

communist review

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Russian Revolution: debates on strategy and tactics

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Marxism and religion; a debate we do not need

IFOR TORBE

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GERRY SABLES PROOF READER

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International Women's day has once again come and gone. It is richly ironic that March 8th, a national holiday in the former Soviet Union and most of the other former socialist countries, was largely ignored in the West until the 1990's. Now women's day and women's week celebrations abound, and quite rightly too, provided the origin and real meaning of the event is also remembered. The Second International, on a resolution from Clara Zetkin at the International Conference of Socialist Women in Copenhagen in 1910, established International Women's Day as a day in which women workers in all countries could link their common struggle against inequality, oppression and super-exploitation. The fact that now, in the 21st century, many of the juridical inequality battles (eg the right to vote and the right to be educated) have been won in most (though not all) countries, should not blind us to the continuing super exploitation of women workers. The recently published EOC Report (Just Pay: Equal Pay Task Force Report) on women's earnings in Britain shows that the gender pay gap is greater here than in any other European country. The rise in the National Minimum Wage to £4.10 per hour (to be implemented in October 2001) will do nothing to stem the feminisation of poverty, much less to reduce the gender pay gap. New Labour, despite its egalitarian rhetoric, is not working for women.

Whatever the outcome of the forthcoming General Election this year and for elections in the foreseeable future, it is clear that British foreign

policy, unless we have a socialist revolution, will not change. Andrew Murray's article on Labour's foreign policy demonstrates what most students of history should know – that there is a continuum in foreign policy, the course of which is decided by 'British interests' and those interests are determined by the power of capital using politicians as their mouthpieces and the Foreign Office as their agents. The same can be said of US foreign policy: its operation in the Caribbean region is discussed in Richard Hart's article. German foreign policy likewise displays remarkable (and worrying) continuities with the past as Manfred Sohn's article indicates. Foreign policy is an area which attracts far less comment and analysis than other spheres of government policy other than when it forces itself into the headlines at times of international conflict. It is regarded as a specialist field beyond the grasp of mere citizens – a problem which is compounded by the media's clinically descriptive accounts of conflict zones in which the pundits hide their lack of

analysis behind a welter of facts and fancy graphics. Such a lack of analytical clarity signally fails to explain, as distinct from chronicling, past and present crises in, for example, Rwanda, Yugoslavia, Israel, the Gulf States, the Falklands and many more. This, however, does not mean that the opinion formers don't know which side they are on. It's a bit like the way positivist history is written and taught – collecting 'the facts' is its goal and obsession: the more facts you have the nearer you are to 'the truth'. However, 'the facts' don't exist outside an analytical framework; the mere selection of one fact above another already betokens an interpretation; and the positivists are already quite certain of their historicist starting point. That is the certainty that the capitalist system itself is the embodiment of progress and that their own country's application of it is generally held to be superior to that of its rivals. In the realm of foreign policy, however, problems present themselves because the policy is often as irrational as the capitalist system itself. Salisbury, the 19th century Tory prime minister (architect of Britain's so-called isolationism in the period immediately before World War One), expressed this well. He once remarked that British foreign policy rarely follows a straight course and hence Britain should have no permanent allies or permanent friends – British interests are served by pragmatism rather than principle.

Why did Blair tamely assist Bush's bombing of Iraq? The media would have us believe that, as in Kosovo, a great principle was at stake and this was once again a humanitarian mission based this time on the sudden imperative to assist the Kurds against the tyrant Saddam Hussein. Sanctions, now in their 10th year, have failed to dislodge the weaponry supplied by the west in the first place, much less to teach Saddam to be nicer to the Kurds. How ironic that at the very moment of the bombing raids, over 100 Iraqi Kurds were washed ashore in France seeking asylum. Humanitarian Blair did not offer them a welcome in Britain. Playing the race card in the run up to a general election is far more important in the quest for the votes of middle England. Blair's adventurism is rooted in the neo-colonialist adaptation to a post-colonial world which Britain no longer dominates, but whose primary products she still wishes to control.

Of all the 'great betrayals' of new labour, its foreign policy is the least surprising – it has always been awful. The Attlee government initiated nuclear testing, sent British troops to fight the communists in Korea and supported the apartheid regime in South Africa. Much more surprising is new labour's conversion to neo-liberalism masquerading benignly as 'the third way'. Ramsay MacDonald's defection in 1931 may have set a historical precedent in the betrayal stakes for a Labour prime minister in office, but this is small beer compared to the highjacking of the entire party and the transformation of its traditional social democratic ideology into laissez-faire capitalist revivalism with a tinge of conscience for the 'socially excluded'. No wonder the Tories are forced to rebrand themselves and are advised to minimise the use of the word 'conservative'. In a historic reversal of the metaphor, it looks like the labour sheep have stolen the Tory wolf's clothing!

MARY DAVIS



Russian Revolution: debates on strategy and tactics

Kenny Coyle

In this two-part article, I want to look at two of Lenin's most important but often neglected works; the book *Two Tactics of Social Democracy in the Democratic Revolution* written in 1905; and the collection of notes and letters from early 1917, usually referred to as the April Theses.

These two works are essential in understanding the development of the Russian Revolution and in illustrating Lenin's genius both for long-term strategy and his tactical flexibility in the light of changed conditions.

Both these works have also been the victims of misunderstandings, incomprehension, subtle distortions and even, on occasion, outright falsification, by some sections of the Marxist left.

A number of writers maintain that it was Trotsky's theory of Permanent Revolution that triumphed in the course of the October Revolution of 1917. According to these accounts, Lenin and the Bolsheviks jettisoned their previous programme for a "revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry" in the months between the February and October revolutions in Russia and instead embraced Trotsky's positions.

Duncan Hallas, a leading British Socialist Workers Party theorist, has argued that:

"[The Russian Revolution of 1917] saw Trotsky brilliantly vindicated when Lenin in effect, although not in words, adopted the Permanent Revolution perspective and abandoned the democratic dictatorship without ceremony."¹

The split of the Russian Social Democratic and Labour Party in 1903 into Bolshevik and Menshevik wings is often reduced to a dispute over the rules or, more profoundly, a disagreement over the nature of a Marxist party in Russian conditions. However, half-hidden among these disputes was a growing divergence between the Social Democrats over the character of the coming Russian Revolution and the components of a revolutionary anti-Tsarist alliance. It was this issue that dominated the debates of Russian Marxists in 1905-1906, during the first great anti-Tsarist revolutionary wave.

Menshevik view For the Mensheviks, the Tsarist autocracy, the feudal oppression of the peasantry and the generally underdeveloped state of Russian capitalism meant that the main task of Russian Marxists was to support a bourgeois-democratic revolution that would sweep away Tsarism and allow the unfettered development of capitalism.

This would thereby increase the size and social weight of the Russian working class. A bourgeois-democratic revolution would also establish a democratic republic with wide political freedoms, thereby allowing the working class to learn the political skills necessary to eventually overthrow capitalism itself.

The Mensheviks believed that since the revolution to overthrow Tsarism was needed to allow the development of capitalism the Russian bourgeoisie should lead this struggle. The role of the working class was to support the liberal bourgeoisie in establishing a democratic republic. At some later date, as capitalism matured, the working class would begin its struggle for socialism. The Menshevik view was best summarised by one of its leaders Martynov:

"The proletariat cannot win political power in the state, either wholly or in part, until it has made the socialist revolution... But that being the case it is evident that the coming revolution cannot realise any political forms against the will of the entire bourgeoisie, for the latter will be the master of tomorrow. That being the case, the revolutionary struggle of the proletariat, by simply frightening the majority of the bourgeois elements, can have but one result – the restoration of absolutism in its original form. The struggle to influence the course and outcome of the bourgeois revolution can find expression only in the extension in the exertion of revolutionary pressure by the proletariat on the will of the radical and liberal bourgeoisie, and in the compulsion on the part of the more democratic 'lower strata' of society to bring the 'upper strata' into agreement to carry through the bourgeois revolution to its logical resolution."

The Mensheviks often took an intransigent position on any Social Democratic participation in a Provisional Revolutionary Government to replace the Tsarist regime, arguing that the Social Democrats should not participate in the government itself to preserve working-class independence from the capitalist parties.

The Menshevik's 1905 Geneva conference had declared that:

"...Social-Democracy must not set out to seize power or share it with anyone in the provisional government, but must remain the party of extreme revolutionary opposition."

Two lines It was against this position that Lenin's *Two Tactics* came to be written in 1905 outlining the Bolshevik strategy of REVOLUTIONARY DICTATORSHIP OF THE PROLETARIAT AND PEASANTRY. In an article published several years later, Lenin argued that subsequent developments had confirmed the view outlined in *Two Tactics*.

"The experience of the 1905 Revolution and of



the subsequent counter-revolutionary period in Russia teaches us that in our country two lines of revolution could be observed, in the sense that there was a struggle between two classes – the proletariat and the liberal bourgeoisie – for leadership of the masses.”²

Two essential lines emerged because:

“Only these trends – the Bolshevik and the Menshevik – manifested themselves in the politics of the masses in 1904-08, and later, in 1908-14. Why was that? It was because only these trends had firm class roots – the former in the proletariat, the latter in the liberal bourgeoisie.”³

The political gulf that separated the Bolshevik and Menshevik wings of the RSDLP was based on the fact that:

“The Bolsheviks helped the proletariat consciously to follow the first line, to fight with supreme courage and to lead the peasants. The Mensheviks were constantly slipping into the second line; they demoralised the proletariat by adapting its movement to the liberals.”⁴

The identification of which class would lead the bourgeois-democratic revolution was a critical area of dispute. In Lenin’s view the bourgeoisie was not capable of consistent revolutionary leadership but on the contrary would seek to curb and check the momentum of the anti-Tsarist revolution. Lenin believed that they were more likely to strike a deal with the large landowners and opt for a constitutional monarchy, allowing only restricted democratic rights for the working class along with minor agrarian reforms that would not benefit the mass of peasants:

“The behaviour of the liberal bourgeoisie was the second line. We Bolsheviks have always affirmed, especially since the spring of 1906, that this line was represented by the Cadets and Octobrists as a single force. The 1905-15 decade has proved the correctness of our view. At the decisive moments of the struggle, the Cadets, together with the Octobrists betrayed democracy and went to the aid of the tsar and the landowners. The ‘liberal’ line of the Russian revolution was marked by the ‘pacification’ and the fragmentary character of the masses’ struggle so as to enable the bourgeoisie to make peace with the monarchy.”

The revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry

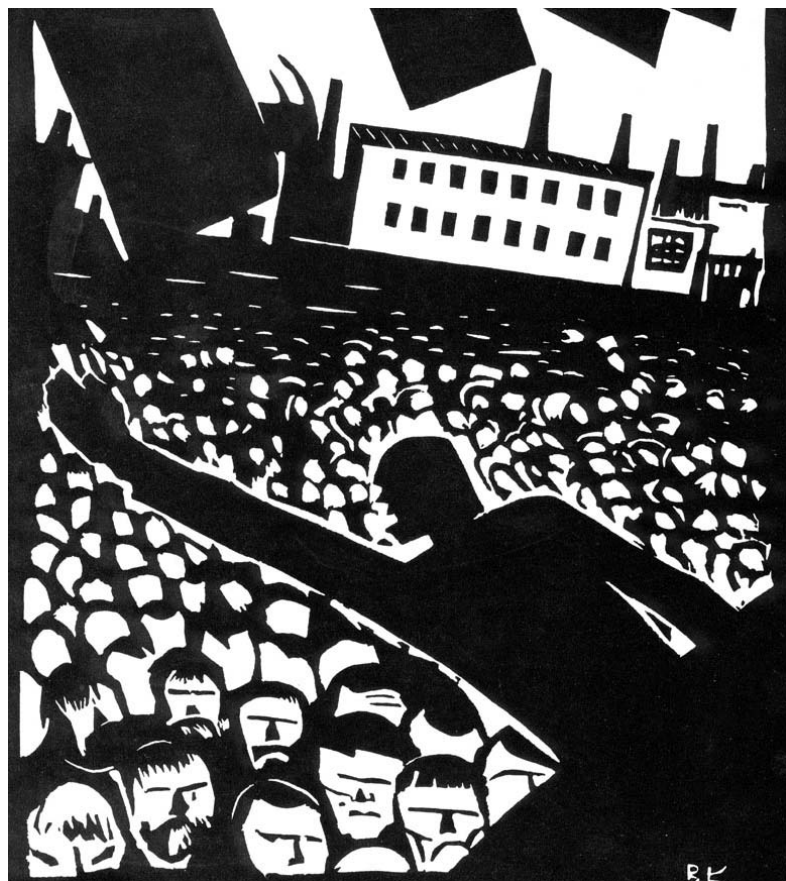
The Bolshevik view placed little hope that the Russian bourgeoisie would be capable of leading the anti-Tsarist struggle. Instead, Lenin argued that the most consistent revolutionary forces were the working class and the peasantry. If these forces could unite, under the leadership of the working class, then it was possible that a “revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry” could be established. This is one reason why the term “democratic revolution” was often used by Lenin rather than “bourgeois-democratic”, since a peasant-worker revolution would inevitably display different characteristics from the classical revolutions of the late 18th and 19th centuries in which the bourgeoisie had played a more consistent revolutionary role.

The Bolsheviks identified three distinct class positions in the anti-Tsarist opposition:

“The following forces take a stand against the old order, against the autocracy, feudalism, serfdom: 1) the liberal big bourgeoisie, 2) the radical petty bourgeoisie, 3) the proletariat. The first fights for nothing more than a constitutional monarchy; the second, for a democratic republic; the third, for a socialist revolution.”⁵

Yet, because of the backwardness of Russia and the fact that the mass of the population were peasants, an immediate transition to socialism was not possible. However, a successful overthrow of the autocracy by the workers and peasants could have a powerful impact, pushing aside the inconsistent liberal bourgeoisie within Russia and stimulating socialist revolutions in other more advanced countries. Lenin believed that the coming anti-Tsarist revolution should establish:

“a democratic, not a socialist dictatorship. It will not be able (without a series of intermediary stages of revolutionary development) to affect the foundations of capitalism. At best it may bring about a radical redistribution of landed property in favour of the peasantry, establish consistent and full democracy including the formation of a republic, eradicate all the



oppressive features of Asiatic bondage, not only in village but also in factory life, lay the foundation for a thorough improvement in the position of the workers and for a rise in their standard of living, and — last but not least — carry the revolutionary conflagration into Europe. Such a victory will by no means as yet transform our bourgeois revolution into a socialist revolution; the democratic revolution will not directly overstep the bounds of bourgeois social and economic relationships; nevertheless, the significance of such a victory for the future development of Russia and of the whole world will be immense.”⁶

For the Bolsheviks, the key to success would be to ensure the leading role of the working class in the democratic anti-Tsarist revolution alongside the peasantry. A decade after the 1905 Revolution, Lenin summed up its lessons:

“The proletariat advanced in a revolutionary fashion, and was leading the democratic peasantry towards the overthrow of the monarchy and the landowners. That the peasantry revealed revolutionary tendencies in the democratic sense was proved on a mass scale by all the great political events: the peasant insurrections of 1905-06, the unrest in the army in the same years, the “Peasants’ Union” of 1905, and the first two Dumas, in which the peasant Trudoviks stood not only ‘to the left of the Cadets’, but were also more revolutionary than the intellectual Social-Revolutionaries and Trudoviks. Unfortunately, this is often forgotten, but still it is a fact. Both in the Third and in the Fourth Dumas, the peasant Trudoviks, despite their weakness, showed that the peasant masses were opposed to the landed proprietors.”⁷

The Bolsheviks also viewed participation in a provisional revolutionary government in a different light from the Mensheviks. If the working class was to play a leading role in the revolution against Tsarism it should not automatically cede governmental power to other forces. The precise attitude to a provisional revolutionary government was therefore not set in stone but was regarded as a question of political tactics to be decided at the time in view of the prevailing balance of forces.

