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CONTRIBUTORS

- JOHN KELLY
- PEGGY PRIOR
- KENNY COYLE
- ANITA HALPIN
- OSCAR DE LOS REYES
- ROB GRIFFITHS



Editorial

One of the main criticisms levelled at the former socialist countries of Eastern Europe by the British trade union establishment was that trade unions in those countries were not 'free' and independent of the state. Thus it was that despite some of their anti-semitic attitudes, the TUC gave fulsome support to Lech Walensa and Solidarnosc in Poland on the grounds that this was a real trade union free of communist control. Indeed the same yardstick has been used until this year to restrain solidarity activity with Cuba until it adopted the 'freedoms' advocated by the ICFTU: an organisation not known for championing them elsewhere in the Caribbean or Latin America. Cuba's economy, despite the hardships imposed by the US blockade, is now, almost miraculously reviving as Oscar de los Reyes' article shows.

Whatever one's analysis of the role of trade unions in socialist countries, one would expect the same standards that were used to judge them to apply to our own labour movement. Now that a Labour Government is in office the issue is all the more pertinent. Just how independent of New Labour is the leadership of the British trade union movement? The answer is, not very. Of course we understand the organic link between the political and industrial wings of the labour movement in this country, but the understanding, to be meaningful, must be mutual.

The first speech Tony Blair made to the TUC after he was elected as Labour leader struck an ominous note – he made it clear that 'trade unions could expect no favours from a Labour Government'. There was not even a hint of the old social democratic tripartism and yet somehow the TUC continues to aspire to such heady delights. In the absence of such minimal consensus there is no reason whatsoever for the TUC to remain so supine.

For the movement to grow it needs not only good organisational and organising initiatives (see the articles by Peggy Prior and Anita Halpin), but the same critical independence of the state which it champions elsewhere. Even accepting the limitations of the old social democracy, it must be acknowledged that it was infinitely better than the 'new' politics of the third way which is resulting in shifting the balance of wealth and power firmly in the direction set by the Tories. This is what the trade union movement desperately needs to tackle. It will not do so on an ideological basis, but it must do it on the basis of a genuine form of fairness at work which puts workers' rights, pay and conditions at the top of the agenda. Hence the need to oppose all forms of privatisation, particularly now when education, health, air traffic control, prisons, the London underground and much else besides, is imminently threatened. The somewhat ugly word 'privatisation' may not be used any more to describe the process now euphemistically known as PFI (Private Finance Initiative) or PPP (Public Private Partnership), but the result is the same. As John Kelly shows, it is not necessary to see the pro-capitalist ideological flaws of social partnership in order to oppose it – the fact is that it does not work, at least not for those who sell their labour power.

We make no apologies for including so much material on industrial/trade union matters in this issue which appears during TUC week. This includes a fascinating reminiscence of Henry Gunter, a Jamaican militant who sent us parts of his own story which we are pleased to publish. However we are not fixated solely on the trade unions, important as these are, and continue in this issue with the third part of Kenny Coyle's series on anti-communism. Rob Griffith's article will, we hope, open a debate on the national question.

The trades union congress, St. Andrews Hall Glasgow 1919.



The Limits and Contradictions of Social Partnership

John Kelly

Previous articles in this journal have documented the costs of so-called 'social partnership' agreements for workers and unions. By weakening trade unionism and subordinating its activities to the logic of the capitalist firm, employers have been able to boost profits at the expense of workers' jobs and their terms and conditions of employment and to do so with the acquiescence of the trade unions.¹ In its most recent statement on British manufacturing industry the TUC has drawn attention to the problems of poor output growth – 1.5% in the three years 1996-99 – and the loss of over 200,000 jobs in the past two years. One of its solutions to these problems is social partnership, even though, as we shall see, the partnership companies have axed jobs just as readily as other firms.² Moreover, and despite the best efforts of the TUC and Labour Party leaderships, the number of partnership agreements has been estimated to be no more than about fifty.³ If these arrangements are so beneficial to capital and so popular with the powerful right wing of the labour movement, then why are they so rare? To answer this question, we need to set out and then explore the emerging contradictions of social partnership, both at the level of the capitalist firm and at the level of the state.

First, partnership agreements often entail a pledge to the workforce of some degree of job or employment security. But there is an increasingly apparent contradiction between the labour force stability implied by this pledge and the chronic instability of the product markets in which many partnership companies operate. Second, the rhetoric of partnership agreements has often promised unions a significant degree of influence over corporate business strategy. Yet the reality is that key business decisions in sectors such as finance, retail and banking are made by small, rival cliques of boardroom capitalists locked in takeover battles, whilst unions and workers are left standing on the sidelines. Finally, the European model of partnership espoused by the TUC implies some broad degree of social and economic equality between labour and capital. Yet the reality of the much vaunted Irish experience of 'partnership' has been a pronounced rise in inequality.

Competition, centralization of capital and job losses Following the sale of the Rover car company to the Phoenix Group in April this year, almost 4,000 jobs are likely to be shed at the company and its associated supplier firms. This was the most

dramatic example of the continuing erosion of employment in British manufacturing industry, and was particularly significant because of Rover's much-heralded (and clearly worthless) pledge of employment security. Since Labour was elected in May 1997 there have been more than 170,000 redundancies in the manufacturing sector, with the heaviest losses in Scotland and the West Midlands.⁴ Some commentators have blamed these redundancies on Britain's slack labour laws, which make it very easy for employers to axe jobs. Others have blamed the strong value of the pound which makes British manufacturing exports more expensive than goods priced in other currencies.

Both these explanations have a grain of truth, but neither gets at the underlying processes which constantly drive capitalist employers to cut costs. In sectors such as drinks, utilities, banking, insurance and finance the competition between rival firms has resulted in a rapid process of centralization of capital. The spirits sector of the world drinks industry was controlled by just four firms as late as 1997: United Distillers, IDV, Allied Domecq and Seagram. Since then United Distillers and IDV have merged and now form part of the Diageo group, and Seagram is likely to be taken over by either Diageo or Allied. In the utilities sector, the separate water and electricity companies created by privatization are in the process of being centralized into multi-utility conglomerates. North West Water is now part

TRADE UNION

Workers protesting against fat cats.



of the United Utilities group with interests in electricity as well as water; the South Western Electricity Board was taken over by Welsh Water to create a company called Hyder; Scottish Power now owns Southern Water; South West Water and Anglian Water are now subsidiaries of a company called Pennon.⁵ It is a similar story in banking and insurance. Lloyds bought up TSB several years ago and the new group acquired Scottish Widows in June 1999; the Royal Bank of Scotland acquired NatWest in March of this year; and Barclay's Bank is about to take over the Woolwich Building Society.

National level partnership The centralization of capital reflects the competitive struggle as each firm tries to enhance market share and increase its mass of profits. But centralization only makes sense if production costs can be driven down. In manufacturing and services, the merger of giant firms normally leads to the closure of production facilities or branches which have become surplus to capitalist requirements. For example, the proposed takeover of the Woolwich Building Society by Barclay's will result in the closure of about 100 High Street branches. In the more highly regulated utilities sector, where there is less scope for closures and stricter price regulation, profits can be increased by cutting jobs and intensifying the work of those who remain. Although labour is rarely the largest cost of production in manufacturing and utilities, it is normally the most pliable, particularly where protective labour laws are feeble, unemployment is high and unions are weak or compliant. It is in these sectors that we find a concentration of social partnership agreements with their promises of employment security. However in the conflict between the security provisions of the partnership agreement and the competitive logic of costcutting, it is the latter which wins out every time.

Union influence Since May 1997 Allied Domecq has shed 160 jobs in London and Leamington Spa, whilst drinks rival Diageo has cut 1,000 jobs in Perth, Strathleven and Basildon. The cidemaker H.P.Bulmer, another famous partnership company pledged to employment security, shut down two sites in 1999 despite operating as a virtual monopoly in a very buoyant market. In the utilities sector, Hyder announced 1,000 job losses in December 1999 to add to the 1,500 jobs lost in its water division between 1993 and 1998. British Gas Trading got its 1997 partnership agreement off to an inauspicious (but predictable) start by shutting down two major offices with the loss of several hundred jobs. And Scottish Power contributed to the jobs haemorrhage with an announcement of 450 redundancies in May of this year. In banking it was a similar story, though on a substantially larger scale.

Barclays shut down 171 branches in April of this year with 7,500 jobs lost in the process. NatWest, another partnership company, cut 3,400 jobs in 1999 representing about 6% of its workforce. Its new owner, the Royal Bank of Scotland, announced in February that its plans involved 18,000 job losses from the former NatWest branch network.⁶

The chronic inability of so-called job security agreements to prevent job losses has now been confirmed by the 1998 Workplace Employee Relations Survey, a national study of almost 2,200 establishments. It showed that the presence of a job security policy made absolutely no difference to the rate of job loss (although firms with such policies were less likely to resort to compulsory redundancies).⁷

Perhaps aware that job security policies raise worker expectations of job protection, employers are simply abandoning such measures altogether. 36 companies recently obtained money from the government's Partnership Fund, set up to encourage partnership at work, but hardly any of them involved job or employment security.⁸ A survey of fifty recent trade union recognition agreements told a similar story. Although sixteen of them purported to be partnership agreements, only three contained employment security commitments such as a no compulsory redundancy pledge.⁹

The employers' rapidly diminishing interest in job security has nothing to do with the steady fall in unemployment, apparent not only in Britain but across the capitalist world since the mid-1990s (with the exception of Japan). For despite tightening labour markets, there has actually been a rise in levels of job insecurity. The proliferation of insecure, temporary and often low-paid work; the difficulty of finding alternative well-paid work after redundancy; and the weakness of trade unions: all these factors have continued to fuel high levels of anxiety amongst sections of workers about the costs of job loss.¹⁰ It is a measure of the arrogance of the employers and their indifference to workers' interests, that they have simply lost interest in the whole issue of job security.

Union influence A similar disdain increasingly characterises the relations of partnership employers with trade unions. Tesco, the latest model partnership company to be uncritically written up in the business and right wing union press, wasted no time in exploiting the compliance of the shopworkers' union USDAW. The first collective agreement in the new era of partnership abolished double time payments for Sunday working by new staff and replaced it with time and a half, although some local shop stewards did put up a fight.¹¹ Worse is yet to come as Tesco has announced that it wants to scrap premium payments for Saturday working for all of its staff, on the specious grounds that the weekend is now a normal part of the working week and should not be



paid at a different rate.¹² Of course by the employer's own logic, pay could also be harmonised upwards by increasing weekday rates up to weekend rates, but that would eat into profits and dividends. Pay rises in other partnership companies such as Barclays, NatWest, Blue Circle and Hyder have settled around the average for their respective industries, neither better nor worse.

That employers have no real interest in developing meaningful bargaining relations with unions is apparent from their attempts to dilute the bargaining process or even avoid it altogether. NatWest became so impatient with the attitude to pay negotiations of its 'partnership' union UNIFI that it simply imposed the 1999 pay settlement on the workforce. National Power and Tesco only signed so-called partnership agreements in 1996 and 1998 respectively after senior managements debated whether they could derecognize their unions entirely and operate as non-union firms. It was fear of union and worker reaction, not fondness for the principles of labour-management co-operation, that led them to sign partnership agreements.¹³

In the insurance industry, Scottish Widows (now part of Lloyds TSB) and Legal and General have both entered 'partnership agreements' that weaken the role of collective bargaining and substitute employer-friendly processes of 'discussion' and 'consultation'. In the former, pay and conditions are no longer to be 'the subject of acrimonious debate and contest but will be jointly settled in a new pay & benefits committee.....'. The Legal and General agreement declares that 'formal joint negotiation is not an appropriate way of managing pay.' The union signatory to these agreements is MSF, an organization whose New Labourite national leadership has become increasingly enamoured of social partnership. Even more alarming is the evolution of one of the oldest partnership agreements at Blue Circle Cement which dates from 1985. The 1997 version of the agreement, strenuously supported by the company's pro-partnership AEEU convener, sought to do away with 'rules and regulations' and substitute 'flexibility and commitments'. Translated into plain English, the employer wanted to scrap hard won worker rights embodied in collective agreements and replace them with employer control. For instance, workers had secured the right to take three days compassionate leave in the event of a family bereavement. Under the new agreement, this automatic right was replaced with an employer commitment 'to view any such request with sympathy and consistency'.¹⁴ It is clear that when employers talk about the benefits of social partnership with unions, they mean compliant, pro-business unions that are content with meaningless consultation and empty pledges of job security.

National level partnership: Britain and Ireland
Social partnership does not operate only at

corporate level. Both in Britain and Ireland the trade union confederations (the Trades Union Congress and the Irish Congress of Trade Unions respectively) have sought to influence their respective governments and secure state intervention in labour markets, industry and welfare provision. The record of the British TUC after more than three years of New Labour is one of fairly conspicuous failure. True, there is a National Minimum Wage and a union recognition law and trade union leaders now talk to government ministers and sit on public bodies, all of which would have been unthinkable under the Tories. On the other hand, TUC influence over government policy has been minimal. Public spending was pegged for two years at the level planned by the Tories despite union protestations. Pensions have been raised by amounts so small as to be insulting and the Minimum Wage was set at a level way below that demanded by unions. The policy of privatisation has been continued, through the Private Finance Initiative and through Best Value (another form of Compulsory Competitive Tendering), and indeed has been extended into new areas such as air traffic control. New Labour's approach to the enactment of European Directives on parental leave and on part-timers' rights has been identical to the Tories: it has tried to water them down in order to make them inoffensive to big business. Even the TUC, for all its meekness and compliance, has been moved to mount a legal challenge to the Labour government, the outcome of which is still awaited.¹⁵ Even though the unions have secured more access to the corridors of power, nobody in the government seems to be paying them any attention.

Social partnership in Ireland The Irish experience of social partnership dates back to 1987 when the ICTU signed up to the first of a series of corporatist-style arrangements with government in which the union movement traded wage restraint for a series of welfare and legislative measures. The Programme for National Recovery was succeeded by the Programme for Economic and Social Progress (1990), the Programme for Work and Competitiveness (1993) and Partnership 2000 (1997). Supporters of these arrangements point to evidence on growth rates and on unemployment to vindicate their case. A 3.4% annual growth of GDP per head of population (1980-93) has turned Ireland into the fastest growing economy in Europe and earned it the appellation of the 'Celtic Tiger'. Unemployment has fallen rapidly, from 16% in 1987, one of the highest rates in the advanced capitalist world, to just 4.7% by May of this year.¹⁶

But a closer look at the figures suggests that Irish and foreign capital have been the real winners at the expense of organized labour. To start with, there has



been a dramatic shift in the class distribution of the spoils of economic growth. In 1987, the share of national income taken by capital through profits, dividends and interest was 31% whilst labour's share, made up of wages and salaries, was 69%. Ten years, and three partnership agreements later, capital's share had soared to 41% and labour's dropped to 59%¹⁷. Foreign capitalist investors have found Ireland to be highly attractive and for good reason. Levels of corporate taxation are minimal; it is easy to repatriate profits to overseas corporate headquarters; and the Irish government has abandoned its policy of encouraging foreign firms to recognise trade unions. The distribution of wage income has also become highly unequal despite the partnership rhetoric about fairness. Earnings dispersion (the earnings of the top ten per cent of wage/salary workers compared with the bottom ten per cent) grew faster in Ireland than in any other advanced capitalist country between 1987 and 1994, the period of the first two partnership agreements. The reasons for this trend were twofold. On the one hand a small stratum of highly paid managers and professional workers saw their incomes rise very rapidly during the years of supposed pay moderation. On the other hand, the proportion of low paid workers actually increased in Ireland over the same period, from 18% of the labour force to 21%, making the 'Celtic Tiger' the low pay capital of Europe.¹⁸

Even more alarming is the impact of the centralized partnership agreements on the trade union movement itself. Although union membership has risen a little in the 1990s, unions have experienced huge problems breaking into the growing non-union sector, despite the supposed attractions for employers of social partnership. It is also becoming apparent that the biggest casualty of centralized partnership bargaining is the scale and quality of workplace trade unionism. A growing number of union activists in Ireland have voiced their concern at the declining level of union activity at the workplace, and the problems this creates in articulating and pursuing members' interests.¹⁹ The co-optation of the union movement at national level and the demobilization of the unions at workplace level are two sides of a 'partnership process' that has redistributed income from labour to capital on a massive scale.

Social partnership: limits and prospects

The rhetoric of social partnership emerged within the British labour movement in the early 1990s at a time of acute union weakness. Unemployment was rising again after declining in the late 1980s; union membership was continuing to fall each year; a small, but growing number of employers had stepped up the class war by derecognizing trade unions; and the Tories had been re-elected for a fourth term. The strategy of social partnership preached the doctrine that moderate unions had no

alternative but to collaborate with the employer in order to 'add value' to the firm. By doing so they could avoid derecognition, exert a degree of influence over business strategy and help protect jobs. The evidence assembled here shows these hopes are an illusion. Capitalist employers in competitive markets are both unable and unwilling to provide any meaningful job protection. They are equally unwilling to cede any degree of real influence to unions although they are perfectly happy to have union leaders legitimate unpalatable decisions about jobs and sell them to the workforce. At national level, both in Britain and even more so in Ireland, it has become clear that the logic of social partnership subordinates the interests of workers to the economic and political interests of capital.

