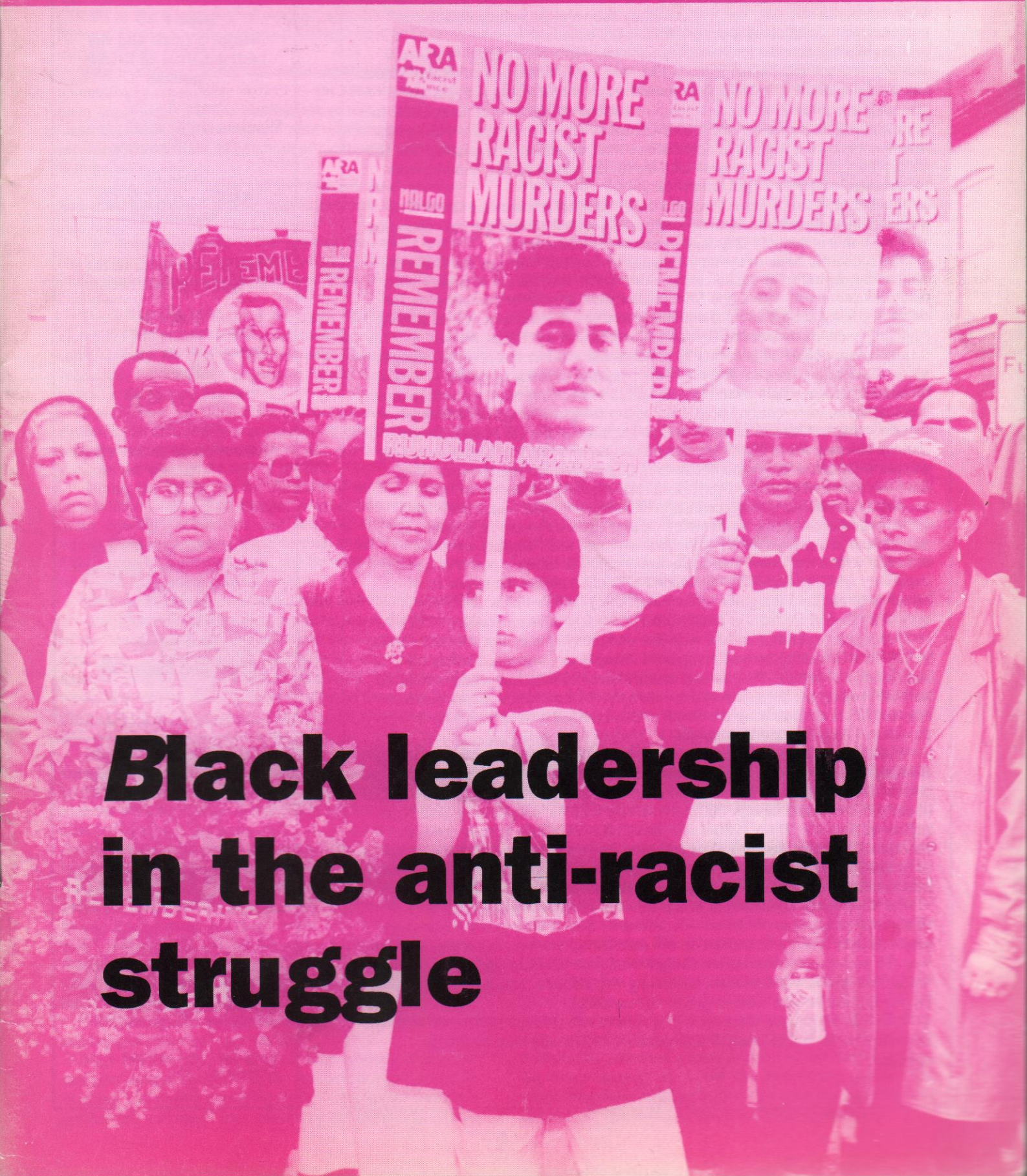


Socialist Action

Sept/Oct 1993 issue 5 50p

Review



Black leadership in the anti-racist struggle

Comment

Somalia — racism and the new colonialism

The despatch of 30,000 United States troops to Somalia at the end of last year was hailed by liberals as opening a new era of *humanitarian*, as opposed to *imperialist*, intervention. But it was rapidly shown to be a crude exercise in colonialism — with all of the racist abuses this entails.

A right wing essayist for *Time* magazine showed a better grasp of this new world order than left liberal journals like *New Statesman* when he wrote: 'Places like Somalia have to be handled in the old way. Not post-cold war, but again pre-cold war: given over in trusteeship to some great power willing and able to seize and rule it, as France once ruled Lebanon. Third world nations don't like that idea because it smacks of colonialism. And so it does. It is colonialism. But no one has come up with a better idea for saving countries like Somalia from themselves.' (Charles Krauthammer 26 July)

In the same vein of racist cynicism the *Economist* commented on the first massacre of civilians by UN troops by quoting with approval the old colonialist adage — 'this is the only language these people understand'.

The economic basis of the new colonialism is clear. Through the 1980s the US sucked capital from the so-called 'third world' into the US economy. As a result investment in Africa, the Middle East and Latin America frequently fell below the level needed even to maintain existing infrastructure. Africa's living standards were thrown back 30 years to the levels of the 1960s. As the infrastructure collapsed preventable diseases like cholera re-appeared, alongside social dislocation, famines and civil wars, causing millions of deaths — a new holocaust. Because such conditions de-stabilise client regimes, a return to direct, colonial-style, intervention became necessary to uphold imperialist interests.

According to General Alfred Gray, commander of the US Marine Corps: 'The underdeveloped world's growing dissatisfaction over the gap between the rich and poor nations will create a fertile breeding ground for insurgencies [that] have the potential to jeopardise regional stability and our access to vital economic and military resources.' Therefore if the United States is to 'have stability in these regions, maintain our access to their resources, protect our citizens abroad, defend our vital installations, and deter conflict we must maintain within our active force structure a credible military power projection capability with the flexibility to respond to conflict across the spectrum of violence throughout the globe.' ('Defence Policy for the 1990s', May 1990, quoted by Daniel Volman in *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 1993).

The biggest operation in line with this was the Gulf war. But a month earlier, in July 1990 Washington had set up a US Army group organised solely for intervention in Africa. That its first action should be in Somalia had nothing to do with feeding the hungry. Anyone who believes that should ask themselves why the US is not attacking the South African funded armies which have devastated Angola and Mozambique.

What matters to the US about Somalia is not the plight of its children but its strategic location in the Horn of Africa adjacent to the Middle East's oil supplies and the Indian Ocean. When the Ethiopian revolution ended US influence in that country, Washington rapidly built up relations with the neighboring Siad Barre regime in Somalia. From 1980 Barre provided the US with airbase and port facilities. Operation Restore Hope followed Barre's overthrow by the coalition of forces led by General Aideed — currently the US' bogeyman. The goal of US intervention is to create a new puppet regime in Somalia.

The ideological concomitant of this new colonialism is an officially sanctioned resurgence of racism — continually discovering new African states whose people 'cannot be trusted' to run their own countries. In a reversal of the way the post-war decolonisation struggles inspired the fight against racism worldwide, the new colonialism is creating a re-charged racism to justify its crimes against the non-white majority of humanity.

Today, as in the past, there is no progressive role for imperialist intervention anywhere in the world. The US-led operation in Somalia must be totally opposed.

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Socialist Action

**Building an alliance for
socialism**

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The welcome collapse of the *ERM*

The collapse of the European Exchange Rate Mechanism (ERM) at the beginning of August was the biggest step forward for the working class in western Europe since the middle of the 1970s.

West European Capital had come together around a completely reactionary project — the creation of a European super-state and the elimination of the welfare state. This was made possible by the new relationship of forces resulting from the re-introduction of capitalism into eastern Europe after 1989.

The Maastricht Treaty simply codified these goals and laid out a timescale for their implementation. Its first stage was the ERM.

The break-up of the ERM renders the whole project incoherent. Capital's united front to destroy the welfare state has been significantly disorganised. That is something to celebrate.

The ERM was brought down quite deliberately by the German bourgeoisie which would neither lower its interest rates, to help the rest of the European Community out of recession, nor continue to prop up those currencies under attack in the money markets.

The German capitalist class has shown that, since unification, it can dictate terms to western Europe. At present this means pursuing its domestic economic goals irrespective of the consequences for the rest of the EC.

During the 1980s the EC functioned on the basis of a simple deal — the ERM stopped weaker economies devaluing against the D-mark and harming German exports whilst Germany used its trade surplus to subsidise the EC. Unification brought that to an end because Germany could no longer afford the subsidy.

More fundamentally German capital understands that this is a unique and finite historical moment: to use the aftermath of unification to settle accounts with the German working class and, in particular, to eliminate the German welfare state, its relatively high wage levels and its shorter working week. Everything will be subordinated to these goals over the next two or three years, including the coherence of the EC.

This opportunity exists because unification, far from strengthening the German working class, as some on the left foolishly imagined, has completely undermined it. In the east the working class is demoralised by the shock of industrial collapse and unprecedented levels of unemployment. In the west the Social Democracy, the SPD, as at every great historical turning point, has left it bereft of leadership. First the SPD isolated the East German left by joining the campaign for unity. Then it accepted that this should be paid for by cutting the living standards of the west German working class. When this helped racism gain a base, it capitulated to the government's campaign to blame the asylum seekers and voted to exclude them. Now its goal is a grand coalition with the Christian Democrats.

German capital will let nothing stand in the way of seizing this historical opportunity.

High interest rates are needed, both to draw in funds to meet the costs of subsidies to the east, and to grind down the working class with unemployment. Government ministers predict this will reach four million by the beginning of next

year. On 11 August the cabinet endorsed the first stage of the attack on the welfare state with steadily deeper cuts until 1997. These include cutting unemployment, social security and child benefits, increasing taxes and freezing public sector pay. The government has also proposed re-establishing a 40 hour week and extending night, weekend and holiday working.

Once this has been carried through German capital will proceed to some form of EC monetary arrangements because it will not allow its exports to be undermined by competitive devaluations. But any such mechanisms will be even more directly and openly under German control than previously. Thus a week after the ERM fell Chancellor Kohl went on TV to say that monetary union might well be postponed for a couple of years, but the Maastricht criteria, particularly the ceiling on budget deficits and public debt, must be rigidly adhered to and, furthermore, any European Central Bank must be based in Frankfurt. In reality it would be merely an extension of the Bundesbank.

German hegemony will be reinforced by extending its sphere of influence into eastern Europe — starting with the Czech republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovenia, Croatia and the Baltic states.

The French idea that Germany would be controlled by a supra-national entity has collapsed — all such entities will be dominated by Germany. Furthermore other states resistance will be weakened by the division of their political establishments between pro- and anti-German currents.

At the same time, however, it will be far more difficult to sell this new shape of capitalist Europe to the labour movements of Italy, France, Britain and so on because it will mean joining a system openly controlled by Germany.

This new situation has the potential to renew and strengthen the left in Europe. The entire perspective of right wing social democracy — Euro-socialism — has been shattered. It was the most fervent champion of the ERM and Maastricht. Its politics raised unemployment in the EC to reach 10.6 per cent by June this year. Now, as a result of such policies, Euro-socialism is collapsing. In some countries, such as Italy, it may even disappear.

The Labour Party has been paralysed through the worst Tory crisis for 20 years because of its support for Maastricht. Neil Kinnock, then John Smith, backed to the hilt a policy that threw millions of people out of work and started the destruction of the welfare state. To carry through that policy the right-wing was prepared to break the trade union link and tacitly tell the Liberal Democrats that a deal on proportional representation was on offer — steps that would block the election of a Labour government for the foreseeable future, and create the conditions for an historic defeat of the labour movement. The demise of the ERM knocks out the lynch pin of that entire system of politics.

The left has a chance to significantly widen support for an alternative — based on dismantling the vestiges of British imperialism and diverting the resources to restoring employment and defending the welfare state; building, through the Anti-Racist Alliance, a mass anti-racist movement; opposing every attempt to revive the Maastricht agenda; and supporting those fighting imperialist intervention in Russia, Eastern Europe, Africa, Asia and Latin America.

Major's crisis and the remaking of British politics

The continuous crisis of Conservative Party since the last general election is the result of far more fundamental forces than simply the political fall-out from the recession, let alone Major's personal failings. What is taking place is the demise of the party system through which British politics has been organised since the middle of the last century, writes JOSIE BELL.

Since the general election, the Tory Party has stumbled from crisis to crisis. Most importantly it has been deeply split over Europe, particularly since Britain was forced out of the European Exchange Rate Mechanism last September. This split culminated in the government's House of Commons defeat over Maastricht in July. The fact that Major could only save the government by forcing a vote of confidence was an obvious expression of the depth of his party's crisis. So too is his pact with the Unionists — which will create new problems for him in Ireland.

The crisis is reflected in the party's collapse at the polls. In May the Conservatives were crushed in the county council elections — losing control of 15 councils. The Christchurch by-election was lost with the biggest swing against a governing party this century. Major's standing in the polls is the lowest ever recorded for a prime minister. In July and August some opinion polls put the Tory Party third, behind not only Labour, but also the Liberal Democrats.

This situation is a manifestation of long term forces operating in British society and politics. It signifies that the respite which North Sea oil gave the Conservative Party from its historical decline is over. The party's decline is now re-gaining the momentum it had assumed from the early 1960s — the period which marked the end of 80 years of Tory supremacy in British politics — and the beginning of the end of the political party system resting on that Conservative hegemony.

Between 1886 and 1945 the Tories had won the largest share of the vote in 12 out of 13 general elections. With the exceptions of the pre-World War One Liberal government and the post-Second World War Labour government, the Tories were in office almost continuously between 1886 and 1964.

However, after 1964 the Tory party

was in opposition for eleven and a half of the next fifteen years and lost four out of five general elections.

Thatcher, even with the huge new resources made available by North Sea oil was only able to slow, but not halt, this decline so that *each of the general elections after 1979 was won with a successively lower share of the vote* — 43.9 per cent in 1979, 42.4 per cent in 1983, 42.3 per cent in 1987 and 41.9 per cent in April 1992.

Now that the contribution of North Sea oil to the economy has been greatly reduced by the fall in international oil prices, Major no longer has the resources which allowed Thatcher to slow down the longterm deterioration of the Conservative Party's position. As a result that decline is resuming its main course, at an accelerated rate.

To grasp the breadth and likely results of the crisis now confronting the Tory Party it is necessary to see it in its

full historical scope.

The modern Conservative Party's dominance of British politics after 1886 was based on a clear economic, social and political orientation — the epoch of classical British imperialism based on foreign investment.

This reached incredible proportions. *On the eve of the first world war Britain invested twice as much outside the country as it did in the domestic economy.* This contrasts with Germany, for example, whose overseas investment never rose above 20 per cent of total investment. By 1914 the profits arising from British capital's vast overseas assets reached eight per cent of GDP.

Throughout this period, therefore, domestic industrial capital was a subordinate part of a ruling class dominated by the international expansion of British capital.