The task of thoroughly sweeping away Tsarism and clearing the autocracy out root and branch would therefore fall to an alliance between the working class, “the only consistent fighter for democracy”, and the peasantry. A democratic dictatorship would seek to satisfy the demands of the mass of the peasants for land reform and secure their longer-term support for the working class. Such an alliance could lay the basis for the eventual transition to socialism, though Lenin warned of the dangers of failing to properly distinguish these two stages.

“The very mistake committed by the communes

that have existed in history is that they confused the democratic revolution with the socialist revolution. On the other hand, our slogan - a revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry - fully safeguards us against this mistake. While recognising the incontestably bourgeois nature of the revolution, which is incapable of directly overstepping the bounds a mere democratic revolution, our slogan pushes forward this particular revolution and strives to mould it into forms most advantageous to the proletariat; consequently, it strives to make the very most of the democratic revolution in order to attain the greatest success in the further struggle of the proletariat for Socialism.”⁸

Lenin understood the democratic revolution as a bridge to the socialist revolution. The more radical the democratic revolution the faster the working class and the poorer peasantry would cross over to the socialist side, bringing the next stage in the revolutionary process closer.

“The complete victory of the present revolution will mark the end of the democratic revolution and the beginning of a determined struggle for a socialist revolution. The satisfaction of the demands of the present-day peasantry, the utter rout of reaction, and the winning of a democratic republic will mark the complete end of the revolutionism of the bourgeoisie and even of the petty bourgeoisie – will mark the beginning of the real struggle of the proletariat for Socialism. The more complete the democratic revolution, the sooner, the more widespread, the purer and the more determined will be the development of this new struggle. The slogan of a “democratic” dictatorship expresses the historically limited nature of the present revolution and the necessity of a new struggle on the basis of the new order for the complete emancipation of the working class from all oppression and all exploitation.”⁹

Trotsky’s Permanent Revolution There was a third, minor, trend among Russian Marxists, that represented by Leon Trotsky. He agreed with both Bolsheviks and Mensheviks that the immediate *tasks* of the Russian Revolution would be bourgeois democratic. However, Trotsky believed that the working class would not only play the leading role, as did the Bolsheviks, but that it would dominate and impose its own class agenda from the beginning.

“In the revolution at the beginning of the 20th century, the direct objective tasks of which are also bourgeois, there emerges as a near prospect the inevitable, or at least the probable, political domination of the proletariat. The proletariat itself will see to it that this domination does not become a mere passing ‘episode’, as some realist philistines hope.” (Trotsky, *Results and Prospects*, pp. 199-200.)



Only the working class, in the shape of a Social Democratic government, could carry out these bourgeois democratic tasks Trotsky argued:

“The representative body of the nation, convened under the leadership of the proletariat, which has secured the support of the peasantry, will be nothing else than a democratic dress for the rule of the proletariat.”¹⁰

But once in power the working class would not stop at bourgeois-democratic limits. The Social Democrats in power would be obliged to carry out the socialist revolution. Unlike the Mensheviks, Trotsky wanted the working class to conquer political power immediately.

Here we are confronted by questions of tactics:

“...should we consciously work towards a working-class government in proportion as the development of the revolution brings this stage nearer, or must we at that moment regard political power as a misfortune which the bourgeois revolution is ready to thrust upon the workers, and which it would be better to avoid?” (Trotsky, *Results and Prospects*, pp. 199-200.)

Bolshevik opposition to Trotsky’s line was expressed by Lenin, who dismissed Permanent Revolution as irrelevant to the course of the Russian revolutionary process and instead urged the forging of an effective and long-term revolutionary alliance between the Russian working class and the majority of the peasantry:

“To bring clarity into the alignment of classes in the impending revolution is the main task of a revolutionary party. This task is being shirked by the Organising Committee, which within Russia remains a faithful ally to Nashe Dyelo, and abroad utters meaningless ‘Left’ phrases. This task is being wrongly tackled in Nashe Slovo by Trotsky, who is repeating his ‘original’ 1905 theory and refuses to give some thought to the reason why, in the course of ten years, life has been bypassing this splendid theory.

That is the crux of the matter today. The proletariat are fighting, and will fight valiantly, to win power, for a republic, for the confiscation of the land, ie, to win over the peasantry, make full use of their revolutionary powers, and get the ‘non-proletarian masses of the people’ to take part in liberating bourgeois Russia from military-feudal ‘imperialism’ (tsarism).¹¹

Trotsky’s difficulty was that, while arguing that a proletarian revolution was the only possible way forward and that once in power a workers’ government would not limit itself to bourgeois democratic tasks, he also believed that Russia did not possess the reserves either to build socialism on its own, nor indeed to hold out against a hostile conservative Europe. The success and survival of the Russian Revolution therefore depended on support from revolutions in more advanced

countries. He formulated the problem in an interesting way.

“Is it inevitable that the proletarian dictatorship should be shattered against the barriers of the bourgeois revolution? Or is it possible in the given *world-historical* conditions, that it may discover before it the prospect of breaking through these barriers? (Trotsky, *Results and Prospects*, pp. 199-200, our emphasis.)

The language is revealing. Trotsky viewed the ‘bourgeois revolution’ as a barrier to socialist revolution. Lenin, meanwhile, viewed the ‘democratic revolution’ as a pathway or a bridge toward it:

“...from the democratic revolution we shall at once, and precisely in accordance with the measure of our strength, the strength of the class-conscious and organised proletariat, begin to pass to the socialist revolution. We stand for uninterrupted revolution. We shall not stop half-way.”¹²

Did Trotsky ‘underestimate the peasantry’

With an overwhelmingly agrarian population, the attitude of Social Democrats toward the peasantry was crucial.

The Mensheviks were the most hostile. Essentially they saw the peasantry as a backward social class and a conservative and anti-socialist political force. The best prospect was the speedy development of agrarian capitalism that would transform the peasantry into rural proletarians and therefore a subject more worthy of Social Democratic interest.

The accusation that Trotsky underestimated the revolutionary potential of the peasantry is not a “Stalinist invention”, but was based on the differing assessments of the class character of Russian revolutionary struggle and the varying potentials of the bourgeoisie and peasantry.

In his work 1923 work, ‘The New Course’, Trotsky rejected accusations that he had underestimated the peasantry, arguing that as chief organiser of the Red Army he had in effect created a revolutionary peasant army. He also claimed credit for anticipating the turn away from War Communism to the more peasant-friendly New Economic Policy. While this is true in part – Trotsky was not guilty of underestimating the need for the working class in power to have the support of the peasantry – it avoids a different issue – namely the potential of the peasantry as an active ally of the working class in the revolutionary struggle for power itself.¹³

In his major pre-1917 work on Permanent Revolution, ‘Results and Prospects’, Trotsky had so stressed the revolutionary power of the working class that he reduced the anti-Tsarist revolutionary movement to merely a ‘single combat’ of the working class against the Tsarist regime. The peasantry was relegated to a supportive audience.



“The struggle for the interests of *all* Russia has fallen to the lot of the *only now existing strong class in the country*, the industrial proletariat. For this reason the industrial proletariat has tremendous political importance, and for this reason the struggle for the emancipation of Russia from the incubus of absolutism which is stifling it has become converted into *a single combat between absolutism and the industrial proletariat* a single combat in which the peasants may render considerable support but cannot play a leading role.” (Trotsky, *Results and Prospects*, p. 198.)

Trotsky had argued that it was only *after* the working-class seizure of power that the bulk of the peasantry would be shaken out of passivity and inaction and drawn into the revolutionary movement.

“Many sections of the working masses, particularly in the countryside, will be drawn into the revolution and become politically organised only after ...the urban proletariat, stands at the helm of the state.”¹⁴

Indeed, even then, Trotsky argued, active participation by the peasants was not essential – passive acceptance of the new state power was enough.

“In such a situation, created by the transference of power to the proletariat, nothing remains for the peasantry to do but rally to the regime of workers’ democracy. It will not matter much even if the peasantry does this with a degree of consciousness not larger than that which it usually rallies to the bourgeois regime.”¹⁵

For Lenin, on the contrary, the determination and consciousness of the peasantry as an *active ally* of the working class was decisive. Remarking on the Menshevik leader Martov’s approving comments on Trotsky’s argument, Lenin wrote:

“The most fallacious of Trotsky’s opinions that Comrade Martov quotes and considers to be “just” is the third, viz.: “even if they [the peasantry] do this [“support the regime of working-class democracy”] with no more political understanding than they usually support a bourgeois regime.” The proletariat cannot count on the ignorance and prejudices of the peasantry as the powers that be under a bourgeois regime count and depend on them, nor can it assume that in time of revolution the peasantry will remain in their usual state of political ignorance and passivity.”¹⁶

Trotsky’s approach was very different from the Bolsheviks. In his book ‘1905’, Trotsky had written: “It goes without saying that the proletariat must fulfill its mission, just as the bourgeoisie did in its own time, with the help of the peasantry and petty bourgeoisie. It must lead the countryside, draw it into the movement, make it vitally

interested in the success of its plans. But, inevitably the proletariat remains the leader. This is not the ‘democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry’, it is the dictatorship of the proletariat supported by the peasantry.”¹⁷

But this is a misconception of the Bolshevik perspective. Lenin made a subtle but crucial distinction between the peasantry’s ‘independence’, that is to say its possession of definite, distinct class interests, and its political inability to lead the revolutionary struggle. The revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry was an alliance between independent classes in which the political weight of the working class was matched by the social weight of the peasantry. The democratic revolution was a means of mobilising the peasant masses in a struggle for their own class interests, since they coincided to a large degree with the immediate interests of the working class.

“The outcome of our revolution will actually depend most of all on the steadfastness in struggle of the millions of peasants. Our big bourgeoisie is far more afraid of revolution than of reaction. The proletariat by itself, is not strong enough to win. The urban poor do not represent any independent interests, they are not an independent force compared with the proletariat and the peasantry. The rural population has the decisive role not in the sense of leading the struggle (this is out of the question) but in the sense of being able to ensure victory.”¹⁸

Lenin argued that those who ‘underestimated’ the active revolutionary potential of the bulk of the peasantry, such as Trotsky, were in fact aiding those who feared the participation and alliance of the peasantry in a democratic revolution against Tsarism, whose momentum would grow over into a socialist revolution. Furthermore, at times Trotsky viewed the peasantry pessimistically, not so much as an ally but as an obstacle whose backwardness was a hostile anti-working class factor:

“From the very first moment after its taking power, the proletariat will have to find support in the antagonisms between the village poor and village rich, between the agricultural proletariat and the agricultural bourgeoisie. While the heterogeneity of the peasantry creates difficulties and narrows the basis for a proletarian policy, the insufficient degree of class differentiation will create obstacles to the introduction among the peasantry of developed class struggle, upon which the urban proletariat could rely. The primitiveness of the peasantry turns its hostile face towards the proletariat.

The cooling-off of the peasantry, its political passivity, and all the more the active opposition of its upper sections, cannot but have an influence on a section of the intellectuals and the



petty-bourgeoisie of the towns. Thus, the more definite and determined the policy of the proletariat in power becomes, the narrower and more shaky does the ground beneath its feet become. All this is extremely probable and even inevitable ...”¹⁹

The factor that Trotsky cited as a weakness of the peasantry, its differentiation into distinct strata, was taken by Lenin as a positive and welcome development. It was Lenin who first attacked Trotsky’s attitude to the peasantry, long before Stalin resurrected the issue in the inner-party struggle of the 1920s:

“The differentiation of the peasantry has enhanced the class struggle within them; it has aroused very many hitherto politically dormant elements. It has drawn the rural proletariat closer to the urban proletariat (the Bolsheviks have insisted ever since 1906 that the former should be separately organised, and they included this demand in the resolution of the Menshevik congress in Stockholm). However, the antagonism between the peasantry, on the one hand, and the Markovs, Romanovs and Khvostovs, on the other, has become stronger and more acute. This is such an obvious truth that not even the thousands of phrases in scores of Trotsky’s Paris articles will ‘refute’ it. Trotsky is in fact helping the liberal-labour politicians in Russia, who by ‘repudiation’ of the role of the peasantry understand a refusal to raise up the peasants for the revolution!”²⁰

Now let us look at some contemporary misinterpretations of Two Tactics.

Two Tactics: Lenin’s versus the SWP’s

John Rees of Britain’s Socialist Workers Party has attempted a deeper critique of Lenin’s ‘Two Tactics of Social Democracy in the Democratic Revolution’. Rees is unimpressed.

“Lenin’s initial estimation of the forces involved in the Russian Revolution is contained in his Two Tactics of Social Democracy in the Democratic Revolution. This work obviously predates the experience of 1917; in fact it even predates his full absorption of the lessons of the 1905 Revolution. In some important respects it is a regression to a point less politically developed than that of Marx and Engels in 1850.”²¹

This is a reference to the ‘Address to the Central Committee of the Communist League’ in 1850, in which Marx said:

“While the democratic petty bourgeois wish to bring the revolution to a conclusion as quickly as possible, through the achievement, at most, of the above demands, it is our interest and our task to make the revolution permanent, until all more or less possessing classes are forced out of their position of dominance, until the proletariat

conquers state power, and the association of proletarians, not only in one country but in all the dominant countries of the world, advances so far that competition among the proletarians of these countries ceases and that at least the decisive productive forces are concentrated in the hands of the proletarians.”²²

Marx’s address was concerned with ensuring the political and organisational independence of the working class from petty-bourgeois democrats in the revolution against feudalism, ensuring that the working class constituted the most consistent wing of the revolutionary movement pushing the democratic revolution on swiftly to socialist revolution. Despite the wording, this is not at all the same as Trotsky’s Permanent Revolution. It is, if anything, closer to Lenin’s concept of uninterrupted revolution.

In any case, Marx and Engels revised their position. Writing in his introduction to *The Class Struggles in France 1848-1850*, Engels reconsidered: “History has proved us, and all who thought like us wrong. It has made it clear that the state of economic development on the Continent at that time was not, by a long way, ripe for the elimination of capitalist production ...it still had great capacity for expansion.”²³

So while initially Marx and Engels did imagine that the proletarian revolution could advance quite rapidly in 1848-50 in at least some European countries they later regarded this as an over-optimistic mis-estimation because of the immature development of capitalism and of the working class and its political leadership.

The distrust of the bourgeoisie’s revolutionary ardour, however, was not so far off the mark. The bourgeoisie, or at least significant sections of it, showed a recurring tendency to compromise with feudalism and to sell its anti-feudal allies, the peasantry and working class, short. As we have seen, such a distrust was voiced by Lenin himself and is in no way incompatible with Lenin’s strategy.

This is how Rees understands the Bolshevik strategy:

“Lenin thought the Russian bourgeoisie was too weak to lead the democratic revolution in the way that the English bourgeoisie had done in the 1640s, or the French bourgeoisie had done in the 1790s. The working class would therefore have to lead an insurrection which would overthrow tsarism and establish a democratic republic. But for the working class to be able to perform this task it would have to be led by a revolutionary party which insisted on a political strategy free of compromises with the vacillating bourgeois democrats and their fellow travellers inside the organisations of the working class, the Mensheviks.”

