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Inspiration and warning from Argentina

**WORKERS DO NOT HAVE
THEIR OWN MASS PARTY**

by Bob Archer

BOLD mass action by the people of Argentina has seen off four presidents in two weeks. They refused to back down despite nearly thirty dead and many hundreds injured.

As this issue of Workers International Press went to the printers, Eduardo Duhalde had just assumed office. Recently Mr. Duhalde confessed: "The political leadership is shit, and of course I include myself in that".

Virtually every sector of the population rose in struggle against those in power, who are imposing the whole burden of the economic crisis onto the working class and the middle class.

The dramatic events in Argentina are an **inspiration** because they are the most concentrated and courageous expression so far of popular opposition to imperialism in crisis. They are bound to find an echo in many other places because the situation in Argentina is only a specific and particularly-shaped combination of the same conditions created by the world crisis in a whole series of countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

The events are a **warning** because they demonstrate once again the truth of the historical experience that such struggles can only be fully successful if the masses can destroy the state apparatus of the capitalist class and replace it with one representing their own needs and desires.

Anti-imperialist and anti-'globalisation' campaigners everywhere need to study the situation in Argentina extremely carefully.

The unity and combativity of the Argentinian people is only the first pre-condition for a successful struggle. How it is to be maintained and developed is a political task whose solution will need to draw on the historical experience of the whole working class.

Argentina's workers have a long history of militant trade union organization and political class-consciousness, and this on its own has been an important factor in the general mobilization.

But like workers everywhere the workers of Argentina do not have their own mass political party.

Indeed the crisis and splits which the Trotskyist Movement for Socialism (MAS) has undergone over the last decade is one

of the important features of the crisis in Argentina.

In fact the organized working class as such, the largely bureaucratic unions and even the more radical rank-and-file assemblies of strike-pickets, were slow to become involved in the street-fighting. The decisive demonstrations involved above all young people and the various left-wing groups.

And yet the working class is the only force which can unite the whole social protest, lend it organizational shape and provide it with concrete and substantial goals.

The struggle in Argentina is also profoundly international in character. The political rulers of the country - people who are now angrily denounced as 'thieves' whenever they dare show themselves in public - are the servants of foreign imperialist interests.

Behind them stand the US, European and Japanese banks and finance houses which will insist on the repayment of every red cent which has been 'loaned' and every penny of interest which they can screw out.

They must do so because to allow Argentina a way out would be to encourage every victim of the crisis to resist.

And, as everyone in the world now knows, these interests are backed by B52 bombers, US special forces and the mercenaries of imperialism.

Developments in Argentina, which grow organically out of world developments over the last few years, throw down a challenge to the most conscious and thoughtful workers everywhere. **A political step-forward on their part is needed.**

The most significant form such a step could take at the moment is the development of an international association of active workers.

The foundation of the International Network of Active Solidarity by Brazilian trade unionists two years ago was a vital step in that direction. Now it must assume a wider scope and become much more active, initially in providing solidarity with Argentinian workers, helping delegations from abroad to visit the country and become thoroughly familiar with the situation there and publicizing the experiences of the Argentinian people's struggles far and wide.



Faces of the mass movement in Argentina: (Left) an assembly of employed and unemployed workers; (Right) Left wing parties on the march. Pictures courtesy of Partido Obrero website <http://www.po.org.ar/>

Five presidents in two weeks

ADOLFO Rodriguez Saá was hastily picked as caretaker president after the undignified departure of Fernando De la Rúa.

After a week in office he resigned, claiming that regional leaders of his party would not support the package of emergency measures he had proposed.

Saá is a member of the Judicialist Party (PJ), which claims to continue the populist tradition of Juan and Evita Peron. He has been a regional governor for 12 years.

He had announced an immediate moratorium on repayment of all interest and principal on the foreign debt, dramatically billed as the biggest default in history. However, imperialist governments, led by George W. Bush, rushed to congratulate him on assumption of the presidency, so the world's bankers were evidently hopeful he could safeguard their investments.

Saá announced a number of

dramatic measures to flatter public opposition to bureaucracy and corruption. He reduced the number of ministries from 12 to 3 and abolished all the official cars and aircraft provided for leading politicians. However, he did not plan to sack any civil servants, so it was not clear how much money these steps would save.

He pegged the presidential salary at \$3,000.

He promised a number of measures to help relieve the effects of poverty, including work creation for more than 100,000 people, food aid for the starving, and an increase in the minimum wage.

He retained the currency board which ties the peso to the dollar, so no devaluation of the peso was planned. However, many commentators wondered how he would lay hands on enough hard currency to make good on what amounts to a promise to hand over valuable dollars to any purchaser who turns

up with intrinsically worthless pesos. The alternative of abandoning the dollar-peso peg is attractive because it would allow the peso to fall in value and encourage Argentina's exports. However, it would mean handing the problem on to industry and the middle-class who have taken out dollar-denominated bank loans for businesses and homes.

Saá kept the previous government's strict controls on foreign currency deals and bank transactions. This led to renewed rioting when the banks re-opened and Argentinians found they could still only withdraw 1,000 pesos a month. Because the law courts rejected moves to lift banking controls, many Argentinians accused the legal system of continuing a corrupt relationship with government.

A 'third currency', the 'argentino', was to be introduced to replace the 17 sub-currencies or coupons already circulating (variously called patacones, lecop, etc.).

Adolfo Rodriguez Saá could not solve a single major issue facing the masses in Argentina. Nor could any of the measures he took satisfy the bankers or the imperialist governments who are their political representatives.

His forced departure deepens the crisis of capitalist rule in Argentina.

The fifth president in the space of two weeks, Eduardo Duhalde, has confirmed that Argentina has defaulted on her foreign loans and has broken the dollar peg. A Peso devaluation of about 30 per cent is expected which would some relief to the country's exporters and industries, but will intensify pressures on small businesses and the middle class. The crisis in Argentina is a long way from being solved.

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WORKERS OF THE WORLD UNITE!

How does the country that has everything end up broke?

THE economic and social explosion in Argentina is a very clear expression of the contradictions within imperialism.

Rich in natural resources and with a considerable manufacturing industry, Argentina has been robbed successively over many centuries by Spanish, British and US imperialists.

This country sees 2,000 people a day, some of them well-paid and well-qualified professionals, fall under the poverty line. Fourteen million Argentinians are living on less than \$4 a day and they are confronted with supermarkets stuffed full of food and consumer goods.

While consumers in the US and the UK are more or less instructed to get their credit cards out and go on a spending spree to 'save' their national economies, Argentinians were told they had to do without food, accept deep cuts in government services, up to 20 per cent unemployment, public sector wage cuts of 13 per cent and under-payment or in some cases non-payment of pensions so that the De la Rúa government could pay its foreign debts.

Argentina's subordination to imperialism is expressed in chronic currency instability and a huge debt

owed to foreign investors and bankers.

In the late 1980s, when prices were doubling every month, the government very strictly 'pegged' the peso to the dollar. This meant that one peso would be exchangeable for one dollar and that Argentina's interest rates would be the same as those prevailing in the USA.

This step stabilized the currency and ushered in several years of economic expansion. The cost, however, was a continued growth in the foreign debt.

In 1997, the real weakness underlying the Pacific 'tiger' economies in South-East Asia became evident. Thailand, Indonesia, South Korea, Taiwan, the Philippines and others saw currency collapses, factory closures and growing poverty and social and political unrest.

These developments sparked off crises in other 'emerging markets', like Russia and Brazil. World trade faltered and finally went into reverse during the year 2000, when the hoped-for boom in 'new technology' turned out to be an expensive sham.

The problems have been concentrated in the finance and share-trading sector which is the huge pump

sucking wealth out of the former colonies and semi-colonies and into bank vaults in the US, Japan and western Europe.