In the first half of the 19th century



the British capitalist class was faced with a politically independent working class movement — Chartism — and a growing inability to maintain control of the situation in Ireland. But its enormous wealth as the pre-eminent capitalist power, controlling the world economy, gave the British ruling class a margin for domestic economic concessions which simply did not exist for any other capitalist class — enabling British capital to avoid the convulsions which shook the rest of Europe in 1848 and periodically thereafter.

These resources enabled the British capitalist class to put in place the system on which the hegemony of the modern Tory Party eventually became established. In 1846, with the repeal of the Corn Laws, agricultural protectionism was abandoned so that cheap food could be imported. This had the effect of raising working class living standards while driving small farmers and landowners out of business. The Tory split over the issue created the modern Liberal and Conservative Parties. Nonetheless this cheap food policy was maintained for more than 120 years until Britain joined the EEC. Alongside this, British capital's growing income from overseas assets provided the material basis to integrate the better off part of the working class within the framework of Tory Party dominance. Because the profits of the most influential section of the capitalist class were not derived from the exploitation of the *British* working class at all but from *overseas* investment and empire, it was possible to make concessions to secure domestic stability. These in turn enhanced the attraction of overseas, as opposed to domestic, investment and the income from overseas assets reduced the pressure for British manufacturing industry to remain competitive.

In the heyday of Britain's world domination this combination of cheap food and overseas expansion allowed a political system in which *two* directly capitalist parties — the Tory Party and Liberal Party — alternated. From 1859 to 1874 the Conservative and Liberal Parties won every single seat in every single general election in England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland. (John Ross, *Thatcher and Friends*)

However, by the 1880s British capitalism was challenged externally by the more dynamic German and US economies. This, together with the further development of the working class and extension of the suffrage internally, made it incapable of sustaining the monopoly of politics by purely capitalist political parties.

The Tory Party became the sole dominant party of British capital after 1886. This modern Conservative Party was built up by adding successive reactionary layers to its original core of capitalist landowners — the City, Irish landlords and Unionists, the Church, and, after 1886 and Joseph Chamberlain's split from the Liberals in opposition to Irish home rule, a section of industrial capital and a working class base in the more prosperous parts of England. As a party it brought together the most reactionary, and in many cases archaic, forces in British society, to create the most powerful possible alliance against the working class.

The attempt of what remained of the Liberal Party to meet the challenges of rising anti-colonial struggle in Ireland and working class radicalisation by moving to the left failed. The Liberal Party was eclipsed by the Labour Party after the First World War.

The first world war marked the end of British dominance in the world capitalist economy without creating an alternative world system. Although the United States emerged after 1918 as the world's most powerful capitalist state, it was not yet strong enough to restructure the world economy around itself. For that to be possible the Second World War was necessary in which the US crushed its most powerful capitalist rival, Germany, and transformed its other major competitor, Britain, into a mere vassal. The lesser threat, at that time, of Japan was obliterated in the process.

In the interregnum, with Britain no longer able to set the terms of the functioning of the world capitalist economy and the US not yet strong enough to take over, the world economy, after 1929, broke up into rival blocs, fascism emerged in Europe, and the inter-imperialist competition which culminated in the 1939-45 world war was unleashed.

But even during this inter-war period the vast scale of the British empire and its accumulated assets cushioned its decline. British capital did not have to resort to the level of repression which which spread across Europe in the 1930s.

However, the Second World War did mark the definitive end of Britain's leading world role. The price the US imposed for the economic and military aid on which Britain's survival depended during the war was the opening up of the empire to the dollar and agreement to a post-war world capitalist system to be organised by Washing-

PRIME MINISTERS' LOWEST POINTS

Gallup first asked its standard question 'Are you satisfied with the Prime Minister of the day?' in 1938. Below is a league table of the lowest ratings experienced by every Prime Minister since then



48%
Winston Churchill

Lowest: 48% Apr 1954
Previous high: 55%
Highest after that: 56% Oct 1953



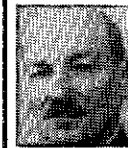
42%
Sir Alec Douglas-Home

Lowest: 42% Dec 1963
Previous high: 48%
Highest after that: 48% (Aug 1964)



41%
Sir Anthony Eden

Lowest: 41% Apr 1956
Previous high: 73%
Highest after that: 56% (Dec 1956)



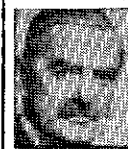
37%
Clement Attlee

Lowest: 37% Sep 1948
Previous high: 66%
Highest after that: 57% (May 1951)



33%
James Callaghan

Lowest: 33% Nov 1976
Previous high: 57%
Highest after that: 59% (Oct 1977)



32%
Neville Chamberlain

Lowest: 32% May 1940
Previous high: 68%
Left office



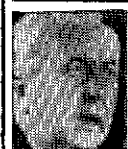
31%
Edward Heath

Lowest: 31% Jun 1971
Previous high: 45%
Highest after that: 43% (Jun 1973)



30%
Harold Macmillan

Lowest: 30% Oct 1957
Previous high: 54%
Highest after that: 79% (May 1960)



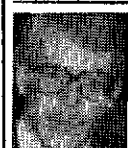
27%
Harold Wilson

Lowest: 27% May 1968
Previous high: 69%
Highest after that: 51% (Jun 1970)



23%
Margaret Thatcher

Lowest: 23% Apr 1990
Previous high: 53%
Highest after that: 33% (Sep 1990)



21%
John Major

Lowest: 21% Jun 1993
Previous high: 59% (Feb 1991)
Highest after that ?

British overseas assets were massively liquidated to pay for US aid. Britain was transformed by the war from one of the principal creditor countries to the world's principal debtor state. In a memorandum to the Labour cabinet in 1945 Keynes described the situation as a 'financial Dunkirk' from which the country could only extricate itself if it received massive financial aid from the United States. Without that aid, Keynes predicted: 'Abroad it would require a sudden and humiliating withdrawal from our onerous responsibilities with great loss of prestige and acceptance for the time being of the position of a second class power... At home a greater degree of austerity would be necessary than we experienced at any time during the war.' (*Our overseas financial prospects*, 13.8.45)

'Suez overnight showed Britain to be a second rate power, subordinate to Washington.'

For the necessary aid Britain would have to be prepared to accept American terms including 'acceptance of a monetary and commercial policy along the general lines on which they have set their hearts.'

Following the war it rapidly became clear that the only way Britain could retain even a shadow of its former world role was as a junior partner to the US. This was precisely the terms of the 'special relationship'. While the US took over unchallenged leadership of the capitalist world, Britain was given specific concessions, such as collaboration on some nuclear weapons and assigned a minor partnership

role as in the Gulf and the Middle East. The high level of military spending dictated by this further weakened the economy.

Nonetheless Britain was no longer capable of sustaining its empire and, starting with the loss of India and Burma immediately after the war, it progressively broke away. Furthermore the limits of US support for Britain were strictly circumscribed by Washington's fundamental goal of dismantling, not propping up, the British empire.

This whole development culminated in the debacle of the Suez crisis in 1956. Here, after Nasser nationalised the Suez canal, the joint British and French expedition against Egypt was brought to a shuddering halt by American financial and political pressure — engineering a collapse of the pound followed by a humiliating public retreat.

Britain was shown overnight to be a second rate power subordinate to Washington. As Alistair Horne put it in his biography of MacMillan: 'When Nasser nationalised the Suez Canal Company on 26 July 1956 they went to bed one night, as it were, regarding themselves as belonging to a power of the first rank, and woke up to the reality of relegation to the second division, no longer with a capacity for manipulating their global destinies in the imperial manner of the past.' After that the prime minister, Anthony Eden, physically collapsed, resigned and was replaced by Harold MacMillan.

The end of British imperialism's independent world role, which Suez confirmed, demanded a new strategic orientation — a new pattern of capital accumulation. To survive British capital concluded it had to integrate itself

into the newly emerging European imperialist system. This was inaugurated by MacMillan's historic decision to apply for membership of the European Economic Community — the most fundamental change in British policy for 100 years. This first attempt was vetoed by De Gaulle who rightly regarded Britain, at the time, as simply a trojan horse for the US.

Finally, however, under Ted Heath, in 1972, Britain joined the EEC. The Liberal Democrats had already made themselves the purest representatives of European capitalist integration. This has since been consolidated by Labour's shift to fervent support for the EEC and Major's fight to break the Tory Party's resistance to Maastricht.

But the attempt to integrate British capitalism into the emerging European imperialist system poses an absolutely fundamental problem — it requires a complete change in the priorities of the British economy for the last 100 years. And this cannot be done on the basis of the political party system which corresponded to that past period of capital accumulation.

This manifests itself in the insoluble problems of the Major government.

The priority given to Britain's world role, including the level of military spending necessary to defend this, distorted the whole economy so that Britain proved incapable of attaining the levels of domestic investment, and therefore productivity growth, of the other major west European countries in the post-war period. Each attempt to do so ultimately collapsed in a new balance of payments crisis — the famous 'stop-go' cycle which held back economic growth in the 1950s and 1960s. Previously Britain had bridged its trade deficits with huge earnings from the services of the City and profit on overseas investments. As these declined the only other way to bridge the gap was by rebuilding a competitive domestic manufacturing base. But to achieve this on a capitalist basis required a level of domestic investment which could not be sustained without radically changing the priorities of the British economy — at the expense of the City, overseas investment and military spending — and the most drastic attack on working class living standards since the war.

Furthermore such an economic and political course would break up the entire system of economic interests and alliances on which the Tory Party's hegemony was based and would also require a massive weakening of organisational strength built up by the British labour movement in the



struggle for the economic reforms and concessions which British imperialism had made possible.

The attempts to achieve these objectives created permanent political instability from the beginning of the 1960s. After the first incomes policy in 1962 successive governments combined statutory wage restraint with anti-union laws to try to wear down the organisational strength of the working class in conditions of near full employment. This culminated in the crushing defeat of the Heath government by the miners in 1974. All of these attempts ultimately failed and trade union membership peaked in 1979 at 13.3 million.

North Sea oil gave Thatcher the appearance of having found a solution to capital's dilemma by plugging the gap in the balance of payments, generating a massive new contribution to government revenues, while high interest rates and a high exchange rate facilitated a new wave of overseas investment and drove up unemployment. Only the creation of mass unemployment, changing the relationship of forces between capital and labour, allowed Thatcher to impose her anti-union laws. As a result, between 1979 and 1991 trade union membership fell by more than a quarter to 9.6m — the lowest since 1954. But the revival of trade union militancy which accompanied the Lawson boom showed this is not enough to impose a really qualitative defeat on the trade union movement.

Furthermore, a precondition for this whole orientation was high international oil prices. When the oil price collapsed so did Thatcher's leadership. In addition, the 1987 stock market crash wiped out 20 per cent of the value of British overseas assets and thereby reduced the contribution of profits from these to the balance of payments.

In 1987-88 the biggest balance of payments deficits in British history ended the Lawson boom and set the ground for the recession, triggered by the attempt to prop up an over-valued exchange rate in the European Exchange Rate Mechanism.

The replacement of Thatcher by Major decisively consolidated the Tory Party's turn to participate in European economic integration. But it is precisely the inability to carry through this choice without a fundamental change in priorities, a brutal attack on the working class and new political party system, which has thrown the Tory Party into almost continuous crisis ever since.

Britain's enforced exit from the

ERM last September showed that it was impossible to sustain the high exchange rate demanded by the City of London and compete within Europe. Devaluation and lower interest rates brought a faltering economic recovery but this is limited by the recession in the rest of the EEC, the huge budget deficit and the threat to growth of a new balance of payments crisis.

Capital's way out of this impasse is to dismantle the most important post-war gain of the working class — the welfare state and the system of universal benefits on which it is based.

This sets the terrain for the present crisis of the Conservative Party. Because its fundamental bases lie in a different pattern of capital accumulation, and the social alliances corresponding to this, the party faces its greatest crisis since the 1840s. It is now so divided as to have become dependent on the Irish Unionists — which will add to its problems by destabilising Ireland.

For 30 years a new capitalist party system has been forcing its way into existence in British politics. That process is now coming to a head. Its shape is already quite clear — to replace the hegemony of the Tory Party with a political party system in which the pure party representative of European integration — the Liberal Democrats — holds the balance permanently in a system of coalition governments. The problem is that the peculiarity of Britain's 'first past the post' electoral system is that it tends to deliver parliamentary majorities and so block coalitions. This makes a Labour government, rather than a long period of coalitions, the most likely replacement if the Tories lose office.

That is why the decline of the Tory Party produces a relentless campaign by capital to strengthen the Liberal Democrats and commit Labour to proportional representation. PR, by blocking the formation of majority Labour governments, would subordinate the Labour Party to the Liberal Democrats.

The role of this new party system for capital is to destroy the reformist gains made by the British working class under British imperialism and, in tandem with similar moves across Europe, to destroy the welfare state. The Tory Party is currently too weak to accomplish these goals.

The political basis for this new consensus has been laid in John Smith's total support for Maastricht — which incorporates centrally, through its ceilings on budget deficits, the goal of rolling back the welfare state. Whatever the rhetoric of the moment, Tory



ministers are correct when they point out that it was John Smith and the Labour right who opened the debate on the future of universal benefits and the revival of the means test (which is what so-called 'targeting' means). The Commission on Social Justice was established to provide the ideological arguments to soften up the labour movement for this attack.

Smith's proposal to commit the Labour Party to a referendum on PR paves the way for a coalition with the Liberal Democrats in a hung parliament which could then usher in a new electoral system and with it capital's new political party system — designed, contrary to the illusions of Hilary Wainwright, John Palmer and other supporters of PR like *Socialist Organiser* and *Socialist Outlook*, for the greatest attack on the working class for more than a century.

The collective trade union vote in the Labour Party, far from being an anachronism, is a major obstacle to the parliamentary leadership achieving these reactionary goals — for the simple reason that they collide with the interests of the majority of trade unionists. Capital wants to break Labour's link with the trade unions to make sure that the inevitable radicalisation of parts of the labour movement in response to the attack on the welfare state is not reflected at the level of government. That is why the campaign to break the trade union link has been carried out in tandem with the drive to commit the party to PR.

The crisis of the Tory Party and the attempt to create a new political party system which would dismantle the welfare state faces the labour movement with its greatest political challenge in the twentieth century.

Women, single mothers and the attack on the welfare state

Women are the chief beneficiaries of the welfare state, in terms of direct benefits, and the socialisation of tasks otherwise falling on their unpaid work in the family. Any attempt to roll back the gain of the welfare state is inevitably a profound attack on the position of women. Such an attack is already well-advanced in Eastern Europe as a result of the re-introduction of capitalism after 1989.

David Blunkett immediately capitulated to the government's premise that public policy's objective is the preservation of the traditional patriarchal family structure.

The mass entry of women into the workforce in the post war period constitutes one of the most fundamental changes in the structure of society in the 20th century. The rapid capital accumulation demanded an expanding workforce in conditions where surplus agricultural labour had long been exhausted in Britain. As a result capital turned to women and Black people from Asia, the Caribbean and Africa.

This profoundly affected the social position of women. The entire working class benefitted from this advance of women with rising living standards, the development of the welfare state and the creation of more civilised human relations.

Alongside the steadily rising participation of women in the workforce has been the rapid decline in the marriage rate, the increase in the proportion of single parent families and single person households.