Rees falls flat at the first hurdle.

First, his description of Lenin’s views on the



nature of the democratic revolution avoids any mention of the peasantry, Rees does not 'underestimate' the peasantry, he makes it vanish.

Second, while never relying on the bourgeois parties or forces, while stressing the need for independent action and refusing *ideological* compromises, Lenin never held to "a political strategy free of compromises with the vacillating bourgeois democrats" – quite the opposite:

"The Russian revolutionary Social-Democrats repeatedly utilised the services of the bourgeois liberals prior to the downfall of tsardom, that is, they concluded numerous practical compromises with them; and in 1901-02, even prior to the appearance of Bolshevism, the old editorial board of *Iskra* (consisting of Plekhanov, Axelrod, Zasulich, Martov, Potresov and myself) concluded (not for long, it is true) a formal political alliance with Struve, the political leader of bourgeois liberalism, while at the same time it was able to wage an unremitting and most merciless ideological and political struggle against bourgeois liberalism and against the slightest manifestation of its influence in the working-class movement.

The Bolsheviks have always adhered to this policy. Beginning with 1905, they systematically advocated an alliance between the working class and the peasantry against the liberal bourgeoisie and tsardom, never, however, refusing to support the bourgeoisie against tsardom (for instance, during second rounds of elections, or during second ballots) and never ceasing their relentless ideological and political struggle against the bourgeois revolutionary peasant party, the "Socialist-Revolutionaries," exposing them as petty-bourgeois democrats who falsely described themselves as Socialists. During the Duma elections in 1907, the Bolsheviks for a brief period entered into a formal political bloc with the "Socialist-Revolutionaries."²⁴

Third, as for Rees' idea that the Bolsheviks never agreed compromises with the bourgeoisie's "fellow travellers inside the organisations of the working class, the Mensheviks", this too is false.

"Between 1903 and 1912 there were periods of several years in which we were formally united with the Mensheviks in one Social-Democratic Party; but we never ceased our ideological and political struggle against them as opportunists and vehicles of bourgeois influence among the proletariat. During the war we concluded certain compromises with the "Kautskyites," with the Left Mensheviks (Martov), and with a section of the "Socialist-Revolutionaries" (Chernov and Natanson); we were together with them at Zimmerwald and Kienthal and issued joint manifestoes; but we never ceased and never relaxed our ideological and political struggle"²⁵

Having failed to grasp Lenin's 'regressive' strategy Rees goes on to argue that:

"[Lenin's] position in *Two Tactics* contains a weakness which allows for constant backsliding, especially by those who claimed to be Lenin's supporters but who did not share his revolutionary intransigence. For, if the revolution is to result in a bourgeois democratic settlement, if a 'democratic dictatorship' is the furthest stage to which the revolution can advance, then the working class is reduced to being the furthest left wing, the most consistent element, in the democratic revolution."²⁶

This is most certainly not Lenin's argument in *Two Tactics*. Instead, his 1905 work elaborates the belief that the democratic revolution contains within itself, perhaps more properly within the forces it unleashes, the momentum to develop further, unfolding into the socialist revolution.

"Like everything else in the world, the revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry has a past and a future. Its past is autocracy, serfdom, monarchy and privilege. In the struggle against this past, in the struggle against counterrevolution, a 'single will' of the proletariat and the peasantry is possible, for here there is unity of interests." Its future is the struggle against private property the struggle of the wage worker against the employer the struggle for Socialism. Here singleness of will is impossible. Here our path lies not from autocracy to a republic but from a petty-bourgeois democratic republic to Socialism."²⁷

Far from seeing the two phases separated by a 'Chinese Wall' as Rees does, the democratic revolution for Lenin was the key that unlocked the door to the socialist revolution, not "the furthest stage to which the revolution can advance". Indeed, Lenin repeatedly emphasised that even within the democratic revolutionary phase certain elements of the socialist revolution would be present, although the rate and extent to which they would unfold could not be exactly predicted.



1919: Trotsky, Lenin and L. B. Kamenev



“Of course, in actual historical circumstances, the elements of the past become interwoven with those of the future, the two paths cross.”²⁸

Rees seems unable to grasp this dialectical approach of Lenin, since he continues:

“Trotsky went on to agree with Lenin that the Russian bourgeoisie was too timid to lead a democratic revolution, largely because the working class which had grown up around the new industries frightened the bourgeoisie with the spectre of a revolution which could sweep both Tsarism and the bourgeoisie away in a single blow. Consequently, the working class would not limit itself to bourgeois democratic demands. When the working class fought it could only do so using working class methods: strikes, general strikes, workers’ councils and so on. But these methods of struggle were as much directed against the bourgeoisie as they were against Tsarism.”²⁹

Rees offers an exceptionally narrow definition of “working class methods”. The Bolsheviks fought from the very beginning against the idea that the working class could fight only with selected techniques, restricting their activity to certain fields. The Bolsheviks used everything from elections to armed struggle to advance the working-class cause depending on circumstance. It is the content of the struggle, not the form, that determines a “working-class method”.

In any case, what of the allies of the working class, where are they, what were they to do, what class methods are open to them?

Unfortunately, Rees has served up a variety of revolutionary syndicalism. Understandable perhaps in an urbanised, largely working-class society of advanced capitalism, but a clock without a spring as far as the debate on the Russian Revolution is concerned. Rees continues that these “working class methods” inevitably:

“raised the question, ‘Who will run the factory?’ as well as the question, ‘Who will run the state?’ The revolution would therefore be a social revolution (ie an economic and political revolution), not simply a political (ie democratic) revolution.”³⁰

Anticipating just such an approach, Lenin countered:

“A Social-Democrat must never for a moment forget that the proletariat will inevitably have to wage the class struggle for Socialism even against the most democratic and republican bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie. This is beyond doubt. Hence the absolute necessity of a separate, independent, strictly class party of Social-Democracy. Hence the temporary nature of our tactics of ‘striking jointly’ with the bourgeoisie and the duty of keeping a strict watch ‘over our ally, as over an enemy,’ etc. All this is also beyond the slightest doubt. But it would be ridiculous

and reactionary to deduce from this that we must forget, ignore or neglect these tasks which, although transient and temporary, are vital at the present time.”³¹

Rees feels that the perspective outlined in Lenin’s Two Tactics:

“contains the inherent danger that the revolutionary party will underestimate the consciousness and activity of the working class, tailoring its slogans to the democratic tasks of the day and forgoing independent socialist agitation. If such a situation arises the party can become a force retarding the development of the working class by failing to formulate a strategy which crystallises its aspirations. Instead the party can channel the energies of the class into fighting for goals far short of those which workers are capable of attaining.”³²

Of course, Lenin was developing his strategy in a context where the working class was a minority and where, as we have seen, he regarded winning the bulk of the peasantry as an essential prerequisite for the advance of the working class.

“In answer to the anarchist objections that we are putting off the socialist revolution, we say: we are not putting it off, but we are taking the first step towards it in the only possible way, along the only correct road, namely, the road of a democratic republic. Whoever wants to reach Socialism by a different road, other than that of political democracy, will inevitably arrive at conclusions that are absurd and reactionary both in the economic and the political sense. If any workers ask us at the given moment why we should not go ahead and carry out our maximum program, we shall answer by pointing out how far the masses of the democratically-minded people still are from Socialism, how undeveloped class antagonisms still are, how unorganised the proletarians still are.”³³

Rees worries that working-class slogans will be watered down, abandoning “independent socialist agitation”. He seems unable to imagine that it could be precisely by carrying forward “the democratic tasks of the day” that brings socialism closer in practice, not just in slogans.

‘Bread, Peace and Land’ were not socialist agitational slogans, but in the concrete conditions of Russian in 1917 concentration on these “democratic tasks of the day” helped build an unstoppable revolutionary movement of workers and peasants.

But the greatest argument for socialism, Lenin argued, was not abstract propaganda but the concrete ability of the working class to offer effective leadership to a majority peasant population that neither understood Marxism nor saw its immediate interests satisfied by the socialisation of land.



“Only in the event of a complete victory of the democratic revolution will the proletariat have its hands free in the struggle against the inconsistent bourgeoisie, only in that event will it not become ‘dissolved’ in bourgeois democracy, but will leave its proletarian or rather proletarian-peasant imprint on the whole revolution.

In a word, in order that it may not hand itself with its hands tied in the struggle against the inconsistent bourgeois democrats, the proletariat must be sufficiently class conscious and strong to rouse the peasantry to revolutionary consciousness, to direct its attack, and thereby to pursue the line of consistent proletarian democratism independently.”³⁴

In fact, if the working class contented itself with socialist propaganda, it would allow the bourgeoisie to lead the peasantry by default. This was precisely Lenin’s criticism of the Mensheviks, who were happy enough to conduct abstract propaganda about socialism in the distant future while leaving immediate concrete political tasks to the liberal bourgeoisie.

“The bourgeoisie will always be inconsistent. There is nothing more naive and futile than attempts to set forth conditions and points, which if satisfied, would enable us to consider that the bourgeois democrat is a sincere friend of the people. Only the proletariat can be a consistent fighter for democracy. It may become a victorious fighter for democracy only if the peasant masses join its revolutionary struggle. If the proletariat is not strong enough for this, the bourgeoisie will be at the head of the democratic revolution and will impart to it an inconsistent and self-seeking nature.

Nothing short of a revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry can prevent this.”³⁵

The leadership role of the working class is expressed precisely in its ability to be a “vanguard fighter for democracy”. Its capacity to take up democratic issues that are not generated within the factory walls, to take up the demands and interests of potential allied classes and to rework them to win the battle for democracy. Lenin insisted on the need to utilise every contradiction of capitalist society, not simply the conflict of labour and capital.

The Bolsheviks never counterposed the issue of democratic political revolution and social and economic revolution as crudely as Rees does. Lenin recognised that simply because the main blow had to be directed against the autocracy and the main content of the democratic revolution was bourgeois democratic, that did not suspend class struggle between working class and bourgeoisie.³⁶

“Wage labour, with its struggle against private property, exists under the autocracy as well; it is generated even under serfdom. But this does not

in the least prevent us from drawing a logical and historical dividing line between the major stages of development...”

And Lenin continues with a crucial point:

“...We all draw a distinction between bourgeois revolution and socialist revolution, we all absolutely insist on the necessity of drawing a most strict line between them; but can it be denied that individual, particular elements of the two revolutions become interwoven in history?”³⁷

For these reasons, the debates over the democratic revolution are not simply ones of historical interest but are played out still in underdeveloped countries oppressed by imperialism or domestic autocracy. The issues of class alliance and compromises are live in the class struggles under advanced capitalism too. While no mechanical transfer of the lessons of 1917 is possible, the richness of Lenin’s writings continues to offer rewarding insights.

How the ultra-left distort Lenin One of the most common misconceptions in some sections of the Trotskyist movement is that until 1917 Lenin was not committed to the leading role of the working class in the democratic revolution. This misinterpretation is bemusing given the clarity with which Lenin formulated this very issue time and again as we have already seen. That this misunderstanding could genuinely be the result of ignorance of Lenin’s views seems unlikely, given the calibre of the theoreticians who apparently uphold this idea.

For example, Peter Taaffe, the leader of the Socialist Party (formerly the Militant Labour/Militant Tendency), claimed that:

“Both Trotsky and Lenin ... argued that it was an alliance of the working class and peasantry which alone could carry through the capitalist democratic revolution.

Lenin expressed this in his formula of the ‘democratic dictatorship of the working class and peasantry’. Trotsky, however, in his theory of the permanent revolution, pointed out that the peasantry historically had never played an independent role. It must be led by one or other of the two great classes in society, the bourgeoisie or the working class. Lenin and Trotsky agreed that the capitalists could not carry through their own revolution. Therefore, Trotsky argued, the working class must assume the leadership of the revolution, drawing behind it the masses in the countryside. Lenin, on the other hand, left open the exact relationship between the peasantry and the working class, in his ‘algebraic formula’.”³⁸

Veteran Trotskyist Bill Hunter likewise claims that Lenin was somehow undecided over the leading class force in the Russian Revolution:



“His [Trotsky’s] difference with Lenin was not on the need for an alliance of the working class and the peasantry in the revolution. The important question he put about the “democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry” – Lenin’s formula – was: which class will lead? He answered that question by pointing out that history had shown that the peasantry – which Lenin several times characterises as petty bourgeois – because of its amorphous character, must be led by either the bourgeoisie or the working class.”³⁹

Dogmatic devotion to the memory of Trotsky has blinded such veteran and well-read left-wing activists to the many dozens of quotations that demonstrate the utter falsity of this position. To spare Communist Review readers, the tedium of weighing through them, I will note just one, from the Bolshevik conference resolution of 1907:

“Only the proletariat can bring the democratic revolution to its consummation, the condition being that the proletariat, as the only thoroughly revolutionary class in modern society, leads the mass of the peasantry, and imparts political consciousness to its spontaneous struggle against landed proprietorship and the feudal state”

(Published in the Bolshevik central organ *Proletary*, No. 14, March 4, 1907 and repeated in the draft resolution for the London Congress, see).

It seems that in order to present Trotsky’s strategy in the best light it is necessary to falsify what the pre-1917 Bolsheviks actually fought for.

Likewise, Socialist Outlook’s John Lister has put an added spin on this argument:

“Trotsky criticised not Lenin’s focus on the agrarian revolution, nor the emphasis upon forming an alliance of the most oppressed against the Tsarist aristocracy and the liberal bourgeoisie, but the fact that *Lenin’s formula placed two antagonistic forces simultaneously in the driving seat. It left open whether the actual dictatorial power would be exercised by the proletariat or by the peasantry when it came to the crunch.*” (John Lister, Socialist Outlook (My emphasis))

Lister’s description of the working class and peasantry as “antagonistic forces” is at the core of the gulf between the Leninist and Trotskyist approaches to the motive forces of the Russian Revolution. In a letter written to Pravda on November 18 1917, (ie after the Bolsheviks had supposedly embraced Permanent Revolution). Lenin outlined an attitude to the peasantry that is diametrically opposed to that of comrade Lister and other writers from the Trotskyist tradition:

“Touching on the question of an alliance between the Bolshevik workers and the Left Socialist-Revolutionaries, whom many peasants at present trust, I argued in my speech that this

alliance can be an “honest coalition”, an honest alliance, for *there is no radical divergence of interests between the wage-workers and the working and exploited peasants.* Socialism is fully able to meet the interests of both. Only socialism can meet their interests.

Hence the possibility and necessity for an “honest coalition” between the proletarians and the working and exploited peasantry”⁴⁰ (Emphasis added)

It was Lenin’s more subtle analysis, differentiating the various strata within the peasantry, which range from the rich kulaks to the semi-proletarianised rural labourers, and identifying their particular interests that allowed the Bolsheviks to build a popular majority, led by the working class, to carry through the October Revolution. To understand how that happened in the concrete conditions of 1917, we will need to look at how Lenin rearmed the Bolshevik Party in the period of “Dual Power” following the February Revolution. In this he had to overcome a doctrinaire interpretation of the revolutionary democratic dictatorship by the so-called ‘Old Bolsheviks’ and translate this long-term, general Bolshevik programme into an immediate and practical strategy for the taking of power by the Soviets. This leads us on to the second part of this discussion, the publication of the “April Theses” and the road to the October Revolution. ★

Notes:

1 Hallas T’s Marxism p18

2 On the Two Lines in the Revolution, November 20, 1915: Collected Works, Volume Vol. 21, pp. 415-419 Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1966

3 On the Two Lines in the Revolution,

4 On the Two Lines in the Revolution,

5 Two Tactics, p92

6 Two Tactics, pp52-53

7 On the Two Lines in the Revolution, November 20, 1915

Source: Collected Works, Volume Vol. 21, pp. 415-419 Progress Publishers, Moscow, USSR, 1966

8 Two Tactics, p93

9 Two tactics, p145

10 Results and Prospects V. THE PROLETARIAT IN POWER AND THE PEASANTRY

11 On the Two Lines in the Revolution, November 20, 1915

Source: Collected Works, Volume Vol. 21, page 419

“The term ‘permanent’ (meaning unbroken, uninterrupted) revolution’ has for decades caused confusion, even among sections of the Marxist movement.” (sic)

12 SOCIAL-DEMOCRACY’S ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE PEASANT MOVEMENT *Proletary*, No. 16, September 14 (1), 1905 in V. I. Lenin, Collected Works, 4th English Edition, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1972, Vol. 9, pp. 236-37.

