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AFTER FLORENCE

Italian ESF Coordination

(1) The ESF in Florence was an extraordinary event. It was based on a broad participation, an expression of social and political actors, especially young people. More than 60,000 inside the Fortress, and one million in the streets demanded in a new way a change in the world, a stronger demand than what was on offer. Again in Cosenza, on 23 November, in the protest against the arrests of a group of 20 young members of the southern movement on the basis of absurd accusations (crimes of opinion), that same demand and participation expressed themselves. These are the reasons for the success of the ESF in Florence and they demand our efforts to strengthen the movement's tools and forms, and not only its contents and perspectives.

(2) In Florence the movement of movements, while continuing its own process, expressed itself in new forms, an extraordinary mixture of differences and radical issues—against neo-liberal policies, against the war without any reservations, and for new and broader universal rights. This synthesis of unity and radicality can guarantee another precious heritage of the movement: its autonomy and unavailability for exploitation by external and instrumental political designs.

(3) Autonomy, radicality and unity stress the need for a qualitative leap forward and for the enlargement of the movement aimed at rooting its proposals in society. The social movements' agenda approved in Florence has, from this point of view, a great value, because it is a concrete tool for working together and giving the different actors at Florence an opportunity for self determination.

(4) For these reasons the Italian ESF Coordination thinks that there is a need to start a more inclusive process—to build up a broader public space in which networks, associations, movements, social forums, the different social actors can meet each other and exchange issues, practices, campaigns. A space belonging to all women and men, legitimated on the basis of its activities and initiatives. In the next period we are engaged in many activities and in the preparation for and participation at Porto Alegre, aiming to let the ESF experience in Florence live, with its strong heritage of social movements, actors and issues, inside the Third World Social Forum (23-28 January 2003).

Florence, 29 November 2002

**THE EUROPEAN
 SOCIAL FORUM
 IN FLORENCE:
 THE LESSONS OF
 SUCCESS**

Chris Nineham

No one really knew what to expect. For the Italians particularly there was the stress created by the scare campaign coordinated between the state and the media. Everyone else was probably uneasy about how Berlusconi would respond and worried that his strategy of tension might work. But there were other fears. Some worried that the heavy-weight speakers and subject matter would turn off the new generation of activists, others that activists were tired of travelling. A number of commentators felt the movement was losing direction and focus, that because we hadn't decided what we are for, people might start losing their nerve to be against.

Any dark thoughts vanished in the Florence sunshine. On the opening day huge queues developed at registration. The raw figures speak for themselves, but they don't tell the whole story. The 60,000 mainly young people who flooded into the forum created something extraordinary.

For the first time in years, huge numbers of trade unionists, peace campaigners, socialists, environmentalists, anti-racists and many more were coming together to discuss and debate. Though it was very hard to get an overview of such a massive event it seemed like most of these people regarded themselves as participants, not spectators. It's true some of the platforms were too big, too old, too white and too male, but there was real discussion in every plenary and every seminar I went to.

The forum wasn't just a physical meeting point of different strands of resistance. People had the political confidence to recognise the connections between the different issues that motivated them to come. Again and again the speakers who got the most applause were the ones who made the links between globalisation and war, between the struggle in Palestine and the US attack on Iraq, between neo-liberalism and racist policies on migration, and so on. It was as if the intellectual baggage of years of defeat

and stagnation had finally been left behind, and people felt free to declare themselves against a system, a capitalist system.

The result was a serious dialogue between the traditional left and the new, network-based movements. The idea that there is a clear break or even hostility between the broadly Marxist left and the post-Seattle movement didn't stand the test of Florence. That is not to say there is an ideological consensus in the movement. All sorts of approaches got a good hearing from the Catholic radicalism of Rosi Bindi to the autonomism of the disobbedienti and the radical reformism of ATTAC. But against the background of environmental destruction, the commodification of every area of life and the drive to war, radical solutions made sense. Revolution was in the air.

Success needs to be analysed just as carefully as failure. Partly Florence was one more proof of the growing radicalisation of European society. And of course we had the head start that came from being in Italy where the left has had not just Genoa but two general strikes and a series of mass anti-war demonstrations.

But as some of the Italian organisers liked to repeat, no political event is simply spontaneous. It is worth considering how the Florence forum was organised because it worked so well and also because it took us all beyond some of the received assumptions of the movement.

The Italians insisted from the start that the forum should be an open space that would welcome all sections of the movement. Crucially they applied this principle from the start of the organising process. All organising meetings were open to anyone involved in the movements. The meetings were deliberately rotated around Europe to help draw in participants from all corners of the continent.

The organisers consistently took this active approach to broadening the forum. They understood that a space has to be won and filled. In the face of media scapegoating they had to win the trust of the people of Florence, to make it hard for the local authorities to obstruct them or the police to harass them. At the last preparatory meeting a truly impressive activist from the Arci network reported on local preparations. She told how the movement in Florence had organised meetings in schools and colleges, factories and hospitals to explain what the ESF was about and how its concerns were connected to those of the general population. She said they had had a brilliant reception almost everywhere.

The ESF itself didn't hide behind the

walls of the conference centre in the Fortezza da Basso, a fortress built in the 16th century to subjugate the city rather than to defend it. Proceedings opened with a big ceremony in Piazza Santa Croce near the centre of town. During the event different networks organised marquees in most of the city's main squares with music, food and politics. By the end of three days' peaceful protest and discussion the owners of the expensive shops that had closed and boarded up their windows were the laughing stock of Florence. More importantly, Berlusconi had been humiliated.

In the first place all this had depended on persuading the swelling social movements in Italy and beyond to take part. An impressively wide spread of organisations were brought on board, from the European Trade Union Confederation and all the Italian unions through the NGOs and Catholic groups to the main radical parties.

Creating this kind of unity required a systematic strategy. It meant guaranteeing that every serious part of the movement could participate, but it also meant putting an argument to the various groups about the importance of a united movement. So for example it was important to have a dialogue with the autonomist groups to try and persuade them to be part of the forum and then to defend their decision to have 'one foot in and one out' of the process.

But unity of the organisations is only valuable if it's based round principles people from the grassroots of the movements can recognise. The Social Forum wouldn't have worked as a purely neutral space. Florence didn't just show that it is possible to be radical and united—it showed that radical politics are essential to building a genuinely broad movement.

From the start the ESF was clearly and proudly against neo-liberalism, racism and war. As the event approached it became clear however that the threat of war was the big concern of most people opposed to the neo-liberal agenda. Partly this was because a war on Iraq was likely to cause a catastrophe in the Middle East and beyond. Partly it was clear the prospect of the war was creating outrage in very wide layers of society. But also it was because an attack on Iraq was the priority for those at the headquarters of neo-liberalism in Washington and by a simple law of symmetry it had to be ours. At the last preparatory meeting in Barcelona we agreed that the main slogan of the demonstration in Florence would be 'Don't attack Iraq' and that the meeting would issue a call for cross-continent anti-war action.

These were controversial decisions.

They risked putting the forum on collision course with governments and social democratic organisations across Europe. But they were decisively correct. When word got out that the demonstration at Florence would focus on stopping the war the ESF became a magnet to activists. 1,300 people signed up to come from Barcelona alone in the three weeks before the forum. People were deeply relieved that such a mainstream project conceived on such a grand scale was prepared to take a principled stand on the big issue. It was a stand that had eluded most politicians, and it showed that the ESF really was going to be something different, something honest, something that would make a difference.

This radical agenda had to be fought for within the movement. There were some quite sharp arguments at the preparatory meetings. Many people were worried that making opposition to war central might alienate sections of the movement, that it might antagonise the authorities. Others opposed it because they were worried where it would take the movement.

If there were debates during the process of organisation, they continued into the forum. It's right there should be more spaces for in-depth discussion next time and that we need to work on ways of encouraging more participation in the big meetings. But there was plenty of controversy and argument in Florence. There were debates about the nature of women's oppression, about strategies for sustainable development, and about the role of Islam. Interestingly some of the biggest meetings were debates about strategy—how to build a movement against the war, the role of parties inside the movement.

These debates didn't weaken the sense of the unity of the event. The demonstration on the Saturday was an awesome display of resistance united round three central slogans. But they did make people think hard about how to go forward. We have big challenges in the next year. We have to find ways to connect the inspirational politics of Florence to wider and wider layers of society and particularly to relate anti-capitalist ideas to growing working class militancy. At the same time both the war and the repression of the Italian movement since Florence show the lengths the opposition will go to to maintain global control.

In this situation it is an illusion to believe we can build a non-ideological movement. We need to be radical, and we need to work to stay united. But to do that we need to have a movement that openly and seriously discusses its own political strategy. That is one reason why it is essential to let the radical parties take

their place inside the forum movement. We need clear and open debate because the stakes are so high.

More than anything else Saturday in Florence showed what is possible. The closing demonstration was extraordinary. Florentines lined the route clapping and in some blocks of flats in working class areas it seemed like the majority of families were waving and cheering. An amazing number of households had prepared banners saluting the demo. There were a million on the march in a city of about 400,000. It was as if the movement was merging with the working class of Florence. All of a sudden we who were chanting against war, against neo-liberalism and against racism felt like the majority.

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A CONTRIBUTION BY COMMUNIST REFOUNDATION TO A DISCUSSION ON A EUROPEAN ALTERNATIVE LEFT

**International Office, Partito della
Rifondazione Comunista**

For a Europe of peace

In 2002 Europe finds itself at a decisive turning point in its history. The past year has been marked by truly epochal events, which are destined to leave an indelible mark not only on any political chronicle of events, but especially on the awareness of these events by European citizens.

For the entire world 11 September 2001 opened up a degenerative process in the international political framework. For the first time since the Second World War and since the fall of the Warsaw Pact countries, US government elites are imposing a concept of a 'necessary' war both against so called 'enemies', and their 'allies'—particularly their European ones—in deference to a doctrine that views war as an endemic factor in contemporary society. It is true that since the end of the Cold War there have already been the dramatic acts of war against Iraq in 1991, and especially NATO's intervention in the Balkans, in the very heart of Europe. But it is also true that the intervention in Afghanistan, and the imminent intervention in Iraq, herald a qualitative leap in terms of military escalation, which it would be mistaken not to understand. What we are experiencing now is not traditional warfare but the first war of the era of globalisation—it is permanent global warfare. No specific enemies or clear military objectives are identified, nor is there any geopolitically restricted area of intervention, given that war can be exported to any country. On the contrary, what is being proposed is a massive increase in the offensive potential of the West, and a specific stance, particularly by George Bush, of the US's right to militarily intervene, including any preventive intervention, based purely on the strength of being the most powerful country in the world. War therefore is

being proposed as the centre of gravity of world politics, given the exceptional conditions war creates over the entire world, and the extent to which it affects both the life of communities and individuals—far beyond what one is generally willing to accept.

Permanent global war obviously changes the previous international balance of power, but it goes even further: it questions the fundamental principles on which the concept of international law was constructed. It also represents a serious destabilisation of all the institutions that in some way exist to regulate relationships between national states (this includes the UN and NATO). One of the peculiar characteristics of capitalist globalisation, which has emerged most clearly in the crisis of globalisation itself, is the systematic questioning of the idea of democracy—which is in some way related to the concept of the sovereignty of the people. As a matter of fact this war is waged against humanity and against all its citizens, since it has clearly become the tool through which a new world order and a new status of citizenship is being imposed within the so called advanced countries. The changes in formal juridical guarantees which were introduced after 11 September are part of the same trend: the creation of lists of both 'rogue states' and political organisations; the introduction of so called anti-terrorist laws; the use of summary and military courts against simple suspects or prisoners of war (who are not even granted this status); the increase in repressive policies against men and women migrating from the south of the world; the redundancy in the role of national parliaments and the sidelining of the United Nations. Moreover, we can see the essential cessation of all ongoing peace processes, including that between Israel and Palestine, the peace processes in Western Sahara, Colombia, Kurdistan, and many others throughout every continent. These are simply cancelled from the world's political agenda through a new definition of endemic and local conflicts, whose solution is no longer the responsibility of the international community.

Europe has not been able to play an authoritative or effective role within this new scenario. On the contrary, never before has it been so obvious that the economic giant of the European Union is in every respect a political dwarf. The EU has not been able to intervene in the Middle East crisis; indeed its behaviour has actually favoured Sharon's criminal policy. As the political and humanitarian crisis in Palestine got worse, it did not even resort to economic deterrents so as to put pressure on Israel, as it could have

done by adopting a resolution of the European Parliament to suspend the association treaty between the EU and Israel. Similarly, it has intensified its links with Turkey, even though it is in open violation of the human rights of the Kurds and of its citizens in general. Furthermore, the EU has backed the action of the Moroccan government in its definitive annexation of Western Sahara by intensifying its economic and political links. Moreover, it exists in a situation of being unable to conceive of itself as being a single organisation, as is clearly evident from its different positions regarding intervention in Iraq. Warmongering positions totally aligned with the US (Blair, Berlusconi and Aznar) cohabit with the rather different behaviour of the French and German governments, together with those of Scandinavia.

In recent years the EU has pursued policies aimed at its own militarist repositioning in international politics. In particular we must oppose the proposal of establishing a European army, whose objectives would clearly be offensive. Such an army would inevitably work alongside a reformed NATO (in other words the NATO which militarily intervenes outside the borders of member countries). This is why we continue to demand the disbanding of NATO, as it will increasingly take on the role of a rapid intervention force under orders from the US administration.

But at the same time, especially in Europe, there is an international movement against war, which is asserting itself as a structural element of opposition to this world order. Today's movement against war, unlike the one against the war in Kosovo, has the potential to express a hegemonic, majority viewpoint within Western society. Furthermore, it has taken on the shape of a long-term movement which challenges the sad fact that today war has become a chronic factor in the world. It is establishing a system of alliances that involves sections of society which are not traditionally pacifist, and works in close collaboration with workers' organisations. One of the main reasons behind this sea-change has been the presence over the past year of a new movement that challenges globalisation. This movement has a new take on the recent conflicts and inequalities produced by the structural processes which are rapidly changing our society. Thus, even opposition to war becomes broader and involves economic and social aspects, in addition to the obvious political ones. To this purpose it will be essential to fully contribute to the overwhelming success of the European demonstration which will be held at the end of the European

Social Forum in Florence on 9 November. This demonstration could really become a decisive turning point, just as Genoa was in July 2001, in terms of triggering a multiplication of forces which are in the field, all struggling against impending war.

For a Europe of economic, social, and environmental rights

Today the development of economic integration—the real basis of European unification—is in deep crisis. This is a crisis of consensus as well as a structural crisis. To have privileged economic-monetary aspects rather than others has led to an intrinsic fragility in the institutions of political sovereignty. As a matter of fact the decision-making processes are very complicated and often contradictory, and bring into focus the influence of the European Central Bank in all its strength, together with the inability of national states to create a new role for themselves and protect the interests of European communities. The EU has given itself a real monetary ideology, and the stability pact represents its most structural aspects. Though agreeing that the introduction of the euro may have positive effects on the economy of the entire continent, we cannot refrain from expressing an extremely negative judgement on the treaties that have imposed strict budgetary policies on individual member states and have in fact developed mechanisms for the privatisation of strategically important public utilities (electricity, water, telecommunications, transport, etc) as well as cuts in social expenditure (pensions, health, education, proactive policies for employment, etc). Today the stability pact is being challenged by the right, probably so as to relaunch military and infrastructural expenditure, but not by social democracy—which defends it to the hilt. It is up to the forces of the alternative left to debate the stability pact and impose social policies which deal with the continent's emergencies: growing poverty levels, the rise in unemployment and the fragmentation of employment practices.

In recent months the unbridled growth of neo-liberal policies has led to an objective worsening of living conditions throughout Europe. These policies are not only attributable to traditionally conservative forces, but also to policies over the past 15 years that have witnessed the involvement of European social democratic forces.

It is obvious that there has been an ac-

celeration by right wing governments, especially as regards attacks on employment protection, and more generally in their attacks against citizenship rights, starting with those of migrants.

These difficulties have been contested effectively by a massive trade union response, which has involved the whole of Europe. In Germany, in spite of the social democratic government, engineering workers have been very active in defending existing terms and conditions. In Great Britain, the historical break with the Labour Party over privatisation, wages and working conditions has led to an unprecedented mobilisation by the trade union movement, which also participated in large numbers during the anti-war demonstration held on 28 September. In Spain the new legislation on labour market reform led to an extraordinary general strike in June, preceded by massive trade union demonstrations against the stance of the EU on employment protection. In Italy, starting with the mobilisation of engineering workers, the trade union movement has already called two general strikes and a gigantic demonstration of three million people—mainly over the maintenance of general rights at work.

As the Johannesburg forum has shown, on a world scale there is no policy which can make globalisation compatible with the protection of the environment. Genetically modified foods, privatisation—particularly of water—the growth in greenhouse gases, waste disposal, deforestation, and the exploitation of raw materials are all themes which are totally absent from the real political agendas of governments, especially European ones—whereas they are strongly present in the practice of the 'movement of movements'.

All these mobilisations do not have any clear political representation—particularly in Europe the new movements are not represented by the forces that gave life to centre-left governments. Such a gap was not created beforehand; rather there is an objective distance between the demands for change put forward by these movements, and the desire by social democratic parties to maintain their neo laissez faire outlook. These movements correspond to a changing reality, and exist within a political space which has become a vital area of intervention for alternative left wing forces.

For a democratic Europe

The process of the EU's integration is increasingly taking on the shape of a series of exclusions to the detriment of the weakest members of our communities. The debate on the European convention which has, moreover, been very far from the concerns

of European citizens, does not reflect in the slightest the real issues which have emerged recently, including war, social issues, and the rights denied to migrants. One can foresee an increasing separation between politics and society, in a system in which formal rights—which are often under explicit attack themselves—do not even allow one to propose a reduction in inequalities.

Once more it is down to the alternative left to expose the democratic crisis of the EU. To do so we must organise mobilisations, but we must also present a plan of intervention within the institutions. We must raise the issue, which has been taken for granted for too long, of recreating popular sovereignty in terms of the creation of social models. The so called 'Governance' has progressively deprived democratic sovereignty of its power, dismantling the policies of a plethora of organisations, depriving them of any real control and placing them under the very strong influence of multinationals.

The issue of real democratic representation within the European Parliament, its legitimisation, and the form of government of the EU are all very topical issues, especially on the eve of the EU's enlargement to the east.

Nevertheless, we need to face up strongly to the issue of migration. European governments have dedicated particular attention to this matter, with an obsession about security that has greatly influenced elections throughout the continent, which has led to success for openly xenophobic or conservative right wing parties.

An alternative left for Europe

A few political consequences for the forces that see themselves as alternatives to this neo laissez faire warmongering model can already be drawn from what has been written above. First of all, today we can say that there is an objective political space to the left of social democracy which opens up a space for a discussion of issues and themes that have long been abandoned by the forces of the moderate left. The defeats of recent decades rendered these forces rather marginal, so at the moment a real organic vision of the world is lacking. In reality though the alternative left has an enormous transforming potential, both symbolical and concrete, in the face of the real crisis of civilisation that has assailed our continent. We could actually reach the conclusion that the same prospect of achieving a political Europe can only be reached on the basis of massive battles fought for the attainment of general interests—while at

the same time rediscovering the best traditions of the working class movement. To this purpose, a broad shared initiative should be prepared on the themes of social justice and an alternative economic policy, which could be an essential vehicle in the building of an alternative platform for the next European elections in 2004.

The second point to be made derives from the fact that the list of forces within this new alternative left does not only include political parties. The 'movement of movements' is a fundamental agent of change in this historical phase, and the issues it raises closely coincide with our own agenda of political priorities. We also know that to try to emerge from being in a minority with respect to the moderate left, it is absolutely essential to remain within the movement, both in terms of its own political project, and in terms of its concrete links with different social realities. In this sense the European Social Forum in Florence will be an unrepeatable chance to create an even greater synergy among forces that have already been working together for many years. The creation of open, non-bureaucratic collaboration which respects national differences—also in view of the next European election—may help to define a political entity which has the characteristics we have discussed here. The task facing the alternative left is therefore ambitious, but it must no longer be postponed. In other words, 'If not now, when?'

This document was presented to a meeting of European left parties hosted by the PRC in Florence on 5-6 November 2002. Translation edited by Tom Behan.