During 1998, a collapse in the Brazilian stock market led to a sharp fall in the value of the Brazilian currency, the real. This cheapened exports from Brazil, which is one of Argentina's main competitors. Argentina could not devalue the peso in retaliation because of the currency board peg. The Argentinian economy went into recession.

This not only threw Argentinians out of work, but also led to a loss in export earnings, which meant the country could not meet her dollar-denominated debts. The government had to offer higher interest rates abroad in order to borrow more dollars to pay the loans already outstanding.

In the third quarter of 2001 Argentina's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was down by nearly five per cent compared with the previous year. In manufacturing and construction the figures were -7.1 per cent and -12.3 per cent. Some bankers feel the peso is over-valued by 50 per cent.

Soon the country owed foreign banks £132 billion. In order to scrape

together the money to pay the debt, the Radical government of president Fernando De la Rúa adopted a policy of 'zero deficit'. Austerity measures were imposed and public service wages cut by up to 13 per cent with more cuts threatened. Pensions were also cut, and in some cases were not paid at all.

Many Argentinians realized that the currency peg was under intense pressure and took steps to convert their pesos into dollars or put their peso bank balances into dollar-denominated accounts abroad while the going was good. During the year 2001, \$18 billion dollars were exported from the country.

The government therefore introduced strict banking controls, including a cap on withdrawals. Meanwhile the currency board meant that domestic interest rates had to shadow those in the US. As a result the government could not lower interest rates to support businesses in difficulty inside Argentina.

The Radical government of Fernando De la Rúa had successfully united almost every layer of society in opposition to it.

Impoverished professional people, bankrupt small-businessmen and

retailers, cash-strapped public servants, starving pensioners and masses of unemployed workers and youth all united in demanding the repudiation of the foreign debt and immediate devaluation of the peso.

The cause of the crisis lies neither in the incompetence nor in the corruption of successive governments of Argentina, although both factors are undoubtedly present in full measure. Right at the root of capitalism and imperialism lies the exploitation of human labour by capital.

Profits are derived from the unpaid labour time workers devote to creating commodities over and above their wages.

The class struggle over who gets the surplus value added to goods by workers in the labour process is the mighty driving force in the development of capitalist society, which almost every commentator has been at pains to conceal over recent decades.

But the gathering world crisis has brought this factor to the world's attention in the most urgent way. It's strongest expression is the fate which imperialism assigned to the people of Argentina and the powerful spirit of their resistance.

Eye-witness accounts of the social turmoil in Argentina

Revolutionary days

Extracts from 'Revolutionary Days', an article published by the Partido de Trabajadores por el Socialismo on December 22, 2001:

'...It was a process which involved all the oppressed and exploited sectors of society who were using different methods but had a common aim: the overthrow of the government of De la Rúa and Cavallo.

With the introduction of the limit on the amount of money that savers can withdraw from their bank accounts and further attacks on pensions and wages, a series of protests started: the banging of pans and the blockading of roads by small shopkeepers, the well-supported 24-hour general strike on December 13, and the demonstrations outside supermarkets in Mendoza, Entre Rios and Quilmes. This discontent then took a leap forward and transformed December 19 and 20 into revolutionary days - an historic independent action of the Argentinian masses which will put its mark on the next period.

On the morning of December 19 the most oppressed sectors of the working class and the masses entered the political arena. In the most populated areas of Buenos Aires province and in 11 other provinces, contingents of unemployed people and their families marched to supermarkets in a desperate search for food. The closeness of Christmas and the

New Year was one of the factors that precipitated the revolts - a symptom of a situation in which five million unemployed and underemployed people have been left behind in this economic depression.

...This time the most impoverished and desperate sectors of society took to the political stage together with the middle classes and the workers ... 'No more hunger! Bread and work!' is the simple demand ...

The second great event took place after De la Rúa declared a state of emergency with the aim of 'safeguarding the peace', i.e. of frightening the middle classes and repressing the looters. By that time there had already been several deaths. After the announcement, a massive, spontaneous mainly middle-class demonstration took to the streets of the capital, the center of political power. Challenging the state of emergency, hundreds of thousands of demonstrators marched to the Plaza de Mayo. Bonfires were lit on street corners and pans were banged together by people on the march and people on their balconies. Drivers sounded their horns. A real flood of people marched to the Plaza de Mayo, Congress Square and even Cavallo's resi-

dence ... The most frequently-heard slogans were 'Stick the state of emergency up your arse!' and 'Get out, we don't want any of you!' ...

On Thursday December 20 the government was overthrown following the Battle of Plaza de Mayo. Early in the morning, thousands of young workers, unemployed people, clerical workers and students confronted the police. The youth played a crucial role. The battle for control of the square started just after 9am and lasted till midnight. Over and over again the demonstrators stood their ground as the police, using tear gas, horses, rubber bullets and sometimes live rounds, viciously attacked them with the aim of clearing the square.

... Shamefully, the trades unions, the general confederations - CGT and CTA - and even the Pickets' Assembly of the FTV-CTA and the CCC (Militant Class-Struggle Current) were not present. By boycotting the demonstration they prevented contingents of organized workers from participating in the struggle.

... At nearly 7pm the resignation of De la Rúa and his escape in a helicopter from the terrace of the government palace ended the days with a political victory for the masses. The situation is as revolutionary as it could be given the current leadership.'

The rest of this report can be viewed on the website of the League for A Revolutionary Communist International
WWW.workerspower.org

A sort of revolution

Extracts from 'This was a revolution of sorts' by K.C.Rolazo, a supporter of the International Workers League - Fourth International (LIT-CI) in Argentina

'There was no money in the streets. People's gas and electricity were cut off when tenants failed to pay for these commodities in due time.

Then the looting of the big supermarkets began. First it was timid groups of organised beggars. In one case they were promised "a little something for Christmas" by the manager of a large supermarket. When they returned to fetch their presents, they found the gates closed and armed policemen trying to shove them away. They insisted that they had been promised help.

Finally a small delegation was allowed in to "negotiate" with the management. Once inside they were told that they could take 70 parcels containing some flour, oil and dry pasta. After a short meeting at the gates of the supermarket, the decision was: "let's take what they give and come back for more tomorrow".

The following day all hell broke loose: not only dozens of supermarkets were "looted" or "expropriated", but important sectors of the middle class found this highly plausible. Municipal workers of the city of Cordoba destroyed the Town Hall in repudiation of the economic measure taken by the city government and their example was followed by Entre Rios...

The result (of declaring a state of emergency) was not long in coming... The Plaza de Mayo, which up to that moment had been silent, dark and surrounded by police patrols began to take a different life... Thousand of spontaneous demonstrators thronged from different neighbourhoods beating pots and pans, blowing whistles and clapping their hands. These were not political or

trade union militants or activists. They were not the desperate hungry crowds looting the supermarkets. They were the urban middle class, the "new poor", the ones who had voted for de la Rúa just two years ago when he had promised to put an end to the corruption ...

They came in family groups, the mama, the papa and the perambulator, the daughter and her boyfriend holding hands, the grandma holding up her pension cheque to show that she had still been unable to collect her meagre pension. They looked straight into the TV cameras and said that they were proud that the Argentine people have at long last recovered their dignity and would no longer be lied to in such a blatant way. They carried national flags and sang the national anthem several times. They seemed most surprised and outraged when the police actually charged at them with high-pressure water hoses, tear gases, and rubber bullets. But they showed a surprising amount of persistence and courage.

Dispersed and chased away from the Plaza de Mayo, they re-grouped and returned, only to be chased away once more and then once more find a way back.

In those countless to and fro movements, the festive atmosphere and the perambulators disappeared, people grabbed the fizzing tear gas bombs and threw them back at the police, they put up barricades, they threw stones...

As the night turned into morning, the morning into afternoon, the battle continued, but the main characters of the drama changed. Left wing militants replaced the politically undefined...

