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VIEWPOINT

• **Brazil**
Direct democracy

• **Daniel Bensaïd**
In defence of
communism

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Showdown in Rio Grande

On October 25, voters gave the Workers Party (PT) an increased role in local and state governments across Brazil.

This is particularly true in the southern state of Grande do Sul,¹ where the PT is led by radical left currents.

Ernesto Herrera

The confrontation between two irreconcilable political projects is now taking place in a national scenario marked by the economic crisis, savage austerity measures imposed by the neoliberal government of Fernando Henrique Cardoso and international capital, and a social resistance that is undergoing a radicalization.

On 7 November 1998, the Rio Grande state leadership of the PT presented its first balance sheet of the October elections.

Contrary to the adaptationist outlook that prevails in many sectors of the Latin American left – and even among leaders of the PT – the evaluation and the leadership's proposals don't leave any room for doubts.

"Our victory was achieved within a climate of deep going political class struggle," says the resolution.² "...We won the elections thanks to the powerful political movement that we built around our proposals and our candidacies..."

"Our victory is the victory of a radically democratic political project that seeks to re-establish the state's responsibilities in regulating the economy, promoting development on the basis of distributing wealth and social justice and attending to society's demands for improving the quality of life..."

"The intense class struggle that characterized the electoral dispute and the social mobilization that guaranteed our victory will not be dissipated in this new stage of government.

"The declarations of the barons of local industry and business associations, the position of major media interests, and the behavior of the conservative legislators in recent days, sets the tone of how they will relate to the new elected government.

"On the one hand, there is an attempt by sectors of big business to isolate our government. But on the other side, there is a vast social mobilization of the social sectors that assured our victory."

The state leadership of the PT



anticipates a scenario of confrontation and advances the need for a strategic programmatic proposal. The text affirms that "the period will impose a dynamic of social struggle in defense of the democratic and popular government. [This is] a government that beyond administering the state, and seeks to be a creative and active participant in a national context marked by a growing process of pauperization and marginalization.

"We face the challenge of posing a left alternative that is a political and cultural reference point for promoting the country's democratic forces and popular forces."

Rio Grande do Sul now has a left government that isn't content with merely administering public assets decently. Rather, it will fight for a favorable correlation of forces with the neoliberal right, in the framework of a true class struggle between labor and capital.

With this in mind, the resolution emphasizes that one of the new government's key initiatives must be the "construction of a broad mass movement that

ideologically confronts the policies of [President] Cardoso and the ruling classes and assumes the task of defending and building support for the policies of the democratic and popular government of Rio Grande."

The state leadership of the PT proposes three initiatives:

- to launch an audit of the privatizations, with participation from the social movements.
- to make the 1 January 1999 inaugural ceremony, when *compañero* Olivio Dutra takes office as governor, into a large popular demonstration.
- to call a broad national conference to oppose the federal government's fiscal package and agreements on state debt payments.

A solid municipal record

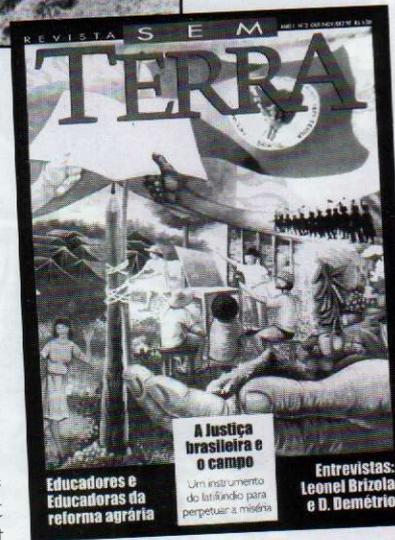
This victory and the popular mass support obtained can also be explained by the successive PT governments in dozens of municipalities throughout the state and, in particular, its capital, Porto Alegre.

The policy of promoting mass participation in formulating the budget has been a key factor in organizing and mobilizing civic associations as well as tens of thousands of residents around political, economic, and social demands.

However, problems are now multiplying. In addition to blackmail from the right and the business community, the

popular government will face the open hostility of the state Legislative Assembly. The neoliberal parties have a large majority: 55 deputies to 20. To make matters worse, the outgoing right-wing governor has left a huge mess for the PT to sort out.

Our Latin American correspondent **Ernesto Herrera** discussed these problems with *compañero Miguel Rossetto*³ the new deputy-governor.



• **The victory of the Popular Front in Rio Grande has a great importance for the left in the region.⁴ But we must be realistic. You take office constrained by the conditions imposed by the Mercosur free trade zone.⁵**

Miguel Rossetto: That's true. On a whole range of questions, from the Mercosur to cultural questions, there's a need to define and promote an agenda, in this case through our base in the municipalities.

Our position is to clearly take the offensive in this regard, along with the *compañeros* in Uruguay and Argentina. [This leads to] an agenda that will undoubtedly be very full. But we think this offensive strategy will also be a way of opening spaces right here in Rio Grande.

• **The first thing that stands out in this "transition" period is the strong debates on what you call fiscal blackmail.**

There's something interesting here. The liberals, the neoliberals, have two ideological axioms: the idea of a balanced budget, on the one hand, and the idea of the state as an incompetent, backward, bureaucratic public power, a cumbersome machine, on the other.

But if we just take the example of Rio Grande do Sul, we see that the outgoing neoliberal administration is a scandal, even if it is gauged from its own viewpoint and proposals. This is a government that raised taxes, and sold 5 billion *reales* (1 *real* = US\$1.20) in public assets, (telecommunications, electricity, and insurance companies).

That is the equivalent of this state's annual budget, and more than 10% of state GDP. The outgoing administration expanded the internal debt, the state's consolidated public debt, which rose from 7 billion to 17 billion *reales*.

So, if you take the question of the balanced budget, even from the perspective of their liberal premises, it's clear that everything is a fraud.

The funny thing is that it is the PT – in the Porto Alegre municipal government – that has a balanced budget. In four years of neoliberalism in Rio Grande, the right increased taxes, sold off public assets, got deeper into debt, and destroyed public services.

What type of state did they build in these four years? It is a classical situation: the state was an instrument for transferring public profits to the large monopoly groups; it was a state that surrendered to the logic of finance capital and the neoliberal project.

It was a state designed to pay debts and sustain finance capital. I want to insist on this. It was an instrument for transferring public resources to the big economic groups, such as General Motors, Ford. A state that transferred **public assets to the monopoly groups, a**

state that financed these groups, a state that renounced its regulatory capacity, its capacity to serve, to provide society with basic public services.

And at the same time, the administration cut the budget.

They raised taxes, raised money through privatisation, and still cut the budget?

Yes. They diminished the role of the budget: all their ideas for modernizing industry involved cutting taxes on private companies. And the entire debate on new investments was based on brutal budget slashing and transferring public resources to the private sector. Meanwhile, all kinds of taxes on the population were increased!

• **A similar debate took place at the beginning of the Mercosur...**

Yes. It was a classic European-common-market type debate. One of the first measures adopted was a regulation to prevent the large economic groups from doing as they pleased with state finances.

There was a lot of concern about industrial relocation, when the large businesses move their operations from one jurisdiction to another, because of more attractive fiscal, environmental or labor regulations. This is also a problem inside Brazil. Big capital applies pressure, and the states compete to reduce their public expenditures, in a spiral of cuts in labor, environmental and fiscal constraints on big business.

• **There is a rumour that you will freeze public sector wages for the first 12 months of your office**

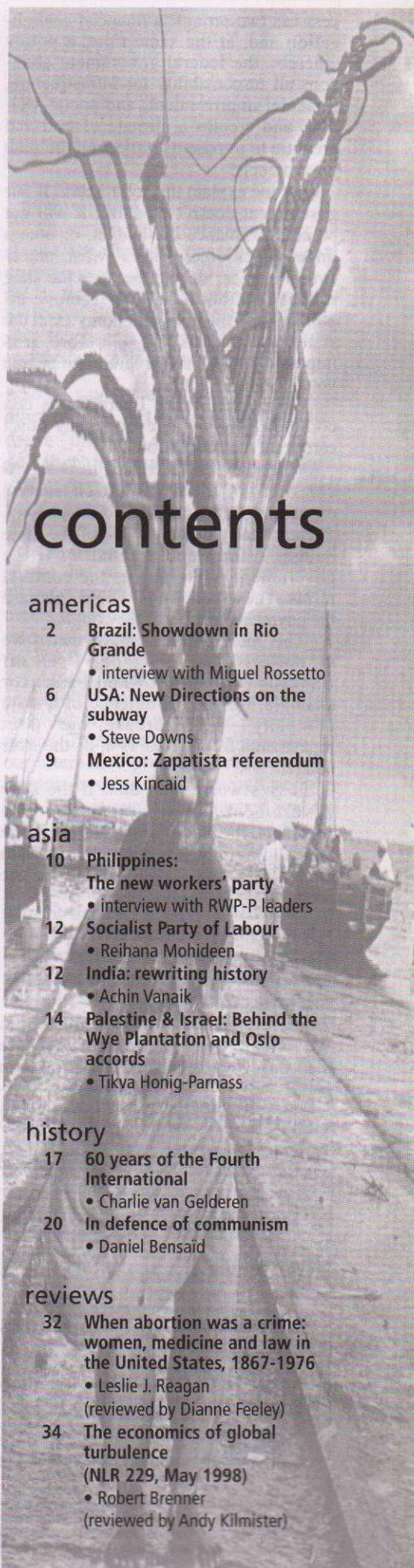
The state of Rio Grande do Sul is bankrupt. The state has an average monthly deficit of 110 million *reales*. In addition to this there are debt payments to the central government, debts that are unpayable.

• **Is this the reason you are discussing whether the debt should be paid or whether to declare a moratorium?**

Exactly. What I'm trying to say is that the balance sheet of the neoliberal administration is a complete disaster. The economy is growing at an average annual rate of 1.3%, which is totally mediocre; profitability has fallen in agriculture, industrial production has declined, and 850,000 workers statewide are unemployed. In addition, we are witnessing a process of brutal impoverishment outside the state capital.

Any development project based on budget cutbacks and the transfer of resources to the private sector is a project of sectoral concentration and, at the same time, of marginalization.

This is why the impact of this policy of re-centralizing resources in the federal government imposed by President Cardoso strips state and municipal treasuries of resources for development. This pro-



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★ Brazil

cess has two prongs: a financial centralization and, at the same time, a policy whereby the federal government abandons all responsibility for infrastructure, financial improvement, and social welfare, and creates a climate of political pressure to impose its project on the state governments.

Let me explain this a bit better. If our government doesn't privatize, it will not be able to finance the budget, or obtain financial resources. This is what, objectively, is under debate, because the snag is that neoliberal policies remove all political and financial autonomy from the state governments and, therefore, it is impossible to put the program the people voted for into practice.

Of course, for the liberals, this is a completely minor question; they don't care what the people vote for.

What they *are* interested in is signed contracts of a colonialist character; especially debt renegotiation contracts. These already commit 13% of the state budget – and impose penalties if the government doesn't meet the contract terms. These sanctions would increase the payments to 17% of the budget.

This means, quite simply, that if we do not privatize, if we don't sell off Banesur (the state-owned bank) for example, this act of defence of a state company will increase our debt repayments from 13 to 17% of the state budget.

It gets worse than that. If the state government doesn't meet the 13% payment, the new contracts allow the federal government to stick its hands into our coffers, and directly withdraw the funds to pay this public debt.

• **It looks like the future will be marked by permanent conflict with the federal government. How does this affect governability?**

We have inherited a terrible framework. We must deal with an absolute inadequacy of the state. These long-term

debt agreements eliminate our autonomy in implementing our program.

Our agenda for a national discussion, and our new relationship with the federal government, necessarily entail conflict. Recognizing and managing that conflict will be a key factor in the governability of Rio Grande do Sul.

We must seek governability based on the determined pursuit of the commitments of our electoral program.

The ability to apply our governmental program entails permanent debate and conflict with the federal government, and a renegotiation of all these agreements.

We are not going to pay the 13%, we won't sell the public assets, and therefore, the basis for governability consists of breaking these agreements.

This demands a conflictive relation with the Cardoso government, and at the same time, it entails a permanent process of discussion and mobilization among the people to sustain the governmental program.

We are a minority in the Legislative Assembly. We have a completely conservative judicial branch. There is a whole oligarchical block united against our program. Thus, we face a scenario marked by an intense internal dispute within the state, and also, an intense political dispute on a federal level.

I'm giving you these concrete examples because they are what give concrete form to our project and make it viable. The question is not only one of an opposition government on a strategic level in relation to the federal government.

All this must be understood in this particular framework. It is not a question of running an opposition government in more stable, calmer circumstances. Our program will not be viable without a policy of confronting the national government. Therefore we will work on the basis of the idea that our government will be marked by permanent conflict. We must have the capacity to maintain,

to strengthen, our base of social support.

The risk of isolation is undoubtedly great. For this very reason, the situation demands that we must permanently legitimize our political program. And to do so, more than ever we must develop the idea of popular participation as a source of legitimacy for this program.

From this flows the idea that it is of key importance to extend the policy of mass public participation in budget decisions, of expanding relations with the farmers, with public servants, with the small and medium producers.

This also explains the dispute over democratization of the communications media, the confrontation with the big monopolies. That is, we are aware that the margin we have for implementing our program is extremely narrow. Thus, the increased need for mass mobilizations.

• **Your fundamental political idea and programmatic proposal is a modification of the relationship of forces, ending the transfer of state resources to private companies, from labor to capital.**

But this doesn't automatically generate the resources needed to make the program viable and to satisfy the economic and social demands. How, then, are these resources to be generated?

That's the problem. It is not just a question of the capacity to finance our projects, our investment policies. That's not where the discussion is at; it's about obtaining the resources to pay the wages of state employees. [The state spends 80% of its budget on salaries]. The problem before us is, for example, the impossibility of paying salaries of state employees in February.

So we have two things that we have to tackle: the question of the debt, which is unpayable, and, at the same time, to reverse a series of legislative measures

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that withdrew resources from the state government.

• **Are you considering new taxes as a source of revenue?**

No, not at all. We feel that with a good tax administration, collection of debts, and an internal reorganization of the tax structure, we could hope to pretty quickly recover revenue levels.

We have other minor sources of revenue that would allow for a more comfortable situation in the first few months, such as reducing superfluous public expenditures in advertising, etc. But increasing revenue basically implies fighting tax breaks and improving internal tax administration.

There is an added difficulty: the federal government's policies not only remove resources from the control of state governments, but also increase federal taxes.

In addition, when the economy is in a recessive phase, resources cannot be generated. This explains the major problems that we face in sustaining the state governments in the immediate period.

This presupposes a considerable degree of agreement and coordination with other state governments. And not just with those run by the opposition. In fact, most of the state governments have the same problems.

• **What are the main problems the state governments face in terms of financing the services they provide?**

In parceling out responsibilities, a series of key social powers remain in the hands of the state governments. Things like public education and public safety.

This has a serious impact. To give you an idea, in the state of Espiritu Santo, the crisis is so intense that the police are on strike and the governor, who belongs to the PT, had to call out the army to guarantee public safety.

This is the future of this country, because the states are accumulating direct responsibilities to the population in fields such as health, education, and safety. In the framework of the economic crisis, this amounts to a very big social crisis.

Over the next few months we envision an intense political dispute over the correlation of forces, discussion and conflict. Keep in mind that this scenario has an absolutely unpredictable outcome.

We have to enter this dispute with offensive proposals and at the same time, try to avoid isolation, both on a national level, and within the state of Rio Grande do Sul.

• **Left government opens a space for an strategic alternative to the neoliberal project. But the concrete problems you identify force us to be original in terms of the proposals,**

Shouldn't you reconsider the time-

frame and rhythms of the logic of accumulation of forces and confrontation with the bourgeoisie.

Wouldn't it be better to accept two time frames for implementing your project?

The electoral victory improves the conditions for a progressive project. But it does not resolve the crisis.

The great challenge before us is, precisely, the construction of an alternative project as a response to the crisis created by the neoliberals. This is the challenge; there aren't two time frames, there's only one, which is the construction of an alternative project sustained by a vast mobilization and popular participation as conditions for resolving the crisis of governability.

This is so much the case, that more than ever we will have to run a government of resistance and audaciousness.

In this climate of deep crisis, the only way out is implementing an alternative popular project, while frankly telling the population that it's not merely a situation marked by some difficulties, but a deep going crisis that must be radically modified. There is no other possibility, and therefore it is necessary to politicize the debate, politicize citizen participation and the mass mobilization.

• **In many sectors of the Latin American left which see the possibility of winning elections for the national government - Uruguay's Broad Front (FA), El Salvador's FMLN, or Nicaragua's FSLN, a new idea is taking force: in a framework of a mammoth crisis and the scandalous exclusion of the majority of the population, one of the main problems that these left governments will face will not be the pressure from big business, but the "corporatist" demands of the social movements that will seek to recover wages, employment levels, and all the rights that were taken away by capital and the neoliberal governments.**

Do you share this opinion? Is popular pressure a problem for a popular, left wing government, or is the real danger this kind of thinking?

It is clear that corporatist pressures exist and will continue to do so. The great challenge is, precisely, the degree of politicization; there is no other alternative.

But to say that there won't be pressures from business would be very naive. On the contrary, the main threat will come from big business: blackmail, companies transferring their operations, cuts in financing, and so on. These are the main factors that can feed the crisis and generate destabilization of any left government.

Those who think like you describe should ask what this concept of "social corporatism" really means. Does it mean that you feel the enemy is also to be found among the workers, among state employees? What type of political approach does this stance lead to?

• **Some say, for example, that the election of a left government would cause "inflation of expectations", and that this could generate a polarization that puts the very stability of the popular government at risk...**

That would be underrating the people. It is true that sometimes we cannot satisfy all the demands. In the municipal governments there are times when we cannot satisfy all the wage demands.

But that is not the main problem. The key, I insist, is the degree of politicization and mobilization, of people's understanding of what a popular government means. The viability of our program, of our alternative project, is related to the support coming from a broad popular base. This is our base of support and the main source of the government's stability.

Our project doesn't have anything to do with the good behavior of businessmen or capital. A government such as ours is based on the popular movements' active commitment to the program and the defense of this program, which is radically different from that of the dominant classes. And the people understand this perfectly.

For that reason I said that we must have considerable confidence in the people, because in addition, it is on the basis of organized support, of popular participation, of a permanent mobilization, that we can begin thinking of a real fight for hegemony in society and, most definitively, of a substantial modification in the correlation of forces. ★

Notes

1. Rio Grande do Sul has 10 million inhabitants and a Gross Domestic Product of 56bn *reales* (1 *real* = US\$1.20). It is Brazil's fifth most important state.

2. In the second round of the gubernatorial elections, the Popular Front and PT candidate, Olivio Dutra obtained 50,78% of the ballots cast (2.84 million votes) against 49,22% (2.76m) for the pro-government candidate Antonio Britto.

3. Miguel Rossetto is 38 years old. He was a mechanic and activist in the steelworkers union in the city of Sao Leopoldo at the end of the 1970s and beginning of the 1980s. He was elected as a federal deputy in 1994. Within the PT, he is a member of the Socialist Democracy tendency, which is identified with the Fourth International.

4. For example, the November congress of the Uruguayan Broad Front unanimously voted to send greetings of solidarity to the new government.

5. The Southern Cone Common Market is comprised of

New Tracks

New York City's bus and subway workers are the players in one of the key battles to reform and reenergize the US labor movement. **Steve Downs** reports on the progress of the radical New Directions movement within the Transport Workers Union.

The fight is concentrated in Local 100 of the Transport Workers Union (TWU). The entrenched Willie James bureaucracy is fighting hard against the reformers of the New Directions current [which includes supporters of the socialist feminist group Solidarity]

Earlier this year, the TWU was forced to rerun the local's election, after protests at Willie James' cheating in the December 1997 election.

After a short, intense, and frequently bitter campaign, the ballots were counted on May 21st: Willie James' slate was re-elected, but by an even narrower margin than in December 1997. James, the incumbent president, defeated New Directions candidate Tim Schermerhorn by a mere 670 votes (10,252 to 9582).

ND's vice-presidential candidate, Darlyne Lawson, missed winning a seat by only 113 votes. ND's eight other candidates lost by 130-400 votes.

It is easy to put a positive spin on New Directions' results. After all, ND has steadily gained ground from the 3,000 votes it received in its first run in 1988. New Directions picked up an additional seat on the local executive board in the May election, giving New Directions twenty-one of the thirty-six seats directly elected by the membership. However, since the ten top officers also sit on the executive board and are elected at large, the James slate has a twenty-five to twenty-one majority.

A polarized union

Local 100 is a deeply divided union. New Directions support comes almost entirely from the members in the subways (roughly 60% of the local's total membership), while the support for the James slate comes from the bus drivers and maintainers (68% of subway workers voted ND while 80% of bus workers voted for the James' slate). This divide grew between the December 1997 election and the May 1998 rerun. ND's vote among subway workers went up relatively and absolutely, but went down among bus workers.

Vice presidents are elected on a local-wide basis. The incumbents who will be in charge of four subway divisions (Rapid Transit Operations, Maintenance of Way, Stations, and Car Equipment) lost the vote inside those divisions, but were part of the winning local-wide slate. They will inevitably clash with the division officers and other executive board members, ND candidates who were elected by the members they work with and who view themselves as the

legitimate representatives of those division members. The VP appoint the full-time staff and are charged by James with running the divisions and limiting ND's influence.