The term “uninterrupted revolution” is one most commonly applied to Lenin’s views of passing over from the democratic revolution to the stage of socialist revolution, as opposed to Trotsky’s belief that there could be no separate democratic stage, the democratic tasks only being solved in the course of socialist revolution. However, at least one Trotskyist writer has treated these concepts as synonymous. In the newspaper Socialist Outlook in 1998, John Lister wrote, with deliciously unconscious irony:

13 This misestimation of the revolutionary power of the peasantry was repeated, in gloriously spectacular form, in the case of China. Trotsky wrote that the Chinese Communists not “throw their forces into the scattered foci of the peasant rising, since their party, which is few in number and weak, will in no



way be able to embrace it". [Cited in Kostas Mavrikis, On Trotskyism, p146. RKP, London 1976]. On the contrary, the Chinese Communists' embrace of the peasantry meant that by 1945, membership of the Communist party reached 1,200,000, the People's Liberation Army numbered 900,000 and the liberated areas had a population in excess of 100 million.

14 Results and Prospects V. THE PROLETARIAT IN POWER AND THE PEASANTRY
15 Permanent Revolution, p23
16 THE AIM OF THE PROLETARIAN STRUGGLE IN OUR REVOLUTION, Social-Demokrat, Nos. 3 and 4, March 9 (22) and March 21 (April 3) 1909 Lenin Collected Works, 4th English Edition, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1963, Vol. 15, p374.
17 Trotsky 1905pp309-310, cited in LeBlanc, p107
18 V. I. Lenin, THE CRISIS OF MENSHEVISM, Proletary, No. 9, December 7, 1906, From V. I. Lenin, Collected Works, 4th English Edition, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1965, Vol. 11, pp. 342
19 Results and Prospects, chapter IV, The Proletariat in Power
20 On the Two Lines in the Revolution
21 John Rees, THE SOCIALIST REVOLUTION AND THE DEMOCRATIC REVOLUTION, International Socialism Journal, Issue 83, Summer 1999
22 ADDRESS OF THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE TO THE COMMUNIST LEAGUE (March 1850) From the Appendices to Frederick Engels, *Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Germany*, FOREIGN LANGUAGES PRESS, PEKING 1977, First Edition 1977, pp. 149-64.
23 MESW Vol 1, p191-192
24 V. I. LENIN "LEFT-WING" COMMUNISM, AN INFANTILE DISORDER, FOREIGN LANGUAGES PRESS PEKING 1970 page 68-69
25 "LEFT-WING" COMMUNISM p69
26 John Rees, THE SOCIALIST REVOLUTION AND THE DEMOCRATIC REVOLUTION, International Socialism Journal,

Issue 83, Summer 1999
27 Two Tactics, pp89-90
28 Two Tactics, p90
29 John Rees, THE SOCIALIST REVOLUTION AND THE DEMOCRATIC REVOLUTION, International Socialism Journal, Issue 83, Summer 1999
30 John Rees, THE SOCIALIST REVOLUTION AND THE DEMOCRATIC REVOLUTION, International Socialism Journal, Issue 83, Summer 1999
31 Two Tactics, pp90-91,
32 John Rees, THE SOCIALIST REVOLUTION AND THE DEMOCRATIC REVOLUTION, International Socialism Journal, Issue 83, Summer 1999
33 Two Tactics, p17
34 Two Tactics, p57
35 Two Tactics, p58
36 It is unquestionably the case that this point was lost by some Communist Parties, in a variety of instances, where unnecessary compromises were reached and the party did not guard either its independent role or that of the working class from other forces. The massacre of Indonesian Communists in 1965 is one such example. The correct criticism of such policies is not that these parties failed to embrace Trotsky's Permanent Revolution, but that they abandoned a Leninist approach to class alliances in developing countries.
37 Two Tactics, p90
38 Socialism Today, monthly journal of the Socialist Party, Issue 49, 2000
39 Permanent Revolution: Battle Cry for the Twenty First Century, By Bill Hunter. From web site of the International Socialist League
40 Alliance Between the Workers and Exploited Peasants Written: November 18, 1917. Collected Works, Volume 26, p. 333-35 First Published: Pravda No 194, November 19, 1917



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Marxism & Religion

a debate we do not need **for Torbe**

A reply to Geoff Bottoms

The final sentence in Geoff Bottoms' article *Marxism and Religion* in issue No 31 reads "Let the debate begin and the struggle continue" Such a debate is more likely to hinder the development of the struggle.

Bottoms' article has neither the breadth nor the depth that its title implies. It lacks breadth because it deals only with Christianity, and only a part of it at that, and depth because in respect of Marxism he is concerned with, in his own words, 'its analysis without its materialist or atheistic philosophy'. Before one can debate one must clearly define the subject to be debated. For a definition of Marxism we cannot do better than turn to the greatest Marxist after Marx and Engels, Lenin. In his article of 1913 *The Three Sources and Three Components of Marxism*,¹

after saying that the sources are at the same time the components he gives priority to dialectical materialism as the prime source from which stem the other two, first the primacy of class struggle, as asserted in the first substantive line of the *Communist Manifesto* and then the economic analysis of capitalism. There may be some value in a discussion of the social practices and aspirations of Marxists and Christians without reference to the dialectical materialism of the former or the deism of the latter, but it is not a debate on Marxism and Religion.

Bottoms makes the mistake of equating Communist and Marxist. A Marxist must be a Communist, not necessarily a member of any particular

party, but certainly a political activist aiming at setting society on the road leading ultimately to its organisation according to Marx's well-known formulation "From each according to work, to each according to need" But a Communist does not necessarily have to be a Marxist. Castro's qualifying of Marxist in "from a strictly political sense", i.e. without regard to the philosophy of Marxism makes his remark quoted by Bottoms effectively "Christians can be Communists" There's nothing new in that. Lenin, in a 1909 (I) article *The Attitude of the Workers' Party towards Religion*,² wrote "the question often arises whether a priest can be a member of the Party, and the question is usually answered in an unqualified affirmative. If a priest comes to us to engage in joint activities and conscientiously performs Party duties and does not come out against the programme of the Party he may be allowed to join the ranks for in such a case the contradictions between the spirit and principles of our programme and the religious convictions of the priest, would remain something that concerned him alone. We must not only admit workers who preserve the belief in God, but must deliberately set out to recruit them".

There are certainly differences between the situation in Britain today from that which obtained in Russia in 1909, but the basic principle remains the same. What we Marxists say to our comrades-in-arms, members of our Party or not, atheist, agnostic, humanist, or deist we are fighting the battle to set out on the road to Socialism in the most adverse situation since the end of the Second World War. If we can succeed in travelling some distance along that road, the time may come when we have to part company. But now is not the time to discuss



those issues which would cause such a parting.

One such issue, of considerable significance for the concept of Liberation Theology, was raised by Lenin in 1905 in an article, *Socialism and Religion*,³ in which he wrote “even the Russian orthodox clergy has now been awakened by the thunderous collapse of the old mediaeval order in Russia. Even it is joining in the demand for liberty. We Socialists must support this movement and bring the demands of honest and sincere clergymen to their logical conclusion demanding that they must be in favour of *the complete separation of the church from the state and of the school from the church*” The italics are mine. While the secularisation of the state and of education is not an immediate issue for the Communist Party, it became one for me, as an individual atheist, 50-years ago when my five-year-old daughter started at infant school. If I had insisted on my child not being subjected to religious propaganda, she would have to have been segregated from all her class-mates at certain times, for a reason which a child at that age could not possibly have understood. One may further ask “Is Liberation Theology concerned only for the oppressed peoples in the Third World, or is it prepared to declare openly for the liberation, for example, of the women of the Irish Republic, for their right to divorce, use contraception, and have abortions if they so wish? And, in general, where does it stand in the fight against the anti-abortionists? Again, where did Liberation Theology stand in relation to the recent battle over Clause 28, and, in general, where does it stand in relation to liberation for homosexuals?” If Liberation Theology remains silent on issues which would bring it into conflict with Papal edicts, its scope and its value are limited.

In so far as Bottoms deals with the subject of his title, my critique is based, in part, on the fact, I am a Jewish, not a Christian, atheist. That means, among other things, that at an early age, I “knew” ,with all the certainty of one with a religious faith, that Jesus was not the Anointed One (Messiah in Hebrew, Christ in Greek) and did not have God for his father or a virgin for his mother. Later on, shortly after my Bar Mitzvah on my thirteenth birthday, when I was contemplating going to the Yeshiva (Hebrew seminary) to study to become a rabbi, I came to realise that the so-called Christian teachings, which people like Tony Benn, for whom I have the greatest respect and admiration, claim to be roots of Socialism, are, in fact the teachings of a

devout Jewish rabbi, albeit an anti-Establishment one. Jesus, despite his exclusion from the list by the Jewish Establishment, was one, and not the last, of a succession of such teacher-sages responsible for extensions and developments of Jewish precepts set out earlier, particularly in the Pentateuch.

The tortuous devices by which Christians seek to reconcile belief in God the Creator with the evolution of species are of no concern to Marxism. In my book *The Nature of Nature*⁴ I wrote “Religion is the most powerful, persistent and pervasive offender in suspending objectivity wherever and whenever it might conflict with preconceived notions. Eventually the weight of scientific evidence prevails and another feature of Man’s interpretive mind appears — its enormous elasticity!” One of the Ten Commandments that the Christian heresy of Judaism does not obey is the one enjoining us to keep the Sabbath. (Sunday, as every Spaniard and Italian and Briton who wishes to preserve it knows, is the Lord’s Day, not the Sabbath, which is Saturday) The relevance of this to reconciling Genesis and evolution is that what many dismiss as mere myths ... are much more than that. The New Testament shows that Jesus taught, as did all his rabbinical predecessors and successors, by means of parable. There are many indications that the Hebrews understood the stories in the Old Testament to be such parables the story of Abraham and Isaac is the injunction to the followers of Jehova to make the great social advance of giving up the practice of propitiating their god, thereby ensuring salvation for the tribe, by sacrificing the son of the tribal chief. Incidentally the story of the crucifixion provides what Marxists call the negation of the negation the return, at the higher level, of salvation, not merely of the tribe but of the whole world, through the sacrifice of the son of God himself. Likewise, the story of the creation provided the basis for introducing an enormous social advance namely a regular obligatory day of rest. How many Christians, in the days when they had armies of servants and slaves, observed their Lord’s Day in the democratic spirit of the Fourth Commandment? “thou shalt not do any work, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, nor thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thine ox, nor thine ass, nor any of thy cattle that thy manservant and thy maidservant shall rest as well as thou”

Bottoms asks for “reappraisal of the classical



Marxist texts” without saying which texts or in what respect they are to be reappraised – presumably because liberation theology is “highlighting religion as a crucial component of the culture of the oppressed which cannot be reduced in a crude or simple way to economic determinants” . ‘Crude and simple’ have never before been the pejoratives used by opponents of dialectical materialism. I am not aware of any Marxist text which “reduces culture to economic determinants”, whether it is the culture of the oppressed or the oppressors. If we are to talk about the culture of the oppressed, does Bottoms mean the culture that they had before they were robbed of it along with their land and their freedom or after they were, forcibly in some cases, Christianised. During a visit to Cuba some years ago I went to an Afro-Cuban entertainment. There, where Marxists rule, I saw a presentation of the religious content of the culture of the oppressed. In Cuba, the people of African descent, unlike those in the USA, have been able to preserve much of their original culture, including their African languages, and an understanding of their religion preserved as a counter to their enforced Christianity. The Voodoo dance I saw was not the vicious travesty peddled in countless Hollywood movies, but a beautifully enacted story of the rescue of the rain-god who had been captured by an evil spirit. But ultimately it must be said that it is economic determinants that impel imperialist invaders to replace the indigenous culture with their own. After all, Jesus was executed for attempting to preserve his indigenous culture against the imperialist Roman invader. I don’t know which African summed it up as “When the white men came, they had the bibles and we had the land. Now they have the land and we have the bibles”

Bottoms, in common with most believers, misrepresents what I called in the letter quoted in the first paragraph the uncompromising atheism of dialectical materialism as agnosticism in the formulations “God can be neither proved nor disproved”, and” historical materialism which makes faith neither necessary nor redundant.” The above quotation from *Nature of Nature* goes on: “...a special status awarded to God alone among the things the existence of which is disputed. That special status is embodied in the advocacy of agnosticism, which dispenses with the necessity of accepting the corollaries of the logical impossibility of proving a negative, If that dispensation were extended to the fields other

than religious belief someone claiming to have made a new discovery would only have to say ‘Prove I haven’t’ Someone propounding a new theory would only have to say ‘Prove it wrong’. The only possible verdicts in a court of law would be ‘guilty’ or the Scottish ‘not proven’. Mathematics would become a series of pointless exercises.”

Bottoms quotes John Polkinghorne’s argument for deism as against Materialism “quantum theory has revealed a much more flexible and unpredictable universe than the one Newton envisaged.” Marxists have always argued that the universe envisaged by Newton does not accord with dialectical materialism. Engels in *Dialectics of Nature*⁵ wrote “Natural science confronted by an out-and-out conservative nature in which, even today everything was as it had been from the beginning and in which for all eternity would remain as it had been since the beginning. In *The Nature of Nature*⁶ I took further the thesis that the Newtonian concept of the Universe is *contrary to* the principles of dialectical materialism arguing that the uncertainties of quantum theory are a reflection of the fundamental thesis of dialectics, in Engels’ words “The whole of Nature has its existence in eternal coming into being and passing away, in ceaseless flux, in unrelenting motion and change”⁷. Summarising my Marxist critique of Newton, I wrote “Newton was a man of his time, for whom the Universe had been created by God and set in its pattern of motion once for all time with laws to keep it forever unchanging, Such a man could not but conceive the natural state to be constancy and relative rest, and therefore have to hypothesise a force to account for each departure from that state”⁸

The gap between Marxism and Religion remains as wide and unbridgeable as ever it was. No useful purpose can be served by attempting to bridge that gap at a time when the need for all varieties of believers and all varieties of non-believers to put aside their differences and work together in the common cause was never greater. ★

Notes

1 VI. Lenin Selected Works. Volume 11. Lawrence and Wishart 1943. pp9 et seq

2 *ibid.* p669

3 *ibid.* p660

4 lfor Torbe *The Nature of Nature*. (obtainable from Morning Star) p127

5 F. Engels *Dialectics of Nature* Progress Publishers 1972 p24

6 lfor Torbe *Nature of Nature* pp 75 et seq

7 F Engels *Dialectics of Nature* p 30

8 lfor Torbe *Nature of Nature* p 7





New Labour's Foreign Policy

Andrew Murrey

In the run-up to the forthcoming general election, there will no doubt be much discussion throughout the labour movement over in which policy areas the present government has marked an improvement, however small, over its Tory predecessor and in which it has represented absolute continuity.