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The whole of this eye-witness account can be viewed on www.socialistvoice.org.uk

The Irish Worker

by John Steele

Political Status Committee keeps up the pressure

The Irish Political Status Committee has continued its campaign for the restoration of the rights which were won by the sacrifices of the hunger strikers of 1981 and removed by agreement with Sinn Fein when they signed the Good Friday Agreement.

An historic first public meeting on this issue was held in London on 24 November. It also commemorated the 1981 Hunger Strikers and speakers were Francie Mackey (32 County Sovereignty Movement), Patricia Campbell (Fourthwrite Magazine and former anti-H Blocks/Armagh activist) and a representative of the relatives of the current Turkish hunger strikers. Members of the IPSC also took part in pickets of the Irish Embassy in London to protest at the treatment of political prisoners in Portlaoise jail and marched with their banner (see photograph) at the huge anti-war demonstration on 18 November.

In E2 wing of Portlaoise jail prisoners have recently been subjected to brutal treatment. Some had to have hospital treatment when riot squads were sent in to beat them up. The prisoners had refused lock-down in protest at the ongoing campaign of discrimination against them including the refusal of an application for temporary leave by a prisoner whose child was sick in hospital. The POWs have taken similar action in the past without any brutal reaction but this time the riot squad were given free rein to go in heavy-handed.



The Irish Political Status Committee banner on the march

Greetings from WIRFI brought to London meeting

"The Workers International for the Rebuilding of the Fourth International congratulates the Irish political Status Committee on the holding of a meeting which links the 20th anniversary of the 1981 Hunger Strikes with the current situation of Republican prisoners today and the demand for the restoration of political status.

The struggles and sacrifices of the nationalist uprising in the north of Ireland - including the martyrdom of the 10 who gave their lives in 1981 - have been betrayed by a Sinn Fein leadership happily acting as ministers of the Crown in a 6-county parliament at the mercy of the Unionist veto.

We believe that Sinn Fein is driven to do a deal with imperialism because of the class nature of its political programme. This is based on the belief that there can be a liberal democracy in the north of Ireland and that the development of capitalism through cross-border in-

stitutions will make the border irrelevant. That is why, along with their refusal to restore democratic rights to political prisoners, they also attack the working class in their support for such actions as hospital closures and the privatisation of public services. Their actions prove, yet again, that there can be no development of a united Ireland through a gradual system of stages, starting with a democratic parliament at Stormont. The six counties is an irremovable entity which can only be removed by the working class fighting on a socialist programme.

Connolly's maxim that the cause of Ireland and the cause of Labour are indivisible was never more true. As the next wave of fighters against British rule in Ireland emerges, it is vital that the organised working class wins its place at the head of this movement.

We salute the memory of the Hunger Strikers of 1981! We support the fight for political status today! Forward to the workers' republic!"

Book review

For a realignment of forces

Republican Voices, By Kevin Bean and Mark Hayes, with a foreword by Bernadette McAliskey; Seesyu Press £5.00. Available at PO Box 31, Belfast BT12 7EE

Irish Republicanism is in deep crisis. The decision of Sinn Fein to join a six-county government at Stormont, administering British rule and the openly anti-working policies of Unionism and New Labour, has produced much disquiet and soul-searching among its members, particularly those who were at the forefront of the military struggle.

With the IRA leadership in full agreement with Adams and McGuinness it was only a matter of time before the decommissioning of weapons took place. Nevertheless, it has made the unease over the direction of Republicanism more acute. The surrender of weapons is a blow to deep and sincerely-held Republican values. It effectively de-legitimises and criminalises the possession of arms in pursuit of the fight for national self-determination. It attacks the whole concept of political status that the hunger strikers fought for.

Much of the acquiescence of the Republican movement to the decision to work in a partitionist parliament and decommission arms came from the realisation that the military struggle could not win and the lack of a developed alternative to the Adams line. The support for the Good Friday Agreement among Republicans is based more on the principle of, "It's as good as can be got in the circumstances", rather than a belief that it will eventually lead to a united Ireland, as the Sinn Fein leadership contend. Many members of the Provisional Republican movement openly admit that they have agreed to the

process, "With gritted teeth."

However, even allowing for this disquiet, it is remarkable how small the numerical opposition to the GFA has been. A movement which mobilised tens of thousands of nationalists on the streets and severely rocked British imperialism has, with very little trouble from its membership, been reduced to an electoral policy that accepts the Unionist veto and British rule.

There is, of course, the Real IRA and the Continuity IRA with their political supporters, but these are groups stuck in a political time-warp of outdated nationalism with elitist military actions that are totally divorced from any mass movement or popular support. They cannot provide a basis for victory and are going nowhere.

This little book, 'Republican Voices', reflects a more serious discussion that is slowly developing within Republicanism. In her Foreword Bernadette McAliskey says, "there are important questions to be asked." She says some of these are "Has the leadership of the movement abandoned Republicanism to maximise the nationalist agenda? Have they determined that the obstacle to Republican ideals was the continuation of war? Are we any nearer the creation of an independent Republic? Have Republican leaders consciously decided to abandon the socialist Republic?"

The book which, it is claimed, "contributes to our understanding of both the nature and purpose of Irish Republicanism" is compiled from interviews with six male Republicans, all former activists with the Provisional movement and ex-prisoners. Some of the views are conflicting, particularly on the issue of the peace process and the GFA. The editors attempted to have an even wider spectrum of Republican thinking but several contributors "felt it neces-

sary to decline or withdraw contributions already made ... because of external pressure exerted by the Republican movement. Potential contributors who were very supportive of the current 'mainstream' Republican leadership position withdrew because they were urged not to be associated with a 'dissident' position or give credibility to critical discussion."

The contributors try to evaluate, through their experiences of the past thirty-two years, where Republicanism is now and while these are obviously genuine attempts at analysing the movement they were such an integral part of, their comments display both the crisis and confusion of Republican thought at this time. The questions which Bernadette McAliskey posed are certainly addressed but cannot be fully answered inside the parameters of Republicanism.

The essential problem with the philosophy of Republicanism is that it was developed at a time of capitalist expansion and in the colonial countries it became the ideology of a native bourgeoisie fighting for political and economic independence in order to develop an indigenous industrial base. But the economic development in imperialism produced very explicit limitations on national movements and more and more ensured that the bourgeois (and petty bourgeois) leaderships had no independent role to play outside the dictates of imperialism.

McAliskey puts her finger on the problem. "Here lies the unspoken truth of the tension within Republicanism - it is not a working class ideology based on socio-economic analysis. It is essentially a bourgeois democratic and liberal philosophy arguing for a particular political framework through which society functions." This is obviously correct but McAliskey runs up against a brick

wall in her thinking as she continues, "From a socialist perspective recognising it for what it is doesn't make it a bad idea."

This displays the woolly thinking and confusion of Republicanism. Bourgeois democratic philosophy is precisely a "bad idea" when posed as the answer to the problems of the working class. I'm sure that Bernadette McAliskey doesn't actually believe that the ideology of the ruling class should not be challenged. What her comments reflect is the belief that the partition of Ireland can be achieved separate from the fight for socialism.

The book is particularly rich in its accounts of how the contributors were drawn into membership of the IRA. The little snapshots of family history and events give a flavour of the turmoil that existed in nationalist areas where they were convinced they were taking part in an insurrection. But there is a consistent tendency to play down the battle for ideas. They are adamant that "the Republican movement drew its initial legitimacy from the streets" and that, "Contemporary Republicanism was/is far more a product of the repression and sectarianism perpetrated by the Stormont regime and Unionism's inability to reform itself."

Undoubtedly these were the factors that brought the youth in the working-class areas of the north into the conflict but the manner in which the war was conducted was connected to the dominant political ideology of the leadership which had been won over a long period of struggles and splits. It is this absence of an examination of the ideological struggles inside (and outside) Republicanism that is the biggest weakness of the book. One of the contributors, Brendan Hughes, calls for a realignment of forces "if the Orange state is ever going to be smashed" and suggests the "help of ordinary people,

progressive socialists, working class politicians, progressive Protestant working class politicians, communist working class politicians, any sort of people with a genuine interest in the working class."