Yet there are grounds for thinking that the strategy of social partnership may be reaching the end of its shelf life. The material conditions which gave rise to it are steadily changing and so in turn is the balance of class forces. First, and most significant, is the fall in unemployment from 9.6% in 1994 to 8.2% (1996), 6.3% (1998) and 5.6% in May this year.²⁰ The business press now carries a growing number of stories about labour shortages and the bargaining power this places in the hands of organised labour is evident from the recent strikes at privatised bus companies, many of whom face serious recruitment problems.²¹ Second, for the first time in twenty years union membership is on the rise. Figures for both 1998 and 1999 showed small increases for the union movement as a whole, fuelled in part by the upsurge in recognition agreements across the economy. Because of the increased volume of resources going into organizing activity, a majority of individual unions are now back into growth.²² Third, the wave of union derecognition has abated and under Labour's Employment Relations Act (1999) the employers must now follow a set procedure if they want to remove unions. Finally, we have witnessed the first strike threat by workers operating under a social partnership agreement. Scottish Power workers finally said no to yet another spate of redundancies, announced in May this year, by voting 4 to 1 in favour of industrial action. Faced with this determined display of militancy the employer backed down and scrapped the proposed job cuts just days before the strike was due to begin.²³

Conclusion As labour markets tighten, union activists should be able to argue more persuasively than ever that social partnership is a dead end for the union movement and that there is an effective alternative. Building (or rebuilding) workplace union organization; linking groups of activists across workplaces and companies; winning the support of officials and union conferences for militant and progressive policies; using union elections to replace the timid advocates of social partnership with



militants who will 'add value' to workers' lives not to corporate balance sheets; and finally waging the ideological struggle against the anti-socialist forces now in charge of the Labour Party. ★

Notes:

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- 17 Allen, K. *Workers and the Celtic Tiger. Why partnership doesn't pay*, Dublin: Socialist Workers' Party, 1999, p.3
- 18 Pay figures from Barrett, A., Callan, T. and Nolan, B. 'Rising wage inequality, returns to education and labour market institutions: evidence from Ireland', *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 37(1), 1999; Teague, P. 'Pay determination in the Republic Of Ireland: towards social corporatism?', *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 33(2), 1995 and O'Reilly, M. 'An unequal partnership', *Morning Star* 24 September 1997.
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- 21 *Morning Star* 12 August 2000.
- 22 *Labour Research*, August 2000.
- 23 *Morning Star* 1 June, 2 June 2000.



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What they forgot to kill

UK Trade Unions & the Organising Agenda Peggy Prior

some 900 people joined. However, the exercise was very expensive and, worse, "it is not known how many of these new members were retained".⁴ Undeterred, unions adopted a range of tactics to attract new members, including the expansion of membership benefits and services, the production of glossy leaflets, and, in some cases, the employment of dedicated recruiters.⁵

Nevertheless, union membership continued to fall throughout the early 1990s. At the same time, however, unions in Australia and the United States were finding a new buoyancy.⁶ Following their lead, some unions began, tentatively at first, to adopt the methods known collectively as organising, and in 1998 the TUC opened its Organising Academy, which trains organisers working on placements for individual unions. The results, at least to date, appear to have been positive. In 1998, total TUC membership grew for the first time since 1979,⁷ and in 1999 all unions reported an increase, bringing total TUC membership to some 7.85 million.⁸ Moreover, organising drives have been successful in winning a number of new voluntary recognition deals, with more workplaces ready, if necessary, to use the statutory procedures which came into effect in June 2000.⁹

The organising approach differs radically from previous recruitment efforts. At its heart is the recognition that leafleting and other cold selling tactics are ineffective; instead, what works is the personal approach. One of the central principles of organising is that successful recruitment depends on one-to-one contact, where the organiser listens to the worker, seeking to demonstrate how joining a union might assist with his/her concerns. A second, and related, principle is that like recruits like – that is, workers are more likely to be persuaded to join a union if they are approached by somebody like themselves, and particularly by somebody of the

Trade unions in the UK have found a new sense of confidence and purpose. The TUC, along with many individual unions, has adopted what has come to be known as the organising agenda, and organising is the means by which unions can "take their future into their own hands"¹

This paper will examine the organising agenda, outlining its strategies and tactics, and assessing its apparent success in increasing union membership. In so doing, it will note the distinction between organising as a new, improved method for recruiting union members, and organising as a fundamental shift in culture and priorities. It will also seek to open the debate on the implications of the organising agenda for the Left. The paper will conclude that a wholehearted adoption of the organising agenda is crucial, but that radical change will have to take place on a number of fronts if a genuine organising culture is to be achieved.²

Recruiting new trade union members

Between 1979 and 1996, membership of TUC-affiliated trade unions fell from 12.5 million to below 6 million.³ There were a number of reasons for this, not least the decline of highly-unionised manufacturing industries and the collapse of working class confidence and solidarity engineered by the Conservative administration. However, the unions did not preside idly over their own decline, and attempts were made to stem the losses. In 1990, for example, the TUC coordinated a drive by fourteen unions in Trafford Park, Manchester: workers in 67 companies were approached, and



same gender, ethnic origin and/or age. One heartening by-product of the drive to organise has, therefore, been the increasing number of women, black people and younger people who have been visibly drawn into the ranks of a movement which might still be described as ‘pale, male and stale’¹⁰

The organising model is also notable for its strategic approach to recruitment. Once initial contact has been made, whether as a result of an enquiry to the union office, or perhaps as part of a targeted campaign, the organiser will recruit a small group of members and then work with them to develop and implement an organising plan. Such plans, in the main, focus upon equipping the initial group of workers to approach their workmates, with support being provided by the organiser and the wider resources of the union. Within the plan, there will be detailed ‘maps’ of the workplace, identifying those workers who are most likely to join and, crucially, become involved in further organising. The plan also identifies the key issues affecting the workforce, so that the organising team can initiate campaigns around them. Similar approaches are taken in workplaces where there is less than 100% union membership, or where union activity has declined or stagnated.

The organising model of union recruitment brings together a number of key factors which explain its apparent success. First, it lays great emphasis on the need to ask workers to join the union: polls of non-members and TUC research indicate that there are some five million workers in Britain who would join a union if they were asked.¹¹ Second, since it stresses the role of lay activists and dedicated organisers, it has enabled unions to be proactive in an era when “financial pressure ... has led to cuts in the number of full-time officials, and other changes ... have put heavy pressure on those who are left”.¹² Third, it focuses on the willingness and ability of unions to respond to the needs and aspirations of people at work. The two most important reasons for joining a union continue to be the need for support in case of a problem at work, and the desire for better pay, terms and conditions, both of which “lie at the heart of traditional collectivism and confirm its continuing relevance today”.¹³

At the same time, however, a note of caution may be necessary, especially since the organising approach is still relatively new. There is, as yet, “no reliable evidence on organising drives *per se* ... (at least not for this country ...)”,¹⁴ although one study has found that “union recruitment drives which emphasise organising are proving successful in raising ... membership levels”.¹⁵ However, overall union member-

ship is affected by a number of factors. Whilst the relative importance of each is difficult to assess, the ‘determinants of union growth’ include “the cost of living, unemployment, the attitude of employers, the legal framework and the institutions which devise and administer it, the growth and composition of the labour force, public opinion and the value system of the community...”.¹⁶ It is possible, therefore, that the adoption of the organising model has simply coincided with the election of a Labour government which, while it has failed to deliver on a number of fronts, has at least created a slightly more positive social and economic climate for trade unionism.

An organising culture Perhaps the most important element of the organising agenda is the emphasis on “membership participation, empowerment and a very real sense of ownership of the processes of organisation and bargaining”.¹⁷ This, above all, distinguishes organising from other approaches, and notably from the ‘servicing’ model adopted by most unions in the 1980s. In a servicing union, members are treated as passive recipients of representation and the outcomes of collective bargaining, of friendly benefits, and of a range of individual services such as cheap insurance and personal legal and financial advice. However, “we now realise that it is not sufficient to recruit members: we must *organise them* – or, even better, assist them to *organise themselves*”.¹⁸ In an organising union, then, workers are recruited on the basis that they will be involved in identifying issues

Table I: The Servicing and Organising Models of Union Recruitment

In a Servicing Union ...	In an Organising Union ...
‘The union’ is a third party	Members are the union
‘The union’ tells members how to solve problems, or does it for them	Members generate their own issues and organise to solve them together
Union officials rely on employers to provide lists of workers’ names	Members ‘map’ their workplace and generate their own information
Union officials rely on employer cooperation for access to the workplace	Organising is done from the inside, or can take place elsewhere – e.g. in workers’ homes
Union membership is pushed using cold selling techniques	Union membership is built through initial contacts, natural leaders and one-to-one discussion
Union membership is sold on the basis of services, as an ‘insurance policy’	Union membership is built through education and support, the key message being that of collective empowerment
Members rely on full-time officials to recruit and solve problems	Workers build the union through one-to-one organising and form a committee to solve problems
Recruiting members is seen as a separate activity	Recruiting is an integral part of organising
Results are achieved, but will probably be temporary	Results are achieved as a result of sustained efforts - and are more likely to be permanent



of direct concern to them, at work and in the community, and in resolving their problems through collective activity. While the servicing union does things for (or even to) members, the organising union does things with them, primarily by enabling them to do things for themselves. 'The union' becomes 'our union'. Hence there is a shift from a reactive culture, one which is concerned primarily with responding to employer initiatives, to an organising culture founded upon active participation in setting, and pursuing, the workers' agenda. Table 1 gives a fuller picture of the distinctions between the servicing and organising approaches to recruiting new members.

As yet, there is very little evidence to indicate that organising has, in reality, meant much more than the new approach to recruiting outlined above, but, taken to its logical extent, the organising agenda entails a fundamental shift in trade union culture, priorities, strategies and government, as well as a necessary reallocation of resources. Table 2 draws out some key elements to demonstrate just how radically an organising union might differ from a servicing union. The distinctions run across virtually all aspects of trade unionism, from the roles of members, representatives and full-time

officials, through the content of the bargaining agenda, to issues such as attitudes to employment law and equality of opportunity. Workplace trade unionism becomes much more visible, and the bargaining agenda, rather than being reactive and economistic, becomes proactive and inclusive. Resources are shifted away from legal representation and top-heavy bureaucracy and towards organising: one US union now devotes some 30% of its resources to organising.²⁰ Similarly, a priority is given to those activities, such as research, information and education, which provide direct support for union members in the workplace.

Clearly, then, the organising agenda represents a challenge to established norms. One example is that of the role and style of shop stewards. A shop steward can act as a delegate, who is "mandated by his members and [does] no more or less than carry out their wishes", or as a representative, who takes "much more of a leadership role, taking initiatives and playing a major part in the development of policies as well as in their execution".²² The organising agenda demands that shop stewards be encouraged to adopt the 'representative' role, taking the lead in building participatory workplace trade

Table 2: Servicing and Organising Cultures

	In a Servicing Culture	In an Organising Culture
Union membership represents	an insurance policy	a voice at work: dignity, respect and empowerment
Members	are passive recipients blame 'the union' when things go wrong complain that 'the union' does nothing for them, even though they pay their dues may be apathetic, failing to attend meetings or participate	are active participants own the issues, successes and failures identify with and participate in their union; an attack on the union is an attack on them. want to play a full part
Shop stewards	react to members' problems	act as leaders, educating and empowering members to identify and solve problems
Full-time officials	recruit members and solve problems	empower, support and assist members
Union presence	may only be felt during pay and other major negotiations	is constant and high-profile
The bargaining agenda	is largely reactive and defensive, and frequently economistic and sectional	is active, proactive and inclusive
Individual employment rights	are all-important; vast resources are dedicated to enforcing members' rights	are important, but no substitute for organisation and bargaining; the law lays down minimum standards, it is used as a negotiating tool, and the courts are a last resort
Collective employment rights	may be viewed as irrelevant in an individualistic union-member relationship	provide crucial supports for the organising agenda
Equality of opportunity	may be viewed as an optional extra; women, black people and others may be marginalised and under-represented	are viewed as central in an inclusive bargaining agenda; steps are taken to involve all sections of society
Union policy and government	may be highly centralised, professionalised and bureaucratic	is led by lay members
Trade unions are	reactive, defensive and over-reliant on employer recognition and cooperation	active, proactive and independent



unionism, and shunning the 'leave it to me' attitude. As one study found, "local leaders, by their ability to lead in a way that encourages members to become involved and to see the collective implications of the issues that arise, can build upon surges of participation and interest, thus increasing the strength of workplace unionism."²³

Similarly, the role of most full-time union officials centres on servicing union members "through collective bargaining and individual casework."²⁴ Organising, however, entails "the lay membership taking on as many servicing tasks as possible (thereby freeing the officer to concentrate on leading the development of new forms of workplace organisation as well as organising the unorganised in other workplaces)".²⁵ This in turn will require extensive re-education for those accustomed to working in a servicing environment. Union members and their shop stewards will have to reconsider, not only the demands they make of their union, but also the ways in which they make them. Essentially, organising means less 'what can the union do for me?', and more 'what I can do with and for my union?'

The challenges posed by the organising agenda become less daunting when it is recognised that, to a great extent, the unions are "merely rediscovering their original role – that of assisting working people to organise themselves and thus to improve their terms and conditions and gain respect at the workplace".²⁶ When, in 1888 and 1889, the match-girls, then the gasworkers, then the dockers, organised themselves to take action over their appalling working and living conditions, they did so spontaneously, building their trade unionism from the shopfloor up. Moreover, their actions were a revolt against what we might now term the servicing activities of the amalgamated unions: "Trade Societies which admitted only workmen earning a high standard rate, ... and which frequently excluded all but regularly apprenticed men, were regarded by the builder's labourer, the gas stoker, or the docker, as aristocratic corporations with which he had as little in common as with the House of Lords".²⁷ The 'new unions' organised both men and women, and they placed their faith in the ability of the working class to achieve improvements through collective action. The organising agenda, similarly, has collectivism and equality of opportunity at its core.

On the other hand, however, it has been suggested that 'Newer Unionism' might be a more accurate description of the organising agenda, since unions are now seeking to organise a more diverse workforce in a wider range of jobs and workplaces.²⁸ In many ways, both analyses are correct. The organising agenda, with its emphasis on self-organisation, empowerment, and the ability of

working people to achieve things on their own terms and in their own way, certainly seeks to replicate the collectivism and spontaneity of the late 1880s. At the same time, however, there have been extensive changes in the nature of work, the workforce and the workplace, not least the increasing importance of small and medium sized enterprises, the growing numbers of women at work, the multiracial and multicultural nature of today's workforce and the growth of part-time and 'atypical' work. The organising agenda has the potential, not only to address all of these developments, but also to do so in a way which seeks to overcome the "growing division of workers into sections and groups, each pursuing its own economic interests irrespective of the rest".²⁹ Ultimately, the goal of organising is to rebuild working class solidarity, or, as one of the original organisers, Tom Mann, put it, "the power and the disposition to act in concert as the working-class against the dominating plutocratic class".³⁰

The organising agenda and the Left

Democracy in the UK is in crisis, as has been demonstrated by the very low turn-outs in recent parliamentary and other elections. The same is true of democracy in the trade unions: a substantial proportion of union members take no part in the decision-making processes. For example, in the recent elections for the T&G General Executive Council, no less than 13 of the 39 members were elected unopposed.³¹ Whilst this might well demonstrate a degree of faith in and respect for those candidates, it is more likely proof of a widespread failure to engage in the institutions of union government. And indeed, if members of a union – any union – are recruited on the basis of 'servicing' principles, because the union will do things for them, it is hardly surprising that those members will view the structures by which policy is made and implemented, and by which the union is administered, as totally irrelevant.

Since the organising agenda is concerned with rebuilding working class confidence and participation, it holds out substantial hope for the renewal of democracy in the trade union movement. It also offers an unrivalled opportunity for Left unity. However, if this opportunity is to be grasped, radical changes will be necessary. Socialists and Communists in the union movement, as Lenin suggested, seek to "take up actively the political education of the working class and the development of its political consciousness".³² Trade unions are an important vehicle for this process, since "If you want to help the 'masses' and win [their] sympathy and support ... , you must absolutely work wherever the masses are to be found. The trade unions ... are the very organisations in which the masses are to be



found”.³³ However, the organising agenda poses some important questions about the way in which these aims are pursued. At present, it would appear that the organised Left is far more concerned with delivering votes for specific candidates and policies than it is with engaging in constructive debate: if the chosen candidate is elected, or the preferred policy adopted, it hardly matters that few members took part in the decision. As a result, Left politics have become increasingly personality-driven, particularly with regard to elections and appointments, and this in turn has a tendency to exacerbate the principled differences which exist between different groups. Furthermore, and somewhat contradictorily, personality politics can also lead to the forging of alliances which further damage the prospects for unity.

The way out of this cycle of destruction is through the organising agenda, which is essentially concerned with democracy, equality and dignity. Organising means that working people are empowered to make informed decisions, rather than having to be told who to vote for or what to do. The role of the Left is, therefore, to take the lead in promoting the organising agenda, and the shifts in culture and resources which must accompany it, in order to ensure that empowerment is a reality. Just as workplace organisation is built around issues of concern to the workforce, so an organising union can be built around key popular demands such as the repeal of the anti-union laws, the drive for genuine equality of opportunity, and principled opposition to notions of ‘partnership’. Once this process has started, it will gain its own momentum, ensuring that electoral and other decisions are made, not on the basis of personality and which ‘machine’ is supporting a particular position, but on the basis of whether or not a candidate or policy position is likely to further the interests of working class democracy and solidarity.

Conclusions This paper has explored the organising agenda in trade unions, highlighting its apparent success in delivering membership increases, but urging a note of caution regarding the fundamental changes which are necessary if a genuine organising culture of trade unionism is to be built. The organising agenda poses major challenges to almost every aspect of established trade unionism, including the activities of the Left, although these must be viewed in the context of organising as a return to the roots of British trade unionism and the revival of working class democracy and solidarity. Perhaps the real question is how the labour movement came, in such a relatively short time, to depart so far from its roots. However, it is clear that, if unions are to fulfil their potential, the organising agenda is the only way forward. ★

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Henry Gunter the recollections of a Jamaican trade union activist and communist

In 1940 a recruitment drive was launched by the American government for workers from Jamaica to the Panama Canal Zone. I joined the many that had volunteered. It was my first trip abroad and [I] was excited about it. With hundreds of my countrymen we set sail from Kingston the capital.