REGROUPMENT AND THE SOCIALIST LEFT TODAY

Alex Callinicos

The millennium was celebrated as marking the entry of the world into an epoch of capitalist prosperity and peace. In reality the years that followed have been marked by the development of a global economic recession and by the most serious international crisis since the end of the Cold War. In counterpoint to these grim events has been the emergence since the Seattle protests in November 1999 of a worldwide movement in opposition to global capitalism and, increasingly, also to American imperialism's war drive. This has provided the context for a significant revival in Europe of what has come to be known as the radical left—parties to the left of mainstream social democracy. Among the most important developments are the success of Trotskyist candidates in the first round of the French presidential elections in April 2002, the shift leftwards by the Partito della Rifondazione Comunista (PRC) in Italy, and the electoral challenge to New Labour mounted by the Socialist Alliance and the Scottish Socialist Party (SSP) in Britain.

This process is by no means confined to Europe. Latin America, among the greatest victims of the neo-liberal Washington Consensus, has experienced the rebirth of the left as a result of a series of spectacular struggles—above all, Argentina's December 2001 rebellion. The London-based international business paper the *Financial Times* has anxiously surveyed these developments in a succession of increasingly gloomy articles. One of these quoted a remark by Michael Shifter of the Inter-American Dialogue that could be applied to much of the rest of the continent: 'People are taking to the streets in a way we have not seen for some time... In Peru left wing movements from the 1960s and 1970s that everyone thought were dead are popping up again'.¹ On the eve of the landslide victory by Lula, leader of the Workers' Party (PT), in the Brazilian presidential elections, the *Financial Times* reported that, for the Republican right in Washington, 'these developments are tantamount to the extension of a new "axis of evil" that already includes Fidel Castro's

Cuba and Hugo Chávez's Bolivarian revolution in Venezuela'.²

In fact, Lula's victory was a much more ambiguous event. It reflected the strength of Brazil's mass movements—notably the CUT trade union federation and the MST landless movement, which have been in the forefront of the global opposition to neo-liberalism, notably through the World Social Forums held at Porto Alegre. But Lula's election followed the PT's move towards the centre ground by adopting increasingly neo-liberal policies to assuage the financial markets—a pattern all too familiar from the history of European social democracy. Though in this article I concentrate on the processes of regroupment at work in Europe, my analysis may have a bearing on developments in other continents.

Europe's new lefts

The radical left in Europe is a heterogeneous grouping. It encompasses some of the main formations of the revolutionary left—most notably the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (LCR) in France and the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), in Britain, the flagship organisations of the two main international Trotskyist tendencies, respectively the Fourth International (FI) and the International Socialist Tendency (IST).³ The PRC, by contrast, has its roots in the Stalinist and left social democratic traditions, though revolutionaries (including the supporters of the FI and the IST) also participate in it. Finally, the radical left embraces several coalitions—the Socialist Alliance in England and Wales, the Red-Green Alliance in Denmark, the Left Bloc in Portugal—and one party, the SSP, that also unite revolutionaries and reformists in their ranks.

These diverse formations are now formally grouped together through the Conferences of the European Anti-Capitalist Left, which take place twice a year. The existence of these and other networks connecting the radical left is evidence of a dramatic process of realignment that is under way. The participation, for example, of the SWP in a meeting in Rome in September 2002 convened by the PRC and largely composed of the main surviving European Communist parties would have been inconceivable five years ago. This process is also reflected in the discussions that have developed among different revolutionary tendencies—most notably the FI and the IST, whose representatives met in Paris that same month. Once again, such a meeting would have been unimaginable a few years earlier.

It is important, however, to appreciate

that the evolution of the formally organised radical left in Europe is only the tip of the iceberg. The process of radicalisation under way is much broader. Since the late 1990s a series of anti-capitalist networks have emerged in Europe: for example, ATTAC, the French campaign for the Tobin Tax that has greatly broadened its focus and its geographical scope since its foundation in 1998; the Italian social forums movement that developed after the protests at the G8 summit in Genoa in July 2001; Globalise Resistance in Britain and Ireland; the Genoa 2001 Campaign in Greece.⁴ These and many other activist coalitions are now involved in the European Social Forum that first meets in Florence in November 2002; many have also been involved in the World Social Forum. They overlap with the mass mobilisations that have swept Europe over the past year—against anti-union legislation in Italy and Spain, against the Nazi Le Pen in France, and, above all, against the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. The Stop the War Coalition has become the focus of perhaps the biggest peace movement in post-war British history, one moreover with a radical anti-imperialist edge that connects it to the broader contestation of global capitalism.

Party and movement

The development of these movements defines the task of the radical left today. Can they relate effectively to these movements—make themselves part of the movements, work to build them, and also fight politically to influence them? This is the decisive test that we must pass today. The electoral interventions that the different formations make, either at the national level or potentially on a Europe-wide scale, need to be judged by this criterion rather than seen as ends in themselves. For example, the brilliantly effective presidential campaign mounted by Olivier Besancenot and the LCR was successful both because Olivier articulated the anti-capitalist consciousness particularly of larger sectors of French youth and because it situated the Ligue as the key factor in building a political vehicle for this consciousness. Electoral campaigns are simply one means by which the radical left can shape the radicalisation, not (as they seem sometimes be conceived) as the privileged form of political intervention.

By definition, the radical left are committed to building political parties—a controversial position that is rejected by many influenced by the reformist and autonomist currents within the anti-capitalist movement. In our view, a proper understanding of the Leninist tradition requires us to reject the choice that is

often presented between party and movement as a false dilemma. Revolutionary socialists should be seeking to build *both* party *and* movement. Far from weakening the movement, an effective socialist party can make the movement stronger, more dynamic and more coherent. The SWP, for example, has been a leading force in the Stop the War Coalition. This has not, however, made the appeal of the coalition narrower. On the contrary, we have resisted attempts to narrow down the coalition by committing it, for example, to a formal critique of imperialism or a condemnation of radical Islam. By successfully arguing that the coalition should focus exclusively on opposition to Bush's war drive and the consequent racist attacks and threats to civil liberties, we have helped to keep it as inclusive as possible and therefore laid the basis for the mass movement that it has become.

This kind of appreciation of the relationship between party and movement flows from the broader revolutionary Marxist tradition. This tradition is, however, not a set of timeless texts, but rather a historical process through which successive generations of revolutionaries have developed Marxism through engaging with the concrete struggles of their day. To determine what kind of parties we should be building and with whom it is not enough to read Lenin and Trotsky (essential though that is). We have carefully to examine the historical situation that has produced the present opening for the radical left. 'Building the party' today in the aftermath of Seattle and Genoa and 9-11 is not the same as it was in the 1970s or the 1980s, let alone in the era of the Second International or after the Russian Revolution or during the heyday of Stalinism. The kind of parties we should be building now depends crucially on the historical circumstances that presently confront us.

The revival and realignment of the left currently under way have two main causes and confront a major challenge.⁵ The causes are the collapse of Stalinism and the development of the anti-capitalist movement; the challenge is the new era of imperialist war. The fall of the Stalinist regimes in Eastern and Central Europe and the disintegration of the Soviet Union had initially a negative effect on the left internationally, since many still invested—if only perhaps unconsciously—hope in the existence of what appeared to be a systemic alternative to Western-style market capitalism. In the longer term, however, the end of (no longer) 'existing socialism' has served to wipe the slate clean ideologically, and encouraged activists and intellectuals to confront capitalism without any sense of having to situate their politics

with respect to the Stalinist monstrosity. This feeling of entering a new era has been greatly reinforced by the development of an international movement against global capitalism—a process punctuated by the great protests at Seattle, Genoa, and Barcelona, and by the meetings of the World Social Forum at Porto Alegre. A decade after the End of History was proclaimed capitalism is once again being practically challenged and ideologically contested. The manifest weaknesses of the anti-capitalist movement—above all its ideological incoherence and ambiguous relationship with the organised working class—do not alter its immense significance in renewing the left internationally.⁶

The challenge that the movement faces is obvious. The post Cold War era has proved to be a new epoch of imperialist wars, in which the United States confronts—not in the first instance its major economic or geopolitical rivals such as Germany, Japan, Russia, and China—but medium-rank capitalist dictatorships with the aim of maintaining and extending its global hegemony. The Bush administration's war drive, currently focused on Iraq, has taken this process to a new and dangerous phase.⁷ The anti-capitalist movement can accordingly only develop if it widens its focus and becomes also an anti-war and anti-imperialist movement. Where it has taken on this task, as it has in Italy and Britain, the result has been a deepening and extension of the movement (indeed in Britain the anti-war mobilisations have arguably turned what was hitherto more a diffuse anti-capitalist mood into a real movement). When anti-capitalist networks have failed to make opposition to the Bush war drive central to their activity, as they have in France, the movement has stalled. I return to some implications of this divergence below.

Is reformism finished?

This analysis of the sources of the left's revival has recently been contested by Murray Smith, a leading intellectual in the International Socialist Movement (ISM), the dominant platform inside the SSP. Smith writes:

'The starting point for any consideration of regroupment on the revolutionary left is the broader process of recomposition of the workers' movement.

'The starting point is the qualitative change in the traditional workers' parties, which opens up possibilities for new workers' parties based on socialist, class-struggle politics, and which is itself a product of the evolution of capitalism since the 1970s. The conditions for regroupment and for new parties have been germinating for ten or 15 years. It's

just a question of when different political forces understood it. Scottish Militant Labour started to understand it in the mid-1990s, which is why it took the initiative to form the Scottish Socialist Alliance in 1996 and the SSP in 1998. The SWP did not understand it at all then and does not fully understand it now'.⁸

What is it precisely that the SWP fails fully to understand? The answer comes in a throwaway reference by Smith to 'the bourgeoisification of social democracy' that he fails to elaborate. This would be a big change indeed, if the social democratic parties had broken their moorings with the workers' movement and become openly capitalist formations. The problem here is less a failure of 'understanding' on the SWP's part than a major political disagreement. But even if it were true that organisations such as the British Labour Party, its Australian counterpart, the German Social Democratic Party (SPD), and the French Socialist Party (PS) have become 'bourgeoisified', this development would not be sufficient to explain the international revival of the left in the sense in which I have been describing it. To begin to fill the space vacated by social democracy requires more than raising a new political banner—or even standing parliamentary candidates. It depends also on the development of new struggles and movements that begin to give growing layers of workers and young people a concrete sense of their capacity to resist and fight for an alternative. Thus the starting point for the development of the 'left of left' in France was the public sector strikes in November-December 1995.⁹ Seattle, Genoa and Argentina have played this role on a broader international front.

There is, however, an important sense in which Smith is right. It is undoubtedly true that the decline of the traditional workers' parties has opened up space to their left that the radical left is beginning to fill. But this is a process that has been unfolding over a much longer time-span than the 'ten or 15 years' to which Smith refers. It is a product of two events—1956 and 1968—and a longer-term process, the decline of classical reformism. 1956—the international crisis precipitated by Khrushchev's secret speech denouncing Stalin and by the Soviet suppression of the Hungarian Revolution—represented the first crack in the dominance of the workers' movement hitherto jointly exercised by the social democratic and Communist parties. The historian Eric Hobsbawm, who remained a loyal member of the Communist Party of Great Britain till its collapse in the early 1990s, recently called 1956 a 'traumatic year' and a 'great earthquake' in the history of the Com-

munist movement.¹⁰ The CPs' loss of both legitimacy and activists permitted the emergence of the first formations and publications of a New Left that sought to develop an alternative to both Stalinism and social democracy.¹¹

1968—and more generally the upturn in the class struggle and political radicalisation that swept the advanced capitalist countries between the late 1960s and early 1970s—created a much larger audience among workers and youth for the organisations of the far left that sought, with varying degrees of success and under diverse ideological influences, to build some version of a Leninist revolutionary party. It was the decline of these movements in the late 1970s that was at the origins of the crisis of the left—a crisis greatly reinforced by the capitalist offensive inaugurated under Reagan and Thatcher in the 1980s and generalised under the banner of neo-liberalism in the 1990s—from which we are now beginning to emerge. Nevertheless, certain organisations that came out of the struggles of the 1960s and 1970s, notably the LCR and the SWP in Europe, remain significant forces in the radical left. The intellectual traditions and the historical experience that they embody can make an important contribution to the further development of this left.¹²

Running through the ups and downs of the class struggle over the past generation has been the decline of classical reformism, though this has not been a continuous trend, but rather a complex process involving a variety of interacting forces. Two in particular stand out. First, the mass reformist parties, whether social democratic or Communist (one of the features of the post-1956 period has been the more or less complete transformation of the Stalinist parties into conventional reformist formations), have suffered a significant decline in their working class base. The dense, all-embracing workers' parties of the first half of the 20th century—the SPD, widely perceived as 'a state within a state' in both pre-war Germany and the Weimar Republic during the 1920s—can no longer rely on the continuous involvement and the political allegiance of large layers of working class activists.¹³ This process is uneven—more pronounced in Britain and France (where the PS never had the organic involvement of significant number of manual workers) than in Germany, generally slower in the CPs—but it is undeniably a generalised phenomenon.

The erosion of the reformist parties at the base has had various causes, many of which reflect larger social processes. On the one hand, the bureaucratisation of parliamentary and municipal politics have distanced them increasingly from everyday working class life; at the same time,

modern electoral machines are much less reliant on the routine activity and occasional mobilisation of local activists than they were in the past, as hugely expensive media campaigns become the focus of the electoral contest. On the other hand, the development of rank and file trade unionism, community activism, and other forms of grassroots activity have created the means of posing and winning demands that do not depend primarily on electing or pressuring municipal or parliamentary representatives. This kind of 'do it yourself' reformism has helped to disconnect working class people from 'their' parties.

This disconnection has been reinforced by the second major factor in the decline of reformism, namely the diminished scope for reforms. The past 30 years of capitalist crisis and neo-liberal restructuring have unleashed wave upon wave of attacks on reforms won during the long boom of the 1950s and 1960s, or even earlier. Caught between pressures from above and below, from the bosses and from their working class base, social democratic parties in office have knuckled down to capital and abandoned their increasingly modest reform programmes in the name of fiscal austerity and economic competitiveness. Such was the fate of the British Labour governments in the 1960s and 1970s, and of the prolonged, and increasingly cynical and corrupt Mitterrand presidency in France between 1981 and 1994.

The more recent cohort of social democratic governments in Europe, swept into office in the late 1990s on a wave of rebellion against the experience of Thatcherism in Britain and of its generalisation via European Monetary Union on the continent, represent a further stage in this process, in which the term 'reform' has been completely emptied of meaning and used to refer to yet more neo-liberal measures. The damage that this can inflict on the social democrats themselves is indicated by the French presidential and legislative elections in April-June 2002, in which the traditional vote of the PS and its Communist ally haemorrhaged leftwards to the Trotskyist candidates and rightwards to the fascist Le Pen, allowing the scandal-ridden Gaullist Chirac to sneak back into the presidency with the bonus of a large parliamentary majority.

Social democracy is undeniably in decline. This is not, however, the same as its 'bourgeoisification'. Lenin characterised the Labour Party and its like as capitalist workers' parties. They are, in other words, parties that express workers' resistance to capitalism and seek to contain that resistance within the framework of the system. This contradictory function

depends upon the role of the trade union bureaucracy, which acts as the connection between the parliamentary leadership of the social democratic party and the organised working class. The bureaucracy itself occupies an ambiguous position, operating as a distinct social layer whose interests depend on their ability to strike compromises between labour and capital, and therefore to prevent workers' struggles from developing into a challenge to the system. Simply put, social democracy is the political expression of the trade union bureaucracy. This relationship both provides a buffer, insulating the parliamentary leadership from rank and file pressures, and sets limits to its freedom to manoeuvre in the bourgeois political arena.¹⁴

Given the Marxist analysis of reformism and the trade union bureaucracy, to assert that social democracy has been 'bourgeoisified' is to claim that it has broken loose from the anchorage in the organised working class provided by its link with the trade union bureaucracy. Undoubtedly this is the outcome devoutly sought by the right wing of the contemporary social democratic leaderships, represented above all by Tony Blair and the other ideologues of the Third Way, whose model is provided by Bill Clinton's 'New Democrats'. Yet even Blair has failed to achieve this goal. Labour's campaign in the 1997 and 2001 elections depended critically on trade union finance and personnel; currently a cash-strapped party leadership is trying to persuade the unions affiliated to increase their financial support for Labour. Nor is this a one-way process. Blair's desperate efforts to persuade George Bush to go to the United Nations for a fig leaf of legitimacy for war against Iraq reflected the depth of opposition to war in the working class movement that was, above all, expressed by the 40 percent of the votes cast at the Labour Party conference in October 2002, mainly by trade union affiliates, in support of what amounted to an anti-imperialist amendment.

The workers' movement elsewhere in Europe never suffered defeats as severe as those inflicted in Britain under Thatcher. Facing generally less cowed trade unions, the continental social democrats, for all their failures in office, have manoeuvred in order to contain their base. Lionel Jospin in France carefully cultivated a socialist rhetoric dramatically at variance with his neo-liberal policies—arguably, it was his decision to abandon this hypocrisy and move more openly onto the centre ground of bourgeois politics that doomed him to humiliation in the first round of the presidential elections last April. More striking still, the ultra-opportunist Gerhard Schröder, confronted with the most

robust workers' movement and most persistently proletarian reformist party in Europe, has tacked and turned, signing up to a classic Third Way document with Blair but rescuing bankrupt firms, opening up German companies to Anglo Saxon style speculative finance but going slow on the labour market 'flexibility' demanded by the bosses, eagerly participating in the NATO bombing campaign against Yugoslavia in 1999 but narrowly winning re-election in 2002 on the basis of opposition to war in Iraq.

The connections between social democracy and the organised working class have become significantly looser over the past generation, but they have not been broken. The loosening is important: on the one hand, it increases the room for manoeuvre of leadership teams intimately involved with the media and big business; on the other hand, it widens the space for the development of alternatives to the left of social democracy. But the remaining links are also important: any alternative project based on the belief that reformism is finished will go dangerously adrift.

One reason why this belief is dangerous is that reformism is a wider phenomenon than organised social democratic parties. Reformism—in the sense of a political movement that seeks the gradual improvement of capitalism rather than the revolutionary transformation of society—stems from the material conditions of working class life under capitalism, and in particular the way in which these conditions (in particular the fragmentation and passivity induced by the capitalist economy) lead workers, even when they are engaged in struggle, to doubt their ability to take control of society. This lack of self confidence can only be broken down through protracted class battles and the active intervention of organised revolutionaries. The defeat of reformism is not something that happens automatically.

Moreover, reformist consciousness can exist even where a social democratic party does not exist. This has long been true in the United States, where a kind of bastard social democracy within the unions has helped to bind many workers to what is indisputably a straightforwardly capitalist party, the Democrats. Versions of reformism can develop even within militant mass movements. This is very evident within the anti-capitalist movement in Europe, where ATTAC in France has emerged as an increasingly well defined right wing, seeking to remedy the ills wrought by neo-liberalism by strengthening the nation-state and reforming the European Union and resisting efforts to mobilise the movement against the Bush war drive. This should surprise no one who remembers their Lenin: if the working class does not spontaneously gravitate

to revolutionary consciousness why should looser and more amorphous social movements?

Modalities of regroupment

The persistence of reformism in both organised and unorganised forms has two important political implications. First, it means that a major strategic task of the radical left is to win over the working class base of the social democratic parties. The key tool forged by the Communist International in its early years to achieve this objective—the united front tactic—retains its historical significance, even if united fronts today often take new forms. The experience of common practice in struggle around demands and through organisational forms that can be shared by diverse political forces is essential if those currently influenced by social democracy are to be won to a revolutionary programme.¹⁵ Secondly, the classic distinction between reform and revolution—drawn by Luxemburg and Lenin in the era of the Second and Third Internationals—also remains of critical importance. If historical processes are not automatically wiping social democracy out, then it will require political intervention and argument to weaken the influence of reformism in both the organised working class and the anti-capitalist and anti-war movements. A party that aspires to offer workers a way out of the impasse of social democracy can only do so if its programme and practice are based on a revolutionary critique of reformism.