The rise in women's employment has increased their economic inde-

pendence. This has loosened the economic ties maintaining traditional family relations, and unleashed a series of profound changes in social structure and attitudes.

By the end of the '60s the impact of the new social position of women was felt throughout society. Effective contraception was won. The divorce law was liberalised. Abortion was decriminalised. Formal, legal, equality was established, while of course this has still not been achieved in reality. Women entered higher and further education at increasing rates.

Social attitudes changed with a rapidity that led the '60s to be dubbed the decade of the 'sexual revolution' — including the end of the social stigma of single motherhood, the virtual disappearance of terms like 'illegitimacy' and 'spinster' from the vocabulary, the moral acceptance of divorce, the provision of contraception to young women, the end of 'cookery' and 'needlework' as a staple in the education of young women, and more recently the beginning of a new visibility for lesbian women.

The women's liberation movement, broadly defined, both articulated this new social reality and helped force the pace of change.

In the 1980s, as these processes worked through, further important issues were forced higher up the agenda — domestic violence, rape, sexual harassment, child abuse and others.

At the same time, the movement of women into the workforce began to transform the labour movement. Women joined trade unions and de-

It is no accident that the government's attack on the welfare state should be prefaced by a vicious ideological onslaught on women, in the form of the witch hunt against single mothers.

This targetting of women for the first blows in the battle of the welfare state is a reflection of the huge stake that women have in its preservation.

SYLVIA ASHBY explains why the proposals to roll back the welfare state are the first serious attempt to undermine the social position that women have won over the last four decades.

manded that they represent their specific interests as women workers, dramatically changing their priorities and structures.

However, while capital reformed the workplace to draw more women into employment, it fought tooth and nail to relegate them to a second class, low paid status within the workforce. Women's average pay levels have never risen more than a little above 75 per cent of those of men. Huge numbers of women workers are confined to unskilled, low-paid and unorganised employment, frequently part-time where pay levels and conditions are on average worst of all.

The development of the welfare state facilitated women's entry into the workforce and was given greater impetus by it. Expanding public services, health care and benefits alleviated the double workload that women now faced — paid at work, and unpaid in the family. Child benefit and other non-income related payments created a positive incentive for many women to work.

'The welfare state facilitated women's entry into the workforce'

In the 1990s, while the number of male workers has decreased due to unemployment, women continue to enter paid work in increasing numbers. However, the circumstances in which women enter the workforce have al-

ready come under attack as capital has tried both to hold down low paid women's wages and dismantle the welfare support systems which lightened women's double workload.

Despite this, increasing numbers of women are entering the workforce. The latest figures show that at the end of 1992 there were 10.1 million women in paid work, compared to 10.7 million men. Women are now 48.6 per cent of the total workforce, compared to 41.7 per cent in 1971.

In many areas of the country, the number of women working now exceeds the number of men. For example, 'Essex woman is more likely to have a paid job than Essex Man', as the *Financial Times* put it. Women are the majority of the workforce in Essex, Isle of Wight, East Sussex, West Sussex, Cornwall/Scilly Isles, Devon, Hereford and Worcester, Merseyside, Mid Glamorgan, the Borders and Lothian. In East Sussex, the area with the highest proportional female employment, women are 54 per cent of the workforce.

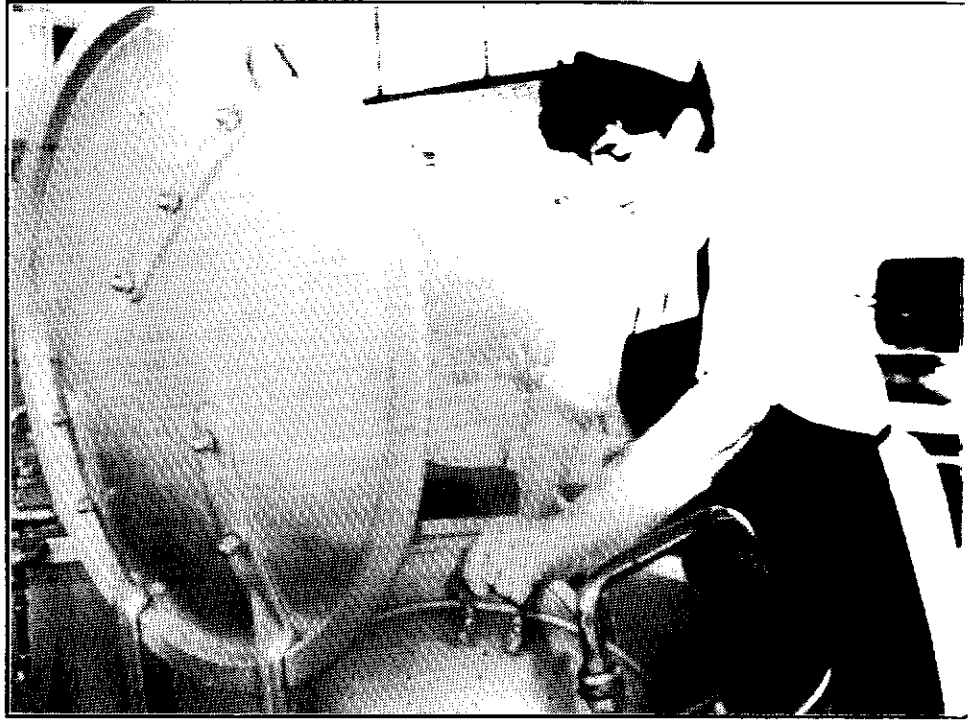
The rise in the economic activity rate and the actual employment of women is occurring across all ages from the mid-20s to retirement age, with the highest levels of economic activity among women aged 35-44 years — now running at 76.4 per cent. (*Social Trends 23*)

Moreover, the increase in female employment is almost entirely explained by growing numbers of *married* women working.

Two fundamental processes explain this continuing change in the sexual composition of the workforce long after the end of the post-war boom with its structural shortage of labour. Today *the economic participation of women is reinforced, firstly, by the shift in structure of the British economy with a decline in manufacturing and an increase in services, and second, by the huge rise in part-time working.*

Of the 10.1 million women working, 4.6 million are in part-time jobs. At the same time, the total workforce in manufacturing has slumped from 8.1 million in 1971, to 4.6 million in 1992, while employment in services has risen from 11.6 million to 15.6 million in the same period.

Part-time jobs done by women are very low-paid — and with the looming abolition of the Wages Councils, which fix a minimum wage for 2 million low paid workers, 80 per cent of them women, they are likely to become more so. Nonetheless this whole process objectively strengthens the social position of women, their economic independence, and dramatically re-



shapes the social structure.

To turn to the social position of women and the family. Since the late-19th century a historic tendency for the proportion of those people who were married to rise had been identified. This reached a peak of 70 per cent of those over 15 in 1971, but then this tendency went into reverse and has declined ever since. The 1981 census showed that 65 per cent of over 15s were married, but in the 1991 census this falls to 53 per cent — a drop of 12 per cent in a decade. The total number of marriages in the same period fell by nearly a fifth from 459,000 to 375,000.

Among 20 to 44 year olds, the proportion who are married has fallen to an historic low point, with the percentage of those married lower today than in 1891! The only reason that the *overall* number of those married remains higher than in 1891 is due to the increased longevity of the population and the higher proportion of married people in the older age groups.

The marriage rate increased from the late 19th century because rising living standards allowed more people to set up independent households. Tax and other benefits also encouraged legal marriage.

The reversal of this trend after 1971 is the result of a new economic factor — the mass entry of women into the workforce. By 1965 the majority of married women were in paid work. This revolutionised society by providing women with the chance of a degree of financial independence outside marriage. The traditional family, which had been reinforced by rising living standards, began to be undermined by

the economic independence of women.

The same process has led to a steep increase in the rate of divorce. The majority of divorces are initiated by women, and the remarriage rate of widows and divorced women is less than half that for men. Changes in the divorce laws *de facto* recognised that women could no longer be compelled by their economic status to stay in an unwanted marriage. The demand for easier divorce became irresistible.

This erosion in marriage rates is one symptom of a developing crisis of the family structure established in the 19th century. The number of births outside marriage has steadily increased to now reach 30 per cent (see fig 1). The proportion of single person households has risen from 11 per cent to 27 per cent since 1961. The number of single parents has risen to make up nearly 20 per cent of all households with children in the same period. The traditional family unit made up of two parents plus children is now a minority — only one third of all households.

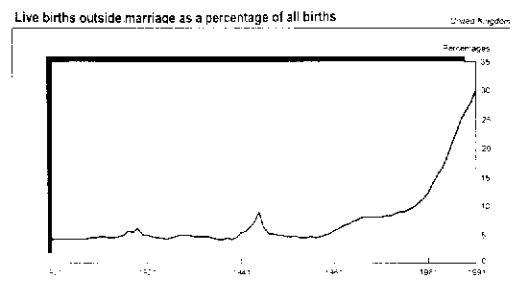


figure 1

Thus the participation of women in paid work has triggered a social process of emancipation of women from the subordinate position assigned to them in the patriarchal family system.

At the same time, the fact that childcare provision has not been socialised to any significant extent makes it difficult for single parents to work, often confining single mothers to low paid, part-time jobs. This underdevelopment of the welfare state in Britain means that single-parent families experience greater poverty than in most other European countries. The government intends to make this situation even worse.

'The absence of childcare provision confines many single mothers to part-time, low-paid work'

The current softening up exercise — the spending limits imposed by the Maastricht treaty, the Tory discussion of public spending cuts, the debate on targeting benefits initiated by Labour and the launch of the Commission for Social Justice — should not be seen as routine. It is something far more fundamental.

The proposal is to dismantle the welfare state.

The offensive of the government to roll back and destroy the welfare state has so far focussed on the proposal to raise women's retirement age from 60 to 65, to cut benefits paid directly to women, and to hit women indirectly by undermining the NHS.

The vicious campaign to lampoon single mothers as 'wedded to the state', blamed for their children's ill-health, low educational achievement and other social problems, aims to scapegoat them for everything from budget deficits to crime rates.

The establishment of the so-called Child Support Agency is the first concrete manifestation of this. Women will be made dependent upon payments from the biological fathers of their children, rather than state benefits, undermining their financial independence. Such payments will be unreliable, hence increasing poverty, and forcing many single mothers to seek paid work, or to work for longer hours.

Only women receiving state benefits will be forced to be assessed by the Agency — virtually all the 895,000 single parents receiving income support will be assessed.

The government anticipates that it will save £530m in benefit payments in the first year. A spokesperson for the agency quoted in the *Independent* on 5 April said that they accepted that only 'a few thousand' single mothers would be better off.

The new law will cause massive financial hardship, as well as being a

disgraceful intrusion into women's personal lives — even sperm donors who have not donated via a registered clinic may find themselves liable for maintenance payments!

The policy is aimed at cutting public expenditure, and creating a pool of potential workers — single mothers — who will be forced through hardship into the 'labour market' at low wages. That will exercise a downward pressure on wage levels as a whole.

Such policies against so-called 'welfare mothers' were pioneered in the United States, with clear racist overtones, explicitly to force single mothers out to work.

The other benefit paid directly to women with children — universal child benefit — is also threatened. Paid to women, irrespective of income, it is an important source of financial security. Precisely because it is *universal*, women do not lose it if they work for wages. Its universality means all mothers have an interest in making sure its value is maintained. This creates a political pressure that simply would not exist for a means-tested alternative.

Unlike with the Child Support Agency, there are real contradictions in forcing through the abolition of child benefit. Over 12 million children qualify for it. Those who would lose out if it became means-tested are unlikely to vote for a party advocating such a change. Furthermore, a means-tested benefit would make working outside the home less attractive for those on low incomes.

This does not mean that child benefit is safe. It means that capital

will try to make its abandonment an issue standing 'above parties' — like Maastricht.

John Smith's Commission for Social Justice was set up with a brief to look into 'the balance' between universal and targeted benefits. The Fabians, the *New Statesman*, the *Guardian*, various Front Bench spokespeople, and John Smith in his leadership election, have already started to argue that 'targeting' benefits is 'fairer'.

Other cuts and changes in welfare and health provision have the effect of substituting women's unpaid work in the family for state provision. 'Community care', attacks on the NHS, proposals to make patients convalescing in hospital pay for their beds, and so on, all mean more unpaid home nursing, mainly by women.

If we add the cuts in NHS abortion facilities, the proposal to take the contraceptive pill off the prescription list, reductions in the benefits to carers for the long-term sick, cuts in the real level of state pensions, and raising women's retirement age what emerges is a fundamental attack on the social position and living standards of women. This has to be taken totally seriously. Such an onslaught on women is already underway in Eastern Europe.

It is an attempt to turn the clock back in the family, while driving down the terms under which women undertake paid work, and negatively impacting on all wage levels.

If this were carried through it would be a major defeat for women, and for the living standards of the entire work-

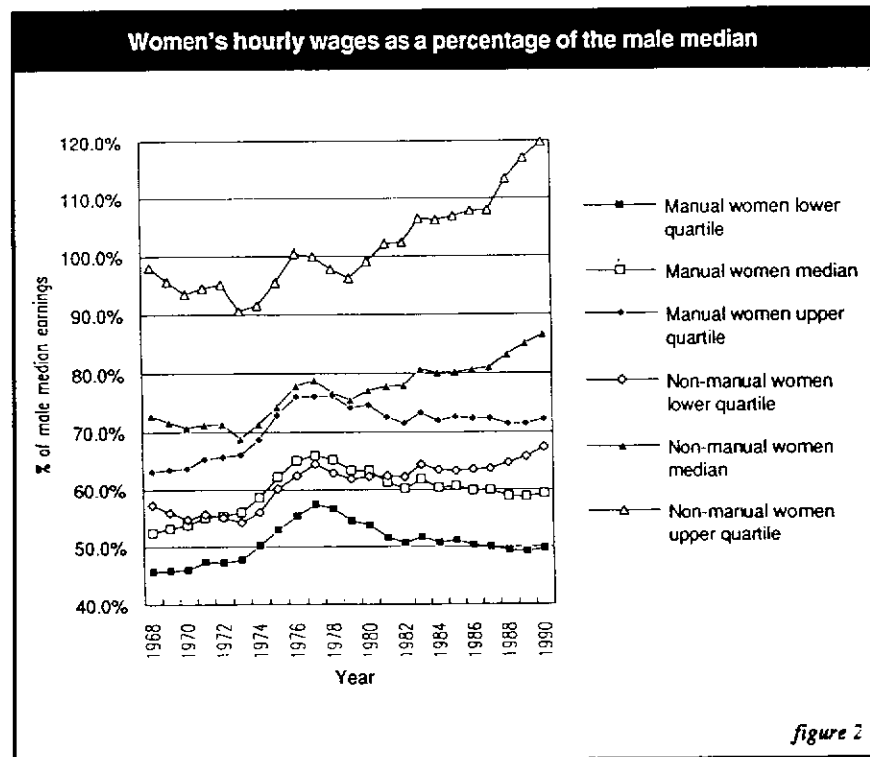


figure 2

ing class.

As the battle for the welfare state opens, its very first plank must be defence of the social position of women.