There is one major area of policy, however, in which New Labour has, at least arguably, been worse – foreign affairs. The foreign policy of the Blair government has been one of sustained aggression on a scale not seen since the second world war. At one point last year, British armed forces were engaged in military operations on three continents simultaneously – Europe (in Yugoslavia), Asia (around and over Iraq) and Africa (in Sierra Leone).

The government has also played perhaps the leading role internationally in undermining the main pillars of the post-1945 conduct of international relations – international law, respect for the authority of the United Nations etc. In its place it has erected a new variation on the old adage that “might is right” – “might is right when backed by moralising”. This new policy has been turned to armed intervention in the Balkans and a neo-colonial strategy in Africa among other projects.

It is small surprise that Douglas Hurd, John Major's Foreign Secretary, writing in the *Times Literary Supplement* (10/11/2000), draws attention to the fact that “foreign governments quickly concluded that... consensus prevailed in British foreign policy” after Blair's election, the only exception being the issue of the European Union. Only the rhetoric – of “ethical dimensions” – has changed, Hurd asserts.

All this has received much less attention within the labour movement than it has deserved. The war against Yugoslavia could not, of course, be ignored, but most of the movement blandly fell

into line behind Blair and Cook's moralising. Other issues have been for the most part ignored – an all-too-traditional failing in this country throughout the epoch of imperialism, where the connection between the role of British business “at home” and foreign policy has been too little studied.

Indeed, the Balkans conflict marked a step backwards in this respect, with institutions on the left generally highly critical of Blair's policies supporting the bombardment of Yugoslavia – *Tribune* newspaper and the Scottish TUC amongst them.

It is overdue that the left paid greater heed to foreign policy. The record of the last four years and recent moves by the government, including support for the EU's rapid reaction force, indicate that British imperialism under its new Labour executive is set on a course of greater aggression and intervention, policies which will sooner or later have a dramatic impact on the British people themselves.

The Position of the British Ruling Class

In order to understand the essence of the Blair-Cook policy, it may be helpful to start by examining the fundamentals of the position and strategy of the British bourgeoisie. Here, too, we are bedevilled by well-meaning misconceptions on the left. Twenty years ago it was quite commonplace to hear the view expressed that NATO had turned Britain into the “fifty-first state of the USA”. Today, it is more common to encounter the argument that Britain is an oppressed nation under the yoke of the European Union.

Both views are false. At best, they call to the mind the problem of a blind person trying to describe an elephant by use of the sense of touch alone – accurate as far as it goes, which is not very far in terms of the larger picture. Above all,



these opinions exaggerate the decline of British imperialism as an independent force in the world, over-play the dependent status of the British bourgeoisie in relation to other imperialist powers and minimise the continuity in Britain's global policy over the last hundred years or more.

It is regrettable that some comrades are able, quite correctly, to draw attention to considerable elements of continuity in German policy whether under Kaiserism, Weimar democracy, Hitlerism or the Federal Republic (before and after 1989) but are unwilling to apply the same rigour to the strategy of the British bourgeoisie itself.

It is important to try, because not all capitalist classes are identical within the world economy, not all occupy the same position internationally, and each, therefore, has its own special features often expressed in foreign policy. While it would be wrong to go all the way with Lord Palmerston and argue that Britain's interests are "eternal", and ignore evident changes in policy occasioned by changes in the world situation and Britain's place within it, certain of these features have endured throughout the period of imperialism.

First, there is British imperialism's extensive international role. The proportion of gross profit accruing to British-controlled interests from overseas is far higher – around twenty per cent of the total – than the equivalent figure for any other imperialist power. Moreover, this profit, worth over £100 billion a year, is acquired in almost every part of the world, setting Britain apart from, say, Germany, the bulk of whose external investments remain either within the EU or, to an increasing extent, in the former socialist countries of eastern Europe.

This international spread of interests has accelerated considerably since the Thatcher government removed all controls on the export of capital in 1979, and received a further boost from the deregulation of the financial markets of the City of London in 1987. This trend has reinforced the basis, which had been eroding with the passing of formal Empire, for speaking of the global role and global interests of British imperialism.

This puts Britain in a category only otherwise occupied by the United States. There can, of course, be no comparison between the gross scale of external business interests of the two countries, nor between their relative capacity to project brute force around the world – but it does indicate a commonality of interests not fully shared by Japan, Germany or even France.

In a nutshell, the interests of US and British business can both be affected by challenges anywhere in the world to the "new world order" imposed by imperialism after 1989. It is this, rather

than language, history or culture which underpins the much-vaunted "special relationship".

Two further factors influence British foreign policy here. The first is the fact that those British monopolies which play a world role in themselves are largely concentrated in those fields of business which have always demanded what the Victorians might have called a "forward" foreign policy – oil, arms and finance. These groups call most of the shots in foreign policy.

The second is a growing inter-penetration of US and British finance capital. This is represented by the large number of take-overs of City merchant banks by US interests, matched by takeovers in the US by British "high street" banks and by the creation of transatlantic monopolies like BP Amoco, which has seen British Petroleum, for so long both instigator and instrument of British imperialist policy, acquire two huge US oil companies – Amoco and Atlantic Richfield in the last two years.

The alliance between the ruling classes of Washington and London therefore rests on a firm foundation, expressed in their joint commitment to maintain a world safe for profit-making, with no corner left uncontrolled.

These independent international interests and this alliance with US monopoly also condition the attitude of the British ruling class to the European Union. Again, it is very evidently not the same as that of the German or French bourgeoisie, let alone that of Belgium or Denmark.

British monopoly is more-or-less united in support for the "common market", an extended free trade zone guaranteeing enlarged markets for British business. This remains important, too, for transnationals investing in manufacturing in Britain. However, support for the creation of an integrated federal European state, never overwhelming, seems to be shrinking rapidly.

Again, this is consistent with historic trends in ruling class policy. First priority: Preserve Britain's world role. Avoid getting bogged down in European entanglements which might inhibit that global freedom of manoeuvre. Second priority: Prevent any one power establishing a European hegemony, since that would ultimately confound the first priority.

Naturally, these policy priorities do not present themselves in the way that they did before the first or second world wars. The global freedom of manoeuvre of British capitalism is dependent on maintaining the alliance with the USA. And there is a far greater "European entanglement" through the single market than previous generations of British diplomats would have envisaged.

Nevertheless, it is not fanciful to see the traditional policy of British imperialism being expressed in relation to the EU today. The



increased construction of a European super-state, far from being in the interests of the commanding heights of British finance capital, represents a risk of being subsumed under a German-directed hegemony which will prioritise the creation of an EU regional bloc, expanding eastwards and shaped towards the interests of German and French monopolies.

The policy of all British governments since the war, with one exception, has been to reconcile these conflicting interests within the ruling class – independent role, dependence on the US alliance, support for a European common market, opposition to a European super-state. The ultimate strategy has been to maintain and maximise the profit-making ability of British business in the first place, and the general stability of world capitalism in the second.

The only post-war government which has followed a substantially different strategy was the Heath administration which, confronted with a nadir in the independent fortunes of British imperialism, an upsurge in the class struggle at home and distrustful of Washington's intentions, in effect bet the store on European integration.

Social democracy has traditionally been even closer to the US than Conservative governments have in the post-war period, and Blair has re-established that priority most firmly.

The Line of the New Labour Government

The New Labour government has, indeed, operated entirely within the framework dictated by the underlying interests indicated above. There has been absolutely no strategic deviation from service of the interests of British imperialism, as Douglas Hurd acknowledged.

All those Labour policies which, twenty years ago, represented a partial break with the strategy demanded by the City and the monopolies have been discarded. EU withdrawal, unilateral nuclear disarmament, opposition to first use of nuclear weapons, a new international economic order – have been abandoned.

What is new is, of course, the moralising rhetoric of an “ethical dimension” to cover what has actually been an extension of the policy of military aggression and intervention. Talk of ethics and morality actually make things worse, since they can be used to justify almost any intervention anywhere, in places which “the national interests” cannot be stretched to reach.

This rhetorical deployment, filling the role once met by “Christian civilisation” and later by “fighting the Communist threat” in justifying imperialist intervention, has made it easier, no doubt for the former leftists in charge of New Labour foreign policy – Cook, Hain and Short – to justify their actions to whatever remains of

their consciences or their political constituency.

But it cannot alter the essence of New Labour policy, which has followed four basic lines:

1. **Alliance with the USA.** This over-riding priority was expressed not merely in the close links forged between Blair and Clinton during the Balkans aggression, but also in British support (with muted reservations) for “Star Wars Two”, but in the continued joint bombardment/blockade of Iraq and even the reluctance to concede justice to the displaced islanders of Diego Garcia.

2. **A more pro-EU twist.** Blair has spoken of returning Britain to “the heart of the EU”, not to implement the Euro-federalist agenda but to obstruct it wherever it may harm the interests of British finance capital. Thus New Labour has backed the creation of the rapid reaction force as an instrument of imperialist intervention outside the EU itself (always emphasising the link with NATO in order to calm Washington's worries), but has blown cool on the single currency. In this it has reflected the growing indifference to the single currency issue shown by much of big business, as reflected in opinion polls, newspaper comment and business-affiliated political circles.

3. **A new interventionism.** Apart from the well-known wars in the Balkans and the Gulf New Labour Britain has taken a lead in the bullying of Zimbabwe and the occupation of Sierra Leone, the latter with barely a United Nations fig-leaf. This betokens a greater imperialist self-confidence and a greater willingness to shrug off charges of “neo-colonialism” on the part of social democracy. It increases the power and prestige of British business within the general framework of the “new world order”, beyond any immediate benefits from particular companies in particular cases.

4. **Promoting the multi-lateral interests of world capitalism.** New Labour Britain has emerged as one of the most outspoken advocates of the unfettered market and a world made safe for capitalism. Whether it has been in trade talks, in the promotion of those bodies which express the undiluted interests of the world bourgeoisie – WTO, JME, World Bank – and the downgrading of those, like the United Nations, which theoretically represent humanity as a whole, New Labour has batted for business in general. This meets the particular needs of the City, with its tentacles everywhere, as well, of course.

To sustain these policies, New Labour is starting to reverse the cuts in defence spending initiated by the Major government and develop the British armed forces in a fashion oriented towards intervention against weaker states, either unilaterally or in concert with other imperialist powers. It has also been active in prodding other states, long term clients of British arms



monopolies, like Australia, to similarly increase their military build-up to deal with “threats” which are not detectable to the naked eye.

Balancing these conflicting foreign policy requirements is not easy. On the single currency, for example, the Blair government would clearly prefer to see Britain enter eventually, in order to prevent a “two-speed Europe” developing, which in plain language would mean an EU dominated by Germany, alone or in consortium with France. Such a development would mark a signal defeat for British policy and awaken the long-standing spectre of Britain confronted with a continental bloc under united control from which it is excluded. The antipathy of public opinion to the Euro precludes an early move to take Britain in which, as noted above, is of little concern to the City and most of the major monopolies.

Similarly, Britain has had to carefully balance support for the EU rapid reaction force with a desire not to upset the USA, its “big brother” in policing the new world order. The US, of course, wants to have it both ways. It no longer wishes to bear the main military expense of imperialism’s operations in Europe, but it does not wish to see the EU slip the leash altogether, a move which could see the emergence of a strategic rival. Keeping the rapid reaction force under NATO’s wing, with the loyal British rather than the perfidious French having the decisive say in its use, is the answer Washington has come up with - one the Blair government seems only too happy to go along with.

The Blair Doctrine So what is “new” in New Labour’s foreign policy. Social Democracy and imperialism have been entwined for a century or more. Indeed, Social Democracy has long been the expression of imperialism within the working-class movement, and a dominant one in Britain. Without wishing to be too mechanistic, changes in the situation of imperialism and its alignments will sooner or later find expression in social democratic policy.

During the long years of the Cold War, when the bourgeoisie throughout Europe divided between those who wished to accommodate the existence of the Soviet Union and those who wished to confront it, social democratic parties broadly identified with the former trend, and thereby became potential partners in the peace movement.

Post-1989, however, imperialism has been able to spread its wings a little more. Dealing with world socialism, with all its potential to support national liberation, is no longer an issue. The consequences of aggression, of the boldest assertion of imperialism’s drive for world domination, need less to be taken into

consideration by policy-makers. That is why the years since the fall of the USSR have seen more, rather than less, conflict, contrary to the perspectives held out by liberals and social democrats at the time.

Across Europe (and in the USA, where the Clinton administration might loosely be identified with what would on this side of the Atlantic be termed social democracy), social democracy has adapted to this new mood. Its special role has been to provide new justifications, new arguments, to cover the bolder imperialist policy of systematic intervention in the affairs of sovereign states, of sanctions and worse against transgressors and of establishing new neo-colonial arrangements in one part of the world after another.

There have been several ideological casualties - as well as the many human ones - in the process. Even some Tories, for example, have been alarmed at the ease with which Labour had abandoned its traditional support for the authority of the United Nations, and its belief in solving international disputes through the medium of international law. Values upheld for several generations have been almost casually discarded by Blair and Cook, without much of their own party appearing to notice.

Taking an axe to these traditional props of Labour foreign policy, Blair and Cook have offered their own ethical values as a substitute. Yes, they may quietly concede, they are operating outside international law, or without the sanction of the United Nations, but they answer to a higher calling.

This may be presented as the need to prevent “humanitarian disaster” in the case of Kosovo, “curbing aggression” in the case of Iraq or protecting lesser civilisations from themselves in the case of Africa. No matter that, to take but one inconsistency amongst many, a far greater “humanitarian disaster” has been caused in Iraq by the Anglo-American sanctions and bombing policy than would have been prevented in Yugoslavia even had NATO’s wildest allegations been true.

Clearly, the real inspirations of this new policy lie elsewhere. Helpfully, the Prime Minister himself has spelt them out in a remarkable speech delivered in Chicago whilst the bombing of Yugoslavia was still in full swing.

In it, Blair outlined what amounts to a charter for endless war in support of world capitalism. It is the basic text for New Labour’s foreign policy. Blair first invoked the birth of “a new doctrine of international community”. This is a significant term in that it was the one used to cloak the war against Yugoslavia in respectability, given the absence of any UN authority. It was, of course,



an international community that excluded China, India and Russia, to name only three of the world's four most populous states.

On what principles, then, is this "community" to be founded. Blair spelt them out: Universal acceptance of global markets and free trade, with NATO, the World Trade Organisation and the G7 group of big powers as the main institutions controlling the community. There was room only for a "reconsideration" of the role of the United Nations, Blair said.

"Any government that thinks it can go it alone is wrong. If the markets don't like your policies they will punish you", he warned. He also made it clear, however, that if the markets didn't "punish" an independent-minded government, military measures would.

Blair conceded that in the years since the end of the Cold War "our armed forces have been busier than ever". He then explained how they could become busier still, asserting that "the principle of non-interference must be qualified in important respects". Five considerations, he argued, should inform any decision as to whether or not to intervene:

"First, are we sure of our case? War is an imperfect instrument for righting humanitarian distress, but armed force is sometimes the only means of dealing with dictators. Second, have we exhausted all diplomatic options? We should always give peace every chance, as we have in the case of Kosovo. Third... are there military operations we can sensibly and prudently undertake? Forth, are we prepared for the long term?. And, finally, do we have national interests involved?"