These considerations help to provide a framework for approaching the question of regroupment. There are three conceptions current on the left internationally. The first is championed by Rifondazione in Italy, and reflects the PRC's politically ambiguous evolution. The PRC leadership seems to be trying to bring together the main surviving Communist parties in Europe, the leading organisations of the revolutionary left, and the non-party elements within the anti-capitalist movement. There are two difficulties with this approach. In the first place, the PRC is exceptional among the European CPs in having moved sharply to the left in recent years. The plight of the French Communist Party (PCF) dramatises an alternative trajectory. It participated in Jospin's 'plural left' coalition; its ministers served in a government that implemented neo-liberal domestic policies and helped to wage war on Yugoslavia in 1999 and on Afghanistan in 2001. Consigned to opposition because of the drastic electoral punishment that it suffered (even more severe than the other constituent formations of the 'plural left') in the polls in

2002, the PCF is now seeking to rebuild its left credibility by campaigning against war on Iraq. All the same, this unappetising history indicates that, even if we cast our nets widely when defining the 'radical left', the survivors of historical Stalinism are, on the whole, not useful partners.

The PRC is therefore a special case among the European CPs. Its decisive move leftwards since it brought down the first centre-left Olive Tree coalition in 1998 was an extremely welcome development. All the same, there are problematic elements in its approach to party building. Reflecting the dramatic decline in Marxist culture in Italy since the implosion of the revolutionary left in the late 1970s, the PRC is extremely eclectic theoretically, and has, in particular, uncritically absorbed large chunks of the autonomist Marxism redeployed for the present era by Michael Hardt and Toni Negri in their celebrated book *Empire*. There is something paradoxical about a mass workers' party taking on board a leftist ideology that is systematically hostile both to organised labour and to party building.¹⁶

Moreover, the PRC has retained from its past a conception of the party that equates it with the movement—a conception common to both Stalinism and social democracy that is radically at odds with Lenin's approach, which sharply distinguishes between party and class, conceiving the party as the self-conscious section of the working class that organises to win over the majority.¹⁷ In consequence the PRC tends not to confront the political heterogeneity of the anti-capitalist movement, and therefore fails to recognise the significance of building united fronts among diverse currents and fighting ideologically within the movement for a revolutionary Marxist approach.

The second approach to regroupment is that championed by the ISM and its allies internationally. This offers the SSP as a model for party building today. As defended in particular by Murray Smith, this is a broad or 'strategically non-delimited' party in the sense of leaving open the question of reform and revolution. The justification for this approach is supposed to be the disappearance of reformism—the idea of 'the bourgeoisification of social democracy' that I criticised above.¹⁸ Smith makes much of the idea that in criticising this model the SWP is accusing the SSP of centrism, a cardinal insult in the dictionary of revolutionary polemic:

'We should define a party concretely, by the role it plays in relation to the fundamental classes in society and to the state. A centrist party is a party that oscillates between reformism and revolutionary politics. Is this what the SSP does? The reality is that the SSP is play-

ing a role of conducting propaganda and agitation in the working class, taking up all the issues that confront the working class on a national and international level and presenting a socialist alternative. No doubt the party still has weaknesses, but there is no sign of oscillation or subordination to any other political force'.¹⁹

In fact, the SWP does not regard the SSP as a centrist party. Its supporters participate loyally in the SSP as members of the Socialist Worker Platform. The SSP has undoubtedly not vacillated when confronted by major tests—above all, that posed by the Bush war drive. This reflects the fact that it is a party led by serious revolutionaries. But to accord the SSP leadership the credit they deserve is not the same as accepting that they have somehow discovered the philosopher's stone of party building. Already the SSP's short history has highlighted some difficulties with the 'strategically non-delimited' model. Two in particular stand out.

First, the belief that reformism is dead leads to the opposite of opportunism, in the form of a sectarian attitude towards the Labour Party. This is entirely logical given the ISM's premises: if Labour is just another capitalist party, then why treat it any differently from the other leading bourgeois parties—the Tories, Scottish Nationalists, and Liberal Democrats? But Labour *is* different in that, particularly thanks to its left and the trade union leaders, it still commands the loyalty of the mass of organised workers. The failure to understand this leads to missed opportunities to build united fronts capable of breaking into Labour's core support. The SSP has mounted a number of particularly foolish attacks on George Galloway, a Scottish Labour MP who has been one of the toughest leaders of the anti-imperialist wing of the anti-war movement in Britain. The trouble with a triumphalist conception of the SSP is that it can cause its unnecessary isolation within the organised working class in Scotland.²⁰

Secondly, an underestimation of reformism can paradoxically lead to the attempt to fill the entire space that it has supposedly left. The SSP leadership appear to believe that the death of social democracy means that pressing bread and butter economic demands automatically has a radicalising dynamic. This can lead to a sort of parochial economism manifested, for example, by a tendency of some members of the leadership to counterpose pursuing electoral agitation around the economic demands the party has prioritised (free school meals, for example) to building the anti-war movement. Of course economic demands matter, but in the present climate in

Europe it would be a terrible mistake to try artificially to separate them from the broader political radicalisation. In Britain, for example, a genuine 'class-struggle left wing' has emerged in the trade union bureaucracy that is prepared *both* to oppose war on Iraq on a principled basis *and* to challenge Blair's neo-liberal economic agenda (even though some of them, for example Andy Gilchrist of the firefighters' union, still remain strongly committed to Labour). It would be sad if revolutionaries lagged behind left reformists by trying to keep economics and politics separate.

None of this means that it may not in some circumstances be appropriate to build a 'strategically non-delimited' party that avoids taking a position on reform and revolution. For example, if a significant section of the left trade union bureaucracy, with substantial rank and file support, broke with Labour and sought to launch a new party, perhaps on a relatively explicit reformist programme, any revolutionary organisation worth its salt would have very seriously to consider being in on this party from the start. But considering this kind of scenario underlines that SSP-type parties cannot be treated as a general model, but merely as one possible vehicle for the longer-term process of building a mass revolutionary party. Again, in the actual situation that prevails in England and Wales it is certainly correct to build the Socialist Alliance—which has some of the characteristics of a party and some of those of a united front—in a programme that is socialist but that falls well short of revolution: artificially to declare the alliance a revolutionary party would shut it off from the substantial sections on the left of the working class movement who are only just beginning to break with Labourism.²¹ Nevertheless, in such broad coalitions it is essential for revolutionaries to retain independent organisation in order to combine building the coalition with the objective that gives this work its meaning—the construction of a mass revolutionary party.²²

The third conception of regroupment—that of revolutionary regroupment—is that defended by the SWP. Its aim is to bring together all those who identify with the revolutionary Marxist tradition as it was developed and defended by Marx and Engels, Lenin and the Bolsheviks, Trotsky and the Left Opposition, and who want to build the movement today on a non-sectarian basis. To clarify what is involved in this conception of regroupment, let us consider its component elements.

In the first place, it is important to make clear that no regroupment that is meaningful can take place if one current insists that its interpretation of the tradition must

be the basis of the regroupment. This does not mean that the SWP, for example, ceases to defend key aspects of its theoretical heritage—for example, the interpretation of Stalinism as bureaucratic state capitalism developed by Tony Cliff. But there are other interpretations of revolutionary Marxism that cannot simply be dismissed because they diverge from our own with respect, say, to the question of Stalinism. For example, Daniel Bensaïd's *Marx L'Intempestif*—recently translated into English as *Marx for Our Times*—defends a conception of Marxism that is radically non-determinist, conceiving history as the interference of different times in which revolution is not an inevitable outcome but rather an interruption of bourgeois normality, a drastic intervention in a world that capitalism is driving to catastrophe. As Bensaïd notes, this is one contestable reading of the revolutionary Marxist tradition that—one might add—in no way implies the analysis of the USSR as a degenerated workers' state that was long the official position of the Fourth International of which Bensaïd is a leading figure.

There is, in other words, more than one way to carry on the revolutionary Marxist tradition. But, Bensaïd also notes, Marxism is 'the theory of a practice that is open to several readings. Not any readings whatsoever: not everything is permissible in the name of free interpretation; not everything is valid'.²³ Revolutionary Marxism has developed in response to a series of great crises in the workers' movement—in particular the collapse of the three internationals that posed a series of choices: between Marx and Bakunin, Lenin and Kautsky, Trotsky and Stalin. No version of revolutionary Marxism today is likely to be of any use that does not internalise in some form Trotsky's critique of Stalinism—not merely the social interpretation of the Stalin regime that treats it as a material phenomenon and not just an ideological deviation, but also the theory of permanent revolution and the critique of popular frontism, essential tools that, if taken up, could have helped avoid a series of disastrous defeats where instead the movement pursued the chimera of a 'national-democratic revolution': China 1925-27, Spain 1936-39, Iraq 1958-62, Indonesia 1965-66, Iran 1978-79. Any analysis of the triumph of neo-liberalism in post-apartheid South Africa—not, of course, a world-historic defeat, but a tremendously wasted opportunity after the great workers' and community struggles of the 1980s—would discover that its roots also lie in the efforts by the leadership of the African National Congress and the South African Communist Party to separate the struggle for national lib-

eration from that for socialism.²⁴

The theory of permanent revolution is, of course, not the property of any particular current, even if there are different readings of it. Essential for a lasting regroupment is not simply a shared commitment to the revolutionary tradition of which this theory is part, but a non-sectarian approach to building the anti-capitalist movement. It is important to bear in mind that there are influential sectarian versions of Trotskyism that despite their other divergences share a propensity to start with their differences with the rest of the movement (and indeed with each other). This is to be found among groups stemming from the orthodox Trotskyist tradition—for example, the bulk of the far left in Argentina—and also, alas, among at least one from the IS tradition, the International Socialist Organisation in the United States.²⁵

One point in common between the IST and the FI has been their commitment to building the movement against global capitalism, even though there are significant differences between them about the precise balance between united front work and party building within the broader movement. The FI comrades are, on the whole, noticeably more cautious than we are about pursuing political arguments within the movement—perhaps most importantly over what we regard as the centrality of opposition to the US war drive to the future of the struggle against capitalist globalisation. Implicit in this disagreement is, in our view, a misunderstanding of the nature of united fronts.

In our view, there is no contradiction between building on the broadest and most inclusive possible basis, and engaging in comradely argument with the other forces in the movement. The first is, on the contrary, the precondition of the second. The test of a non-sectarian approach is that revolutionaries start, not from what differentiates them from others, but from what unites them, and offer a dynamic strategy for building the movement. Debates within the movement are likely to be most fruitful when they arise from the concrete questions of how to develop the struggle rather than being picked out of the air by sectarian wisecracks. But it is self-defeating to avoid argument at all costs. The development of any serious mass movement inevitably involves a process of differentiation between more and less radical forces. We are seeing this today with the crystallisation of a reformist wing within the anti-capitalist movement around the leadership of ATTAC France. Revolutionaries have to know how to work with forces to their right without capitulating to them.

The future of left regroupment de-

depends heavily on how well revolutionaries address this tricky task. If, at the same time, they learn how to work together more effectively, the rewards will be considerable. Thus increasing cooperation between the LCR and the SWP, as the leading European organisations in international currents with significant influence on other continents (for example, in Brazil in the case of the FI, and in South Korea and parts of sub-Saharan Africa in that of the IST), could begin to constitute a powerful revolutionary pole of gravity inside the movement against global capitalism. If this does take place, it will be through a gradual process, involving both frank political discussion and the accumulation of experiences of practical cooperation that can build mutual confidence and a framework of shared political understanding. It is worth taking care and time to get the process right. Revolutionary Marxists have a real chance increasingly to shape the new wave of struggles that is developing. It would be a tragedy were we—either through hesitating too long or by impatiently trying to force events—to throw this opportunity away.

Alex Callinicos is a leading member of the Socialist Workers Party (Britain). This text has also been published in *Links*, journal of the Democratic Socialist Party (Australia). It was written before the European Social Forum in Florence.

Notes

(1) R Lapper, 'Latin America Turns Left', *Financial Times*, 29 July 2002.
 (2) R Lapper, 'US Right Scents a New "Axis of Evil" in Latin America', *ibid*, 23 October 2002.
 (3) Alas, Lutte Ouvrière, the other leading far left organisation in Europe, remains stuck in an increasingly self destructive sectarian groove.
 (4) Describing this movement as 'anti-capitalist' is controversial, for reasons that sometimes reflect the genuine ambiguity of the movement, which was well brought out by Pierre Rousset of the LCR, when he said at the Asia-Pacific International Solidarity Conference (Sydney, Easter 2002) that the movement is anti-capitalist in the sense of rejecting the system, but not in the sense of having a coherent revolutionary perspective for an alternative. The label 'anti-capitalist movement' has the double advantage of stressing its anti-systemic character and of avoiding silly arguments over whether we are for or against globalisation, but it should not be taken to mean that it is a movement composed of revolutionary Marxists, as will become eminently clear below.

(5) The argument briefly set out here is much further developed in A Callinicos, 'Regroupment, Realignment and the Revolutionary Left', *IST Discussion Bulletin* 1 (July 2002). This bulletin contains a variety of materials on far left regroupment. It is available at www.is-tendency.org. Many other SWP texts cited here are available either at this site or at www.swp.org.uk

(6) For much more analysis of the anti-capitalist movement, see A Callinicos, *An Anti-Capitalist Manifesto* (forthcoming, Cambridge, 2003).

(7) See J Rees, 'Imperialism: Globalisation, the State and War', *International Socialism* 93 (2001) and A Callinicos, 'The Grand Strategy of the American Empire', *International Socialism* 97.

(8) M Smith, 'Where is the SWP Going?', *Frontline* 8 (2002), online edition, www.redflag.org.uk. Scottish Militant Labour was the name adopted by the Scottish supporters of the Militant Tendency after they broke with the Labour Party in the early 1990s (south of the border Militant became the Socialist Party of England and Wales). It subsequently split between the ISM and the Scottish supporters of the SP-dominated international current, the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI), who form a separate platform within the SSP.

(9) J Wolfreys, 'Class Struggles in France', *International Socialism* 84 (1999).

(10) E J Hobsbawm, *Interesting Times* (London, 2002), ch 12 (quotations from pp205 and 210).

(11) For accounts of the development of the New Left in Britain and the US after 1956, see respectively D Widgery, *The Left in Britain 1956-68* (Harmondsworth, 1976) and M Isserman, *IFI Had a Hammer...* (New York, 1987).

(12) See, on the upturn of 1967-76, C Harman, *The Fire Last Time* (London, 1988). Daniel Bensaïd of the LCR has written an important critical assessment of the experience of building the FI, particularly in France, in *Les Trotskysmes* (Paris, 2002).

(13) For an early study of this process at work in Britain, see B Hindess, *The Decline of Working Class Politics* (London, 1971).

(14) See T Cliff and D Gluckstein, *Marxism and Trade Union Struggle* (London, 1986), part 1, and *The Labour Party: A Marxist History* (London, 1988).

(15) A Callinicos, 'Unity in Diversity', *Socialist Review*, April 2002.

(16) See the critique of autonomist Marxism in A Callinicos, 'Toni Negri in Perspective', *International Socialism* 92 (2001), and *An Anti-Capitalist Manifesto*, op cit, pp80-83, 93-102, and A Nimtz, 'Class Struggle under "Empire":

In Defence of Marx and Engels', *International Socialism* 96 (2002).

(17) See C Harman, 'Party and Class' (1968), reprinted in T Cliff et al, *Party and Class* (London, 1997).

(18) See, in addition to the text by Smith cited above, his 'The LCR and the Question of a Workers' Party', *IST Discussion Bulletin* 1 (July 2002).

(19) M Smith, op cit.

(20) See Mike Gonzalez's reply to Smith, 'The Socialist Worker Platform and the SSP', due to appear in *Frontline*.

(21) The SWP's approach to the Socialist Alliance is most fully set out by John Rees in 'Anti-Capitalism, Reformism and Socialism', *International Socialism* 90 (2001).

(22) It should be clear from the foregoing how mistaken Smith and other leaders of the ISM are to compare the SWP's stance with that of the CWI leadership, who, as Smith puts it, 'panicked at the consequences of opening up the organisation in this way and retreated to the bunker' ('Where is the SWP Going?'). The English SP, the core of the CWI, having opposed the formation of the SSP, walked out of the Socialist Alliance in December 2001 after it lost a conference vote. The SWP has, by contrast, demonstrated its commitment to the Socialist Alliance as part of its pursuit of a broader process of revolutionary regroupment whose aim is to break wider layers of the working class from reformism. It is a form of ultimatism to dismiss all those who reject the SSP model as open or concealed sectarians.

(23) D Bensaïd, *Marx for Our Times* (London, 2002), p2.

(24) See, for a recent discussion of these issues, J Rees, 'The Democratic Revolution and the Socialist Revolution', *International Socialism* 83 (1999).

(25) A Callinicos, *The Anti-Capitalist Movement and the Revolutionary Left* (London, 2001).

A LETTER FROM LCR COMRADES

**Daniel Bensaïd, Léon Crémieux,
François Duval, François Sabado**

Dear Alex,

Some notes for discussion on the basis of your two texts on the question of regroupment.¹ They are (relatively) brief despite the scale of the question, but after Florence and given the accumulated delay, we haven't had the time to do more.

(1) On periodisation and the present stage

The text 'Regroupment and the Socialist Left Today' starts from 'the emergence since the Seattle protests in November 1999 of a worldwide movement in opposition to globalisation and, increasingly, also to American imperialism's war drive'. This phenomenon substantially changes the conditions for the construction of a revolutionary force. We are in agreement on this point.

The question has moreover been on the agenda since the turning point of 1989-91. It was clear that German unification, the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the end of the Cold War, etc, marked the end of a great cycle that began with the First World War and the Russian Revolution. If one accepts the rough notion of 'the short 20th century', it was a matter then of a historical turning point that would of necessity translate itself more or less quickly into a reshuffling of the geopolitical pack, but also into redefinitions and recompositions among currents in the workers' movement.²

Of course, this turning point was itself the culmination of a long process of which, as you recall, 1956 and 1968 can be considered as the symbolic stages. In 1956 the uprisings in Poland and Hungary (and also the crisis of the Hundred Flowers in China) announced the crisis of the bureaucratic systems (whatever their conceptual characterisation) and contained in germ the Sino-Soviet conflict. The Seventh World Congress of the Fourth International acknowledged this already in 1957 in a document entitled 'The Rise, Decline, and Fall of Stalinism'. As to 1968, another symbolic conjunction, this time of the Vietnamese liberation struggle, of the French May, and of the anti-bureaucratic movements in Poland, displayed the irruption of a new

generation and announced the weakening of the traditional apparatuses (social democratic and Stalinist) in the workers' movement.

The collapse of the bureaucratic dictatorships in 1989-91 constituted the final act in a counter-revolution that started in the 1930s. The overthrow of these regimes, whatever the outcome, was necessary to clear the stage of accumulated ruins and to make possible a new departure. To the extent that it was inscribed in the context of the liberal Counter-Reformation, it also meant in the short term a degradation of the balance of forces to the detriment of the workers' movement and the national liberation movements. The event thus presented contradictory consequences: in the short term, it opened the way to the imperialist offensive; in the medium term, it prepared the way for a reorganisation of a left freed from the Stalinist burden. An example of the 'discordance of times'³

It seems to us that, in retrospect, 2001 will mark a new critical point and a new stage. Not only because of 11 September. As Walden Bello put it, beyond the Twin Towers of Manhattan, two other towers have been overthrown: that of the New Economy (symbolised by Enron and the financial scandals), and that of Argentina, which had been presented as the star pupil of the IMF in Latin America. The combination of the economic crisis, of military imperialism and of the menace of war against Iraq (as well as the war waged by Sharon against the second intifada) is a powerful factor of mobilisation and politicisation in the movement against capitalist globalisation that began to grow in the mid-1990s with the Zapatista rising, the strikes of winter 1995 in France, and the unemployed marches, then, in an accelerated manner, with the demonstrations of Seattle, Prague, Nice, Genoa, Porto Alegre, Barcelona, Florence, etc.

The result is that there are now new horizons opening up for the revolutionary left (the contrast with the sinister years of the 1980s is evident), but in a context where the spiral of defeats hasn't been broken: the 1995 strikes didn't stop the privatisation of France Telecom and the neo-liberal reforms of Alain Juppé; the intifada has developed, but the Zionist state has in effect reoccupied the Palestinian territories; the anti-war movement has grown, but in ten years the US and NATO have intervened in the Gulf, the Balkans, and Afghanistan; crises are accumulating in Latin America (Bolivia, Paraguay, Venezuela, Ecuador, Colombia) and Lula won the Brazilian presidential elections, but the Workers Party (PT) multiplied 'preventive' guarantees for the benefit of the international finan-

cial institutions; the European revolutionary left has obtained significant election results for the first time, but Le Pen got through to the second round in the French presidential elections and the extreme right presses forward in Austria, in Holland, in Italy.