This policy is designed to confine some women to an ultra-lowpaid segment of the labour market. Single mothers will work because state benefits will no longer be paid. Women will have to take jobs, at any rate of pay or conditions of work, just to feed their children.

However, the problem for capital is that the very fact of women entering into the workforce is in itself an obstacle to such plans, strengthening the social position of women, and increasing their influence in all social spheres, and in the labour movement in particular.

'The very fact of women entering the workforce is in itself an obstacle to capital's plans'

This advance of women has created an alternative agenda for realising the progressive and liberating goal of maximising women's ability to participate in social production. Most fundamental is the requirement for high quality, universal social provision of child care, and such intermediate reforms as tax relief on childcare and nursery payments. Secondly, low pay has to be challenged by the entire labour movement. The key to this is the demand for legislation to establish a National Minimum Wage.

It is because these rather modest reforms are utterly unacceptable to British capital at the present time that we have the vicious ideological campaigns to scapegoat single mothers.

The poorest women, most dependent upon the welfare system, are to be forced further into poverty, low-paid unorganised, or illegal work, with fewer and fewer resources to care for their young.

A subsidiary aim is to divide women along class lines extending the American model of a 'two tier society', and further dividing both women and the working class. While professional and well-trained women have advanced, developing for example private childcare provision, the poorest women will be forced backwards.

This dynamic towards an exacerbated class division among women is also reflected at the level of wages. A *Socialist Economic Bulletin* paper published in September 1991 demonstrated that while overall women's



wages have stagnated at around 75 to 80 per cent of male median pay — with fluctuations reflecting developments in the economy overall. However, when this is broken down between the low and higher paid a very different picture emerges. Among the lowest paid manual women workers pay levels only briefly rose above 50 per cent of the male median, and have slightly declined through the 80s. On the other hand, among non-manual women workers wages have continued to rise proportionately, reaching nearly 90 per cent of the male median by 1990. Among the highest paid women the trend is even sharper, with their wages continuing to proportionately climb sharply, overtaking the male median and reaching 120 per cent. (see fig 2)

The implications are clear, some women will continue to advance economically, including in comparison to men, while the poorest women's standards of living are forced backwards.

This will also lead to a new increase in domestic service, as with the growing employment of immigrants with no legal rights as domestic servants in the United States.

Glossy women's magazines are running features on whether a Philippine, Irish or East European makes the best 'home-help'!

At the core of the necessary response to this assault, alongside the ongoing issue of the level of women's wages and the fight for a national minimum wages set at a substantial level, lies the crucial question of state provision of child-care.

Britain's record in providing state or subsidised child-care for working women is the worst in Europe. A recent study conducted for the Department of Employment showed that average spending on childcare by working mothers was 1.10p for each hour worked. Taking average earnings after tax this amounts to almost exactly a quarter of their entire take-home pay. Lone parents on average spend 22 per cent of their after-tax earnings on childcare.

Nonetheless, private childcare con-

sumption has risen by 450 per cent over the last 12 years.

Rather than vilifying single mothers — or imprisoning them for going to work without being able to afford childcare as in one recent case — the demand has to be for a massive increase in state funded and workplace nursery provision.

Unfortunately Labour has crumpled in the face of the ideological offensive against single mothers. David Blunkett argued that council housing lists should prioritise those who have shown themselves to be 'responsible' by entering into a long-term relationship before having children.

This can be changed. Over the last two decades women have had a powerful impact upon the trade unions. An *Employment Gazette* study in May 1993 showed that at the end of 1991 there were 9.6 million trade union members in Britain — a fall in membership of 362,000 since the previous year. However, in the same year, the female membership of trade unions increased by 20,000. In other words the entire fall was in male membership. By the end of 1991 women constituted 39.35 per cent of trade union members, and all trends indicate that this proportion will continue to rise.

To attract an increasingly female membership, unions are forced to develop policies and structures that are more responsive to their needs.

The fight to defend the social position of women, to defend the welfare state, to rebuff the ideological offensive against single mothers is crucial to defending the entire social position of women, particularly for the least well-off. However, it is also vital for the working class as a whole, for the attempt to drive down the wages and living conditions of women is a cutting edge against entire social wage — through destroying the welfare state and undermining wage levels.

Women have to take the lead in a struggle that is necessary to defend and take forward the labour movement as a whole and with it the poorest sections of British society.

AIDS in 1993 — back to the beginning?

In the first quarter of 1993 the government announced the largest ever quarterly increase in the number of reported cases of AIDS in Britain — 418 people developed AIDS, writes JIM WHANNEL. Since 1992, 7,341 people have developed AIDS — 79 per cent of whom are listed as gay or bisexual men. One might have expected Virginia Bottomley to announce new measures to deal with this health crisis.

Instead the government cut the public funding of the Terrence Higgins Trust (THT), the major community based provider of services and support, from a miserable £450,000 to £150,000. Redundancies had previously only been avoided due to a bequest by Freddie Mercury in 1992. Bottomley further inflamed the atmosphere by saying that 'high risk groups' would now be targeted — Conservative politicians apparently have a congenital inability to say the word 'gay'. A media campaign spear-headed by the Tories claimed that heterosexuals were not at risk and indeed that there would not be a heterosexual pandemic in the future. Homophobes used to claim that they could spot lesbians and gay men when they entered the room — apparently HIV is the first virus with similar powers. It is noteworthy that AZT results showing that the drug was not as effective as had been claimed were published around the same time. After millions of pounds of profits major conglomerates might not secure global profit levels previously guaranteed.

In the run-up to Bottomley's attacks on AIDS funding the television programme *Dispatches* ran a much-criticised 'documentary' attacking the so-called AIDS industry in Africa and alleging that the HIV and AIDS crisis

in parts of Africa has been completely over-stated. *Dispatches* ran an equally notorious piece two years ago arguing against the relationship between HIV and AIDS.

Throughout the 1980s community groups, set up and staffed largely by lesbians and gay men, had difficulty securing funding or recognition. Thatcher would not discuss the AIDS crisis in the cabinet until 1986 and vetoed the first AIDS national advertising campaign. 'It's like writings on a lavatory wall', she is reported as saying. The *Public Health (Infectious Diseases)* regulation of 1985 was passed allowing judges to impose physical restraint on persons with HIV/AIDS. A public information campaign was conducted without information. The government refused to advertise in the lesbian and gay press until the late 1980s. Indeed they expected the Pink Paper to run advertisements on safer sex at a loss whilst paying the *Economist*, *New Statesman* and *Spectator* the going rate.

Throughout the eighties the attacks on the welfare state have caused immense hardship for people with HIV/AIDS, who were already facing a barrage of prejudice and malice. Special needs payments for housing, laundry and diet were hit in 1988. Housing benefit regulations were changed to the detriment of claimants — the bureaucratic system takes no account of the crisis which AIDS often is. The lesbian and gay press carried a welter of posthumous benefit cheque stories. Unlike in other health charities and campaigns, welfare rights and hardship funds have become central features. The government funds organisations like the Scottish AIDS Monitor (SAM) provided funding is not used for people. People with HIV/AIDS could be locked up, misinformed, denied adequate benefits and ignored — that is the Conservative record.

The current reactionary direction of government policy has been criticised far and wide. Professor Nicholas Day, head of the Institute of Public Health at Cambridge and author of the Public Health Laboratory Service report on AIDS, has said: 'It would be a disaster if the government decided that a heterosexual epidemic was not a realistic

prospect for the future'.

Dr Les Pudd of the National AIDS Trust has called for the report which Bottomley has used to justify the decision to be published. The government's stated view is not only naive but stinks of racism. Around three-quarters of world-wide transmission of the virus is via heterosexual sex. The prevailing notion that African or Asian heterosexuals and European homosexuals have some predilection for acquiring HIV is homophobic and racist nonsense.

A comprehensive initiative by the government is needed to meet the health crisis confronting gay men. As Derek Ogg of Gay Men Fighting AIDS has stated, the education campaign needs to be continuous — the virus is here for the foreseeable future. Coupled with this must be ongoing education and information aimed at also safeguarding those having heterosexual sexual contact. Labour should be energetically campaigning to secure this combined strategy. Unfortunately David Blunkett, Shadow Health Secretary, has confined his comments to asking for Professor Day's report to be published. If Blunkett cannot formulate a radical programme to deal with this crucial health issue — especially given the wealth of experience and advice now available thanks to the initiative of the lesbian and gay community and health workers — he should resign. Many fear that the reports to come from Labour's Commission for Social Justice will be even less adequate.

Media misrepresentation of the facts around AIDS has again become widespread. Hospital switchboards were besieged by thousands of callers following media reports that a doctor was dying of AIDS in the Glasgow area (daily reports were published as he was slipping into a coma, culminating in the front page publication of his photograph). Glasgow papers carried articles about teachers who were HIV positive or had AIDS implying there was some danger. There are no recorded cases of doctor-patient or teacher-pupil transmission of HIV.

The next decade will be crucial in the fight to avoid a disastrous AIDS pandemic. Homophobia, racism and the Conservative Party are in the way.

Black leadership in the anti-racist struggle

The ARA is the broadest mass anti-racist movement that has ever existed in Britain. It combines the backing of the organised labour movement with deep support in the Black communities — shown by the 50,000-plus turn out for this year's ARA festival — ARAfest.

The strength of the ARA is the combination of Black leadership in a united front with the entire labour movement. Without black self-organisation it would be impossible to identify the key issues of the racist offensive, to determine the correct campaigning priorities and to effectively combat racism. Without the labour movement, and in particular the trade unions, it would be far more difficult, if not impossible, to create the scale of mass movement necessary to defeat the new upsurge of racism.

This is because we now confront in Europe the greatest rise of racism and the extreme right since the 1930s. This is an expression of the new relation of forces between capital and labour as a result of capital's re-conquest of Eastern Europe. European capital has begun its biggest post war attack on working class living standards — the proposal to dismantle the welfare state — and racism is to be one of its key weapons in the struggle this will unleash.

The cutting edge of the fascists is precisely racism made respectable by major capitalist parties to divert attention from the policies which have given the EC the highest level of unemployment in the industrialised world.

Chancellor Helmut Kohl initiated the campaign against asylum seekers



that gave fascists a mass base in Germany. Just days after the German parliament voted to severely restrict asylum rights the extra-parliamentary racists responded with the Solingen massacre. In France, the new government is carrying out Le Pen's program with police hunts for illegal immigrants and ending automatic citizenship rights for French-born children of non-French parents. In Italy the anti-immigrant Northern Leagues are now the main party in the north of the country. In Britain, the Tories played the race card on the eve of the last general election and will do so again.

Right wing Social Democracy — Euro-socialism — has been pulverised in recent elections because it led the fight for Maastricht's monetarist policies in France, Italy and Spain. With no economic alternative, it capitulated to racism — not even extending the right to vote to immigrants.

This situation demands a different scale of anti-racist movement to anything that has existed previously in Eu-

Marx's observation that history repeats itself, the first time as tragedy, the second as farce, aptly encapsulates the attempts by the Socialist Workers' Party, then *Militant*, to counter-pose their own white-led front organisations to the broad anti-racist movement created by the Anti-Racist Alliance (ARA). LOUISE LANG looks at why Black leadership is a precondition for an effective anti-racist struggle and the accommodation to racism of those left groups who reject it.

rope. That movement has to mobilise the most powerful possible alliance of social forces, led by the victims of racism, in a long term struggle which will have momentous consequences for the future of society.

The alliances on which that movement must be based — the Black communities, other minorities and the majority of the labour movement — became organised in Britain, with the ARA, earlier than in the rest of Europe. This is because the major growth of the Black community took place earlier in this country and immigrants had greater civil rights than in much of continental Europe — a spin-off of empire reversed by successive immigration laws.

The growth of the Black workforce and its struggles laid the basis for self-organisation to permeate the trade unions and Labour Party by the beginning of the nineties. This meant that not only was there a network of national Black organisations, particularly the Black Section, the National

Black Caucus and the Society of Black Lawyers, able to initiate the ARA, but there was also a network of Black self-organisation and activists in the trade unions and Labour Party which could link up with the anti-racist left to win the fight for the principles of the ARA within the labour movement. In developing this process of Black self-organisation and unity the Black Section applied in the conditions of Britain the basic principle popularised by Malcolm X that 'There can be no black-white unity until there is first some black unity.' As Malcolm taught, imperialism has so enslaved, oppressed and scattered Black people that if their voices are to be heard they must create a sense of identity, of common interest and of unity.

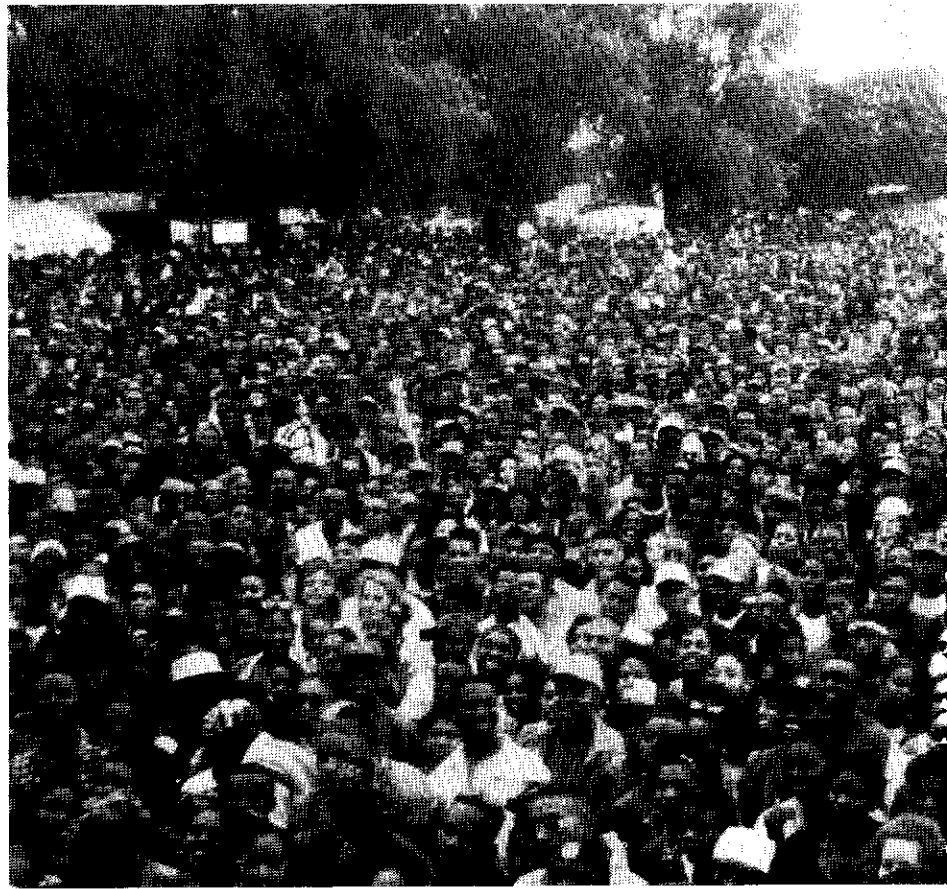
Thus the ARA represents a completely new level of anti-racist movement in Britain and Europe. It also poses the possibility — and necessity — for the left to fundamentally develop and extend its own politics. Since the ARA was launched in November 1991 literally thousands of labour movement activists have discussed the necessity of Black leadership in the anti-racist struggle, at trade union conferences, on national executives and at local meetings.