But this necessary realignment cannot succeed without an attempt to understand and draw lessons from all previous attempts to take the main political demands of Republicanism and forge them with a working-class programme and movement. In particular, of course, there was the struggle of the group around James Connolly's son, Roddy, to give independent working-class leadership and the experiences of the Republican Congress and the fight for the demand of the Workers Republic.

But there is also a need to look at the more recent, if limited, attempts to critically examine the political orientation of the Republican leadership which some of the contributors to this book were involved with, especially the issues which were raised in the book, 'Questions of History', written by Republican prisoners in Long Kesh in 1987. 'Republican Voices' refers to this book, which Sinn Fein was forced to publish after initially attempting to suppress it, but there is no mention of the political points raised in it.

The Sinn Fein leadership was particularly upset that there was a criticism of the 'stages' theory in the book by the Long Kesh prisoners. This important theoretical issue needs to be revisited as it is precisely on this point that the GFA agreement is being sold - socialism has to be put on the back burner while all sorts of anti-working class forces are united in a pan-nationalist front.

The debate within Republicanism is still relatively muted but, despite all its limitations, 'Republican Voices' is a necessary and welcome contribution to the fight for a realignment of working-class forces.

WIRFI statement on recent developments in the Socialist Alliance in Britain

Towards a working class

MEMBERS of the Workers International (British Section) joined the Socialist Alliance when it was established in London in 1999. It had already existed for two years before that, mainly in the Midlands and Manchester and we had sent representatives to its conferences.

When, in 1996, the Labour Party finally ditched all reference to socialist policies by deleting Clause Four of its constitution (the common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange) miners' leader Arthur Scargill announced that he would found a new party. The Socialist Party (SP - previously Militant Labour) proposed to him that before launching a party there should be an alliance of socialist groups, trade union bodies and campaigns conducting a discussion throughout the working class about the need for such a party.

Scargill rejected this and founded, with others, the Socialist Labour Party (SLP). This is now a shell, with financial resources and only a handful of members. Hundreds were expelled when they came into opposition to Scargill's politics and bureaucratic methods.

Meanwhile the SA was founded by the SP with other groups and individuals. Its purpose was to develop a non-sectarian organisation that could encompass and reach out to workers and their allies, breaking from the Labour Party, to launch a widespread discussion about the history and future of the working class and to stand candidates in elections.

The big development in interest and membership came when the SA fielded candidates in the general election in June 2001. Taken together with the SLP, Scottish Socialist Party and the Welsh SA these alternative socialist candidates won over 185,000 votes.

However, although there is a need for a new party which is fundamentally different not only from "new" (Blairite) Labour, but from "old" social democratic Labour, the SA fought the election largely with "safe" generally agreed anti-capitalist, left social democratic policies. For it is a hybrid organisation, comprised of a number of socialist groups and individuals with fundamental differences on important questions such as internationalism, terrorism, the nature of imperialism, rights of self-determination, the "peace process" in Ireland, Palestine and Israel, the class character of the Labour Party and others.

In a number of cases the SA's parliamentary candidates were not members of any of the organised groups, but leaders in their own right - in local trade unions, community campaigns and the civil rights movement. Their decision to be part of the SA was a sign of the growing anger of masses of people who had thought that the election of a Labour govern-



"They (the Liverpool dockers) know how to organise, centralise and unite workers in struggle. We cannot conceive of a new party without them". (Left) Supporters of the sacked Liverpool dockworkers march through the city

ment in 1997 meant an end to Tory policies.

At its highest point this movement is represented by those organised in trade unions and community campaigns. At its base there are millions of workers, many of whom are black and the butt of racism, trying to survive on social security and in low-paid casual jobs. These millions express their growing anger at politicians and state bureaucracy by refusing to vote.

However, instead of the SA taking forward the developments made in the general election campaign by having a broad and open national political conference drawing in organised workers and publishing a verbatim report of its proceedings to take the discussion out far and wide, it turned in on itself with a national structure conference where politics were barred. This "no politics" decision was even more surprising considering that the gathering took place in the middle of the Afghan war "against terrorism"!

There are many views within the SA as to what kind of organisation it should be. Some believe that it should be simply an electoral alliance. Others, including the WIRFI, think it should be a federation of groups and individuals opening up a wide discussion towards founding a new socialist party, and others believe that it should immediately become a centralised party with its own newspaper and with rights for minorities.

What the conference agreed was a constitution which centralises the organisation with a slate system of electing the national executive and a national council comprised of the na-

tional executive plus a delegate from each branch and regional body. In practice the SA has been reduced to an electoral front for the Socialist Workers Party (SWP). Even though they have only three members on the national executive they control the majority of branches and regional bodies.

When the SWP joined the SA in 2000, it was like a "cuckoo in the nest". For the SWP maintains that it is *already* the party of the working class. Anxious to keep everybody on board, and to try to avoid a power struggle the other main groups (Socialist Party — SP, International Socialist Group - ISG, Workers Power - WP, Communist Party of Great Britain - CPGB, Alliance for Workers Liberty - AWL) simply turned a blind eye to this SWP view of itself. In reality all of them share the same view either that they are already *the* party or that the main aim is to "unite the left".

In a well-publicised report presented to a recent SWP conference, the SA is listed along with Defend Council Housing, Stop the War Coalition, Anti-Nazi League and Globalised Resistance as the five faces of its so-called united front tactic.

Moves of the SWP to tailor the organisation to suit their own purposes came early on. When they could not get a decision through an SA conference for an executive committee instead of the very open liaison body that then existed, they got their own way by turning up to the following meeting of the liaison body with enough of their members to push through a resolution for a small executive committee of the liaison body,

including their own proposed slate of who would comprise this new body.

They and their supporters claimed that this was a necessary move to "centralise and streamline" the organisation, but such bureaucratic manoeuvres avoid the real life of a movement, coming into being breaking with the old and giving birth to the new. Such a movement is necessarily uncontrolled, uneven, confused and contradictory. The "left" sectarians are uncomfortable if they cannot control things.

The SP members walked out of the national structure conference when the SWP refused to agree an amendment limiting the number of members from any one group on the leadership committee. Since the SA is not now the type of open federal organisation they helped to found, the action of the SP is understandable. However they also start from a belief that they are already the party of the working class.

A number of campaigns, small groups and individuals are now also discussing their response to this new situation in the SA and we are part of that discussion. **But any attempt to try to overcome the situation with organisational solutions cannot deal with the main problem. For it is the working class as a whole that faces the necessity to build its own new party.**

In the main resolution of the third congress (June 1999) of Workers International (WI) we set out our conception of the kind of party we should all be working to build:

"The most important attribute of a genuinely working-class party is, of course, the fact that it is based

and arises, not automatically but naturally and mostly, from the struggles of the working class itself. The workers' party is the party of the vanguard of the class, that is to say it assembles, unites and centralises the best leaders and organisers of the fighting working class. Without this vanguard there can be no workers' party. A party which comes into existence outside of those workers who organise and lead the workers' struggles is not a genuine workers' party. Even less so if it turns its back on these fights and has a life somehow parallel but outside of them, bringing together a party of those who come from or represent this or that organisation or group."

We believe that it is the existence of the SA "outside of those workers who organise and lead workers' struggles" that is the real problem. A clear example of this separation came when "the left" groups formed the London Socialist Alliance (LSA) to stand candidates in the Greater London Assembly elections in 2000 and for the first time the SWP joined in.

An initial test came when the London Regional Council of the RMT union, representing London Underground workers decided to stand 11 of its members as Campaign Against Tube Privatisation candidates. The leaders of the Regional Council are socialists with long experience in the movement and their candidates were a full-time official, the chair and secretary of the Regional Council, branch officers and health and safety representatives.