We are therefore witnessing strong social and political resistances and a polarisation of class relations, which is reflected in electoral advances for the far left and the far right. The global context remains, however, unfavourable for the popular classes. The waves of resistance of the middle and late 1990s have not yet succeeded in reversing the powerful tendencies of the neo-liberal offensive of the past few decades.

A race [*course de vitesse*] has begun (or a contest at a slow pace [*ou de lenteur*]: this perhaps is what you are referring to when you describe the present period as 'the 1930s in slow motion', but it is necessary always to be suspicious of historical analogies that tend to emphasise more the similarities than the differences) starting from an unfavourable balance of forces for the workers' movement. Above all, the gap between the social mobilisations (or even explosions) and political recomposition remains immense (as situations as different as Argentina or Algeria show). Here again, discordance of times: the globalisation of resistances moves much more quickly than the regroupment of political forces (time is needed to digest the disasters of the 20th century that have seen the Stalinists discredit revolution while the social democrats abandoned reform for neo-liberalism, more or less tempered).

It remains nonetheless the case that all the signs indicate that this revolutionary left is recovering, that the legitimacy of neo-liberal capitalism has been powerfully undermined, that the question of another possible world is being posed on a large scale (even if the answer remains a faltering one), that the strategic debate that has been on its death bed during the past two decades is being resumed. In brief: will socialism or barbarism win? The question is more relevant than ever. And we have heavy responsibilities to help answer it.

(2) The war and radical Islam

We agree that the present war drive is one of the key issues in world politics. The necessary fight against imperialist wars must not however mean a relativisation of all other social and political questions.

All the same, we agree on the necessity of building large unitary mobilisations against the war, and of struggling first of all against our own imperialism, that of

the Western capitalist metropolises. But we must, in each case, take into account the specific features of each conflict. If there certainly has been an imperialist offensive over the last decade with the unleashing of four wars since 1991, in the Gulf, the Balkans, Afghanistan, and today the preparations for war in Iraq, we must also integrate the totality of factors that led into each conflagration.

Thus in the Balkans there were two wars: the war between the NATO powers and Serbia, and Milosevic's war of ethnic cleansing against the people of Kosovo. That had practical consequences making it necessary to combine mobilisation against the NATO bombing campaign with the demand for self determination for the people of Kosovo.

On the war in Afghanistan, we opposed the imperialist intervention, but, as a revolutionary organisation, we also denounced the Taliban regime and its massacres. The revulsion against both was so great in popular milieux that this position could be translated into slogans for unitary mobilisations.

Today, on the war against Iraq, without in the least supporting the dictatorial regime of Saddam Hussein, and without making him the champion of the peoples against imperialism, we are concentrating our fire against American imperialism. Given the American war aims and the condition of public opinion towards this conflict, our critique of Saddam is not expressed in slogans in unitary mobilisations.

We thus insist on the necessity of specifying our general positions—positions against imperialist aggressions—in response to each conflict.

We also wish to respond to an accusation you have repeatedly made, that responsibility for the weakness of the anti-war mobilisations in France falls on the leadership of ATTAC or the LCR.

Let us deal above all with your tendency to explain this situation by the position of the LCR on this or that slogan. You have enough political experience to know that difficulties don't come from this or that slogan but from the global balance of forces and from the orientation of the big parties of the traditional left. Also, this accusation, often crudely made, hardly contributes to creating the conditions for a real discussion between us, on the war but also on our anti-imperialist tasks or on the emergence of a radical Islam.

The second point of divergence noted in your texts concerns the question of Islam. Thus you attach great importance to 'the consensus that now exists within the IS Tendency over both contemporary imperialist wars and radical Islam'. This notion of radical Islam remains very obscure. Is it a confused sentiment of

young demonstrators enraged by imperial arrogance? Is it a state of mind, or crystallised currents, and in the latter case which ones? We will have this kind of focused discussion. But, as a first approximation, our position is well summed by Gilbert Achcar: neither Islamophobia, which sees in every Muslim the spectre of 'green fascism' (it would be very good to have Islamist currents on the demonstrations here just as there are anti-war left Christians) nor complaisance towards reactionary political and religious authorities against which our comrades are fighting in their countries (sometimes in peril of their lives). The world has changed since the Comintern's Baku Congress of the East in 1920 (which called for mobilisation not only against imperialism, but also against obscurantist mullahs), and one cannot today consider religion, in this case Islam, as merely the religious envelope of a social revolt. And it is also necessary to look out for the difference between (political) anti-Zionism and (racial or religious) anti-Semitism. Yes to 'Sharon—murderer!' No to 'Death to the Jews!'

(3) A transformed political landscape

You start (in 'Regroupment, Realignment, and the Revolutionary Left') with a double 'earthquake': the popular risings and the collapse of the Stalinist regimes in the East, the appearance of a mass anti-capitalist movement, and notably the entry into politics of a new generation. This renewal manifests itself, to varying degrees in different countries and continents, on a genuinely global level. Capitalist globalisation is producing a globalisation of resistances and a new internationalism on an unprecedented scale—one only has to compare Florence with the most important European mobilisations of the 1960s (the Berlin demonstration against the Vietnam War in February 1968 for example, or that in Milan in 1973) to get a measure of the difference. Beyond the demonstrations and the counter-summits, the loss of hegemony of the Stalinist and social democratic organisations (obviously uneven because of historical and national differences) is expressed in the trade union movement (the appearance of a combative minority element), in the diversity of social movements, in the changed relation of forces between the reformist apparatuses and the revolutionary left.

With respect to these apparatuses, the death agony of the Communist parties seems irreversible. Deprived of the reference to the 'socialist camp', they haven't been able to renew their social base because of the changes in the productive

apparatuses, and have been drawn into managerial practices [*gestionnaires*] that bring them close to social democracy. Only the Greek CP has preserved a mass implantation. What is worrying is that this historic crisis has hardly produced (except in Italy) significant left currents. The wastage of activists has gone further than we expected.

On the evolution of social democracy, it is necessary to take into account the qualitative transformations of the past 20 years under the pressure of neo-liberalism. The changes in capitalism of these last 20 or 30 years have had a tendency to undermine the social and material bases of classical reformism. We are confronted with a 'reformism without reforms' or a social-liberal reformism that has had consequences for the structure of social democracy, expressed in a certain disconnection with popular layers and by an increasing integration of its apparatuses into the summits of the state and in the private boards of directors of the big industrial and financial enterprises. Without strongly sharing Murray Smith's point of view, to which you refer, it seems however that his text, provided one gives to the notion of embourgeoisement a descriptive rather than a conceptual value, puts its finger on certain phenomena:⁴

● 'Embourgeoisement'? Once again, the term isn't rigorous conceptually. It describes, however, one aspect of the evolution of certain social democratic parties, notably southern Europe. After 15 years spent in government out of the last 20 years, the French Socialist Party (PS) only claims 150,000 to 180,000 members (and not activists) at Congress times (when it is necessary to check membership cards to elect delegates!). Around half hold elected positions. Certainly the great majority are petty elected officials, but it remains no less the case that the party's life depends more on its relationship to institutions than on that with social organisations. Let us add that it is necessary to measure the lasting and profound consequences of the evolution of the past two decades. At the summit of the Socialist Party apparatus, the privatisations have culminated in a kind of fusion of public sector elites and big private capital (the directors are the same people). This is reflected in organic connections in clubs like the Club de l'Industrie in France or in the composition of the Blair and Schröder governments. The 'Third Way' also has a sociological connection (Daniel wrote an article on this subject a few years ago in *Le Monde diplomatique*).

● Trade unions? This is the second aspect on which your text demands clarifications or corrections. You sum up your position with the formula: 'Simply put, social

democracy is the political expression of the trade union bureaucracy.' As Trotsky put it in his discussion with Yvon Craipeau, it is necessary to add: 'to a certain extent' and 'up to a point'. For this organic link between the trade union bureaucracy and social democracy is clearly very different in southern Europe, with a militant minority and very divided trade unionism, and in Germany, Britain, or Belgium. Moreover, we are now very cautious about characterising political phenomena (in this case political social democracy) as an expression or reflection of a social substance (working class or bureaucratic): the mediations—as you will readily acknowledge—are much more complex than these simplifications suggest.

● Finally, if the social democratic parties are not going to remain passive and leave the field open to a radical or revolutionary left, a tilt of the helm leftwards (announced by neo-Keynesian speeches and by calls for new forms of regulation to correct the excesses of neo-liberalism) remains problematic. Beyond the rhetoric of PS leaders like Emmanuelli or Mélenchon, a Keynesian turn at the European level would mean not only breaking with the Stability Pact and stimulating purchasing power, but also the coordinated adoption of a strongly redistributive fiscal policy, the relaunching of systems of social protection, the re-establishment of political control over central banks, the creation or relaunch of public services. In other words, a radical turn to reverse the logic of European construction as it has been conceived and practised ever since it began. That doesn't mean that there has to be all or nothing, that there is no room for manoeuvre, but the difference between the socialist democracy of today and that of the 1930s is at least as great as the similarities.

But all these tendencies are not finished processes. You write that 'the connections between social democracy and the organised working class have become significantly looser...but they have not been broken,' and that 'any alternative project based on the belief that reformism is dead will go dangerously adrift.' That's right. The erosion (it also uneven) of the social democratic parties is neither mechanical, nor irreversible: these apparatuses are going to attempt to react to their decline and to their electoral defeats; they will take initiatives and attempt to form new links with certain sectors of the social movement, etc.

You also write that 'reformism is a wider phenomenon than the organised social democratic parties'. That's true. Reformism can certainly take other forms than that of traditional social democracy or even organised parties. There always

already exist reformist currents in the social movements (this is perhaps what you are referring to under the expression 'do it yourself reformism').⁵ If authors such as Toni Negri or John Holloway claim not to have renounced a revolutionary perspective, their theorisation of impotence and their mythology (of the multitude for one, of an imaginary Zapatism for the other) can perfectly well ideologically nourish left reformist currents in the anti-globalisation movement.⁶ Numerous articles show that we are largely in agreement on this point.

(4) United front and regroupments

'The persistence of reformism in both organised and unorganised forms has...important political implications. First, it means that a major strategic task of the radical left is to win over the working class base of the social democratic parties. The key tool forged by the Communist International in its early years to achieve this objective—the united front tactic—retains its historical significance' (A Callinicos, 'Regroupment and the Socialist Left Today').

Unlike really ultra-left sects, we are also in agreement on the continuing importance of a united front tactic. But in the case of a tactic, the entire difficulty lies in its application to highly variable concrete situations. The political basis of the united front depends on relations of forces and on possible allies. We will stick here to a question of method: if the compromise makes mobilisation possible, it can be justified, provided once again that we express in full independence on its limits and disadvantages. On this point, we can thus have different appreciations of the situation and of possible alliances, but not a disagreement of principle.

On the other hand, it seems that we don't always have the same notion of the united front. You consider the Stop the War Coalition as well as Globalise Resistance as united-front organisations. The first is a large coalition. If Globalise Resistance is a united front bringing together different currents in the workers' movement on a limited platform, Chris Nineham's speech on its behalf in the debate on movements and parties in Florence is sufficiently astonishing (for French people formed in the tradition of the Charter of Amiens and of the organisational independence of mass organisations with respect to parties⁷): he began his speech in the name of Globalise Resistance and ended more or less by calling for building the revolutionary party! In fact, there exist intermediary forms between the united front and the party—single-issue campaigns, which are partial

united fronts to the extent that certain members of reformist parties are associated with them: for example, ATTAC, or the anti-fascist movement Ras L'Front.

Perhaps this is related to historical and cultural differences of approach, but these different concepts of the united front are also connected to different practices in mass work. For us, the intervention of revolutionaries in trade unions or in unitary social movements is not the mechanical projection of their party-political work. It does not consist in imposing the party positions by chucking them into the mass organisations, but convincing the largest possible sections of them on the basis of their own practical experience. The intervention of revolutionaries aims to build mass organisations to encourage unitary mobilisation and self organisation. We are thus seeking to transform the unions and unitary movements into combat organisations against the bosses. In sum, 'we stimulate class-struggle positions', but on the basis of the experiences of sectors of the mass movement, and not by the simple formal adoption of the party's slogans by these organisations...

In the present situation, the united front campaigns are thus on the agenda—against imperialist war
—for the abolition of Third World debt
—for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of Israel from the Occupied Territories
—against the bosses' social reconstruction (privatisations, social security)
—for the rights of immigrants, etc.

(5) Party and regroupments

The question of regroupment and the party is obviously of a different order. In the present situation, small revolutionary organisations can find a way to escape from their marginal position, to connect themselves to sectors of the mass movement, to contest the leadership of the mobilisations with the reformist parties. You distinguish three conceptions or models of how to respond to these challenges in terms of re-composition and regroupments:

—a conception attributed to the Partito della Rifondazione Comunista (PRC) which privileges the regroupment of the old Communist movement and what remains of it;

—a conception attributed to Murray Smith, who makes a party that is 'non-delimited strategically' a generalisable model, because of the vacuum left by the embourgeoisement of social democracy; —finally, that 'defended by the SWP', whose aim would be 'to bring together all those who identify with the revolutionary Marxist tradition as it was developed and defended by Marx and

Engels, Lenin and the Bolsheviks, Trotsky and the Left Opposition and who want to build the movement today on a non-sectarian basis'.

Every typology has its advantages (which are pedagogical) and its inconveniences (which are those of oversimplification). But things can be more complex and even combine several formulas. In any case, here too, it is a question of a concrete analysis of the concrete situation.

You define the project of the PRC as an attempt to bring together the principal surviving Communist parties in Europe, the principal organisations of the revolutionary left, and autonomist elements in the anti-capitalist movement. This is, in fact, a bit like the domestic landscape of the PRC. But that is a specific situation related to the history of the Italian left. Is this really a European project? Will this still be the case after Florence? This doesn't seem to have been the direction of the speeches by the PRC general secretary, Fausto Bertinotti, who strongly emphasised the damage caused by the centre-left coalitions and counterposed the necessity of an alternative left to the practice of a mere left that hopes to alternate in office with the right. These questions are open, because it is hard to see how the European CPs that have been reduced to satellites of social democracy can embark on such a dynamic. Italian conditions are, from this point of view, too specific to offer a continental model. In any case, we agree with you that the surviving CPs are obviously partners in a united front policy but that, with the odd exception, they are not priority partners, or even useful ones for the construction of a revolutionary party. Our concern in France is rather to avoid being sucked into the death agony of the French Communist Party (PCF) in the name of a mythical 'communists' home' [*maison des communistes*] where we would help to prop up a moribund apparatus.

The second approach to regroupments would be that of a large party, 'strategically non-delimited', and leave open the question of the cleavage between reform or revolution. This formulation is confused from the start. To the extent that a party defines itself by its own programme, it is always of necessity delimited, to a certain degree and up to a certain point. We prefer the formula 'a party with incomplete strategic delimitations' [*parti aux delimitations strategiques non achevees*]. The question is precisely to know where this delimitation occurs, according to the concrete situation and the partners involved.

Our orientation must start first from the new period. The end of an entire historical and political cycle of the workers'

movement—the collapse of Stalinism and the social-liberal transformation of social democracy—puts on the order of the day a reorganisation of the workers' movement and gives all its relevance to the construction of a new political force, of a force that seeks to break with the capitalist system. Its programme, its content, its profile must start from a social, democratic, and anti-capitalist emergency programme. That doesn't necessarily mean a strategically complete programme, notably on the forms and modalities of the political conquest of power. It's a matter rather of taking up again a series of political and strategic questions related to the necessary preparation for big class fights: social and political demands, both immediate and transitional, the question of public and social appropriation, independence from bourgeois institutions, the problematic of a workers' government. Thus, in France, a compromise cannot situate itself outside a programmatic and practical engagement against the social reconstruction demanded by the employers' organisation MEDEF (employment, flexibility, wages, public services, social security), against the institutions of the Fifth Republic, against the imperialist war and against capitalist globalisation. In other words: a break must be made with the policies practised for 20 years by the governmental lefts. For the moment the formula remains algebraic. If currents disengage themselves from the PCF, the PS or the social movements, we can propose Estates General and see what political basis takes shape.

We have, for our part, a heritage and a programme (by definition always under repair). But, to the extent that that we consider this programme always useful (and that we do not see there a kind of artificial and sectarian identification), we mustn't self limit it, cut it back, disguise ourselves as what we aren't, in the hope of achieving by this a hypothetical enlargement of the party that we want to build. We defend our ideas because we believe them to be correct. And we are ready to envisage possible compromises in response to really existing currents or organisations with which we can converge around the great questions of the day. This was, it seems to us, Trotsky's approach between 1933 and 1938 (in very unfavourable conditions).⁸

In achieving an acceptable compromise, everything depends on knowing in what direction the currents with which we are discussing are evolving (since the fall of the Prodi government, the PRC has clearly shifted leftwards while the 'renovators' of the PCF who supported the Jospin government to the end have moved rightwards despite speeches that

are sometimes radical but without practical consequences). And above all it is a question of knowing whether, in a regroupment, we are gaining in social implantation, in capacity for action and for experience, what we lose in programmatic precision. The negative experiences in this area often concern revolutionaries who have diluted their identity for small-group adventures that, instead of enlarging their capacities for intervention, aggravate theoretical confusion without enriching practice.

Let us note that, while denying that the scenario implied by the experience of the SSP in Scotland can be erected into a general model, you add this clarification: 'None of this means that it may not in some circumstances be appropriate to build a "strategically non-delimited" party that avoids taking a position on reform and revolution.' You cite in this context the hypothetical case where 'a significant section of the...trade union bureaucracy' broke away to the left. That's right. This is moreover what happened in Brazil in the last years of the dictatorship and that gave birth to the PT. And this why we in the Fourth International are loyally engaged in building the PT, convinced that in a mass party neither whose programme nor whose leadership were definitively crystallised, the definitions would come little by little through experience, on condition we preserved a means of expression of our own and that we existed as a current, whatever form that this took.

This new period demands that we position ourselves for a reorganisation of forces and the construction of a new party, of a large party, from class and democratic struggles. It is necessary then to determine the tactical mediations on the basis of real forces. The gap in France between social mobilisations and political representation poses the question of a new party or of a new force (especially after the elections of last April and May). On what bases and with whom?

But we do not see at this stage crystallised currents or groups of activists who are ready to engage in such a process. Even if we participate in all the discussions for a new political force, at present there are no possibilities for new frameworks of construction that would represent a positive transcendence of the LCR.

In the absence of such currents, it would be a diversion to neglect building the league while running after chimeras and imaginary allies. Only a real modification of the relations of forces can attract such allies in the future. The absence of such currents relates perhaps to something more substantial: the absence up to now of a new founding event

sufficiently powerful to transcend the orientation, the identities, the trajectories of each and permit their regroupment into a new formation transcending the limits of each organisation. There can be comings together on the field of action and convergences in struggles, but the conditions do not exist, in France at least, for new organisations.

Plenty of concrete figures can thus be envisaged. It is, however, necessary to underline one essential condition (which corresponds, if our memory serves us right, to the eleventh of the 11 points of the Left Opposition): that internal democracy exists in the common organisation permitting it, through the confrontation of positions, to draw collectively conclusions from the experiences undergone together. Certainly, there is no ideal democratic regime or absolute statutory guarantees. But one can say that, for a mass party, despite certain attempts to ban tendencies and currents, the Brazilian PT remains a pluralist and relatively democratic party. Similarly, Rifondazione Comunista has an internal regime that closely resembles that of revolutionary organisations.

(6) Party and programme

Once we have distinguished what relates to the united front and what relates to the construction of a party properly called, once we have admitted the possibility of partial delimitations and of compromises in a policy of regroupment, there remains a specific level of regroupment among the forces that we consider revolutionary. This regroupment can constitute an effective lever for the construction on new bases and on new relations of force of a powerful social movement. It is in this perspective of a 'crucial process of redefinition under way' that you situate the specific relations between the LCR and the SWP, the Fourth International and the IS Tendency. In considering that the SSP is 'a party led by serious revolutionaries', you acknowledge the fact that our two currents aren't the only revolutionaries.