At the opposite pole has been not simply the racist right — as is to be expected — but also those parts of the left whose politics remain infected by racism — *Militant*, the SWP and the myriad of smaller groups, like *Socialist Outlook*, which act as their apologists.

'Without Black self-organisation it would be impossible to effectively combat racism'

This debate has clarified that the basis of the SWP and *Militant*'s splitting, counter-posing their own front groups — the re-launched Anti-Nazi League and *Militant*'s Youth Against Racism in Europe (YRE) and Panther UK — to a broader alliance, is not simply sectarianism. On the contrary their sectarianism is a symptom of something more fundamental — a profound accommodation to racism expressed in rejection of the principle that the victims of racism, the Black and minority communities, must be in the leadership of the struggle against it. This raises the same issues as Malcolm X's debate with the white liberals who thought they, not Black people, should lead the civil rights struggle in the United States.

Rejecting the leading role of the



Black community in the anti-racist struggle has naturally led *Militant* and the SWP into conflict with the victims of racist violence. The parents of Stephen Lawrence, who was murdered by racists in south east London earlier this year, were forced to write to the ANL, YRE and Panther UK threatening legal action if they did not stop unsolicited visits to their home and the use of the family name without permission.

Subsequently, having first agreed to the family's request for a united demonstration in central London to put pressure on the authorities to bring the murderers to justice, *Militant* and the SWP split and instead called their own anti-BNP 'unity' (sic) march the same day in south London. The family's representative described this as 'a stab in the back'.

Like the SWP in relation to the ANL, *Militant* have been at pains to deny that YRE and Panther UK are its front organisations. This is hardly surprising given *Militant*'s record.

In the 1980s *Militant* became a byword in the Labour Party for opposition to Black self-organisation and positive action against racism — the very processes which laid the groundwork for the emergence of the ARA.

The organisation which spearheaded that struggle from the mid-1980s was the Labour Party Black Section.

Militant was the main 'left' oppo-

nent of Black self-organisation in the Labour Party and trade unions. The SWP took the same view and, logically, tried to persuade *Militant* to unite to form a single organisation with them.

Militant fought even more implacably against Black Sections than the racist right wing. Their Young Socialists' rep on the Labour Party national executive, Frances Curran, led the attack on Black Sections from the platform at party conference. Today Frances Curran is a spokesperson for the YRE.

In Liverpool *Militant* led the council into a disgraceful attack on the Black community — the most oppressed part of the city's population. Whilst the GLC and other left-led councils were implementing positive action programmes to break down racist employment and housing policies, in Liverpool the minuscule proportion of Black people employed by the council declined under *Militant* leadership.

Then, under the pressure of demands by the Black community for representation, *Militant* instead appointed one of their own members, Sampson Bond, from London. The ensuing confrontation led to the removal of Bond. *Militant* supporters repeatedly disrupted meetings at which the Liverpool Black community tried to explain their point of view.



Thus in the period when Black self-organisation advanced throughout the labour movement, and race bars were broken down in local government jobs and housing, *Militant* fought a rear-guard action alongside the racist right.

Militant denounced Black sections as expressing merely the aspirations of 'middle class blacks' — the very charge that had been levelled by racists against the anti-colonial movements in Africa and Asia in the 1950s and the civil rights movement in the United States in the 1960s.

'Advances won by Black self-organisation erode the real split in the working class — which is caused by racism, not by Black people's fight against it'

Militant spokesperson Colin De Freitas, who is now the national secretary of Panther UK, wrote in *Black Sections — an answer to racism?:* 'Marxists however must be implacably opposed to the proposal for the establishment of a national organisation of special Black Sections... Short cuts and cosmetic measures like Black Sections and positive discrimination are no solution. Moreover, these proposals could further undermine the unity of the working class... The basic solution to the problems faced by the blacks, therefore lies in the labour movement

being committed to implementing socialist policies.'

De Freitas asserts: 'Black Sections were not founded with any clear political objectives ... but rather base themselves on simply trying to secure top positions for a handful of Blacks in the movement... the emphasis has been on trying to get reforms for a handful of Blacks within the system. That is why the main campaigning in these sections has been on the question of representation i.e. positive discrimination on parliamentary short lists, reserve NEC places etc. In an attempt to justify this position, the main proponents of black sections have begun to resort to desperate tactics — alleging that the Labour Party is fundamentally racist.'

De Freitas' primary worry was that such demands and characterisations might upset whites: 'The way in which these charges have been made has actually intimidated many white members of the party who fear even the slightest criticism of these proposals will lead to them being branded as racist.'

These politics are a thorough-going accommodation to racism. When the victims of racism demand action to reverse centuries of discrimination they are attacked for intimidating the more privileged whites.

In fact the recognition of Black workers' concerns by the trade unions as a result of Black self-organisation

and the election of Black Labour MPs and councillors were advances which eroded the real split in the working class — which is caused by racism not by Black peoples' fight against it.

The cutting edge of these gains was the struggle of the Black Sections.

Similar arguments were used to attack another important advance by Black people in the 1980s — the programmes of positive action which some left-led Labour councils and trade unions fought for to overcome racist discrimination in housing and employment. Bob Lee, another *Militant* leader, argued: 'positive discrimination by undermining that unity [of the working class] would add fuel to the smoldering embers of racism, and increase the danger of serious racial conflict in the inner cities... With mass joblessness facing both black and white workers... "positive discrimination" in favour of blacks could only, in practice, operate at the direct expense of whites. (*Positive Discrimination No Answer in Racism a Militant pamphlet*).

Militant oppose action to redress the inequality caused by racism on the grounds that it will 'provoke' the racists: 'In the present conditions of slump, an actual policy of 'positive discrimination' with 'quotas' and 'reserved jobs' — apart from not working in any case — would represent a dangerous departure from the positive of class solidarity... It would quickly create hostility and bitterness among despairing workers who would resent the idea of 'preferential treatment' for some while the rest go without. How long would it take for that resentment to assume a racial character? It has already been seen that sections of the despairing white workers can be seduced by the racist position of the fascists. How much more would this apply with "positive discrimination" in operation?' (*Racism a Militant pamphlet*).

This is the same racist logic as the SWP's claim: that 'at a time of Tory-imposed cuts in council housing and jobs, when there are fewer resources to go round anyway, "positive discrimination" in favour of black people runs the risk of provoking a racist backlash.' (*Racism, Resistance and Revolution* published by the SWP)

This turns the truth on its head. Racism is reinforced by capitulating to it and undermined by the struggles of Black people to reverse it. Racism has been rolled back in direct proportion to the success of the struggles of Black people for positive action, equal representation, access to employment, the right to organise and hold positions in

the labour movement and so on. That is the lesson, for example, of the civil rights movement in the United States. Racism can only be defeated by all-out political struggle and mobilisation, not hanging back for fear of offending the racist prejudices of white workers.

In *Militant's* through-the-looking-glass world the demands by the victims of racism for positive action to secure equality are smeared as 'preferential treatment'.

Although dressed up in ultraleft rhetoric, these politics of *Militant* and the SWP represent the corruption of these groups by British imperialism. Both groups give absolute priority to the economic, particularly trade union, struggles of the working class. Whereas *Marxism on the contrary asserts the primacy of politics over economics*. As Lenin put it: 'Politics must take precedence over economics. To argue otherwise is to forget the ABC of Marxism.'

Furthermore, as Lenin put it: 'the spontaneous working class movement is trade-unionism and by themselves working class trade-unionist politics is precisely working class bourgeois politics.' To advance to socialist politics the economic struggle alone is utterly insufficient. In Lenin's words: 'to

advance the interests of the working class as a whole, a movement is needed which is the tribune of the people which reacts to every manifestation of tyranny and oppression, no matter where it appears, no matter what stratum or class of the people it affects.'

In an imperialist country like Britain, economism means to abandon those oppressed by imperialism outside and inside the country. Lenin described such politics as 'imperialist economism'.

Militant provides one of the most pure examples ever known of such politics. It is the basis of *Militant's* apparently contradictory combination of combative pursuit of the economic struggle for wages, jobs and so on with extreme capitulation to British imperialism, as with its famous refusal to oppose the despatch of the British fleet to the south Atlantic in the Malvinas (Falklands) war and its bitter hostility to the Labour left's dialogue with Sinn Fein in the early 1980s.

The second consequence of adapting to the pressure of imperialism is to deny, and refuse to fight for, the specific needs of the sections of society who are most oppressed within imperialist society — women, oppressed na-

tional minorities and, most of all, the Black communities. This too is dressed up in ultra-radical rhetoric against 'middle class Blacks', 'middle class women' and so on. But its real basis was succinctly summed up by Trotsky: 'Opportunist organisations by their very nature concentrate their attention on the top layers of the working class.' Thus *Militant* in Liverpool combined a fierce struggle against the Tory government's attacks on local jobs and services with a *total disregard for the specific needs of the most oppressed part of the local population — the Black community*. *Militant's* opposition to the womens' liberation movement and, for many years, to lesbian and gay liberation, are also manifestations of its political adaption to British imperialism.

These politics have nothing to do with Marxism. Trotsky uncompromisingly condemned such pandering to the prejudices of the more privileged workers. He demanded that Marxists support the right of Black people in the United States to self-organisation up to and including the right to form a separate Black state. Instead of limiting the struggle of the oppressed, Trotsky argued: 'The worst crime on the part of the revolutionaries would be to give the smallest concessions to the privileges and prejudices of the whites. Whoever gives his little finger to the devil of chauvinism is lost.'

It is no accident that the *Militant* put these politics forward as an alternative anti-racist movement to the ARA.

There is a profound logic in the sectarianism of *Militant* and the SWP to the Anti-Racist Alliance. Black leadership and self-organisation as the only basis on which a serious anti-racist struggle is conceivable threaten *Militant* and the SWP's entire political framework because it requires a break with chauvinism, economism and class reductionism — in short with 'imperialist economism'.

Militant and the SWP represent the past of 'Marxism' in Britain — a past of systematic adaptation to British imperialism. They represent precisely the politics Marxism in Britain has to break from if it is to go forward.

As Marx put it: 'The tradition of the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the minds of the living. And, just when they appear to be engaged in the revolutionary transformation of themselves and their material surroundings, in the creation of something which does not yet exist, precisely in such epochs of revolutionary crisis they timidly conjure up the spirits of the past to help them.'

Lenin on positive action against national oppression

In one of his last articles, directed against Stalin's abuses of oppressed nations, Lenin spelled out the need not only for 'formal equality' but also to 'compensate' the victims of oppression by positive action.

In my writings on the national question I have already said that an abstract presentation of the question of nationalism in general is of no use at all. A distinction must necessarily be made between the nationalism of an oppressor nation, and that of an oppressed nation, the nationalism of a big nation and that of a small nation.

In respect of the second kind of nationalism we, nationals of a big nation, have always been guilty, in historic practice of an infinite number of cases of violence; furthermore we commit violence and insult an infinite number of times without noticing it. It is sufficient to recall my Volga reminiscences of how non-Russians are treated; how the Poles are not called by any other name than Polyachishka, how the Tatar is nicknamed Prince, how the Ukrainians are always Khokhols and the Georgians and other Caucasian nationals always Kapkasians.

That is why internationalism on the part of oppressors or 'great' nations, as they are called (though they are great only in their violence, only great as bul-

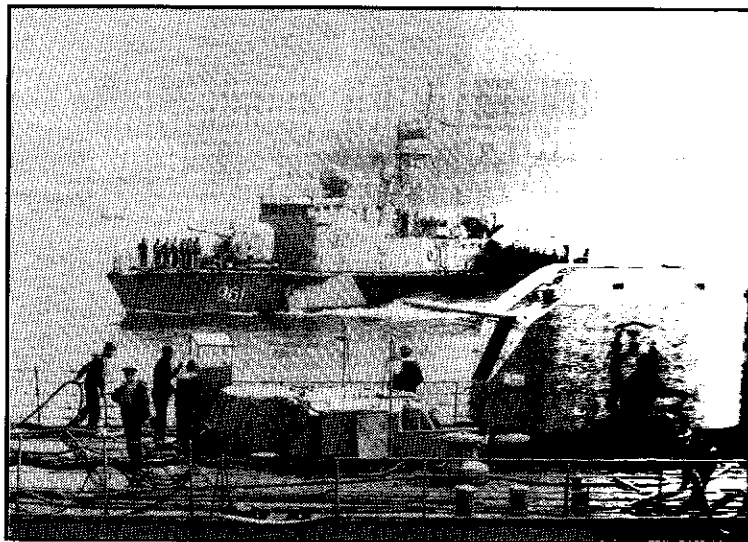
lies), must consist not only in the observance of the formal equality of nations but even in an inequality of the oppressor nation, the great nation, that must make up for the inequality which obtains in actual practice. Anybody who does not understand this has not grasped the real proletarian attitude to the national question, he is still essentially petty bourgeois in his point of view and is, therefore, sure to descend to the bourgeois point of view.

What is important for the proletariat? For the proletariat it is not only important, it is absolutely essential that he should be assured that the non-Russians place the greatest possible trust in the proletarian class struggle. What is needed to ensure this? Not merely formal equality. In one way or another, by one's attitude or by concessions, it is necessary to compensate non-Russians for the lack of trust, for the suspicion and insults to which the government of the 'dominant' nation subjected them in the past.

(From *The question nationalities or 'autonomisation'*, Lenin, *Collected Works*,

Ukraine — ‘those who call it a crisis are dangerous optimists’

The strike by miners in the Ukraine’s Donbass coalfield at the beginning of June and their demand for autonomy for eastern Ukraine — which in reality means closer links, or even reunification, with Russia — has put the issue of the relations between Russia and Ukraine at the top of the international political agenda. Geoffrey Owen reports on what is at stake.



It was the split between Russia and Ukraine which ended the super-power status of the former USSR. Between them these two states contain 80 per cent of the former USSR’s population and the vast bulk of its industrial production, raw materials and agriculture. The separation of their economies had catastrophic consequences for both countries — and most especially for Ukraine. Any movement to bring them back together would therefore meet overwhelming support in Russia and at least in the eastern part of Ukraine. It would also rapidly bring together most of the rest of the former Soviet Union.

Conversely, for the United States and Germany, the most important single foreign policy goal is to prevent this happening and maintain an independent Ukraine. This is taken to extreme lengths as shown by the issue of nuclear weapons.

There are 176 intercontinental ballistic missiles and more than 1800 nuclear warheads on Ukrainian territory. Originally Russia, Ukraine and Washington agreed that the weapons would be dismantled and returned to Russia. Since then the Ukrainian parliament has declared ownership of the missiles and Washington now argues that the warheads should be dismantled but then kept in the Ukraine under international, that is United States, supervision, and not returned to Russia. That would establish a US military

toehold in Ukraine and the threat that the missiles might be re-assembled to threaten Russia at some point in the future. That is totally unacceptable to the Russian military let alone the Russian people at whom the missiles would be aimed.