Bearing in mind it was wartime, World War II in progress, the five-day trip was not a very pleasant affair. I was confined to the bunk for most of the time due to sea sickness.

On our arrival we were placed in different jobs. I was placed in one of the Commissary unlike a supermarket. It was for whites only. An apartheid system existed, the white area as classified as "Gold" while the black peoples' area was classified as "Silver." This was my first experience of racial discrimination in operation.

Lionel Lynch an active stalwart in the Labour Movement from Jamaica got in touch with me on reading a letter I had written to the local press on the Labour struggle in Jamaica. He came to see me as he was working in a different part of the Zone. We became very good friends over the years on our return to Jamaica after the expiration of the 2 years contract.

We travelled at different times to America as war workers. He made a contributory article to my paper *The Jamaican Worker*. Lionel Lynch died here in Birmingham, a very active participant in our struggle for social justice.

After a brief stay in Jamaica I was recruited along with hundreds of Jamaicans for war work in the United States of America. We had a trouble free sailing although the fear of German U-boat attack was always at the back of our mind, a convoy took us safely to New York. We were then dispatched in groups to different areas of the United States. My group was sent to work in Milwaukee, Wisconsin at the Allis Chalmers Tractor plant, which was converted to do munitions work for the war effort.

We all came under the Trades Union Congress of Industrial Organisation, the main union which covers the workers in the factory. A call from the editor of the Union daily paper for one of us to write about how we fit in with the new surroundings - I wrote an article in which I set out plans for full involvement in the works and where racial discrimination would impede our war effort. There were few black Americans employed as skilled labour. The article led to an invitation to write a small daily paper on behalf of the Jamaican workers so rightly named *The Jamaican Worker*.

Through the [sic] paper I was able to secure improvements in our working conditions as we were assigned in the first instance to menial jobs. The call for up-gradement did not go unheeded. Many of our workers were placed in jobs where they could learn new skills.

Through the columns of the *Jamaican Worker* our boys were able to keep in touch with news from home as the articles were passed unto the Editor of *Public Opinion*, O J Fairclough, who in turn printed my editorial articles and other news of interest. A few of our Jamaican workers made written contribution[s] as my friend and comrade Lionel Lynch, who was working in another part of the United States.

During this period I became closely associated with the CJO branch and its union activities. I met some of the top officers who were interested in giving our workers fair play. My address to one of the local conferences was well received from the next day's report in their daily newspaper. What was expressed to me is how little the Trades Union had been involved in our recruitment from Jamaica as foreign workers. This was also true of our own Trades Union back in Jamaica in laying down any labour guidance for our protection. This was also borne out on our recruitment to work on the Canal Zone also [sic]. It seems that during those days and maybe years before when Jamaican workers were recruited to help build the Panama Canal or to cut the cane in Cuba, [there] was an interest only to get rid of the surplus unemployed.

At the end of the war in 1945 we were sent to a Camp Murphy in Florida in batches from where we were repatriated back to Jamaica. The treatment was severe in the behaviour of the American guards who were stationed in the Camp. They carried out intolerable abuse to some who they felt had stepped out of line. These guards were what was then called 'Southern Crackers,' armed to shoot. I took steps to write an article on this treatment and sent it to the Editor of the *Union Daily News* in Milwaukee. The editor printed my account with a follow up article on the treatment which was meted out as unjustifiable for men who had given their services to the war effort. I did not realise that activities and writing were to be used against me due to the era of McCarthyism, which sprang up after the war in America. My fellow countryman who I shared accommodation with during my stay in Milwaukee was sent home in his 'hatch' after me. When I met him in Kingston after his arrival, he informed me of the FBI investigator who called at the house and made enquiries in to my behaviour and conduct. Many of the men in my group of workers at Allis Chalmers had been able to return to America but I was unable to secure a visa due to my activities, even when I was able to produce a letter of commendation from the boss of my works section. On my return to Jamaica I met Frank Hill who gave a write up on my return in his paper *The Masses*. At his office I met Mr Norman Manley who was due to



tour America on a speaking tour, I had helped to set up with Mr Brindley Cyrus, a West Indian Lawyer stationed in Chicago, an organisation called the West Indian American Society. Mr Brindley Cyrus drove from Chicago to address one of meetings in Milwaukee and I in turn was invited to one of the society's meeting[s] in Chicago.

During my stay in Jamaica, I was actively engaged with my friend Lionel Lynch in forming groups of the PNP in Portland. The one I had organised at Nonsuch had grown in membership, that we were called upon to send a delegate to the PNP annual conference held at the Work Theatre in Kingston. I met Richard Hart when I took a case to him for to recover some money I had invested in a business. The case was successful when it went to the court. Mr Richard Hart was busy with the then West Indian Federation Conference, which I attended as an observer in Kingston. I also met Mr Brindley Cyrus who was there in Jamaica as a guest. He then promised to help me in my efforts to return to the United States.

It was apparent to me that my return to the States would not be successful through the climate of persecution of progressive Americans for Communist activities. This was an era when a number of progressive West Indians were deported. Many had lived for years in the States. When the drive for workers to go to England in an effort for rebuilding the country, I took the opportunity to be one of the many Jamaicans to make the trip in the beginning of 1950, I was fortunate that accommodation was secured for me by a friend who had been living in Birmingham.

Living conditions were very poor then due to a shortage of houses especially for us the incoming immigrants. Along with this shortage of housing was a colour bar practice in operation from many of the local people who refused to let accommodation to the black people. I was under the impression that this was due mainly to fear. This led me to write an article to Public Opinion, which was published under the heading 'The British Workers knew little about us from the Colonies.' The article provoked a reply from the Colonial Department in a form of denial.

I attended a meeting of a small group of Afro-West Indians who were already settled in Birmingham and was elected President of the Afro-Caribbean Organisation. We were deeply grateful to Dr C J Piliso, a South African who had a house where we could meet monthly. Our first task was to win friends among the Labour Movement and other progressive bodies to break through the racial bar which was in existence.

I proposed an organised march through the city centre with banners bearing slogans such as 'No Colour Bar to housing and jobs.' The march was well supported. We set about inviting Councillors of the City Council, Officers from the various Trades Union and political parties to address our meetings. These meetings had greatly helped to highlight

some of the areas where black labour was barred against. The City Transport department, although short of workers, had refused to employ black workers, although the hospitals were fully integrated with the races.

A delegation was set up and an arranged meeting with the City Council took place. After this a public statement was made by one of the City's Aldermen calling for employment of black workers in the Transport Department. Quite a public debate was made of it by the number of letters written for and against it. Finally however a breakthrough was made where blacks were employed as Conductors. Over the years quite an improvement had been made where the Transport System is fully integrated.

I was elected as a delegate by my Union Branch to serve on the City's Trades Council. This gave me an opportunity to bring forward publicly some of the problems we faced in jobs and housing conditions. Where many of our ethnic workers were not acquainted with pay and conditions where they work, the Union Branches were asked to see that the necessary protection was given, in a few areas of work exploitation of cheap labour was highlighted, ie. the struggle for independence in Africa and the West Indies by colonies with the British Empire had been stepped up. Many countries in Africa and Asia were having a period of struggle where British troops were used to crush the peoples' struggle. Many protest meetings were held to which I became an active participant. Kenya was one of the countries from where we had representatives to address our protest meetings. As a delegate to the Birmingham Trades Council I was able to raise the issue of British Colonialism in the repression of the various colonies' drive for independence.

When Paul Robeson's passport was returned to him at the end of the McCarthy era in America, he was able to visit Europe. We arranged a welcoming party for him on his visit to Birmingham. It was a proud and historical time to welcome this great Negro fighter for Peace and Human Justice notwithstanding his great talent as a singer and actor. At our get together he wanted to hear about our problems. At many of the public meetings he addressed he reminded the British people of the contribution the black people had made in the war towards making the World free from Nazism. If they were good enough to serve in the war, they were good enough to be treated as citizens, free from racial discrimination.

I met Paul Robeson in Milwaukee where I was introduced to him when he sang at a rally organised by the American Soviet Friendship Society, then in operation because both countries were allies during World War II. On meeting him here in Birmingham I was able to have his autograph on a photograph taken at that concert in the States. I was able to meet Paul about one year later on his return visit to Britain. he was invited by the African Students Union at Birmingham University as their guest speaker. Paul Robeson was one of the great fighters for Peace



during the Cold War. I was deeply moved in the resolve to fight for peace along with the big throng of people worldwide who were caught up in this struggle. In my resolve I forwarded an article to the progressive magazine called Jamaica Arise under the heading "We must fight for Peace." It was directed to the people in Our own Jamaica, where our people were used during the war to fill the gap of labour shortage in the United States or Britain. But this in itself was no solution to our problem of solving our own long-term employment for our people. Our own self-determination was more important.

During my term as Chairman for the Afro-Caribbean Organisation we had several public meetings on local issues, also on the Colonial struggle. A number of well-known men were invited to address these meetings. Names such as George Padmore, the well known West Indian journalist and Pan African founder Fenner Brockway, MIP, who was a very active fighter on British Colonial issues. When Seretse Khama was banned from returning to his country Botswana because he married a white girl, Ruth, we arranged a protest meeting, which was well attended. A reception was held at Dr Piliso's house prior to the meeting. My wife organised the lunch for Mr Fenner Brockway, Seretse Khama and his wife and children. A personal letter of thanks from them was sent to my wife.

In 1955 when N W Manley became Chief Minister for Jamaica he set up an inquiry team with the sole purpose to enquire into the nature and effect of the migration from the point of view of Jamaican economy would have also the use of Government in deciding what action to take both in Jamaica and in England and was also intended to place it before the Regional Economic Committee of the Caribbean Area since most of the British territories have some interest in the matter.

The Fact-Finding Mission was headed by a Dr Clarence Senior, PhD, who was Head of the Migrant Services in New York of the Puerto Rican government. He was accompanied by Douglas Manley, MA from the University College of the West Indies.

They toured most of Britain to meet local councils and leaders of various organisations. The Afro-Caribbean Organisation met them at Dr Piliso's residence where my wife catered for the invited guests. We were grateful to Dr Piliso for his assistance. Dr Senior with Mr Manley had interviews with Mr A Bradbeer, Alderman; Mr H Baker, Secretary, Birmingham Trades Council; Mr W H Smith, Transport Manager, and Inspector Fothergill; Mr W J Davies, Liaison Officer, Birmingham. One of the recommendations outlined was major responsibility would be in the organisation of the migrants to help themselves. Self-help activities would in turn aid tremendously in arousing the interest of the broader community. The migrant community and the resident community working together in place after place have already proved that inroads can be made in housing and other difficulties. ★

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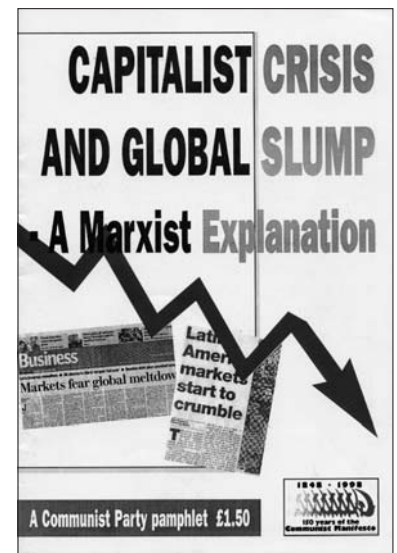
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Anti-communism

Part3: Kenny Coyle

Part two of this article appeared in the last issue of Communist Review

In the first part of this series, we looked first at the intellectual and philosophical origins of what I have termed the “New Wave” of anti-communism, identifying it as a combination of a primarily French-based movement of disillusioned and disappointed post-1968 ex-left intellectuals and the more widespread assumptions of the orthodox Anglo-Saxon Cold War right.

The second part looked at the history of the Soviet Union and, in particular, the analysis of the Stalin period, in which new archival research has forced many Western historians to revise and challenge previously accepted figures and explanations of the Anglo-Saxon Cold Warriors.¹

Despite the argument that the case against communism is based on overwhelming documentation and unarguable evidence, one US historian of the Soviet Stalin era has remarked that the key Western texts lacked the basic scholarly scruples that would be demanded by historians working in any other field. Distortions, rumour, hearsay and preposterous statistical methods abound in academic discussions of the Soviet Union’s recent history, with arguments and ‘evidence’ that no serious historian of other periods or other states would seriously or uncritically accept.²

In this third and final part, I want to look at how ‘The Black Book of Communism’ and the differing figures quoted by ‘The Economist’, have likewise distorted the history of other socialist countries, such as China and Cuba, and have launched an all-sided attack on the international communist movement as accomplices to crimes against humanity.

It should be stressed once again that the ‘Black Book’ is an 850-page work, whose references and footnotes alone take up over 60 pages. The sheer scale of the work has, in itself, been taken by some to be overwhelming evidence and therefore providing an incontestable case against 20th century communism. As one previously quoted enthusiast, claimed “The facts and figures... are irrefutable.”

It is clearly not possible to provide a page-by-page response to the Black Book, such work would likewise need to be a collaborative international effort. Indeed Communists in a number of other countries have produced replies of various sorts to this work. Here, we will limit ourselves to only the broadest issues and calculations and attempt to show that the Black Book, despite the academic credentials of its contributors, is nonetheless an ideological work of dubious methodology, whose underlying anti-communist assumptions lead to some astonishing distortions.

China Following their victory in a long and bloody Civil War, the Chinese communists certainly did act against their political opponents, who had at

differing times collaborated with the bloody Japanese occupation and unleashed waves of terror against pro-communist workers and peasants. However, this repression was not indiscriminate and many of those who had collaborated at a junior level or through coercion were dealt with leniently. Even China’s ‘Last Emperor’ was encouraged, as the Bertolucci film showed, even if in a rather romanticised light, to rehabilitate himself and lead a useful life.

The US-based writer Rudy Rummel, whose work was used by “The Economist” to compile a list of the crimes of communism, puts China second in his list of ‘democidal’ states, worse even than the Nazis. However, we have a measure of Rummel’s determination to push up the figures on China when he includes a figure, itself taken apparently from unidentified newspaper reports, of 5000 dead Shanghai businessmen immediately after the 1949 revolution. This is even more dubious when the source lists them as *suicides*. Likewise, as a response to progressive marriage legislation, which prohibited men from taking more than one wife, some divorced wives whose husbands abandoned them took their own lives. One could blame male chauvinism, feudal practices or family pressure, but this would not do for Rummel, these too must be counted as victims of communism!

Famine ‘statistics’ Like, the Ukrainian famine dealt with in the second part of this series, it is alleged that the Chinese Communists are entirely responsible for the deaths of millions during the 1959-61 period. Usually the figure of 30 million is regularly quoted and therefore, “widely accepted”, ie the mere repetition of them conveys authenticity.³

It is a matter of continuing debate among Chinese Communists about the policies followed by Mao Zedong in this period. There has been widespread criticism of Mao for adopting unrealistic policies during the so-called ‘Great Leap Forward’. In any case, the Chinese Communist Party modified both its agricultural and industrial policies following the setbacks associated with the ‘Great Leap’ and there was substantial inner-party struggle throughout the late 50s and early 60s on a wide range of issues. This hardly supports the idea of a monolithic Communist plan.⁴

The move toward collectivising the Chinese peasantry in 1958 was undoubtedly premature and ill-prepared. Ultra-leftist economic and political blunders and a violation of agreed party policy rather than democidal bloodlust can be blamed. However, it is also highly significant that large parts of China suffered three seasons of poor weather in a row, an objective factor that is usually ignored. Indeed, even critics of the Chinese Communists pointed to the government efforts to aid those affected by famine.

“Through their strong, pervasive control network, however, the Communists were able to equalise the food shortages by maintaining a strict ration system.”⁵ and again, on the period:

“Mainland China was plagued by more of the floods



and droughts that have characterised generations in Chinese history. Undoubtedly, the Communist regime was unique among Chinese governments of the 19th and 20th centuries with respect to the efforts it made toward alleviating the inevitable mass suffering that accompanied these catastrophes. But the efforts were seldom sufficient.⁷⁶

However, if there is no basis for arguing that the Chinese famine was deliberate, but instead a combination of blunders and natural factors, there is still the question of scale. The Indian writer Utsa Patnaik has taken issue with the widespread use of 'famine deaths' statistics, which is worth quoting at length.

"When we look at the estimates of death rate and birth rate for China made by US scholars during the years 1959 to 1961, we find that the death rate rose sharply in a single year, 1960, by as much as 10.8 per thousand compared with 1959. But because China in the single preceding decade of building socialism had reduced its death rate at a much faster rate (from 29 to 12 comparing 1949 and 1958) than India had, this sharp rise to 25.4 in 1960 in China still meant that this 'famine' death rate was virtually the same as the prevalent death rate in India which was 24.6 per thousand in 1960, only 0.8 lower. This latter rate, being considered quite 'normal' for India, has not attracted the slightest criticism. Further, in both the preceding and the succeeding year India's crude death rate was 8 to 10 per thousand higher than in China..."

"Most people will accept that in order to qualify to 'die' in a famine, and become a famine-death victim, it is necessary to be born in the first place. But about 18 million of the estimated 30 million 'dead' in China's famine, were not born at all ... How is this absurd procedure possible? It has come about because not only the rise in the death rate, but also the accompanying sharp fall in the birth rate is being taken into account when estimating 'famine deaths'. The birth rate in China declined and fell to a low of 18 per thousand in 1961 compared with 29.2 in 1958. (After 1961 it rose faster than it had fallen, to reach a peak of 46 by 1964).