New Directions almost won

For over ten years, the managers of New York City's transit system have been working to cut jobs, privatize maintenance work, and undermine the few protections transit workers had won for themselves in the past. Management has sought to implement its restructuring package bit by bit, contract by contract, singling out different sections of the workforce for cuts at different times.

Far from opposing management's plans, Local 100's bureaucracy has embraced them. In 1992, after the membership rejected a proposed contract, then-local President Sonny Hall (now TWU President) said that downsizing was inevitable and the union's job was to get something out of it for the workers who were left.

Faithful to this approach, Willie James responded to the Transit Authority's threat to lay off 2,000 cleaners in 1996 by proposing that the contract be reopened. In exchange for a three-year no-layoff pledge, James agreed to the elimination by attrition of over 500 cleaner jobs. He agreed to let the Transit Authority bring in an unlimited number of "workfare" workers to do cleaning work.

James also agreed to a lump sum payment instead of a raise in 1997 and allowed the Transit Authority to absorb the US\$40 million surplus in the Health Benefit Trust. The Transit Authority had claimed to be in poverty, with a \$200m deficit. One week after the contract was ratified, the TA announced a \$356m surplus.

New Directions has been the only force in the local that has consistently opposed the leadership's strategy. ND has gained support among the membership by proposing a strategy of organizing the members to resist management through direct action on the job.

ND has also advocated allying with subway and bus riders to fight for improved service and lower fares. As a result, New Directions almost won control of one of the most important unions in the nation's largest city!

This was not done with vague promises or feel-good slogans. ND didn't say to transit workers, "Vote for us and your problems will be solved." Indeed, New Directions stated that it didn't matter who was elected if the members

were not involved in the union and prepared to fight management.

While considering why the New Directions slate lost, it is important not to lose sight of the fact that it almost won. Close to 10,000 transit workers voted for the candidates who promised heightened conflict on the job. While the prospect of increased conflict with management was certainly not the only factor that motivated people to vote ND, and discouraged others, those who voted ND did so knowing what it meant.

Why New Directions lost

It's tempting to blame ND's loss on cheating by the incumbents. That may even be accurate. In the bus divisions where James won (and needed to win) overwhelmingly, ND was prevented from checking whether, and how many, supervisors or retirees, who are not eligible to vote, voted.

ND was able to establish that ballots were mailed to retirees, but could not prove that retirees voted, or voted in enough numbers to affect the outcome of the election. And of course there was considerable campaigning by union officers and staff while they were on the union payroll.

But even if the incumbents did cheat, it is important to understand what motivated those members who did vote for the James slate. Incumbents always have a tremendous advantage. But why was that advantage so evident in the bus divisions, and totally lacking in the subways?

The division in Local 100 between the buses and subways go way back. When Mike Quill, one of the founders and the first president of the TWU, broke with the Communist Party in the late 1940s, he turned to conservative, Catholic trade unionists for the activists and officers he needed to replace his former left-wing allies. Many of these Catholic activists worked for the private bus companies in Manhattan and the Bronx. (Boroughs of New York)

In the early 1960s these companies were taken over by the city, and Manhattan and Bronx Surface Transit Operating Authority (MABSTOA) was created. For fifty years, MABSTOA (or the private lines that preceded it) has been the core of the bureaucracy's support: It has provided all but one of the local's presidents. It gave James 3,121 votes. The ND candidate attracted 243.

A key factor in the bureaucracy's support in MABSTOA is that the leadership has built and maintained a machine there that is absent in the subways. Every

bus depot has a full-time union chairperson. Grievances or disciplinary matters are usually handled at the depot, rather than at Transit Authority headquarters (as is the case for workers on the trains and in the stations.)

The union chair controls the assignment of overtime and granting of favors, such as changes in vacations or days off. So, in the buses, the union has a daily presence and a more direct role in making the job more bearable or remunerative than is the case in the subways.

Some ND members believe that the depot chairs use the powers they have to intimidate the bus operators into supporting the incumbents. For example, those perceived as supporters of ND don't get the time off they need for family occasions.

No doubt some of this goes on, but that explanation misses the more important point: The union works better in MABSTOA than it does in the subways. The chairperson gives the bureaucracy a human face and delivers some benefit for individual members.

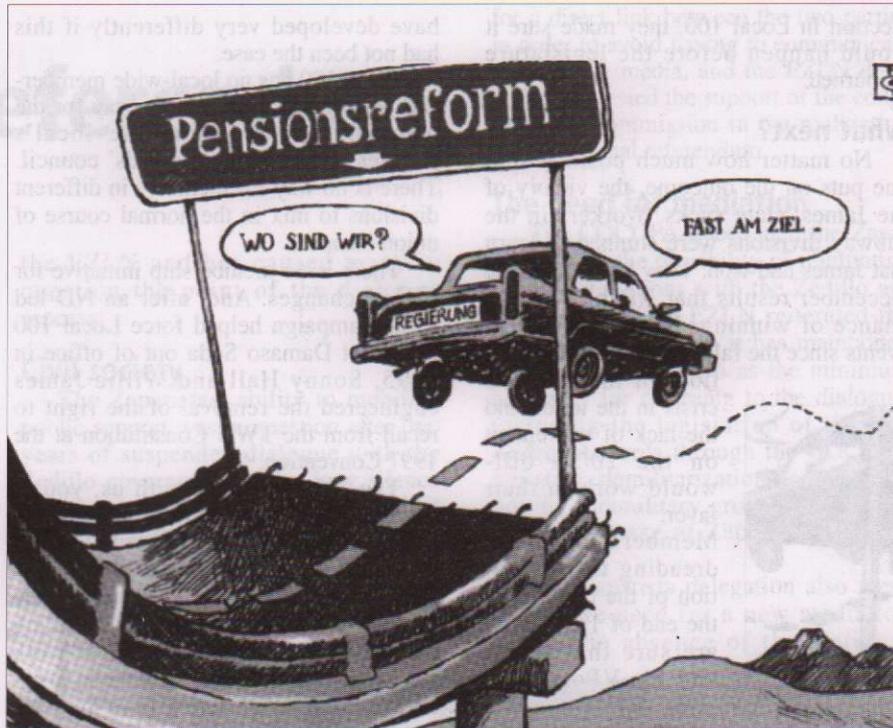
It is not surprising that out of loyalty, a fear of the unknown, gratitude for some favor done, or simply a feeling that things aren't so bad as long as the overtime is plentiful, Local 100 members in MABSTOA are inclined to support the incumbents.

This is not the only factor benefiting the incumbents. Bus workers seem to have experienced, and reacted to, the attacks from management in a very different way from the subway workers. There are instances in the subways where the union has a structure similar to that in buses. For instance, each subway inspection or repair shop has a union chair. Yet ND has won the Car Equipment Division since 1994.

As a result of the history of the union, the nature of the job, the character of supervision, the role of the union chair, and the specific way cuts have hit different sections of the workforce, workers in the subways are more aware than the workers in the buses of the losses, and more aware of the need to do something to prevent further erosion of their working conditions.

Thus, the strength of the union apparatus in the buses helps to maintain support for the bureaucracy and turn out the vote where support is already strong. But that apparatus is of little use in a division where the workers feel the local leadership has failed.

Several other factors turned the inclination of the bus division's workers to support the incumbents into an overwhelming vote. Fear was a prominent part of the incumbents' campaign. Drivers employed by the private bus companies represented by Local 100 were told that their companies would close if New Directions was elected. James and his supporters spread the word that ND would take transit workers out on strike



"Where are we going?" asks the passenger. "Almost there!" asks the driver on the way to reform of retirement pensions.

within weeks of taking office. The James slate also heavily rebaited New Directions' candidates.

The pension election trick

But in the end it was Willie James' promise to win an improved pension for transit workers that proved decisive.

In 1968, after having won a strike in 1966, Local 100 negotiated a pension that allowed its members at the Transit Authority and MABSTOA to retire at age 50 if they had twenty years of service. No worker contribution to the pension fund was required. The essential provisions of this pension soon spread throughout the public sector unions in New York state.

In the early 1970s, the State Legislature eliminated the right to bargain over pensions. Since then, pensions have been set by the legislature and governor in the state capital, Albany. This power was used to lengthen the service requirement, raise the minimum age, and impose a required contribution on the workers.

The standard pension for workers hired after mid-1976 was thirty years of service, 62 years of age (known as a 30/62 deal), and a 3% contribution from the member. The pension itself would be an annual payment equal to roughly 50% of the last year's pay. Returning to a twenty years of service, retiring at 50, and a non-contributory pension became the Holy Grail for most public workers, including transit workers.

Around 1990, the leaders of public employee unions proposed that members pay for any pension improvements. Since 1994, transit workers have had a 25/55 pension, requiring a 5.3% contribution.

In Spring 1997, facing what he knew would be a tough upcoming election, Willie James announced an all-out campaign to win a 20/50, non-contributory pension. All James had to do before the election was have a bill introduced in the New York state legislature. He didn't have to deliver any improvements before the ballots were counted. This was the horse that James counted on to carry him into office.

Despite considerable pressure to unite behind James' campaign for an improved pension, ND refused to help him scam the members. We pointed out that James was raising the issue as an election ploy: Three years ago the union's own analysis concluded that a 20/50 pension would cost each member upwards of 12%. And the fact that 1998 would be an election year for both the governor and the legislature virtually guaranteed the bill's failure.

As it turns out New Directions was right: The 20/50 pension bill never made it out of committee. And though many transit workers accepted our argument that James wouldn't deliver, they thought he would have to produce something, and even a small improvement would be welcomed. This possibility helped James win the rerun.

New Directions knew that James would come back from Albany empty handed. But they also knew that hundreds of votes would turn on this issue. That is why they argued that the rerun election should be held in September, when the fate of the 20/50 bill would be known.

New Directions were not the only ones who recognized the power of this issue. When the TWU ordered a new

election in Local 100, they made sure it would happen before the legislature adjourned.

What next?

No matter how much positive spin one puts on the outcome, the victory of the James' slate sucks. Workers in the subway divisions were stunned to learn that James had won. They knew from the December results that ND had a good chance of winning. ND expected that events since the fall election – the revelations of the financial crisis in the union and the lack of movement on the 20/50 bill-would work in their favor.

Members are now dreading the expiration of the contract at the end of 1999. They are sure that James and his VPs are incapable of negotiating a decent agreement. Some, figuring there will never be a fair election, are urging ND to try to split the subway divisions off from the TWU or to decertify the union.

New Directions, however, is not a group of people who stay demoralized for very long. Nor the kind of union current that goes into suspended animation between elections.

New Directions represents TWU members in the subway divisions. ND slates were also elected to serve as the division officers many divisions: Track, Line Equipment/Signals, Car Equipment, Conductor/Tower, Train Operators, and Westchester/New York Bus (private employer) divisions. Division officers represent the members in their day-to-day dealings with management (the equivalent of chief stewards).

While the local's by-laws state that division officers shall administer the affairs of that division, the local's practice is that VPs and their appointed staff do. So now ND is acting to force the local officers to honor the by-laws.

In the context of preparing for the expiration of the contract, ND will be working to carry out our responsibilities as the elected representatives of the subway divisions-almost 20,000 workers. In the face of full-time officers and staff who are hostile to ND's goal of an active membership and a militant union, this means confronting the bureaucracy, while building the union.

A one-party union

The TWU, like most U.S. unions, functions as a one-party state. There is no institutional way in which policy differences can be ironed out. The executive board is expected to present a united front to the membership. Any criticism of the leadership or its policies is treated as treason to the very principles of unionism. New Directions would probably

have developed very differently if this had not been the case.

Local 100 has no local-wide membership meetings, so there is no way for the members to determine the local's policies. There is no stewards' council. There is no way for members in different divisions to mix in the normal course of union business.

There is no membership initiative for by-law changes. And, after an ND-led recall campaign helped force Local 100 President Damaso Seda out of office in 1995, Sonny Hall and Willie James engineered the removal of the right to recall from the TWU Constitution at the 1997 Convention.

The "If you're not with us, you're against us" attitude of the local's officers led members who disagreed with them to say, "OK, we're against you." But it was the capitulation of the bureaucracy in the face of management's goal of shrinking the workforce and forcing people to work harder that led ND to articulate an alternative strategy that started from the need to organize the membership to resist management.

The officers' failure to represent aggressively members facing discipline led ND to run alternative candidates. The election of VPs on local-wide slates forced ND to organize throughout the local to challenge the entire leadership. ND had to develop a political, strategic, and organizational alternative to the Local 100 bureaucracy because change wasn't possible any other way.

Despite the large electoral support for the ND presidential candidate, and despite the board seats and division officer seats it won, New Directions cannot directly affect the policy of the union. There is no system of checks and balances. There is no openness to debate.

Sonny Hall and Willie James have pledged, at different times, to drive ND out of the TWU. James refers to New Directions members as "phony labor trade unionists" while preaching unity out of the other side of his mouth.

Given the strong support that ND enjoys, the unwillingness to open up the union's structure to ND's participation virtually guarantees that the hold of the bureaucracy will continue to become weaker and the politics of the union will remain unstable. Particularly given the deep strategic and political differences that exist between the two parties.

Over the last ten years, New Directions has built a second party in this one-party state. Although Local 100 is now a two-party state politically, it still maintains the structure that was built in the one-party era.

Among ND's goals are structural changes that will make it possible for the membership to hold their representatives accountable and changes that will make a two-party (or multiparty) system feasible. ND's goal, as stated by one of their board members, is "to make it easier for the

members of Local 100 to remove ND supporters from office than it was for them to get us into office!"

Local 100's future

Increasing the membership's control of the union and its officers is a means to an end. And that end is a more militant union. Whether or not Local 100 will move in that direction is still being fought out.

The current contract with the Transit Authority and MABSTOA expires in December 1999. Those negotiations will be a major test for both the bureaucracy and ND. The outcome of the contract negotiations may determine the outcome of the local's next election, set for December 2000.

The incumbents have lost support with every contract they've negotiated in the last ten years. They cannot afford to lose any more. But they're clearly incapable of fighting for a good contract.

The Transit Authority has had a surplus for three years in a row. It is in a position to offer real improvements in wages and benefits. But it remains intent on getting even more cuts in the workforce, a freer hand to contract out and major changes in work rules.

What will James have to agree to give up in exchange for a decent raise? If he can't persuade management (and the mayor, who will be worried about the effect the transit contract will have on the demands of the city's workers) to bail him out, there is a real chance that James will posture as a militant, even to the point of leading the union into a poorly prepared strike.

A union's future is not determined by an election. Ultimately, Local 100's future will be determined by the members of the union and the decisions they make about what is important to them and how hard they are willing to fight for those things.

For its part, New Directions will be organizing to increase the involvement of the members in the union and their readiness for a fight with management, at contract time or everyday on the job.

The election did nothing to resolve the major issues facing Local 100. The incumbents were returned to office, but they lack a perspective for how to move the union forward or overcome the split within the membership. New Directions showed that it has considerable support among the membership, but it is not in a position to implement its ideas for taking on management. Local 100 remains stuck between an old and a new direction. ★

Notes

Steve Downs is a train operator in New York City's subway, a member of the New Directions caucus of TWU 100, and a supporter of the US socialist and feminist group Solidarity.

The background to this struggle is discussed in "Transit Workers Try a New Direction", by Marian Swerdlow, in issue #74 of the US magazine *Against The Current*. This article © 1998 by *Against the Current*

Zapatista referendum

The Zapatistas' latest initiative is a national referendum on indigenous rights and culture. **Jess Kincaid** reports from Mexico.

For the first time in nearly two years, the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) sat down at the dialogue table.¹ But not with representatives of Mexico's executive branch. Instead, over the weekend of November 20, top-level delegates from the rebel army met with 3,000 representatives of "civil society" – non-government organizations, civic groups, trade unions and prominent personalities.²

The EZLN delegates also met separately with the Commission for Peace and Reconciliation (COCOPA), made up of representatives of all of Mexico's major political parties including the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI).

Both discussions revolved around the COCOPA's proposal for constitutional reforms that implement the San Andres Accords, agreements reached by the Zapatista rebels and the Zedillo administration in February 1996.

The "civic society" groups will organize an unofficial "national referendum" on the COCOPA proposal in the early months of 1999. They accepted an EZLN offer to send one female and one male representative to each of the 2,500 municipalities in Mexico. The EZLN hopes to educate the public and rally support regarding the plan for constitutional changes through this plebiscite.

Behind the blockage, NAFTA

The COCOPA initiative has been stalled since December 1996, when President Zedillo refused to sign it.

The EZLN expressed discontent that, in its view, some parts of the San Andres accords were not included in the proposal, but signed it after consulting with supporters.

Zedillo said he had 29 specific problems with the initiative. Most reflect the Mexican administration's economic interests in upholding NAFTA, trade agreements with the European Union, structural adjustment policies of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, and the developing Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI).

In March of this year, Zedillo introduced his own counterproposal to the COCOPA initiative into the national congress. The unilateral proposal by the government was immediately rejected by

the EZLN and has caused many to question the point of the dialogue process.

Civil society

The Zapatistas' ability to mobilize public support was in question after two years of suspended dialogue with the Zedillo government, and a long silence by the rebels. The Mexican public had turned its attention to other issues, such as the FOBAPROA banking scandal.

These doubts have been quieted, as over 3,000 representatives from over 400 organizations met in San Cristobal, with national participants from 28 of Mexico's 32 states and observers from 15 countries.

While institutional party (PRI) officials dismissed the participants as not representative of Mexican civil society, many Mexicans were impressed at the number and diversity of those present. Participation included non-government organizations, labor unions, environmental activists, artists, peasants, prisoners, students, gay rights activists, children, religious activists, workers, and for the first time, large business owners.

Once again the Zapatistas served as the catalyst to bring together a broad spectrum of Mexicans from a wide variety of experiences.

As at previous Zapatista events, specific discussion forums allowed participants to dialogue on national referendum, militarization and the peace process, and alternative economic, social, and cultural policies. A fourth discussion table for youth was arranged at the last moment, including participation by local homeless children, public school students and punk youth from Mexico City.

The EZLN stated that the success of civil society in organizing the dialogue indicated their capacity to successfully carry out the national referendum.

The COCOPA

After a difficult first meeting, a second, "cordial" encounter between the EZLN and the 16 federal and state legislators resulted in concrete proposals, with members of both groups expressing positive feelings about the possibility for further dialogue.

The COCOPA emphasized the need

for a direct link between the two parties in order to avoid having to communicate through the media, and the EZLN delegation requested the support of the congressional commission in the realization of the national referendum.

The need for mediation

The COCOPA questioned the Zapatistas about the possibility of reinitiating peace negotiations with the Zedillo administration. The EZLN reiterated the five conditions which it has maintained since September 1996 as the minimum necessary for returning to the dialogue, including the legislation of the San Andres Accords through the COCOPA initiative, demilitarization and elimination of paramilitary groups in Chiapas, and the release of Zapatista political prisoners.

The Zapatista delegation also mentioned the need for a new mediation body. The absence of the National

Mediation Commission (CONAI), which facilitated the first meeting between the groups nearly two years ago, was apparent from the first day of the dialogue. The CONAI, headed by Catholic Bishop Samuel Ruiz, was disbanded in June 1998 after Ruiz resigned, complaining of government attacks on

the commission and the church.

The Zapatista delegates issued a communique stating that the COCOPA had broken its word and that the treatment had racist implications. The COCOPA denied the accusations, but made effort to attend the specific needs identified by the EZLN.

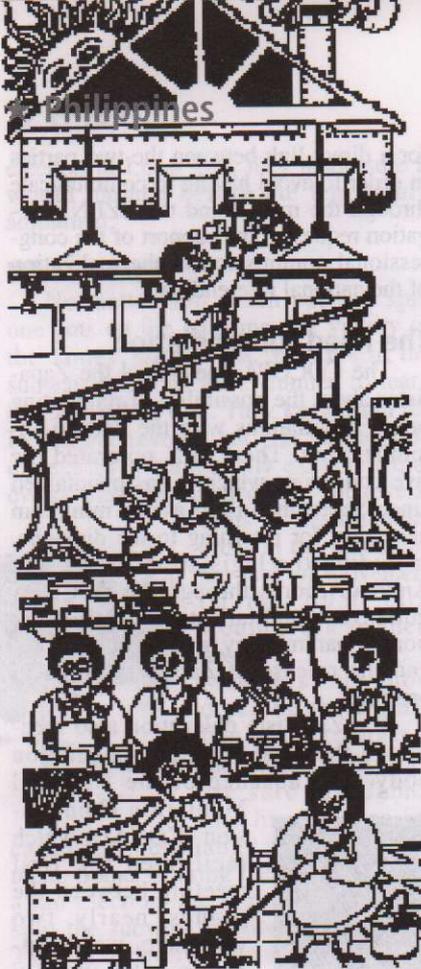
The absence of mediation was also evident on the final day of the dialogue when the COCOPA attempted to deliver proposals from the Zedillo government to the EZLN. The Zapatista representatives refused the sealed documents, because they did not recognize the commission as a mediating body.

The weekend of the talks, demonstrations in 24 U.S. cities were coordinated by the National Commission for Democracy in Mexico in order to support the dialogue with the Zapatistas as well as a 5000-strong civil disobedience event at the School of the Americas at Fort Benning, Georgia. ★



Notes

1. EZLN representatives included *Comandantes* Tacho, David, Zebedeo, and Leticia, as well as Major Moises.
2. Including author Carlos Monsivais, human rights activist Rosario Ibarra de Piedra, singer Fher of the rock group Mana, Amalia Solorzano, mother of Cuauhtemoc Cardenas, former members of the CONAL, faculty of the National Autonomous University, and representatives from Authentic Labor Front (FAT). Source: Mexican Labor News and Analysis Vol. III, No. 21, 2 December 1998. Contact editor Dan La Botz at <103144.2651@compuserve.com>. View the full contents at www.igc.apc.org/unitedelect/.