But now some US analysts are going further. The 1993 edition of *Foreign Affairs*, the house journal of Washington’s foreign policy advisors, carried an article calling for Ukraine to become a nuclear armed state to deter any attempt by Russia to re-unify the two countries. The article argues: ‘Overall, the best formula for maintaining stability in post-Cold War Europe is for all the great powers — including Germany and the Ukraine — to have secure nuclear deterrents and for all the minor powers to be non-nuclear.’ The author argues that while the ‘main burden of checking the Russians’ should fall to a re-unified, nuclear-armed Germany, ‘Nevertheless an independent Ukraine ... is a formidable barrier between Russia and Germany.’ (John Mearsheimer, *Foreign Affairs*, Summer 1993) The next issue carries a piece arguing to extend NATO into Eastern Europe and the former USSR.

Presidents Yeltsin, of Russia and Kravchuk, of the Ukraine, also oppose any reunification of their countries. It was their deal which at the end of 1991 sealed the break up of the USSR and secured their own control of Russia

and Ukraine respectively. For Russia, reunification with Ukraine, would re-establish super-power status and thereby greatly increase its room for manoeuvre vis a vis the west. That would undermine Yeltsin.

Nonetheless immensely powerful forces are being unleashed that are pushing the two countries together.

On the level of the economy, the republics of the former USSR were a single integrated, unit. The break up of the union was therefore completely economically irrational. Inter-republican trade fell by 30-50 per cent last year — a catastrophe in an economy where frequently one enterprise, in one republic, produced the entire supply of a particular product.

Worse, trade between Russia and the Ukraine — by far the biggest trading partners — virtually ceased in the first quarter of 1992.

Thus no single step would more rapidly improve the economic situation in Russia, the Ukraine and the other republics of the former USSR than restoring the economic ties between them.

Since 1991, whereas Belarus and Kazakhstan have repeatedly sought closer ties with Russia, it has been the Ukrainian government which has blocked every step in this direction. This is because the Ukraine, with its population of 52 million people, is in reality the only former Soviet republic

which could be viable — that is neither a satellite of Russia, nor a mere puppet of German or US imperialism like with the Baltic states and Georgia.

Kravchuk's goal was to balance between Russia and the west in order to secure economic and political support from both and thereby create an independent state. He calculated that aid from, and economic ties with, Germany and the United States would compensate the Ukraine for the disruption of its relations with Russia and banked on a big international loan to sustain an independent currency.

'A division is developing between the nationalist west Ukraine and the pro-Russian east'

But Kravchuk's strategy has failed. Ukraine is dependent on cheap Russian oil. As Russia has raised energy prices towards world market prices, Ukraine's economy has been devastated. Furthermore, significant aid from Germany and the United States has not been forthcoming and there has been no loan to prop up the currency. As a result the value of the Ukrainian currency has fallen rapidly even against the rouble — providing a highly visible gauge of the negative results of the break with Russia for the population.

The situation by the beginning of June was summed up by Volodimir Cherniak of the Institute of the Economy: 'It would not be an exaggeration to call the situation catastrophic. Those who call it a crisis are dangerous optimists.'

Prime Minister Kuchma's response is to try to accelerate privatisation which, if implemented, would decimate the heavy industry in the eastern Ukraine. The fivefold increase in food prices at the beginning of June was one of the first steps down this road.

But it immediately met massive opposition which erupted on 9 June with the miners' strike in the eastern Ukraine. The strike closed more than 228 pits, 90 per cent of the Ukraine's coal mines, and scores of other enterprises in the eastern regions of Donetsk, Lugansk and Dnepropetrovsk. The miners called not only for pay increases, but sweeping political demands — a referendum of confidence in the president and parliament, and, most significantly, regional autonomy for the eastern Ukraine including the Donbass coalfield.

The sheer power of the Ukrainian

miners was illustrated by the fact that the government almost immediately appointed Ekhim Zvehilsky, the Mayor of Donetsk, the epicentre of the strike, to first deputy prime minister — equivalent to making Arthur Scargill leader of the House of Commons.

Even though the government quickly offered economic concessions the miners stuck out for their political demands for ten days, only returning to work after parliament agreed to call the referendum demanded by the strikers.

The strike has raised the fundamental issue for the future of the Ukraine — its relations with Russia.

This is reflected in the division developing between the nationalist western Ukraine, which only became part of the Soviet Union in 1940, and the more industrialised east and south, which have been thoroughly integrated with Russia for 300 years and where there is massive support for unity with Russia — particularly, but not exclusively, among the 11 million ethnic Russians. The Russian speaking working class in the industrial heartlands of eastern Ukraine have concluded that the country's economic collapse is due to the cutting of those links.

This division was also reflected in the pattern of support for the miners' strike with the overwhelming majority of mines on strike in the eastern Ukraine, and strong support from other industries in the east and south including Crimea (which only became part of Ukraine in 1954 and voted against independence). The miners have also been supported by the local authorities in those areas. While the official demand of the strikers is autonomy within the Ukraine, the underlying dynamic was illustrated by the adoption of a resolution by participants at a rally in Lugansk, eastern Ukraine, in the first week of the strike, demanding that Ukraine unite with Russia and return to the rouble zone.

As the single step which would most rapidly improve both the Russian and Ukrainian economies is to restore their links, this has the potential to create an unstoppable dynamic and one which, if adopted by the Russian working class within Ukraine, no other force in that country could stand up to.

But any Russian leader, including Yeltsin, who tried to restore Russia's unity with the Ukraine would face unrelenting hostility from the west. Nonetheless, if it were to be put on the agenda by a movement within the Ukraine, no Russian politician would be able to stand in its way because popular support in Russia for reunification with even a part of Ukraine

would be total. Just as no government could sell the Kurile islands to Japan and survive, despite Yeltsin's evident wish for such a deal, even more so, no Russian politician could openly oppose a movement in the direction of restoring Russia's links with the Ukraine and retain office for long.

That is why Yeltsin has done what he can to back up Kravchuk. But this is a dangerous game as shown by the dispute over the Black Sea fleet. After Yeltsin and Kravchuk agreed to split the fleet 50:50 they faced a virtual mutiny. This was a crazy proposal as the fleet is a single, integrated military organism. The fleet's officers rejected the agreement and called for the Russian parliament to be given jurisdiction over the fleet.

Then in July the Russian parliament took the immensely popular step of opposing any division of the fleet and went a step further, declaring that Sevastopol, the fleet's base in the Crimea, should be part of Russia. Yeltsin immediately repudiated this decision.

At the same time the Russian government is under increasing pressure over the discrimination against the 25 million Russians living outside Russia's borders — particularly in the Baltic states — and the growing conflicts on the borders of the former USSR. The announcement by the US that it will take a more active role in these disputes and the discovery that the CIA is training Shevardnadze's forces in Georgia tends to confirm Russian suspicions of US intentions for the future of their country.

'Re-unification of Russia with all or even part of Ukraine would be a terrific blow to imperialism'

The break-up of the USSR has had catastrophic consequences for its people's living standards and security and allowed imperialism to dust off plans to balkanise and recolonise the country. The June miners' strike in the Ukraine was a big step in the opposite direction.

Any real steps by the Ukraine to re-unite with Russia will open a propaganda campaign of cold war dimensions in the west.

But that is because re-unification of Russia with all, or even part, of the Ukraine would deal a terrific blow to imperialism's plans for the former USSR, and the world.

Prospects for Russia's new left

Boris Yeltsin's situation has sharply deteriorated since his referendum success earlier this year. The bungled monetary reform in July resulted in a ten per cent fall in Yeltsin's opinion poll standing — below that of Vice-President Rutskoi for a time. This was followed by significant protest actions against falling living standards involving one and a half million workers particularly in the far east and north. Yeltsin responded by announcing on 12 August that he will defy the constitution and impose early parliamentary elections in the autumn. A new clash between the president and the opposition now looms in Russia.

Yeltsin's problems began when he failed to push his constitution for a presidential dictatorship through the constitutional assembly whose members he had personally selected. Only 10 out of 21 autonomous regions supported Yeltsin's draft. Now it will go before the regional soviets for discussion and amendment. Whatever emerges must then be ratified by the Congress of Peoples' Deputies, in which Yeltsin's supporters are a minority, before it can become law.

The economic situation has also started to deteriorate once again. Following the referendum the government tightened credit and 'liberalised' energy prices, precipitating a new inter-enterprise payments crisis.

Tension is increased by the fact that Russia is embroiled in growing conflicts around its borders. Most significantly in Ukraine the industrial east, led by the Donbass miners, is demanding closer links with Russia. Yeltsin's efforts to help Ukraine's president Leonid Kravchuk through this crisis backfired when their plan to split the Black Sea Fleet 50:50 was rejected by the military and the majority of the Russian public.

Finally, Yeltsin's support among Russian miners has also been eroded. Miners facing large-scale pit closures recently staged their first small parliament demonstration. The Russian Federation of Trade Unions is planning nation-wide action to protest the drop in living standards.

These developments have allowed the opposition to regroup after mistakes in April which allowed Yeltsin to recover from the collapse of his coup attempt. By trying to impeach him, then allowing his referendum to go ahead in conditions where the government controls radio and television, what should have been a crushing defeat of Yeltsin was transformed into his referendum victory.

Now, with his position again rapidly deteriorating, Yeltsin's advisors want to impose the earliest possible parliamentary elections.

We spoke to three leading figures on the left in Russia at the end of July. **LIUDMILA VARTASAROVA** is co-president of the Socialist Party of Working People, founded by Roy Medvedev. She is also a political advisor to Ruslan Khasbulatov, chair of the Russian parliament. **BORIS SLAVIN** is the senior political journalist on *Pravda*, which reflects communist views and has a circulation of 600,000. Slavin is an executive committee member of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation, which was re-established earlier this year. **BORIS KAGARLITSKY** is a leading member of the Party of Labour and political advisor Igor Klotchkov, chair of the Russian Federation of Trade Unions (FNPR).



LIUDMILA VARTASAROVA

It is difficult to make long term forecasts in Russia, because events here change so quickly. But to my mind the president and his team has a short period of time to win some positions in the

elections. But they'll lose ground every day after October. So, from the point of view of the presidential team, elections should take place this autumn or they won't want them at all.

Perestroika is ending with the results of the April referendum. Yeltsin claimed it was a real victory, that he and his policies were supported by the population. But that situation will begin to deteriorate by the end of summer, when people come back from their holidays to their offices.

In the late spring and in summer the situation generally gets better, with some signs of economic improvement in this or that field. So the president depends on the seasons. Today he can claim that he has achieved something. But it will be very difficult for the government to claim the same by next spring.

Some opponents of Yeltsin, some political blocs and parties, are ready to see early elections, either in the autumn or next spring — because they are eager to seize power. As for our party, we are not eager just to seize power, although we certainly want to take part in the government.

The parliamentary elections have to take place by spring 1995. But if the government pursues its present course, the country will be destroyed by then. Our economy would be eliminated by that time — and that's why it is not possible to wait that long.

To my mind the situation is rather favourable for the left. If our activities are sensible I think it will be possible for the left forces of Russia to win a sufficient number of seats in parliament. But I'd like to underline that we need the unification of left forces in a bloc for the elections. If everything is done in a sensible way, we have a chance to win seats in parliament.

The left movement has obtained a kind of rose colour. And I think that socialist ideas are becoming more

popular. Because of our programmes we have some chances in the elections.

The second congress of left forces is likely to take place at the end of September. By that time we are thinking not about unification into one party, but of a kind of bloc, including a left fraction of the Social Democratic Party.

'We need the unification of left forces in a bloc for the elections'

We are discussing a joint left project. But all the parties which are going to make a bloc are trying to keep their own names. Our Socialist Party of Working People wants this name for the party in future; the Party of Labour is the same; the left wing of the Social Democrats who left their party because the rest became supporters of Yeltsin, also don't want to be deprived of their name.

As for elections, our plan is to make a bloc of parties within the Congress of People's Deputies. Some trade union organisations and women's organisations will join us for the elections. Maybe we'll become a part of another broader bloc, or maybe we'll remain independent for future elections.

We are ready to cooperate with the centrist forces of the Civic Union. I mean the party of Rutskoi and part of Travkin's Democratic Party — the coalition that was called the Civic Union some time ago. We are considering what forms this cooperation should take. But within this bloc we think we should keep our independence as left of centre.

As for the communists in the classic

sense of the word, they have their own electorate. This is shown by many recent polls, and I don't think their vote will change greatly. The Communist Party positions are rather independent, but I hope they will act in coordination with other forces.



BORIS SLAVIN

I believe that today in Russia the political forces are fairly evenly balanced. Yeltsin is not strong enough to introduce his personal dictatorship but neither does the opposition have enough strength to come to power. By the opposition I mean all anti-Yeltsin forces.

This relates to the problem of the constitution. The choice is whether Russia becomes an ultra-presidential or democratic parliamentary republic. The paradox is that while Yeltsin talks a lot about democracy he intends to introduce very strong powers for himself. He speaks a lot about the existing constitution but he often violates it. The opposition talks less about democratic principles but *does* a lot more to

uphold them.

Unfortunately, the West often does not understand this. Because it is accustomed to old categories: reformers, communists, democrats, and so on.

Russian society is split differently — between, on the one hand, those who advocate a monetarist, neo-liberal policy and, on the other hand, those who advocate socialist ideas and people who suffer from the consequences of shock therapy. The question is not who is for or against reforms, but whose interest this or that force advocates — the interests of speculative capital or the interests of the majority of society.

That is the main split in Russian society. This is what the struggle around the constitution represents.

More and more people are becoming aware of this. Most importantly, representatives of our leadership have become more aware of it. I interview a lot of senior officials of our country: Yeltsin, Khasbulatov, Zorkin [chair of the constitutional court]. I sincerely believe that such figures as Khasbulatov and Zorkin are on one side of the so-called barricade.

How the struggle ends will depend on many factors. First of all on the economic situation.

Before the referendum Yeltsin froze the prices of oil, petroleum, rent, and some other basic goods and services. But he couldn't maintain this, so dissatisfaction is increasing. In my view, it will be angrily expressed in the autumn and next spring. First of all by the working class, but also by some circles of the intelligentsia.

Since 1991 prices have increased maybe a thousand-fold. But wages have only increased by a factor of 10. In general living standards have dropped by three times. The most awful thing is that the majority of the population doesn't receive even basic products, such as milk, which is necessary for pensioners and children. Meat consumption has decreased by several times and the production of cereal greatly increased.

Most of the population can't afford food. The bulk of Russian citizens go to shops just as they go on excursions. For the first time in their lives our people have come across the very curious fact that there are a lot of goods available but almost nobody can afford them.

We are not psychologically ready for this. Previously we had the opposite: purchasing power, but no goods in shops.

The most terrible effect is that the birth rate is low and the death rate is very high. More people die than are





born. Now we have the destruction of the social sphere. There are no kindergartens, summer camps for children, etc.

The sphere of science and culture, previously always subsidised by the government, has been destroyed. Our intelligentsia is kept silent because they have no opportunity to produce good books, good films, and so on.