We must begin by underlining in this context that, if the difference between reformists (who want only to manage the established order) and revolutionaries (who want to change it) isn't outdated, its practical significance merits re-examination. What does it mean to be a revolutionary at the threshold of the 21st century, after the bitter experience of the defeats of the past century, after a long sequence in which revolutionary victories have been scarce, in the face of the metamorphoses of globalised capitalism? Plenty of things are implicated (and mixed up) in the idea of Revolution with a capital R inherited from the

19th century: a strategic conception of emancipation as well as a mythical image of a liberated humankind.

When we draw a line of demarcation between reformists and revolutionaries, we must try to be precise about what we are talking about. We can distinguish at least three current meanings of the word 'revolution'.

In the first place, it is the proper name that has expressed in the modern epoch a very ancient hope for liberation and re-pleation. Secondly, it took on in the course of the 19th century a more precise meaning, that of 'social revolution' ('Vive la sociale!'), of a radical change of logic: the right to existence against the right to property, needs against profit, the common good against egoistic self interest, democracy against markets. It is this opposition between two incompatible social logics that is expressed in the famous injunction to change the world, and not only to interpret it. It seems to us that the content of this idea of revolution is the least obscured today, the most clearly relevant.

Finally, at the turn of the 20th century and with the Russian Revolution, the term acquired a strategic bearing: it wasn't a matter only of overturning the established order but of defining how to get there—reform or revolution. This certainly is the meaning of the great controversies that agitated the Second International at the dawn of the First World War, summed up by the opposition between Bernstein and Rosa. This strategic sense of the term summed up a series of experiences and themes (sometimes significantly drawing on military vocabulary): strategy and tactics, war of position and war of movement, general strike and insurrection, dual power, etc. It is at this point that the content of the concept is obscured, certainly because of the defeats we have suffered, but also thanks to modifications in the strategic coordinates of which, at the beginning of a new cycle of experiences, we have hardly begun to take the measure.

The latest productions of Negri or of Holloway bear witness in their own way to this strategic disarray without responding to it, except by theoretical artifices. We have had the opportunity to verify on various occasions, in discussions as well as articles, a large degree of agreement on this point. At least it is necessary also to emphasise that these books—witnesses to the intellectual climate, to the spirit of resistance and to its limits—help to relaunch a strategic debate that had sunk to degree zero (in Europe) since the end of the 1970s.

Let us add that the characterisation of an organisation as revolutionary (on the basis of our programme and of our

practice) has only a provisional value and is subject to confirmation. If the duty of revolutionaries is to make the revolution, it is only through the test of events that the line of demarcation will be corroborated in detail. Even the most revolutionary organisations in intention have their conservatisms and their vacillations: we never escape completely from subalternity towards the dominant order that we seek to overthrow.

It is therefore necessary to acknowledge what is of course obvious—that future revolutions, like past revolutions, will have their element of the unknown and the unexpected. It doesn't remain any less true that the revolutionary perspective is still a necessary regulative idea around which to gather the militant forces. It isn't a matter only of a myth (in the sense that Georges Sorel gave this concept), but of a guiding thread or practical plumb-line that allows us to relate the goal and the movement, to separate out necessary and acceptable compromises from unacceptable betrayals, to distinguish what takes us closer to the final goal from what draws us further away from it, etc.

The strategic delimitation between reform and revolution is therefore not engraved once and for all in the marble of texts. It changes as a function of historical experiences. It has a history, which is that of the great founding controversies of the movement (reform and revolution, permanent revolution versus revolution by stages). Thus you cite three great constitutive moments of a revolutionary current, three partings of the way: around the Russian Revolution, in the Communist movement in face of the Stalinist counter-revolution, and the historical divisions of the Trotskyist left (essentially on the question of how to characterise Stalinism and the Soviet Union). We can agree on the method. It is moreover why the first four congresses of the Communist International and the 11 points of the Left Opposition (or the Transitional Programme), have always been for us part of the necessary strategic heritage. They trace a line of political demarcation established on the basis of major events. The third moment, the controversy among Trotskyists over the nature of the Soviet Union, without minimising its theoretical and practical significance, does not seem to us to be of the same order of importance. Moreover, it concerned small organisations, swimming against the stream, and inclined in consequence to exaggerate their ideological identity for reasons of survival.

This is what your own text implies in a different way when you say that 'the theoretical disagreements' on the

nature of the USSR, even if they should be discussed, constitute today a historical controversy and not a point of division among revolutionaries justifying the existence of separate organisations. Since the 1960s, we have believed moreover that the disagreements on the characterisation of the USSR, however important they were, did not necessarily signify, for our two currents, differences of principle with respect to our tasks in the struggle for the revolutionary overthrow of the bureaucracy.

If we want to involve ourselves resolutely in a policy of regroupment, we must make ourselves distinguish (which isn't always easy) the important from the secondary, strategic questions from tactical ones, under the pain of remaining trapped in a sectarian logic of fragmentation to infinity on the basis of divergences that, with a few years (even a few months) of reflection, appear of a very relative importance. Thus, we are today in all probability in agreement with the comrades of the former OCT-Revolution who are today militants of the league in thinking—without denying at all that there were serious differences—that the 1971 split was unjustified and that we have all paid for it.⁹ Equally, the majority of the league have neither the same history nor the same practice as the comrades come from *Lutte Ouvrière* with *Voix des Travailleurs*, but if we want to prepare more ambitious regroupments we must prove that we can find each other and act together in the same organisation to the extent that it is democratic.¹⁰ By contrast, on the basis of the texts, we haven't always understood how the divergences between the SWP and the American ISO could be great enough to justify such a brutal and precipitate break. The accusation of sectarianism on the basis that the comrades had underestimated the anti-globalisation movement at the time of Seattle is hardly convincing. This is true of the majority of the left (including the American trade unions)! The comrades say they became involved in the movement subsequently, without abandoning their participation in the Campaign against the Death Penalty; they called for a vote for Ralph Nader in the 2000 presidential elections (which whether one agrees with it or not is hardly striking evidence of sectarianism); they are involved in the anti-war movement...

We must also be more prudent before drawing organisational conclusions when our organisations are so small, when the practical verification of theoretical disputes is very partial, when a new event can serve (and sometimes very quickly) to dissolve distrust and suspicion. Among revolutionaries, we must have the wisdom to

seek to understand before judging, or before explaining a divergence in the basis of social interests (namely class positions). For our part, numerous unhappy experiences have led us, when a polemic begins, to start from the idea that the comrades are trying to do good (even at the risk of making a mistake), rather than suspecting them of treason. An error is not a crime. If the question of the war is indisputably a major programmatic criterion, the lag in this or that organisation involving itself in the anti-globalisation movement does not justify hasty judgements. Similarly, the comrades of SPEB made a serious error when they campaigned in the French presidential elections for a vote exclusively for LO (instead of a reasonable appeal to vote for the candidates of the revolutionary left). They have committed others: for example, in their intervention in ATTAC and their illusion of transforming this association into a revolutionary party. We haven't—fortunately!—drawn definitive conclusions from this about the political trajectory of SPEB.

Thus we must fraternally discuss the disagreements that arise, in giving them their proper place. You have never failed to reproach the league for its supposed ambiguities on the question of the war. But, from the Gulf War to that in Afghanistan via the NATO intervention in the Balkans, we have always opposed imperialist wars (with nuances that do not appear at all scandalous in a living organisation).

To summarise: in the face of the new situation that has opened up in the past ten years, nothing in our view justifies in principle a separate organisational existence between our two currents, above all if we wish to offer an example and open the way to larger realignments, between currents coming from different histories and cultures. That does not mean that there aren't obstacles between us. But it is necessary to situate them precisely in order to overcome them.

It appears that these obstacles focus above all on the question of the relationship between party building and mass organisations, and on the internal regime of our organisations. This question is all the more delicate in that it is on the borderline between different political cultures and programmatic positions that are hard to disentangle. Thus the relation between parties and trade unions doesn't pose itself in the same terms in the British tradition (because of the history of the workers' movement) and in the French tradition marked by the precocious suspicion of the workers' movement (of revolutionary syndicalism) towards political representation (hence the Charter of Amiens, while remaining open to discussion).

Beyond these differences, it must nevertheless be possible to disengage the great principles of the independence of trade unions and social organisations in relation to parties, of respect for their plurality and their internal democracy. It is in this direction that the texts of Trotsky, from *The Revolution Betrayed* to the *Transitional Programme*, are, in the light of the Stalinist experience, oriented. They bring, from this point of view, a clarification by comparison with the confusion that still marked the first congresses of the CI on the relations party/class/state.

Our disagreements on this question find an overall coherence in the role of internal democracy in the party, in the relations between parties and mass movement and, perhaps, in our very conceptions of socialist democracy.

To go to the heart of the matter: we disagree with a conception of the party that does not integrate the possibility of an organised pluralism. In brief: tendency rights. If the regime of permanent tendencies certainly presents plenty of inconveniences and can go, in the extreme, to render democracy formal by voiding it of its outcomes, a conception of the 'party faction' does not allow free discussion and can lead to a logic of endless successive splits, according to the old adage that the party makes itself stronger by purging itself. At the basis of this conception is the identification of the construction of a tendency or a faction with that of the party. For us, the organisation or the party, even a small one, must already prefigure the conditions of a larger party. We emphasise this point in making it clear that to defend tendency rights does not mean a region of permanent tendencies. The league, which defends tendency rights, has seen itself make and unmake plenty of tendencies, in response to conjunctures and political problems. But, if crystallised divergences express a malaise or a crisis, organisational separation is no more always the best way of overcoming them by re-establishing party 'homogeneity'. Splits have their price, often higher still than the internal disorders of debates among tendencies or factions.

How not to connect your rejection almost as a matter of principle of internal pluralism with a conception of the united front and of mass work that tends to make mass organisations endorse the positions that are those of party building? In fact, how to construct pluralist organisations with mass organisations clearly aligned a priori with the general conceptions of the SWP? These skids off course can go as far as sectarianism, not between revolutionary organisations, but towards the mass movement.

This isn't a secondary question after the century we have just lived through and the balance-sheet of Stalinist and social democratic experiences. While you rightly insist on soviet democracy and the 'socialism from below' championed by Hal Draper, how to reconcile this reference to socialist democracy at the base with the functioning of a strongly verticalist party in its relationship with the unitary movements? There is here a serious problem that must be an object of extended discussions, within the framework of the fraternal relations that we have begun to establish.

What we must clarify between us, to avoid getting bogged down in specific cases and examples, are the common principles. For the questions of democracy, in the party as in relations with the mass movements, are a test of our more general conception of socialist democracy.

One last word—provisional, in the absence of a definitive conclusion, one of your texts finishes thus: 'Since Seattle the revolutionary left has been embarking...on a new voyage. There is no map to guide us—no set of rules or obvious historical reference point to dictate what we should do. The potential rewards are enormous. History will not forgive us if we miss this chance.' Let us address this challenge seriously, with patience certainly, not precipitously, but also with audacity, for the race between socialism and barbarism is more present than ever.

Yours fraternally,

Daniel Bensaïd, Léon Crémieux,
François Duval, François Sabado
**The authors of this letter are
leading members of the Ligue
Communiste Révolutionnaire,
French section of the Fourth
International. Translated by Alex
Callinicos**

Notes

(1) Translator's note: A Callinicos, 'Regroupment, Realignment, and the Revolutionary Left', *IST Discussion Bulletin 1* (July 2002), and 'Regroupment and the Socialist Left Today', printed in the present issue.

(2) Translator's note: See, on the short 20th century, E J Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes* (London, 1994).

(3) Translator's note: See, on the discordance of times, D Bensaïd, *Marx for Our Times* (London, 2002).

(4) Translator's note: M Smith, 'Where is the SWP Going?', *Frontline 8* (2002).

(5) In this context, to speak as you do, of 'the crystallisation of a reformist wing within the anti-capitalist movement around the leadership of ATTAC' seems

like a bad formulation. Perhaps it is an irritated reaction after the description that you gave, during a meeting at Marxism 2001, of ATTAC as an anti-capitalist movement. We warned you against the exaggeration of this formulation (which could have fed the illusions of Socialisme par en bas [SPEB] on the possible transformation of ATTAC into a revolutionary organisation). ATTAC isn't a party, but a single-issue movement (at least originally). Quite logically there coexist within it, on the basis of agreement against Third World debt, for the taxation of capital, against tax havens, of frankly moderate and reformist currents, and of radical and revolutionary currents. The relations among them fluctuate, and the leadership micro-apparatus enjoys a privileged position.

(6) Translator's note: M Hardt and A Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge MA, 2000), and J Holloway, *Change the World Without Taking Power* (London, 2002).

(7) Translator's note: In October 1906 the Confédération Générale du Travail (CGT) adopted the Charter of Amiens, declaring the independence of the trade unions from all political parties, including the Socialists.

(8) See D Bensaïd, *Les Années de Formation de la IV^e Internationale* (Amsterdam, 1988).

(9) Translator's note: The Organisation des Communistes Travailleurs, also known as Revolution!, after breaking away from the LCR developed a form of politics somewhat similar to the 'soft Maoism' of the Italian far left organisation Avanguardia Operaia (itself formed partly by militants from a Trotskyist background). It was one of the casualties of the crisis of the European revolutionary left in the second half of the 1970s: some leading members of the OCT later rejoined the LCR, where they play an active, and in some cases a leading role today.

(10) Translator's note: During the 1990s a small opposition group broke with Lutte Ouvrière and joined the LCR, where they maintain a distinct identity as Voix des Travailleurs.

A NOTE ON RELATIONS BETWEEN THE IS TENDENCY AND THE FOURTH INTERNATIONAL

As the preceding texts indicate, various organisations on the radical left have begun to explore the possibilities of regroupment. In the case of the two main international currents to have issued from the Trotskyist movement, the Fourth International (FI) and the International Socialist Tendency, this involved a number of more or less formal contacts. In particular, the IST decided in January 2002 to delegate the Socialist Workers Parties of Britain (SWP) and Greece (SEK) to represent them in discussions with the FI. In September 2002 representatives of the two parties met a delegation from the United Secretariat (USec) of the Fourth International in Paris. The meeting covered three topics: (1) imperialism and war; (2) party and movement; and (3) cooperation at the European Social Forum at Florence.

Discussion of the first topic reflected considerable agreement over the necessity of building a mass movement against the Bush administration's war drive. The disagreements concerned (1) whether previous wars from the Gulf to Afghanistan required the kind of 'neither-nor' position adopted by the French section of the FI, the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (for example, 'Neither NATO Nor Milosevic' in the 1999 Balkan War) or whether, as the IST comrades argued, a single-minded focus on opposition to imperialism was necessary to rally all the anti-war forces; (2) differences in assessment of the reasons for the unevenness of the anti-war movement across Europe, with the FI comrades stressing objective factors (for example, the legacy of French imperialism and the role of the 'plural left' coalition) to explain the relative weakness of the movement in France, while the IST delegates emphasised the importance of revolutionaries intervening decisively in order to shift the balance of forces in their favour. The discussion also included exchanges over whether or not the SWP was correct to characterise the FI's perspectives in the 1990s as pessimistic, a description that the members of the USec

present rejected.

The discussion of party and movement reflected the different ways in the national organisations represented at the meeting (the International Socialist Group (British section of the FI), LCR, SEK and SWP) had intervened in the anti-capitalist coalitions in their countries, but also underlying them more substantive differences. Some FI comrades argued that revolutionaries should keep a low profile in Florence, and avoid precipitating a showdown with the more right wing forces inside the anti-capitalist movement, though others argued that there was a danger of being too cautious. The IST delegates tended by contrast to stress the process of differentiation that was under way within the movement, arguing that revolutionaries should seek to shape the movement politically, and warning that if the FI comrades took a low profile they ran the risk of becoming prisoners of the right wing. There was also some discussion about whether or not the SWP's and SEK's approach to united fronts could be described as sectarian, something that the representatives of both organisations strongly denied. The final item was discussed somewhat inconclusively: the IST representatives proposed a radical left rally in Florence, along the lines of those during the protests at Nice, Genoa and Brussels. The FI comrades undertook to investigate the practical possibilities. In the event there was no such rally in Florence, although other forms of cooperation between the two currents took place there.

Bilateral contacts have also been developing between the SWP and the LCR. An initial meeting of the two leaderships in London in May 2001 was followed by a more recent one in December 2002 in Paris that was also attended by a member of the USec. The main issues that were covered there were a balance-sheet of Florence and the question of left regroupment. The disagreements evident in the letter in this bulletin from LCR comrades (some of whom were present at this meeting), particularly over the question of party and movement, were well aired in these discussions, with the SWP delegates vigorously defending their approach. There was, however, agreement to pursue the dialogue between the two tendencies, for example at the forthcoming FI Congress, to which the SWP has been invited, and to work together at the World Social Forum at Porto Alegre in January 2003.

Neither current is confining its exploration of the possibilities of regroupment to its relations with the other. The IST's supporters in Scotland form the Socialist Worker Platform inside the Scottish Socialist Party, with which the LCR also

enjoys friendly relations. Both the LCR and the SWP sent speakers to the Asia-Pacific International Solidarity Conference organised by the Democratic Socialist Party (Australia) in Sydney in Easter 2002. The SWP also participated in two meetings of the European left convened by the PRC, in Rome in September 2002 and in Florence just before the ESF in November 2002 (see the text produced by the PRC for the second meeting earlier in this bulletin). Representatives of the LCR and of the FI attended the meeting in Florence as well.

REPORTS

ZIMBABWE

**International Socialist Organisation
(Zimbabwe)**

**Expulsion of Munyaradzi
Gwisai from MDC
Struggle continues! Stand
up for democracy! Stand up
for UNITY!
Don't allow capitalists and
middle classes to derail the
struggle!
Divided we fall—united we
conquer!**

At this critical stage in the struggle, after Insiza and as we face Kuwadzana—when all progressive forces must unite on Saturday 23 November the Movement for Democratic Change National Executive and Disciplinary Committee dropped a bombshell—they announced the expulsion from the MDC of the working class activist and leader, Highfield MP Munyaradzi Gwisai, who is also a leading member of the International Socialist Organisation (ISO).

Gwisai was found 'guilty' of six charges, namely that he: (1) threatened the neighbouring farms of Suncrest and Irvine to give some of their land to lodgers in Highfield rather than turn them into stands for the rich or for Zanu PF members alone or face mass action; (2) that workers use jambanja to force bosses and government to give them better wages and a harmonised Labour Act; (3) denounced the IMF, World Bank, George Bush, Tony Blair and Tony Leon as enemies of working people the world over; (4) opposed the MDC-Zanu PF talks and going to court; (5) said MDC leaders were now too comfortable, forgetting the masses who elected them, and now too cowardly to lead mass action as they had promised; and (6) is a member of ISO.

None of these are new or against party principles. They were in fact contained in the National Working People's Convention Declaration of 1999 which founded the party, and has now been abandoned under pressure from the rich, who have imposed their capitalistic

Bridge programme. Indeed Gwisai included all these things in his election manifesto in June 2000.

The leadership is trying to hide behind a finger saying Gwisai walked out of a Disciplinary Hearing. But what they are not telling the masses is that the decision to fire Gwisai had already been made by the National Executive, and the hearing was just a kangaroo court to rubber stamp that decision—Gwisai rejected this and said let the people of Highfield be the ones to decide. Now the leadership has decided without even consulting the people of Highfield.

These charges, and the expulsion in fact show how authoritarian, undemocratic and neo-liberal the MDC leadership has become. Over the last three years, the ISO (of whom Gwisai is a member) has championed the cause of workers fearlessly and tirelessly—even in the face of hostile threats, in particular the fight for a new Labour Act, together with trade unions, workers committees and other working class activists. In the last six months Gwisai has spearheaded the successful adoption of most of the workers' demands by the Parliament Portfolio Committee on Labour, in which he sits, as proposed amendments to the Labour Bill. These include clauses such as, making workers permanent after three months on contract; contract workers to be paid on a rate of three times the normal rate; 180 days of sick leave for workers; minimum wages linked to the cost of living; the guaranteeing of maternity leave on full pay for pregnant women workers; and decent retrenchment packages in the event of company closure, failing which workers can take over the company and for full rights to strike and go on stayaways.