The LSA steering committee refused to back them. Only the SP and the WI supported them, but subsequently the SP withdrew its support

genuinely ass party

(a mistaken opportunist decision to maintain its place in the LSA.)

The election campaign was preceded by a big upheaval inside the London Labour Party and the trade unions with reverberations throughout the country. New Labour refused to support Ken Livingstone as the party's mayoral candidate, because he would not support their proposed privatisation of London Underground. Finally he stood as an independent and was expelled. Many Labour Party members tore up their membership cards; others refused to work for the party in the election campaign and instead supported Livingstone.

If Livingstone had intended to develop working-class struggle, he would have supported the tube workers. If he had called for the founding of a new socialist party there would have been a mass exodus from the Labour Party into it. Workers campaigning for the disaffiliation of their unions from the Labour Party would have been strengthened. But Livingstone is an individualist tied to social democracy. He called for a vote for him as mayor and for Labour Party candidates for the Assembly.

It was therefore particularly important that the RMT London Regional Council did not accept Livingstone's advice. They campaigned in the election independently against tube privatisation. They were supported by the vast majority of their 8,000 tube-worker members.

This should have been seen by the SA as an important indication of workers breaking from the Labour party. Instead of standing candidates against the tube workers, they should have entered the campaign under the tube workers' leadership.

Instead they scornfully pointed the finger at these workers, saying that theirs was only a single-issue campaign. But what a single-issue! Privatisation is at the heart of workers' struggles and their break from the Labour Party which ditched Clause Four.

The petty bourgeois character of the LSA can be seen from this refusal to accept that there is anything to learn from the organised working class - the most important element to turn to and give confidence to the mass of workers in the fight to establish their independence. How can we possibly have a new working-class party without such worker-leaders?

In the Wyre Forest constituency Dr Richard Taylor, who, although not a socialist, had led a mass campaign to defend Kidderminster hospital against closure and privatisation, stood as an independent in the general election. Thousands of people flocked to vote for him. He received 28,487 votes, defeating the former Labour MP by 17,630. But when he asked the leadership of the striking workers at nearby Dudley Hospital to assist his campaign, the SWP sec-



"The 'no politics' ruling at the structure conference was even more surprising considering that the gathering took place in the middle of the Afghan war 'against terrorism'!"
(Left) Anti-war demonstrators flooded Trafalgar Square during the massive rally on 18 November 2001

retary of the union branch, supported by the SA, refused saying that Taylor was standing only on a single issue. Again, what a single issue!

Unfortunately we can only imagine the importance of the Dudley trade union picket lines going as an organised force among working-class communities in neighbouring Wyre Forest.

Look at the way Frederick Engels approached matters. In 1868 Engels was enthusiastic when Henry George of the Independent Labour Party polled 68,110 votes in the election for mayor of New York. This was one third of the total and beat the Republican, Theodore Roosevelt by almost 8,000 votes. Engels' main consideration was not that George was a "single taxer", believing that the evils of capitalist production would disappear if ground rent was transformed into a state tax! No! Engels wrote:

"The first great step of importance for every country newly entering into the movement is always the organisation of the workers as an independent political party, no matter how, as long as it is a distinct workers' party . . . The masses must have time and opportunity to develop and they can only have that opportunity when they have their own movement, no matter in what form so long as it is *their own* movement, in which they are driven further by their own mistakes and learn wisdom by hurting themselves." (emphasis in the original.)

(Letter 209, 29 November 1886 - Marx and Engels Correspondence: Lawrence and Wishart, 1934)

What we see in the SA is the continuing battle against sectarianism, and leading workers know this. Al-

though many have broken with the Labour Party they will not join the SA because they know from bitter experience that most of "the left" will only support the campaigns they can control, and once "the left" groups consider a workers' struggle is over they move on to other things.

In this connection the sacked Liverpool dockers leap to mind. There can be no doubt about the importance of their leadership and the lessons of the international campaign - central to their 28-month dispute - which went far beyond work of a merely trade union kind.

They know how to organise, centralise and unite workers in struggle. We cannot conceive of a new party without them.

Since the end of their dispute, they have taken important steps forward. Among other things, building on their international work, they have played a prominent part in establishing an international committee of dockworkers, opened an international centre in Liverpool with facilities for educational courses and meetings and they are central to the monthly workers' newspaper *UNITE!* largely based on the newspaper of their dispute the *Dockers Charter*.

The "streamlining" decisions of the national structure conference further strengthen the tendency of the SA to have "a life somehow parallel but outside of [workers' struggles], bringing together a party of those who come from or represent this or that organisation or group".

Nevertheless as the break with the Labour Party develops, many workers are studying the political scene. They must find answers to their life's problems. Questions arise: what is

the relationship between the working class and "the left"; why aren't all the groups in the same party?

The answers lie in the historic struggles over principles in the Second, Third and Fourth Internationals - struggles which arose when workers were seeking answers as they entered into a fight in previous

periods. Today is no exception.

Discussion and actions are also going on independently of the decisions of the SA national structure conference and not under its control. Our aim is to take developments forward, both inside and outside the SA, towards a genuinely working class-party.

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Comments on statements about 11 September 2001

A missed opportunity

I have read the WIP statement on the war against Afghanistan, which from a worker's point of view does not clarify matters at all, and I feel it is another missed opportunity in differentiating the Workers International from the rest of the left.

My reason for saying so is that it leaves unanswered many of the questions that people are asking in conversations throughout communities, factories and pubs.

1. The visual impact of 7,000 people being destroyed at the World Trade Centre, the feelings of horror and grief for those who died, and the sufferings of their families, relatives and friends is not mentioned. Only 'the attacks on the World Trade Centre'. The omission is a callous disregard for the impact this has had on people's consciousness, and the resulting support for pro-Imperialist leaders throughout the world.

Nothing is said about the traumatic deaths of the hostages on the planes deliberately crashed into the buildings, or the 'terrorists' who gave their lives in the suicide attack, or reasons why they did so.

2. No mention is made of Osama Bin Laden whose terrorist organisation is based on religious fanaticism, or the Taliban who terrorise the Afghan people with their draconian interpretation of the Koran.

There is no condemnation or explanation of these terrorist acts. Are we for Bin Laden and the Taliban or against them?

Nothing is said about the reac-

tionary and bankrupt nature of terrorism, nor do we differentiate between the terrorist acts of imperialism and those of the oppressed fighting against their own ruling class.

3. We say nothing about the attacks of imperialism on Afghanistan, our position on the Taliban or the Northern Alliance. Do we support them or call for their downfall?

4. We say nothing about the relationship between imperialism, the training of Bin Laden's fanatical terrorists, and the Taliban, who suppress the basic and democratic rights of the Afghan people. Should Bin Laden be brought to justice for this atrocity, and if so, by whom?

5. What do we say to the Afghan people about starvation, poverty and the denial of basic human rights? How can they resolve their problems, i.e. overthrow the Taliban and install another religious regime?

6. What do we say to the thousands who have lost their jobs and livelihoods because of the bombing of the World Trade Centre? What do we say to the thousands of workers and their families who have cancelled their holidays (their one break in the grind of exploitation) because they are afraid to fly.

These are only some of the issues raised as I watch the developments since 11 September (my 36th wedding anniversary) which I will never forget.

It seems to me that when writ-

ing our statement, we have not started from the premise of the need to raise workers' consciousness by clarifying and explaining the issues raised by the bombing of the World Trade Centre and the resulting bombing of Afghanistan.

How can we 'turn to the working class in each country and internationally to evoke an anti-war movement with real muscle' without addressing the issues from the standpoint of how the working class perceive them?