"The rise in the death rate during 1959-61 compared to the bench-mark year 1958 implies that there was indeed a total excess mortality of 10.5 million persons over the three-year period 1959-61 in China, excess in the sense that if the death rate had remained the same, then the population would have been larger by that many more people. This is the correct estimate of excess deaths, but this order of 'famine deaths' is not quite spectacular enough for the liberal scholars. Therefore, the decline in the birth rate which was very steep during these three years, is taken into account and the children who would have been born if the decline in birth rate had not taken place, are added on by them to the estimate, to arrive at a three times higher estimate which is then called the 'missing millions' and identified with 'famine deaths'."

Furthermore, Patnaik argues, the issue of 'famine deaths' is not a demographic debate but an ideological one.

"Thus in Russia comparing 1994 with 1990 from

the data given by an US academic, we find that the death rate rose from 48.8 to 84.1 per thousand able-bodied persons, as that country plunged into 'shock therapy' to usher in a capitalist paradise, and succeeded in halving its national income. No one can say that the press is under censorship in Russia today or that the estimates are not known. But not one of those eminent economists who have deafened us with their estimates of 'famine deaths' during Soviet or Chinese collectivisation, have bothered to apply the same method to current Russian or East European data, nor will they ever do so; for their interest lies not in objectivity, but in a sophisticated vilification of socialism."

Indeed, Patnaik goes on to show that had India achieved China's level of mortality, from 1962 onward, this would have saved around six million lives a year over the next three decades. In other words, had a developing capitalist society offered the same basic levels of social provision as that of one of the poorest socialist countries, tens of millions of lives could have been saved – in just one capitalist country alone.

Vietnam No one would question that millions of Vietnamese died this century in decades of wars and revolts. But who was responsible?

Rummel estimates over 3.6 million Vietnamese deaths by war and democide in the 20th century. Since he excludes war as a factor, this allows us to discount some 2 million deaths, although this handily means excusing the imperialist governments of France, Japan and the US for initiating these conflicts. Thus Rummel estimates that only 6000 Vietnamese died at the hands of US forces in the 15 years or so of US intervention. But what of the carpet-bombing of the country, the use of Agent Orange, forcibly herding villagers into 'strategic hamlets', napalming children and burning villages. Surely this must account for more than 6000 deaths?

According to Rummel these are *war deaths* and therefore not admissible evidence. Rummel discounts many US killings on the grounds that they may have been "civilians killed in legitimate military action" or although killed by US forces, these were in defiance of US military commands and therefore not 'democidal'. This is breathtaking.

However, these concerns do not apply to North Vietnamese figures, including the military actions by the Viet Cong (National Liberation Front) in South Vietnam, which are regarded as democidal killings rather than acts of war. The distinction is of course an arbitrary one and this stresses the ideological basis for the selection and presentation of 'facts'.

Indeed Rummel is not even on safe ground with his definition of 'war', since the US aggression was never formally considered as war. US propaganda of the time only referred to the Vietnam "conflict". The US constitution provides strict criteria for the declaration of war, which was never adhered to.

North Korea One can get a tenor of the chapter on Korea when, after a description of North Korea



as a paranoid secretive state, the Black Book helpfully explains that:

“these factors explain why North Korea is sometimes called the hermit kingdom”.

In fact, the term Hermit Kingdom was applied to Korea as a whole at least as early as the 18th century. It refers to that nation's historical tendency to shut out foreign influence given Korea's history of incessant invasion and occupation by foreign powers. Indeed it is only by placing the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) or North Korea, in its national, historical and cultural context that one can understand its idiosyncratic 'juche' ideology.

A key component in the official juche ideology of North Korea is Korean nationalism, as one might expect from a nation that has suffered endless attempts to snuff out its identity and independence. Ironically, juche argues that it supersedes Marxism-Leninism, which is outdated and belongs to an earlier era. Likewise, the astonishing personality cults around Kim Il Sung and his son and successor Kim Jong Il are best understood as products of recent Korean history and culture; the struggle against brutal Japanese occupation, the partition of the country in 1945, the enormous devastation caused by the Korean War (1950-53), as much as the outcome of ultra-centralised political power.

As we have seen several times before, wild misestimates of prison populations and their estimated death rates play a major part in the 'evidence of communism's crimes' in countries such as the Soviet Union or China. However, for sheer innovation none of them can match the following calculation offered on the basis of a single 'eyewitness'. The opening sentence gives some idea of the cavalier regard for proof that the Black Book displays:

“As in the case of Party purges, no extensive investigation is necessary [sic] to reveal the scale of the problem. By extrapolating from the estimate of an eyewitness, who reported that five of every 10,000 prisoners in Camp 22 were dying every day, we can see that of the total camp population of about 200,00, 100 people died every day and 36,500 died every year. If we multiply this number by the forty-six years of the regime's existence, we find Korean Communism directly responsible for the death of more than 1.5million people”⁹

In no field of historical research would such incredible statistical sleight of hand be given any credibility.

Afghanistan Chapter 27 of the Black Book, written by Sylvain Boulouque, is devoted to Afghanistan and the civil war between the forces of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan and Islamic fundamentalists, and the ensuing Soviet intervention against the mujahidin which lasted for almost a decade.

Relying almost exclusively on pro-mujahidin sources, the Black Book claims that “the number of dead is extremely hard to determine but most observers agree that the war took between 1.5

million and 2 million lives, 90% of them civilian”⁹. Yet nowhere in Boulouque's chapter is there anything like the number of alleged atrocities or massacres that would amount to even a fraction of that figure. Taking every single example offered by Boulouque of atrocities and massacres as genuine, and the highest available estimate at that, the figures add up to around 180,000. Presumably Boulouque has quoted every major 'atrocities' he could lay his hands on. Yet, even so, the figures simply do not add up. It is inconceivable that given the character of the Afghan war, in which the bulk of military actions were guerrilla and counter-guerrilla operations, that the remaining 1.3 million-1.8 million were killed in unknown and unrecorded skirmishes. If, on the contrary, the total is made up of massacres of defenceless civilians why is Boulouque unable to provide the evidence for the scale of such killings?

Aside from this, of course, is the fact that this war death total includes those who fought in defence of the Afghan Revolution or and were the victims of mujahidin actions such as terrorist bombings, the killings of school teachers, government officials etc. Nonetheless these victims of mujahidin violence are added to the overall total and counted as 'victims of communism'.

It is Boulouque's contention that pre-Revolutionary Afghanistan was on the way to “prosperity, modernisation and democracy” and accuses the Communists of both a “direct and indirect role” in the growth of extremist Islam. The obvious counter to this, of course, is that this was precisely the arguments used to justify Western support for the Shah's regime in Iran.

Yet among Boulouque's charges against the Afghan national democratic revolution was precisely its intention to modernise Afghan society. He writes:

“[Then Afghan leader] Taraki proposed a series of reforms that, according to observers, broke with the traditional ways of Afghan society. Rural debt and mortgages on land were abolished, school attendance became obligatory for all children [ie including girls], and anti-religious propaganda began to appear”¹⁰

It was, in short, this very series of 'modernising' reforms that provoked violent opposition from the most backward sections of Afghan society and the rural landowners. It was on this social base that imperialism sought to encourage the overthrow of the Afghan revolution.

Imperialism's support for the counter-revolution is still claiming lives. The defeat of the Afghan revolution turned the country into a satellite of the Pakistani secret services, the ISI, turning it into a haven for terrorism, the status of women has been thrown back centuries with widows prevented from running their own bakeries, football teams are imprisoned for their “un-Islamic” kit by the Taleban. Afghanistan today makes 8th century Arabia look like a Club 18-30 Holiday.

To help finance the war, the CIA and its allies facilitated the rise of the drugs trade. Mujahidin



groups such as Gulbadin Hekmatyar's Hizb-I-Islami ran dozens of heroin processing refineries to fund their war. Pakistan and Afghanistan are today the largest centres of heroin production in the world, accounting for 500 tons by 1997. World production of heroin in the late 1990s was ten times that of the 1970s. The purity of the drug on the streets has increased 16 times.¹¹

Tens of thousands of 'Afghans', Islamic mujahidin recruited in Islamic countries for the purpose of a 'holy war' against atheistic communism are now the backbone of Islamicist brigades in central Asia, Chechnya, Kashmir and North Africa. Imperialism is now reaping what it has sown.

Greece The Black Book devotes a little over five pages to the role of the Greek Communists during the Nazi occupation and the Civil War that followed (some might even say overlapped). However, it is worth looking at this section partly because thanks to the best-selling novel and forthcoming film 'Captain Correlli's Mandolin' widespread distortions of this period of Greek history have gained a wide audience.

Indeed, the accusations are essentially similar. The communists attempted to impose their rule on Greece, that they provoked needless conflict with non-communist resistance groups, that they were brutal and unconcerned with the welfare of their own people and were merely using the liberation war as a pretext for imposing Moscow's will.

Little information is given as to why, aside from their desire to "impose their own leadership", communist-led EAM-ELAS should have found itself in conflict with the EDES guerrilla group led by Napoleon Zervas. The Black Book's authors claim that:

"This civil war within the main war was of great advantage to the Germans as they swept down upon the resistance units one by one."

the notes on page 782 say that:

"The ELAS falsely accused the EDES of having signed an agreement with the Germans."

Yet documented or not, EDES leaders did collaborate with the Nazis. In fact, Zervas was such a shady character that in the spring of 1942 he accepted 24,000 gold sovereigns from the British to take to the hills to lead resistance activities. He only departed several months later after exasperated British agents had threatened to denounce him to the occupation authorities.

After Zervas finally left Athens the EDES committee in the capital broke up, with some members denouncing the leadership of collaborating with the Germans. If ELAS was suspicious of EDES leaders it was a suspicion shared even by some of EDES' own activists. Indeed, it was well founded. According to the historian Mark Mazower's 'Inside Hitler's Greece', from 1943 onward, Zervas reached a "modus operandi with General Hubert Lanz, in command of the Wehrmacht's 22 Army Corps in Epiros" in northern Greece.¹² Zervas even went so far as to appoint an EDES liaison officer to the Nazi regional headquarters in the town of Jannina. EDES took part

in attacks on ELAS units, even capturing and executing an ELAS priest Father 'Papakoumbouras'.¹³

Zervas was forced to resign his government post in 1947 after his links with the Nazis were exposed during the Nuremberg trials. None of these established facts are in the Black Book.

The Black Book further portrays the bloodthirsty Greek Communists attacking innocent villages.

"On 2 September (1944), as the Germans began to evacuate Greece, the ELAS sent its troops to conquer the Peloponnese, which had always eluded its control thanks to the security battalions. All captured towns and villages were 'punished'. In Meligala, 1,400 men, women and children were massacred along with some 50 officers and non-commissioned officers from the security battalions." (BB, p328)

The very wording is extraordinary. ELAS is accused of sending troops to 'conquer' territory that had been occupied by foreign fascism. This territory had "eluded its control" thanks to the Security Battalions. Who were these battalions?

Set up in 1943, the Security Battalions were volunteer units of Greek collaborationists numbering 8000 men at the war's end. They worked hand in glove with the Nazi Occupation forces and played a full part in the rounding up of resistance fighters and Jews.

The historian Mark Mazower has offered a rather different description and explanation for the events in the Peloponnese. He notes that in the town of Tripolis the increasingly panicky Security Battalions, now abandoned by their Nazi masters and surrounded by ELAS forces, "ruled Tripolis through 'real terror' " and that they "carried out executions in the streets, and laid mines everywhere".

"Elsewhere besieged battalion units clashed with the andartes. On 10 September Kalamata fell in the south, followed five days later by Meligala. Battalion forces collapsed in Pyrgos after a two-day battle.

'Wholesale massacres' of collaborators by the andartes were reported. Numbers were exaggerated, but in the tense, excited, vengeful atmosphere the reality turned out to be violent enough.

After all, up to 1,500 people had been executed in the Kalamata area during the German occupation and thousands of homes had been burned. Battalionists had carried out a last round of reprisals only a few weeks earlier, and now their victims sought their revenge. On Sunday, 17 September the former governor of Messenia and other officials were brought back under ELAS guard from Meligala to Kalamata. As soon as they were marched into the main square frenzied onlookers broke loose of the ELAS civil police and in ten minutes beat some of the prisoners to death, and strung up from lamp-posts."¹⁴

One US military eyewitness remarked of the crowd: "This was their first chance at vengeance and they took it."

In other words, those who had suffered humiliation, torture, the loss of loved ones at the hands of the Nazis and the collaborationist Security Battalions sought immediate and unrelenting revenge, even overwhelming the ELAS



guards. Such events were common in areas liberated from the Nazis all over Europe as collaborators were hunted down.

ELAS opened its ranks to anti-fascist deserters from the Italian and German occupation forces. Around 800 Jews served with ELAS, it even spirited away the chief rabbi of Athens on the eve of his arrest by the Nazis, this in a country where almost the entire Jewish population of Thessaloniki, perhaps 50,000 people from one of the oldest continuous Jewish communities in the world, were deported to Auschwitz and gassed on arrival.

How, does this compare with the Black Book's sensationalist but inaccurate and ahistorical account?

Civil War The responsibility for the Greek Civil War that lasted until 1949, is laid at the door of the communists. Yet thanks to British intervention against ELAS, to restore the Greek monarchy and rearm Nazi collaborators conflict was perhaps inevitable.

Churchill had even argued that collaboration with the Nazis was a lesser crime than being a Communist. As early as November 1944, Churchill was already planning for a showdown with the Greek liberation forces, cabling Anthony Eden: "I fully expect a clash with EAM and we must not shrink from it, provided the ground is well chosen."

Indeed Churchill's orders to British commander General Scobie were clear: "Do not hesitate to act as if you were in a conquered city where a local rebellion is in progress ...We have to hold and dominate Athens. It would be a great thing to succeed in this without bloodshed if possible, but also with bloodshed if necessary."

These dark days at the close of the Second World War, and the key role of British intervention on the side of monarchists and former Nazi collaborators, were the incendiary elements for the Civil War that came later.

Such an attitude from Britain and later the US encouraged the right. Napoleon Zervas, the former leader of EDES, was Minister of Order during the Civil War. Before he was forced to resign over revelations of his collaboration he stated starkly: "No matter the operations of the army, the main thing is to kill the communists in the towns."

In a study of Greek communist policy in the period immediately before the opening of full-scale civil war, Ole L. Smith has argued that the KKE's strategy was for self-defence, initially unarmed, against the 'White Terror' and the repeated provocations by the Right. Only after nearly a year and a half of continual violent attacks on the Left did the KKE take an unequivocal decision to meet force with force.

"The decisive break with legality did not come until September 1947 when the 3rd plenum called for an all-out offensive. Defensive actions had proved illusory; the intransigence of the Government, backed by the British and the Americans, did not leave KKE with any other choice. The 17 months of keeping up legality in order to avert civil war were over. Perhaps one can say that

*the KKE should have seen the truth already in the summer of 1946, and the desperate efforts to avert civil war may in retrospect seem to have played into the hands of the Party's enemies. But in trying to escape the catastrophe of open war the KKE had shown more responsibility than its opponent, although this responsible attitude was a major reason for the eventual defeat of the Left."*¹⁵

The Black Book recycles the usual slanders against the Greek resistance heroes not through scrupulous regard for historical fact but by turning history on its head.

Latin America The French writer, Maurice Lemoine demolished the Black Book's chapter on Latin America in a review published in the French *Le Monde Diplomatique* in December 1997. He noted that while the Black Book's preface promises its readers 150,000 Latin American victims of communism. Yet in the chapter the author announces 15,000-17,000 shot in Cuba, 25,000-30,000 killed in Peru by the Shining Path and the rest, although the author does not explicitly spell it out, in Nicaragua. But this third figure is only possible by adding the 35,000-60,000 who died in the struggle against the Somoza dictatorship and a further 45,000-50,000 who died in the US-backed Contra war against the Sandinista revolution.

Yet the Black Book blames all these on the Sandinistas, who had themselves no lack of martyrs, and are added to Fontaine's list of victims of communism, even though, as Lemoine points out, the Sandinistas had in their ranks more Christians than communists.

Peru The dubious inclusion of the ultra-leftist Shining Path is more than questionable when readers are told that:

"The Sendero also found itself in competition with other political groups. The United Left, strongly supported by the unions, had successfully resisted infiltration by the Sendero ...The Senderistas systematically attempted to eliminate all the classic Marxist organisations and to take control of the unions." (BB p680)

Indeed the remarkable emergence of Shining Path coincided with the growing strength of the Peruvian United Left, whose key component was, although the Black Book does not mention it, the Peruvian Communist Party (PCP)! In fact, the PCP's then general secretary Jorge del Prado survived two assassination attempts by Shining Path gangs. Other Communist and United Left activists in the unions and communities were not so lucky.

This has led some observers to ask whether Shining Path perhaps manipulated by authoritarian forces in Peru, who were happy to see growing chaos and the discrediting of the 'classical Marxist organisations' in order to step in at a later date with a more openly dictatorial regime. As has in fact happened. This argument has no clear evidence that I can find but it is nonetheless plausible, much as in the same way ultra-left and far-right terror groups in Italy were infiltrated and



in some cases run by Italian secret services as part of a so-called 'strategy of tension'. Whatever, the truth Shining Path helped destroy a left alternative in Peru in the 80s and 90s.

The Black Book also fails to address the 'dirty war' tactics of the Peruvian military, which used its counter-insurgency operations to abduct, torture, and kill thousands of Indian villagers and left activists. Such activities directly boosted Shining path's appeal.