The Labour Bill is now set to come to parliament within the next two weeks. But the bosses are massively angry. Led by EMCOZ, Ernst & Young and Eric Bloch, they have launched a huge campaign against the bill, including demonising radical MPs like Gwisai through the media. But as this has failed to work, these unelected bosses, directors and investors (bloodsucking capitalists) have now demanded that Gwisai be expelled from the MDC. The bosses' puppets that call themselves the MDC leadership have obediently carried out the command of their unelected masters, even if this might divide the party, ahead of the crucial Kuwadzana byelection, grant Zanu PF a two thirds majority in parliament and expose the people of Highfield to an unnecessary bloody byelection. This is especially so because ISO and Gwisai are part of the Anti-Privatisation Forum, which seeks to lead community resistance to the murderous IMF programmes like Zanu PF's ESAP and the Bridge Economic Policy, which the MDC leaders

have imposed on the party, and are now implementing in councils like Harare, Bulawayo, Masvingo, which have seen price hikes in council charges of up to 200 percent.

The expulsion of Gwisai signals the climaxing of the war that the rich, the middle classes, the farmers, the industrialists backed by their western/northern imperialist masters like Tony Leon, Blair and Bush have been waging against the ordinary people, seeking to marginalise them and turn the party into the opposite of what it originally stood for. Activists have been purged from wards, districts, and provinces, ISO and other institutional members like ZINASU and ZCTU have been kicked out, activists removed as party employees, as degreed people are now required—as if degrees were asked when the party started in 1999—while party policies that support the rich like privatisation and Bridge are imposed. While they grab all these leadership positions, such middle class elites are cowards who refuse to lead the masses in mass action against the illegitimate Mugabe government, fearing that this might spark social riots and revolution which will affect their and their masters' property and profits—for after all, like Mugabe, they too are exploiting workers and consumers in this period of massive shortages. So instead of fighting the real enemy they concentrate on petty internal squabbles, go to courts, beg Mugabe for talks or whine to their international friends doing anything possible to postpone the mass action and if pushed by the povo, at best say, well mass action is alright, but it is not for us to lead, the people will rise up on their own. If so why then are you leaders—those who can't stand the heat should get out of the kitchen! Because of their cowardice they are now victimising and purging party activists, especially the youth, who are mobilising for mass action—and stifling internal party democracy with everything called 'top secret issues of strategy and tactics', on which only 6 males make all decisions for millions of members, male and female, youths and elderly.

But the rank and file membership of the MDC are not taking this lying down. The MDC Highfield district and wards have overwhelmingly rejected the expulsion and petitioned the president to reverse it and are being backed by many militants in Harare province. Students from universities and colleges are threatening demonstrations opposing it. We salute all these activists and many others, especially workers who are phoning in giving solidarity, contrary to Prof Ncube who thinks Gwisai should be 'happy and relieved'. No Prof Ncube, sir, we are not relieved. We are angry at people who want to divide us at such a critical time in the struggle, whose

irresponsible action might even give Zanu PF the two thirds majority it's craving for in parliament—and so are the masses! Your desperate act shall not intimidate the workers from mobilising for the new Labour Act, students fighting privatisation, nor from reversing the impending mass action, like the 500-plus demonstrations in Highfield on Friday 22 November against supermarkets that distribute food through Zanu PF cards and the NCA demonstrations. No!...the masses want unity and internal democracy in the fight against the Mugabe dictatorship and the capitalist bosses.

And they are right to believe so and we in ISO shall be with them right to the end! This is the time for hard-suffering working people to stick together in unity in the common fight against oppression and starvation, and not petty internal factional fighting.

We call on all workers, students, youths, and activists to join the campaign to say no to the victimisation of Gwisai and other militants. Mobilise your district, province and MPs to support the Highfield district. Oppose these unprincipled expulsions to the National Council, just as you should accelerate the demonstrations, strikes, riots against the regime, including the forthcoming NCA demos. Now it's the time to take head on the rich and their paymasters who have hijacked the party, divided the movement and derailed the struggle against the Zanu PF dictatorship and greedy capitalists. Why should Gwisai be expelled merely for calling for farm seizures—what about those party leaders like the secretary general who have actually been given farms by the corrupt Zanu PF government? For solidarity messages or donations to assist us produce leaflets and posters and hold meetings please phone, fax or e-mail us below—but bosses and capitalists don't bother with your dirty silver!

We shall not wait for another six years. Smash the Zanu PF dictatorship and capitalism! Forward to socialism!

Issued by the International Socialist Organisation, Box 6758; Phone or fax (04) 704209; e-mail isozim@hotmail.com

This leaflet was issued on 25 November 2002

URUGUAY

Javier Carles, Izquierda Revolucionaria

Uruguay is a small country of three million people; it sits on the Atlantic coast between Argentina and Brazil. According to the UN Development Agency, in 2001 22.4 percent of its population and 44.2 percent of its children lived below the poverty line; in fact, the reality is even worse. Absolute unemployment rose from 8.9 percent of the economically active population in 1993 to 20 percent in 2002; and 40 percent of the labour force is in casual or temporary employment. Wages have fallen by 30 percent in the last six months alone.

For three decades the economy has declined in relative terms; according to the World Bank, Uruguay averaged 1.7 percent annual growth between 1965 and 1997, while the other moderately productive economies in the world grew at an average rate of 3.6 percent annually. In industry, the picture was even more negative, with growth averaging 1.2 percent as against 3.2 percent for the rest of the world. In the last four years, this decline has become absolute; in the last four years GDP fell by 2.8 percent in 1999, -1.3 percent in 2000, and -3.1 percent in 2001. In 2002, the GDP has virtually collapsed, and estimates are of a negative growth in excess of 10 percent.

The liberal political system, on the other hand, has been resilient, and the military dictatorships that have ruled so many other Latin American countries have been the exception rather than the rule in Uruguay. Today, it is the traditional left that is upholding that system. The right wing parties are completely discredited, and the Frente Amplio (the Broad Front that includes socialists, communists, the Tupamaros, left liberals and some Trotskyists) is gaining support. In the elections of 1999, the Front won 40 percent of the vote; if there were elections tomorrow it would rise to 55 percent, according to the opinion polls. Many workers believe that once it is in power, the Front will solve all their problems, and the trade union leaders share this perspective and encourage their members to remain passive. According to them, 'a conflict situation would only help the right'. And yet the struggles involving workers and students are increasing both in number and intensity.

The group

Eighteen months ago it was difficult to know where to begin. The traditional left occupied all the space, making any independent activity very difficult. Our International Socialist tradition was unknown—and we had only two members. On 15 March 2001 we held the first formal meeting of our group, by which time we had four members; later we grew to eight and then to 12-14. In May we began publication of our journal *El mundo al revés*, of which we distributed 90 copies monthly. In June we began to publish a Bulletin for distribution in universities and colleges. In 2002, the original group divided into three working groups and one central group; the effect was to make our activity more effective and more regular. A number of comrades participated in the World Social Forum at Porto Alegre, about 15 pamphlets were produced containing our basic ideas, theories and political analyses, and these began to sell at the same time as we began to hold public meetings.

The lesson from all this is that today it is possible to launch a group in locally adverse material and ideological conditions. The scale of the capitalist crisis, the limited response of the traditional left and above all the all the advance of the global protest movement make this possible. But it is not easy to go beyond the initial circle of people, or contact others outside that group, or grow and intervene politically in a successful way. The group was fundamental in the formation of Indymedia Uruguay, but the group very quickly fell under the domination of the autonomists and became closed, sectarian and elitist; effectively it involved no more than four or five activists. On the other hand, the Uruguayan Social Forum held in November 2002 brought together hundreds of activists and revealed an incipient and open anti-capitalist mood. The growth of the group, and of the socialist influence within the protest movement will depend on our ability to move outwards and connect with them, proposing actions with a clear anti-capitalist perspective.

The current situation

In June, the government decreed a floating exchange rate for the national currency, which lost half its value in a matter of days. The price of petrol and food rocketed by 30-40 percent. In July, the financial system collapsed and there was some looting of shops. The government's response was to freeze bank accounts and inundate the poor districts of the capital with police. The IMF and the World Bank intervened to stop the collapse with loans of \$3 billion. Yet the economy remains paralysed, there is no

credit available and no one is investing. The foreign debt has reached \$12 billion, a figure which is more or less equivalent to GNP after devaluation. There have been a succession of bankruptcies and company collapses which could intensify through January and February. There could easily be a further economic collapse at that time and a corresponding catastrophic decline of working class living standards. Perhaps then, people will finally lose their patience.

The number of struggles grew between October and December 2001; there were several workers demonstrations several thousands strong. In mid-January 2002, 15,000 workers took part in a demonstration for jobs and a living wage. By July these demonstrations were pulling in 50,000 workers, and a series of strikes began in the public services. University students occupied a number of faculties and secondary students occupied their schools. There were two successful one-day general strikes, but the trade union and left leaders backtracked. A call for people to take to the street would have brought half a million out and might have brought down the government or provoked early general elections—but it didn't happen. Instead the struggle began to decline and there was growing demoralisation. These left and trade union leaders were certainly influential in holding back the struggle—but it is by no means certain that they will be able to hold people back again if the crisis deepens further.

The future

The great problem we face is our small size, which limits our intervention and our political influence. An intensification of the crisis could deal us a serious blow; many comrades could lose their jobs and the group's future would be more fragile. On the other hand, very few workers or students can see us as a credible alternative. It is therefore a matter of life and death for the group that we extend our network of contacts and grow.

Should we join in campaigns that are gathering signatures for petitions with no perspective for mass protest action? There are very few of us; should we try to give these movements a different direction or try to organise separate activities in support of protests? Should we set up an organisation like Globalise Resistance together with other groups and activists, and would that open new possibilities for contacting new people and drawing them into anti-capitalist struggles? These are the questions we need to address now.

THAILAND

Ji Giles Ungpakorn

This is the first contribution to the *IST Bulletin* by us. First, we would like to say how useful it has been to read the reports from other countries, especially where organisations are small and where there were some successes and some failures. Reports of activity from outside the main English-speaking countries helped us get a bigger picture of what is going on in the world. These reports are very important for the Thai comrades because the dominant Maoist tradition of the old left (from the defunct Communist Party) is very insular and nationalistic. Traditionally, activists are very ignorant about international affairs. Sending our delegation to Indonesia last year was very useful in terms of educating our members. Hopefully it also helped to further raise the issue of Permanent Revolution with the PRD (People's Democratic Party).

Our organisation, Workers Democracy, is five years old. We started off with a mixed bunch of left wing members with a wide variety of views. After about one and a half years we sharpened up the politics when the reformist and nationalist members left. We now have about 35 members, of whom about half are university students. We have some factory workers and white collar workers too. To begin with we concentrated on re-establishing Marxism on the Thai political map. We are the only organisation that is openly socialist in Thailand. We have achieved a degree of success on this point, because now we are known among all progressive and intellectual circles as 'the Marxists'. For this reason, the debate about socialism has been shifted from 'Marxism is dead' to the pros and cons of Marxism. However, we are very small and continue to recruit at a slow pace.

Following the events in Seattle and the debate between the IST and the ISO in the US, we pushed outwards to engage with other people, rather than staying inward looking and pure. Our first ever 'Marxism 2002' was a success (for us) because we attracted 80 people to one of the main meetings. After an embarrassing 'anti-war demo' where only six of us turned up, we have attempted to build joint anti-war demonstrations outside the US embassy with religious groups and NGOs. The first one attracted 60 people, half of whom we brought along. The most recent one attracted 120 people—still a small acorn,

but big trees grow from small acorns!

On 6 October this year, an important left wing anniversary, we shall be holding a debate on the best form of organising struggle with leading activists from social movements, such as the Assembly of the Poor and from the labour movement. This is basically an attempt to bring the 'party vs loose networks' debate of the international anti-capitalist movement into Thailand. A few weeks after that we shall be part of a coalition of anti neo-liberal groups organising a teach-in on the effects of neo-liberalism. Included among the speakers will be Walden Bello. The aim here is to try to create a class and anti-market based opposition to neo-liberalism, instead of the dominant Thai nationalist opposition to globalisation.

The level of struggle in Thailand, both among the labour movement and the social movements, is still at a low level, although there are signs of stirrings among young people. The social movements are fragmented and dominated by 'civil-society', single issue and NGO ideology from the post Cold War period. The leaders of these movements know about and attend the World Social Forums, but feel that nothing of substance has changed in the last ten years. We see our immediate tasks as trying to form joint activities with these social movements and NGO activists, while engaging in sharp debates in an attempt to shift the general political mood of young activists away from the pessimism of the late 1980s. In doing this we have to work against a degree of sectarianism among established social movements and NGO leaders.

DENMARK

Jakob Nerup

Introduction

This note was written for a national seminar of the International Socialist Youth (ISU). The most important point is that the possibilities of creating a powerful movement in Denmark are there, but that the Danish left works against this. As we get closer to the EU summit in Copenhagen this December, it has become embarrassingly clear that the left will persevere in its sectarian, nationalist focus on opposition to the EU, instead of mobilising against the war. And furthermore, that this focus is a hindrance to making a connection between the social struggle and the anti-capitalist mood and thereby creating a single movement. For the ISU in Denmark it thus becomes vitally important to concentrate on building the anti-war movement and rooting it in the universities and schools, because here we can create the beginnings of a new movement to seriously break from the backwardness of the Danish left.

Anti-capitalism has come to Denmark

The world isn't just George W Bush going to war, our prime minister Fogh making cutbacks and the untamed greed of the multinationals. It is also a growing opposition in the form of the global anti-capitalist movement and an ever more militant working class. Not since 1968-74 have we had a mood saturated with politics and generalisations of the immediate social struggles and the global battles against war and capitalism.

All over the world the opposition is growing, not just in words but also in deeds. Every day the global movement against the war of the US grows stronger, the anti-capitalist movement grows in number and more and more people ask the fundamental question: why not abolish capitalism, war and the multinationals and replace them with a society in which our needs can be satisfied and where there is true democracy?

The global anti-capitalist movement is diverse and broad. It is at the same time reformist and revolutionary. It is simultaneously pro-capitalist and anti-capitalist in its ideologies. It is rebellious as well as wanting a dialogue in its tactics. This diversity is both a strength and a weakness, if we are to ultimately win the fight. This became very clear at the World Social

Forum where 60,000 met for discussions on whether another world was possible. The common denominator of the WSF is not the way to a different society in the future, but instead a common ground for a critique of global capitalism and militarisation as it was strongly stated in the statement of Porto Alegre. The European Social Forum in Florence showed that the movement has taken an important step forwards. Today the critique is turned much more strongly against the capitalist system itself, and the movement has become conscious of being a common challenge to the European ruling class. It is decisive that we managed to find common directions and decide on simultaneous actions against the US war on Iraq.

We have an anti-capitalist movement in Denmark too. It appears as a strongly politicised mood in which, for instance, the issue of 1,000 multinationals avoiding taxes in Denmark gives rise to a popular demand that the richest should contribute to the community. It appears when more than half the population considers Danish managers to be greedy and fraudulent:

'The Berlingske Tidendes News Agency—together with the Institute for Opinion Polls Analysis (IFO)—has just completed a survey of the Danes'—and the Danish executives'—attitude to the scandals of the US businesses. The survey shows one general feature—less confidence. In the population at large more than one quarter have become more negative in their view of US business executives—and even though the events have taken place far away from home, 20 percent have become more critical of Danish business executives. Furthermore, more than every second Dane thinks that Danish executives put their own profit above the good of the company they are leading. Similarly, a majority believes that Danish directors—to a greater or lesser extent—manipulate results to make them look better than they are in reality.' (*Berlingske Tidendes Nyhedsmagasin*, 19 August 2002).

It is there as an undercurrent becoming visible every time a survey is done about welfare, when a clear majority in favour of solidarity can be seen. Not just as regards basic welfare issues such as a free and well-functioning public health system, but also in support of the rich contributing more taxes. According to the weekly newspaper *A4* (14 October 2002) up to 70 percent of the population opposes the tax cut proposed by the government and want 'taxation to follow the general increase of wealth in society, so that every year there will be more money for public welfare'. Taking a look at all these figures in their totality, they radiate support for the defence of welfare and solidarity in practice.

The mood gets expressed when arguments against the cutbacks and neo-liberal 'reforms' of the government are politicised, when the student union DGS gathers 40,000 high school students to a joint day of strikes on a platform of solidarity with the economically weakest and across the entire educational system; when academics, in their opposition to the university reform that entails an increased influence of businesses on the board of directors and on the election of headmasters, express themselves in this manner.

The change of mood becomes noticeable when the leading daily newspaper, *Politiken*, becomes more and more critical of the single-minded neo-liberal agenda on a national as well as a global plane. This is not to say that *Politiken* all of a sudden has become anti-capitalist—it is rather an indication of how the political critique is sharpened, and how they try to breathe life into the social profile of the social democratic Third Way. It is expressed by an editorial like this:

'In Denmark, the richest 10 percent have a combined income 20 times bigger than the poorest 10 percent. People in social group 1 [the richest 10 percent] are healthier and live longer, while those in social group 5 die at an earlier age. Health, mortality, the feeling of wellbeing, success in the educational system etc are almost mechanical reflections of the social situation. Did you know, by the way, that among the working population of Danes in 2000, only 4.3 percent were academics while 35.6 percent were unskilled and 33.8 skilled workers?'

The change of mood can also be seen in the trade union movement. Not because the bureaucrats have left behind class collaboration and market philosophy, but because there are clear indications of a distinct change on two levels. One is on the shopfloor, where shop stewards have created networks based on geographical location as well as on type of industry, which do not consist merely of the established left but have a broad political base, realising that it is important to fight together when the government attacks the working class. The formation of the nationwide network Fagligt Ansvar and their collaboration with the sections of the TUC dominated by the Social Democrats shows a shift on behalf on the trade union bureaucracy in the direction of struggle.

The second level is the election of new people to central positions within the trade union movement, new people with clear opposition to the so called 'new wages' model and privatisations. The newly elected chairman of the trade union of the public sector white collar workers (FOA), Dennis Kristensen, has clearly drawn a line on these two vital questions,

as has Alan Bondo, the newly elected chairman of the teachers' union. This isn't a revolution from below, but it shows that people, by proxy, want a new line on welfare and are against neo-liberalism, even though the working class does not collectively have the confidence to challenge the government.

The anti-capitalist mood is definitely present when thousands of kindergarten workers all over the country strike against cutbacks and in favour of welfare. It is present when nurses and whole town communities fight against the closure of local hospitals. It is present when high school students and pupils from the adult educational system are on strike against fees and for equal opportunities for everyone. It is present in front of parliament when trade unions, student organisations, representatives from the world of culture and NGOs protest against the anti-social government. It is present in organisational form in ATTAC, the Social Forums, the Initiative for Welfare, Global Roots, etc.

The fragments of a new picture, where the neo-liberal ideology no longer rules, and where an ever growing minority wants an active defence of welfare and global justice, is emerging. This new picture cannot be seen, of course, by those blinded by the neo-liberal offensive of the 1990s for whom Denmark still shows the right on the offensive. Their defensive and pessimistic, outdated point of view does not see the anti-capitalist mood and with it the polarisation characteristic of the present situation. Only by combining the many fragments to a complete picture does it tell us about the new possibilities this new mood gives us for building an anti-capitalist movement against war and capitalism.

We want a big and politically strong movement in Denmark. If the left begins to take notice of the mood, if the left begins to look for possibilities for an anti-capitalist movement and not least takes inspiration from the movement and creates a new left, then we would really be a challenge to the Fogh government and become a clear alternative to neo-liberalism.

No parliamentary alternative either

At the last election, not only the Social Democrats but also the left wing parties—the Socialist People's Party (SF) and Enhedslisten (the Unity List, or Red-Green Alliance)—lost votes. And this hasn't changed significantly in recent opinion polls. The parliamentary left has in general taken part in too many deals and compromises, and is included in the same loathing of politicians the other parties are

hit by. This is because they do not distinguish themselves from the rhetoric of the ordinary politicians and their talk about working on committees. Even the 'Robin Hood campaign' of the Enhedslisten is based on parliamentary answers and not the activity of people themselves or on the present struggles. Instead, they ought to use parliament as a platform to make sharp attacks on the greedy capitalist system and on the attacks on welfare, and not least be a megaphone with media access for the anti-capitalist struggle and the concrete fights for welfare.

On the plane of local government it is even worse. The Social Democrats here appear like the guarantor of the Fogh government's cutbacks and attacks on welfare. Often, local SF politicians appear with the same sad expressions on their faces when, as chairmen of local committees, they close hospitals and fire kindergarten nurses. And Enhedslisten has this year been part of deals in the major cities including continuing reductions of welfare. Thus, despite their rhetoric against cutbacks, they stick to their responsibility as administrators of them. This doesn't make them a credible alternative.