The first question begged by this list is to whom the "we" refers to. From the foregoing passages it is pretty clear - the big powers which are, in any case the only ones with the military wherewithal to consider armed interventions of the type described.

Secondly, the list is entirely subjective. There are no objective measurements of the kind which law strives to provide against which any intervention can be judged. And, of course, the final point about "national interest" is a catch-all which can be used to justify any desired act of aggression.

That "interest" is overwhelmingly cast by Blair in terms of free markets and acceptance of the global capitalism from which British business profits so handsomely. Elsewhere in the speech, just to underline the point, Blair placed great emphasis on the "need to ensure flexible labour markets, to remove regulatory burdens and to untie the hands of business".

Untie the hands of business! There is a battle cry for the British armed forces. In this sense, Blair is merely following the Ministry of Defence which, in its first post-Cold War doctrinal

exposition, spoke of the armed forces as being needed, amongst other things, to help ensure market access for British companies.

This, however, is where social democracy in Britain has arrived - and not in Britain alone. The Yugoslav war was led at every turn by social democracy, everywhere using its ethical slogans to justify its aggression. War without end, war without law, war for markets, the "new world order" at the point of a bayonet, market access or death. This is New Labour's foreign policy stripped to its essentials.

It makes all the more important the issue of developing an alternative, anti-imperialist and democratic set of foreign policy demands. This is a difficult project, given the history of indifference to these questions in the British labour movement, and the fact that many of those who are anti-Blairite on the domestic front are supporters of his conduct of foreign affairs. But it is essential if there is to be a real break with New Labour's support for big business, given that this support is at the foundation of foreign as well as home policy.

These demands should include:

- The abolition of NATO, which has now not a shred of justification for its existence and exists only as an instrument of international aggression.
- The "repatriation" of all British troops deployed around the world, including in the Balkans and the Gulf.
- No British participation in the EU rapid reaction force.
- Support for a new international economic order to undo the damage caused, and being caused, by imperialism, disassociating the labour movement from the disgraceful chauvinism of Clare Short towards the poorer peoples of the world.
- Full respect for national sovereignty and the principle of non-interference by the big powers, together with measures to establish the genuine equality of all states at the United Nations.

Alongside this, it is time the left started to revive the traditions of international solidarity - and the organisations which expressed it - which were important campaigning tools during the cold war. Under the "new world order" those traditions are more relevant than ever.

These issues also need to be taken to the heart of the trade union movement. As argued here, New Labour's policies are all of a piece - support for British big business and the interests of world capitalism informs all of them. Opening the road to the defeat of the Blair clique and towards Socialism depends on breaking with the ideologies of labour imperialism and reformism, of which New Labour is the most reactionary expression seen to date. ★



Globalisation or Continentalisation? Some thoughts on German-Continental- Europe Imperialism

Manfred Sohn

Without doubt, today's Germany, a member of NATO, is a firm part of the imperialist G7 bloc that economically and politically dominates the planet. World opinion has it that the "German danger" that led to both World War I and World War II is not a factor at the moment, but within the German left there is growing concern. The size of Germany today is best illustrated by some demographic facts. After reunification with the former German Democratic Republic in 1990, Germany became a unified state of 357.000 square km and 82 million inhabitants, of whom 91 percent are Germans. The remainder is mostly from the southern countries of Europe and Turkey. After Germany's defeat in 1945, it became the third biggest economy in the world and easily the largest in Europe. Together with France, Germany is the core of the new "Euroland" which now has a single currency in twelve countries. It possesses the strongest army in Europe, although officially lacking atomic weaponry.

Germany and two World Wars At the beginning of the last century, along with the U.S. Germany was the fastest growing capitalist country, competing more and more with the British Empire. The contradiction of growing economic and military power on the one hand and very little international political influence on the other as compared with both with Britain and France was a principal factor leading to World War I (WWI). The entry of the USA into that terrible conflict decided the outcome in favour of Britain, France and their allies. Germany recovered and the war that began in 1939, World War II (WWII), had two purposes – a second attempt to win WWI and to establish itself as a leading European nation with worldwide stature, and to erase the danger of a socialist alternative to the capitalist system, developing in Russia. In Germany itself in those times there was both a strong socialist movement and a strong communist party – with over 300,000 members. The great fear of the German ruling class was that Germany could see the next communist wave. Given that there was no mood among the people to make war again, the desire of the ruling class for revenge for WWI within the framework of bourgeois democracy seemed an impossibility. The result was its decision to support the fascist party, to help Hitler to come to power and to support his bloody attempt to destroy the communist party and any socialist or pacifist movement in Germany. After the deep defeat of the left in Germany in 1919, the

way was free for the terrible second attempt to become the main power all over Europe and on this foundation of the world. Germany was again beaten, again recovered although this time it needed more time than after WWI. Nonetheless it played a major role in destroying socialist construction in Eastern Europe. Germany is now the dominant power, especially in the former socialist bloc countries of Europe like the Czech republic, Slovakia, Poland, Belarus and in the Balkans. It now enjoys a stronger position than ever. However, it must be remembered that the great weight of history is no longer in Europe. In 1900 by all indicators Europe's influence on world economic developments was much greater than today. Asia, especially China, Japan and India is growing. It appears that the most significant confrontations in world politics in the 21st century will no longer be between Britain and Germany or between Germany and USA, but between the growing economic weight of Asian countries.

Nonetheless let's look at the waning but still mighty continent of Europe. What was at the root of 20th century developments? The core of the answer is what Lenin described while explaining the three great imperialist blocs of those days: "We see three areas of highly developed capitalism (high development of means of transport, of trade and of industry): the Central European, the British and the American areas. Among these are three states which dominate the world: Germany, Great Britain, the United States. Imperialistic rivalry and the struggle between these countries has become extremely keen because Germany has only an insignificant area and few colonies; the creation of Central Europe is still a matter for the future, it is being born in the midst of a desperate struggle." (Lenin, *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* Chapter VII). Written in 1916 this "desperate struggle" was WWI. This German attempt failed, but what is the situation in Europe now? Economically, it as Lenin wrote: the creation of "Central Europe". And German capital is surely the master of this area. The former British Empire was the real loser of the past 50 years – its influence is dwindling still. An important indication is that the pound, once the main currency of the world from the end of the Napoleonic wars until 1914 has now become only the currency of one part of the world. Britain must now decide if its currency in the coming decades is to be a junior partner of the U.S. dollar or is to join the Euro which, in practice, is the Deutsche



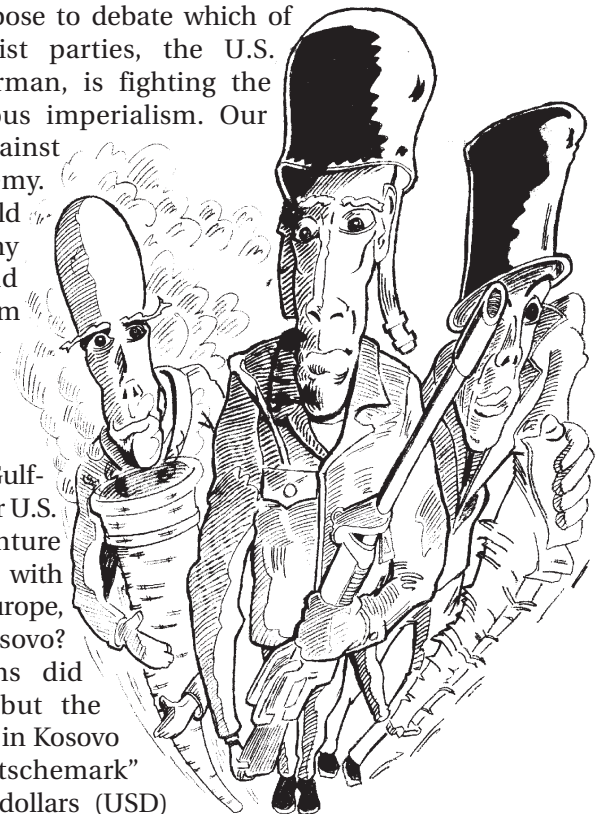
mark.

What does this bode for the future? Before we can draw conclusions a discussion of many complicated questions is required.

‘Globalisation’ and Competition – The first question is:- Does globalisation prevent the imperialistic powers from competing with one another in the arms trade? The history of capitalism is the history of the world establishing itself as economic unit. This process took about 200 years and was foreseen in the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*. In modern times, this is accelerated because of rapid means of transport e.g., airlines, the invention of wireless communication, the power of modern computers, etc. There are many examples of their use in modern history. The first wave, came with the creation of the steam engine and mechanical spinning mills. The second was the creation of the railways. In the mid-19th century, there were about 5000 railway companies in the U.S. alone (as the “Economist” wrote in a survey concerning “The New Economy”, September 23rd 2000, page 21). How many software companies will exist only 50 years in the future? The growth of new technologies and the development of world transportation and communication portends great hopes that the future will be bright and that on this scale, it would lead to an era of world peace. However, what we can learn from history? Robert Shiller of Yale University recently published a price earnings ratio of America’s S&P 500 over 120 years – that means those companies which were noted at the main stock markets in USA in in their time (The Economist, September 23rd 2000; “The New Economy Survey”, page 21). The price of railway companies’ shares rose until the big crash of 1902/04. This led to a world wide crisis in Britain and elsewhere in the world. The hopes of world unification died. The contradictions of the imperialist powers sharpened and led to WW I. A very similar movement was seen two decades later. The boom of electricity, telephones, radio and cars gave impetus to a more intranetted world and the hope of an ever booming economy. The result was a higher than ever peak of stock values, especially of those companies that were producing electronic commodities. This era ended in October 1929 , Economically the result was the destruction of the overdrawn value of shares – in other words the crash – and unemployment. Politically the main result was (like the period from 1902 to 1914) the rise of contradictions between the main capitalist powers, leading to WW II. In the autumn of 2000, The Economist noted, “Prices now are higher in relation to profits than they have ever been before.” A crash is inevitable. Because we are still living at a time of unequal development of capitalist countries, a surge between them will continue. And like the crash 100 years ago that

destroyed the railways as the “joints” connecting the leading capitalist countries, the economic debacle 50 years ago destroyed the cables linking that world at that time. That same concern threatens to destroy the Internet and e-mail communication of today, not forever, of course, but as a hope of an ever peaceful interconnected capitalist world.

The danger of war A second important question is: Is the USA so strong there is no real danger of an escalating war? In “Political Affairs” (PA) of July 2000 (New York), Scott Marshall wrote, “Not even at the end of World War II was U.S. imperialism in such an unchallenged position as top dog of world imperialism. Today, while inter-imperialistic rivalry is still very much a feature of globalization, there is no serious challenge of U.S. military might... Also it is clear that even a ‘one world superpower’ with unchallenged military superiority does not mean an end to war dangers. We only need to look at the military destruction rained down on the Balkans, the continued bombing of Iraq ... to see the danger. This unbridled U.S. power is a totally new feature of globalization. While it is most clear in the military arena, U.S. domination of globalization is apparent in trade and in the institutions of global governance like the WTO, the IMF and the World Bank.” I understand his point but I do have some questions. First I agree completely that military superiority does not mean an end to the dangers of war. The wars we called “little” were easily as catastrophic to the people who suffered as much or more as the “great wars” like WW I and WW II. However is U.S. superiority really so great? In that same light, it serves no purpose to debate which of the Communist parties, the U.S. British or German, is fighting the more dangerous imperialism. Our struggle is against the same enemy. However, I would like to ask why and how did U.S. imperialism lose the war in Vietnam? And what of the thunderstorm that was the Gulf-War, yet another U.S. military adventure though fought with money from Europe, Japan and Kosovo? The Americans did the fighting, but the main currency in Kosovo now is “Deutschemark” and not U.S. dollars (USD)



nor British pounds. The new president in Yugoslavia may have been installed also by U.S. diplomacy, but he is a declared enemy of the U.S. and a declared friend of Europe and Germany. Has that all happened by accident? Don Sloan ('Political Affairs, July 2000), wrote concerning Vietnam: "A leaning back into history conjures up another event that took place a century before – the American Civil War of 1861-5. Just as the groundwork for Vietnam was laid almost 20 years before our armed intervention, the power brokers in America worked on as early as 1840 before the cannons roared at Fort Sumpter." That is accurate history and the challenge for Marxists is to find the traces of war before the "cannons" are roaring. There is no doubting England was the leading military superpower in 1890. Its navy ruled the seas, its currency was the world's currency. This was also the situation during the so-called "Boxer War" in 1899, when seven imperialist powers contained the Chinese people in their fight for freedom. But at that very time, Rosa Luxemburg – one of the era's great Marxists in Europe saw the coming of the great wars. While both the political and military framework of those days was dominated by England, the economic power shifted slowly but clearly from Great Britain to Germany. Contradictions of those kinds are historically short-lived.

What is the situation today? The gross domestic product of USA in 1950 was 1019 billion USD. That was nearly ten times as those of Japan (106 billion USD) and nearly the same as that in Western Europe (1079 billion USD). Over 40 years later the figures were: 3861 billion in the USA, 1681 billion in Japan, and 4875 billion in Western Europe. On the other hand, the trade balance of USA has now reached a minus of \$412 billion (October 2000) while the EURO 11 have a plus 24 billion and Japan a plus of 126 billion in USD. On the surface, there is no change concerning the power of the U.S. However, the important point is that the basis for the world's economy is shifting. The contradictions growing out of the unevenness of capitalist development do not lead to war in times of uniform growth. The lesson of history is that the danger for mankind begins with the slump on the stock market. What is the situation here? The political and military superiority of the USA from 1950 to 2000 gave its ruling class the ability to finance its power machine with money of other countries. But the result is a high level of indebtedness of nearly all sectors of the U.S. economy. That is why the danger of an economic crash is much greater in America than in Europe. The September 23rd 2000, Economist in its survey of the new economic market wrote, "A crash in share prices would make a serious if temporary dent in America's economy, even though the underlying economic benefits if IT would continue. Stock markets in many other

economies are overvalued too, but a bursting of the bubble would claim many more victims in America than in Japan or Europe, partly because far more people own shares and partly because in recent years American households and companies have borrowed huge sums in the expectation that share prices will continue to climb. Sooner or later they are likely to discover their mistake."

Contradictions in Europe A third important question is: What about the contradictions within Europe? The economic view of capitalism's history presents the world as an economic unit. But it is this unit that become one of the foundations of the Communist world in the very future. It is essentially false to describe the world as a "single economic unit" as a new fact. Applying the term "globalisation" does not help to understand the process. This concept was presented over 150 years ago in the *Communist Manifesto*, and at that time was already more than 100 years old. It is neither new nor complete. Because capitalism is a chaotic system, it does not flow on a regular basis but instead, in a series of thrusts. Capitalism in the 18th and 19th centuries broke the chains of the regional framework in which it was born, but which then became too tight. The result was the destruction of the small states that formed middle Europe. That the British Empire was the controlling power in the 19th century and its currency, the pound, the central currency of the world, resulted in the building of modern nation in the early fights of the bourgeoisie in the 17th century. The result of this was the early creation of a united nation in a degree of unity which did not exist on the continental Europe in that time. In a similar way, the strong position of U.S. capitalism in the 20th century came about from its ability to build a nation out of nearly half a continent as a result of the bloody Civil War of 1861-1865. So the Americans prepared themselves for their dominance of the 20th century because they succeed in the 19th century with the creation of a continental market with united politics, common currency, norms and laws. The history of imperialistic Europe and especially of imperialist Germany is one of a – till yesterday – failed attempt to take a similar step. Our present situation is not the stage of globalisation. Globalisation is a process which has been developing since about 1500 and will only be completed with the victory of Socialism. We are living in a special stage within this huge epoch. And this stage is – like the stage of nationalism which broke regionalism during the 18th century – the stage of continentalisation, breaking nationalism. But it is doing this in a imperialistic and so most dangerous way for the peace of the world. The



important point is that the economic powers of Europe will only become political powers when Europe is united. This is not only the aim but indeed the main problem of German capital which dominates Europe more and more. But it would be a mistake to underestimate the progress that was made during the last three decades and now with the euro. The three most important capitalist countries of the continent – Germany, France and Italy – will be closely linked like never before in European history since the time of the Roman Empire. The euro will be the strongest currency of the world surpassing the dollar by many fold. It will have one central bank, with common laws of duty, exchange and other economic issues. And the headquarters will be in Frankfurt. This is happening at full speed.