Cuba Now we turn to the Black Book's treatment of Cuban socialism.

"Repression was also felt in the world of the arts. In 1961, Castro had stated that the position of the artist was at the very centre of society. But a slogan perfectly encapsulated his real views "The revolution is all; everything else is nothing." (BB, p651).

The Cuban leader is doubly damned since whatever he says publicly, Fontaine knows what he is really thinking. Pity, then that he uses a fake quote. The Fidelista maxim was in fact "Within the Revolution everything, against the Revolution nothing." A not unimportant distinction.

Cuban socialism is a failure, we learn, since in 1952 Cuba was the third most prosperous Latin American state by per capita GDP, even though Fontaine accepts that Cuba then was the US's biggest brothel and casino, but that "thirty years later, after more than 20 years of Castroism, Cuba had dropped to 15th". The small matter of a US blockade is not considered important to mention. Incidentally, in 1999 Cuba had the fastest growing GDP of any Latin American country. Remarks about educational, health and other welfare benefits unavailable to most Latin Americans seem superfluous.

In its foreign policy, Fontaine accuses the Cubans of sending an "expeditionary force" to Angola to support the MPLA in "its civil war with UNITA forces". In fact Cuban troops were sent to repulse invasion by the South Africans and indeed over a decade later Cuban and MPLA success at Cuito Cuanavale stopped the apartheid war machine dead in its tracks, leading directly to the liberation of Namibia and ultimately the democratic opening in South Africa itself.

Nor will one find much help in Yves Santamaria's chapter on "Afrocommunism", which treats South Africa's invasion as a mere detail and compares Jonas Savimbi's alliance with the South Africans as epitomising a "Leninist and Stalinist approach". (BB, p697).

Again we return to the Black Book's fascination with prison populations and not only its statistical dishonesty but its apparent difficulty with simple arithmetic

Fontaine says that: "During the repressions of the 1960s, between 7,000 and 10,000 people were killed and 30,000 imprisoned for political reasons." (BB, p656). Yet the author offers only three specific death figures, that of foreign press reports that 600 Batista regime figures were executed in the immediate aftermath of the revolution, (although

the reports themselves are neither quoted nor identified), "381 'bandits'" in Santa Clara and 1,000 executed in La Loma de los Coches" after the crushing of the Escambray "protest movement", again with no reference as to sources for these figures. Yet as Fontaine earlier notes (p653), this 'protest movement' was in fact an armed counter-revolutionary rebellion. Targets of these bandits included teachers sent into remote areas to wipe out illiteracy. In any case Fontaine's figures add up to 1,981 not 7,000-10,000.

Imprisonment for "political reasons" is a deliberately imprecise term. Bay of Pigs invaders were imprisoned for political reasons as were saboteurs and armed rebels, but they were imprisoned for their actions not their beliefs.

Fontaine then offers figures of "between 15,000 and 20,000 prisoners of conscience" in 1978, and in 1986 "some 12,000-15,000 political prisoners". Once again it is important to make a distinction between actions and belief but Fontaine's figures, suspending disbelief for the moment and accepting their accuracy, shows a *decline*. And proposing more recent figures Fontaine says:

"According to Cuban human rights representatives, many of whom were themselves former detainees, physical torture no longer occurs in Cuban prisons. These sources, together with Amnesty International, put the number of political prisoners in Cuba in 1997 at between 980 and 2,500 including women and children." (BB, p664).

This figure is now down to about one tenth of the 1978 figure, a remarkable relaxation of the "Interminable Totalitarianism in the Tropics", as the Black Book's Cuban section is titled.

Leaving aside the "When did you stop torturing your prisoners" diversion. We now have an identifiable checkable source, Amnesty International's Report for 1997. Yet Amnesty's report for that year claims not 2,500 political prisoners but:

"Hundreds of political prisoners detained in previous years and convicted after unfair trials remained imprisoned. Many were prisoners of conscience." (AI Report 1998)

The next year, however, AI stated:

At least 150 political prisoners, including 30 prisoners of conscience, were released, many on condition that they leave the country. At least 350 others remained imprisoned, including some 100 prisoners of conscience. (AI Report 1999)

In other words by 1999, Amnesty could only claim around 100 prisoners of conscience and a further 250 guilty of a variety of politically motivated acts. While, by the 2000 Report, we are told that:

Several hundred political prisoners, including a number of prisoners of conscience, were believed to be held in Cuba, most of whom were convicted after unfair trials. By the end of 1999, AI was working on behalf of 19 prisoners of conscience. The absence of official data and the severe restrictions on human rights monitoring made it difficult to confirm information on other possible prisoners of conscience."



With 19 identified 'prisoners of conscience', we are very far indeed from the initial figures of the Black Book when we seek to examine hard evidence. A serious examination and interrogation of the sources allows us to dismiss the claim that the Black Book's statistics are verified and unchallengeable.

It must be noted, of course, that the Cuban government does not accept either Amnesty International's definitions or figures. The Cubans regard it as essential to safeguard their Revolution and have a variety of security laws designed to prevent a US-backed counter-revolution. In Amnesty's own words:

*"These include providing information to the US government; owning, distributing or reproducing material produced by the US government or any other foreign entity; and collaborating, by any means, with foreign radio, television, press or other foreign media, with the purpose of destabilising the country and destroying the socialist state."*¹⁶

Whether one sees such measures as impermissible infringements of conscience or legitimate measures of self-defence in the face of a nearly 40-year campaign of economic warfare, attempted invasion and terrorism, clearly depends on your point of view. It also depends on placing the Cuban revolution in its historical and regional context.

The Central American republic of Guatemala has a comparable population to that of Cuba. This is part of AI's country report for 1999:

"The Historical Clarification Commission report, the result of 18 months of investigation involving 42,000 victims of human rights violations, was made public in February. The Commission recognised the responsibility of the military and its civilian adjuncts for the vast majority – 93% – of the atrocities committed during the years of civil conflict. It also found that in four specific areas, the army's counter-insurgency campaign had perpetrated genocide against indigenous people, who made up 83% of the victims. The Commission also pointed to the role played by the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in these violations. Data obtained in 1999 by human rights groups under the US Freedom of Information Act confirmed that as early as the 1960s, the USA had formulated, encouraged and helped implement a counter-insurgency strategy which relied on clandestine actions by "death squads", made up of police and military agents but wearing plain clothes in order to maintain "government deniability", to eliminate suspected "subversives".

Che Guevara witnessed at first hand the CIA-backed overthrow of the Guatemalan government of Jacob Arbenz in 1954, which was followed by 36 years of US-backed military dictatorship and repression. Had the Guatemalan revolutionaries succeeded, how many of the estimated 200,000 lost lives would have been spared? It is faced with such stark alternatives, which could be duplicated throughout Central and South America, that one must consider the determination of the Cuban government to resist external aggression and

internal counter-revolution and its measures of self-defence.

Conclusion It has not been possible to rebut all of the Black Book's arguments or even to mention, if just in passing, the slanders heaped on communists throughout the world in its pages. The intention has been to expose the most outrageous claims, to give a measure of the methodology and lack of evidence that this volume exhibits. As was noted by Maurice Lemoine there is no mention in the Black Book's section on Latin America of one major country where the communists were in a Popular Unity government between 1970 and 1973, that country is Chile. It was Henry Kissinger who famously remarked that the US would not stand idly by and watch a country go communist because of the stupidity of its people. The result was the bloody anti-communist Pinochet dictatorship.

The crimes of capitalism and imperialism are still happening as the bombings in the Balkans or the starvation policies of the IMF remind us. Communists should remain confident that one day those crimes will be paid for in full. ★

Notes:

1 For example, Stalin was accused of murdering the Leningrad Communist leader Sergei Kirov in 1934, both to eliminate a rival and to provide a pretext for the purges. As late as 1992, the Belgian Trotskyist writer Ernest Mandel in his "Trotsky as Alternative" alleged that the evidence was huge. However, US researchers into Soviet archive material now believe that such a view not only lacks any proof whatsoever, but is also contradicted by other available evidence. See Robert Thurston's discussion of the Kirov Affair in 'Life and Terror in Stalin's Russia', Yale University Press, 1996, pp19-24.

2 Robert Conquest openly stated in his book 'The Great Terror' that "truth can thus only percolate in the form of hearsay" and that "basically the best, though not infallible, source is rumour" (sic). J Arch Getty remarks in "Origins of the Stalinist Purges", "For no other period or topic have historians been so eager to write and accept history by anecdote." (p5)

3 Jung Chang's best-seller 'Wild Swans', (p309) uses precisely this term "widely accepted".

4 See the eyewitness account of many of the idiocies of the 'Great Leap Forward' by British communist journalist Alan Winnington in 'Breakfast with Mao', pp202-217, Lawrence & Wishart, 1986. In fact, the ultra-leftist excesses were in direct contradiction to the policies agreed by the Chinese Communist Party's 8th congress, which Mao ignored and undermined.

5 Stanley Karnow, 'Mao and China: A Legacy of Turmoil', Penguin 1990, p95

6 Robert C North, 'Chinese Communism', p191, Weidenfeld and Nicholson, London 1966

7 Utsa Patnaik, 'On Measuring "Famine" Deaths: Different Criteria for Socialism and Capitalism?', People's Democracy, Delhi, September 26, 1999

8 Black Book 557-558, Crimes Terror and Secrecy in North Korea

9 Black Book, p 725

10 Black Book, p 711

11 Unholy Wars: Afghanistan, America and International Terrorism, by John Cooley, Pluto Press

12, 'Inside Hitler's Greece', Mark Mazower, p 142.

13 Ibid, p314

14 Ibid, p358

15 Self-Defence and Communist Policy 1945-1947, Ole L Smith in "Studies in the History of the Greek Civil War 1945-1949", p176. Edited by Lars Boerentzen, John O Iatridies and Ole L Smith, Museum Tusculanum Press, Copenhagen 1987.

16 All Amnesty International figures and quotes are taken from its internet site.



Gains in TUC democracy but the agenda is not yet complete

Anita Halpin

There is more to winning industrial success than bad bosses – of which there are too many – and good slogans – which are easy to write but much more difficult to deliver.

To be effective trades unions need to have not only a strategic programme and ideological clarity, but also be organisationally strong, and that is why it is a grave mistake to ignore issues of internal union democracy.

The extent to which unions can win real gains for working people depends on these inter-related factors. A vital dimension and the thread running through and connecting them is democracy. Trades unions must respect – and be seen to respect – democracy as, after all, employers do all they can to deny democracy in the workplace.

Therefore a vigorous internal democracy is essential to the organising agenda to recruit and retain workers in living, fighting unions which involve, represent and mobilise them.

This was the starting point of an article I wrote in the run-up to the 1997 General Election on the need to redress the democratic deficit in TUC structures (Communist Review 25). It was timely to consider the democratic agenda as this would relate to the trade union movement's ability to exert influence on government in a cohesive and co-ordinated way

The widest, most democratic debate around clear perspectives is a prerequisite for any significant advance by the working class and the full participation of all sections of working people is essential when it comes to translating conference resolutions into effective action.

This is the reason why discussing trade union structures and internal democracy is not a diversion from industrial struggle and the labour movement's core agenda. Concerns about constitutional matters should not be condemned as peripheral.

The TUC has just completed a consultation on its own structures. The response was a good, with 33 unions representing some five million members taking part, and the views were refreshingly diverse. They didn't fall into the expected camps of 'right' versus 'left' or 'large' versus 'small' unions.

And, if, there were those whose real agenda was to limit democracy even further – the many positive responses made his impossible

The background In Spring last year the TUC launched what it called the Millennial Challenge to consider ways in which trade union structures might need to change over the next ten years. The appellation, 'Millennial', was a misnomer – given that capitalism wouldn't change at the stroke of midnight on 31 December 1999.

There was a conference around this document in May 1999; various debates at the September Congress, and discussions at the October General Council to which all general secretaries were invited. This led to a consultation specifically about the TUC's own structures.

Initially, it was intended this should also cover inter-union relations in advance of the new employment legislation in order to overcome inter-union rivalries and 'infighting and squabbling'. But, this element was taken out early on and has been dealt with separately.

I don't intend to review the TUC's new Disputes Principles and Procedures, save to say that if all affiliates respected sister unions there'd be no need for rules. Unfortunately, bad habits die hard and the predators are still with us! So the new rules will only be as good as their implementation, but the key to changing bad habits is for each union's membership to hold its leadership to account and to win democratic advances internally.

The current consultation This sought to address three main areas of TUC structure and constitution.

The first was the long-standing concerns of smaller union, going back to the 1994 'relaunch' that they can not play a full part in the TUC's decision-making process between Congresses.

Secondly, and arising directly from a 1999 Congress motion, issues relating to the TUC's equality structures. Specifically, the right to send motions forward to the Congress agenda; the call for a motions-based disability conference and representation on the General Council for disabled and gay and lesbian trades unionists.

And thirdly – and arising from discussions at the extended General Council meeting – weaknesses in the current arrangements for Congress and the changing role of the General Council within the TUC structure.

Given the history of past TUC consultation exercises, some people – myself included – tended to be sceptical about the will of the establishment to make real changes. We expected a very tight deadline which would limit the number of responses, with no clear-cut decisions at the end of the day other than what Congress House had first thought of.

But as I have already indicated, there was a wide range of responses. And Congress House, which had intended to have the whole thing done and dusted by April, heeded those who argued the right of Congress to decide.



So, happily this scepticism was misplaced and the proposals (in the form of rule changes) going to this year's Congress provide democratic advances to the TUC's constitution and structures. These gains, many of which were hard won, and the principles they encompass will need to be defended at Congress.

Yet some key democratic questions still remain partially or totally unresolved, and these must be pursued in the future. After all, I would argue, the reason why progress has been made this time round is precisely because the deep concerns about the democratic deficit of TUC structures have been raised regularly – not to say relentlessly – year-in-year-out by a number of unions.

Maybe the message is finally getting across that the politics of representation are as important as the policies agreed; each strengthens the other. This, of course, creates a basis for better recruitment and retention. And championing democratic rights in this way helps to draw people towards progressive policies.

Democratic advances There was one early gain. From the beginning, Congress House made it quite clear that the basic assumption was that Congress would remain annual. Only two unions disagreed, with one of them even suggesting a triennial congress. And, the idea of a two-year rolling programme a la new Labour received only one scant mention.

The General Council A number of issues related to the General Council have been raised over the years. In particular, concerns about its unrepresentative nature with the advent of automaticity in the 80s and the result of the 'relaunch' in 1994 which did away with industry

committees and established a new Executive Committee.

While mergers and amalgamations are creating larger and larger general union, the majority of new affiliates are small, specialised unions, and this trend is likely to continue. Thus, every year the General Council becomes less representative.

Under automaticity, unions with over 200,000 members (Section A) have between two and six seats on the GC, the number depending on their size. And where any of these unions has more than 100,000 women members at least one of their seats must be filled by a woman. There are additional automatic seats, one each, for any union with more than 100,000 members (Section B).

Seats in Sections A and B are filled by each individual union and not voted for at Congress. In all other Sections, candidates are nominated by their own unions and then elected at Congress by delegates in the relevant sections.

The next group of seats, in Section C, is for all remaining affiliates with fewer than 100,000 members. Currently, the number of seats is determined by the total affiliated membership at the time. In recent years there have been six or seven seats.

In Section D, four reserved women's seats are open to nominees from all unions with under 200,000 members (that is Sections B and C).

Over the years, concerns about under-representation of black members have been addressed by the creation of three additional sections – E, F and G – to elect one black member from unions in section A; one black member from all other affiliates, and one black woman member from all affiliated unions.

As a result of the consultation a number of extra elected seats from 2001 are being recommended to Congress. Eleven seats in Section C, irrespective of the total affiliated membership in any year, and three additional seats (in new Sections H, I and J). These new sections will consist of one member representing trade unionists with disabilities; one member representing gay and lesbian trade unionists, and one member under the age of 27.

