds were cut off and existing loans called in. As a result, in order to try and meet their liabilities, the funds had no choice but to liquidate their investments on a massive scale, taking profits where they could and cutting their losses elsewhere. This frenetic trading activity produced some of the most extraordinary and volatile conditions ever seen in the markets.

Normally, a generalised weakness in equity markets results in the dollar and US government bonds benefiting from a 'flight to quality'. Yet last week, within the space of three days the dollar lost almost 20% of its value against the yen - the kind of violent swing not seen since the break-up of the Bretton Woods exchange rate system in the 1970s. At the same time bond prices were savaged. This extraordinary development was a direct result of an acute crisis of liquidity in the financial system. Any financial asset - be it a share, a bond, a currency or whatever - is only worth what someone is prepared to pay for it. The forced 'fire-sales' by hedge funds and banks desperate to close loss-making positions scared most buyers away from the market. At one point dollar-yen trading practically came to a standstill.

In such bizarre circumstances prices inevitably become extremely volatile and irrational. Greed gives way first to fear and then to panic. In a fascinating dialectical process, what is perceived as a *sign* of instability itself becomes the *cause* of further destabilisation. In the end no financial asset, however 'safe', is trusted. Capital has nowhere left to hide and cash becomes the only refuge. The immediate consequence of such extreme risk aversion is easily predictable: a 'credit crunch' or generalised withdrawal of credit in which bad and good risks alike can be swept into bankruptcy.

Central to the current dilemma is the situation of the banks. They are particularly vulnerable in these conditions because their assets are relatively illiquid, whereas their liabilities are quintessentially liquid. If the 'dash for cash' gathers significant momentum, then banks in general will be compelled to sell assets and some will struggle to meet their commitments. The ensuing uncertainty adds greater impetus to the vicious spiral and increases the climate of panic.

You do not need to be an economist to perceive that the present situation is fraught with danger for the capitalist system. The flow of capital rather than economic fundamentals has produced the present crisis, but a generalised forced retrenchment and a contraction of lending across the board will inevitably produce significant casualties in the real economy.

With the exception of a few politicians, like Gordon Brown, nobody denies that a recession is now inevitable. The only question is how severe it will be.

Concerted interest rate cuts in the developed economies have done something to shore up confidence, but their impact is likely to be short-lived. Interest rates in Japan are virtually zero, yet the Japanese economy remains mired in recessionary stagnation. None of the policy measures suggested thus far has much credibility - certainly not the notion of 'beefing up' the IMF. Bankers and bureaucrats favour this option because it accords with the curious received idea that problems can be solved simply by throwing money at them. Such thinking is epitomised in the nonsensical proposition that the Russian meltdown, for example, could have been averted 'if only' a few more billion dollars had been injected into the Russian financial system.

In reality, the IMF has been a significant part of the problem, rather than any kind of solution. It was IMF pressure which compelled Asian governments to devalue their currencies and jack up interest rates - a policy that in retrospect can be seen as a contributory factor in the Asian conflagration.

Vacuous talk from the British prime minister and chancellor about creating new global regulatory bodies to oversee the economic and financial policies of states is rightly seen as mere whistling in the dark. The globalisation of finance capital, its development into a supranational, parasitical 'productive force', has reached the stage where it is beyond any effective regulation - something one detected in the subtext of Greenspan's speech last week. The idea that the system may in some significant respects be out of control, or at least in the grip of ineluctable deflationary pressures, was implicit in what he had to say. In trying to describe "a phenomenon that none of us has seen before", Greenspan more than once emphasised that the ultimate consequences of the current crisis remain *unknown*. They *cannot*, in fact, be known because to an appreciable extent they will be shaped not by any rational process, but by emotion. As Greenspan says, the "major shift towards liquidity protection is really not a market phenomenon ... but a fear-induced psychological response. And markets cannot effectively function in an efficient manner in that environment."