The new workers' party

• How does your revolutionary strategy differ from the Maoist past?

Jona: before, it was the armed struggle which determined everything else. We had a rigid conception of military stages, copied from Mao Zedung's writings on the Chinese revolution. We tried to force political developments into our schema of stages: defensive, stalemate, offensive and revolution. We now have a more flexible strategic framework. We don't force developments into this military framework.

Harry: We thought that the accumulation of military strength would grow over into an accumulation of revolutionary potential. We now realise that the reverse is true.

Revolutionary developments don't just depend on armed strength. There are many factors influencing the growth, or retreat, of revolutionary consciousness and mobilisation. We now recognise the importance of open mass movements, electoral work, even parliamentary activities. The importance of these factors varies from place to place and time to time. Another important factor is the development and consolidation of organs of political power of the oppressed. Such as the territorial self-government of indigenous peoples, in the regions of Mindanao where our guerrillas operate.

• This must mean big changes for your armed wing...

Harry: Our armed forces [the Revolutionary Proletarian Army – RPA] now have a defensive role. They do police work, and defend the gains made in areas where we are relatively strong. Before, we subjugated our political interests to our military goals. We attacked mainly to capture weapons, regardless of the consequences for the local population. Now, we choose our targets much more carefully — military leaders, or particularly reactionary landlords.

Jona: Our troops are diligently adjusting to their new role. Before, we did everything we could to create the impression of a civil war between the government and the people. In those days, we said that the army was a product of the mass movement, but it was not. In fact, the main factor for recruitment was the popular reaction to the fascist characteristics of the regime. That is no longer present.

Ricardo: We are reorienting and reorga-

nising the armed wing. We are trying to consolidate. We want the army to be at the service of the mass movement, not the other way round

Harry: But as we increase the self-organisation of the oppressed minorities, we see a sharp increase in the number of people wanting to join the military wing. Self-defence is an integral part of building those new organs of political power. Particularly since the land question is at the centre of the preoccupations of the indigenous peoples and poor peasants. And the landlords and warlords have their own armies. As well as the Armed Forces of the Philippines, which function as the private army of whichever local capitalist is ready to pay them.

We are transforming the relationship between army, party, and mass organisations. As we consolidate the organs of popular power, we assist the people in creating all aspects of governance.

The army is no longer part of the party, but answers to the self-government bodies. The government bodies take care of recruitment, and look after the families of the fighters. This removes a huge organisational burden from the party, which now concentrates on the ideological education of the guerrillas, and helps give overall direction and political leadership to the struggle.

• What about mass work?

Harry: The revolution is not just about smashing the reactionary state. We need to begin building the alternatives — like the organs of popular power. Building the revolution includes planting the seeds as we go forward. Marxists like ourselves must combine our work with that done by development NGOs, popular organisations, and the churches.

We have begun to develop electoral and parliamentary work. We are an underground party, so our candidates stand on other, broader lists. We also mobilise support for progressive candidates from outside our ranks. In Mindanao we present joint lists with a Moro liberation front.

Since the last elections, our representatives and parliamentary contacts have been able to channel development aid towards regions where the popular organisations are strong — even, sometimes, to municipalities where the local government is revolutionary! So far, this combination of parliamentary and extra-parliamentary work has been a positive factor for the continuous improvement of our peoples' lives.

The Revolutionary Workers Party-Philippines is the largest regroupment since the explosion of the Communist Party of the Philippines in 1992-3.

Over the last five years, the groups which form the new party have moved decisively away from their Mao-Stalinist origins, developing a dynamic and pluralist strand of revolutionary Marxism that is quite new in the Philippines

At its founding conference in 1998, the new party decided to seek Permanent Observer status in the 4th International, which has its origins in the Trotskyist movement.

In the coming months, we will introduce the new party, its analysis of the current situation, the national question in Mindanao, and the Philippine variant of liberation theology.

In this first installment, our staff writer Jean Dupont spoke to three RWP representatives: Harry, from the National leadership; Ricardo, from the national secretariat; and Jona, from the regional leadership for the capital, Manila. [JD]

Ricardo: Alternative development strategies are at the centre of our transitional programme — the party's strategy of combining concrete reforms with demands that take the popular movement forward.

The government has an official development strategy — "Philippines 2000" We can't just denounce this as a neo-liberal strategy. We need to propose alternatives, suitable for the current needs of the population and the resources available. All the aspects of our revolutionary work should be consistent with this transitional programme.

Land reform is at the centre of our proposals for a rational agricultural system. These proposals are particularly addressed to the organs of popular power, or organisations representing the rural poor, such as Banana and sugar plantation workers. Where we are strong, we try to implement these reforms.

We are currently consulting the mass movements about the issues which we should prioritise in the coming constitutional changes and elections. We hope to produce a legislative and constitutional agenda that will guide all areas of our work in this domain. It isn't just a question of propaganda. Whatever can be implemented already, we will do, wherever we are strong enough.

• What are your main successes recently?

Harry: we spent five years trying to analyse our errors, and purify ourselves of the Mao-Stalinist poison. The big split in the Communist Party was the beginning of a long and painful process of "rethinking and retooling". Party groups were working in isolation, but, as we entered the pre-party phase and finally founded the new party, we realised that we had all been undergoing the same process.

The Mao-Stalinist party is still strong. In Mindanao, we are more or less surrounded by areas they control. And they are very hostile to us. So our very existence is our greatest success.

Actually, as we developed the new ideological basis for a re-founded workers' party, we found a new inner strength. Although the "big bang" in 1992-3 had a heavy cost, we have managed to expand the current which rejects the Mao-Stalinist line.

After years of being confined to a narrow, dogmatic schema and an anti-democratic political culture, we can define our own project, in an open, dynamic atmosphere. It is tremendously invigorating.

Ricardo: Now we have the party we want. The various groups which came together to form the new party have reached consensus on basic documents covering all areas of our work, and reviewing the strengths and weaknesses of our own history.

We have also consolidated a national party, with a solid base in the three main groups of islands: Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao. Many of the other groups which split from the Communist Party are still at the pre-party stage, or confined to one particular region of the country.

• And your main weaknesses?

Ricardo: We are still consolidating and deepening the new awareness we have been talking about. We need to "level up" the understanding at cadre level, and spread the new ideas at the level of our mass base. Transforming a Maoist party with 30 years of "protracted people's war" strategy is a tremendous task.

Jona: We used to see ourselves as a monolithic, hegemonic party, acting as the compass for the entire left movement. But now we face a new epoch for the Philippine communist movement. There are many radical and revolutionary organisations: some Maoist, some closer to our own thinking.

It remains to be seen how these groups will work together. The Maoist party is still the largest — though it continues to split. Among those who rejected the Maoist line, we are moving from a phase of fragmentation towards a phase of regroupment.

Harry: The process of consolidation has been fairly uneven. Now that we have the party structures stabilised, we need to look at each sector of work, create the networks between comrades in different regions, articulate a national strategy, and disseminate best practice and new ideas. In some areas our trade union work is well developed. In others, like Visayas, it is less so.

The weaknesses of the new party will become apparent as we try to intervene in the various sectors and regions.

As Jona said, pluralism is a new phenomena in the Philippine Communist movement. Dealing with that pluralism, inside and outside the new party, may be a big challenge for us.

In the Maoist outlook, the sectoral organisations were mere transmission belts, with a uniform policy, implemented from above. But now, for instance, we have three different party youth organisations, in the three main island groups. How will we unify these groups? Will they form one organisation, or a looser federation? These are new, important questions.

• Is there a generation gap in the new party?

Jona: I don't think so. There has been a continuous momentum in the revolutionary movement. The fall of the Marcos dictatorship meant the softening of some of the fascist elements of the state. But the new governments were not fundamentally different. There were no radical changes in the education system, for

example. There is a wider democratic space, but the fundamental problems facing the population are the same. So recruitment to the Communist groups has been sustained, despite all the changes.

Harry: Perhaps there was a kind of generation gap. After the Marcos dictatorship, many comrades enthusiastically returned to legal areas of work. Among some, there was a development of institutionalised thinking. Those working in Non-Governmental organisations became increasingly concerned with their own careers, and the service they provided became increasingly bureaucratic. Some joined the middle classes. Others resented the level of party work we expected from them. Some became an anti-party element.

When the big democracy debate erupted in the Communist Party, these people seized the chance to move out of activism. They rejected the Mao-Stalinist orientation, but they also rejected all alternatives which currents like ourselves put forward!

Over the last five years, many of the most cynical or disillusioned have left. Hopefully, the new party will be able to ensure a more serious and co-ordinated intervention in the NGO and institutional spheres. But we have certainly lost comrades in the process.

• What are the prospects for greater co-operation on the left?

Harry: The internal development of the party is the essential question. Can we open up our own organisation, and become truly willing to work with others? Can we accept that other groups may be better than we are in a certain sector of work? After all, we were trained to think that we were the best, and that we had the only correct line. How to unlearn that kind of thinking? It is a very painful process.

A number of external factors are pushing all left groups to consider closer co-operation. None of us are strong enough, on our own, to intervene in the 1999 constitutional convention. We will have to work together if we want to stop the government approving a new Visiting Forces Agreement, allowing the United States to again use the Philippines as a massive military base for intervention across Asia.

In Mindanao, our armed wing has good relations with a Moro Liberation Front. We have united on multi-sector campaigns. As they gradually accept the necessity of mass work alongside the military struggle, we are helping them. We also have a joint electoral project.

As in other countries, it is often easier to work with the broader left than with other revolutionary groups coming from our common past in the CPP. So, although the anti-Maoist current is still very fluid, there are all kind of irritants and obstacles to closer co-operation. But

★ Philippines

we were able to integrate some groups right before our April congress.

And, now that we exist, the other 'pre-party' groups will have to position themselves accordingly.

• What attracted you to the Fourth International?

Harry: As we abandoned the Maoist project, we were fully aware that the revolutionary project cannot be confined to one country.

We wanted to reach out to progressive and revolutionary groups worldwide. Apart from the Fourth International, we didn't see any other group playing this necessary role at the international level.

Ricardo: The International has accumulated a wealth of experiences from different countries and periods. We can learn much in a short time through joining its discussions and training programmes.

The International's pluralist tradition helps broaden our outlook, and is an

antidote to the "one true way" thinking which used to dominate the CPP.

• In joining the International, you will change it...

Harry: Our relationship with the International is symbiotic — both sides contribute to the other, and both are changed in the process.

We will be holding our own second congress just before the International organises its own World Congress. So the debates will flow between the two levels.

At a concrete level, we add strength to the International. We are a large group with a long history, and a solid implantation in our country.

The Fourth International is weak in Asia, where we will help develop networks of revolutionary and radical groups.

Of course, we have no objection to the International maintaining friendly relations with other groups in the Philippines, wherever this is useful. ★

The assault of Hindu communalism on Indian secularism and the rights of religious minorities has gathered pace since the election into central government of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in March 1998.

The ideologues of communalism come from the "Sangh combine" — the group of Hindu communalist movements which includes the governing BJP, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad [World Hindu Council], Bajrang Dal and the far-right Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS).

In October 1998 a conference of State Education Ministers was presented with a report recommending that the national education system be "Indianised, nationalised and spiritualised".

According to the report, this means: compulsory instruction in Hindu religious texts, teaching of Sanskrit and for girls, "home keeping" lessons.

The conference itself was to open with a Hindu religious chant! Non-BJP ministers staged a walk-out and the conference was only resumed when the report was withdrawn — for the moment.

But the Sangh combine is already putting this new philosophy into practice. More than 1.2 million children attend RSS-run schools, in virtually every Indian state. Their curricula, text-books and teachers all propagate RSS values and the *Hindutva* [Hindu nationalist] view of History. [BS]

Achin Vanaik

Let no one be in any doubt. The Sangh Combine today are out to transform popular understandings of Indian history by changing the content and manner of history teaching at the level of schools and colleges so as to accord with their own *Hindutva* version of that history.

Unfortunately, not only the Sangh, but disturbingly large sections of the Indian elite think they are justified in doing so.

In this context a crucial question is raised. Can history writing, research, understanding and teaching be separated from the passions of politics? This can only be answered by both a yes and a no.

Yes, there is such a thing as truer histories subject to the controls of evidence and therefore different from myths, untruths, half-truths and "feel good" nationalist accounts of what happened in the past. Indeed, when early nationalist passions die down there can be greater scope for more subtle and accurate understandings of history regardless of how it affects the inescapable inventions and myths of nationalist self-image. Nationalism, after all, is "getting history wrong" at least some of the time.

Something like this is now happening

Socialist Party of Labour

Reihana Mohideen

Two smaller socialist organisations, the Socialist League (LS) and the Revolutionary Proletarian Party (RPP), fused on 30 November 1998.

The new Socialist Party of Labour (SPP) will hold its founding congress in May 1999.

Like the Revolutionary Workers' Party (see separate article), the Socialist League was previously part of the pro-Maoist Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP).

Until early 1998, the LS was part of the Manila-Rizal Revolutionary Committee (KRMR). They split over the refusal of the leadership to call a party congress, and what the LS considers to be a right-wing political trajectory of the organisation, and the clique method of its leader, Popoy Lagman.

Led by Sony Melencio, the LS has a base in the student movement through the Young Socialist League (LSK). It has recruited the leaders of two large urban poor communities in the north and south of Manila and is rapidly building its base in these areas.

The RPP comes from the formerly Moscow-aligned Communist Party (PKP), formed in 1930. The PKP discredited itself during the period of the Marcos dictatorship by agreeing to a "political settlement" to lay down its arms in exchange for release of leaders who were imprisoned by the regime.

While the PKP participated in the subsequent anti-dictatorship movement it was never able to recover fully. The activists of the youth radicalisation of the '70s and '80s joined the Maoist CPP, which had split from the PKP in the late 60s.

The RPP forces split from the PKP in 1993. The split, led by youth leader Rodolfo Javellana, revolved around the lack of democracy in the party, the PKP's class collaborationist politics and its sectarianism.

The RPP won over the rural workers mass organisation of the PKP. This Federation of Agricultural Workers is the oldest poor peasants' organisation in the Philippines. It claims 10,000 members.

The two organisations reaffirm "Marxism-Leninism... democratic centralism... The need to establish an open revolutionary socialist party... The principle of uninterrupted revolution, from national-democratic to socialism... the leading role of the working class in the struggle ... where the first step will be the establishment of a revolutionary state of the workers together with their allies."

"It is also our task to defend nations and governments, like Cuba and Vietnam, which advance socialism but are continuously harassed and violated by imperialist nations..." ★

Source: Green Left Weekly #344, 9 December 1998

Rewriting history

The Hindu right is trying to transform history textbooks and teaching in Indian schools.

in Ireland where neither British colonialist paternalism nor an aggressive Republicanist political counter to it are seen as guiding frameworks for the new histories that are being researched or written.

But for this to happen, a country's nationalism has to become more relaxed, mature and confident – everything, in fact, that is not happening in India.

Here, fifty years after Independence, the elite, (from whose ranks emerge those most concerned with writing, reading, arguing about, and teaching history) is more insecure, frustrated, aggressive than ever before. It is an elite disappointed by the past, disappointed by the present, and uncertain about the future. It is an elite that is suffering something of a collective identity crisis and thus more open than ever to the seductions of a history that is being reshaped according to the passions of a particular kind of identity politics.

History is always a dialogue between the present and the past: there is no way that it can be immune from the politics and preoccupations of the present. New questions are constantly being posed and new histories being written to highlight new ways in which the past and present are connected.

This is not in itself undesirable provided the purpose remains the writing and understanding of real histories – of correcting older weaknesses and biases, of exploring hitherto unexplored terrains, of making better use of older or newer source materials, etc. There is always an instrumentalist dimension to history writing and teaching connected to the politics of the present. But a history-telling that is effectively reduced to such instrumentalism as its primary purpose (which is the goal of the Sangh) is no longer meaningful history though it can certainly be meaningful politics.

So history writing and teaching may not be separable from the passions of politics at any given time but this must not be made into an excuse either for relativism in history (anything goes) or myth-making as history. What must also be taken into account when assessing alternative historical approaches is also what kind of politics and what kind of passions inform these explorations, and how compatible they are with the search for better, deeper and wider histories. Decent and more humane political passions will clearly tend to promote more decent and humane kinds of historical explorations. The passions unleashed by *Hindutva* are anything but

humane or decent.

History, said Brecht, is unpredictable not because there are no determinations but because there are too many. It is the complexity of human history that must be better grasped if better histories are to be written, a complexity which in recent centuries has exponentially increased!

The Sangh's *Hindutva* notion of history has utter contempt for any such approach. It attempts to justify its project not on the grounds of being able to provide better or truer histories but by declaring that other, secular histories were themselves politically motivated.

The claim then, is that the larger and long term failure of that older political project known as Nehruvianism also invalidates the history writing of those times. Just as politically, the Sangh argues, it is necessary to try something new rather than old secular Nehruvianism, historiographically they exclaim, what is wrong with adopting something new as well?

Past bias?

Thus time and again the refrain one hears in the public media is that there was biased history writing in the past so whatever one's criticisms of what the Sangh are upto, others were just as bad, if not worse. The favourite whipping boys are of course, the Marxists.

Insofar as Indian history writing was influenced by the temper and politics of the National Movement it was predominantly a strong centre-left Congress interpretation of modern Indian history and of the composite character of Indian culture and society that held the fulcrum, though never the full spectrum.

Marxists who were pro-Congress were never that many and their influence was grossly exaggerated. But in these anti-socialist and anti-Marxist times nothing sells better than such attacks on the intellectual or political left.

Certainly, Marxism has had considerable influence on history writing and understanding, much more so than Marxists. For it has not been difficult for many a non-Marxist historian to recognise the important value and power that various insights originating in, or emphasised by, the Marxist tradition, has had for the historian's craft in general.

In this respect, mid-twentieth century history writing in India was no different from what was happening worldwide except, ironically, in countries ruled by regimes claiming to be Marxist. Here, too much of history writing foreshadowed

what the Sangh today wants and promotes – a shameful instrumentalism in which scientific endeavour, objectivity and truth were firmly subordinated to ideology.

What Marxist influence did was to bring in the study of the structures of everyday life, of the material conditions of existence, of ordinary human beings to the very forestage of history writing, understanding and teaching displacing the kind of histories that dominated till late into the nineteenth and early twentieth century. These were political narratives centred on "great leaders", and religious-cultural-ideational narratives that talked of enduring mentalities, etc.

The positive impact has been enormous and enduring. Great macro-histories (and many a micro-one) can no longer be written without paying some kind of debt to Marx and Marxism even though it no longer seems a debt, only common sense.

History to be proud of

The passion of politics of pre-and post-independence India was not only different from the India of today, it was also far more progressive as compared to the colonial past. It is hardly surprising then that the histories of India subsequently produced, for all their pro-Congress or nationalist biases and weaknesses, were far superior in range, depth and quality.

This was particularly evident in political, social and economic histories of various kinds. The rise of new kinds of writing and research on "history from below" as embodied in the best of Subaltern Studies¹ represented further progress in Indian historiography. The one third world country of which the accusation of a Western-colonial or Macaulyan historical mind-set is most off the mark, is in fact India, precisely because it had the sustained and powerful National Movement that it did.

What a great tragedy it is that instead of seeking to transcend the limitations of that nationalism as it affected the historian's craft, the Sangh today is aiming to reinforce its most central weakness.

This was always in the domain of cultural histories where elite nationalism from the mid-nineteenth century was decisively influenced by a "reversed Orientalism" that today finds its strongest expression in a *Hindutva*-Brahminical view of Hinduism, Indian society and cultural nationalism. Today's intellectual inheritors of Western paternalism in historical research, understanding and writing are, in fact, the loyalists of the Sangh Combine. The irony could hardly be sharper. ★

1. A school of Indian historiography concerned with problems of power and subordination among subaltern

Wye and the Israeli plantation

The Wye Plantation and Oslo accords serve the interest of Israeli big business, American imperialism and the IMF and World Bank. **Tikva Honig-Parnass** explains why

The system of globalisation requires that the political and military structure in the Middle East remains intact to ensure American imperialist control of oil resources as well as its free access to cheap labour and unlimited possibilities for investments.

The Zionist State, since its establishment in 1948, has continued to defend and uphold the imperialist position. Furthermore, together with other non-Arab states from the region, Israel was assigned the role to defend the Arab reactionary regimes (termed by Noam Chomsky as the "local facade") from any uprising by their exploited people.

The local bourgeoisie in the Arab States is an heterogeneous class which combines pre-capitalist elements with local foreign capital. This feudo-bourgeois class is not capable of existing outside the imperialist framework, and is consequently not capable of implementing the tasks of the bourgeois-democratic revolution.

Historically, the Palestinian question has been a source of instability in the Middle East. The continued Palestinian dispossession by Zionism, coupled with their struggle for national rights has maintained a situation with a high potential for turning the Arab masses against imperialism and their exploitative regimes, and thereby raising Arab nationalism.

Hence imperialism's support of the Zionist colonialist movement's aspirations to establish an exclusive Jewish state in Palestine. This goal was achieved during the 1948 Partition War, in which the majority of the Palestinians were expelled from the area designed for the Israeli state, and those who remained were dispossessed economically and politically, rendering them second rate citizens in the Zionist-Jewish state.