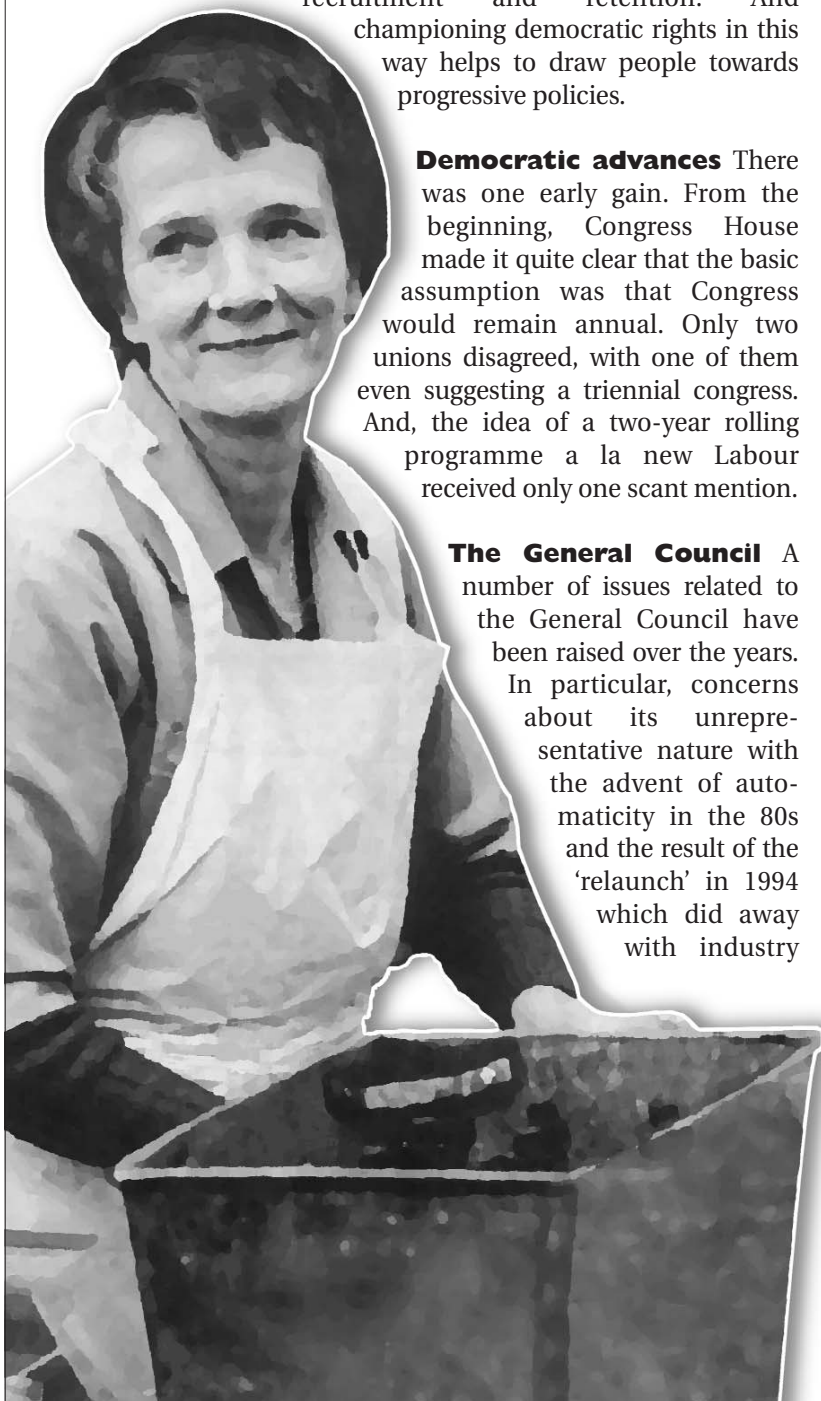
The new youth seat sends out a positive message and is to be welcomed as are the two extra equalities seats.

The larger General Council does have the potential to be more representative of total TUC membership, though there is a danger that the larger unions will hold the H, I and J seats – as they do the current E, F and G ones.

The suggestion that the General Council should be made up of all union general secretaries was not widely supported, though most unions wanted more involvement. The idea now is that there shall be two all-union meetings a year. A two-day, post-Congress one in October and a one-day review-type meeting in the summer.

These meetings will be open to one senior

Women workers are a growing force within the TUC.



member of the union's choice, but not necessarily the general secretary. This is a small victory, in that Congress House wanted to invite only general secretaries, and it was pointed out that this would lead to a heavily male-dominated attendance and ignored the rights of independent unions.

This arrangement must be made to work. It should not be seen a 'sop' to the small, specialist unions – also now being called 'niche' unions. Very few large unions were represented at last year's extended General Council meeting and, apparently, much of the discussion was re-run at the Executive Committee where the large unions could have their say.

If the intention is to be more inclusive and more representative, then there is a responsibility on all unions to actually attend.

Equalities conferences It is at least ten years since the desire of the so-called 'equalities' conferences to have direct policy input into the main (men's) TUC was first voiced.

The 'equalities' conferences are the TUC's Women's Conference, Black Workers Conference, Gay and Lesbian Conference. One of the most positive results of the current consultation is that, from next year, there will be a disability conference which is a delegate and motions-based annual conference and which would elect members to a new disability committee.

Currently the decisions of all these conferences are advisory only. They do elect members directly to their respective equality committee, but there are always General Council members on the committee – usually a majority. These committees report directly to the General Council. Thus, the annual equalities conferences have no direct line to Congress, other than by way of a paragraph in the Annual Report.

The rationale for wanting a direct policy input was the belief that the effectiveness of the TUC's campaigning can be greatly enhanced by extending debates at Congress. At present the only way to get equality issues onto the main TUC agenda is for one union effectively to 'give up' one of its two motions. So, it is to the credit of many unions – both large and small – that there have been good equality debates over the years.

But the quality and inclusiveness of any democracy is important and that is why it was seen as crucial to provide a direct route to input issues of special concern. This is genuine mainstreaming.

The mechanism which has gained most support over the years to achieve this is to allow each of these conferences to put two motions and two amendments and to send a small delegation direct to Congress each year.

This is now policy of a number of affiliates and of each of the equalities conferences themselves. It is a position that has been narrowly lost on a card vote – though clearly won on a show of hands – at the past two Congresses. This, therefore, was clearly an issue that could not go away even though there are still

those who would wish to ignore the equalities agenda – and still refer to 'minority' groups.

So there was no option but to come up with some sort of proposal or face another tight vote at Congress, and possible defeat. The offer on the table is that each conference shall have the right to send one motion (the way the motion is to be chosen by the conferences is still being worked out).

Well, one motion is better than none – but not as good as two; yet this must be judged to be a gain, however small. But – and there is a but – the motion will remain the property of the union which originally submitted it to the relevant conference. And, there will be no delegations nor any opportunity to put down amendments.

Making the original union responsible for the motion could, unfortunately, give ammunition to those who have always argued that extra motions from anywhere other than affiliated unions is unfair. But, the principles of democratic inclusion on the one hand and extension of democracy on the other, are sufficiently strong arguments to answer this retrogressive attitude.

The proposal on the equalities motions is admitted by all to be a compromise but it is, I believe, a genuine attempt to begin to address the issue and, as such should be supported. Of course the longer-term goal must remain the full democratic involvement of all the equalities conferences in the way described.

Furthermore, these same rights must be given to the TUC's other advisory conference and that is the Annual Conference of Trades Union Councils, which has its own policy on two motions and a delegation going to the main TUC. This then is the first major item of what could be called unfinished business (see also below).

The Trades Councils Conference is also looking to representation on the General Council and this should be raised as well. And, in the longer term, consideration should be given to all these conferences directly electing their General Council seats, so that GC members will have a direct relationship with those constituencies which constitutionally they are intended to represent.

There have been a number of attempts to marginalise trades councils, despite the fact that they are an integral part of the movement. We argue that the Labour-trade union links must be retained because the Labour Party was formed by the unions. In the same way, we must argue that the role of trades councils is integral to working class struggle and remember that the trades councils were central to the formation of the TUC itself.

Congress The TUC's view of Congress is that it is the 'annual public showcase of trade unionism', and is also the principal policy making body and the means by which the General Council is held accountable.



A number of unions were critical of the way in which the parade of invited platform speakers – contrary to the view of Congress House – actually made the annual congress less newsworthy than would genuine debate on relevant policy issues. Hopefully this warning will be heeded and the promise this year is for fewer guest speakers.

The need to concentrate on real debate has been partially addressed in that there will be a word limit on motions and amendments of 250 and 50 words, respectively, by rule from 2001 and recommended for this year. The attempt to limit debate by allowing unions only one motion and one amendment found very little favour.

But the main culprit – the mega-composite – has not been tackled though a surprising number of unions across the spectrum raised this. Overall, their message seems to be that it is wrong to try to bury differences in lengthy composite motions that mean all things to all unions.

At present, compositing is managed bureaucratically. The General Purposes Committee identifies motions which could be composited and then the office writes the draft and general secretaries or other full-timers sign it off – usually with very little debate. The suggestion that a union's delegation ought be consulted is met with wry disbelief. So, the whole compositing process is an issue that must be kept on the agenda for the future.

While constitutionally the General Council is accountable to Congress, in fact this is very tenuous given the lack of accountability and transparency of the Executive Committee.

And the proposals for the enlarged General Council do not address the accountability of the Executive Committee at all. This and the gap left by the disappearance of industry committees are the other main items of unfinished business.

Unfinished business

The Executive Committee Soon after John Monks became General Secretary, major changes were made with the 1994 relaunch of what was hailed

as a 'more campaigning' TUC. Campaigning may indeed be more inclusive now, but decision making is more exclusive due to the way the Executive works and its relationship to the General Council.

The guiding principle behind the relaunch was that too many resources were tied up in servicing 'ineffective committees', including the industry committees and the General Council sub-committees. So all these committees were wound-up – save for the equalities committees. The then Finance & General Purposes Committee was transformed overnight into an executive committee which would meet monthly and, at the same time, the number of General Council meetings was reduced from 12 to just five a year.

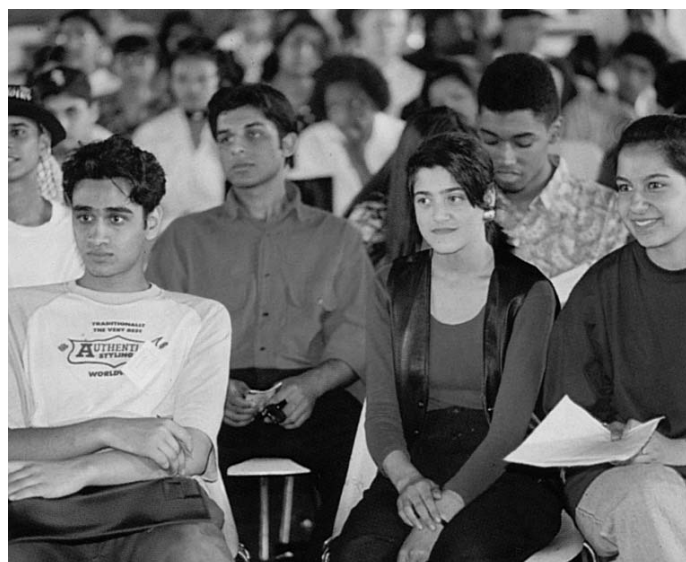
From the very start, there were particular concerns about the accountability of the new Executive Committee, and the issue has been raised in one way or another at every Congress since 1994, but nothing has been done – other than repeated promises to review the composition of the Executive. And there is nothing on offer this time either.

Last year, on the back of a remitted motion, the TUC promised to consult affiliates on how the General Council could become more representative of the multi-sectoral and diverse interests of affiliates. And, as a rider to this, how in its turn the Executive could reflect the diverse interests of all trade unions, and not remain a self-perpetuating group of 'big boys' with an in-built majority.

Even if the Executive were to become more representative, it would still not be democratic. The committee reports to the General Council, but its numerical membership is at least 50% plus one of the General Council.

The General Council's powers have been virtually taken away by the Executive Committee. The Executive is even less representative of affiliates than is the General Council, though there has been a slight improvement in recent years. And, while the General Council is partly elected by Congress, nobody elects the Executive; membership being

Equalities conferences



decided by the General Secretary and the incoming President – which smacks a bit of patronage.

The TUC's current consultation paper acknowledges that the Executive has taken on the role of policy development and implementation. Yet, constitutionally, the General Council is the decision-making body between Congresses and accountable to Congress – so there is an obvious contradiction.

Power must be returned to the General Council, so both the makeup and the size of the Executive still need to be tackled. Nor is this a narrow or sectarian position because a wide range of submissions to the recent consultation expressed concerns about the lack of transparency, openness and accountability of the Executive Committee.

There are a number of ideas about how the General Council can become more representative, and the issue is taken up in two motions to Congress 2000.

(The first asks for an elected Executive – but doesn't say how this should be done nor how big it should be. It also wants the Executive to have more powers and calls for only four, all-union General Council meetings a year. The second calls for the Executive at no time to be more than 40% the size of the General Council and further calls for its direct election at Congress from the incoming General Council.)

However it is done it is crucial that policy making is restored to the General Council so it can, again, be properly accountable to Congress.

Industrial co-ordination A strand running through some of the consultation responses was the question of how affiliates could come together around common industrial issues. This has previously been voiced as a particular concern by health service unions.

As yet there are no very clear ideas of how this gap could be filled, and it is obviously an area for future consideration. But it is obvious that specially-convened Task Groups with a limited remit and life are not what is required.

The option proposed by the Communist Party in its submission to Congress House was industrial sector conferences on the first day of each annual Congress. They would report to the full Congress and get endorsement for its proposed strategies. These industrial conferences would also be the constituency for electing industrial seats on the General Council from among all unions with special interest within each industrial sphere.

Future challenges All unions need a vigorous internal democracy. Different unions have different problems and some unions have come further than others. But there are areas of individual union democracy and accountability which relate directly to and affect aspects of the TUC's democracy, in particular the role and remit of individual delegations.

In reality, most delegations have quite limited powers and are frequently unrepresentative of the union's membership. These issues need to be addressed. Delegations, rather than 'head office', should have the democratic control and responsibility for motions, amendments and compositing and ensure that the union takes no positions that are not consistent with their own agreed policies.

The unrepresentative make-up of many delegations is compounded at Congress as general secretaries troop to the rostrum to support worthy – and in their view worthy – composite motions which could be described as 'position papers' rather than resolutions for action.

The TUC, in its consultation paper, claimed that one in four delegates spoke at last year's Congress. While it is no doubt true that the number of speeches made was numerically equivalent to one quarter of the registered delegates, this ignores the number of general secretaries and other full-timers who spoke more than once – or even more than twice.

These figures also hide one of the most worrying features of Congress and that is that far too few lay delegates, that is those working at the trade, are actually allowed to speak by their delegation leaders. This is another argument for TUC and other delegations to win the right within their own unions to take democratic control on behalf of the union of the business at any conference or meeting they are elected to attend and to ensure that their votes are cast in line with their agreed conference policies.

This responsibility of delegations to be accountable must apply at all levels, right up to the TUC General Council and the Labour Party NEC. And it is the responsibility of union members to hold their delegations to account which must include the right to recall and replace them. For example, at least one large union – which has automatic seats on the General Council – elects its GC members at annual conference. But, different unions will arrive at different solutions within their own union structures.

Whatever the ways and means, the end is to create a fully participatory democratic union that will build morale and overcome the frustration that many must feel when a policy they battled for at their own conference is totally ignored as soon as everyone's gone home and they have to wait one – or even two years – to start all over again.

Without accountable and participatory democracy, policies lack relevance and are therefore much less effective. This is why communists and socialists argue for fully representative democracy. In the early days of the trade unions, borrowing the language of the Chartists, members were described as 'constituents' and – then as now – trade union membership must be inseparable from the right to vote carrying with it full rights of participation. ★



Cuba's Economy 1999: Recovery Continues

Praising the hard work of the Cuban people, Vice-President of the Council of Ministers, José Luis Rodríguez, was able to announce that Cuba's economic growth in 1999 was 6.2%, consolidating upon the positive results of previous years and underlining the island's continuing economic recovery.

Now, all observers, including usually disparaging economic publications, such as Britain's Economist magazine and New York's Wall Street Journal, concede that Cuba's economy has succeeded in turning the corner after the dreadful collapse of the early 1990s. It is the sixth consecutive year that Cuba's economy has shown positive growth. The figure was all the more impressive because at the beginning of 1999, the forecasted growth was only 2.5%.

Mr Rodríguez, speaking at the National Assembly of People's Power meeting in Havana at the end of December, told delegates that the results were basically due to four factors: the continued expansion of tourism, a dramatic increase in domestic oil and gas production, the recovery in the sugar industry and an improvement in general labour productivity.

Aquaculture Production 1999 (percentage increase/decrease over 1998)	
Sugar	+17.20
Root Vegetables	+14.40
Green Vegetables	+56.30
Beans	+29.25
Fruit	+64.70
Eggs	+17.90
Pork	+10.90

In particular, Mr Rodríguez praised what he called "the sustained work of our heroic people" during the year, adding that the country had counted on the "unselfish will of millions of patriots" in achieving the growth. Labour productivity had grown by 5.4% and the cost of generating each dollar of hard currency earnings had fallen by 2.4%, thus increasing the net return on investments.

Implicit in Mr Rodríguez's comments is the fact that Cubans are working hard for only modest returns in the short term. Profits are being ploughed back into productive capacity rather than increasing living standards, a trend that is reflected in less than heartening figures about the distribution of food and fuel via the state ration system.

A significant part of the growth has to do with sugar the traditional staple of the Cuban economy. The 1999 crop totalled 3.783 million tonnes, almost half a million tonnes more than 1998, but still well below the more than the eight million tonnes harvested in 1990. More significantly, however, labour productivity in this sector improved dramatically with a 22% reduction in the cost per tonne of raw sugar produced.

The country attracted 1.65 million tourists in 1999 (50,000 fewer than hoped for) compared with 340,000 visitors in 1990. More than two million tourists are

expected to travel to Cuba in 2000. Gross income from tourism increased by 11% and average earnings per tourist per day also improved (see table).

Tourism 1999	
No. of visitors	1.65 million
Growth (over 1998)	+16.5%
Gross income	+11.0%
Earnings per tourist day	+2.6%

Oil extraction increased by a quarter on the previous year while gas production showed a dramatic 260% rise due to the introduction of new technology in Cuba's oilfields that captures gas that was formerly burnt off. This has facilitated projects to pipe gas into homes in Havana and Santiago de Cuba, both of which are on course to be expanded in the coming year, as are Cuba's plans to modernise thermoelectric plants, build new high energy facilities and high-voltage transmission lines. A deal with Venezuela (November 1999) will

mean that Cuba should complete its Cienfuegos oil refinery (potentially the country's largest) this year. In addition Cuba may put oil blocks in the Gulf of Mexico up for bidding. The country now produces 41% of its own energy needs.

The industry minister, Marcos Portal, who oversees the electricity, petroleum, nickel, cobalt and cement sectors, has dozens of projects on his plate. Portal has announced plans to increase petroleum output to 2.6 million tonnes in 2000 from 2.2 million tonnes in 1999 and to raise natural gas production to 650 million cubic metres this year from 500 million cubic metres last year.

Optimism tempered Optimism in all these areas should be tempered by the fact that since 1998 sugar prices in the world market have collapsed, costing the county some US\$265m in earnings. In addition, oil prices have more than doubled since the end of 1998, making it imperative that domestic production meets these targets.