Although the severity of the coming recession cannot at present be known, it would be premature and foolish at this stage to talk in terms of a slump or depression. However paltry the policy response to this latest crisis of capitalism may be, we can assume that politicians and bankers have learnt something from 1929. In that crisis US policy makers reduced the money supply by over 30% and tried to export their slump by erecting protectionist trade barriers like the notorious Smoot-Hawley Tariff Act of 1930. As a result, world trade was halved in the space of a couple of years. This time round they will at least not make the same mistakes. We can expect a concerted policy of reflation through interest rate cuts and other measures designed to inject liquidity into the system. Crucial to the success of this strategy as a whole will be the way in which the Japanese government comes to terms with its own long-running banking and financial crisis. Even the mere passage of an outline legislative framework for

dealing with the banking problem produced paroxysms of relief reflected in a surge in equity valuations across the world on September 13. Perhaps this reaction was symptomatic of the febrile state of the markets in general, but it may represent the most significant pointer to the way in which capital can begin to rebuild confidence in its own system.

Even if the Japanese finally get around to cleaning out their Augean stables, there are still a significant number of potential problems that could exacerbate the crisis. Foremost among them is Brazil, the world's ninth largest economy, where the situation remains critical. Despite inflation of just one percent and growth of around four percent, foreign capitalists have withdrawn more than \$30 billion from Brazil in the last few months. If Brazil falls victim to the current squeeze on liquidity, the effects will be extremely serious for the US economy. Brazil accounts for more than 50% of Latin America's GDP and is thus a bellwether for the region as a whole. Wall Street has some \$60 billion invested in Latin America - well over 10 times its already damaging exposure to Russia - and the region accounts for around 20% of US exports.

Of the other factors which could precipitate a further deterioration in the economic and financial climate, three stand out. In the first place, the savings ratio in the United States is negligible. Americans have grown accustomed to easy profits from a long and unprecedentedly rewarding bull market. American mutual funds, the equivalent of our unit trusts, have been a bedrock of support for Wall Street. If US small investors decide to cash in their chips, then the consequences could be quite dramatic. Secondly, the collapse of another hedge fund (the Tiger fund was rumoured to be the distressed seller behind last week's grotesque falls in US bonds) or more particularly a bank would further shatter confidence and possibly lead to a meltdown. Finally, there is the prospect of sheer deflationary pressures on the system. As Japan has proved over the last decade, simply lowering interest rates is no solution. If asset prices fall faster than nominal interest rates, then real rates actually rise to produce a situation that is beyond the control of any central bank or government.

In Britain the situation already looks gloomy by any measure. The Chambers of Commerce quarterly survey paints such a picture. Taking the West Midlands as a guide to the rest, one reads talk of confidence being "wrecked" and of a region heading for deep recession in the manufacturing sector. The service sector, representing more than 50% of the survey's respondents, also reports a significant downturn in business. This, one should note, is before the impact of recent economic and financial developments has been taken into account.

Undoubtedly, Gordon Brown's humiliating revision of growth targets for the coming year will not be the last. The interest rate medicine is likely to be applied with enthusiasm, with a low of three percent forecast by the end of 1999. If stimulation of this magnitude does not succeed in boosting the economy, then we shall be able definitively to declare that we are in the grip of a global deflationary crisis.

One thing is certain. The resilience of the capitalist system should not be underestimated. Without the conscious *political* intervention of the world's working class, there can be no talk of 'the collapse of capitalism' ●

# Demonstration shows the way

**José Villa** of Poder Obrero (Peru) and the Liaison Committee of Militants for a Revolutionary Communist International describes the situation in Peru after last month's occupation of the presidential palace

September 30 1998 saw an historic event in 20th century Peru. Workers occupied the presidential palace in Lima, the most heavily guarded building in a heavily militarised country. Inside Fujimori's headquarters the protesters burned tyres and captured uniforms and even ammunition from the presidential guard.

A joint day of action had been called by the engineers' and teachers' union (SUTEP) and backed by the Peruvian General Union Confederation (CGTP). It consisted of a national strike and massive demonstrations in the main cities. In the morning tens of thousands of workers marched, together with students and pensioners, in Lima, Arequipa, Cuzco and other provincial capitals. In Lima alone around 50,000 people participated in the demonstrations (*La República* October 1).

At midday the workers were able to enter the Plaza Mayor. This is Lima's central square which the army and militarised police protect with tanks and armoured vehicles. The demonstrators not only broke through the protective barriers, but marched right into the presidential palace. Against the wishes of their leadership, militant industrial workers, teachers and students climbed the palace railings and entered its yard. One worker made a speech from the presidential balcony. Fujimori saw his headquarters occupied by 'terrorists' but was unable to expel them for over half an hour.