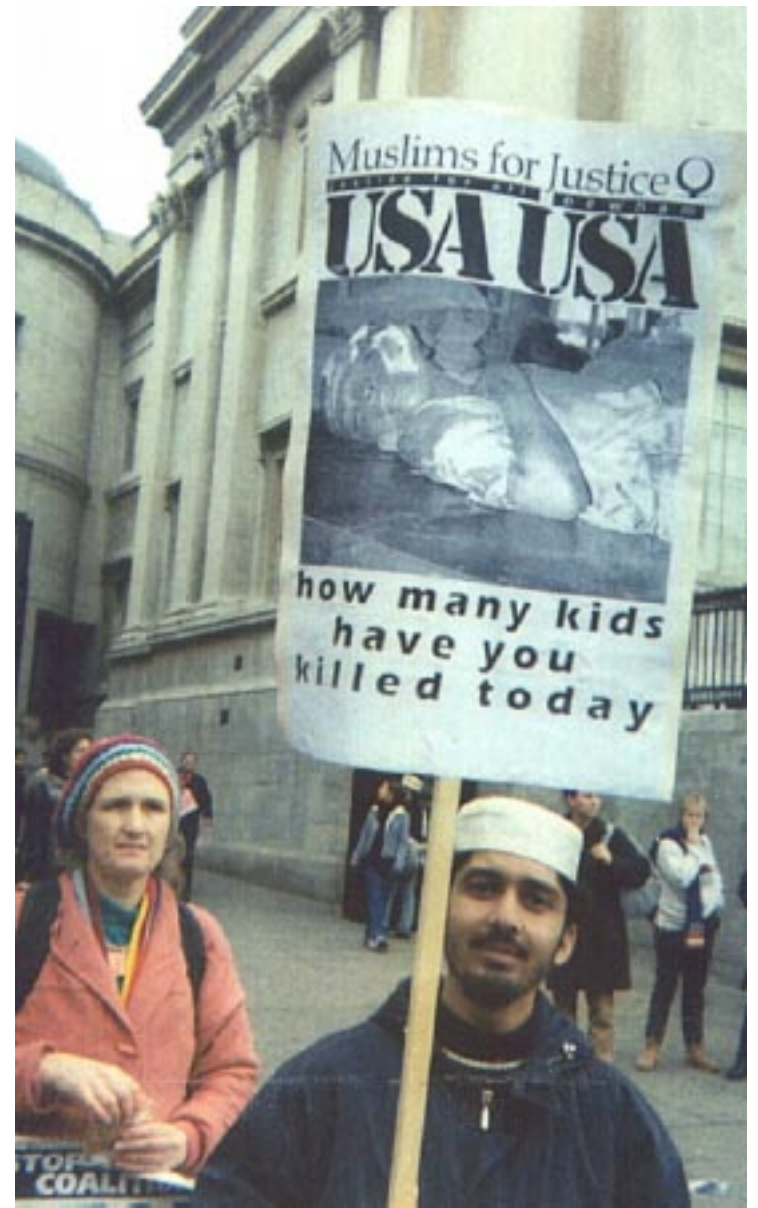
I feel the last six paragraphs are weak in explanation and substance, written in 'Trotskyist' style, which most working people would not understand.

In conclusion, our statement does nothing to encourage people in Britain, Europe, America and elsewhere to stop supporting their capitalist and imperialist leaders from continuing the war against Afghanistan.

We must use our propaganda to intervene now, to clarify issues and raise awareness of who are the real enemies (and friends) of workers, oppressed and dispossessed. To break them from their leaders - capitalist, reformist, trade unionist and religious - who keep them down-trodden and exploited.

I hope my contribution is not merely seen as a criticism of a small group of dedicated, overworked comrades, who I admire, but a different approach on how to reach those activists that will be thrown up in the coming months.

Jim Bevan



Over 50,00 marched through London on 18 November to demand an end to the bombing of Afghanistan. They included powerful contingents of Muslims living in Britain as well as trade unionists, socialist groups and peace campaigners

Bloated self-assurance swiftly deflated

I agree with the principles espoused in the document 'Now we must stop Bush's war against the peoples', by the LIT-CI.

However, my problem is one of the assessment of the imperialist response to 11 September. For one, Afghanistan is only a smoke-screen.

USA imperialism reflected in its larger-than-life heroism has been dealt a massive blow. This is not the first one against its arrogance and sponsored assassinations.

After the Gulf War, in the wake of

the collapse of Stalinism, its bloated self-assurance as the now undisputed king of the west and the policeman of the world was quickly deflated when it invaded Somalia.

The accompanying racism also received a serious blow when this supposedly primitive black nation made rubbish of its video-game military technology by interfering with their electronics and redirecting their bombs to US and UN camps.

The US people - the working class in particular - is being awak-

ened out of a drugged existence.

They are forced to contemplate the causes of the terrible events of 11 September. They are forced by the dual response of the imperialists by job-loss and the raining of bombs on Afghanistan.

The imperialists cannot and do not feel at ease, because the inevitable mass upsurge weakens their collaborationist bourgeois regimes in the middle east and the mass response in western Europe and the USA coincide with the inevitable

attacks on jobs.

The American masses after all stopped the war in Vietnam in conjunction with the Vietnam revolution.

Even fundamentalism in the long run will not benefit, because in any mass upswell against imperialism the masses stake their claim and weaken reaction.

What I am essentially trying to say, is that the chain of events does not enforce imperialism's strength, but in the minds of most people in-

cluding the Americans, the USA's invulnerability can be no more.

Imperialism can no longer attain the same stature as when Britannia ruled the waves.

In the back of each one's mind is the knowledge that the root causes of 11 September lies in Palestine where with bitter regularity a mother and father bend over the lifeless body of an 18 month-old baby.

Hewat Beukes
WRP, Namibia

Trotsky speeches newly reprinted

Europe and America: two speeches on imperialism, published by Workers International to Rebuild the Fourth International

THE TWO speeches reproduced in this pamphlet were delivered in 1924 and 1926. They present a vivid early anticipation of many features of what today is called 'globalisation', which in reality is the extension and deepening of the crisis of imperialist society.

Trotsky understood the central fact that the United States of America had emerged from World War I as the strongest imperialist power because of her massive industrial capacity. But he anticipated a significant feature of her hegemony: that it was exercised above all by finance capital.

Trotsky saw that the relationship

of forces between the United States and Europe was not one of equals. On her way to world dominion, the US would have to deal with the outgoing dominant world power, Britain, and 'put Europe on rations', propping up European capital and at the same time closely circumscribing its spheres of activity.

Trotsky knew how the United States, as the late-comer to world dominion, could cloak every act of banditry with phrases about liberation and excuse every war with a pacifist slogan.

And he analysed unforgettably how Europe's social democrats become the 'missionaries' for Americanisation, laying bare the basic trends underlying this process over 70 years before Tony Blair became the chief apologist for George W.

Bush's 'war on terrorism'.

Trotsky understood the United States' drive to expand in China, interrupted for forty years by the Chinese revolution.

But above all Trotsky posed the question: does a capitalist world order based on American hegemony offer the possibility of 'developing the productive forces on a world scale and of leading mankind forward?' (page 39).

He points out: 'We live under conditions of world economy'. Europe is dependent on America, but that implies that America is vulnerable to problems arising in Europe and the rest of the world.

America accumulates masses of capital, but this in turn demands fruitful investment opportunities. America is compelled either to sit on

her great wealth or invest abroad, creating industries whose products will compete with America's own. And the very fact of such investments in Asia, South America and Africa call forth great social upheavals which in turn have a direct impact on Wall Street.

Thus American capital itself is the source of the greatest drive to war. As Trotsky says: 'The American "pacifist" programme of putting the whole world under her control is not at all a programme of peace. On the contrary it is pregnant with wars and the greatest revolutionary paroxysms'. (P.19)

With the re-publication of these speeches, Workers International intends to initiate a series of pamphlets discussing basic questions of Marxism and the workers' movement.