A true parliamentary alternative has to be based on the anti-capitalist mood and stand on the right side of the line drawn in the sand.

Why there is no big movement: the left caught in the quagmire of defensiveness

But this mood hasn't materialised either as a big common anti-capitalist protest movement or in organisational form, such as a big ATTAC. Many people on the left in Denmark do not perceive any anti-capitalist mood but rather a turn to the right, and they have kept the opposition to the EU as their cornerstone.

The anti-capitalist mood is not a narrow left wing phenomenon growing stronger the farther to the left one moves. The movement and its agenda is to be seen elsewhere, wherever one resists and fights against the neo-liberal agenda—albeit on a reformist platform.

There is a much bigger perspective and actual criticism of the system in a Social Democrat active in ATTAC than in a local politician from Enhedslisten doing deals on the budget in the town hall. And there is a bigger future in the reformist shop stewards from the union of the kindergarten employees (BUPL) who want to fight for welfare than old left wing trade union bureaucrats who just want statements for the press. And there is far more internationalism in the

sculptures by Jens Galschiøt (an artist from Fune with an international status) of starving boys from the Third World wearing Nike shoes than in the EU opposition of the Danish left.

The examples above, which have been taken from the real world, illustrate the core of the argument. It isn't the political membership card that makes a difference. Inside the Social Democrats there are grassroots activists who work as trade union militants fighting against privatisation and for welfare, or take active part in the movement. But at the same time, it is the liberals around the former leader of the party, Nyrup, following the Third Way deconstruction of welfare, which are the strongest faction inside social democracy. We can see Social Democrat mayors making cutbacks and trying to break strikes among public sector workers, who often have Social Democrats as their spokespersons. Inside the Social Democrats there are internationalists who see themselves as part of the global movement, for instance in ATTAC and in the anti-war work, and at the same time there are ministers and mayors shouting for war, nationalism and racism. We can see the leadership of the Social Democrats making deals with the government about the universities, at the same time as their youth organisation (DSU) hand out leaflets against the government at a student demonstration on 3 October.

The SF is in many respects the little brother of social democracy. The reply of the party's leader, Holger K, when they failed to attract more voters, was to draw the party even closer towards the neo-liberal policies of the Social Democrats opening up for a racist and anti-Muslim agenda. Politicians from the SF as a whole participate in deals implying layoffs and cutbacks, and just as often, it is members of the SF who are the leaders of protests. Formally, SF takes part in the anti-capitalist movement through representatives, while their youth organisation (SFU) are deeply involved in the movement and its international activities.

Enhedslisten can be seen as the naughty cousin of social democracy. Enhedslisten speaks out clearly against neo-liberal politics in parliament and takes part in mass movements. But the relationship to the reformist parties still shows. Enhedslisten too makes deals and has trade union bureaucrats stopping strikes and days of action, at the same time as many of the most outspoken shop stewards consider themselves sympathisers of the party. Enhedslisten plays a leading role in many NGOs, student organisations and in all the initiatives surrounding the summit protests. They therefore play a key role. Although Enhedslisten is not strong enough, as an

organisation, to lead the movement by itself it is first and foremost the political weaknesses of Enhedslisten which prevents them from becoming the luminous opportunity for a new left.

The situation is the same when we turn to the trade union movement or the student organisations. Inside the trade unions there is a lot of anger about the continuing flow of cutbacks, 'new wages' and the attacks on the rights to collective agreements and on the unemployed. This anger has pushed the bureaucrats to a more critical rhetoric, which has also manifested itself in demonstrations on 20 March and 5 October. Similarly, the possibility for forming a network of activists irrespective of workplace or party membership, and which can form the backbone of future fights, has been opened up. But on the decisive questions, the trade union bureaucracy is still tied up by its deals and negotiations, its fear of strikes and its subservience to parliamentarism. This also holds for the left wing bureaucrats in Fagligt Ansvar, who single-mindedly seek a marriage with the leadership of the TUC instead of actively supporting strikes among the kindergartens and challenge the government by calling for nationwide days of action.

Inside the student organisations, the picture is slightly different because the movement is much clearer. Under pressure from cutbacks and from activity in the educational institutions, the student organisations have called nationwide one-day strikes and have begun to take up more general political issues. And yet, the leadership dominated by the left (SUF and SFU) hesitates. They do not dare and do not want to lead a massive fight against the government. They do not engage in a general ideological criticism of the government, and they don't commit wholeheartedly to the agenda of the anti-capitalist movement, eg against war or in mobilising for the summit. They have completely forgotten the lessons from the 1960s and 1970s where the students were radicalised and their fights politicised very quickly. From this, a completely new generation of young socialists grew out, which through the 1970s set a decisive political agenda in which economical and political struggles weren't separated but combined.

A line drawn in the sand

The above characterisation can be more precisely stated as the classical ambiguity between protest and acceptance of the capitalist system and parliamentarism, which is part of any reformist party's nature. Economic and political struggles are separated and the contrast between the willingness of the top to enter into

negotiations on the one hand and the will to fight of the members of the other, is as old as the working class movement itself.

How does this line drawn in the sand then act in practice, when the mood is for far more activity than before? First and foremost it is vital to understand the present state of the class struggle as polarised and hence possibilities exist for both the working and the ruling class. If you, like SF and Enhedslisten, perceive the situation as dominated by a neo-liberal offensive and a left on the defensive, you won't be looking for possibilities to create a movement, instead you will be looking for holes to hide in. This means that you will be looking back and not to the future, and this is part of the explanation of why the Danish left consider opposition to the EU as the most important struggle, despite the lack of support for demonstrations called on this basis. This means that the left rarely sets a political agenda, as for instance during the meeting of foreign ministers in Elsinore (31 August), where the left talked EU while the foreign ministers discussed Palestine and the war on Iraq.

The other important explanation to this line in the sand is the crisis of the movement itself. The Danish left has tried very hard to keep different movements separate. ATTAC is not allowed to have an opinion on war or the environment, while the Palestine protests must have nothing to do with the student organisations. Politically, this is explained as due to the wish to preserve the different movements and not allow them to suffer any political harm. In the words of Enhedslisten in their summary of the conference of the European Anti-Capitalist Left held in Brussels in December 2001:

'A part of the debate was on whether we should and could try to get movements like ATTAC to relate to, for example, the war in Afghanistan, or whether that would be to enforce a political process and undermine the broad collaboration. While it may of course look different in different countries, the dominating view was that we must be careful not to take the broad movements and their members as hostages to our political views on other issues. The connection between neo-liberal globalisation and the imperialist war the US is fighting in Afghanistan may be obvious to us, but isn't necessarily so to others' (Enhedslisten internal membership paper, January 2002).

But this argument comes from a time when the class struggle was in decline. Today, the activists themselves quite naturally make these connections, and fortunately initiatives do spring forward

despite the hostility of especially Enhedslisten against such broad social forums. The big arrangement against the Fogh government on 5 October expressed this wish from below for greater unity, just like different social forums or networks spring into existence locally. One could call this the united front tactic in a new way, where it is not just the united action about a common, specific fight, but rather a common movement on the basis of a common political criticism of the ruling class as well as common support for each other's struggles.

In many ways, the Danish left has been a hindrance to the building of a strong anti-capitalist movement. They have been against an ATTAC with a broader agenda for the entire anti-capitalist mood, and for a long time they insisted on maintaining the political separation between the different movements. Neither as political parties nor as an organisational force have they thrown all their energy into this process, whereby they have not given the movement the needed organisational experience, which quite naturally has set the movement back. We can hope and actively work for the left to learn from this, letting itself be inspired by the mood and the international experiences, allowing it to contribute to the building of a strong, dynamic anti-capitalist movement.

The possibilities for a new left

The search for political ideas representing a solidaristic alternative to war and capitalism is not confined to the movement. Many activists look for a socialist party expressing their activism, their political criticism of the system and which can play a leading role in the movement without having plans to enter negotiation about welfare and which puts forward a clear socialist alternative. This is expressed inside the movement when people say that the established political parties are no alternative while working side by side with members from the same parties in common activity. It would, for instance, have been an enormous strength if an anti-capitalist party of the size of Enhedslisten had existed during the strikes in the kindergartens in September. On the one hand, such a party could have made a difference in parliament, mobilising in favour of the workers on strike and holding fast to a line of no compromise. On the other hand, such a party of activists could have coordinated and pushed for strikes in the rest of the trade union movement.

For the International Socialists and the ISU it is our goal to create the strongest possible alternative to war and capitalism. Not just as a movement and social strug-

gle, but also in a politically organised form. We are open to new developments with anybody sharing this goal, and we do not think that minor differences about Trotsky's transition programme, for example, or tactical questions concerning working class struggle, should stand in the way. We want an open discussion about a possible regroupment on the Danish left—ie, the possible formation of a common organisation.

The growing anger and willingness to fight for welfare combined with the growing political criticism of war and capitalism creates lots of new socialists. And not just socialists who accept the parliamentarism and reformism of the old left, but who actively want to build an alternative. Perhaps the left today does not have people lining up to join them, but things can pick up speed very quickly as the class struggle intensifies. In November 1967 the Left Socialists (VS) were formed as an alternative to the support SF gave to the Social Democratic government. A couple of hundred people took part in the founding meeting, but already in May 1968 the new party had grown to 3,000 members. This is how fast things can go, if we make the right approach to people. But where should people get organised if they do not have a visible alternative naturally connected to their activism and anti-capitalism?

As described above, there is no clear answer to this question. Neither the Social Democrats nor the SF will today become the cornerstone for a new left wing alternative with roots in the anti-capitalist movement and the fight for welfare—but many of their members and sympathisers will. It is an open question if Enhedslisten will. The most important obstacle for the possibilities of Enhedslisten is their political weaknesses. The agenda of the anti-capitalist movements do not take up the front page with Enhedslisten, because they do not see the world as changed since Seattle and do not recognise the existence of an anti-capitalist mood. Unfortunately, Enhedslisten lacks the ability to coordinate and organise the social struggle inside trade unions and in the educational institutions, nor do they make this a priority. If Enhedslisten take political steps to become the party of the movement and the party inside the movement, they will have the opportunity to become the dynamic focus point of a new left in the same way as VS was in 1968.

EU fixation hinders the anti-capitalist movement

But perhaps the greatest political factor is the way Enhedslisten is tied to the opposition to the EU. Even though Enhedslisten sees itself as internationalist, its

political arguments are EU fixated. For instance, the Board of Enhedslisten has come up with the following statement about the EU summit in Copenhagen in December:

'For us in Enhedslisten it is thus important that the activities in Denmark seek to combine the fight against the European Union with the daily struggles against the turn to the right, privatisations, cutbacks and reductions in welfare. Enhedslisten will work for the creation of broad, popular and peaceful mobilisations during the entire period of Denmark chairing the EU. Therefore, Enhedslisten takes active part in both the Initiative for a Different Europe and Stop the Union Copenhagen 2002, and we also make our own separate activities. Everybody must be able to take part' (Statement from the annual conference of Enhedslisten's April 2002).

There are two major problems with this EU fixation. One is that the EU is turned into the greatest obstacle to democracy and welfare. Neither US capital nor their war machine plays any significant role in this narrow world picture and it becomes a hindrance to a clear view of global capitalism. The other political problem is that the alternative to the EU put forward by Enhedslisten is Danish sovereignty and the UN on the international arena. By not making it into a class issue, they end up supporting arguments which are basically nationalist, because they support the notion that Anders Fogh [the prime minister] and A. P. Møller [the biggest Danish multinational] are better than Chirac and Phillips. And at the same time, they continue to spread illusions about a UN dominated by the US and the rich countries.

Opposition to the EU today is the last point the Stalinists and the remainders of the DKP [Danish Communist Party], who always stood for a petit-bourgeois nationalism, has to hold on to. Without a break with this kind of politics, Enhedslisten will not be able to move forward politically in relation to the new movement. And the odd thing is that the members of Enhedslisten do not share this EU fixation. A survey of the reasons why new members joined showed that the fight against Fogh (85 percent) is the most important reason, while the EU question is only considered as the most important one for one quarter of the new members.

Some people would argue that Enhedslisten is a very mixed organisation, and that there are strong forces pulling in the direction of activity, struggle and revolutionary politics. Of course, there are plenty of individuals trying to do this, but an actual organisational expression for this does not exist. Not even SAP (a Trotskyist party of the Fourth International)

forms such a tendency. They have been burdened by a lot of administrative work at Enhedslisten's main office at parliament and they share the EU fixation. In the monthly newspaper from October one can read long articles about the EU, which essentially are about the correctness of the EU fixation and they defend, albeit critically, the deals entered by Enhedslisten's local politicians and their hesitation during the kindergarten strikes. SAP hasn't been able to draw Enhedslisten in a more revolutionary direction. Instead parliamentarism and reformism have integrated SAP.

Invitation to a discussion about a new left

Of course, everything is not just about Enhedslisten when we talk about a new left. SFU, or large parts thereof, has to be included, as must SUF, Global Roots, SAP and SUN [Socialist Educational Network] must be seen as natural participants. And not the least, there are all those who today are active in the movement and who can make important contributions. The creation of a new left is not just a theoretical construction, however, but a very concrete political process. This process has already begun several other places in Europe with LCR in France, Rifondazione in Italy and SWP/Socialist Alliance in the UK being the most outspoken, and a common culture of debate is being developed between these and also in the European anti-capitalist left (including among others Enhedslisten).

IS/ISU wants an open discussion with all activists in the anti-capitalist movement, the trade union grassroots and the student activists. We believe that this discussion has to take place in the movement too, such that the political discussion can help broaden the agenda of the movement and increase the political consciousness of its activists.

The IS Tendency—a dynamic revolutionary tradition

The main point for revolutionary socialists is not to have the most theoretically 'correct' answers or the broadest possible coalition, but the building of a revolutionary alternative with a mass base inside the working class and among the students, which can act and lead the struggle. When, on the one hand, the conditions of the class struggle are sharpened by the attacks of the ruling class and, on the other, are met with struggle from below, the revolutionaries must not stand still. If you stand still when a mass demonstration

moves forward, you are either pushed to the side as a spectator or at worst trampled down. It is much better to be part of the movement and be at its head keeping its speed and direction.

For the ISU, as for the whole IS tradition, the anti-capitalist movement is a new opportunity we want to influence as much as we can. But of course it depends on our size how big an influence we can be. In Britain the Socialist Workers Party of the IS Tendency is the largest political force to the left of New Labour, and this can be seen in the central role played by the SWP in the anti-war movement and has, for example, been the decisive organisational force in mobilising 400,000 in a demonstration in London on 28 September against the war on Iraq. The SWP also takes an active part in building the Socialist Alliance, a broad electoral alternative focusing on the consequences of neo-liberalism and is an advocate for active struggle.

In Denmark, the ISU is a small organisation that cannot make a big difference on its own. Due to our active members who can put the arguments very well, we can make a difference on a particular school or in a specific trade union, but we cannot on our own build, for example, an anti-war movement or overcome the anti-EU obsession of the left at the summit. It is thus, as always, vital to organise more anti-capitalists and turn them into revolutionary socialists in the ISU. We regard it as an important contribution to the building of the anti-capitalist movement that a strong Marxist current is also formed within the movement. Without such a tendency, the movement is only influenced by shifting moods and the dominant reformist arguments.

For the ISU there is no contradiction between working for a new left and building the IS Tendency. On the contrary, we see it as a single, connected project in which a break in the outdated views of the left and a new organisational form can create much stronger socialist alternatives. We will take active part in and seek to influence other activists from our own revolutionary tradition. As the situation is today, this break cannot come by entering Enhedslisten and drying up just like has happened to everybody else. The strongest force for change must come from the thousands of anti-capitalist activists demanding a change in politics of the Danish left—and their number will grow explosively in the time to come, as will, therefore, the demand for a new left.

Wanted: a strong anti-capitalist movement and a new left.

Jakob Nerup is a leading member of the International Socialists (Denmark)

CONTROVERSY

THE UNITED FRONT, SECTARIANISM, AND LONDON SMOG

Ged Peck

I was considerably concerned in reading the contribution by Comrade Munyaradzi Gwisai of the Zimbabwean ISO in July's issue of this bulletin. Perhaps some might question the discussion raised here about localised politics in an international bulletin, but everything is determined according to the dialectical interaction of two elements: theory and practice. Political outcomes are crucial in understanding whether a theory has any validity. We in the SWP would point to our historical arguments over the class nature of Eastern Europe and its outcome, as compared with the confusion that some of our rivals found themselves in following the collapse of those regimes, as a means of theoretically justifying our long-held position on bureaucratic state capitalism. Lenin, in discussing the tenants of Marxism to young people, commented on communism thus: 'You should not merely assimilate this knowledge, but assimilate it critically'.¹ Munyaradzi would agree, of course, when he states 'the best teacher for the masses is experience, not abstract communist propaganda',² although I feel that this still downplays the relational dialectical element of theory. In that sense, when he comments approvingly of the Revolutionary Democratic Group (RDG) 'united front party' formula,³ I feel it necessary to examine this contention in the light of local experiences in a united front, for example the Socialist Alliance. I would further suggest that had Munyaradzi been 'blessed' with their presence in Zimbabwe, the ISO would never have achieved even the limited (though highly creditable) breakthrough of the Highfield election seat.

It is not my intention to do a sectarian deconstruction of RDG politics here, but

simply to remind comrades that they mustn't take what they read in the *Weekly Worker* as being in any way an accurate assessment of the situation.⁴ In line with the unsectarian precepts of the Socialist Alliance, all the SWP members in my locality purposely refrained from responding in print to the RDG calumnies that were heaped upon us, even when it was implied that myself and another member were in some way homophobic.⁵ Indeed, it is largely the matter of sectarianism that bothers me.

There was much in the bulletin, however, that demonstrated the need for groundwork to be done on a possible future regroupment of the left. The FI document pointed to some important prerequisites of future regroupment and joint work with those from differing perspectives within the Trotskyist movement:⁶ 'In general we seek to hold friendly and solidarity relations with these organisations, excluding the ultra-sectarians'.⁷ Murray Smith, in the section of his article on the political premise upon which any new workers party might be based, remarks, 'We have to conceive of the party not ideologically but politically, comprising all those who are ready to commit themselves on certain bases, people coming from different horizons'.⁸ Alex Callinicos refers to 'discussion of the political differences that exist on the far left and in the broader movement,' and the 'need(s) to be pursued in an open and comradely way,' without denying that differences exist.⁹ And finally, from our own *International Socialism* journal, Jim Wolfreys noted the 'incomparably better'¹⁰ stance of the LCR as compared with LO in terms of their proposals for a post-Chirac debate involving the wider anti-capitalist left. This is even after the LCR, wrongly in my view, backed a vote for Chirac in the second round.

The conclusion is obvious. We mustn't let tactical disagreements such as this, or historical, although important differences of analysis on as the class nature of the USSR, preclude a comradely exchange of views with a view to trying to delineate the future.

Neither is it my intention to offer a 'solution' to any future regroupment as I simply don't have one (and I suspect no one else does either at the moment). But when Munyaradzi Gwisai talks encouragingly about a group whom I have experience at first hand for more than a

decade, not to mention my experiences in our local Socialist Alliance, one simply has to respond. The RDG 'offend' all of the points raised by the comrades above. Indeed, I would go so far as to argue that any future regroupment, based on their demands on participants to follow the 'appropriate line' (irrespective of the fact that those participants may not be part of the usual democratic centralist tradition that many of us are used to), would spell disaster. Moreover, to describe one's comrades in the manner that appears to them to be acceptable, both in public and in print, hardly lends itself to fraternal work. Now it might be argued (and there is a point here) that the group is so small as not to register on any future map of the left. However, if it were just the case of an isolated Socialist Alliance having to suffer them, then it would simply be up to the Socialist Alliance, collectively, to do something about it. In the mean time, we must guard against a misreading of their politics in order that our own fraternal organisations are not misled. Munyaradzi himself admits (as I would about Zimbabwe) that his views about the Socialist Alliance might be 'impaired by being an observer from a distance'.¹¹ I'm afraid I have to agree.