These events moved Peruvian public opinion. The palace, built by Francisco Pizarro (the Spanish soldier who conquered the Inca empire), has been for nearly five centuries the symbol of unquestioned power, and the ruling class never allow the 'mob' inside its walls.

The September 30 demonstration marked a radical turn in Peruvian politics.

During the 1990s Fujimori was able to defeat not only one of Latin America's most militant labour movements, but also a guerrilla insurgency. He imposed an ultra-Thatcherite monetarist policy. In August 1990 he froze wages, while increasing energy prices 30-fold and cutting all subsidies. He destroyed the welfare state and privatised one of the most state-based economies in the region. Next he militarised the main national universities and factories and imposed the most draconian and repressive 'anti-terrorist' laws.

Under them there are more than 5,000 political and union prisoners. Anybody can be arrested and held for up to 15 days without access to lawyers or contact with their family. During this time they are subject to brutal torture. Immediately afterwards they can be sentenced to life imprisonment by a military tribunal. 'Terrorists' have no access to radio, television or books. They have access to sunlight for half an hour a day and are entitled to just an hour

and a half of family visits per year. As Fujimori declared, they are in "living tombs".

Before the 1990 general election Fujimori was an unknown 'non-political' personality. The main 'anti-imperialist' forces were discredited. Alan García's APRA government (1985-90) initially was very popular due to its policy of extensive price subsidies. Although APRA was not a bourgeois workers' party, it was affiliated to the Socialist International. When García nationalised the banks the right mobilised opposition. His government disintegrated amidst hyperinflation, general strikes and guerrilla advances.

However, the left was incapable of capitalising on the discontent. The United Left, a popular front that enjoyed almost one third of the votes and was based on three 'Marxist-Leninist' reformist parties and small bourgeois forces, betrayed the strikes and backed many of García's repressive measures. Its programme was not very dissimilar. The Maoist-Stalinist PCP-Sendero Luminoso achieved some support in shanty towns and among poor peasants, but alienated many other poor strata and workers with its sectarian and totalitarian militaristic policies. They opposed strikes and they killed many union militants.

By 1990 the traditional right wing was reunited around Mario Vargas Llosa as its presidential candidate. The APRA and the United Left opposed Vargas's shock therapy programme and backed Fujimori. He was able to win nearly 60% of the votes in the second round, presenting himself as the candidate against the traditional elite. However, once elected, he chose to adopt the IMF's austerity programme, backed by military might. The official unions and the left were discredited by their initial collaboration with Fujimori.

Fujimori managed to marginalise the revolutionary left and the unions. He persuaded the official left to join his 'anti-terrorist' crusade. The PCP-SL's methods pushed many into Fujimori's camp. He was able to obtain popular support through posing as a strong man capable of defeating hyperinflation and terrorism and who was attracting Japanese and western capital to reactivate the economy. Billions earned through privatisation were used for public works in the poor areas.

In April 1992 Fujimori sent in tanks to dissolve parliament. Yet many workers preferred him to the 'traditional' parliamentary forces, renowned for their corruption and attacks on the working class.

Fujimori obtained a majority in a new fraudulent 'constituent congress' and in a referendum for his authoritarian Magna Carta. In 1995 he was re-elected with nearly 60%, almost three times more than Javier Pérez de Cuellar, the former UN secretary-general, who led a broad opposition coalition (from rightwing neo-liberals to Stalinists). He established an authoritarian regime with the backing of the army and the

all-powerful National Intelligence Service (SIN). His system was based on 'independent' and 'technocratic' leaders and movements.

In 1998 Fujimori and his congress imposed a law which allowed him to be re-elected for a third term for the period 2000-2005. He purged those who had objected from the Constitutional Tribunal, withdrew Peruvian nationality from the owner of an opposition TV channel and forced the president of the association of lawyers into exile.

More than a million signatures were collected demanding a referendum over the re-election issue. Massive student demonstrations took place.

Opposition forced Fujimori to replace his prime minister with Javier Valle Riestra, former leader of the left and 'pro-human rights' wing of APRA. Valle Riestra instructed the police not to attack the students. He opposed Fujimori's re-election and declared he was a democrat who wanted to reform the authoritarian machine from the inside. Tens of thousands of students assembled in the Plaza Mayor and he withdrew the army from the universities. However, Valle Riestra did not even last two months in power before he was replaced by the former prime minister.