Europe and America

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An American reader writes

Demonstrate the feasibility of socialism to workers

The article by Bob Archer in the Oct. 2001 issue of Workers International Press, "Imperialist Crisis and the Working Class" is excellent at explaining the current degenerated state of the capitalist system.

What I wish that

Bob Archer would do is explain exactly how the socialist organization of society is the correct evolutionary solution to the current problems arising from the hegemony of capitalist economies in the period of imperialism.

To win working people to the cause of socialism, more than just pointing out the barbaric state of affairs of the status quo needs to be done.

It is also necessary to show what to replace capitalism with and to

demonstrate its feasibility. Given the severe reversals of the gains of the Bolshevik revolution, the path that the Chinese revolution has travelled and the travesties that have occurred in the name of socialism such as the poli-

cies of Stalin and the Pol Pot regime in Cambodia, it is understandable that many working people will view the call for a socialist revolution with skepticism.

In Solidarity,

Peter Lehmann

The real world reveals its necessity more than ever

PETER LEHMANN is right when he says that Stalin, China, Pol Pot, etc have created great problems and undermined working-class confidence in socialism. Many Marxists, too, have lost confidence in recent years. If we do not take this into account, we will not be able to make the progress which has been made possible by the collapse of Stalinism, the degeneration in so-called socialist parties around the world, and the deepening economic and social crisis.

However, socialism is not a utopia which may or may not be established depending on how well we socialists argue for this or that blueprint. The establishment of socialism is the necessary next step for the human race because of the productive forces and productive relations which have developed in capitalist society itself.

Socialism is also contained in the way the working class organizes itself, what it fights for and what it has fought for and achieved.

Capitalism has enhanced to an enormous extent the social nature of production. This, incidentally, is the powerful and progressive side of 'globalisation'.

These production processes are nowadays organized by huge capitalist companies (trusts, combines, concerns, multinationals) which have been much criticized recently because their actions have been seen to be in many ways contrary to the interests of human beings and the environment in which they have to try to live.

The reason for this is not the size or power of the companies themselves, but the capitalist social relations they enshrine.

On the basis of the productive forces developed within capitalism, workers in the West and in the former USSR and in Eastern Europe were able to achieve certain gains which were moves towards socialism and which created better conditions of life. These were education, the health service, water supply, electric and gas power, transport, social housing, etc. All of these social gains, which many

Bob Archer replies

people came to believe existed automatically as a right, depended on multi-national companies, automobile manufacturers, construction firms, pharmaceuticals, petroleum, papermaking, publishing, etc

And of course workers in the West could enjoy these things because the bourgeoisie used its military domination to exploit colonies economically.

Ultimately, the gains in the former Soviet Union could not be defended and developed while it was part of a capitalist world. In fact, as time went on the Soviet Union and all the countries of the so-called Eastern bloc relied on loans from the World Bank. Nor can the working class in the West defend and develop its gains while they exist within a production for profit system.

So although we are now faced with the problems of overcoming loss of confidence in socialism, the real world reveals its necessity more than ever.

The social gains are now being destroyed - privatized - as the multinational companies on which these services depend for their day-to-day existence are now taking them over.

The question for all the anti-privatisation campaigns is: do we extend the social services by taking over the capitalist companies, or do the capitalist companies take over our services!

The necessity for socialism therefore is revealed both in the way capitalist production is 'globalised' and in the way the working class is forced to fight back.

So socialism must be created in advance of its actuality in the way the working class organizes itself — in its internationalism

This was and is the first and most important question.

The establishment of the First International was born out of practical necessity: workers were being pitted against each other.

That International was also estab-

lished in opposition to utopians who saw socialism as an ideal outside and above the class struggle. But to remove 'socialism' from the way way workers organize themselves for struggle against the enemy is to make it into a religion.

The anarchy, destruction, inhumanity, repression, wars, disease and starvation which capitalist states and capitalist enterprises unleash upon the world are an expression of the drive for private profit on the part of capital, which itself becomes a mighty social forces driving and directing the activities of human beings.

This was why Marx concluded (very early on in his life) that the social nature of production could only be fully expressed if private property was expropriated. In a passage in "The German Ideology" which still deserves careful study, he said:

'(1) In the development of productive forces there comes a stage when productive forces and means of intercourse are brought into being, which, under the existing relationships, only cause mischief and are no longer productive but destructive forces (machinery and money); and connected with this a class is called forth, which has to bear all the burdens of society without enjoying its advantages, which, ousted from society, is forced into the most decided antagonism to all other classes, a class which forms the majority of all members of society, and from which emanates the consciousness of the necessity of a fundamental revolution, the communist consciousness, which may, of course, arise among the other classes too through the contemplation of the situation of this class.

'(2) the conditions under which definite productive forces can be applied, are the conditions of the rule of a definite class of society, whose social power, deriving from its property, has its practical-idealistic ex-

pression in each case in the form of the State; and, therefore, every revolutionary struggle is directed against a class, which till then has been in power'.

(Karl Marx, 'The German Ideology', Lawrence & Wishart, London, 1965, p.85.)

The phrase 'a class ... from which emanates the consciousness of the necessity of a fundamental revolution' deserves a great deal of consideration. Pondering this point (and correctly pointing out that such consciousness did not arise merely from workers generalizing their experience at the point of production), Lenin added that while the working class gravitated towards socialism, the ruling class worked might and main to counteract that natural tendency.

In order to achieve the necessary clarity and strength to carry out the revolution, the working class has to endow itself with its own political party.

However, this is the point which is most often misunderstood by Marxists and would-be Leninists.

They think that the job is to find a way of explaining the process to workers in a didactic way.

The besetting error of the 'Marxists' today is to try to organize the Marxist movement separately from workers in struggle and then proselytise in the working class.

It is quite true that Stalinism in all its different forms, including Maoism and Pol Pot, committed dreadful crimes and did enormous damage to the working class and the socialist movement.

Certainly it corrupted Marxism, lied about theoretical matters and pushed forward political view opposed to the interests of the working class.

But the worst crime of Stalinism was to bring socialism into disrepute as a viable future, and that was tied up with a concerted attempt to liquidate the movement of the working

class. That is also what is involved in the turn everywhere by formerly nominally socialist parties to the most right-wing, pro-capitalist outlook.

And it is the same development which informs the ever-closer collaboration of most trade-union leaders with the bourgeois state.

To create conditions for a rebirth of Marxism in the working class, Marxists today must devote every possible resource to re-building the class organizations of workers.

This is not a question of leaving your Marxism in your pocket when you go into a discussion with workers, a trade union meeting, a group struggling for civil rights, or an anti-war rally.

On the contrary, Marxism will prove itself and gain respect to the extent that it provides people and organizations with a correct way forward and concrete actions which develop them, with always the need expressed to evoke practical organization and action by the oppressed and exploited as much as possible.

And Marxists will not be able to do this unless they study in the closest possible detail the forces that bear on people's political development in this situation. They must learn to understand what Trotsky called 'molecular developments', apparently tiny changes in the way people think and their ability to act.

And socialism become a truly living question today when the same companies employ workers all over the world at vastly different rates of wages and of exploitation, where such a thing as the so-called 'Third World' can exist in which millions live under vastly different conditions from the so-called 'First World'.

It becomes a vital question when people fleeing war, poverty and repression set sail across the Timor Sea in cockle-shell open boats, storm the entrance to the rail-tunnel into the UK or try to break through the US border. Under these conditions an international organization of militant workers has become an absolute necessity and the main responsibility of Marxist today is to help one to come into being.

A reply to Charlie Pottins by Bronwen Handyside

The War Crimes Tribunal IS a travesty of justice

IN HIS criticism of Radoslav Pavlovic's article on Milosevic's appearance before the Hague War Crimes Tribunal (Workers International Press July/August 2001) Charlie asks us, (Workers International Press October 2001):

"Surely, instead of denouncing the tribunal as a 'travesty' before the star enters the dock, we must demand it does a thorough job?"