It remains to be seen if Britain will join the continent and adopt the euro as its currency. The other important open issue is whether the former socialist states of Eastern Europe will affiliate.

The German danger Today the position of the German-dominated capital in Europe, achieved without war, is stronger than it was in the dawn of WW I in 1910 or in the middle of WW II in 1940. The lesson Germany learned from WW I and II, (one European war in two parts), was to first rule economically and then militarily. In this perspective, the steps of history become clear: the Montan-Union, the Bonn-Paris axis, EWG, EU and now the euro. The military step will come, although not yet. The preparations are being made. Older U.S. Army officers will recall the beginning of armament of the “Bundeswehr” started with American weapons. First the Germans abolished the dependence on tanks (Leopard I), then on aircraft (Tornado instead of Starfighter and Phantom) and finally the creation of the European Aeronautic Defense and Space Company (EADS).

We must now look to the various developments of capitalism today. The hope – and the political aim of all Communist parties in Europe – is to fight the common currency as the main steps to a European superpower that will one day become a military superpower. The fight of the Danish people against their banking authorities on the question of joining the common currency and the same in Britain shows that this opposition against the euro is not yet lost. One of the main thrusts of all progressive organizations in Europe is to prevent the unity of the financial conglomerates and to build the unity of the people. This is a special task for the left in Germany, remembering what the founder of the Communist Party of Germany (KPD) said before he was killed by the counter-revolution in 1919: The main enemy is the enemy in our own country! ★

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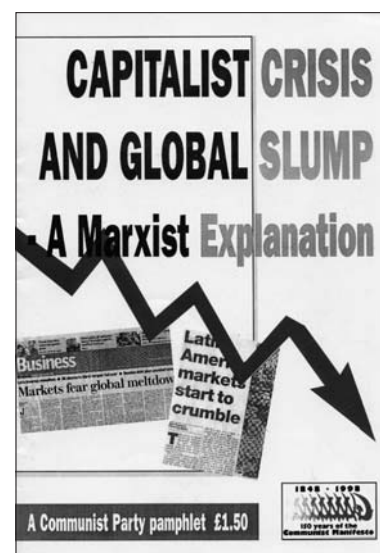
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US Influence in the Caribbean Region

Richard Hart

By the 1870s the economy of the United States of America had matured to the point at which the production capacity of industry exceeded the demands of the home market, necessitating the acquisition of overseas markets for manufactures. This was the warning given by William M. Ewarts, the US Secretary of State, in August 1877:

The vast resources of this country need an outlet, as we have recognized so disastrously during the past five years. Production is greater than our home demands, and unless an outlet is found for the excess we must still continue to feel the depressing effects

The Secretary of State was echoing in general terms the sentiments expressed in the previous month by the influential manufacturers' publication *IRON AGE*, the July 1877 issue of which had made the same point:

As our manufacturing capacity exceeds the wants of home consumption, we shall either have to curtail the same by shutting up a great many establishments or we shall have to create a fresh outlet through export.¹

Earlier European experience had proved that, in a world in which a number of industrialised countries were undergoing similar problems, overseas markets and investment opportunities could best be acquired or retained, and protected from competition, if the government of the industrialised country could claim ownership and control of the territory where the market for its manufactures was to be established or the investments of its nationals were to be located. This had been the rationale for modern imperialism.

In the Caribbean region several European powers had colonies which they had acquired during the

earlier mercantilist period. In the later period of capitalist development, when there was a need for overseas markets for manufactures and opportunities for investment, these colonies acquired an added importance. In Africa and the Far East the industrialised European states had subjugated and added to their empires vast territories with less developed economies or whose governments had been unable to resist conquest. Ownership and control had enabled the governments of these European metropolitan countries to ensure that their colonies imported manufactured goods only from the metropolis or that where imports were permitted from non-empire sources the import duties imposed on such imports were higher than the duties on imports from the metropolis.

Manufacturers and investors in the USA who, in the closing decades of the 19th century had begun to look for overseas markets and investment opportunities, would no doubt have liked their government to acquire colonies. There were however constraints on the possibilities of empire building for US imperialists. These included:

1. The fact that Latin America, the under-developed area most suitable geographically and in economic terms for US expansion, consisted for the most part of countries which had recently acquired their political independence in liberation wars or political struggles against Spain and Portugal. Any attempt by the US Government to recolonise them would have been fiercely resisted by the local populations and opposed by Britain;
2. The fact that the USA had itself come into existence in the course of a war of independence, which had engendered strong popular anti-colonial sentiments;



3. The fact that by the time a section of US manufacturers and investors had developed imperialistic motivations, very few countries remained in the world which could be, but had not yet been, colonised. In Africa the only countries remaining uncolonised by Europeans were Ethiopia in the east and Liberia in the west. All of the Far East, with the exception of China, Japan, Korea and Thailand (then called Siam). After the Russo-Japanese war in 1905, Japan established a protectorate over Korea, and annexed it in 1910. Siam, though nominally independent, had been dominated by France and Britain since the mid-19th century.

Liberia had been established in 1847 by the American Colonization Society as a place of settlement for former American slaves. Its resources were already being exploited by the US Firestone Company, which had extensive rubber plantations there, and it had little more to offer. Though lacking modernisation, both China and Ethiopia were countries ruled by well established dynasties of such long standing that it would have been difficult to justify an attempt to colonise either of them. Also, apart from the fact that the USA lacked the capacity at that time to conquer either of these countries, such was the competition for Chinese trade that Britain and France would not have permitted it. Colonisation of Japan would have been inconceivable.²

The USA did however acquire a small possession in the mid-Pacific. In 1892 Queen Liliuokalani of the Hawaiian Islands had allowed some US citizens to establish sugar cane plantations and manufacture sugar there. They repaid her in the following year by sponsoring a coup. In January 1893 US Marines landed and forced her to recognise the rebel government. A month later the US representative declared a "protectorate" over the islands. In 1898 the Hawaiian Islands were formally annexed by the US Government.³

In February 1898 the US Government aggressively pursued its policy of overseas expansion by promoting a conflict with Spain, the weakest of the European imperialist powers. The pretext used for launching the Spanish-American War was the sinking of the US warship Maine at Havana, Cuba, for which, with insufficient proof, it blamed the Spanish Government. US troops were landed in the Spanish colonies of Cuba in the Caribbean and The Philippines in the Far East.

The Spanish-American war ended with the signing of a peace treaty in Paris on 10 December 1898, whereby Puerto Rico in the Caribbean and Guam in the Pacific became outright US colonies. The Philippines, Spain's other possession in the Far East, also became a US colony in effect although described as a "protectorate". As regards Cuba, where at the time the war with Spain commenced

the Cubans had almost succeeded in throwing off the Spanish yoke, the peace treaty declared:

Spain renounces all rights to sovereignty and property over Cuba. With respect to that island, when it is evacuated by Spain, it is to be occupied by the United States.

To give these transactions a semblance of legality, Spain was to receive in compensation twenty million dollars. The US maintained its military occupation of Cuba for over two years, allowing the Cubans to elect a convention to draw up a constitution but refusing to withdraw its occupation forces until that convention had agreed to amend its draft by incorporating therein an amendment prepared by Orville Pratt, a US Senator. The Pratt Amendment contained the following clauses:

3 that upon transfer of the control of Cuba to the government established under the new Constitution, Cuba consents that the U.S. reserve and retain the right of intervention for the preservation of Cuban independence and the maintenance of stable government, adequately protecting life, property and individual liberty and discharging the obligations with respect to Cuba imposed by the Treaty of Paris on the United States;

4 that all the acts of the military government and all rights acquired thereunder shall be valid;

5 that to facilitate the U.S. in her performance of such duties as may devolve under the foregoing provisions and, for her own defence the U.S. may acquire and hold the title to land for naval stations and maintain the same at certain specific points.⁵

This humiliating restriction on Cuban sovereignty, under colour of which the US Armed Forces again occupied Cuba for nearly two and a half years from 1906 and parts of the island in 1912 and from 1917 to 1922, was not removed until President F.D. Roosevelt introduced his "good neighbour" policy in 1934. But to this day, by virtue of a lease which a Cuban Government was forced to grant, the USA retains its naval and military base in Guantanamo at the eastern end of the island.

These modest territorial acquisitions were by no means commensurate with the requirements of the imperialist power which the USA was rapidly becoming. But without involvement in conflict with the stronger European imperialist powers, which the US Government was not at that time strong enough to undertake, there were no further possibilities for territorial expansion. Denied the opportunity to exercise the legal and constitutional controls with which the European powers controlled their colonies, the US Government was put to the necessity of developing alternative methods of dominating the governments of other countries.

This non-colonial form of imperialist domination, now sometimes described as "neocolonialism", was exercised by a variety and



sometimes a combination of methods. These included economic and financial pressures, bribery and corruption of local politicians, arming and financing of disaffected local aspirants for power and mercenaries to overthrow unco-operative governments, and, direct military interventions. By these means the US Government achieved over many Latin American countries a control no less effective than that exercised by the European imperialists over their respective colonies. As the economic and military strength of the USA increased relative to that of the other capitalist imperialist states, these neocolonial methods of control were extended on a world-wide scale.

The following table gives the number of actual US invasions, country by country, of countries in the Caribbean region.

Country	Number of invasions
Honduras	7
Nicaragua	4
Panama	5
Cuba	3
Dominican Republic	3
Mexico	3
Haiti	2
Guatemala	1
Grenada	1

The most prolonged occupations were those of:

Cuba – for just under 2½ years from 1906 to 1909, to establish a pro-American Government in the uncertain period following the establishment of independence;

Panama – for 11 years from 1903 to 1914 with brief interruptions, during and following its secession from Columbia in 1903 – a secession encouraged by the US Government to further its interests in the Canal Zone of the Panama Canal;

Haiti – for 19 years from 28 July, 1915 to 15 August 1934, during which time US Government agents collected taxes and used them to pay debts owing to US creditors. Before departing US soldiers defaced the statue of Haiti's national hero Toussaint Louverture by smearing it with tar;

The Dominican Republic – outright occupation for nearly 6½ years from 1916 to 1924, following the earlier establishment of a US Customs Receivership in 1905, from the proceeds of which unpaid foreign creditors received payment ;

Nicaragua – for almost 7 years, from 7 May to 5 June 1926 and again from 27 August, 1926 to 3 January, 1933, to protect US interests during a time of widespread revolutionary activity.⁶

The US Government did not venture to land forces on territories in the region which were British, French or Dutch colonies, with one exception. That occurred in Jamaica in 1907 when,

following an earthquake and fire which destroyed much of the city of Kingston, US Marines were landed. They were quickly re-embarked when the outraged colonial governor demanded their immediate withdrawal. The US Government did however obtain a permanent foothold in the Caribbean Antilles in 1917 when it purchased three of the Virgin Islands, former colonies of Denmark.

The growth of the US economy also increased the importance of the USA to other countries in the Caribbean region and elsewhere as a market for their exports. This in turn increased the US Government's influence over them. Despite the fact that, under their colonial relationship with Britain, the British colonies in the Caribbean region were required to impose higher customs duties on goods imported from the USA than the duties payable on imports from Britain, their trade with the USA flourished. One reason for this was their proximity to the USA, resulting in lower transportation costs.

In the case of Jamaica, by far the most populous of the British colonies in the region, a second factor was the development of the production of bananas for export. Bananas had been cultivated in Jamaica for internal consumption since the 17th century, but it was in the 1880s and 1890s that their cultivation for export began. Before the development of steamships and later refrigeration, the market had initially been entirely in the USA because the fruit if shipped to Britain would have been over-ripe by the time the ships reached their destination. The growth of this market had greatly increased the importance of trade with the USA and consequently the influence of the USA in the Jamaican economy.⁸

An enterprising trader, the Boston schooner owner Lorenzo Dow Baker, not only encouraged local farmers to grow bananas for sale to him but purchased land in the island and developed banana plantations. His Boston Fruit Company, which later became the United Fruit Company, expanded rapidly. This Company also developed banana plantations in Costa Rica and other Latin American Republics, dominating the economies of some of them to the point that it controlled their politicians and governments, hence the cynical references by journalists to 'Banana republics'.

During the Second World War the British Government became increasingly dependent on the USA for financial aid and war material support. The US Government saw this as an opportunity to increase its influence in the British colonies. Unable to become substantial colony-owners themselves, the Americans urged the European colonial powers to embark on decolonisation. They knew that if the colonies became politically independent, the US Government would be able to exercise greater political influence over them and American exporters and investors would then have



access to them on terms of equality with their former owners.

At the end of August and beginning of September, 1940, the British and US Governments entered into an agreement for leases to the US Government for 99 years of lands in Antigua, British Guiana, Jamaica and Trinidad for the establishment of US naval and air bases. Payment was in the form of the transfer to the British Navy of fifty old destroyers. In 1943 the British Government approved a scheme for the use of British West Indian labour to make good the labour shortage in the USA, arising partly from the recruitment for the US Armed Forces that was taking place. These agreements resulted in employment opportunities for West Indian workers and contributed to the increasing influence of the USA in these colonies.

Although the USA did not enter the war against Germany and its allies until December 1941, President Roosevelt had been supportive of Britain and was supplying Britain with war materials under the Lend-Lease Act enacted in March 1941. On 14 August 1941 a historic meeting took place in mid-Atlantic, on warships of the two nations, between Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill. At this meeting the two leaders drew up a joint eight point declaration, known as the "Atlantic Charter", which set out the principles on which they had agreed that the post-war world should be based. The third clause of this Charter proclaimed:

*They respect the right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live; and they wish to see sovereign rights and self-government restored to those who have been forcibly deprived of them.*⁹

Roosevelt was in no doubt concerning the general application of these words, but no sooner had Churchill returned to Britain than he declared that the Charter was meant to apply only to countries occupied by Britain's enemies and did not apply to the British Empire. On 9 September 1941 he made a statement to this effect in the House of Commons. There were immediate protests from several British colonies. Roosevelt too was reportedly annoyed but refrained from publicly contradicting Churchill.