The Peruvian workers' movement has very militant traditions. In 1918 it was in the vanguard of the struggle across the continent for the eight-hour day. It was associated with student radicalism. In 1930 general strikes shook Peru. In 1945-48 the workers' movement won many rights in the 'democratic interregnum'. In 1956 workers' strikes were at the forefront in defeating Odría's dictatorship. During the 1970s Peruvian workers, teachers and peasants organised massive strikes which overwhelmed the 'socialist' military junta and later pushed it out of power. On July 19 1977 an historic general strike saw most of the nation rally behind the proletariat. There was a revolutionary situation, with massive demonstrations and the creation of people's assemblies. However, far from developing organs of dual power, the 'left' fell into electoral retinism. Nevertheless, in 1978 the 'Marxist' left for the first time became a national electoral force. Hugo Blanco's 'Trotskyists' won 12% of the vote.

In the 1980s several general strikes were fought in a decade of austerity measures and militarisation. Nevertheless, the working class was held back by Stalinism in two different forms. The parliamentary Stalinists (IU) always tried to contain strikes and demonstrations within safe reformist limits. The guerrilla-Stalinists (PCP-SL and also MRTA) also distrusted workers' organisations and mass mobilisations. The Senderistas violently opposed unions and strikes. They wanted to subordinate the proletariat to the dictates of an elite.

The four general strikes of 1988 and the National Popular Assembly, a proto-soviet created in November 1987, were betrayed in two ways. On the one hand the labour bureaucracy and the IU opposed an indefinite general strike in favour of more moderate demands and methods. On the other hand the guerrillas tried to convince the masses that liberation would not come from their own struggles, but

from supporting a petty bourgeois armed vanguard which was against the construction of autonomous workers' soviets and militias.

Over the last decade most of the left leaders have migrated to the neo-liberal camp. The powerful IU disintegrated and its fragments are now reduced to less than one percent of the vote. Some of them ended up with Fujimori or the neo-liberal opposition. Even many guerrilla fragments, including Abimael Gonzalo's Senderista faction, are now backing the state.

The workers' actions on September 30 show that a new actor could change the political scene. The bourgeois opposition was trying to capitalise on the discontent against Fujimori. A 'Democratic Forum' was created around former Fujimori supporters. The union leaders who marched on that day form part of this broad cross-class bloc.

The Democratic Forum supports most privatisation and the payment of the foreign debt to the imperialist pirates. Many of its components are well known for their corruption and for backing the draconian anti-'terrorist' laws.

The banker Gustavo Mohme, national coordinator of the Democratic Forum, is also the owner of *La República*. He supported state repression of 'criminal subversives' and wants to keep revolutionary 'infiltrators' out of workers' demonstrations. *Caretas*, the main opposition bourgeois journal, attacked the demonstrations, saying the army intentionally allowed the radicals to enter the palace with the aim of discrediting the opposition. During the demonstration some leaders of the moderate opposition tried to address the masses, but they were attacked by the militant workers.

On Sunday October 11 the municipal elections showed how unpopular Fujimori is becoming. In Lima, where one third of the 25 million Peruvians live, 'Vamos Vecino' (a new Fujimori front) obtained less than 30% of the vote.

The September 30 demonstrations and previous student marches have shown the way. Only direct action can stop Fujimori. Poder Obrero (Workers Power) has been very active, producing leaflets and its paper. We are agitating with thousands around the slogan, 'Down with Fujimori's dictatorship! General strike now!'

Poder Obrero is against the Democratic Forum and any other class-collaborationist popular front with the bourgeoisie. We are demanding a workers' united front. We are for building rank and file coordinating committees which should have their own self-defence guards and should organise demonstrations and strikes. We are against voting for bourgeois candidates in the elections. We called for workers' candidates in the last elections.

Against Fujimori's autocratic constitution we call for a democratic constituent assembly. We demand the abolition of all anti-terrorist laws, the elimination of all militarised zones (under which half the population has to live) and the unconditional release of all anti-imperialist prisoners.