The 1967 War was aimed at destroying Egyptian President Nasser's nationalist project. Israel completed what it had not been able to achieve in 1948, by conquering all of historic Palestine. Israel thus won the status of "strategic asset" for American imperialism.



The US accepted the Israeli Labour Party's "Alon Plan", which has been directly translated into the Oslo agreements. This plan, which is a version of an apartheid solution, was rejected and contrary to international consensus and UN agreements prior to the Gulf War.

Intifada

The *Intifada*, the Palestinian popular uprising which began in 1987, was directed against both the policy of surrender of the PLO leadership (which despite its official declarations, in fact, accepted the US-Israeli plan) and of course the Israeli occupation.

The *Intifada* demonstrated the permanent threat to the stability of the region, and furthermore confirmed to the imperial powers the need to implement the Alon Plan.

The Gulf War of 1991 consolidated US hegemony in the Middle East and made possible the enforcement of its plan. The aim of this new agreement was to put an end to the national aspirations of the Palestinian people, and to ensure the continuity of Israeli rule in the 1967 occupied territories, with the collaboration of Arafat's PLO leadership.

Arafat co-opted

Arafat, who succeeded in sabotaging the *Intifada*, was the only potential partner who was willing to integrate into the regional "Pax Americana" and to accept the Oslo agreement and its apartheid solution.

Heading the PLO, which led the national movement, enabled Arafat to commit himself to the humiliating surrender conditions of Oslo, with the temporary support and trust of the Palestinian masses. However, a large portion of the leadership in the PLO as well as its institutions opposed Oslo from the beginning.

The PLO has officially recognised the Zionist racist state, founded on the dispossession and expulsion of the Palestinian people – and has thus practically accepted the 1948 Partition and even Zionism.

Israel, in turn, recognised the PLO, but as an organisation which did not represent the entire Palestinian people. Therefore, the Oslo agreements easily avoided recognising the right of return of the 1948 refugees.

Moreover, the PLO has renounced the national struggle by accepting its definition of the national struggle as purely "terroristic", and has promised to forsake it.

Bantustan Palestine

The PLO in fact gave legitimacy to an additional partition of historic Palestine by agreeing to Israel's pretension to ownership rights on the West Bank and Gaza Strip, which have now become "disputed territories." The Israeli withdrawal from these territories has become a matter of give and take in the future final settlement negotiations – which of course will be determined by Israel and the US alone.

However, the territories which are due to be included in the Palestinian self-rule areas will only have limited sovereignty. Symbols of statehood may indeed be granted to them. However control of borders, foreign relations, security, and natural resources will all remain under Israeli control.

What is perhaps more important is that the territories under Palestinian self-rule are not at all contiguous. Instead, they consist of scores of tiny, isolated, enclaves, disconnected by the Israeli settlements and military checkpoints.

The bigger enclaves, which include Gaza, the northern West Bank, the southern West Bank, and Greater Jerusalem are also completely separated from each other. These fragmented pieces which will finally be granted statehood, are presently being turned into a caricature of the South African Bantustans.

The Palestinian Authority's collaborative self-rule, whose backbone is the repressive and corrupt bourgeois machinery of the Palestinian diaspora, are already replacing some of the tasks of the Israeli army in keeping "internal order." In co-operation with the Israeli security

forces and the American CIA, any struggle against Oslo and the Israeli occupation will be repressed.

Open for business

The political and military framework which was delineated by the Oslo agreement in 1993 determined economic agreements, sponsored and controlled by the IMF and the World Bank. These agreements aimed to create a unified and "open" economic system in the Middle East which would strengthen the international machinery of economic exploitation in the region.

The political agreements aim at "normalisation" and the lifting of the boycott on Israeli goods. This is a necessary condition for opening the Middle East markets and serves as the "bridge" for the economic penetration of the Arab hinterland for Israel.

In the division of labour designed for the "new Middle East", Israel was to be a regional economic power, concentrating on high-tech industry and technically advance knowledge.

The *comprador* and Palestinian-Jordanian bourgeoisie were designed to become active agents for this penetration, and to collaborate in the exploitation of cheap labour resources, without the security risks inherent in importing Arab labour to the Israeli territories proper.

Indeed it was Israeli big business which in fact led the "peace" process towards the Oslo agreements, as a necessary step towards privatisation and integration into the globalisation system.

American economist Lester Thurow charted the division of labour designed for the Middle east by the IMF and the economic path Israel ought to take:

"Those not producing oil in the region should be making goods and services for those who sell oil. Israel should bring technology, middle-waged industries and organisation abilities to the table. But none of that can happen unless and until the political and military disputes between Israel and the Arab World are settled." (*Head to Head*, Warner Books, pages 216-7)

The PLO leadership which signed the agreement is simply the emanation of the corrupted bourgeois of the bureaucratic apparatus of the PLO in exile, and of Palestinian capitalism in the territories, which had no special interests in a national market.

Israeli control

The Oslo agreement, which denies any real sovereignty for the Palestinians, has instead designed the framework for the Paris economic agreement to confer the status of defender of the 1967 occupied territories on the Israeli economy.

The Palestinians will be denied control of their own borders and of their national currency, including the authority to impose their own custom duties, along with severe limitations on their indepen-

dent economic foreign relations. Also, the agreement makes possible the continuity of Israeli theft of the natural resources – mainly land and water.

The principle of free movement of goods and individuals, which is supposed to be the foundation of neo-liberalism, and which of course was adopted in the Paris economic agreement, is to be unilaterally implemented for the benefit of Israel alone. The newly-developed industrial parks which will be opened to Israeli labour-intensive industries and to Israeli, European, and US investments, will have no connection to the domestic Palestinian economy, nor its development.

Having total control over the Palestinian economy, Israel is able to reward its own self-policing partners by granting the Palestinian Authority the monopolies which manage the basic sectors of goods bought from Israeli companies.

Thus we are witness to the growth of a corrupted layer whose interest is to preserve the repressive and exploitative situation. This layer is there to satisfy the main concern of the IMF and US imperialism; namely stability. However it is ironic that the Oslo surrender agreement and the repressive role of Arafat eliminates any prospects of the very stability which is Oslo's rationale.

Inside Israel

The two main dominating parties in Israel, Labour and Likud, do not differ in their positive position toward neo-liberalism (as well as towards Oslo) Beginning in the late 1980s, the Labour party started privatising the huge public sector by distributing public property to multinational corporations and wealthy businessmen.

During the past two decades, many of the assets of the Histadrut (the only trade union in Israel) were privatised as well. This was part of a policy aimed at destroying the only (albeit corrupt) organised power representing the Jewish working class, reducing wages and making cuts in social welfare.

Thus when Netanyahu from the Likud came to power in 1996 he in fact inherited from the Labour government an economy which replaced collective bargaining with "personal contracts", without unified trade unions, and social services which had been destroyed. More than 15% of labour power is foreign workers brought in by the State to replace the Palestinians from the 1967 occupied territories.

Nonetheless, there remains a rather strong support among both Labour and Likud to continue with certain facets of the welfare state economy. This is a natural desire in a settler society such as Israel in which there is a permanent tension between the Zionist, colonialist ideology and policy on the one hand, and economic liberalism on the other hand.

The consensus around the Zionist ideology as well as the national and

religious element of Jewish identity of the state and its citizens is almost total. This creates a strong bias towards social defence. Thus the new aspirations to liberalise the economy are compromised by traditional Zionist beliefs which by definition require the state to play a substantial role in managing the economy.

It is therefore impossible that the liberalisation of the Political/economic basis of Israel can be completed within the Jewish sector to the same brutal and unhuman extent which we witness in other places. On the other hand, this full mobilisation and commitment to Zionist ideology, which incorporates certain social defence mechanisms, is one of the central factors which has traditionally blocked the radicalisation of the Jewish working class.

Left Zionism

One of the necessary conditions in the pre-state period for the successful establishment of the Zionist-colonialist project was its capability to prove that it could be an effective servant of imperialism in the Middle East (first with the British and later with the Americans). In turn, the Zionist project was therefore dependent upon the success of harnessing the Jewish proletariat in Palestine to support the aims of Zionism and imperialism in the region.

The Histadrut, and the Zionist "socialist" labour movement which headed it, was the main vehicle used to mobilise the workers to the tasks of colonialisation as well as to pacify their exploitation by emerging capitalism.

The Histadrut and the labour movement did not come to Palestine to build a new "socialist" society. They did not for example attack the concept of private property. But they did adopt a discourse of socialism (using their local version of "national socialism") for it served as an effective myth in mobilising the workers behind Zionism.

However, it was the (Stalinist) Palestinian Communist Party which gave legitimacy to the combination of colonialist politics and socialist language which characterises the Israeli left.

The Communist Party accepted the imperialist partition of Palestine, and has presented the 1948 War as a national liberation and anti-imperialist war.

The positions of the Communist Party have made it difficult to separate the youth and the proletarian vanguard from Zionism and made it easier to divide the working class according to nationality.

The Arab-Palestinians who remained in their homeland after 1948 (when approximately 800,000 of them were expelled) became



★ Palestine & Israel

"Israeli". They were dispossessed of their lands and were transformed into labourers, for whom the village served as only a place to sleep.

But the policies of all Israeli governments have prevented the Palestinians from working in major industries, such as energy and arms, due to "security reasons." They have been completely marginalised into the lowest paid jobs with the weakest defence of the Histadrut.



principle on all of the fundamental issues of Zionism: Jewish immigration, "security" and the building of an exclusive Jewish state, as well as the Oslo agreements as the just solution to the conflict. This is a "Left" which sees the American imperialists as democratic, human, and just allies!

Second class Jews

The division of the working class in Israel, according to nationality, is supplemented by an important division between the Jewish wage-labourers.

This division runs along the major ethnic cleavages which divides the Israeli Jewish society, namely between the *Mizrahim* (immigrants from Arab countries and their Israeli-born descendants) and Europeans, the *Ashkenazim*.

The bulk of the Jewish working class, especially in non-managerial positions, whether skilled or not, consists of Jewish *Mizrahim*.

Their exploitation and discrimination in the economic sphere was accompanied by racist and systematic cultural oppression by the Ashkenazi-European settler elite. Thus, the overlapping of race and class among the Jewish working class has reduced the development of a strong class consciousness, mainly through the prevailing discourse which expresses the *Mizrahim* oppression in the terms and politics of cultural-identity.

In Israel, the executive business class are mostly Ashkenazi Jews. Those who lose the most, in declining order, are the Palestinian labourers from the 1967 occupied territories, the Palestinian minority from inside Israel, and the Mizrahi Jews who have remained since their arrival, trapped in the geographic and economic periphery.

Israeli society is characterised by a high consensus around Zionism. "Left Zionism" was born distorted within the colonialist framework. Nationalists and racists saw themselves as revolutionaries and humanists, settled on the stolen lands of Palestinians, and sang the *Internationale*.

The Zionist left, still continues to view Zionism as a national liberation movement and totally rejects its colonialist nature.

Both Left and Right agree in

The Palestinian left

The Palestinian Left is now paying for its terrible mistakes. Arafat sabotaged the Palestinian Intifada, and took all measures necessary to re-establish his hegemony over the national movement in Palestine, which had liberated itself from him during the first months of the popular uprising.

The struggle, in all of its various forms, had the potential to prevent the Oslo agreements. Instead these deals culminated in the defeat of the national struggle against the occupation and the legitimisation of the Zionist colonialist state.

From this point on, every pursuit of the national struggle will be confronted with the corruption of the Palestinian Authority and its police, which, under the guidance of the American CIA and Israeli "security" forces, is becoming a brutal oppressor, not less than the Israeli army it has replaced.

At present the Palestinian people lack any organisation or party which is capable of engaging in a systematic struggle against the imperialistic settlement. The Palestinian defeat, the depth of popular de-mobilisation, and the disarray of the left forces that would have been needed to create the progressive dynamic for this step, are enormous problems.

And of course the unfavourable relation of forces which brought the surrender of Oslo has only grown worse as a result of it.

The past politics of the Palestinian Marxist left (the Popular Front and the Democratic Front) have led to the disintegration which now exists. They failed ever to differentiate their politics from that of the PLO leadership – that is, to carry on a struggle for a democratic program which centres around a secular and unified Palestine.

Nor, in the past, did these parties condemn the PLO leadership, which has forsaken this task and accepted the Palestine

partition and the idea of a Palestinian state alongside Israel.

The Palestinian Left never adopted a policy of class independence, and could not adopt a class programme which connected the social, democratic and national demands. In short they acted within the narrow confines of petit-bourgeois nationalism: they were certainly radically anti-Zionism and anti-imperialist, but never anti-capitalist.

Thus, in the post-Oslo era, we are witness to the completion of the imperialist partition policy: Palestinian and Israeli working classes whose leaderships are captive under their own national bourgeois ideologies and policies.

This is an achievement much more significant for the multi-national corporations, the IMF, and the World Bank, since it is a necessary condition for the stability of their direct profits throughout the entire Middle East. ★

The author works at the Alternative Information Centre in Jerusalem. She is an editor of *News from Within*. This article is based on her presentation to the *Socialist Outlook* event, Fighting Neo-Liberalism world-wide, held in London on November 15.



Transformation and regroupment

Regroupments of forces determined to learn the lessons of the historical abomination that was Stalinism and to continue, against the winds and the tides, to fight against capitalism are being realised in a number of countries.

The organisations of the Fourth International are ready to be part of the re-groupment process. It is an important step towards the recomposition of the anti-capitalist left on a world scale. At the international level, the Fourth International is an active participant in re-groupment, bringing with it the advantages of a long tradition of combat against capitalism and Stalinism. ★

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60 Years of the 4th International

Charlie van Gelderen is the last living participant from the Fourth International's founding conference in 1938.

To mark the 60th anniversary of the organisation, he gave the following speech to the 1998 Fourth International Youth Camp in Denmark.

In September 1938, I was privileged to attend the Founding Conference of the Fourth International as an observer from the Fourth International Organisation of South Africa.

It was not accidental that the conference took place at that historical moment. The beginning of the second world war was a year ahead, but its threat was looming over Europe.

The international labour movement was in total disarray, its Stalinist and social democratic leaderships unable and unwilling to organise working class resistance to the coming catastrophe. Far from resisting the war, they were, in fact, vigorously at work mobilising the masses for enthusiastic support of the war.

Security

It was against this background that the thirty delegates met in Paris that September. (It is often stated that the founding conference took place in Switzerland. This was for security reasons.)

We had very real reasons to fear the activities of both the police of the bourgeois states and the secret agents of the Stalinist regime, the GPU. Rudolf Klement, the secretary of the organising committee was, in fact, abducted and assassinated on the eve of the conference.

The conference itself was penetrated by a GPU agent, known to us as Etienne, who attended as the Russian delegate. His real name was Mark Zborowski, and he had wormed his way into the confidences of Trotsky's son, Sedov.

When I look back, I am appalled at the almost complete lack of security. Paris seemed to be swarming with members of the youth organisation of the American section. They were all aware that the conference was taking place, and were frequenting cafes with delegates.

It was in this atmosphere that the man who was to drive an ice pick into the brain of Leon Trotsky years later, known to us then as Jacson, a Belgian sports journalist, was able to enter into a

relationship with Sylvia Ageloff, one of the young American comrades who were in Paris simply to have a good time.

He was, of course, a GPU agent, a Spaniard, Ramon Mercader. I saw a great deal of him and he was, apparently, not at all interested in politics. He seemed to have plenty of money, which he spent freely.

Patriotism

The conduct of the leaderships of the Second and Third (Communist) Internationals in those fateful months leading up to World War II, was even more craven than that of the Second International in 1914.

All the important parties of the Second International – the German, the French and the British Labour Party formed a "civil peace" with their respective capitalist class, once war actually broke out.

But, before hostilities began in August 1914, they at least made noises, deceiving the masses that they were trying to stop the threatening catastrophe. They met in Brussels, to discuss what could be done to mobilise the workers, half-heartedly, it is true, and completely without conviction.

Noske and Ebert were waiting breathlessly to join their compatriots in singing "Deutschland, Deutschland Uber Alles". In Britain Henderson was waiting to join the War Cabinet.

"Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past."

The 18th Brumaire of Louis Napoleon
Karl Marx

Fourth International.

Now, sixty years later, we can look back and ask ourselves, were we right? Or were people like Isaac Deutscher right, who thought it was premature and that there were still possibilities to work inside the Comintern? These questions have returned to us throughout our history, and I will return to them later.

The transitional idea

The main task of the Founding Conference was to adopt the programme *The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International*, perhaps better known as the *Transitional Programme*.

Trotsky, exiled in Mexico, was unable to attend the Founding Conference, but in the Spring of 1938, he prepared the draft of the Transitional Programme, which was discussed in all sections of the International Communist League, the precursor of the Fourth International.

He considered its adoption the "most capital conquest" of the revolutionary movement since Lenin's time, perhaps a rather exaggerated claim, but its importance must not be underestimated.

The significance of the Transitional Programme must not be judged by a pedantic study of its texts. Many of its demands are no longer relevant but this is also true, of course, of the last section of the Communist Manifesto. It in no way diminishes its historic importance. Those who come fresh to the document will probably be surprised how fresh and modern much of it still is.

The Programme made a thorough and rounded analysis of the period in which it was launched. It presented to the international working class, to the peasants, the poor and oppressed in the colonial countries and to the revolutionary core of Bolsheviks fighting the Stalinist bureaucracy in the Soviet Union, a programme for immediate action on all the pressing problem of life and struggle which confronted them.

It differed from previous programmes because of its transitional approach.

The programme of the Second International was divided into two parts, independent of each other. The minimum programme "limited itself to reforms within bourgeois society" and the maximum programme promised "socialism in the indefinite future". There was no bridge between the minimum and the maximum programmes. Socialism was mentioned only in passing at May Day rallies.

The same approach lay behind the Stalinist revisionist theory of a "two-stage revolution": first the struggle for democracy then – but when? – on to socialism. The latest example of this is the strategy of the South African Communist Party during the transition from apartheid to "non-racial" capitalism and parliamentary democracy.

The Transitional Programme takes the struggle from where it is, from the concrete consciousness of the working class today to the conquest of power and socialism. It lived up to the prescription laid down by Rosa Luxemburg:

"Our whole programme would be a miserable scrap of paper if it were not capable of serving us for all eventualities

and in every moment of the struggle, and to serve us by virtue of it being practised and not by its being shelved.

"If our programme is the historical formulation of the historical development of society from capitalism to socialism, then obviously it must formulate also the transitional phases of this development.

"It must contain them in their fundamental features and therefore also be able to indicate to the proletariat the corresponding attitude in the sense of approaching closer to socialism in every given moment.

"From this it follows that for the proletariat there cannot be, in general, a single moment when it would be compelled to leave its programme in the lurch, or in which it could be left in the lurch by its programme."

Rosa Luxemburg would have approved of Trotsky's Transitional Programme.

In 1999 – time for revolution

In Britain we now have the Labour Party in power with the biggest majority a government party has ever enjoyed. In France we have a so-called Socialist government. But, far from advancing toward socialism, they are busy dismantling even the nationalised enterprises still extant and embracing the "free market" with even greater enthusiasm than their right-wing predecessors in office. They have even left large chunks of their own reformist programmes in the lurch.

The Stalinised Communist Parties of China and Vietnam are travelling at breakneck speed in the same direction. The Stalinist distortion of the workers' state has been overcome by its own contradictions and the utopian illusion of building "socialism in one country".

The starting point of the Transitional Programme is that the economic prerequisites for a socialist revolution have already, in general, been achieved.

True, capitalism is still turning out new inventions and higher levels of technology. It has spread its tentacles into every corner of the globe, as Marx and Engels predicted in the *Communist Manifesto*, 150 years ago. But this has not filled the bellies of the starving masses in the so-called developing world.

Financial crisis is still an unavoidable feature of capitalism. There really is no way out for the capitalist class.

This was true in 1938, when the Fourth International was founded, as it is today. The historical conditions for socialism have not only ripened but, in the words of the *Transitional Programme*, they "have begun to get

somewhat rotten."

Old demands...

As I said earlier, people who come fresh to the *Transitional Programme* will find that many of its prescriptions for the ills which afflict society are still valid. What the *Programme* describes as the two basic economic afflictions which summarise the increasing absurdity of the capitalist system; unemployment and high prices, are still very much with us.

As then, so today, we demand the right to work and decent living conditions for every one, not only in the industrialised countries but also in the deprived underdeveloped lands.

We want to see an end to the pictures of children starving in famine conditions while in Europe and America the cold storage units are overfilled with carcasses of meat and farmers are encouraged not to produce with heavy subsidies.

To combat the ever rising prices, the 1938 programme raised the slogan of a sliding scale of wages. This means that collective agreements should assure an automatic rise in wages, in relation to the increase in consumer goods. This is a slogan which we could well use today and to which we would add that state pensions also should be pegged to the rising cost of living.

Today we have millions of working class families where no one has been in a job for years. The working class cannot permit an increase of chronically unemployed paupers. In Europe we have over 20 million unemployed and the weekly hours for those still at work is rising.

In the United States, where in 1950 corporation executives were 30 to 40 times higher paid than the average of their employees, by 1990 this had increased to 140 times higher.

In the so-called developing countries, the workless total uncountable millions, forcing the youth into prostitution and making families dependent on child labour. These basic facts make some of the demands of the *Transitional Programme* very relevant.

As in 1938, the demand for a programme of public works and a sliding scale of working hours should be in the programme of demands of every trade union. The bosses vote themselves fat cat salary increases and bonus shares.

In Britain, the directors of the privatised Yorkshire Water, despite the droughts of the last years and record complaints from the consumers, have voted themselves pay increases of 40 per cent. The workers who make the flow of water possible, are limited to pay increases of 5 per cent.