Nickel production, another key export, remained stable at about 68,000 tonnes. However, a rise in the price of nickel on the world market helped the balance of payments figures.

The country hopes to increase its cement-production capacity by 1.5 million tonnes to 4.5 million tonnes this year. Significantly, cement and steel production were two of a range of industrial outputs that were not mentioned in the Minister's speech. Such an absence may be a tacit admission that production levels were at or, more likely, below the outputs for 1998. This is interesting because construction, the main industrial consumer of these products, continued to grow, especially in the tourist sector. This means that Cuba is possibly importing steel and cement, adding to the balance of payments deficit which worsened by 18.3% over the year. Mr Rodríguez told delegates that the value of exports fell by 0.2% while imports grew by 0.4%.

The government declines to say how much foreign investment has been made in Cuba during the 1990s or to discuss the companies doing business in Cuba and therefore risking sanction under the Helms-



Burton law. Rather, it gives the number, about 360, of companies owned jointly by the government and foreigners, Cuba's preferred investment mechanism. Of these, nearly a quarter are Spanish.

Mr Rodríguez said that the results were proof that Cuba's model of limited market reforms coupled with Socialist state control was superior to the neoliberal economic model. Citing figures for the rest of the Latin American region, he underlined that Cuba's economy had consistently outperformed the average for the region by a wide margin. While the rest of Latin America showed 25% average growth, for the period 1995-99, Cuba's had grown by an average of 4% overall.

This means that investors can expect Cuba not to change its economic policy soon. Further moves towards a market economy internally are less likely if such results continue. At the same time, the figures indicate that 'Cuba will definitely continue to woo investors who are willing to meet its joint venture demands.

Domestic results In terms of the domestic economy, particularly food, Mr. Rodríguez gave detailed percentage figures for a wide range of products (see table) most of which showed improvements except for milk and rice, which had been affected by the adverse climate conditions. Thus Cuba is likely to continue to import rice and milk for the foreseeable future.

However, despite the growth in the production of food, there were still shortages. Mr Rodríguez admitted that the distribution of basic necessities under the ration system was still not enough to meet the needs of the people.

This was reflected in the continued growth of sales in the private farmers markets where he reported a 35% increase. That these markets continue to provide an important source of the nation's food was also underlined by the fact that despite the failure of the ration system, food consumption improved generally. Cubans now consume an average of 2,369 kcals per day and 59.4 grams of protein.

The growth of the farmers' and artisans' markets (9% growth) is indicative of another underlying factor — the increase in the circulation of dollars in the economy, particularly in the hands of the populace. Mr Rodríguez announced that 62% of Cubans now had dollar bank accounts, compared with 56.3% in 1998. "Most are in small quantities", he said.

Just where Cubans' get access to these dollars is not fully explained in the official figures because they omit to mention the amount of currency that comes from relatives in the US. US estimates of this range up to \$800 million a year (equivalent to \$72 per head of population). Not surprisingly, Cuban estimates are far lower. However, there is a significant discrepancy evident in the amount of convertible currency being paid out officially to workers and the amount that is obviously being spent in market. According to Mr Rodríguez there are now 1,796,000 workers (about 30% of the total workforce) receiving bonuses or part of their wages in convertible currency (a 6% increase over 1999). These received a total of US\$52.3m, a figure which amounts to about \$29 per worker.

Industrial Production 1999 (percentage increase over 1998)	
Oil	+25.0
Gas	+260.0
Air Conditioners	+22.9
Beer	+20.4
Clothing	+14.7

In terms of national currency, the average salary was increased from 211 pesos to 223 (roughly equivalent to US50 cents a month), an average rise of 5.7%. More than 60% of workers, particularly in the areas of health and education, had significant wage rises of between 12% and 40%. 87,000 jobs were created and official unemployment is currently running at 6%.

A US economist calculated last year that the average household income, taking into account the high social wage of free health care, education, subsidised housing, utilities, pensions and food, was equivalent to about US\$160 per month. It is therefore likely that a significant amount of the hard currency expenditure comes from consumers changing their national pesos into dollars either out of monthly wages or their savings. Despite these wage inputs which significantly increased the national money supply, the amount of national pesos in circulation only increased by 0.7%.

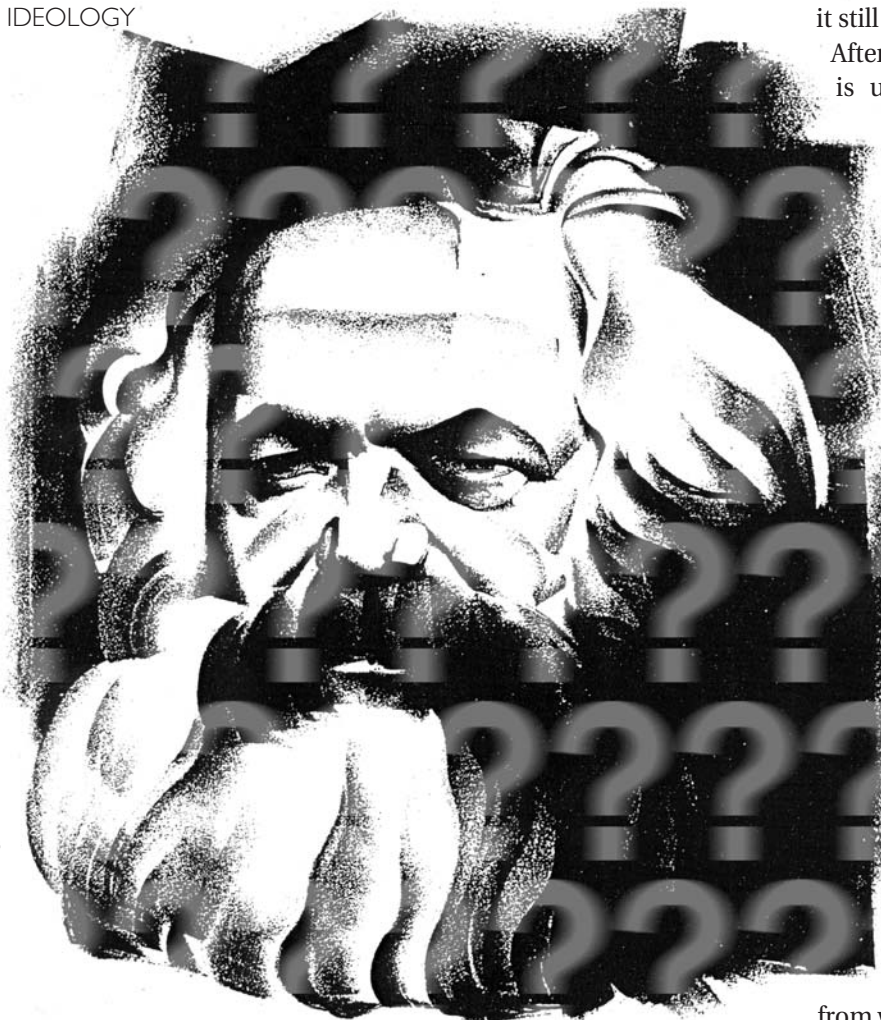
Inflation is under control, and the peso's real exchange rate has stabilised at about 20 pesos to the dollar from a low of more than 120 pesos in 1994. The average exchange rate for the country outside Havana was given as 21.1 to the dollar.

Other factors which illustrate a small improvement in living standards were a 25% reduction in power cuts, the installation of 40,000 new telephone lines, an increase in the numbers of newspapers and teenage magazines printed, and a reduction in the list of the number of medicines that were unavailable from 266 to 225.

In conclusion, it is evident that Cuba is recovering slowly but steadily from the economic slump and the prognosis for the future is promising providing that the sugar industry can maintain its momentum.

Mr Rodríguez sounded a note of warning when he said that although the economy in general had maintained its rhythm of growth: "the improvements in efficiency are still not enough to compensate for the accumulated impact of the first years of the - Special Period." in particular, there were considerable financial constraints brought about by the difficulty that Cuba has had in obtaining credits. Much depends upon world markets and whether Cuba can capitalise upon the recent openings that it has secured in getting access to softer loans, particularly with the UK's ECGD and its Japanese equivalent. ★ *This article is reprinted by permission of Business Cuba.*

Cuba compared with Latin America		
1999	Cuba	Latin America
GDP	+6.2%	0.0%
GDP Capita	+5.6%	-1.6%
1995 - 1999	Cuba	Latin America
GDP	+4.0%	+2.5%
GDP Capita	+3.65%	0.8%



Marxism and the National Question Today

Rob Grffith

For Communists, the central guiding principle of our approach to the national question has traditionally been summed up in the slogan: **THE RIGHT OF NATIONS TO SELF-DETERMINATION.**

All nations should be free to choose a separate, independent political existence, with a sovereign state of their own.

This was the principle adopted at the London Congress of socialist and trade unionist organisations in 1896, elaborated by Stalin for the Russian Bolsheviks in his articles on *'Marxism and the National Question'* in 1913, and defended by Lenin against Karl Kautsky, Rosa Luxemburg, the Jewish Workers' Bund and the so-called Austro-Marxists.

It was first adopted as capitalism was entering its final and highest stage, that of imperialism – the era of imperialist wars, anti-imperialist revolt and socialist revolution. One hundred years on, should

it still serve as our central guiding principle?

After all, it is apparently a slogan or principle that is used by the imperialist powers to attack, weaken and divide states that challenge imperialist interests:

- the 'national rights' of the Slovenians, the Croats, the Bosnians, the Kosovars have been supported by Britain, Germany, the US and NATO to break up Yugoslavia and facilitate their economic, political and military drive eastwards.

- The 'national rights' of the Chechens and other nationalities can be invoked to justify the destabilisation and division of Russia – a continuation, it could be argued, of the process that broke up the Soviet Union.

- The 'national rights' of the Kurds are used to justify NATO's continuing military intervention in Iraq.

- The 'national rights' of the Tibetans are trumpeted to discredit and discriminate against China.

Nearer home, the right to national self-determination threatens to break up the United Kingdom; to set Scotland, Wales and England against one another, stimulating nationalism in each; to divide the British labour movement; and to weaken Britain

from within as the European Union seeks to suck up what remains of Britain's national sovereignty from without. The existence of a Scottish Parliament provides the opportunity for reactionary campaigns – such as that against gay rights and the repeal of Section 28 – to rally their forces and attempt to opt out of progressive reforms.

Is not the right of nations to self-determination, then, a hostage to reaction – an abstract principle or an empty, impractical slogan; one which ties our hands and opens the door for imperialist intervention?

Should we not abandon it, and judge each national question purely on its merits, from the perspective of the political class struggle? – Where a national movement assists the working class and the cause of socialist revolution, we should support it. Where it weakens the working class and assists imperialism, we oppose it.

Such a pragmatic approach would repeat past errors, would open the door to opportunism and revisionism in the Marxist-Leninist movement and would play into the hands of imperialism. It is also an approach based on a misunderstanding of the principle and how it should be applied.

Marx, Engels and the 'Principle of Nationalities' In the era of bourgeois revolution against feudalism and absolutism, when the capitalist class and its intelligentsia fought for



political power against the landlords, financiers, monarchs and emperors in Europe, Marx and Engels sided with the bourgeoisie and urged the emerging proletariat to do likewise.

But they noted that numerous small nationalities such as the Gaels, the Bretons and the Basques were what Engels called *'fanatical standard-bearers of counter-revolution'*.¹ Their territories were bastions of economic, social and political backwardness. In the great revolutionary upsurge of 1848, on the promise of national autonomy (limited self-government) – and with the backing of Tsarist Russia – the Czechs, the Croats, the Slovenians and the Ukrainians had sided with their own oppressors, namely the Hapsburg monarchy, to crush the revolts of the Polish and Hungarian nationalists and the democrats of Vienna.

Engels vowed that *'one day we shall take a bloody revenge on the Slavs for this cowardly and base betrayal of the revolution'*.²

Emperor Louis Napoleon of France, on the other hand, championed the 'Principle of Nationalities' whereby all national peoples without their own state should be entitled to form one, to declare their independence and – for example in the case of the French minorities in Belgium and Switzerland – to amalgamate their territory with that of their fatherland. The Prussian, Austrian and Russian empires likewise embraced this 'Principle of Nationalities', advocating it enthusiastically for their rivals while always finding it impractical to operate themselves.

Marx and Engels opposed this 'principle' because it was, in their eyes, a tool of reactionary intrigue. It also meant, for instance, that the Rumanians *'who never had a history, nor the energy to have one'* were supposedly of equal importance to the Italians with their 2,000 years of history and their *'unimpaired national vitality'*.³ Indeed, Italy was at that very time demonstrating its vitality in an epic struggle for national unification.

Engels insisted that *'apart from the Poles, the Russians and at most the Slavs of Turkey, no Slav people has a future for the simple reason that all the other Slavs lack the primary historical, geographical, political and industrial conditions for a viable independence'*.⁴ With incredulity, he noted that according to the Principle of Nationalities: *'The Welsh and the Manxmen would have an equal right to independent political existence, absurd though it would be, with the English'*.⁵

Engels argued that this principle was a Russian concoction (Louis Napoleon lacking the brains to have thought it up himself). Its aim was to justify the division and occupation of Poland, and to stir up the Serbs, Croats, Ukrainians, Slovaks, Czechs and the *'other remnants of bygone Slavonian peoples'* in Turkey, Hungary and Germany. Even at the time of writing, Russian agents were using the Principle of

Nationalities to incite those *'nomadic savages'* – the Lapplanders – in northern Norway and Sweden to set up an independent Finnish state (which would itself require Russian protection, naturally).⁶

To the Principle of Nationalities, Marx and Engels counterposed the *'right of the great European nations to separate and independent existence'*.⁷ Some had already exercised that right – notably England and France – while others such as the Poles, Germans, Italians and Hungarians were struggling against imperial rule to do so. The *'rubbles of nationalities'*, on the other hand, had shown no such energy and could therefore claim no such right to national self-determination. They would never become nations and embark upon their own path of independent capitalist and democratic development: rather, civilisation would be imposed upon them by the great historic nations.

As late as 1885, Engels was dismissing the Serbs, Bulgarians, Greeks and *'other dishonest rabble'* as *'miserable remnants of former nations'*.⁸ This was the position he had elaborated for the International Working Men's Association, at Marx's request, in a series of articles in 1866 under the title: *'What Have the Working Classes to Do with Poland?'*

It was a potentially disastrous approach, borrowed from Hegel and placed on a materialist footing but then applied mechanistically and subjectively rather than dialectically. It undermined the slogan of the Manifesto of the Communist Party – *'Workers of All Lands, Unite!'* – and challenged the credibility of the First International's appeals for international working class solidarity.

In particular, it detracted from their ideological struggle against great-nation chauvinism among the workers of the big and oppressor countries, enabling German socialist leaders Karl Kautsky and Eduard Bernstein to develop their case for a benign and civilising imperialism. It also assisted nationalists in the small and oppressed nations to portray the democratic and working class movement as hostile to national aspirations, and provided more space for the imperialist powers to pose as 'true' defenders of the rights of small nations.

Marx and Engels had in effect devised a Darwinian law of national survival and then applied it statically, in a particular era of capitalist development. Nationalities that had not achieved statehood and were not struggling for it, by the 1860s, would never achieve it; they would henceforth remain marginal until their dissolution into one of the historic nations. Such a prognosis is understandable given the era through which Marx and Engels were living: how long could any nationality survive as a semi-feudal outpost in a world being transformed by the phenomenal productive forces of capitalism? – forces, moreover,



commanded by the national bourgeoisie of every historic nation, striving for and utilising national state power.

According to such a perspective, all talk of the 'rights' of mere nationalities appeared absurd as well as reactionary. Certainly, to proclaim the 'right' of a nationality to separation and independence would have been meaningless when such nationalities – by definition – were too weak even to launch a struggle for statehood. But this need not have ruled out the formulation of a comprehensive national policy as part of the democratic programme of the working class movement. This Marx and Engels did not do, perhaps fearing that even national demands short of independence would stimulate reactionary nationalism in what were – again by definition – reactionary nationalities.

More seriously still, Marx and Engels had underestimated the capacity of capitalist development to transform the social class structure, culture and political life of even the smallest and most marginal nationalities – and thereby stimulate a reinvention of their nationality and national consciousness on a new class basis.

Uneven Economic and Political Development

The approach adopted by Marx and Engels was quickly proved wrong by the tide of events, more specifically by the dynamics of the uneven development of capitalism, economically and politically. Before the end of the 19th century, capitalist development had hugely accelerated in many hitherto backward regions of Europe. Some nationally distinct areas – notably those with sizeable mineral fields – began to generate a locally-based if not entirely indigenous bourgeoisie with its own autonomous economy; an industrial working class was also created, along with an intelligentsia and other intermediate strata. In some places this new economic market and social class structure incorporated and reconstituted what had been a feudal nationality, which a native capitalist class or a petty bourgeois intelligentsia redefined culturally and politically. Among many small or previously 'submerged' nationalities, these social elements formed national movements, reconstructed 'the nation' and put it on the road to statehood. Even some of those nations that did not demand full independence, such as the Welsh, developed an amorphous national movement which nevertheless constructed a political consciousness and a range of institutions associated with nationhood. Nationalities became nations as the accelerated development of their productive forces created an economic basis and a social structure that renovated and transformed national characteristics and national consciousness, rather than eroding or overwhelming them.

Other nationalities were either bypassed by capitalist development – or the development occurred in conditions that restricted the emergence of a native capitalist class and intelligentsia, or militated against them identifying their class interests with the founding of an autonomous or independent national state. Again, the development of an area's productive forces can take place in a way which integrates a nationally distinct territory and its people more fully into a wider state and identity, through mass immigration, cultural assimilation etc. Uneven development can therefore mean that some nationalities fail to become transformed into capitalist nations, and may even disappear in time as distinct nationalities.