We are for a new party to fight for a workers' and peasants' revolutionary government ●

## What we fight for

- Our central aim is to reforge the Communist Party of Great Britain. Without this Party the working class is nothing; with it, it is everything.
- The Communist Party serves the interests of the working class. We fight all forms of opportunism and revisionism in the workers' movement because they endanger those interests. We insist on open ideological struggle in order to fight out the correct way forward for our class.
- Marxism-Leninism is powerful because it is true. Communists relate theory to practice. We are materialists; we hold that ideas are determined by social reality and not the other way round.
- We believe in the highest level of unity among workers. We fight for the unity of the working class of all countries and subordinate the struggle in Britain to the world revolution itself. The liberation of humanity can only be achieved through world communism.
- The working class in Britain needs to strike as a fist. This means all communists should be organised into a single Party. We oppose all forms of separatism, which weakens our class.
- Socialism can never come through parliament. The capitalist class will never peacefully allow their system to be abolished. Socialism will only succeed through working class revolution and the replacement of the dictatorship of the capitalists with the dictatorship of the working class. Socialism lays the basis for the conscious planning of human affairs: ie, communism.
- We support the right of nations to self-determination. In Britain today this means the struggle for Irish freedom should be given full support by the British working class.
- Communists are champions of the oppressed. We fight for the liberation of women, the ending of racism, bigotry and all other forms of chauvinism. Oppression is a direct result of class society and will only finally be eradicated by the ending of class society.
- War and peace, pollution and the environment are class questions. No solution to the world's problems can be found within capitalism. Its ceaseless drive for profit puts the world at risk. The future of humanity depends on the triumph of communism.

**We urge all who accept these principles to join us. A Communist Party Supporter reads and fights to build the circulation of the Party's publications; contributes regularly to the Party's funds and encourages others to do the same; where possible, builds and participates in the work of a Communist Party Supporters Group.**

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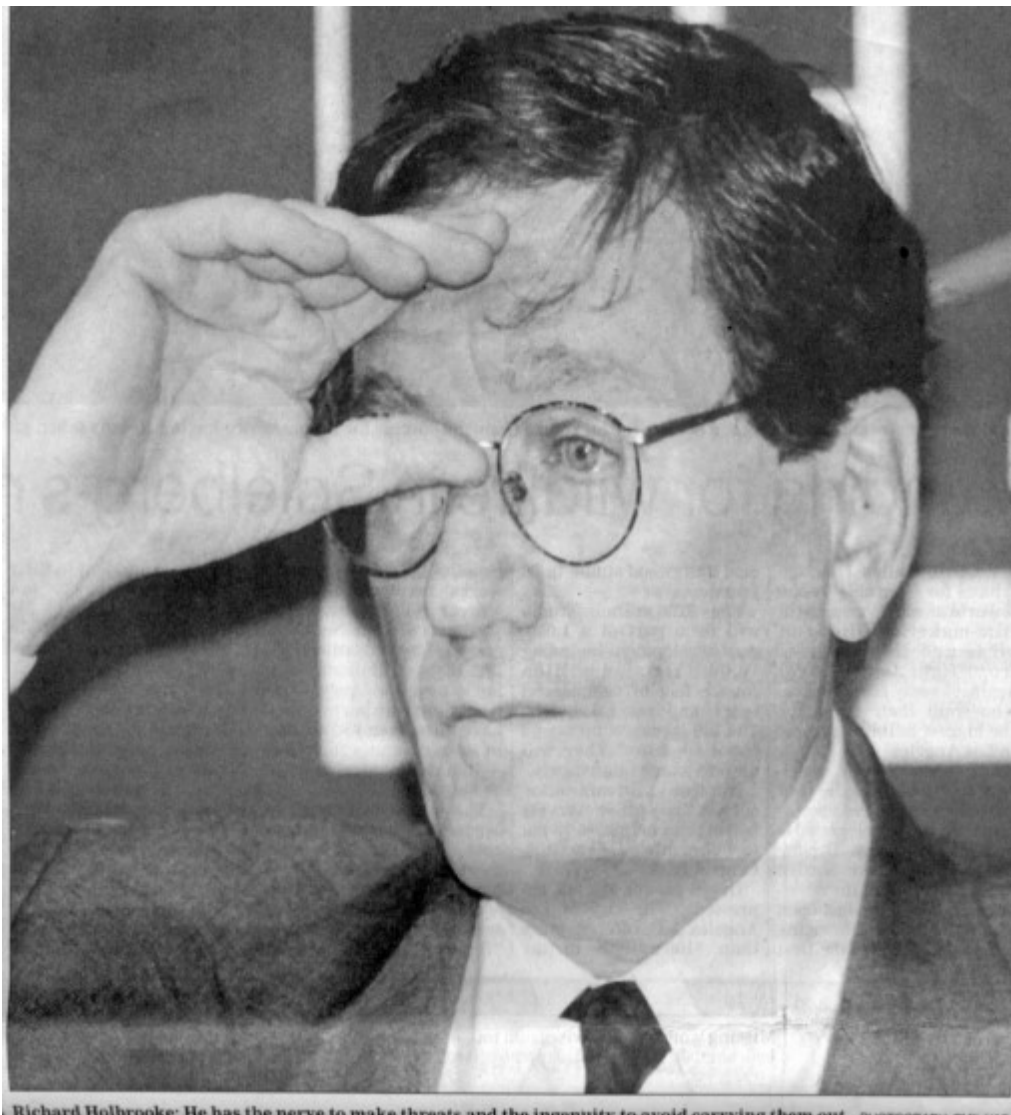
# Kosova stitch-up