The merchant bankers, Goldman Sachs have voted to sell off the company. Each of the 190 full partners will make at least £50 million from the deal – without putting in any extra hours of work.

Yet they insist that giving in to the demands of the workers for a bigger

share of the wealth which they produce with their labour would not be possible; that it would lead to increased unemployment and bankruptcies. To this the workers must raise again the demand put forward in the *Transitional Programme*: Let us have a look at the books!

...and new demands

Of course, the *Transitional Programme*, drafted in 1938, must be brought up-to-date, to meet the conditions of today and related to the current consciousness of the workers and the oppressed. But its methodology is as relevant as ever.

I refer you again to the quotation from Marx with which I began. While we make our own history we can only do so "under circumstances directly encountered..."

In 1938, the most immediate dangers facing the world were imperialism, fascism and war. While these will remain dangers as long as capitalism lasts, a revised *Transitional Programme* would embrace the issues of women and gay rights and the environment.

We must demand the abolition of the international debts of the impoverished countries of Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and Latin America.

Capital, in its mad rush for profit is fast destroying the earth's resources, regardless of the cost in human life which this entails.

Marginalisation

Why, if the programme adopted at the Founding Conference was so correct why did the Fourth International not develop into a powerful organisation? Why did it not succeed in planting itself deep into the working class movement? What has been its role and its influence in the 60 years since it was founded?

Of course, we do not claim infallibility, we were certainly not always right. We have to admit that in the sixty years since it was founded, the Fourth International has not succeeded in implanting itself deeply in the mass movement. It is impossible, in the space available, to go into all the reasons for this and others will find different explanations.

We knew war was coming but it came less than a year later – before we could make any real impact. The working class had experienced a series of defeats — Germany, Spain, Austria. In the Soviet Union, what remained of the Bolshevik cadres who made the October revolution had been physically annihilated.

Thanks to the revisionist Marxism of the Stalinists and the social-patriotic doctrines of the reformists, the struggle against fascism was transformed into support for war against Germany. For the Stalinist parties, of course, this changed after the signing of the Stalin-Hitler pact.

We were rowing against the stream. Our tiny forces could not effectively

counter the mass produced propaganda of the Stalinist and social democratic bureaucracies.

And, of course, in a period when the working class was in retreat, there were many in our ranks and on the periphery of our movement, who could not stand up to this; who identified the years of reaction as the conclusive defeat of the revolution.

(We see the same symptoms today, with the apparent triumph of the so-called free market, which has even been described as "the end of history").

The assassination of Trotsky was also a powerful blow. His leadership at that time was crucial and irreplaceable.

Like Trotsky, we expected that, however the war started, the Soviet Union would inevitably be involved. And that, whatever the outcome, the Stalinist bureaucracy would collapse. In the event, the military victory of the Red Army strengthened Stalin's grip and gave him renewed prestige.

This led to increased despondency in our ranks and to people seeking alternative programmes — even to desertions to Stalinism and to bourgeois democracy.

I again return to the question: Were we right to launch the Fourth International when we did and what has it accomplished?

Let us look at the nature of the historic period in which we took the decision. What were our targets?

The objective conditions were revolutionary, but the working class, the proletariat who was to be the instrument of the revolution, was ideologically backward and tethered to Stalinism and reformism.

Our programme, the *Transitional Programme*, laid down a line of action which would free the working class from these chains and lead them into battle with slogans and demands that corresponded to the objective reality.

Above all it aimed to restore the class independence of the working class, to tear them away from the ideology which tied them to the bourgeoisie.

Sectarianism

For reasons which I have already mentioned – the swift approach of the war, which transformed the anti-fascism of the workers in the bourgeois democratic countries into a patriotic war against Germany (a line vigorously endorsed by the Stalinist parties until the signing of the Hitler-Stalin pact and to which they returned with renewed enthusiasm after the invasion of the Soviet Union) we were unable to make any real impact.

But we cannot take refuge in blaming the objective conditions. While our activities are circumscribed by the circumstances in which we find ourselves, human beings do make their own history.

We believed, with Trotsky, that the collapse of the bureaucratic Stalinist regime in the Soviet Union would place

the Fourth International in a favourable place to give the proletariat renewed revolutionary Marxist leadership.

Perhaps, and I emphasise perhaps, if we had a strong leadership and a united international we could have made some impact on the remaining revolutionary cadres in the Soviet Union when the regime began to unravel in the period since 1989.

Many of them did turn to the writings of Trotsky as they became available. In addition to Trotsky's works, the Fourth International had made valuable theoretical contributions to Marxism.

But, instead of being confronted with a united Fourth International, they found themselves facing a dozen disparate grouplets all claiming to be the authentic voice of Trotskyism.

Sectarian splits have been a chronic ailment in our movement. Minorities, instead of remaining inside the international and fighting for their positions, split off on the slightest pretext, believing themselves to be more Trotskyist than Trotsky, to form tiny sects, impotent and without any future.

How different to Trotsky, who persisted in his adherence to the Third International till 1933 and the utter defeat of the German working class.

The future

Our International is not dead or dying. In these dark days of defeat and betrayal we have kept aloft the banner of revolutionary Marxism.

The working class, the oppressed peoples of the world will not for ever bear the crushing burdens of unemployment, poverty and repression which is their lot under capitalism. For capitalism there is no way out.

Even as I write, the signs of a new economic decline are evident. The liberal economists talk of "down-sizing", "re-organising production" and "layoffs". These are euphemisms for the sack.

There is an ever-decreasing expenditure, in real terms, on the social and health services. The homeless are still living in the streets. The only expenditure which has increased is in preparation for the next war.

Only the workers of the world and their allies in the underdeveloped countries can put an end to this madness.

For that they need international leadership and a program which will give a revolutionary impulse to the struggle. I believe the *Transitional Programme* of the FI, brought up to date, can give that leadership. ★

• During 1999 we will present a range of viewpoints on the history of the revolutionary socialist movement, eye-witness reports from key moments, and original documents. For a full list of upcoming texts, write or e-mail us!

In defence of Communism

by Daniel Bensaïd

Preface

The cold war is over, but anti-communism is stronger than ever.

In 1995, François Furet submitted his proposal for an epitaph on the tombstone of communism, in the form of his thick book *A past and an illusion: an essay on the Communist idea in the 20th century*.¹

In 1997, a team of historians coordinated by Stéphane Courtois authored an even more monumental work. *The Black Book of Communism: Crimes, terror, repression*.² This book takes 800 pages to list the crimes of communism throughout the world and to calculate the number of corpses littered throughout its history.

The book's goal is to pull communism out of its grave in order to put it on trial. For fear, perhaps, that it still haunts the world...

A massive success in France, the *Black Book* has already been published in German, French and Italian. Swedish and English versions will go on sale in the next few weeks.

"Why the hesitation to set up a Nuremberg tribunal [to judge] communism?" asks Courtois. He declares himself judge and jury and proceeds to pronounce his verdict. Communism, he says, is indistinguishable from Stalinism, and was at least as criminal as Nazism.

The result is a terrible muddling of people's terms of reference, and a thoroughgoing disorientation of political, historical and ethical consciousness.

By the end of the book, the history of the 20th century looks like a warehouse of neatly stacked corpses, in which the October Revolution was nothing less than a horrible error and the communist ideal a murderous monstrosity.

This is a book about history. But its impact, and the massive media coverage it has received, reflect a very modern ideological struggle.

The following text by Daniel Bensaïd was first published in pamphlet form by France's Ligue Communiste Revolutionnaire. As the author explained in the preface to that edition, "we cannot allow the history of the Russian Revolution to be told as a tale of untrammelled repression. We cannot let reason give way to fury. We cannot let the victims in this history be painted with the same brush as their hangmen.

"For these reasons, we have to return to October, to study it and to draw lessons for the future. For October was too great an event to be trampled underfoot by this new breed of historian-cum-inquisitor." [JD]

Introduction

Writing about the French Revolution in 1798 – at the height of the Reaction – Emmanuel Kant said that such an event, whatever its failings and retreats, was not destined to be forgotten. This was so, he said, because such a major break in the course of events provided a glimpse, even if only briefly, of the promise of genuine human freedom.

Kant was right. Our task today is to see if the great promise associated with the October Revolution – that event that shook the world, that ray of hope in the midst of the darkness and carnage of the First World War – can itself also be "recalled...by nations". These are the stakes involved in the research into and struggle over this question of our collective historical memory.

The 80th anniversary of the October Revolution of 1917 almost went unnoticed. The release of the *Black Book of Communism* has at least had the merit of once again focussing attention on the "October affair", one of those major squabbles that will never truly be settled.

The main person behind the collection of essays, Stéphane Courtois, spells it out very clearly when he says that the goal of his enterprise is to prove that Stalinism was fully in keeping with communism, that Stalin was the direct heir of Lenin, and that there was an airtight continuity between the initial revolutionary flame and the icy twilight of the Gulag. "A Stalinist and a communist are one and the same," he writes in the November 9 edition of *le Journal du Dimanche*.

It is essential that we provide a straightforward answer to the question raised by the great Soviet historian Mikhail Guefter: "This is the problem that has to be unravelled: was the march of events indeed continuous, or rather are we dealing with two sequences of events that, although intimately linked, in the final analysis belonged to two distinct political and moral universes?" (5)

A decisive question indeed, the answers to which determine the way we see the century that is winding down – and the commitments we make for the coming turbulent century. If Stalinism, as some argue or are prepared to concede, was no more than a simple "devia-

tion" or a "tragic extension" of the communist project, we would have to draw some very radical conclusions about communism as such.

1. A very fin-de-siècle trial

This is precisely what the backers of the *Black Book* want. In fact, it is quite easy to be taken aback by the Cold War tone adopted by Stéphane Courtois and some of the media coverage of the book.

But the cold-war tone is not anachronistic. Capitalism – shrewdly rebaptised as "market democracy" – has been triumphantly proclaiming the defeat of any kind of alternative after the disintegration of the Soviet Union. It is meant to be the absolute hands-down winner at the end of the 20th century.

In truth, however, this unrelenting Cold War attitude betrays a terrible, repressed fear – the fear that the vices and festering sores of the system will be all the more damning now that capitalism can no longer use its now-defunct bureaucratic twin as an alibi.

What the system needs, therefore, is a preventative demonisation of anything that could hint at a different future for the planet.

Now that its Stalinist counterfeit has collapsed utterly, the spectre of communism can once again return to haunt the world.

How many formerly zealous Stalinists – due to their inability to distinguish between Stalinism and communism – stopped being communists when they stopped being Stalinists, all the better to embrace the cause of capitalism with the fervour of the newly converted?

Stalinism and communism are not only discrete, but also implacably antagonistic. Recalling this difference is one important way for us to pay tribute to the many communist victims of Stalinism.

Stalinism is not a variant of communism, but rather the tradename for the bureaucratic counter-revolution. To be sure, in the throes of the struggle against the Nazis and in the debates over the consequences of the world crisis between the two World Wars, honest party members did not immediately take stock of this fact and continued to devote themselves body and soul to the cause. But this changes nothing. To answer Mikhail Guefter's question, we are indeed dealing with "two political and moral worlds", distinct and irreconcilable.

In other words, our conclusions re in stark contradiction to those drawn by Stéphane Courtois in the *Black Book of Communism*.

Courtois occasionally denies having called for a Nuremberg trial for communism. He is somewhat embarrassed about sharing such a demand with fart-

"This is the problem that has to be unravelled: was the march of events indeed continuous, or rather are we dealing with two sequences of events that, although intimately linked, in the final analysis belong to two distinct political and moral universes?

If we do not manage to unravel this problem, even today we might through carelessness become dangerous.

When we do not pause to reflect upon the past, the worst prejudices can be revived and historical consciousness is barred from piercing its way into the realm of politics."

Mikhail Guefter
"Stalin died yesterday" ⁴

right leaders like Jean-Marie Le Pen of France's *Front National*.

However, the approach taken by the *Black Book* tends not only to erase the differences between Nazism and communism but also to suggesting that a purely "objective" and arithmetic comparison of the two actually favours Nazism.

Nazism, the book says, claimed only 25 million lives against communism's 100m; it was responsible for 20 years of terror, as opposed to communism's 60 years.

The first jacket of the book loudly proclaimed that communism had taken 100 million lives. In the book itself, the authors arrive at a figure of 85 million. Apparently, Courtois or his publishers had rather cavalierly thrown in another 15 million for good measure.

There is something terribly cynical about this morbid, wholesale number-crunching that throws together different countries, periods, causes and camps. It is also, of course, deeply disrespectful towards the victims themselves.

In the case of the Soviet Union, Courtois counts 20 million victims, although we are left in the dark as to what this figure covers exactly.

In his contribution to the *Black Book*, Nicolas Werth actually provides a figure that is lower than the usual approximations. He says that historians, basing themselves on detailed archives, now calculate the great purges of 1936-1938 claimed some 690,000 victims. This is already enormous, worse than a horrific tragedy.

Werth also establishes that on average

two million people were held in the Gulag every year, of which a greater proportion than previously believed were actually freed to be replaced by new arrivals.

To come up with the figure of 20 million deaths, it is therefore necessary to include — in addition to the purges and the Gulag — the two great famines (five million deaths in 1921-1922 and six million in 1932-1933) and the civil war.

It comes as no surprise, however, that the authors of the *Black Book* cannot demonstrate that the famines and the civil war were "crimes of communism", the result of exterminations coldly planned and executed.

With such an ideological approach, it wouldn't be very difficult to write a *Red Book of the Crimes of Capital*, adding together the victims of colonial pillage and genocide, world wars, of deaths at work, epidemics, endemic famines, not only of yesteryear but of the present day as well.

In the 20th century alone, it would be easy to count several hundred million victims. Hannah Arendt saw modern imperialism as the blueprint of totalitarianism and the colonial concentration camps of Africa as the prelude to many other camps.(6)

If we are no longer examining regimes, periods and specific conflicts, and rather seeking to incriminate an idea as such, how many deaths through the centuries could be blamed on Christianity and its various evangelical "missions", to free-market capitalism and "laissez-faire"?

Even in Russia, and even if we accept Courtois' cock-and-bull calculations, capitalism would still be responsible for many more than Stalinism's "20 million deaths". Remember the two world wars.

Stalinism's crimes are sufficiently hair-raising, horrific and massive for there to be any reason to throw further crimes into the balance. Unless of course the objective is deliberately to cloud historical analysis.

This was certainly what happened on the occasion of the bicentennial of the French Revolution. At the time, some historians showed great enthusiasm in blaming the Revolution not only for the Terror or the repression of the Vendée resistance, but also for the white terror, for deaths in the war against the intervention of the counter-revolutionary coalition, and even for the victims of the Napoleonic wars!

There is nothing new about legitimate and useful comparisons of Nazism and Stalinism. Trotsky, for one, spoke of Hitler and Stalin as "twin celestial bodies".

But the differences are just as important as the similarities. The Nazi regime applied its programme and kept its

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sinister promises, whereas the Stalinist regime was built *against* the communist project of emancipation.

The regime had to devour communism's activist base in order to consolidate itself. The great number of circles of dissidence and opposition between the two wars are proof of this tragic reversal. There were the suicides, among others, of Maïakovski, Joffe, Tucholsky and Benjamin.

Can the Nazis point to such examples of tormented conscience in the face of an ideal that has been betrayed and deformed? Unlike Stalin's Russia, Hitler's Germany didn't need to become "the country of the great lie". After all, the Nazis were proud of their accomplishments, whereas Stalinist bureaucrats couldn't face themselves in the mirror of communist principles.

In choosing a historical method that deliberately depoliticises and dilutes concrete history in time and space, the authors of the *Black Book* leave us with little more than a theatre of shadows.

Nicolas Werth, for example, openly embraces "the deprioritisation of political history", all the better to trace in a linear fashion the decontextualised history of repression. The goal is no longer that of putting a regime, an era, or identifiable hangmen on trial – but rather that of incriminating an idea, "the idea that kills".

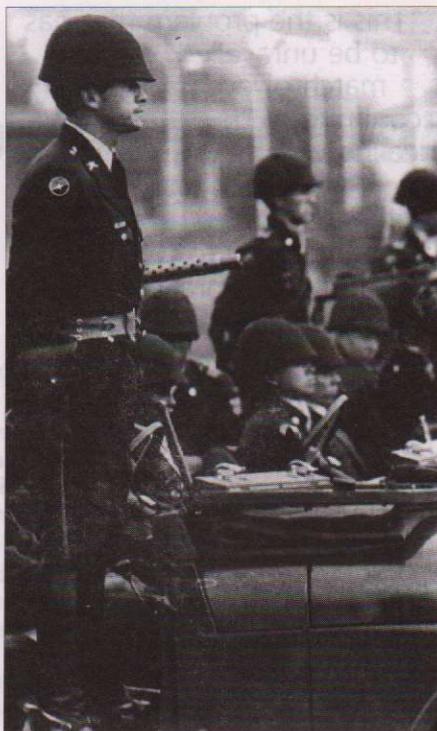
To carry out a trial not of facts and specific crimes but of an idea, inevitably creates collective guilt and makes a crime of alleged intentions.

For Courtois, the court of history is not only retroactive. It becomes dangerously preventative, when he laments that "the idea of revolution has not been buried deeply enough" and notes with indignation that "openly revolutionary groups remain active and operate in complete legality"!

To be sure, repentance is very much the fashion these days. Former Stalinists have a bad conscience that weighs on them like a rock. Some like Courtois himself, may well have a lot of mourning to do. Their atonement may well be peppered with resentment. But that is their own business.

But what about those who have remained communists, without ever having worshipped Stalin or recited from Chairman Mao's *Little Red Book*? What on earth does Courtois expect these communists to atone for? They doubtless made errors here and there. But given the way the world is going, it is clear that they have chosen neither the wrong cause nor the wrong adversary.

To understand the tragedies of the 20th century, and to draw useful lessons



for the future, we have to leave the ideological stage. We have to go beyond the conflicting shadows that are cast there, immerse ourselves in the stuff of history, and examine the logic of political conflicts in which concrete choices are made between many different possible outcomes.

2. Revolution or coup d'état?

A critical review of the Russian Revolution on the occasion of its 80th anniversary raises a series of questions, both historical and programmatic in nature. The stakes are high, involving our very ability to envision a future open to revolutionary activity. After all, each version of the past points to a different future.

The mass of new documents made available by the opening of Soviet archives will undoubtedly shed new light on the events of those years and give rise to new controversies. But even before delving into the archives, we run up against the dominant ready-made ideological discourse.

In these times of counter-reform and reaction, it should come as no surprise that Lenin and Trotsky are vilified in the same way that the heroes of the French revolution, Robespierre and Saint-Just, were vilified during the Restoration.

To orient oneself in the current controversy, a good starting point is a review of three ideas that are quite widespread today:

1. October was not really a revolution but rather a plot or a minority-inspired *coup d'état*. From the beginning, it imposed, from above, its authoritarian conception of social organisation, benefiting a new elite.

2. The evolution of the Russian Revolu-

tion and its totalitarian misadventures were foreseeable. They were the product of a kind of original sin in the revolutionary idea. The unfolding of real historical events can therefore be reduced to tracing the lineage and the fulfillment of this perverse idea – brazenly leaving aside major upheavals, colossal events, and the uncertain outcome of all struggles.

3. The Russian Revolution was damned from the start. Its birth was "premature" relative to the "historical process". It was the product of an attempt to force the course and pace of history. The "objective conditions" for overthrowing capitalism were not in place. Rather than having the wisdom to "self-restrain" their project, Bolshevik leaders were in fact the active agents of this violation of the "laws of history".

3. A revolution "from below"

The Russian Revolution was not the result of some conspiracy, but rather the explosion – in the context of the war – of the contradictions accumulated under the autocratic conservatism of the Czarist regime.

By the beginning of the century, Russian society had come up against the brick wall of these contradictions. The country was an exemplary case of "combined and uneven development", at once a dominant and a dependent country. It combined the features of the feudal countryside, where serfdom had officially been abolished for less than half a century, and the features of the most concentrated form of industrial capitalism. Although a major power, it was dependent both technologically and financially.

The list of grievances drawn up by father Gapone during the 1905 revolution is a striking inventory of the misery prevailing in the land of the Czars. Attempts at reform were quickly blocked by the oligarchy's conservatism, the stubbornness of the despot, and the weakness of a bourgeoisie confronted with a nascent workers movement.

The tasks of the democratic revolution therefore fell to a kind of third estate in which – unlike the French Revolution – the modern proletariat, although in a minority, had already become the most dynamic force.

It is for this reason that "Holy Russia" came to represent the "weak link" in the imperialist chain.

The experience of the First World War set the tinderbox alight.

The evolution of the revolutionary process between February and October 1917, demonstrates quite clearly that it was not a matter of a conspiracy of a handful of professional agitators.

Rather, it was the accelerated assimilation of a political experience on a mass scale, of a wide-ranging metamor-

phism of consciousness, of a constant shifting of the relationship of forces.

In his masterful *History of the Russian Revolution*, Trotsky meticulously analyses this radicalisation – from one trade union election to the next, from one municipal election to the next – among workers, soldiers and peasants.(7)

Although the Bolsheviks accounted for only 13 percent of delegates at the congress of soviets in June 1917, things quickly changed after the July Days and Kornilov's attempted coup. By the second congress in October, the Bolsheviks accounted for 45-60% of soviet delegates.