I therefore intend to outline, from a localised perspective, the concrete operation of the united front in my area on the basis of the points raised by Callinicos in the bulletin.¹² Firstly, sectarianism within the united front and examples as to where this might lead; secondly, permanent factions and prototype parties; and thirdly, the united front itself in current conditions. But, as a political prelude, I wish to raise some issues to demonstrate how a perspective such as the RDG has, and the manner in which it is presented, pose serious concerns for fraternal realignment and current work.

Think as we tell you— sectarianism within the united front

Dave Craig of the RDG was mentioned in Munyaradzi Gwisai's contribution. As it in part referred to a debate I remember well, I looked it up again. My local Socialist Alliance was the point of discussion, although not without a somewhat dishonest reflection of actual events:

'On the one side Socialist Alliance comrades advocate not only a local

constitution to ensure the inclusion of all trends...on the other side the SWP comrades feel these politics are not what the Socialist Alliance should be about and see them as a challenge to their control of the alliance'.¹³

I would certainly have not raised this again had it not been raised for me. On the surface, we see a benevolent attempt to give minorities 'inclusion' rights which were being hampered by those awful SWP people who want to keep the lid on the Socialist Alliance. The reality was altogether different. Not only was the local (RDG) constitution a reflection of their own political policy—which a sizeable minority in the Socialist Alliance did not approve of—but the proposed 'local membership' requirements demanded that all Socialist Alliance members adhered to their 'programme' *prior* to membership being accepted. We can see this in an e-mail placed on an open Socialist Alliance bulletin board by a supporter of the RDG. Additionally, we can also see from this fragment that the policy they intended to follow diverged to a significant degree from that which had been agreed nationally, and not what all of the members of the local Socialist Alliance wanted:

'A programme I should remind comrades is not the national programme, there are significant differences. I should also point out that to attend the next Steering Committee as a voting member of the BSA [the local Socialist Alliance] will require comrades to have signed up and paid up, on a joining form which reprints our [the RDG's] programme as it stands—not just a scrap of paper'.¹⁴

Note the word 'require'. An astonishing demand, and hardly a glowing example of freedom of expression and an explanation of why SWP members and others present would have no part of it.

Earlier in the e-mail, he again spelt out how the local Socialist Alliance was going to go its own way irrespective of any minority views: 'The [local Socialist Alliance] can decide to do what it wants to do for itself...it is an independent Socialist Alliance, it is autonomous.'

Regarding the precise relationship it might have with the national Socialist Alliance, it was made clear that 'we are not yet affiliated to the national organisation and as such we are an independent Socialist Alliance...gone are the days of bureaucratic centralism and arbitrary expulsions as a backdrop to revolutionary politics.'

The perspective was clear from the start. Get a foothold in a weak area and don't let any issues of national democracy and the need for the united front to be applied in an unsectarian manner get in the way. It was a disgraceful and reprehensible ploy typical of the organisation

that Munyaradzi Gwisai mistakenly appears to think so highly of.

And things were no better in terms of the 2001 election address. Despite participating in the National Policy Conference where a national policy document was adopted with just one vote against, the local Socialist Alliance subsequently adopted an electoral address which specifically contained commitments overwhelmingly defeated, making the conference apparently pointless by flying in the face of democracy.

Trickery runs hand in hand with being a sectarian, and the RDG certainly have a near monopoly on it. Their key and overriding concern was to get their 'programme' accepted at a local level irrespective of its digression from national Socialist Alliance policy. At key meetings, when the right to vote on the 'programme' was being proposed, it was suddenly restricted to those who had attended two (!) previous meetings. Additional attacks also occurred, one, in particular, when the SWP was threatened with the public issuing of an official Socialist Alliance leaflet lambasting us following the big demonstrations over the Vauxhall closure and demanding that *all* local activities should be coordinated through the local Socialist Alliance. Such a public attack on a supporting organisation is unprecedented.

Finally, when their local Socialist Alliance A3 sheet appeared on peoples' doorsteps, we were assailed by demands of the left taking up 'the programme', quotes from Trotsky, the obligatory swipes at the SWP, all dressed up in old-style 'revolutionary' language. This was not, in any sense, a method for building a united front among varying political viewpoints on the left, nor a sane means of convincing others outside it that we might possibly express their aspirations. It was a total embarrassment.¹⁵

In a general sense, even though their positions on the 'programme', and Socialist Alliance newspaper, and the shifting of the national Socialist Alliance towards the example of the Scottish Socialist Party were defeated, an ordinary independent in the local Socialist Alliance would certainly have been none the wiser as these points were continued with regardless.

If anything, it has to be admitted that the local SWP were a little too acquiescent regarding the need to maintain fraternal relations with the wider Socialist Alliance membership. In other words, we bent over backwards too far. We certainly recognised that problems would arise, but felt that rational argument (and compromise where agreement could not be reached) would resolve these disagreements. It is a salutary lesson that in some circumstances this does not, and cannot, work. It is therefore important that

Munyaradzi Gwisai appreciates the real outcome of real situations before assuming all is well with a viewpoint that is well published in the *Weekly Worker*, although twisted beyond belief.

Munyaradzi comments: 'This means recognition on the part of the majority that it must not seek to bureaucratically manipulate the new party of regroupment and especially stifling the freedoms of expressions of the minority factions'.¹⁶ I couldn't agree more.

Issues from the past can haunt the present

The difficulty of any united front (but more sharply, of one which takes part in national elections), is the way in which some groups hold onto every dot and comma of their policy without reference to changing class forces, and most destructively insist that everyone else adopts their world view. I'm afraid to say that this is what the RDG have wished to do (within the SWP) since their inception. Let's trace some issues over the past decade and try to imagine what would have happened to the SWP had we allowed this to develop.

With a war against Iraq appearing to be most likely at the time of writing, it is perhaps informative to see how the SWP position on the last Gulf War was described. Once more poor old Lenin is trotted out in order to 'prove' a particular position, irrespective of the fact that although history might at times repeat itself as farce, an exact replication of past events never occurs. This is one of the reasons why Lenin used the metaphor of 'stick bending'; meaning to keep to one's point of principle and political analysis, but be prepared to address the situation in ways that fit the times. In this regard, it appears that the RDG's stick must be rather brittle.

We immediately see the dreadful state any organisation would find itself if it followed their line. Their publication at the time notes that the main enemy 'is at home' (nothing wrong with that). They then go on to muddy the waters by claiming that the SWP had not only adopted an 'ultra-left position' (again, a perfectly allowable claim if they really believe it), but that 'they [the SWP] are supporting Saddam Hussein'.¹⁷ In the next issue they then go on to compound the insult with an article supposedly outlining the SWP's view entitled 'Victory to Iraq—victory to sub-imperialism?'¹⁸ combined with a few misunderstood quotes by John Molyneux. And as they warm to their own invective, 'the SWP [also] supports the annexation of Kuwait [with] the denial of self-determination' of which we gave Saddam Hussein 'military' and 'political' support. Our members might have been

surprised by this, although I'm sure that Saddam appreciated it. They then 'expose' (lovely word, full of clandestine nuances) the SWP by arguing that in our pamphlet on the Gulf War, 'nowhere does the slogan "Victory to Iraq" appear.' What devilish deviousness! Moreover 'nowhere is the formula of military support for Iraq explained.' Well of course not. It might give the game away. And just in case the reader doesn't wish to plough through their incessant quotation and mis-quotation-mongering, we are presented with a cartoon of our secret friend, Saddam himself, selling *Socialist Worker* with the secret slogan 'Victory to Iraq' while wearing a badge stating 'nerve gas' and 'hostages'.

Quite absurdly, this led to the claim that our so called 'line' on Iraq left the Iraqi working class high and dry, even though anyone with a memory would know that IS/SWP has consistently opposed Saddam and pointed to the massacres of the left which heralded his arrival while consecutive British and US governments sold him weapons. What the RDG failed to understand in the Gulf War was that although we would have liked both working classes to have overthrown their regimes, the imminent agenda item was the devastating effect that US success could lead to in the Middle East. Therefore, without in anyway positing a simplistic 'victory to Iraq' slogan, we nonetheless wanted, as the bottom line, US imperialism to be defeated as it was the major imperialism in the region. As Marx argued, sometimes history does not come of our own choosing, but to take an abstract position on an issue which has indeed decisively affected the Middle East and the dominance of Israel over the past decade, is rather silly.

The debate they engaged in over South Africa was little better, only this time refraining from the insults to present a political argument. As the first multi-racial elections approached in 1994, based on one person one vote, we were criticised for arguing that workers should go on strike for higher wages beforehand. This was, accordingly, 'syndicalist politics'. After the elections we were also criticised by arguing for the same thing. For an organisation that prides itself on being the true representative of Trotskyism, such an astonishing misunderstanding of the theory of permanent revolution takes some doing. With the backing of the international monetary system, and the overtures that the ANC were making towards international capitalism, it was inevitable that although the elections were a huge step forward and to be welcomed, the outcome in terms of working class economic

advancement would be limited to say the least. Therefore, striking keeps the demands of the working class to the front of the agenda and could only force some ANC politicians to offer a more radical programme in order to maintain an audience. At the same time it gives our side more confidence to go forwards. It was, as I have said, a classic application of the theory of permanent revolution and ABC to most Marxists.

Having dealt with this (and ignored many other examples), perhaps one from a local perspective may give Munyaradzi Gwisai some idea of the self limiting nature of any future SWP (or whatever) if these perspectives were adopted.

At the most recent meeting of my local Socialist Alliance, there was a debate on the position the national Socialist Alliance should adopt when it comes to the euro debate. This is a summary:

'In a motion proposed by Alan Thornett and seconded by Ged Peck it was pointed out that the Euro project was an attempt to advance deregulation and privatisation across Europe. It also involved the construction of a 'Fortress Europe' through the imposition of draconian immigration controls. Additionally, there were ongoing attempts to coordinate the military apparatus of the EU in order to bolster military interventions on a global scale. This necessitated a campaign in any referendum on the demands "For a workers' Europe not a bosses' Europe", "No to the euro" and "No to Fortress Europe".

'Indeed, in order not to be seen on the same side as the 'Little Englanders', the campaign must oppose anti-European arguments based on nationalism, xenophobia or sovereignty. An internationalist and socialist policy on Europe requires open borders, an end to NATO, and solidarity with all anti-capitalist forces on whatever continent they arise'.¹⁹

Clearly delineating us from the right, we might wonder what alternative there might be when the referendum comes up. The outcome was a counter-motion proposed by Steve Freeman of the RDG that voters should boycott the elections, or write a slogan across the ballot paper! No wonder it lost.

But it is the example of South Africa that Munyaradzi Gwisai needs to take account of before rushing to commend the RDG. If we take our eye off the ball in terms of what would develop the overall interests of the working class, then any future revolution is pushed to the back burner.

The problem is largely a matter for ourselves, although perhaps not entirely. Might it not impinge upon the Socialist Alliance, and particularly those independent Socialist Alliance members who are prepared to work fraternally with those

they currently disagree with on some issues? Whereas our 'upbringing' tends to harden us against such slurs, they will not likely take to being called a monarchist fellow traveller. (Another popular complaint about the SWP.)

Once more, I emphasise that my point is not to take sectarian liberties in this bulletin, but to point out that there are some currents which could prove thoroughly destructive of the entire united front project, particularly if they are believed, if only in part, from afar.

Factions, permanent factions, and a prototype party?

Munyaradzi sees the Socialist Alliance as 'already [a] prototype of a revolutionary party'.²⁰ OK, we can fraternally disagree on this one, but if this were so, it throws open the question of factionalism and how it might affect the future growth (or even the continuance) of such a prototype.

The question of factional activity is a matter to be determined by actual events rather than any overriding policy. In the early days of the Russian Social Democratic and Labour Party the Bolsheviks themselves were a faction alongside others. Indeed, in today's Socialist Alliance, the national constitution recognises 'the right of minorities publicly to promote their views'.²¹ But with the formation of new political parties ('prototype' or otherwise) which intend to be fighting national elections and carrying out activities under a united platform, the matter needs to be more carefully addressed. There is no problem with a platform presenting its views for an agreed period with circulation rights in order for them to win their position. But at some stage the party has to take a conference decision in order to maintain the widest possible agreement of action. Should that faction win, then their perspective has been clearly accepted by party members. Should they lose, there can be no question of continuing with a defeated perspective as if nothing had happened. To do so is an abuse of conference and the rights of the majority.

Therefore, the key word is 'permanent', whereby any party would suffer continual infighting if it were allowed to continue. I hardly have to refer to the revolutionary left here—just look at the current position in the Tory Party.

Because the Socialist Alliance is not a 'prototype party', the adoption of this policy is obviously inappropriate. You cannot insist that a united front organisation agree to every dot and comma that the majority group manages to force through. Yet this is precisely what has

happened locally as I have demonstrated above. The outcome has been some members feeling like a visit to the Socialist Alliance is like a visit to the dentist, and in other cases, to put off the experience altogether. The confusion of the Socialist Alliance with a 'prototype party' will merely lead, under current conditions (which are always the determining factor) to splits and disintegration. It is a confusion of form and reality. Context is all.

Reference to, and the quotation of Lenin in trying to find theoretical backing for one's view, can be very dangerous (and I've already offended against it once). One only has to look at Lenin's different attitudes towards the peasants, and many other matters, based on the changing realities of the time, to realise the pitfalls of taking things out of context. Therefore, from a historical perspective, the relative openness of the RSDLP was later reversed to the total banning of factions (forget the 'permanent' bit!) in 1921 due to peasant dissatisfaction, social dislocation, and the dangers of Kronstadt. This was to apply to CC members as well.²² Any attempt to confuse the Socialist Alliance with such a party—either in a period of relative stability or a period of crisis—would be catastrophic. It would mean disputes of a monumental nature, (and I am not just referring to the minuscule RDG) and is therefore in no one's interests, least of all the independents and affiliated organisations who at least have a genuine commitment to collective and fraternal work.

However, it is perfectly correct that Munyaradzi Gwisai raises the issue of future realignment. It is something that no sensible revolutionary can avoid in the light of developments in the anti-capitalist movement.

The united front and realignment

Let us consider the current situation. As noted above, debates are now progressing across organisations that have previously had little to unite them, even though they claim to be within the same Trotskyist tradition. The debate has now widened to include those in the anti-capitalist movement. More importantly, it has not simply restricted itself to debates but had an active element in the mobilisations for Genoa, Seattle, and the like. Of course, there are many who may never become Marxists, but in *Anti-Capitalism: A Guide to the Movement*,²³ George Monbiot's introduction states, 'We have been divided by our ideological differences and suspicions of each other's tactics. Above all, we have failed to understand how powerful we can be if we

work together'.²⁴ In his summing up, Alex Callinicos gives a positive, but careful assessment of where we are now: 'Its immediate practical effects have been real enough, but relatively limited. The demonstrations outside the Seattle summit gave the Third World delegates with the WTO meeting the courage to resist the demands of the US and the European Union for a new round of trade liberalisation.'²⁵

He then goes on to list the effect of other protests, but adds: 'Significant though these achievements have been, the greatest impact of the movement against capitalist globalisation has been symbolic and ideological. After a decade in which many gave way to political despair... Seattle demonstrated that collective action could still change the world.'

A very simple example in the ideological shift is expressed through a quote from a Nader supporter: 'Voting for Nader felt like a tiny step into a broader movement'.²⁶

Indeed it was—tiny, but significant. It might be added, *en passant*, that a leading RDG supporter commented at an Socialist Alliance meeting that voting for Nader represented 'bourgeois regression'!

Callinicos concludes, 'Proposing a socialist alternative...poses questions both about the nature of this alternative and the strategy required to achieve it. But then the point of this essay, as of the book as a whole, is not to close off debate, but to contribute it'.²⁷

It is therefore within this context, and that of the positive debate taking place with the *IST Discussion Bulletin*, that we in the SWP posit a united front of a new type which Callinicos has already discussed elsewhere at length.²⁸ But to attain that united front, it presupposes a willingness on the part of those involved to work fraternally together and not to boycott initiatives, as happened when one supporter of the RDG position refused to turn up at a joint Stop the War/Islamic demonstration because he apparently felt a hostility to all religions. It means using your brains as well as the collected works of Trotsky and Lenin.

Individual perspectives within the united front will differ and there is no reason to liquidate one's position to gain popularity. You might gain an audience, but you will have nothing new to say. Therefore, the manner of operation (and the way that you present your views) within the united front is of crucial importance. It is not a 'raid', neither is it a compromise to populism. It is a genuine wish to engage in debate and organise resistance in areas where we agree. If we let sectarianism reign, expressed through 'clever' though hostile remarks, verbal or written, then the united front

will fail and capitalism will have gained.

When Munyaradzi Gwisai comments that 'a new culture surpassing the 1980s sectarian culture has to be achieved',²⁹ we can agree wholeheartedly. But what any future regroupment might look like is like trying to discern the right bus stop during the old London smogs. We know it's there, but can't yet find it. Moreover, to extend the analogy, if we insistently and impatiently go for the first bus stop that emerges from the gloom, we'll most likely end up in the wrong place.

It is that danger which Munyaradzi Gwisai's article appears to lead to.

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Notes

- (1) V I Lenin, 'The Tasks of Youth Leagues', *Collected Works*, vol 31, p288.
- (2) M Gwisai, 'The United Front, Entrism and the Revolutionary Organisation in Zimbabwe—Lessons from Struggles in the Periphery Capitalist Societies', *IST Discussion Bulletin* 1, July 2002, p23.
- (3) *Ibid*, p26.
- (4) Over a year ago, in a conversation I have with their editor, Marcus Larsen, he admitted that the paper 'took money' from the RDG so that they (the RDG) could have a page where their views could be aired.
- (5) Indeed, this is still something that can only be referred to circumspectly. We were extremely concerned about the nature of a website put up by a leading member of the RDG dominated 'officers' group. This could have been used to the detriment of the Socialist Alliance by any of the bourgeois press. Far from sweeping it under the carpet, as Dave Craig of the RDG appeared to want to do, we wanted this member excluded. See *Weekly Worker*, 4 April 2002.
- (6) 'Building the International Today', *IST Discussion Bulletin* 1, pp10-15.
- (7) *Ibid*, p13.
- (8) 'The LCR and the Question of a Workers' Party', *IST Discussion Bulletin* 1, p21.
- (9) A Callinicos, 'Regroupment, Realignment and the Revolutionary Left', *IST Discussion Bulletin* 1, p8.
- (10) J Wolfreys, 'The Centre Cannot Hold', *International Socialism* 2:95, p69.
- (11) *IST Discussion Bulletin* 1, p26
- (12) A Callinicos, 'Regroupment, Realignment, and the Revolutionary Left', *IST Discussion Bulletin* 1, p7.
- (13) D Craig, 'Taking Issue with the SWP: United Front of the Third Kind', *Weekly Worker*, 18 April 2000, p4.
- (14) From a local Socialist Alliance officer

to all local Socialist Alliance members, 4 January 2002.

(15) This is the first time that I have referred to these matters in print as I was certainly not going to publicise it in the pages of the *Weekly Worker*, even though we had to put up with a distorted picture of the situation. It has only changed now because the sectarians have been defeated, and that it is important comrades do not obtain an incorrect assessment based on this distorted picture. Since then, comrades might notice that the newspaper appears to have taken a more frosty view on the RDG. I certainly hope this continues.

(16) *IST Discussion Bulletin* 1, p26.

(17) *Republican Marxist Bulletin* 7, September/October 1990.

(18) *Republican Marxist Bulletin*, Gulf Special, November/December 1990.

(19) The report to place on the proposed local website.

(20) *Ibid.*

(21) Constitution of the Socialist Alliance adopted at the national conference on Saturday 1 December 2001.

(22) Lenin, *Works*, p178.

(23) See *Anti-Capitalism: A Guide to the Movement* (Bookmarks 2001) which contains the diverse views of individual critics of the system, to Globalise Resistance, ATTAC, the World Development Movement, Friends of the Earth, many others, and ourselves.

(24) *Ibid.*, p5.

(25) *Ibid.*, p387.

(26) *Ibid.*, p389.

(27) *Ibid.*, p399.

(28) A Callinicos, 'Unity in Diversity', *Socialist Review*, April 2002

(29) *IST Discussion Bulletin* 1, p26. In fairness to Munyaradzi Gwisai, he does go on, in the same sentence, to include the ending of 'self deceptions through "toy Bolshevik mass revolutionary parties".' I would take issue with his premise here, although this cannot be dealt with within the confines of this article.

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