Marx and Engels later modified their mistaken approach, particularly under the impact of the national struggles in India and Ireland.

Having praised the civilising benefits of British rule in India in the 1850s, Marx turned into one of the most trenchant and implacable critics of the Raj. From 1867, he supported the full separation of Ireland from England. Alongside Engels, his researches revealed the extent to which a less-developed and under-civilised nationality could nevertheless have a rich history of its own – something they would have discovered in their investigation of early Irish and Welsh societies and their legal codes. Lenin himself made the point that Engels had come to favour a federal republic as the solution to the national question in the British Isles, because there '*the national question was not yet a thing of the past*'⁹.

The case of Ireland impressed upon Marx and Engels the need to overcome national antagonisms between workers on a principled basis: on the basis of support for the national aspirations of the oppressed, and uncompromising opposition to the grip of reactionary ruling class ideas on the working class of the oppressor nation. Marx also came to understand more clearly the connection between colonial and imperialist rule and under-development.

The retreat of the revolutionary movement in Europe after the defeat of the Paris Commune in 1871, and the possibility of upheaval in the Russian Empire, also led Marx and Engels to pay more attention to the prospects outside Europe, to turn away from a tendency to Euro-centrism. Deeper examination of the historical development of non-European societies produced a growing appreciation of the role that could be played by anti-colonial movements. Marx even revised the French edition of *Capital* in 1875, to confine his model of 'primitive accumulation' to western Europe.¹⁰

The Leninist Approach At the end of the 19th century, the spread of imperialism and the growth



of national and anti-colonial movements required a clear and agreed formulation from the advancing socialist movement. Hence the London Congress resolution in 1896 for the full right of self-determination for all nations (effectively abolishing the unhistorical distinction between 'historic' and 'non-historic' peoples) and for international working class unity against capitalism and for socialism.

But what precisely is a nation? Stalin elaborated and summarised a definition subsequently adopted by the international Communist movement:

'A nation is an historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture'.¹¹

This is still a workable starting point for characterising a nation, although it needs to be understood in all its parts and their interconnections, in its totality and in the processes of change.

This definition was never meant to be a checklist, although most of its critics and even some of its advocates have vulgarised it as such. The defining characteristics are mutually dependant and reinforcing and – in their essence – democratic. For instance, how and to what end could an unstable community of people, or a people without their own territory, exercise political independence? In the capitalist mode of production, the necessary stability requires a common economic life which is also the basis for a stable common culture. How could a community with a common culture have been created without a common language and psychological make-up, both of which are themselves historically constituted? Remove any of the interconnected factors and what remains is a riot of imprecision and a recipe for undemocratic minority rule or veto.

A nation, Lenin and Stalin argued, has an absolute right to self-determination, which could only be meaningfully understood as the right to political separation and independence. Against the oppression, intrigue and hypocrisy of capitalism, the working class should uphold this right consistently and universally.

Of course, having the right to do something does not always mean that it is wise to exercise that right in a given set of circumstances. As Lenin pointed out, to advocate the right to divorce is not to urge every married couple to get divorced.¹² Whether the right should be exercised was to be assessed from the standpoint of revolutionary progress. Will separation advance the political class struggle nationally and internationally? If not, revolutionaries should oppose independence in such a case – while upholding the right of the nation concerned to choose that path, preferably on the

basis of an agreed divorce settlement.

In his polemical battles against those who opposed the right to national self-determination, or who downgraded the importance of international working class unity, Lenin broadened and deepened the Communist and working class movement's understanding of – and practical approach to – the national question.

Firstly, his policy on the national question embraced nationalities and national minorities as well as established 'nations'.

Distinguishing between nations (whether or not they have a sovereign or autonomous state of their own) and *nationalities* is an important one in determining the consistently democratic, Leninist attitude to a particular national question. A nationality is a distinct group of people – more than a tribe – who share a set of national characteristics e.g. a common language, cultural traditions, a predominant outlook on national affairs, a common historical development etc., but do not do so securely, fully (their indigenous language may be facing extinction, their national consciousness is weak, they may be a minority within what was once their exclusive national territory) or comprehensively (they might no longer have their 'own' territory or a shared economic life).

For Lenin, where such a nationality forms a territorial majority, it should enjoy administrative autonomy but not an automatic right to full independence. Nations should as a matter of course exercise a degree of political and administrative autonomy – he even came to support federalism – with the right to secede, as Finland did from Soviet Russia in 1918.

Secondly, Lenin argued that all nations and nationalities in a multinational state should have the right to use their own language, to receive education in their native tongue and to learn their own history in schools, with no privileges or special status for any nation, nationality or language.¹³

Thirdly, Lenin identified the significance of supporting national-revolutionary movements in the colonies, in their national liberation struggles against imperialism. He identified six further principles to guide communists in their



formulation and pursuit of a national policy:

■ A Marxist analysis should always be made of the class composition of a nation, its nationalism and its so-called national culture.

■ There is a special duty in the dominant or oppressing nation to combat great-nation chauvinism and to uphold the national rights of other nationalities.

■ In the subjugated or oppressed country, there is the special duty to uphold proletarian internationalism.

■ The working class should lead the fight for national rights as a democratic and strategic necessity, while maintaining its own organisations and outlook even when participating in alliances.

■ Communists and workers should be organisationally united across the state in any multinational society.

■ The fight for national rights should be formulated and conducted in a revolutionary – not a reformist – way.

Here was the national policy that Marx and Engels had not developed, although Engels had been groping towards it in his final years.

The dangers of ignoring or rejecting these Leninist principles have been demonstrated by experience. To deny a nation its right to self-determination is to uphold the oppression of that nation by another; likewise to support the denial of rights to nationalities and national minorities is to side with the oppressor nation and, more precisely, to surrender to the great-nation chauvinism of its ruling class. The denial and suppression of national rights does not provide a permanent solution of any kind, let alone one which serves the interests of the working class of any country. Indeed, the denial of these rights can create opportunities for imperialist aggression, as Iraq and Serbia recently discovered to their cost after their regimes withheld or withdrew autonomy from the Kurds and the Kosovars.

Implementing national rights and the principle of national self-determination does not create or perpetuate national antagonisms. Where inequalities and oppression exist in the relationship between two nations, they should be challenged and done away with – not enforced in the name of a false ‘unity’, or in the name of ‘civilisation’ or even socialism. Lenin himself warned that revolutionary Russia could not bring socialism to Germany and Poland on Red Army bayonets.¹⁴

Let us also remember that it is upon the principle of the right to national self-determination that Cuba, Serbia, Iraq and other countries stake their claim to international solidarity when under attack from imperialism.

On the other hand, when Communists have responded to the national question in a principled way, they have often succeeded in building powerful revolutionary movements, in leading

solidarity campaigns and in winning national liberation struggles.

The National Question Today Where does this leave us in relation to some current manifestations of the national question?

The Kosovo Albanians clearly constitute a nationality within Serbia – but their claim to nationhood, and therefore to the right to national self-determination (i.e. to political independence from Serbia) is specious: they cannot lay sole claim – either historically, currently or securely – to Kosovo as their national territory; and their language, culture and outlook is still predominantly that of the nation of which they are a detached part, namely Albania. At the same time, Kosovan autonomy should not have been withdrawn in 1989, even though the rights of the province’s Serbian, Romany and Jewish minorities had to be protected.

In India, Communists have to formulate a national policy where there are two hundred languages and dialects, 25 states and seven union territories. The new Draft Programme of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) makes a class analysis of the national question, and seeks to apply a consistent Leninist approach to it.¹⁵ It notes the role of bourgeois-landlord forces in playing upon linguistic and national sentiments, the adverse impact of uneven capitalist development on minority nationalities and ethnic groups, and the role of extremists and imperialist agencies in promoting separatist movements. To defend the territorial integrity of India and to promote ‘unity in diversity’ between all its nationalities – especially among workers and poor peasants – the CPI(M) proposes the following democratic policies:

■ The restoration of real powers to the federal states.

■ Regional autonomy within states for areas of a specific ethnic, social and cultural composition (including the Adivasi and tribal peoples).

■ Equality of national languages in the central parliament and administration.

■ Hindi to remain as an official language but not be obligatory, with protection for the Urdu language and script.

■ The predominant language of each state to be the medium of government, administration and education, with provisions for minority languages including the right to receive education in the mother tongue.

■ Central government to promote co-operation between states and between peoples in the economic, political and cultural spheres, with special assistance to backward and weaker states, regions and areas.

Only the full and principled application of the



Marxist-Leninist approach to the national question, including the right of nations to self-determination, will provide a solution to the Irish question. The peoples who inhabit the province of Northern Ireland do not constitute a 'nation' and therefore, whatever the transitional arrangements, no one section has any right to veto the right of the Irish nation as a whole to national self-determination. The Northern Ireland unionists/loyalists/protestants share a common language and a unique culture and outlook – but these are bound up with another 'nation' or conglomeration of nations (the 'United Kingdom' or Britain) and, like any claim to territory, are based on the denial of the right of the Irish nation to self-determination. They are a distinct religious and cultural community, and could be regarded as a nationality detached from another, hybrid nation – but they do constitute a nationality in their own right (the 'Northern Irish' or the 'Ulsterites') or a nation.

National inequalities that have existed in Britain, and which have their origins in feudal annexation, are at last being remedied in a concrete, practical way. There is no reason to believe that a Scottish Parliament – or an English one for that matter – would become a bastion of reaction. That will be decided in the course of political struggle in each country. Only a principled approach can maintain the class and labour movement unity between Scottish, Welsh and English workers that has been built up over one hundred years and more.

This unity is vital not only for self-defence, and for advance towards socialist revolution. A united labour movement must also take the lead in defending democratic self-government in Britain against the drive to create a bureaucratic monopoly capitalist United States of Europe. British monopoly capitalism is seeking to reverse a century of working class democratic advance through further integration into the European Union, transferring powers from the elected British parliament and government to the European Commission and European Central Bank. In that respect, the labour movement and peoples of Britain face a national battle for democracy. But it is not a national liberation struggle of an oppressed nation against a foreign imperialism – to characterise it as such would be to downplay the role of the British ruling class in exploiting and oppressing other countries, and in promoting the European Union itself. Therefore there is no basis for developing a supposedly 'progressive' or 'left-wing' British nationalism. Britain is not an oppressed nation; it remains a major imperialist state, where the main enemy of the working class continues to be the British bourgeoisie.

Nationalism (whether British, Irish, Welsh, Scottish, English or any other brand) is a bourgeois

or petty bourgeois ideology that elevates 'the nation' above the class viewpoint, above class loyalty and working class internationalism. Capitulation to nationalism of any kind sooner or later disarms the working class, increases national antagonisms instead of reducing them, and can demobilise and even liquidate Communist and other working class organisation. Marxism-Leninism is the outlook of the Communist movement, serving as it does the historic and fundamental interests of each national working class and of humanity as a whole.

The serious error on the other side of the European Union question would be to deny or underestimate the national-democratic significance of this struggle in the name of some abstract internationalism, for fear of being associated with nationalism. Challenging the undemocratic rule of European Union bureaucrats and bankers who are buttressed by laws and treaties set in concrete will be significantly more difficult in a United States of Europe, even with the solidarity of other workers in that union. The bourgeois-democratic British state still represents the most favourable ground upon which the political class struggle can be conducted by the British labour movement and its allies. It is also our internationalist duty to campaign with other progressive and working class movements outside Britain to challenge the development of a European imperialist, military super-state.

In an era of deregulated and globalised markets increasingly dominated by industrial and financial transnational corporations (TNCs), where an imperialist world order is enforced by alliances of capitalist states, it is clearly in the interests of workers to unite their national labour movements in action, across national and state boundaries. Proletarian internationalism lags behind the international co-operation of capitalist monopolies and their states.

Even so, the basis of capitalist political and military power remains the national or multinational state. The European Union, NATO, the IMF and other international agencies of imperialism were created by, and rest upon, the national state power held by the capitalist classes in their respective countries; without that national state power, those agencies would collapse like a house of cards. Our primary internationalist duty still is to make the socialist revolution in Britain. The national or multinational state is also the level at which working class and popular movements have developed their organisations, their political consciousness and their democratic rights. The greater their real or potential influence on state policy – the closer they come to political power – the more determined will be imperialism to undermine their national and other democratic rights. For Communists and the working class



movement to abandon national rights because imperialism is embracing them in a distorted, selective and hypocritical fashion, is to sacrifice the fundamental and long-term interests of the working class for short-term pragmatic expediency. It is opportunism of the most dangerous kind.

For Lenin, too, the national question was essentially one of *democracy*. The working class and revolutionary movement should be at the forefront of every democratic struggle – for women’s rights, against racism – exposing and challenging the role of finance capital in obstructing, distorting and undermining democratic rights. This approach characterises the strategy adopted by the Communist Party of Britain in its programme, *The British Road to Socialism*. In this way the working class educates itself politically and wins new allies to the revolutionary cause.

But in the democratic battles of the present, Lenin also looked to the future and in doing so provided yet another argument in favour of national rights:

*‘All nations will arrive at socialism – this is inevitable, but all will do so in not exactly the same way, each will contribute something of its own to some form of democracy, to some variety of the dictatorship of the proletariat ... There is nothing more primitive from the viewpoint of theory, or more ridiculous from that of practice, than to paint, “in the name of historical materialism”, this aspect of the future in a monotonous grey.’*¹⁶

Stalin drew a portentous distinction between the ‘capitalist nation’ and the nation as it would develop under socialism. The ‘socialist nation’ would be re-established on a different economic and social basis; its culture and politics would be filled with a new class and democratic content, its relations with nationalities and other nations imbued with a spirit of equality, peace and internationalism – not based on annexation, exploitation or the threat of war.¹⁷ In such new conditions, national distinctions would add richness and variety to socialist society.

The experience of socialist reconstruction in the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia – despite errors in many fields – provided a glimpse of the future ‘socialist nation’. For relatively long periods, old antagonisms were held in check and even eroded; whole nationalities were given political, cultural and linguistic rights and the potential to develop on an economic base; new socialist ‘national’ – or multinational – identities began to emerge (Soviet, Yugoslav, Czechoslovak) on the basis of formal equality between nations and nationalities, even though privileges were not wholly eliminated in practice.

Some of the nations and nationalities that have achieved – or are struggling for – independence or autonomy since the collapse in the Soviet Union

and eastern Europe, owe their survival to socialist national policies. While it is true that others victimised under Stalin survived despite that regime, many more benefitted from economic development, cultural support and a degree of political autonomy that many stateless nations and nationalities would never have enjoyed under capitalism.

It is already clear that monopoly capitalism in the 21st century, led by the United States, threatens the right to national self-determination, the political and economic sovereignty, and the cultural and linguistic distinctiveness of all but the most powerful nations. To be a democrat and a patriot increasingly means to challenge monopoly capitalism – imperialism – and to be a socialist and an internationalist; to be a socialist and an internationalist increasingly means to defend national democracy and all that is progressive in national culture and identity – in other words to be a patriot in the sense in which Lenin, too, identified himself as a Russian patriot.¹⁸

Today as much as in the past, the Marxist-Leninist world view synthesises the national question and internationalism on the only basis that can ensure the free development of every nation and nationality, and of humanity as a whole – on the basis of the political class struggle against capitalism and imperialism, for socialism and communism. ★

Notes

1. F. Engels, ‘The Magyar Struggle’ (1849), Marx and Engels *Collected Works (MECW)* Vol. 8 p. 234
2. F. Engels, ‘Democratic Pan-Slavism’ (1849), *MECW* Vol. 8 p. 374
3. F. Engels, ‘What Have the Working Classes to Do with Poland?’ *MECW* Vol. 20 p. 157
4. F. Engels, ‘Democratic Pan-Slavism’ (1849), *MECW* Vol. 8 p. 367
5. As note 3
6. As note 3
7. As note 3
8. F. Engels to August Bebel, November 17, 1885
9. V. I. Lenin, *The State and Revolution* (1916), *Collected Works* Vol. 25 p. 447; F. Engels, ‘A Critique of the Draft Social-Democratic Programme of 1891’ (1891) Marx and Engels *Selected Works* Vol. 3 pp. 435-6
10. K. Marx, First Draft of the Reply to V. I. Zasulich’s Letter (1881), *MECW* Vol. 24 p. 346
11. J. V. Stalin, *Marxism and the National Question* (1913), *Collected Works* Vol. 2 p. 307
12. V. I. Lenin, *The National Programme of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party* (1913), *CW* Vol. 19 p. 543; *A Caricature of Marxism and Imperialist Economism* (1916), *CW* Vol. 23 p. 72
13. See, for example, V. I. Lenin, ‘The Nationality of Pupils in Russian Schools’ (1913) *CW* Vol. 19 p. 533; and ‘Critical Remarks on the National Question’ (1913) *CW* Vol. 20 p. 44.
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16. V. I. Lenin, *A Caricature of Marxism and Imperialist Economism* (1916), *CW* Vol. 23 pp. 69-70
17. J. V. Stalin, ‘The National Question and Leninism’ (1929), *CW* Vol. 11 pp. 353-4
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Useful websites

Communist Party of Britain and Young Communist League

<http://www.communist-party.org.uk>

Morning Star socialist daily newspaper

<http://www.poptel.org.uk/morning-star>

Searchlight anti-fascist magazine

<http://www.searchlightmagazine.com>

Trades Union Congress

<http://www.tuc.org.uk>

International Centre for Trade Union Rights

<http://www.ictur.labournet.org>

Cuba Solidarity Campaign

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