'A shift of values has taken place. The hero of our times is not the printer, scientist or doctor but the entrepreneur'

A shift of values has taken place. The hero of our times is not a painter, a science, a teacher, a doctor. But a businessman, an entrepreneur. Our culture is greatly distorted by the influence of the America. We didn't like what our former dissidents said, that under Stalin art and literature falsely showed the tremendous prosperity of our state. Nowadays we have to consume a lot of the same kind of films made in the USA.

And finally there is foreign policy. We have to make a lot of concessions to America in all spheres of society. The internal policy of the government is divide and rule. The external policy, dictated from abroad is the same.

Here we can see the reasons for the creation of a very powerful opposition inside our society.

Much will depend on the unanimity of our opposition. I believe that if things continue as they are now, Yeltsin will not survive another year. The only thing which can save him is to shift his course from confrontation towards agreement in society. Or, he can

be saved by contradictions within the opposition itself.

Pravda is a newspaper of left forces and democratic federalists. It represents the ideas of the centre left, with more emphasis on the left. *Pravda* is being attacked from all sides. Neo-Stalinists criticise what they see as *Pravda's* retreat from revolutionary positions; Yeltsin and other senior officials object to our newspaper's attacks on them.

I think this means *Pravda* is going in the right direction. The drawback is the lack of a concrete programme which can be offered as an alternative to the existing direction. It publishes a lot of alternative programmes, but to my mind *Pravda* has to have its own programme.

The Communist Party has a crucial role to play, the main role in the opposition, if it is able to unite all communists, and find appropriate allies amongst the centre forces, and patriotic forces.

Today the communist movement is not unanimous. There is one big Communist Party and a lot of smaller parties. Sometimes they criticise each other more than they criticise Yeltsin. After the decision taken by the constitutional court to legalise it, everybody thought that it would be possible to organise a big united Communist Party. But it didn't happen. For instance, the Socialist Party of Working People, which had tried to restore a big Communist Party, remained independent.

So the first step was just to unite people. The second problem was not to repeat past errors.

I'd like to say a few words about our difficulties and about our mistakes. We don't have close enough links with the working class. In particular we don't have a proper relationship with the trade union organisations, because of the methods of the Communist Party when it was in power. And that is not acceptable now.

There are some cases of neo-Stalinism which can distract the attention of our party. The main problem is just to establish contact with the mass of the population. Unless we do, it will be a very serious drawback of our party.

I also think there are mistakes in the theory of the present Communist Party in its understanding of the concept of patriotism.

The break up of the former USSR and the possible splitting of Russia has provoked a strong resistance. Patriotism means not wanting Russia to be split up. The problem is if pride in your own people becomes the suppression of other peoples.

The patriotism that communists advocate must not involve the suppression of another nation. We should defend Russians who are suppressed by nationalists in other states, for instance in Azerbaijan. But Russians shouldn't believe they're better than others because they're Russians.



BORIS KAGARLITSKY

Government support in the April referendum was no more than around 35 per cent of the population. The government managed to win, but it did not have the majority of the population behind it, even with a tremendous propaganda campaign.

This shows that Yeltsin's policies can't be contained within the framework of democracy in the long term. The government strategists want elections as fast and as undemocratically as possible. The new constitution would consolidate some kind of formally elected — but in reality, authoritarian — power which could not be challenged by any serious opposition.

Keeping certain democratic formalities is important to the government to win additional support for their policies inside the country and from the West. The IMF and the G7 strategy towards Russia is to strengthen the authoritarian tendency within the regime while insisting it remains within a formally democratic framework.

Thus, you have to have a parliament. Nobody cares about who's in the parliament, nobody cares how democratically the parliament is elected, nobody cares about freedom of speech in the country — but you still have to



have a parliament, a fake parliament. Like certain Latin American regimes, or like Singapore, which for years kept two opposition MPs to show the parliament was democratic.

This is very much supported by Western politicians to cheat their own public, which doesn't really know what is happening.

But Yeltsin and his team ran out of time, and ran out of steam with the constitutional assembly. Early elections were to be connected with the issue of the new constitution. The idea was to carry out a peaceful coup d'etat by turning the constitutional assembly appointed by Yeltsin into a parliament which would accept the constitution and thereby displace the Congress of Peoples' Deputies.

The government still has the chance of a relatively good showing if elections take place in October, because who is going to pay for finance minister Fyodorov's austerity measures is not going to become clear till later. But I don't think they are going to destroy the opposition in the elections.

The government strategy will not work because there are too many factors involved, such as the recent issue of dividing the Black Sea Fleet.

Yeltsin and Kravchuk have had many conflicts. But the moment there was unrest in the Ukraine — a growing social movement against the government, with pressure for the reunification of the Ukraine with Russia — the Russian government forgot most of its quarrels with Kravchuk to save the Ukrainian government and prevent reunification. This shows the real solidarity between the ruling elites.

One of the results was the absolutely crazy decision to split the Black Sea Fleet into two parts. Technically it's impossible. When you have just one aircraft carrier, for example, it's very hard to know how to divide it between

two countries!

The Party of Labour completely supports the decision of the Russian parliament to reject this deal with Kravchuk. We also support the people of Sevastopol who want the town to be part of Russia.

Whatever happens, every region to the east of the Urals is going to vote against the Yeltsin government. Yeltsin is not going to have a compliant, controllable parliament. But if elections are postponed until next spring, they could turn into a complete disaster for Yeltsin.

If the left proposes a credible concrete political alternative, and if the unions respond in an adequate way, we are capable of influencing the situation.

'There is a strong radicalisation of the trade union leadership which is starting to understand that Russia is no place for social democratic policies'

For the left there are now two perspectives, which are not necessarily contradictory. One is of a broad centre-left which means working with the Civic Union to increase the weight of the left inside it. The Civic Union is a centrist grouping, a contradictory formation with some people who are unhappy about government policies but not about government ideology. They want privatisation, for example, but would like it organised in a different way. They are people who definitely cannot be described as leftists. But there are also people who are more radical and left wing.

The other option is to form a strong left wing force independent of the Civic Union, which also can cooperate with the Civic Union on certain issues, and which at the same time could cooperate on certain issues with the Communist Party, which is an important force.

We have to get the Communist Party de-demonised because it's part of the political picture. It is a party which is not only the biggest in the country, but commands the support of at least 15 per cent of the population which is substantial. Excluding every seventh citizen from the democratic sphere doesn't help debate.

Up to now there are two other formations of importance on the left, the Party of Labour and the Socialist Party of Working People. There are also some people who represent the left wing of the Social Democratic Party. They formed the United Social Democrats when the SDP went over to the Yeltsin camp. Now in Moscow there is a coordinating committee which brings together the Socialist Party of Working People, the Party of Labour, and the United Social Democrats.

There is also discussion about the possibility of a merger of the Party of Labour and Socialist Party of Working People to form one party. The United Labour Party, or Russian Labour Party — we will find the proper name.

The trade union leadership is now very supportive of the Party of Labour because there is a strong radicalisation of the trade union leadership itself. They have started to understand that Russia is no place for social democratic policies. We don't have the context for Western style social democracy. We have to try something more radical, more substantial.

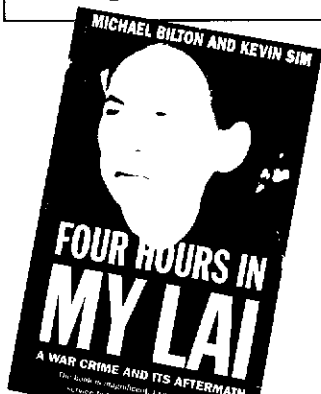
The Party of Labour gets support

from the national leadership of the Russian Federation of Trade Unions and the local leaderships. We are weakest at the middle level, especially in the industrial unions which feel that the Russian Federation of Trade Unions is in fact their political representative. Nonetheless we are getting a response from local trade union leaders who want to set up organising committees for the Party of Labour locally.

So what is going to be the outcome for the left? Most probably a combination of approaches. They are not necessarily incompatible. Tactically I think the best strategy would be to form a strong united left wing organisation, and have some agreement on specific issues with the Civic Union without a complete coalition. And I think a similar agreement will also be reached with the Communist Party.

Four hours in My Lai

Four Hours in My Lai — a war crime and its aftermath
By Michael Bilton and Kevin Sim. Penguin £6.99



Four Hours in My Lai — a war crime and its aftermath tells the story of a war atrocity which 'was not an aberration of the [Vietnam] war, but its apotheosis'. American troops of Charlie Company, murdered 400 civilians, in the villages of Truong Dinh, Tu Cung, My Lai and Co Luy, abbreviated to My Lai 4 by the US explains JAYNE FISHER.

The book details the events in My Lai in the words of the soldiers who participated. Vernado Simpson: 'We started to move through the village, shooting everything in sight, children, men, women, and animals. Some was sickening.' The villagers were rounded up into ditches and shot. Many were tortured and mutilated first. The women and girls were systematically raped. 'It was worse than a massacre. Too many of Medina's [the Captain's] men were taking sordid pleasure in sadistic behaviour. Several became "double veterans," GI slang for raping a woman and then murdering her... Soldiers repeatedly stabbed their victims, cut off limbs, sometimes beheaded them. Some were scalped; others had their tongues cut out or their throats slit or both. Martin Fagan [a private of C Company] saw bodies which had been shot in the head at point blank range. He could tell because the penetration of

an M-16 round created a shock wave inside the skull forcing the brain completely out.'

The book interviews Vietnamese survivors — a welcome change from most accounts of the Vietnam war.

What had caused 'a typical cross-section of American youth' to commit such an atrocity? One mother said 'I sent them a good boy and they made him a murderer.' The US claimed My Lai was a one-off event, where a platoon went inexplicably berserk. But in Vietnam such atrocities were one of the ways the US conducted its war. Members of Charlie company *did* go wild. But they followed the orders of their officers throughout, then sat down and ate lunch next to the piles of corpses.

The book demonstrates that such atrocities were commonplace. Co Luy village, one and a half miles from My Lai, was massacred by another company. In another typical incident, the 2nd platoon of Charlie Company interrogated an old man they came across whilst searching a village. The sergeant, Torres, attacked the injured old man with a knife and then hanged him. Robert Maples 'saw a personnel carrier with 20 human ears strung like trophies on its radio antenna.' Rape, torture and murder of captives and prisoners of war were standard practice.

In My Lai the men were carrying out orders. The



company was told to kill everyone. Sergeant Hodges recalled the pre-attack briefing: 'The order we were given was to kill and destroy everything that was in the village. It was to kill the pigs, drop them in the wells; pollute the water supply; kill, cut down the banana trees; burn the village; burn the hooches as we went through it...Someone asked if that meant the women and children. And the order was: everyone in the village... it was quite clear that no one was to be spared in that village.'

Such methods were routine because in Vietnam the United States was trying to terrorise an entire people into submission. The US treated their enemy as sub-humans.

During the trial of Lt Calley, the only man found guilty of war crimes at My Lai, one soldier told *Time* magazine 'We are here to kill dinks. How can they convict Calley for killing dinks? That's our job.' In his memoir, *Body Count*, Calley recounts: 'We weren't in My Lai to kill human beings, really. We were there to kill ideology that is carried by — I don't know. Pawns. Blobs. Pieces of flesh... I looked at communism as a southerner looks at a Negro, supposedly. It's evil. It's bad.'

'In the end everyone in that country was the enemy' stated one My Lai veteran. Anyone with different eyes was shot at. My Lai horrors. But, the impersonal massacres routinely carried out from the air far outweighed anything that could be done by individuals on the ground.

At Calley's trial, his main defence was that he was carrying out orders. In 1971 he was sentenced to life imprisonment, but after 3 days President Nixon ordered him to be released pending appeal. He finally spent 3 years as the most privileged prisoner in the US.

The horrors of My Lai are a snapshot of the Vietnam war. At least two million Vietnamese died along with 57,000 Americans. Nearly half of the country's natural forests were destroyed. More bombs were dropped on Vietnam than



in the whole of the Second World War and Korean war combined. Thirty thousand children in Hanoi and Haiphong suffered permanent deafness as a result of twelve nights of bombings during Christmas 1972. Napalm 'B', created specially for Vietnam, continues to smoulder under the skin's tissues throughout the lifetime of its victims.

Yet remarkably through all this life proceeded. Underground hospitals, operating theatres, baby delivery rooms were constructed. Every village in North Vietnam had its own underground creche into which babies were lowered when the bombing started. In every classroom there were trap doors so that within seconds a class of 50 children would disappear.

Washington has since broken its agreements to help rebuild the country it destroyed. Not a penny of the \$3.4 billion reparations agreed in the Paris accords has been paid. Instead the US organised a total trade embargo and used Hollywood productions like *Deer Hunter* and *Rambo* to try to re-write history.

But more than anything it is important to remember that the US was finally *defeated* in Vietnam and tens of millions of people were inspired by that extraordinary struggle and the indomitable courage of the Vietnamese people.

My Lai is today known as a 'hero village' in Vietnam. A new village has grown up, rice fields have been reclaimed, houses rebuilt, and the some survivors remain there. It is a symbol that Vietnam, in spite of everything the US has thrown at it, defeated the strongest military power on earth and survives. They were the first country to win a war against the US. For that the imperialists will never forgive them.

At the end of *Four Hours in My Lai* the author reminds us of George Bush's boast that 'the Vietnam syndrome is buried forever'. This book is a small contribution to the struggle to prove Bush wrong. It is also a timely antidote for anyone who thinks something good might come of US intervention in Somalia, Bosnia or anywhere else.

Year 501.

Year 501: The conquest Continues, by Noam Chomsky, Verso, 1993, £11.95.

Year 501 is about imperialism, more specifically, about US imperialism. However, those looking for a theoretical treatise will be disappointed, for *Year 501* is a polemic which paints a detailed and brutal picture of the unfolding of imperialism since 1492, writes COLIN STEVENS.

The book takes us on a 500-year odyssey from the fateful 12 October when Christopher Columbus, 'discovered' America, until the present day. Chomsky's case is that 1992 inaugurated no New World Order, but that since the collapse of the USSR it is precisely this very Old World Order that has been reinforced.

That is, the Old World Order was overwhelmingly determined by the 'confrontation between the conquerors and the conquered on a global scale', and the present policy of the great powers is a just a ghastly continuation of that very conquest.

It is true, as he puts it, that there is new wine in old bottles, but the significance of the collapse of the USSR and Eastern Europe will have incalculable consequences for the worse, and the book registers some of the most dramatic of these.

As forcefully as ever Chomsky exposes the racism that has pervaded Western culture and scholarship throughout these 500 years, and how it is intensifying under the US dominated new-style Old World Order.

Explaining how profound racism was used to justify colonial oppression, slavery and even extermination, he quotes Hegel: 'Among the Negroes, moral sentiments are quite weak, or more strictly speaking non-existent', 'creatures at the level of a mere thing an object of no value.'

It is not surprising that to Theodore Roosevelt 'the most ultimately righteous of all wars is a war with savages'; or that Winston Churchill 'felt that poison gas was just right for use against uncivilised tribes (Kurds and Afghans, particularly)'

The demonising of Saddam Hussein is a direct descendent

— a racist stereotype used to justify the US's devastation of Iraq with overwhelming violence, the slaughter of hundreds of thousands, and thousands more deaths through starvation and disease after the war's end.