But surely the first duty of a Marxist is to identify the class enemy loudly, continuously and uncompromisingly, especially when that class enemy has a long and putrid heritage of whitewashes and cover-ups in its efforts to deceive the working class over its responsibilities for world carnage.

Surely we must not collude in yet another attempt at a cover-up of imperialism's crimes by saying to the world: "let's wait and see how it turns out. It may not be so bad after all".

Bill Hunter's article on the Nuremberg trials, originally published in the Trotskyist paper Socialist Appeal (April 1946) shows how to write about the role of imperialism. It begins:

"At Nuremberg the Nazi gangsters are in the dock as a sacrificial offering for the crimes of world capitalism. The trial is being staged to pretend that only the German imperialists were responsible for the war. Yet in spite of all precautions, the truth is leaking out that all the major capitalist powers bear equal responsibility for the devastation of the world."

Half a century later, the imperialists throw their former protégée, Milosevic, to the wolves to ensure that he and a few others around him will now carry the can for the policies pursued by the imperialist nations throughout the course of the Balkans war.

Key to the ongoing struggle of the working class is an understanding of the class nature of the forces they confront. Whatever the intentions of individuals working in the War Crimes Tribunal, the fundamental premise on which it is based is a filthy travesty of justice. How can those who colluded with the war criminals at every stage of the war have the right to judge the agents with whom they colluded?

As Charlie knows, the imperialist nations who set up the Tribunal started with silent complicity in Milosevic's ethnic cleansing and moved on to active collusion with the imposition of the arms embargo at the beginning of the Bosnian war. The jackals of European politics proceeded over three years, as Radoslav Pavlovic points out in detail, to divide and re-divide Bosnia in line with Serb army victories on the ground.

They imposed the Dayton Agreement, which handed half of Bosnia to the war criminals, and continues day by day and actively to reinforce those divisions. Incidentally the one part of Bosnia where the conditions of the Dayton agreement relating to the return of refugees, and the handing over of war criminals is not enforced is Republika Srpska.

The divisions are imposed in the interests of the world bourgeoisie (led by the US) to weaken the working class and make it easier to impose the capitalist restoration which

is providing rich pickings for foreign exploiters.

As Radoslav Pavlovic points out, Bosnia-Herzegovina is under the control of imperialist-imposed rulers.

Just one small example of this is that last year the Office of the High Representative of the United Nations in Bosnia approved the process whereby a major state owned company, Aluminij Mostar, located on territory controlled by the Croatian army, was privatised by blatant fraud into the hands of Croatian nationalists, making it an easy target for foreign buyers.

The factory management during and after the war dismissed almost all Serb and Bosniak workers (the majority), while rewarding Croat employees with shares. The firm then changed its capital structure to reduce the value of the state-owned part, handing effective control to a dramatically increased private component dominated by Croatian nationalist political structures in West Mostar.

The very existence of the War Crimes Tribunal usurps yet another fundamental sovereign right of peoples of the Balkans, the right to try criminals who have committed crimes in their own territory in their own properly constituted and legally recognised courts. It is yet another declaration that their state does not belong to them, that they have been deprived of the right to decide their own destiny. Why are they being insulted in this way? Because they came under attack by genocidal war criminals implicitly and explicitly supported by the imperialist nations.

Charlie is right to say there can't be anything other than "victor's justice". But there are victors and victors, as he well knows, and as Bill Hunter's explains in his piece on Nuremberg:

"The working class, when it comes to power, will put all the criminals in the dock when they examine the archives. The secret negotiations and schemes, the plots and counter plots whereby world diplomacy is carried on will all be revealed pitilessly, as were the secret negotiations which were made public by the Bolsheviks under Lenin in 1917."

This is the justice demanded by the Women of Srebrenica when they say they want to know the truth about Srebrenica - and that ALL those involved must be put in the dock. Is Charlie saying that we accept bourgeois "victor's justice" and do not point out how it is inadequate?

Hunter shows in his article on the Nuremberg trials how evidence of collaboration between the European ruling class, the Soviet Bureaucracy and the Nazis was vigorously suppressed.

In the same way publicity around the few figures dragged in front of the War Crimes Tribunal is pushed to the forefront while other more significant inquiries are taking place. Charlie points out that one of the Serb generals responsible for the Srebrenica massacre has been jailed by the Hague Tribunal. But at the very same time that General Krstic's (and Dragan Obrenovic's) trial was taking place, and publicised in the world's media, little attention was paid (I saw no reports in the UK



The Workers Aid for Bosnia banner at the Durham Miners' Gala in 1994. We didn't wait for bourgeois organisations to re-establish the unity of the working class

press) to the French parliamentary inquiry, set up to investigate the role played by Benard Janvier, the French general in command of United Nations forces in Bosnia at the time of the fall of Srebrenica.

A few weeks before Serb nationalist forces under General Ratko Mladic seized the town, Janvier and Mladic held three meetings during which it is widely thought the French general guaranteed there would be no UN intervention at Srebrenica as long as hostage UnProFor troops (many of them French) were released.

When Mladic's troops attacked the town, Janvier refused a number of increasingly frantic pleas from the Dutch UN soldiers on the ground for air strikes.

He refused one request because, he said, it had been faxed on the wrong form.

The French set up the inquiry under pressure from several groups, including Medecins Sans Frontieres, which suspected that Janvier was acting on instructions from the highest echelons of the French government, probably former Prime Minister Alain Juppe. Juppe has appeared in front of the inquiry, and denied all involvement. But when Janvier gave evidence, the court went into closed session.

The lack of air strikes told Mladic that he was free to slaughter as many Muslims at Srebrenica as he liked. If Janvier agreed with him that there would be no air strikes then he should be in the dock, and perhaps this is why NATO forces in Bosnia show no signs of arresting him, or his fellow indicted war criminal, Karadzic.

A few points in conclusion: the headline given to Rade's article: "War Crimes Tribunal a travesty of justice" was not a mistake. Or is Charlie suggesting that the Tribunal will fully administer justice? From the points he makes in his letter about the Nuremberg trials, it would appear that he is not.

Radoslav and Workers International Press are not "complaining" (as Charlie implies) because Serb leaders are being prosecuted. But we are not fooled into thinking that those prosecutions mean that real justice will be done. We are not even

fooled into thinking that we should wait and see if justice will be done.

I don't understand why Charlie says (when Radoslav points out that Milosevic is as guilty of the Srebrenica massacre as Sharon is of those at Sabra and Chatila) "spare us the irony". There is no irony in that statement, it is simply a matter of fact.

No one in the Workers International has ever suggested that we don't make use of the bourgeois courts.

Finally: we cannot join in concealing the role of the imperialist nations from their victims. It is an essential part of the struggle to ensure they cease to be victims. We can be completely open about our politics when we work with those who still have illusions about the nature of imperialism (as all of us do on a daily basis), but we must never tell them that we are not quite sure ourselves and that we must wait and see how it pans out.

When Charlie says: "We must demand that it [the War Crimes Tribunal] does a thorough job" he im-

plies that perhaps it can - and thereby he is doing a thorough disservice to the working class.

Unless our understanding and identification of the class forces at work in the world is as clear as we can make it, how can we engage in revolutionary activity?

Workers Aid for Bosnia, for which Charlie salutes Radoslav's instrumental role, was set up on the basis that the European working class had to come to the aid of the Bosnian people.

We fought for the development of Workers Aid, even though we could see that many of the charitable aid organisations, including the United Nations, had far more resources than we, because we knew that the construction of that organisation would strengthen the working class.

We did not wait around to see whether bourgeois aid organisations or politicians might act in a way to strengthen the unity of the European working class. We were crystal clear from the outset that there is no way that they would, because of their class nature.

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