The insurrection was not a deft military sleight of hand carried out by surprise. Rather, it was the outcome and temporary resolution of a test of strength that had been brewing throughout a year. Mass sentiment was consistently to the left of the organised parties and their leaderships – not only the Socialist Revolutionaries, but even a part of the Bolshevik leadership. Up to and including the vote on insurrection!

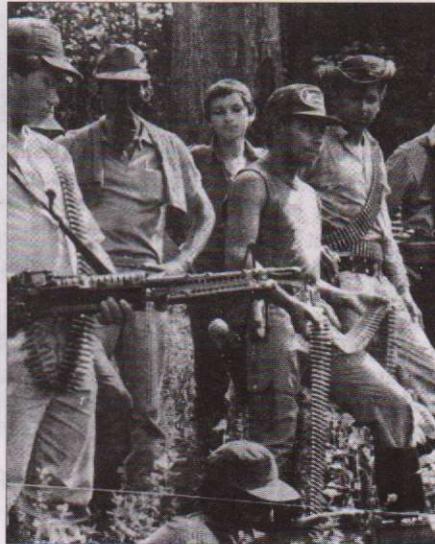
Historians generally concur that the October insurrection – no more violent than the taking of the Bastille – was the culminating moment (*denouement*) of a year-long decomposition of the old regime. This is why there was a very low cost in human lives, when compared to the kinds of violence we have experienced ever since.

The relative "ease" of the insurrectionary seizure of power by the Bolsheviks illustrates the impotence of the the Russian bourgeoisie between February and October. It had been unable to set up a state and to undertake the building of a modern nation upon the ruins of Czarism.

As a consequence, it was not a matter of choosing between revolution on the one hand, and an unqualified democracy on the other. Rather, the country was faced with two authoritarian options – revolution, or a military dictatorship under Kornilov or someone like him.

If by revolution we understand a spirit and movement of transformation "from below", harnessing the deepest aspirations of the people – as opposed to the implementation of some wonderful plan by an enlightened elite – then the Russian Revolution was very much a revolution, in the full sense of the word, rooted in basic demands for peace and land.

To understand that a radical overhaul of property and power relations was genuinely afoot, one need only examine the legislation adopted by the new regime during the first months of the first year of the revolution. Under the pressure of circumstance, these changes sometimes occurred at a quicker pace than had been expected or even desired.



A number of books describe this parting in the ways of the world, notably John Reed's *Ten Days that Shook the World*.(8). It had an immediate international impact, particularly on the labour and socialist movements in other countries.(9)

At the time, few people shed tears for the Czarist regime and its last despotic ruler.(10) Marc Ferro emphasises that – as in all authentic revolutions – the world was being turned on its head, including in the details of daily life. In Odessa, he notes, university students imposed a new history curriculum on their professors; in Petrograd, workers obliged their bosses to learn "the new labour law"; in the army, soldiers invited the chaplain to their meetings "to give his life new meaning"; in some schools, younger boys demanded the right to receive boxing lessons in order to earn the respect of their seniors. (11)

4. The test of the civil war

In spite of the terrible conditions, this initial revolutionary dynamic was still at play during the civil war that began in the summer of 1918. In his contribution to the *Black Book*, Nicolas Werth provides a detailed list of all the forces that were lined up against the new regime. There were Kolchak and Denikin's White armies, and the French and British-led foreign intervention. There were also massive peasant upheavals against food requisitions and working class riots against rationing.

Reading Werth's contribution, it is difficult to imagine where the revolutionary government could have found the strength to defeat such powerful adversaries. Werth argues that it did so through minority terror and the recruitment of desperate lumpenproletarians into the secret police, the *Cheka*.

His explanation takes into account neither the establishment of the Red Army in just a few months time, nor its many victories.

According to the authors of the *Black Book*, the Bolsheviks wanted the civil war from the start. Courtois *et al* describe the terror unleashed from the summer of 1918 onwards as the starting point for all the crimes committed since then in the name of communism.

But real history – made up of conflicts, struggles, uncertainty, victories and defeats – cannot be reduced to this dark tale of the self-development of a concept, in which "the idea gives birth to the world".

It makes more sense to examine the full scope of the civil war and to recognise that it involved a merciless confrontation of antagonistic social forces.

While the Bolsheviks did not want the civil war, they did foresee it. There is a big difference.

From the French Revolution onwards, every revolution has demonstrated the unhappy truth that there will always be a conservative reaction to emancipation movements. Counter-revolution follows revolution like a shadow.

This was shown in 1792 when Brunswick's troops marched on Paris, in 1848 with the June massacres, and during the Bloody Week of 1871.

This rule hasn't been defied since, from Franco's *pronunciamiento* in 1936 to Suharto's 1965 *coup d'état* in Indonesia (which took at least 500,000 lives) to Pinochet's coup in Chile in 1973.

Russian revolutionaries did not declare civil war any more than French revolutionaries had in 1792. They did not call on French and British troops to intervene and try to overthrow them!

Werth recalls that beginning in the summer of 1918 the White armies were solidly entrenched on three fronts and that the Bolsheviks "did not control much more than Moscow and the surrounding region." The mechanisms of the Terror were set in motion in August-September 1918, when the foreign aggression and civil war began.

Likewise, during the French Revolution, Danton proclaimed the Terror to channel the spontaneous terror carried out by the population (the September massacres) in response to the threat posed to Paris by the advances of Brunswick's coalition troops.

Werth recognises that the Revolution was not to blame for the outbreak of civil war. Although he catalogues the horrors committed by both "Whites" and "Reds", he sees the genesis of the crimes still to come in a "hidden war within the war" against the peasantry.

In order to include the victims of the 1921-1922 famine in his accounting of the crimes of communism, Werth tends to describe the famine as being the result of a deliberate decision to exterminate the peasantry.

There is indeed proof of the harsh repression meted out against villages.

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But is it possible to separate the problem of the civil war and that of the agrarian question?

To confront aggression against the new government, the Red Army had to mobilise four million soldiers within the space of a few months. These soldiers had to be equipped and fed. Within two years, Petrograd and Moscow lost more than half their population. Industry was devastated and produced nothing. In such conditions, how else but by requisitioning were the cities and army to be fed?

To be sure, we can imagine ways in which things could have been differently. With hindsight, we can see the dangers associated with the establishment of a political police force and with the bureaucratic arbitrariness of local petty tyrants. But this is a concrete discussion over a range of political options — of possible alternatives in the face of real difficulties — and not a matter of abstract judgement.

By the end of the civil war, the grassroots no longer drove the leaders of the Revolution forward. Instead, the leadership strove to pull the grassroots along.

This is the origin of the mechanism of substitutionism, whereby the party substitutes itself for the people, the bureaucracy substitutes itself for the party, and the providential leader substitutes himself for everything and everyone else.

During this process, a new bureaucracy emerged — the legacy of the former regime and the result of the accelerated social mobility of new leaders.

After massive recruitment into the party in 1924, the several thousand October-era members held little weight, compared to the hundreds of thousands of new Bolsheyiks. In this new batch could be found many careerists who had rallied to the party after the civil war victory, alongside recycled elements from the Czarist administration.

5. The heritage of the civil war

The civil war was a disastrous way for the Revolution to start. It created a jaded acceptance of the most extreme and inhuman forms of violence, which had already reached new heights during the First World War.

It created a legacy of bureaucratic brutality, which Lenin became aware of during the crisis with Georgian communists, and which Trotsky describes in his book *Stalin*.⁽¹²⁾

Lenin's "Last Testament" and the "Journal of Lenin's Secretaries" (see Moshe Lewin's *Lenin's Last Struggle*)⁽¹³⁾ testify in the most pathetic of ways to Lenin's awareness of the problem. Whereas revolutions are the stuff of

multitudes and entire peoples, the dying Lenin was reduced to weighing the strengths and weaknesses of a handful of leaders on whom everything thereafter appeared to depend.

Without a doubt, the civil war was a "great leap backwards", a retreat for the country in relation to the level of development attained before 1914. The country had been bled dry. Of the four million inhabitants that Petrograd and Moscow had at the beginning of the Revolution, only 1.7 million were left at the end of the civil war. Petrograd's industrial workforce of 460,000 had been reduced to 80,000.

The devastated cities became parasites on the agricultural sector, obliging officials to carry out authoritarian supply operations in rural areas. The Red Army had four million members.

"When the new regime was finally able to take the country towards its declared objective," Moshe Lewin writes, "the starting point was actually much further back than it had been in 1917, let alone in 1914."

During the civil war a backward and statist socialism was put in place, a new state was built on ruins. "In fact, the state was established on the basis of a regressive form of social development" (in Moshe Lewin's *Russia, USSR, Russia*)⁽¹⁴⁾

This is the principal origin of the bureaucratisation. A number of Soviet leaders, including Lenin, were aware of the problem fairly early on and anguished over their inability to stem the tide. The unbearable weight of circumstances and the absence of a democratic culture played a key role. As such, there can be no doubt that confusion had set in — from the moment power was seized — over the relationship between the state, the party and the working class.

This confusion was rooted in the idea of the expected rapid withering away of the state and disappearance of conflicting trends within the population. It paved the way for the "statification" of society, and not the socialisation of state functions.

Democratisation is a long and arduous process. It does not proceed at the same pace as decrees on economic reform. Especially not in a country with hardly any traditions of parliamentarism and pluralism. It requires time, energy, and resources.

The burst of activity in committees and soviets in 1917 was the first stage in this process. A kind of civil society was coming into being. In the difficult context of the civil war, the simplest solution was to subordinate the organs of popular power — councils and soviets — to an enlightened guide, the party. In practice, this meant replacing the principle of elected and accountable

representatives with nominations by the party — as early as 1918 in some cases.

Ultimately this led to the elimination of the political pluralism and freedom of opinion required for democratic life. And the systematic subordination of the rule of law to the rule of "might means right".

Bureaucratisation did not stem solely in manipulation from above, but was also at times linked to demands from below. This made it much more difficult to stop.

The grassroots wanted order and peace, after having gone through so much in the World War and the civil war — so much deprivation, that quarrels over democracy, political agitation and calls for accountability were seen as a nuisance.

Marc Ferro quite rightly draws the reader's attention to this implacable dialectic. He recalls that at the beginning of the revolution there were "two trends — democratic-authoritarian in the grassroots and centralist-authoritarian in the leadership." By 1939, he writes, "only one of the two remained."

But for Ferro, the question was settled for all intents and purposes within the space of a few months in 1918 and 1919, with the marginalisation or disappearance of the neighbourhood and factory committees.⁽¹⁵⁾

In a similar vein, the philosopher Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe is even more explicit when he declares that Bolshevism was "counter-revolutionary from 1920-1921 onwards" (that is, even before Kronstadt).⁽¹⁶⁾

This is a key component of the debate. The point is not to provide a Manichean view contrasting the "golden age" of "Leninism under Lenin", on the one hand, and the history of Leninism under Stalin, on the other.

It is not about setting the glorious 1920s against the gloomy 1930s, as if nothing had yet to go wrong in the land of the soviets.

Yes, bureaucratisation was there from the start. Yes, the activities of the Cheka had a life of their own. Yes, the penal colony on the Solovki Islands was opened at the end of the civil war, before Lenin's death. Yes, the multi-party system was eliminated and freedom of expression restricted. Democratic rights in the party itself were restricted beginning with the tenth congress in 1921.

But the process we call the bureaucratic counter-revolution was not a simple event, for which there exists a specific date, symmetrical with the date of the October insurrection. It did not take place in a single day, but rather flowed from a series of decisions, confrontations and events.

Even those involved never concluded their debate over the exact periodisation





– not due to some obsession with historical precision, but rather in an effort to determine the political tasks that the outcome of the debate would imply.

The multiple facets of the process – its emergence and progression – can be charted in part through the accounts of Rosmer, Eastman, Souvarine, Istrati, Benjamin, Zamiatine and Bulgakov (in their letter to Stalin), in Maïakovski's poetry, Mandelstam and Tsetaïeva's anguish and Babel's notebooks.

Take the example of Kronstadt. The disastrous repression there in the spring of 1921 had the effect of raising awareness within the leadership of the need for a reorientation of economic policy.

Consider the civil war. Although the regime had emerged victorious, it proceeded to further restrict democratic freedoms rather than to widen their scope. The tenth party congress banned tendencies and factions.

With the benefit of hindsight, we can and must return to these questions of representative democracy, political pluralism, censorship, the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly, to provide a theoretical framework for examining the problems the pioneers of socialism had to confront – and to reflect upon the lessons of their experience.

It is clear that the legacy of Czarism, the four years of World War One slaughter for which 15 million Russian soldiers were mobilised, and the violence and atrocities of the civil war, all held much greater weight in determining the future of the revolutionary government than the doctrinal errors of its leaders, however serious these may have been.

In an article on "the Revolution and the law" published in the 1st December 1917 edition of *Pravda*, the future minister of education Anatole Lunacharski began with the observation that "a

society is not a unified whole".

It took a great amount of time and tragedy for all the implications of this tiny phrase to be grasped. Since a society is not a unified whole, even after overthrowing the old order, you cannot expect to socialise the state by decree without running the risk of "statifying" society.

Since a society is not a unified whole, trade unions have to remain independent from the state and from political parties, and parties independent from the state. Conflicting interests within a society must find an outlet in a independent press and a plurality of forms of representation. This is also why the autonomy of legal forms and norms must seek to ensure that the rule of law is not replaced by the perpetually arbitrary rule of "might means right".

The defense of political pluralism is therefore not a question of circumstance, but rather an essential condition for socialist democracy. This is the conclusion Trotsky reaches in *The Revolution Betrayed*. "In reality classes are heterogeneous; they are torn by inner antagonisms, and arrive at the solution of common problems no otherwise than an inner struggle of tendencies, groups and parties."(17)

This means that the collective will can only be expressed through a free electoral process – no matter the institutional forms – that combines direct participatory democracy and representative democracy.

While there is no absolute guarantee against bureaucratisation and the professional dangers of power, experience suggests the need for a number of specific measures and an overall approach.

First, the distinction between classes, parties and the state must be reflected in the recognition of political and trade-union pluralism. This is the only way to

allow for a confrontation between different programmes and different ways of responding to all the big questions a society faces. An exchange of the different points of view found in local government bodies is not enough.

Second, those elected should be directly responsible to their voters, who should have the right to recall their representatives. Representatives, however, should not be bound to a specific mandate since this would prevent elected assemblies from engaging in genuine exchange and deliberation.

Third, strict limits should be placed on a person's right to hold several elected offices at once, and on their right to renew their mandates. Their salary should be no higher than that of a skilled worker or public sector employee, in order to prevent government from becoming the personal and professional preserve of a specific layer of individuals.

Fourth, government should be decentralised with responsibilities going to that level of local, regional or national administration closest to the citizenry – with the right of veto for lower levels of government in matters that affect them directly. Provision should also be made for the right to call referenda on popular initiative.

A democracy of the freely associated producers is perfectly compatible with a system of universal suffrage. Grassroots local councils and territorial assemblies made up of workplace and neighbourhood representatives could be established, and could organise voting on major questions affecting the populations in question.



Recent experiences (Poland in 1980-1981 and Nicaragua in 1984) have pointed the way to a system based on two chambers – one elected directly through universal suffrage, the other directly representing workers, peasants, and more broadly, all the different forms (associations, committees) of people's power.

This approach (which in multinational states could include a chamber repre-

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sending the different nationalities) provides a theoretical framework for fulfilling the need for general elections, on the one hand, and the most direct form of popular democracy, on the other. It acts as a check on decrees that confuse the reality of society as a whole with the realm of the state — with the goal being the withering away of the state in tandem with the blossoming, spread and generalisation of self-management.

This overall approach is a summary of the lessons drawn from a painful history. It is not foolproof protection from the professional dangers of power, nor is it a recipe that can be followed in every concrete situation.

With hindsight, we can discuss the consequences of the Bolshevik decision to dissolve the Constituent Assembly. We have to compare the representativity of this assembly and that of the Congress of Soviets at the end of 1917. Would it have been preferable to maintain a dual form of representation (a kind of prolonged dual power)? Should free elections have been organised at the end of the civil war, in spite of the risk that the militarily defeated Whites would get the upper hand in a context of destruction and foreign pressure?

Each situation has to be examined in the specific context of the national and international relationship of forces at the time. That being said, every historical experience thus far has confirmed the warning issued by Rosa Luxemburg in 1918. “Without general elections, without unrestricted freedom of press and assembly, without a free struggle of opinion, life dies out in every public institution, becomes a mere semblance of life, in which only the bureaucracy remains as the active element.”(18)

The need for the most deeply rooted form of democracy is at once a question of freedom and a condition for economic efficiency. It is the only way to ensure the superiority of a planned, self-managed economy over the all-encompassing automatism of the market.

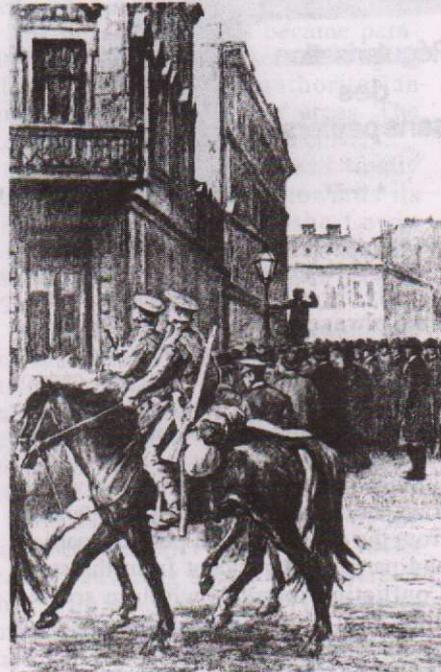
6. Lust for power?
Taken together, the outcome of the first socialist revolution, the triumph of Stalinism, and the crimes of the totalitarian bureaucracy, constitute one of the major events of the century.

For some people, human nature itself contains the seeds of evil. Human nature is said to contain an irrepressible desire for power that shows up in various guises — including that of seeking to make people happy by imposing pre-conceived utopian schemes on them.

The polemical objective of the *Black*

Book is to prove that Stalin followed directly in Lenin's footsteps. To do this, it is necessary to destroy “the old legend that Stalin betrayed the October Revolution”. Jacques Amalric says that “the horrors of Stalinism are consubstantial to Leninism”; while Eric Conan says that “the initial criminal impulse came from Lenin” (*L'Express*, 6 November 1997).

This argument has found a certain response even on the left. The leadership of the French Communist Party (PCF) has failed to extend the critique



of their own past to include a detailed examination of the PCF's traditional periodisation of the Russian Revolution and of the different orientations that clashed throughout the 1920s and 1930s.

Instead they have made a vague self-criticism and referred to Stalinist crimes as a “tragic extension” of the revolutionary moment (Claude Cabanes, *L'Humanité*, 7 November 1997).

If such an inevitable fate, pregnant with such disaster, was unfolding from day one, what possible sense is there in calling oneself a communist today?

7. The 1920s: parting of ways

The initial dynamism of the revolution made itself felt throughout the 1920s — in spite of the bureaucratic reaction, which very early on began to “freeze the revolution”; in spite of shortages and cultural backwardness.

This dynamism could be seen in the many pioneering initiatives made in the field of daily life: educational and pedagogical reforms, family law, urban utopias, graphic and cinematographic innovation. It is this same dynamism

that explains the contradictions and ambiguities of the “great transformation” painfully undertaken in the inter-war period. One finds a mixture of bureaucratic terror, on the one hand, and the energy of revolutionary hope, on the other. Such contradictory circumstances made it difficult to grasp fully their meaning and historical implications.

It is essential, therefore, to examine the roots and key manifestations of what has been called the “Stalinist phenomenon” — by looking at the way society was organised at the time, at the different forces in place and in conflict with one another.

In its own concrete historical circumstances, Stalinism was part of a more general tendency towards bureaucratisation that can be found in all modern societies. This tendency is fed primarily by the emergence of the social division of labour (especially between manual and intellectual work) and by the consequent “professional dangers of power”.

In the Soviet Union, this tendency was intensified and accelerated — bureaucratisation took place in a context of destruction, shortages, cultural obsolescence and the absence of democratic traditions.

From the start, the social base of the revolution was at once broad and narrow. Broad in so far as it was based on the alliance between workers and the peasantry, which accounted for a huge majority of the overall population. But narrow in so far as the minority working-class component was soon wiped out by war damage and losses sustained during the civil war. Bureaucratic brutality is always proportional to the fragility of the bureaucracy's social base and a gauge of the bureaucracy's parasitic nature.

But there was a clear break in both domestic and foreign policy between the beginning of the 1920s and the terrible 1930s.

To be sure, authoritarian tendencies had already begun to get the upper hand before the 1930s. Obsessed by the (very real) “primary enemy” — imperialist aggression and capitalist restoration — Bolshevik leaders began to ignore or underestimate the “secondary enemy”, the bureaucracy that undermined them from within and ultimately devoured them.

Such an unprecedented state of affairs was difficult to imagine; it took time to understand it, interpret it and act on all the resulting conclusions. While Lenin understood the alarm sounded by the Kronstadt crisis — leading him to call for a major reorientation of the economy — it was only later in Trotsky's work *The Revolution Betrayed* that political pluralism was laid down as a principle rooted in the heterogeneity of the proletariat itself, applicable even

after the seizure of power.

Most documents and personal accounts on the Soviet Union and on the Bolshevik Party itself make it clear that there was indeed a major shift of direction in the 1930s. The best proof of this are the millions upon million who died from hunger, were deported, or were victims of trials and purges.

The bureaucracy had to unleash this hurricane of violence in order consolidate its own power and reach its 1934 "victory congress" intact.