**T**he crisis over Kosova seems to be over, at least for the present. After weeks of steadily mounting threats of Nato military attack, the Serb leadership agreed to take part in talks over autonomy for the rebel province, following negotiations with US emissary Richard Holbrooke in Belgrade.

They also agreed to allow 2,000 international monitors to police the area to ensure unhindered access for aid agencies. This is supposed to allow the 300,000 Kosovar refugees currently living in the hills to return to their homes - those that still exist, that is, after the deliberate destruction and looting of Albanian property. Far from ensuring self-determination for Kosova - which in current circumstances can only mean national independence - the agreement provides just for "discussions" over autonomy within the state of Serbia.

Bourgeois politicians, backed by their mouthpieces in the press, described this apparent submission by Serbian president Slobodan Milosevic as "a big climb-down", or, as *The Sun* put it, "Butcher Milosevic caves in". The agreement between Nato and Serbia is presented in the more serious papers as the triumph of tough diplomacy backed by the 'credible threat of force'. The US continues to assert its right to intervene against any people whose leadership refuses to conform to its wishes. The 'credible threat' reached a climax on Sunday, when the fleet of 430 aircraft took up position ready to attack Serbia from their air bases in Italy and Britain. Six B52 bombers were shown on TV arriving at RAF Fairford in Gloucestershire. Milosevic was no doubt meant to remember that it was from Fairford that US planes took off in April 1986 to attack Libya. These B52s also have the ability to launch cruise missiles.

If the current news reports are to be believed, this expensive moving of military hardware around the world achieved its objective without the need to fire a single Tomahawk, although the foreign ministers of the 16 Nato countries on Monday night signed the "activation order", which gives US generals, led by supreme commander Wesley Clark, official permission to attack Serbia if they feel Milosevic has gone back on his word. Given Milosevic's well-known skill at political



Richard Holbrooke: imposing US hegemony

manoeuvring, the cooling of the crisis obviously has less to do with his promises than with the calculations of US political leaders. They have decided that action against Serbia, despite the popularity boost it might provide for Clinton and the clamour for Nato to 'prove its credibility', is not a good idea at present.

The collapse of bureaucratic socialism has given rise to new problems for imperialism. The meltdown in the former Yugoslavia has produced instability, interfering with the exploitation of new workforces and the opening up of new markets. The imperialists do not make their demands against Serbia because they want to ensure Kosovar rights. Far from it. Their fear is that continuing violence in Kosova might ignite the whole region, further threatening capitalist interests. But the Kosovars are certain to reject a settlement which leaves Serbia in control. The international 'peace' force is just as likely to side with Milosevic as the Kosovar Lib-

eration Army, if, as seems probable, it continues to fight for its rights.

The end of the Cold War should at least have ended the danger of nuclear destruction. But Russian foreign minister Igor Ivanov's threat to side with Serbia, however unrealistic it may have been, demonstrates that we are still living in a dangerously unstable world. The imperialists cannot yet be sure of always getting their own way.

How has the 'official communist' left in Britain reacted to the events in Kosova? The *Morning Star* concentrates on reporting the Russian position, of "issuing a tough warning to the west not to unleash Nato air strikes against Yugoslavia" (October 5). This automatic siding with Russia would seem to be a bizarre hangover from the days when the paper was funded by the USSR and spoke for it. The *Morning Star* is not explicit about Russia's motives for opposing military intervention against Serbia. But *The Independent* explains

how they extend "well beyond Moscow's traditional solidarity with fellow Slavs" (October 8). The real reason for opposition to Nato by both Russia and China is that it paves the way for interference within their own territory. They are, says *The Independent*, "alarmed by a threatened use of force by the alliance on what is internationally recognised internal territory of a sovereign country. If Kosovo today, then why not any Russian republic where nationalist insurrection could erupt?"