The book relates how 'The conquest of the New World set off two vast demographic catastrophes, unparalleled in history: the virtual destruction of the indigenous population of the Western hemisphere, and the devastation of Africa as the slave rapidly expanded to serve the needs of the conquerors, and the continent itself was subjugated. Much of Asia too suffered dreadful misfortunes. While modalities have changed, the fundamental themes of the conquest retain their vitality and resilience, and will continue to do so until the reality and causes of the savage injustice are honestly addressed.'

Year 501 weaves coherently together grisly historical events such as the Spanish-Portuguese conquests, the defeat of the Moors and the expulsion of the Jews by Spain, the Spanish Inquisition, the 'racism and savagery of the world conquest', the Dutch and East India companies, the



The conquest continues

booty brought to the English treasury by pirate Francis Drake (which 'may fairly be considered the fountain and origin of British foreign investments'), the 'subduing' of England's Celtic periphery, the colonisation and subsequent plunder of India, Brazil, the Caribbean, Sri Lanka, China, Mexico, Peru, Bengal, Indonesia...the whole of Asia and Africa and Latin America, and the history of imperialism thereafter.

However, the focus of *Year 501* is the rise, consolidation and relative decline of US imperialism.

Chomsky's erudition, appropriate quotes and moral outrage makes *Year 501* an excellent read. He dissects the monstrous hypocrisy of the apologists for imperialism with a devastating touch.

On Watergate, he quotes the historian Nathan Miller 'graft and corruption played a vital role in the development of modern American society and in the creation of a complex, interlocking machinery of government and business that presently determines the course of our affairs.'

While disturbed by events in Russia he jokes: 'There is still room for progress towards the capitalist ideal', for 'Crime has soared in Russia after the collapse of Communism, as it did in Eastern Europe' but 'the levels of crime are still well below New York's standards'.

The US intervention and domination of Latin America is the book's focus in illustrating the horrors of the new imperialism. Thus Chomsky tells us about the inevitable outcome of nearly 40 years of US inspired (and US funded) counter-insurgency war against the Guatemalan people which has resulted in a higher level of child malnutrition than Haiti, 40 percent of students suffer from malnutrition, 87 percent of the population live below the poverty line, 6 million have no access to health service, 3.6 million lack drinking water (total population, 9 million).

The background of repression is even more gruesome: 440 villages totally

destroyed and between 100,000 to 150,000 civilians killed since the 1970s. If 1954 is taken as the initial point when the US regained control, then the number goes up to 200,000.

In the same vein, Chomsky goes through the devastating social, political and economic effects on the Latin American poor of years of what he terms IMF fundamentalism. Such as children being sold in Peru to the highest bidder to pan gold, or sent illegally to the US for the supply of vital organs, sexual exploitation, or experimental tests. Or, Brazil where 75 per cent of the corpses of murdered children reveal internal mutilation and the majority have their eyes removed.

The IMF 'success stories' such as Brazil, Mexico, Chile, Thailand, Singapore, Indonesia, Argentina are dissected for what they really are — social catastrophes. The brutal austerity programs of the 1980s and 'the huge debt accumulated through the partnership of domestic military economic elites and foreign banks awash with petrodollars is to be paid by the poor.'

A specific chapter details US policies of economic strangulation of Vietnam exposing the vindictiveness of a still humiliated empire.

Chomsky convincingly argues that in broader a framework, 'the Cold War can be understood, in large measure, as an interlude in the North-South conflict of the Columbian era, unique in scale but similar to other episodes in significant respects.'

He argues that the countries of Eastern Europe, including Russia — now under seige from the IMF, World Bank, and facing economic devastation — would have become semi-colonial possessions of European capital had they not developed a planned economy. The Bolshevik takeover in October 1917 'extricated the USSR from the Western-dominated periphery, setting off the inevitable reaction, beginning

with immediate military intervention by Britain, France, Japan, and the US. These were, from the outset, basic elements of the Cold War.'

Today 83 per cent of the world's wealth is in the hands of the richest billion, whilst only a miserable 1.4 per cent accrues to the billion at the bottom of the heap, leaving 15.6 per cent for the other 3 billion.

Within the US, its relative economic decline means that the 'end of the affluent alliance and the onset of the "new imperial age" have intensified the internal class war.' This results in 'the entrenchment of Third World features at home', including such facts as 'black

men in Harlem were less likely to reach the age of 65 than men in Bangladesh.'

The attempt to justify this in ruling class circles produces gems such as 'the middle class taxpayer, the politician, and the wealthy upper class, are all victims of the undeserving poor, who must be disciplined and punished for their depravity, down to future generations.'

In the context of a mass stampede to the right by so many formerly left wing intellectuals, Chomsky's *Year 501* comes as a cyclone of fresh air. If you want ammunition to expose just how bloody, brutal and unabashed imperialism remains today, then read this book.

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Black Caucus ●

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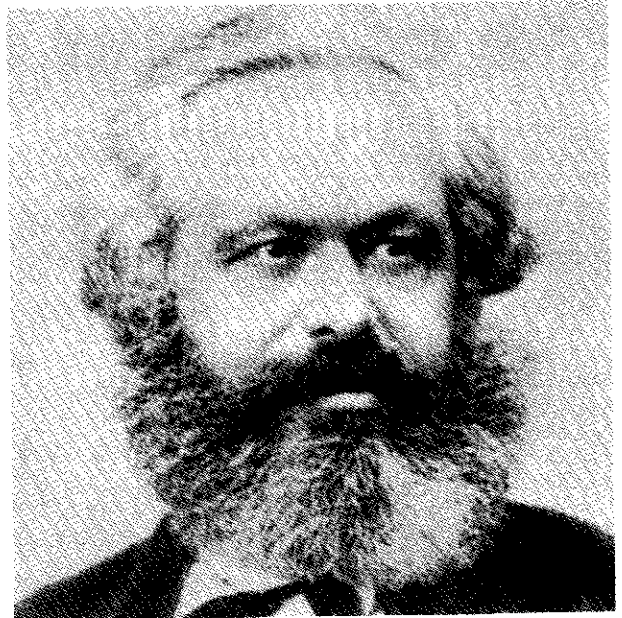
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Marx on hegemony

Socialist Action gives tremendous emphasis to the international class struggle, the struggle of women, the black community, and all sections of the oppressed as part of working class politics. But it does not treat these simply as individual questions — vital as each is separately. *Socialist Action* seeks to integrate them in a hegemonic strategy — that is one in which the labour movement champions the demands of all the exploited and oppressed. Such an emphasis is not a peripheral question of socialism but at the core of Marxism. JAMES CARTER looks at the origins of the idea of hegemony in the views of Marx and its place in socialist strategy.



'So one army lines up on one place and says, "We are for socialism", and another, somewhere else and says, "We are for imperialism", and that will be a social revolution!...Whoever expects such a "pure" social revolution will never live to see it. Such a person pays lip-service to revolution without understanding what revolution is.' — Lenin, *The Discussion on Self-Determination Summed Up*.

Lenin strongly attacked those who counterposed the idea of 'class politics' to the fight of the working class for hegemony. He wrote: 'the famous formula of one of the young leaders of our reformists...who declared that the Russian Social-Democratic (Marxist) Party must represent "not hegemony but a class party", is a formula of the most consistent reformism. More than that, is a formula of sheer renegacy.

'To say "not hegemony, but a class party", means to take the side of the liberal who says to the slave of our age, the wage earner: "fight to improve your conditions as a slave, but regard the thought of overthrowing slavery as a harmful utopia"! To preach to the workers that what they need is "not hegemony, but a class party" means to betray the cause of the proletariat to the liberals; it means preaching that *Social Democratic* (Marxist) labour policy should be replaced by a *liberal* labour policy.'

Lenin insisted that as long as the

working class did not fight for hegemony it had not developed a *class* position at all — it was simply a collection of trades or guilds: 'From the standpoint of Marxism the class, so long as it renounces the idea of hegemony or fails to fight for it, is not a class, or not yet a class, but a *guild*, or the sum total of various guilds.' He stated: 'it is the consciousness of the idea of hegemony and its implementation through their own activities that converts the guilds as a whole into a class.'¹

These concepts of Lenin, of the hegemony of the working class, were however completely rooted in those of Marx — although it was Lenin who attached the specific term 'hegemony' to them. Marx stressed from the beginning that a revolution never develops in the simplistic form of 'one class against another' but through a process in which one class leads all the progressive developments of society. In Marx's words in *The German Ideology*: 'The class making a revolution comes forward from the very start...not as a class but as a representative of the whole of society, as the whole mass of society confronting the one ruling class.'²

To be victorious a class must necessarily represent not merely *its own* but *wider* interests of society: 'No class of civil society can play this role (of leader of the revolution) without awakening a moment of enthusiasm in itself and in the masses: a moment in which this class fraternises and fuses

with society in general, becomes identified with it and is experienced as its *universal representative*; a moment in which its claims and rights are truly the rights and claims of society itself and in which it is in reality the heart and head of society.'³

This poses the *universality* of a class in terms of its ideology and of social reality. In terms of its ideology: 'Only in the name of the universal rights of society can a particular class lay claim to universal domination.'⁴

This *universality* of a class, however, is not simply, or mainly, a question of ideology Marx stressed: 'each class could actually overthrow its predecessors only by liberating the individuals of *all* classes from certain chains which had fettered them'.⁵ As regards the great bourgeois revolutions for example: 'Liberation from the standpoint of the bourgeoisie, ie competition was, of course, for the eighteenth century the only possible way of offering the individuals a new career for freer development.'⁶

To achieve a social revolution a class must therefore not simply represent its *ideas* as liberating all progressive sections of society from bonds which bind them. It must in *material reality* aid their liberation. Thus for example: 'Liberalism, ie liberal property owners at the beginning of the French revolution...were compelled not only to give the mass of the French (rural) population the right to seize property, (but also) to let them *seize actual property*.'⁷

A class can put forward universal goals only if its interests in reality coincide with those of wider strata of society. To complete a passage above: 'The class making a revolution comes forward from the very start...as the representative of the whole of society...It can do this because initially its interest really is as yet mostly connected with the common interest of all other non-ruling classes...Its victory, therefore, benefits also many individuals of other classes which are not winning a dominant position.'⁸

The specific role of the working class is arrived at by Marx through this concept of the *universality* of a class.

Marx noted at the level of ideology that each of the class views put forward in history is of *increasing universality*. Posed purely in terms of ideology one could analyse the development of society through increasingly universal ideas: 'If...in considering the course of history we detach the ideas of the ruling class from the ruling class itself and attribute to them an independent existence...then this conception of history...will necessarily come up against the phenomenon that ever more abstract ideas hold sway, ie, ideas which increasingly take on the form of universality...Every new class, therefore, achieves domination only on a broader basis than that of the class ruling previously.'⁹

It is this fact that every new class comes to power on a broader basis than the one previously which gives practicality, as well as legitimacy, to the drive of the working class for socialism. Posed in material terms each previous revolution had stopped because of its limited, that is *non universal*, social base. For example, replying to Bruno Bauer's cynical idea that all revolutions necessarily fail, Marx noted in *The Holy Family* that: 'The interest of the bourgeoisie in the 1798 (French) Revolution, far from having been a "failure", "won" everything... The Revolution was a "failure" only for the mass...whose real conditions for emancipation were essentially different from the conditions within which the bourgeois could emancipate itself and society. If the Revolution...was a failure, it was so because the mass within whose living conditions it essentially came to a stop, was an *exclusive, limited* mass, not an all-embracing one.'

'If the Revolution was a failure it was...because the most numerous part of the mass, the part distinct from the bourgeoisie, did not have its *real* interest in the principle of the Revolution.'¹⁰

The working class is the most universal class in history because its goals cannot be the liberation of *one* class, and the continuation of the oppression and exploitation of another, but the liberation of the whole of humanity. The working class is therefore in the terms developed later by Lenin, the class capable of the greatest hegemony.

Marx outlined this in the very phrases in which he announced for the first time his view of the proletariat as the bearer of a future society. Integrating the tasks of the developing German revolution he faced at that time Marx noted: 'where is the *positive* possibility of German emancipation? *This is our answer*. In the formation of a class with *radical chains*, a class of civil society which is not a class of civil society. A class which is the dissolution of all classes, a sphere which has a universal character because of its universal suffering and which lays claim to no *particular right* because the wrong it suffers is not a *particular wrong* but *wrong in general*; a sphere of society which can no longer lay claim to a *historical* title, but merely to a *human* one, which does not stand in one-sided opposition to the consequences but in all-sided opposition to the premises of the German political system; and finally a sphere which cannot emancipate itself without emancipating itself from — and thereby emancipating — all other spheres of society, which is, in a word, the *total loss* of humanity and which can therefore redeem itself only through the *total redemption of humanity*. This dissolution of society as a particular class is the *proletariat*'.¹¹ The victory of the working class is, in Marx's words, the necessary step in '*universal human* emancipation.'

These phrases of Marx, in which are contained the entire core of the hegemony of the working class, have nothing to do with empty sentimentality. They directly guide the working class. They mean, in the words of Lenin in *What is to be Done?*, that: 'Working class consciousness cannot be genuine political consciousness unless the workers are trained to respond to *all* cases of tyranny, oppression, violence, and abuse no matter what class is affected.' And in the equally famous phrases of the same work: 'The Social Democrat's (Marxist) ideal should not be the trade union secretary, but the *tribune of the people*, who is able to react to every manifestation of tyranny and oppression, no matter where it appears, no matter what stratum or class of the people it affects.'¹²

It implies also the relation of Marxism to the whole of human culture and civilisation. Again in the words of Lenin: 'Marxism has won its historic significance as the ideology of the revolutionary proletariat because, far from rejecting the most valuable achievements of the bourgeois epoch, it has, on the contrary, assimilated and refashioned everything of value in the more than two thousand years of the development of human thought and culture.'¹³

'Without thinking up every demand of the oppressed and exploited, without coming forward as the representative of the whole mass of society, the working class is incapable of winning'

The working class is the most universal class in history, that capable of the greatest hegemony. Simultaneously *without* taking up every demand of the oppressed and exploited, without in Marx's words coming forward 'as a representative of the whole mass of society confronting the one ruling class,' the working class is incapable of victory.

That necessity for a hegemonic strategy for the working class is the core to its politics. It is why *Socialist Action* gives such emphasis to international politics, to the demands of women, of the black community, and of all the oppressed. In Lenin's words: 'the class, so long as it renounces the idea of hegemony or fails to fight for it, is not a class, or not yet a class, but a *guild*, or the sum total of various guilds', 'it is the consciousness of the idea of hegemony and its implementation through their own activities that converts the guilds as a whole into a class.'

1. Lenin Collected Works (CW) 17 p56-58
2. Marx and Engels Collected Works (MECW) 5 p60
3. Marx and Engels Early Writings (MEEW) p254
4. MECW 5 p60
5. MECW 5 p290
6. MECW 5 p410
7. MECW 5 p208
8. MECW 5 p60
9. MECW 5 p60
10. MECW 4 p82
11. MEEW p254
12. MEEW p253
13. CW 5 p412 and 422

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