8. The key turning point

Nicolas Werth primarily sees continuity between the terror of the civil war and the mass terror of the 1930s. In the process, he relativises the meaning of the 1920s and the clashes over orientation within the party. For him, the 1920s were merely an "intermission" and a "ceasefire" between two rounds of state terrorism.

Yet he himself provides proof of a quantitative change in the scale of repression; and of a qualitative change in the content of this repression.

In 1929, the "mass collectivisation" plan set itself the goal of collectivising 13 million farms by force. The execution of this plan provoked a cycle of large-scale famine and the mass deportations of 1932-1933. "The spring of 1933 was clearly the culmination of the first major cycle of terror that had begun in late 1929 with the launch of the dekulakisation."

In 1934, after the assassination of Petrograd party leader Kirov, the second major cycle began. This cycle included the huge political trials and, especially, the "great purge" of 1936-1938, which is said to have claimed some 690,000 victims. Forced collectivisation and stepped-up industrialisation led to the uprooting of entire sections of the population, a "ruralisation" of the cities and a massive jump in the number of people in the *Gulag*.

There was an increase in the number and severity of repressive laws. In June 1929, during mass collectivisation, a key reform was made to the prison system: detainees given prison terms of more than three years were thereafter transferred to labour camps.

With the uncontrollable surge in internal migration, internal passports were introduced in December 1932. A few hours after the Kirov assassination, Stalin himself drew up the decree known as the "Law of 1st December 1934", legalising summary justice, thereby creating the mechanism of choice for the great terror.

Beyond destroying grassroots movements in the towns and countryside, this bureaucratic terror also liquidated what remained of the legacy of October. We know that the trials and purges elimina-

"For such a phenomenon in human history will not be forgotten, because it has revealed a tendency and faculty in human nature for improvement such that no politician, affecting wisdom, might have conjured out of the course of things hitherto existing, and one which nature and freedom alone, united in the human race in conformity with inner principles of right, could have promised. But so far as time is concerned, it can promise this only indefinitely and as a contingent occurrence.

"But even if the end viewed in connection with this occurrence should not now be attained, even if the revolution or reform of a national constitution should finally miscarry, or, after some time had elapsed, everything should relapse into its former rut (as politicians now predict), that philosophical prophecy still would lose nothing of its force. — For that occurrence is too important, too much interwoven with the interest of humanity, and its influence too widely propagated in all areas of the world to not be recalled on any favorable occasion by the nations which would then be roused to a repetition of new efforts of this kind."

Emmanuel Kant

The Conflict of the Faculties³

ted whole sections of the party and army. Most cadres and leaders from the revolutionary period were either deported or executed. Of 200 central committee members of the Ukrainian Communist Party, only three survived. In the army, 17% of the 178,000 cadres were arrested.

At the same time, there was a huge growth in the size of the administrative apparatus — to carry out this vast repressive undertaking but also to run an economy fully in state hands.

According to Moshe Lewin, while in 1928 the state employed 1.45 million administrative personnel, by 1939 there were 7.5m. During the same period, the total number of white-collar workers rose from 3.9m to 13.8m.

As can be seen, "bureaucracy" is not some vague term. It is a social force.

The bureaucratic apparatus of the state swallowed up whatever genuine party activists remained.

This counter-revolution was felt in all fields, whether in economic policy (forced collectivisation and large-scale growth of the *Gulag*); in foreign policy (in China, Germany and Spain); in cultural policy (19); in daily life itself, with what Trotsky called "domestic Thermidor"; in ideology (with the crystallisation of state orthodoxy, the codification of "diamat" — dialectical materialism — and the publication of an official history of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

This can only be called a counter-revolution. Qualitatively broader, qualitatively more tangible and qualitatively more destructive than the authoritarian measures — however worrying they were — taken during the heat of the civil war.

Nicolas Werth is torn between recognising that the 1930s represented something radically new, and insisting that there was direct continuity between the revolutionary promise of October and the triumph of Stalinist reaction. He refers to the Stalinist triumph, on the one hand, as a "decisive episode" in the establishment of the system of repression; and, on the other, as the "final episode of the confrontation begun in 1918-1922". A decisive about-face or a mere final chapter? You can't have it both ways.

Focusing on the idea of continuity necessarily involves skipping over the controversies of the 1920s and the stakes involved in these controversies, as if the whole decade were an insignificant sideshow. This deprives of all context any linear telling of the tale of repression. It pushes into an ill-defined background all the conflicts that existed around key decisions — whether in the field of international policy (orientation in the Chinese revolution, attitude towards the rise of the Nazis and the

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war in Spain); or with respect to domestic affairs (Trotskyist and Bukharinist opposition to forced collectivisation, economic and social alternatives inspired by a different approach to communism).

9. Counter-revolution and restoration

To describe what happened as counter-revolution is disturbing to some, since the pre-revolutionary order was not restored. Yet history cannot be run in reverse like a film.

After Thermidor, the conservative ideologue and all-round expert in the field of reaction, Joseph de Maistre, made the sublime observation that a counter-revolution is not a revolution put into reverse but rather the reverse of a revolution. The two are not symmetrical. A counter-revolution can therefore give birth to something new and unprecedented.

This is what happened in Germany under Bismarck following the failure of the 1848 revolutions.

Similarly, Thermidor did not go so far as to restore the French monarchy. The post-Thermidor period of the French Empire is an extended grey zone in which one finds a constant interplay between revolutionary aspirations and the consolidation of a new order.

Many communist activists lost their

bearings in just such a grey zone. These activists were impressed by the achievements of the "socialist fatherland" while either unaware of or unable to grasp the full cost.

Those that wanted to know could get a fairly clear, if not complete, idea of what was happening in the 1930s-era USSR of the Stalinist terror. There were the accounts of Victor Serge and Ante Ciliga, the counter-trial organised by John Dewey, accounts of opposition to the repression of anarchists and the POUM in Spain.

But in those days of anti-fascist struggle and "bureaucratised heroism" (to borrow a phrase from Isaac Deutscher), it was often difficult to fight at one and the same time both the main enemy and the not-so-secondary enemy that sparked defeat from within.

The USSR under Stalin was not like the USSR of stagnation under Brezhnev. It was being transformed from head to toe, under the whip of an enterprising bureaucracy. The secret of this energy was not unlike that of the Napoleonic energy that fascinated Chateaubriand. "If Bonaparte's communiqués, speeches and proclamations stand out for their energy, this energy in no way belonged to him alone. Rather, it belonged to its time, it stemmed from the revolutionary inspiration that weakened in Bonaparte's bosom, for his line of march went against it."

This is not the only striking analogy between the two figures: "The Revolu-

tion that gave Napoleon life very soon appeared to him to be an enemy, which he fought on every possible occasion".(20)

No other country had ever experienced as brutal a metamorphosis as that of the USSR in the 1930s under the weight of a Pharaonic bureaucracy. Between 1926 and 1939, the city population rose by 30 million; urban dwellers jumped from 18 to 33 percent of the total population. During the first Five-Year Plan alone, cities grew by 44%, almost as much as between 1897 and 1926. The waged labour force more than doubled in size, from 10 to 22 million.

This led to a mass "ruralisation" of the cities, huge undertakings in literacy and education, and a breakneck implementation of labour discipline.

This great transformation went hand-in-hand with a nationalist renaissance, an upward spiral of careerism and the appearance of a new brand of bureaucratic conformism.

Moshe Lewin spoke with irony about this gargantuan Soviet "quicksand society". It was "classless" - in a manner of speaking. "For a while, before the dust settled, the whole nation became declassed (*déclassé*): some downwards, some upwards."(21)

Mikhail Guefter raises the essential question of whether there was a "continuous march" between October and the Gulag, or rather "two distinct moral and political worlds".

An analysis of the Stalinist counter-

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revolution provides a clear answer. The periodisation of the Russian revolution and counter-revolution is not a mere historical curiosity. From this periodisation flow a series of political positions, orientations and tasks.

Before the counter-revolution, one can speak of errors to be rectified, of alternative orientations within a common project. Afterwards, however, forces and projects stand in stark opposition; it was time for decisive organisational breaks.

Lest there be some misunderstanding, this is not a family squabble aimed at pointing to yesteryear's victims, after the fact, in order to prove the existence of a kind of "communist pluralism" that supposedly unites both victims and their executioners. Rather, a strict periodisation means we can, in Guefter's words, let "historical consciousness pierce its way into the realm of politics".

10. A "premature" revolution?

Since the collapse of the USSR, one line of argument has made a big comeback. The revolution, it is argued, was premature and therefore a doomed adventure from the very beginning.

French Socialist Party leader Henri Weber defends this approach in an open piece in the 14 November 1997 edition of *Le Monde*. The argument, of course, is hardly new; its origins lie early on in the speeches of the Russian Mensheviks and, from 1921 onwards, in Kautsky's analyses. Much blood, tears and destruction would have been spared, Kautsky writes, "if the Bolsheviks had mastered the Menshevik feel for self-limitation to what is attainable. This is the stuff of true leaders".(22)

A revealing formula indeed. Kautsky inveighs against the idea of a vanguard party, but doesn't shy away from ima-

gining an omniscient party that is both pedagogue and master, that is able to fine-tune the course and pace of History as it pleases. As if struggles and revolutions did not have their own logic!

Support for the established order is usually the result of any quest for "self-restraint" when the opportunity for struggle or revolution presents itself. For very soon it is no longer a matter of "self-restraining" the objectives of the party, but of restraining mass aspirations plain and simple. In this sense, social democrats like Ebert and Noske proved themselves to be gifted practitioners of "self-restraint" when they assassinated Rosa Luxemburg and crushed the Bavarian soviets.

The seizure of power in October 1917 resulted from the inability of bourgeois liberals and reformists to provide solutions to the crisis of society and the state.

Mikhail Guefter's answer to the question "Was there any choice in 1917?" is a thousand times more convincing and fertile than the thesis of "prematurity". "This is a decisive question. I have given considerable thought to this problem and my answer is categorical. There was no choice. What was done at the time was the only solution standing in the way of an overhaul of society and senseless débâcle that would have been infinitely more bloody.

"Choices came afterwards, concerning the type of social system and the historical path to follow — all, however, within the framework [created by October 1917]. Not simple variations on a theme (the problem was much broader), nor mere steps to climb en route to a chosen summit, but rather a tributary, many possible tributaries."(23)

These tributaries, these forks in the road, were very numerous indeed, and

always the object of differing and contrasting views — whether in 1923 on the occasion of the German October, or on the question of the NEP and economic policy, on forced collectivisation, on democracy in the party and in the country, on the rise of fascism, on the war in Spain, and on the Nazi-Soviet Pact.

Through each of these tests, different proposals, programmes and orientations locked horns — proof that other paths existed, that events could have unfolded in many possible ways.

In point of fact, the "prematurity" thesis inevitably feeds the idea that history is well-ordered and tuned like clockwork, with everything occurring at its appointed hour, just in time. This approach revives the platitudes of the unflinching historical determinism for which Marxists are so often criticised.

The base, goes the tired old refrain, narrowly pre-determines what happens in the corresponding superstructure. Such an approach overlooks the fact that history is not a steamroller bearing some pre-ordained fate. Rather, history is torn through with events that open out onto a whole spectrum of possibilities — not everything is possible, of course, but a set horizon of various new and possible outcomes is indeed created at such times.

Some 80 years later, the authors of the *Black Book* give the impression that the Bolsheviks, in the wake of their successful October sleight of hand, stopped at nothing to cling onto power for power's sake.

But such a reading of events neglects the fact that the Bolsheviks never imagined the Russian Revolution to be a solitary adventure, but rather as the first stage of a European and world Revolution.

They say Lenin danced in the snow on the 73rd day following the seizure of power. He had not initially expected that the Revolution would be able to hold on for as long as the Paris Commune. In his eyes, the very future of the revolution depended on its extension to a European level, to Germany in particular.

The events that rocked Germany, Italy, Austria and Hungary between 1918 and 1923 highlight the truly European nature of the crisis.

There was nothing pre-ordained about the failures of the German Revolution and the Spanish civil war, the turn of events in China, or the victory of fascism in Italy and Germany. Surely, Russian revolutionaries cannot be blamed for the irresponsibility and cowardice of French and German social democrats.

From 1923 onwards, it became clear that the Bolsheviks could no longer count on a short-term extension of the revolution into Europe. The time had

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come for a radical reorientation. This was the backdrop of the high-stakes confrontation between partisans of "socialism in one country" and those of "permanent revolution" — a confrontation that tore the party apart in the mid-1920s.

While not contesting the initial legitimacy of the Russian Revolution, there are those who draw the conclusion that it was based on a wrong forecast and impossible gamble. But there was no question of a "forecast"; rather, the Revolution was part of an orientation aimed at eliminating the causes of the First World War by overthrowing the system that lay at its root.

There was indeed a shockwave in the wake of the war, between 1918 and 1923. After the failure of the German October, however, the situation was definitively stabilised.

What options existed thereafter? Was it right to sue

for time without illusions of being able to "build socialism in one country" — a country which, moreover, was in a state of ruin?

This was the nub of the debates and struggles of the 1920s.

On the economic and social level, the NEP provided a part of the solution. For it to be implemented properly, however, the country needed officials with a much higher degree of training and culture than what had been imparted by the arbitrary methods of war communism.

Politically, what was needed was a democratic orientation that sought majority legitimacy through elections held in the framework of soviet pluralism. Internationally, the need of the hour was an internationalist policy that did not use the Comintern to subordinate the various Communist Parties and their policies to the interests of the Soviet state. Such options were indeed raised, even if only partially. Unfortunately, there was never a serene debate

over which path should be followed; rather, the necessary exchange was replaced by merciless confrontation.

Those defeated in the process of these struggles were not wrong. While it is common currency to draw macabre balance sheets of revolutions, it is much more difficult to determine the terrible consequences that ensue when a revolution is aborted or crushed. Who can deny that there is a close link between, on the one hand, the German non-revolution of 1918-1923 and the 1937 defeat of the Spanish Revolution and, on the other, the victory of Nazism and the catastrophes of the Second World War?

To determine where responsibilities really lie and provide a periodisation of history based on the broad political alternatives that existed at any given time, it is questions of this sort that must be raised and examined once again.

To speak of "premature revolution" means taking the opposite tack; it means pronouncing a verdict in the court of history instead of delving into the internal logic of the conflict and the policies that clashed therein.

Defeats, after all, are no greater proof of error than victories are proof of truth. "If success meant innocence; if even posterity were to be burdened by the chains of this success; if this besmirched posterity were to promise no more than future slavery rooted in past enslavement and become the accomplice of whomsoever emerged victorious, then what would become of right, what would so much sacrifice have been worth? Good and evil would only be relative, human behaviour would be devoid of all morality."(24)

There is no final judgement in history. That being the case, it is essential that we be able to sketch out an alternative path that history could have taken — by tracing this path step-by-step through all the occasions when major choices had to be made, and when the situation threw up a fork in the road. It is such an approach that makes history intelligible and enables us to draw lessons for the future.

No one can erase that which, in the

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space of ten days, shook the world. The promise of humanity, universality and emancipation that arose in the evanescent heat of that event is far too "interwoven with the interest of humanity" to be so readily forgotten. We have been entrusted with a legacy, which we also represent from day to day. This legacy is threatened by the suffocating conformism of the day. Our task, therefore, is to bring about those "favorable occasions" on which this legacy can be "recalled... by the nations which would then be roused to a repetition of new efforts of this kind." (25) ★

• The *International Viewpoint* website has a range of articles on the Russian revolution, and the new materials being

released from the Soviet archives.
www.internationalen.se/sp/rr.htm

This article is translated from the French by Raghu Krishnan. It was published by the LCR as a pamphlet, following the French edition of the *Black Book: Le Livre noir du communisme. Crimes, terreur, répression*, Stéphane Courtois et al, Paris: Callmann-Lévy, 1997.

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Biographical Notes

Isaac Babel

Novelist, author of *La Cavalerie rouge*. (27) He was executed in 1941 and rehabilitated in 1954.

Walter Benjamin

Leading writer and philosopher. In flight from Nazi terror, while attempting to leave France for the USA, he was stopped at the Spanish border, where he committed suicide on 26 September 1940.

Mikhaïl Bulgakov

Russian writer. Most of his work was not published until after Stalin's death.

Ante Ciliga

Central committee member of Yugoslav CP and Comintern. He travelled to the USSR in 1928 and joined the Left Opposition. Arrested, deported to Siberia and finally expelled from the country in 1936. Author of *The Russian Enigma*. (28)

John Dewey

American educator and philosopher. In 1936, he joined the US Trotsky Defense Committee.

Max Eastman

Eminent American intellectual. In 1922, he established ties with Trotsky while in Moscow.

Panait Istrati

Romanian writer. After a trip to the USSR, he wrote a vigorous critique of the regime. (26)

Adolf Abramovitch Joffe

Played a central role in the Revolution alongside Lenin. He represented the Bolshevik government in Berlin and Tokyo. A friend of Trotsky, he was arrested and deported. He committed suicide in 1927, leaving a farewell letter to Trotsky.

Vladimir Maïakovski

Poet and fervent defender of the Revolution. Denounced bureaucratism. Committed suicide in 1930.

Joseph de Maistre

Politician and writer. He emigrated from France in 1793. Monarchist author of *Considérations sur la France* (1796) and *Du Pape* (1819).

Ossip Mandelstam

Russian poet. He was arrested in 1933, deported, exiled and then deported once again. He died in 1937 in a transit camp.

Alfred Rosmer

Journalist with *La Vie ouvrière* and leader of French Communist Party (PCF). Linked to Trotsky from 1915 onwards, he was excluded from the PCF in 1924. Worked for *Révolution prolétarienne* and then *La Vérité*, weekly publication of the Trotskyist Left Opposition in France founded in 1929.

Sukarno

First president of post-independence Indonesia (1945-1967). In 1967, he was removed from power by his minister of War, General Suharto.

Suharto

Sukarno's minister of War, in 1965 he oversaw the massacre of more than 500,000 communists. In May 1998, he stepped down in the face of popular protest and severe economic crisis.

Kurt Tucholsky

Stridently anti-nationalist and anti-militarist German writer. The Nazis burned his books and deprived him of his nationality. Sought refuge in Sweden. Committed suicide in 1935.

Victor Serge

Revolutionary, member of the Left Opposition. He wrote many novels and chronicles.

Boris Souvarine

One of the leaders of the Comité de la Troisième Internationale and a PCF delegate to the Communist International. He backed Trotsky in 1924 and was excluded from the PCF. Author of a major critical work on Stalin.

Anna Tsetaieva

Writer and poet. Committed suicide upon returning to the USSR in 1941.

Boris Zamiatin

Russian novelist. He left the country in 1931 with Stalin's authorisation.

booknotes

Abortion: women's crime

Dianne Feeley reviews *When Abortion Was A Crime: Women, Medicine, and Law in the United States, 1867-1973* by Leslie J. Reagan (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), \$29.95 cloth, \$17.95 paperback.

Abortion in the United States was not always a crime. In colonial America women, including slave women, used herbs and roots to provoke abortion. Part of the campaign to criminalize abortion during the second half of the 19th century involved challenging both Common Law and popular belief that, prior to quickening, a woman had a right to abort the fetus and restore her menstruation cycle.

One of the threads throughout *When Abortion Was A Crime* is the assertion by women that they have the right to end an unwanted pregnancy. Against this need, the state as well as the medical and religious establishments spoke of the dangers of securing an abortion, the equating of abortion with infanticide, and society's need for population policies.

Criminalizing abortion

In 1857 the newly organized American Medical Association launched a drive to make abortion illegal. Facing competition from "irregular" medical practitioners – particularly homeopaths and midwives – the AMA used the campaign as a way of establishing state control over the medical practice.

Using women's bodies to push their own agenda forward was possible, Reagan explains, because of the intersection of race, gender and class. Reagan cites Dr. Horatio R. Storer, leader of the campaign, who in 1868 envisioned the spread of "civilization" west and south by native-born whites: "Shall [these regions] be filled by our own children or by those of aliens? This is a question our women must answer; upon their loins depends the future destiny of the nation." (p.11)

Fears fueled by women's sexuality and racism are central to the antiabortion movement from the beginning. But neither appeals to patriotism nor the criminalization of abortion were enough to reverse the decline of Yankee women's fertility.

From the beginning, women's bodies were contested terrain, the battleground upon which politicians, the press and the medical establishment fought.

Reagan pinpoints the antiabortion

campaign waged between 1840-60 as "antifeminist at its core." It was "a reactionary response to two important efforts of the nineteenth-century women's movements: the fight to admit women into the regular medical profession and the battle to make men conform to a single standard of sexual behavior." (p.11)

By 1880 most states had passed antiabortion laws prohibiting abortion at any point in the pregnancy, but with an exception for therapeutic abortions if the pregnancy and childbirth threatened a woman's life. Thus physicians not only won passage of the law, but were positioned to win the right to determine when an abortion might be necessary.

Additionally harmful to women was the passage of the Comstock Law in 1873. This anti-obscenity legislation prevented the dissemination of abortion and birth control information through the federal postal system. States and municipalities passed similar ordinances.

Constructing a new framework

The heart of *When Abortion Was A Crime* is an analysis of the four distinct periods in the criminalization of abortion. Those with some knowledge of the history of birth control and abortion may be surprised by the amount of new material Reagan presents. She reads court records, newspaper accounts, debates within medical journals, patient records, studies on abortion practices and accounts by women who had illegal abortions – or who helped them.