In its editorial the *Morning Star* suggests: "Instead of air strikes, political leaders should be fostering talks between Belgrade and the Kosovo Albanians to agree a solution based on Serbia's territorial integrity and substantial autonomy for Kosovo." This is in fact exactly what the US hopes to achieve, even if it has to drop a few bombs on Belgrade to bring it about. But it is a disgraceful position for so-called 'communists' to adopt. We stand for the rights not of states, but of

nations - ie, for *people*, not lines on a map. Unlike the capitalists, workers have no interests in protecting the "integrity" of states, which are conveniently stable units for exploitation. We advocate the greatest possible unity between peoples, but say that this should be voluntary, not based on coercion. So we are champions of the right of nations to self-determination, up to and including secession from the state or states to which they belong and the formation of a new state. The classic Marxist definition of a nation is "a historically evolved, stable community of people which formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture" (JV Stalin *SW* Vol 2, Moscow 1953, p307). By this definition the Albanians of Kosova are a nation and we must support their right to secede. The *Morning Star* is correct to point out that in the Balkans, for historical reasons, national entities straddle many borders. Needless to say, these borders are largely artificial, created by the ebb and flow of imperial occupation, along with its various 'defining' influences - of religion, culture and language. The south Slavs have never been able to form a strong, unified nation-state - with the partial exception of Tito's Yugoslavia.

But in present conditions the way to lessen tensions is not to reinforce state boundaries, but to allow nations to determine the path of their own development.

*The New Worker*, paper of the Kim Jong-ilist New Communist Party, is even more unprincipled than the *Morning Star*. It sides totally with the Serb government, innocently pointing out that it "has not invaded foreign soil: it is simply defending the sovereignty and integrity of its own state" (October 9). That is what Britain has been doing to Northern Ireland for the last 30 years. It then makes the sickening claim that the KLA "is backed by imperialism and serves the interests of foreign governments (including British imperialism), who aim to dominate the region by encouraging separatism and reactionary nationalism" (like the IRA?). Even if it were true that the KLA were funded by western interests, the right of Kosova to self-determination remains unaffected. *The New Worker*, even more than the *Morning Star*, trans-

poses the rhetoric and politics of the Cold War era to current conditions. Its support for Serbia reflects its belief that the former Yugoslavia - even Milosevic's rump - was and is a bastion of working class power. These 'official communists' look not to the world working class to fight imperialism, but to a 'power from on high' - even one as meagre as Serbia - and in so doing excuse the vilest oppression.

The line of *The Socialist*, the paper of the Socialist Party in England and Wales, is far more principled, but programmatically incoherent for all that. It condemns the atrocities in Kosova and "the brutal capitalist clique that rules in Belgrade", calling for the creation of a "strong, independent workers' and peasants' militia" to fight the secessionist war and "make links with independent workers' organisations in Serbia" (October 9). It continues: "Socialists advocate a socialist Kosova, as part of a socialist confederation of Balkan states on a free, equal, and voluntary basis. This has nothing in common with the former Stalinist Yugoslavia." This is a very desirable outcome, but is an abstraction in the face of the Kosovars' actual plight. They should not have to wait for socialism in order to overcome national oppression. It is incorrect to pose such a federation as an immediate demand (socialism belongs to the maximum, not minimum programme). Unity can only be achieved through the voluntary coming together of peoples, and cannot be achieved in circumstances of bloody slaughter.

Communists unequivocally support the right of nations to self-determination, including the right to secede, and the need for international solidarity of the workers, irrespective of nationality, in united proletarian organisations. We recognise that solidarity of workers across state boundaries cannot be won by force, and advocate peaceful and democratic secession as opposed to any kind of coercive or violent maintenance of unity. However, we insist that in all situations the national question must be solved by the people themselves. We are utterly opposed to all intervention by Nato or other imperialist bodies, whether or not in an ostensibly peace-keeping role.

We say no to Nato aggression in Serbia, and demand full independence for Kosova. ●

Mary Godwin