In 1941 President Roosevelt appointed Charles W. Taussig, a businessman with interests in the American Caribbean territories, to head a Commission to make a survey of the British West Indian colonies. In that same year he conceived the idea of forming an Anglo-American Caribbean Commission and made the proposal to Lord Halifax, the British Ambassador in Washington. Halifax reported to his Government that Roosevelt had "suggested that a joint commission be set up by the two Governments to consist of not more than six members"¹⁰

The proposal aroused much suspicion in the Colonial Office and among some colonial Governors, but the Foreign Office welcomed the proposal. A note on a Colonial Office file recorded that the Foreign Office:

*appreciates the reasons for our doubts but they feel that in view of President Roosevelt's personal interest in this first practical demonstration of 'cooperation' it would be inadvisable for us to adopt a suspicious attitude. On grounds of high policy ... they would like to accept the American draft ... In the circumstances we must agree and ... be content with a hope of putting the brake on US enthusiasm at a later stage.*¹¹

The Anglo-American Caribbean Commission was established in February 1942:

*for the purpose of encouraging ... social and economic cooperation between ... USA and its possessions and bases in the ... Caribbean and the UK and British Colonies in the area and to avoid duplication of research ... [The Commissioners were to concern themselves with] labour agriculture housing health education, social welfare finance and related subjects in territories under the British and US flags ... and ... will advise their respective Governments.*¹²

The Colonial Office was disturbed by the appointment of Taussig as the American Co-Chairman, as they suspected him of wishing to make the Commission executive rather than advisory. Forwarding to the Foreign Office a copy of the Minutes of the first meeting of the Commission, held in Trinidad in May 1942, a Colonial Office official noted:

*We find ... features of the proceedings ... alarming, in particular the tendency of certain American members to magnify the scope of the Commission and ... contemplate an executive organisation with headquarters in Washington.*¹³

Taussig believed that the US Government, by actively promoting the political independence of the European colonies in the area, would ensure their future acceptance of American political leadership. In a letter to Roosevelt in June 1942 he advised that the US Government should introduce changes in its own possessions which would serve as a model for the decolonisation of the region:

*The time is at hand when by using our possessions in the Caribbean as a springboard, you could pave the way for a 'charter' granting more political freedom to all the colonial people.*¹⁴

In the latter part of 1942 Churchill was still defiantly adhering to his position as the defender of the British Empire. In a broadcast on 10 November, 1942 he declared:

Let me make this clear in case there should be any mistake about it. We mean to hold our own. I have not become the King's first Minister to preside over the liquidation of the British Empire. For that task;



*if ever it were to be prescribed, someone else would have to be found...*¹⁵

By that time however Churchill, the unrepentant British imperialist, was already out of step with his own War Cabinet, a majority of the members of which had realised that, in her weakened and dependant position, Britain was in no position to ignore demands that she decolonise. These demands came not only from the Americans but also from the subject peoples of the Empire. The strongest calls for independence came from India and Burma, but demands for self-government were also to be heard in Jamaica and other colonies in the Caribbean region and elsewhere.

In July 1942 Viscount Cranbourne, Secretary of State for the Colonies; noted:

The US Ambassador came to see me this morning about the Caribbean situation ... he had just received a ... telegram from Mr Hull [the US Secretary of State] ... The gist of it was that the US Administration were ... "seriously perturbed about the situation that was developing in the British Colonies in the Caribbean. Already there had been requests by the British authorities for American troops to assist in putting down disturbances in our territories, the first time in St. Lucia and the second quite lately in the Bahamas.

*Now Mr Hull was receiving ... disquieting reports as to the possibilities of disturbances in Jamaica in the near future ... it was essential that something should be done to relieve the situation. This was a matter that affected not only HM's Government but the US Government as well. Disturbances in the W.I. Colonies were bound to have an immediate reaction on the colour problem in the US.*¹⁶

The Secretary of State noted that the US Ambassador had told him of a request from the US State Department that "some man of influence and vision" should be sent to Washington "with a view to seeing whether there was any way in which the United States Government could assist in improving the Caribbean position".

Cranbourne was displeased by what he regarded as American interference in British affairs and had given the Ambassador an evasive reply. In September he wrote to Anthony Eden, the Foreign Secretary:

American intervention in the British West Indies has recently been considerable ... if the US Government continues to interest itself in such matters, and intervenes in affairs which are the exclusive business of HMG, our good relations with them may well be adversely affected.

Replying, Anthony Eden had this to say:

I must disagree with the argument ... that the Americans are interfering in matters which do not ... concern them. They are responsible for the defence of the Caribbean and ... the existence of the joint Anglo-American Commission surely implies a

*special degree of reciprocal interest in the Caribbean territories of both countries.*¹⁷

Sir George Gater, a Permanent Under Secretary of State, was accordingly sent to Washington. Referring to his reception by President Roosevelt on 27 October 1942, *The Times*, then the most influential British newspaper, gave this account of what the President had said to the British diplomat:

*He was interested in an extension of the franchise, in compulsory education, and in an attempt to make the islands self-sustaining ... he hoped for a new economic social system which would be a big improvement on present conditions Asked if it would require some form of political unity, the President replied 'Certainly not', but it would require some form of self government.*¹⁸

As the war progressed the British Government found itself increasingly under pressure to decolonise, both from the US Government and from the subject colonial peoples. It also had to face the fact that, weakened by reverses in the war, it no longer had the same capacity as before to police the Empire and suppress the nationalistic aspirations of the subject peoples. The cumulative effect of these factors was that Britain had no alternative but to adopt a policy of decolonisation.

In the post war period the USA became indisputably the dominant power in the Caribbean region. The formation of the United Nations Organisation in 1945 and the subsequent admission to membership of that body of many newly independent states in Africa, Asia and the Caribbean region, did impose some constraints on the ease and impunity with which the US Government was able to impose its will on other countries. Another restraining factor was the increased influence of the USSR in world affairs. Nevertheless, it had replaced Britain as the dominant regional power.

The US Government continued to pursue a policy of intervention in the affairs of other countries in the Caribbean region and elsewhere. In 1954 it armed and assisted a force of mercenaries and disaffected nationals to overthrow the Government of Guatemala and replace it by a Government prepared to accept its dominance. In 1961 a similar attempt to overthrow the revolutionary Government of Cuba failed.

That failure in Cuba appears to have led the US Government to conclude that it could not always overthrow a Government of which it disapproved by arming and assisting disaffected nationals and mercenaries and that the direct commitment to that task of US armed forces might sometimes be necessary. The landing of US troops combined with assistance given to disaffected nationals was the strategy employed by the US Government in the Dominican Republic in 1965 to prevent the Constitutionalist from installing the elected



President.

Yielding to the pressure to decolonise, the British Government had decided to concede independence in 1962 to three of its colonies in the Caribbean region – Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago and British Guiana. Aware of this plan the US Government intervened to insist that independence for British Guiana be delayed until the Premier Dr Cheddi Jagan, known to be of Marxist persuasion, could be removed from office. In a letter to Lord Home, the British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, in February 1962, Dean Rusk, the US Secretary of State, wrote

You know from our correspondence in August of last year of my acute concern over the prospects of an independent British Guiana under the leadership of Cheddi Jagan ... I must tell you now that I have reached the conclusion that it is not possible for us to put up with an independent British Guiana under Jagan

These considerations ... make it mandatory that we concert on remedial steps. In the past your people have held, with considerable conviction, that there was no reasonable alternative to working with Jagan. I am convinced our experience so far, and now the disorders in Georgetown, makes it necessary to re-examine this premise. It seems to me clear that new elections should now be scheduled, and I hope we can agree that Jagan should not accede to power again. ¹⁹

Bowing to the dictates of the US Government, the British Government proceeded with the granting of independence to Jamaica and Trinidad & Tobago in 1962 but withheld it from British Guiana. Not until after, by altering the method of election there to proportional representation, they had succeeded in 1964 in removing from office the Peoples Progressive Party led by Jagan, did they concede independence to British Guiana in 1966.

Destabilisation of the economy of Jamaica, both by economic pressures and by assistance given by the US Central Intelligence Agency in arming and training gunmen drawn from the political opposition, had failed to dislodge the Michael Manley Government, of which the US Government disapproved, in 1976. These methods of intervention were however successful in creating sufficient popular suffering and disillusionment to achieve this result in the 1980 general election.

In a collection of Regional Surveys on South and Central America and the Caribbean, an official observer at the Nicaragua Presidential and Legislative Assembly Elections in 1990 recorded that, during the administration of US President Ronald Reagan, US Government activity had:

involved major and persistent aggressive acts, designed to destabilise the Nicaraguan Government. The USA sought to justify such policies by reference to action taken by the Sandinistas which it alleged were against its national and hemispheric interests

... {These included} its close relations with the Soviet bloc; the rapid increase of its military forces; and its support for subversion elsewhere in Central America, particularly in El Salvador.

Some of these hostile actions were recorded:

*From 1982 successive US administrations allocated funds to the Contras and to the CIA for the purpose of destabilising the Sandinista Government. Such acts included the organisation of the mining of Nicaraguan ports in 1984, which the International Court of Justice, in a ruling that the USA refused to accept, condemned as contrary to international ... law. Continued US aid to the Contras sustained civil conflict ... which by 1990 had caused an estimated 30,000 deaths ... and large-scale displacement of the civilian population ... US attempts to destabilise the Sandinista Government by military means were accompanied by economic pressure. In 1981 the USA suspended all bilateral aid ... and subsequently demanded that the country be boycotted by the major international aid and lending agencies. A US embargo on trade with Nicaragua was imposed in 1985.*²⁰

The active hostility of the US Government towards Nicaragua did not cease until the increased suffering that had been inflicted upon the people had brought about a degree of popular disillusionment with the Sandinista Government sufficient to ensure that it failed to win re-election to office in 1990.

In 1979 a revolution occurred in Grenada to which the US Government reacted with hostility. On 25 October 1983, taking advantage of internal differences which resulted in the killing of the Prime Minister, US troops invaded the island. Leading members and supporters of the Peoples Revolutionary Government were imprisoned and a puppet Interim Government was installed. The US Government provided the money for the payment of Judges to try and convict the prisoners on a charge of murder. As a result of legal proceedings described by eminent lawyers as “a travesty of justice”, persons who had had no part in the killing of the Prime Minister are serving sentences of life imprisonment – a warning to any one in the region who might be considering the possibility of again removing an oppressive regime by revolutionary means.

In December 1989 US troops invaded Panama, kidnapped President Noriega and placed him on trial on a charge of trafficking in narcotics. In his place they installed a President who they felt would be more co-operative on the issue of US interests in respect of the Panama Canal.

In the latter part of the 1980s so-called “Special Service Units” were established in the smaller English-speaking Eastern Caribbean islands, trained, armed and directed by US Army personnel. These insular forces are linked in a so-called Regional Security Service, with headquarters



in Barbados. On 10 May 1987, personnel from the SSUs of Antigua, Dominica, St. Kitts, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Grenada and Barbados participated jointly in their first practice operation in the island of Dominica, under the supervision of US officers.

More recently, the US Government called upon Governments in the Caribbean Antilles to sign so-called "Ship-rider Agreements", authorising US armed forces to enter their territorial waters for the purpose of pursuing narcotics traffickers and suppressing the smuggling of narcotics into the USA and other countries. All the English-speaking countries in the Caribbean region have signed these agreements, though some agreements require prior permission of the local government before entry of their territorial waters takes place.

Undoubtedly, however, the greatest leverage exercised by the US Government over these small countries in the Caribbean region is economic, many of them being dependent on the USA as their principal source of capital and manufactured goods. ★

Notes

1. Quoted in William Appleman Williams, *The Roots Of The Modern American Empire*, London, Anthony Bond, 1970, p.204.
2. When US Commodore Perry, by a show of force in 1853-54, persuaded the Japanese Emperor to open his county's ports to foreign trade, although no European power was then endeavouring to penetrate the Japanese market, he did not attempt to obtain exclusive trading rights for the USA. The concessions exacted benefited European as much as American traders.
3. William Appleman Williams, op.cit., p.355
4. Gabriel Perez Tarrau, "Crime, Plunder and Trickery in the Pacific", in the weekly GRANMA, 5 April, 1981.
5. Hugh Thomas, *CUBA*, London, Eyre &

Spottiswoode, 1971, pp. 451-452.

6. A list of US invasions and occupations, from which this information has been obtained, was inserted into the Congressional Record of the US Senate for 23 June, 1969 (S. 6957) by Senator Everett Dirksen. See also the accounts of these countries' histories in *VOUTHAMERICA*, *CENTRAL AMERICA* and *the CARIBBEAN*, (5s' edit.). London, Europa Publications, 1995
7. Motor cars imported from the USA, for example, paid customs duties of 25 percent whilst the duty on those imported from Britain was 15 percent.
8. For the history of the Jamaican banana export industry see Ansell Hart, "The Banana in Jamaica Export trade", in *SOCIAL and ECONOMIC STUDIES*, Vol.3 Not, Kingston, Univ. of the W.I., 1954 and T.E. Sealey and H. T. Hart, *JAMAICA'S BANANA INDUSTRY*, Kingston, Ja. Banana Producers Assn., 1984. By 1910 bananas accounted for 49.4 % in value of Jamaica's exports: This declined over the next 26 years but rose again in 1927 to 49.8 %.
9. G.M. Howat (Ed.), *DICTIONARY OF WORLD HISTORY*, London, Nelson, 1973, pp. 110-10. Public Record Office (PRO): CO 318/452/1 File 71265 – Halifax to Prime Minister, 10 April, 1941.
11. PRO: 00318/452/1 File 71265 – H.F Downie to Batershill and Parkinson, 2 January, 1952.
12. PRO: CO 31811452/13 File 71265 Part II.
13. PRO: CO 318/452/2 File 71265 – H.F. Downie to E.E. Evans, Foreign Office, 15 May 1942.
14. Thomas C. Howard, "Anglo-American Policies in the Caribbean", a paper presented at the Conference of the Association of Caribbean Studies, London, 1987
15. Reprinted in a letter to the *DAILY GLEANER* on 23 November, 1942
16. PRO: CO 318/455 File 71307 – Memorandum by Cranbourne of meeting with US Ambassador Winnant on 29 July, 1942.
17. PRO: CO 318/455/2 File 71311 – Eden to Cranbourne, 19 October, 1942.
18. PRO: CO 318/455/6 File 71317 – *THE TIMES*, 28 October, 1942.
19. PRO: PREM 11/3666 – quoted in S.R Ashton & D. Kilhungray, (Eds.), *DOCUMENTS ON THE END OF EMPIRE*, Series B Vol 6 *The West Indies*, pp. 486-487
20. David Browning, article on Nicaragua in *SOUTH AMERICA*, *CENTRAL AMERICA* and *the CARIBBEAN*, (5th edition) London, Europa Publications, 1995, pp. 480-483.

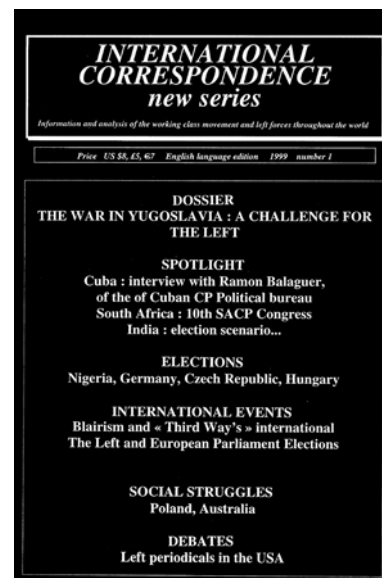
INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE

The appearance of an English-language version of *International Correspondence* is a significant boost to those on the British left frustrated by the lack of information and analyses available on communist and left parties worldwide.

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Those interested in this first issue can contact the Communist Party office (please note our new address) or *International Correspondence* directly at BP 95, 92153 Suresnes Cedex France. Subscriptions are £20 for four issues.



Useful websites

Communist Party of Britain and Young Communist League

<http://www.comunist-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

<http://www.poptel.org.uk/cuba-solidarity>

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