Reagan defines the first antiabortion period from 1880-1930. Despite the law, abortion seems to have been practiced widely. Key to understanding why the law wasn't implemented is the fact that abortion (and childbirth) usually occurred within the confines of the woman's home. Many physicians and midwives willingly responded to the woman who had called for their aid while in this private setting. Abortion was virtually invisible.

Yet between 1890-1920 a campaign against abortion was launched by obstetrics specialists. Despite reports that attributed equal participation of midwives and doctors in abortion, specialists blamed midwives for any resulting death. This campaign resulted in state legislation. "When reporters and city officials connected midwives and abortion to contemporary anxieties about the sexual vulnerability and independence of single women, politicians at every level acted to control midwives... Controlling midwives seemed to be the answer to an array of perceived social problems." (p.109)

Once again, the medical profession used the "danger" of abortion as a way of elevating their status at the expense of their competition.

In the few years before World War I a birth control movement sprung up.

Reagan remarks that for those opposed to reproductive freedom for women, the birth control movement was a better, more focused target than a diffuse pro-abortion sentiment. By and large birth control advocates did not defend the practice of abortion so the two issues were not linked to a broader defense of reproductive freedom.

While that is true, I think there are more connections than public pronouncements would indicate. For example, Dr. Antoinette Konikow, a radical socialist and leader of the birth control movement from Boston, was both a physician and advocate of birth control. Yet when asked in 1928 at a public lecture about whether she supported the legislation of abortion, she noted its legalization in Russia as a positive development – but one she did not view as possible in the United States. However, during that time frame Konikow performed abortions.

Institutionalization of health

The second period (1930-1940) brings dramatic change with the rise of hospitals and clinics as sites for child-bearing and abortion. Thus reproductive medical procedures become both more consolidated in a medical bureaucracy and more visible. While women are driven out of economic necessity to have greater control over their fertility during the Depression, the change of location would dramatically impact on the methods of enforcing antiabortion laws in the next stage.

Certainly the Depression helped to legitimate contraceptives. By 1930 the American Birth Control League had established fifty-five clinics in fifteen states, eight years later they had over 500 clinics. Reagan cites a poll conducted in 1937 showing that nearly 80% of U.S. women approved of birth control – the year that the AMA finally abandoned its official opposition.

As women's need for birth control and abortion grew during this period, Reagan notes that the medical practice of abortion—both legal and illegal—expanded. Not only did physicians begin to recognize that social conditions were an essential component in therapeutic abortion cases, but they began to see the role illegal abortions played in raising maternal mortality. In 1931 the Children's Bureau reported a study of over 7,000 maternal deaths in fifteen states: Illegal abortion was responsible for at least fourteen percent of the country's maternal mortality.

"Professional Abortionists"

Reagan presents three case studies of "professional abortionists" and their practices during the 1930s. Specializing in abortions, each physician used standardized medical procedures, provided care for women who had complications, and had open, busy practices. Most of the women were in the early stages of their

pregnancy—in one case Reagan was able to establish that 96% of the abortions were performed within the first trimester.

Dr. Josephine Gabler, who practiced during the 1920s and '30s on State Street, in downtown Chicago, kept patient records. Reagan was able to read seventy, preserved in legal documents. They identify at least one third of Gabler's patients as working for wages—ranging from teachers and nurses to a waitress, a "wrapper" at a baking company and a sausage maker. Most married women were homemakers, but fully one quarter worked outside of the home.

Dr. George Loutrell Timanus, who practiced in Baltimore between the mid-1920s and 1951, seems to have had relatively affluent patients while Dr. Edgar Bass Keemer, Jr., was an African-American physician who performed his first abortion in 1938. His practice primarily served poor and Black women in Detroit. These specialists, concludes the author, "were an integral part of regular medicine, as the network of physicians who referred patients to these physician-abortionists demonstrates." (133)

Driving Abortion Underground

During the third period (1940-1960) the need of women to gain control of their reproductive lives intensified as they were increasingly moving into the work force. But at the same moment the demand for abortion grew, repression mounted. Police began raiding clinics that had been operating for years—Gabler, Timanus and Keemer were arrested, their records seized, their patients humiliated, exposed and terrorized into testifying for the prosecution. Suddenly the space where thousands of women were able to find relatively safe abortions from skilled physicians was eliminated.

Whereas between 1870-1940 80% of the abortion cases that came before the Illinois Supreme Court involved the death of the patient, between 1940-60 only one-third of the cases did. During the later period the police went on the offensive, raiding clinics and offices, compelling women to testify.

Beginning in 1940 hospitals began to set up therapeutic abortion committees, voluntarily policing physicians. In effect, the anonymous committee defined what was a legal abortion: Legal abortions were done in a hospital by committee approval, illegal ones were not.

Reagan points out that organized medicine could have promoted a liberal interpretation of therapeutic abortion, but instead acted conservatively. Women were perceived as attempting to "abuse" the law and obtain abortions for non-medical reasons. Reagan writes, "probably more important than refusing to authorize therapeutic abortion in specific cases, committees discouraged physicians from seeking approval" in the first place. As a result, with the implementation of a committee most hospitals

halved their abortion rate. Reagan labels this medical monitoring as "McCarthyism within medicine." (180)

In response to this medical repression, both Dr. Keemer and Dr. Timanus attempted to use their own criminal trials as a forum for challenging the U.S. law. Arguing that they carried out legal abortions, both were convicted because the medical community deserted them. In 1951 Dr. Timanus wrote personal letters to the 353 doctors who had referred their patients to him for abortions; not one came forward to testify. By 1958 Dr. Keemer lined up three physicians to testify in his behalf, although only one showed up in court.

As a result of the repression, abortions became harder to obtain, more dangerous, more expensive. It is this period that most of us active in the fight to decriminalize abortion remember: women were being blindfolded and taken to unknown places for clandestine abortions. One never knew the competency of the abortionist.

While the rate of therapeutic abortions in New York City dropped 65% between 1942 and 1962, women of color obtaining only 9% of them. Frequently they were only able to obtain abortions under the agreement that they would also undergo sterilization.

While death from abortion was almost completely preventable, hospitals had entire wards devoted to caring for patients who suffered abortion-related complications. Maternal mortality rates doubled. Black women's rates were three to four times higher than the rates of white women. (209-15)

Reform or Decriminalization?

The repressive conditions that allowed illegal abortion to flourish, with its thousands of botched abortions, created such a discriminatory impact on women and particularly women of color that it set the stage for a public discussion about the crisis. The fourth period (1960-73) is characterized by the search for a reform of the abortion law.

In 1959 a model reform law, drafted by the prestigious American Law Institute, clarified the legal exception for therapeutic abortions, allowing licensed physicians to perform abortions for physical and mental health reasons, fetal defects, or when pregnancy was the result of rape or incest. (The idea of allowing pregnant unmarried women to have access to abortion was beyond the pale.)

Interestingly enough, by 1967 twelve states, including California, passed the reform legislation. California was the big test case—and within a year, it was clear that reform was a failure. It had not succeeded in freeing doctors up to perform more therapeutic abortions, but further empowered the committee system. Both the growing feminist movement and a body of health care workers began to press for outright appeal.

Reagan reviews the coalition of forces that led to the Roe v. Wade decision in her last chapter, outlining in broad strokes the role feminists, physicians and social movement lawyers played. I found her discussion of the way the Illinois attorneys, in their legal brief, emphasized the importance of class, race and gender in abortion fascinating. As Reagan explains, the U.S. Supreme Court decision downplayed the significance of race and class.

In her short epilogue Reagan quickly summarizes the contradictory situation we find ourselves in twenty-five years after the legalization of abortion. She points to the barriers state legislatures, with the sanction of the Supreme Court, have erected, and reminds us that only 12% of the programs for residents in obstetrics and gynecology are routinely taught first trimester abortions. In surveying the backlash, the restrictions, the unavailability of abortion in over 80% of U.S. counties, Reagan concludes that while Roe v. Wade may not be completely overturned, it could be effectively gutted by a combination of court and legislative action. Yet she points to some recent and positive signs of growing activism and alliance building in defense of reproductive rights.

Reagan sees the legalization of abortion as strengthening the battle for patient's rights and civil liberties, as well as a positive development for all women, who want to control their own reproductive lives. She views the legalization of abortion as the result of public debate, political organizing, coalition building and collective action. While critical of the medical establishment, Reagan nonetheless recognizes the variety of physicians' responses to the needs of women patients, whatever the "official" medical or legal policy. For some that may be performing the abortion, for others it is passing along the name of a practitioner.

I found *When Abortion Was A Crime* most valuable in explaining the availability of abortion under each period of illegalization.

Most importantly, the author summarizes how repressive reproductive policies in the post-World War II period led to "a deeply discriminatory and deadly system, a system stamped at every level with the power dynamics of race, class, and gender. Abortion was institutionalized in hospitals in two inter-related structures: the therapeutic abortion committee and the septic abortion war." (214)

Reagan allows us to hear the stories of generations of women who sought to control their bodies. These stories are powerful. ★

Dianne Feeley was active in the pre-1973 reproductive rights movement. In 1976 she helped organize the first demonstrations against the Hyde Amendment, which denied women on welfare the right to Medicaid-paid abortions. She is an editor of *Against the Current*. This article © *Against the Current*, 1998

booknotes

Marxists and economics

Andy Kilmister reviews *The economics of global turbulence*, by Robert Brenner, published as a special issue of *New Left Review*, #229, May/June 1998, 264 pages, £8. For order details and special offer see the December issue of *International Viewpoint*.

Robert Brenner is one of the most widely respected Marxist historians currently writing. He is also a long-term activist on the US left.

The special issue of *New Left Review*, published in mid-1998, has already sparked wide debate among socialists. As guest editor, Brenner attempts to provide an interpretation of the course of the capitalist world economy from 1950 to the present.

It arrived at an appropriate time, being published at a time of exceptional economic instability, in the very week that the Russian currency and stock market collapsed. Any debate on the current world crisis needs to consider Brenner's work.

Brenner wants to explain two developments in particular. Firstly, the "long boom" in the major capitalist countries between 1950 and 1973, and secondly the equally long downturn from 1973 to the present. His explanation of these phenomena is basically very simple, though he links it to a large amount of historical detail (much of which is very interesting).

He sees the turn from boom to downturn as being fundamentally caused by competition between different nationally-based capitalisms. In particular he argues that it was the rise of Japan and Germany as competitors to the USA which first fuelled the boom, which was largely based on growth in those countries, and then led to a world wide crisis of over-production and over-capacity.

Competition from Japan and Germany has meant that US and other manufacturers have faced a crisis of profitability since 1965 or so, which has become acute since 1973 and has persisted almost to the present day.

This has fed through into lower investment and so into lower productivity. Lower productivity has meant that capitalists have been desperate to keep wages down, and have correspondingly led a massive assault on working class organisation, especially in the USA.

This assault has been partially successful in the US, according to Brenner. Wage growth has been held down so much that profitability has recovered in

the last few years, allowing for a weak and sporadic boom.

But this boom is at the expense of capitalists elsewhere, especially those in Japan, Germany and East Asia who have been squeezed out of export markets by US competition and are now in deep crisis.

Brenner presents his account of the boom and downturn as being fundamentally different from the Marxist analyses previously offered.

There are three main variants of these. First, there are a variety of accounts which are based on Marx's theory of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall. For Marx profits only arise through the exploitation of living labour in the productive process.

Use of plant and machinery can not on its own create profit, it only allows for the employment of workers who do create profit and value. Technological change, by increasing the volume of such plant and machinery used by each individual worker, tends to drive the overall profit rate down, because capitalists have to lay out more capital for each worker they are employing.

This mechanism is seen to be at the root of the collapse of profitability at the onset of the downturn in the early 1970s.

The second major account of the transition from boom to downturn is the "profit squeeze" approach. This sees the crisis as being caused by worker militancy which raised wages and led to profits being cut back.

The third approach is the "regulation" approach, originating in France. This view sees the crisis as being caused by the exhaustion of the "Fordist" approach to economic regulation, based on high productivity due to assembly line production coupled with high levels of demand stemming from wage growth and from welfare state expenditure.

The crisis of Fordism, it is argued, is rooted in a decline in the growth of productivity, which threatens the balance between production and consumption.

Brenner dismisses the theory of the falling rate of profit quite quickly.

He then treats the other two approaches as being essentially similar, in that both are based on seeing the crisis as being rooted in working class resistance to capital – either over wages or over productivity. In contrast, he argues, it is competition between capitalists that is key to the downturn, and relations between capital and labour follow from the way this competition has developed.

If Brenner had managed to develop a distinctive and convincing Marxist account of the boom and downturn which was superior to the available alternatives, then that would have been a major development. Unfortunately, his analysis is a failure.

It is not as different from existing views as he maintains, and in many ways it is actually weaker. To see this we need

to look at three things; Brenner's method, his theory of economic crisis and his account of the post-war economy.

Brenner does not really use Marx's concepts at all. Most of his work is simply an analysis of the influence of three factors on the rate of profit – namely the distribution of income, productivity and the ability of capitalists to raise prices. There is nothing in this analysis which would be strange to mainstream economists.

That does not of course mean it is necessarily wrong. But it does raise questions about the view of *New Left Review* that Brenner's work provides the basis for a renewal of Marxism.

More seriously Brenner presents a view of crisis as being determined essentially by just one factor – inter capitalist competition). It is worth comparing his account with that of Ernest Mandel in his book *Late Capitalism*, the most detailed account of the post-war boom to have emerged from the Fourth International.

Mandel argues that the rate of profit is determined by (is a "seismograph of the history of") no fewer than six fundamental variables. "Any single-factor assumption is clearly opposed to the notion of the capitalist mode of production as a dynamic totality in which the interplay of all the basic laws of development is necessary in order to produce any particular outcome," he states.

He traces the effects of these variables through a number of concrete developments, such as the evolution of arms production, technical change, and the transformation of raw materials production. Compared to the richness of this account, Brenner's analysis appears rather simplistic.

Mandel often runs into quite severe difficulties as a result of the complexity of his model. But these difficulties arise from the complexity of capitalism itself and cannot be evaded by arguing that capitalist development is reducible to the effect of just one variable.

Brenner's analysis of the tendency of the profit rate to fall clearly shows the weakness of his approach. His attack sees Marx's theory as arguing that profits will always and inevitably fall under capitalism. Marx's position is rather that there is a tendency for them to fall. The actual course of the profit rate depends on the interaction of this tendency with other factors such as those considered by Mandel.

Brenner analyses Marx as if he were writing mainstream economics with various factors acting simultaneously to produce an equilibrium rate of profit. But this was not Marx's approach. For him capitalist production was fundamentally marked by the way it takes place in time, and so new developments constantly disrupt any equilibrium. The tendency for profits to fall arises from just such an approach, and cannot be understood in a static framework.

Criticism of Brenner's method is not enough to show his theory is wrong. However, there are real problems with the theory itself.

Most importantly, any theory of crisis based on capitalist competition comes up against the problem that such competition is essentially redistributive. It can explain why one firm or country enters difficulties when it is out-competed. But it cannot show why the capitalist world as a whole should enter a downturn.

Brenner's answer to this is that established companies do not respond to new competition by leaving the market. Because they have invested large amounts in the past in fixed capital (such as buildings, plant and machinery) they are prepared to stay in business and compete against newcomers by lowering prices.

They aim just to make a profit on their circulating capital (wages and raw materials payments). But by doing this they lower the overall rate of profit for all concerned, both themselves and the new entrants. This is the response that Brenner sees US companies making to Japanese and German competition in the 1970s and 1980s.

There are two questions about this. When the new entrants realise that the existing companies will be prepared to lower prices rather than give up the market to them, why don't they stop entering the market? There is a long-standing tradition in orthodox economics which sees exactly this mechanism as being a way of stopping new companies entering markets.

What motivates new entrants to come into the market even when they know it will lower profits?

Secondly, once fixed capital has worn out, why don't the existing firms leave the market and restructure their activities by moving to areas where profits are higher and there is less competition?

Brenner does not really answer either of these questions. He analyses the first by saying that the entering firm may simply miscalculate or may have a strategic reason for accepting a lower rate of profit (page 27).

But such strategic reasons are surely based on expecting higher profits in the future. Without these occurring Brenner seems to be saying that the crisis resulted simply from capitalist irrationality.

Brenner's answer to the second question rests on his account of post-war economic history. Here, however, he gradually moves away from the theoretical framework he has earlier outlined and introduces a number of new factors. The central one of these is the role of exchange rates.

In his narrative account Brenner sees the movement of exchange rates as the main way in which US capital has competed with Japanese and German capital.



As Japan and Germany moved into the US market and outcompeted US companies in the late 1960s, the US responded (for almost two decades) with a sustained devaluation of the dollar, raising their competitors' costs and lowering their profits. In this way US firms were able to remain in the market at the cost of lower profitability world-wide.

The difficulty of this account is that, again, exchange rate changes are redistributive. They can explain the transfer of wealth between different national capitalisms but not a generalised crisis across the capitalist world.

For example, the fall of the dollar opened up two possibilities. First by raising incomes in countries like Japan and Germany it could have opened up new markets for US goods. Secondly, by lowering the cost of raw materials (oil for example is priced in dollars) it could have boosted profitability in those countries and helped them compete in the US and other markets.

It could also, of course, have lowered costs for the increasing number of US multinationals producing abroad. It is not clear why such exchange rate changes should have led to generalised crisis.

Actually, Brenner's analysis of the link between exchange rate changes and

crisis is spelt out by implication on pages 28 and 29 of his book.

The basic argument is that some of the gains of higher exchange rates in Japan and Germany went, not to capitalists, but to workers. Wages did not fall in those countries to reflect the extra purchasing power of the mark and the yen – and as a result German and Japanese companies became uncompetitive.

But this means that Brenner's account is not as different from the "profit squeeze" and "regulation" approaches as he hopes. They emphasise workers' militancy and see restraints on capitalists in raising prices as a secondary factor. Brenner sees these restraints as central and workers militancy as a secondary factor. But both work in the same framework.

Even if we accept that capitalist competition may have sparked off the downturn, it is still hard to explain why it has persisted for 25 years.

Brenner has two further arguments here. First, he argues that the explosion of debt in the capitalist world has hindered the restructuring of capital. But he fails to put forward any detailed analysis of why this should be the case and why financial capitalists should have failed to enforce restructuring.

Secondly, he argues that monetarism, by creating such an acute crisis in the early 1980s, made restructuring difficult by closing down opportunities for profitable production in new areas. But this ignores the way in which crises have always been seen in the Marxist tradition as providing the basis for restructuring and change.

Analytically, despite individual insights, Brenner fails to help us understand the long boom and the following downturn, and by extension the current economic crisis.

He is certainly right to argue that inter-capitalist competition must be a part of any explanation of booms and crises. But this is hardly a new insight, and the links Brenner proposes between such competition and other key areas, for example class struggle and technological change, are simplistic and misleading.

Politically, however, the book is even more problematic. The most obvious political conclusion that can be drawn from Brenner's work is a reformist one – the USA, EU and Japan should jointly agree to co-ordinate their production and share out markets more equitably.

Some readers might even conclude, on the basis of Brenner's own arguments, that the problems in each individual economy spring not from the nature of capitalism itself but from the producers living and working in other countries. In other words, some parts of Brenner's account may well turn out to be an obstruction to international solidarity – the only solution to the turmoil. ★





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Cologne '99

Preparations for the June protests against the G7 and European Union summit meetings in Cologne, Germany are underway.

A range of German groups hosted a conference in November, as a preliminary step to organise the 1999 actions. Delegates came from the network of European Marches Against Unemployment, other associations involved in the fight against unemployment and social exclusion, feminists groups, anti-racists, youth, students, and trade unions. As well as all parts of Germany, delegates came from members Belgium, France, Britain and Holland. The 120 delegates included a strong youth presence.

Pan-European networks represented included the EuroMarches, Kairos, Peoples Global Action, Towards a different Europe, Towards a Feminist Europe, Playfair Europe, and a network of groups which campaign against the Multilateral Agreement on Investment.

This strong start is just the beginning, because the conference decided to open up still more, especially towards the trade union sector.

At a time when Europe is being run by left-wing governments, it seems unthinkable that the trade-union movement should be absent at this critical date of future significance.

From January...

About 700 delegates from across Europe are expected to attend the 23-24 January Conference meeting against unemployment, job insecurity and all forms of exclusion, including racism. Other subjects under discussion will include policies on employment and the reduction in working time, the question of a guaranteed liveable income, the question of social protection, job training, democracy, the enlarge-

ment of the European Union into East-Central Europe, and North/South relations.

This Conference will also be the occasion to launch the June 5 demonstration appeal and for detailed planning of actions to take place before and after.

...to June

The marches that will converge on Cologne will be shorter and less ambitious than the 1997 Euro-Marches that converged on the EU's Amsterdam summit. Nevertheless, the German organisers are planning 2-3 week marches in all of the country's regions (Länder). Each will hopefully include activists from all European countries.

These marches will also be connected to other similar initiatives such as the March of Indian farmers, a caravan for the rights of refugees, a barge from Luxembourg, a Prague bicycle demo and above all, an international march of a thousand people, unemployed and salaried, marching from Brussels to Cologne in one week.

A Counter-summit will be organised in Cologne from June 3 to 7. A summer camp will be arranged, to facilitate co-ordination actions taking place around June 5 and June 19, marking the G8 meeting.

All these initiatives will coalesce on June 5, in the streets of Cologne. A massive demonstration will leave Neumarkt square, and tour through the grand avenues of Cologne. The square is just large enough for the expected 50,000 participants. [JD] ★

Source: EuroMarch newsletter. To join, send your email address to <fs@ras.eu.org>. Specify whether you want the English or French service.

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