

Marxist Revival



Towards 21st Century Marxism

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Marxist Revival 1. Winter 2013-4

Page 2: This journal

Page 2: Why Marxist Revival?

Page 3: Why internal democracy is a precondition for building an international organisation

Page 6: Notes on the documents of the Iranian Revolutionary Marxists' Tendency

Page 10: A reply to AWL's Notes on documents of the IRMT

Page 12: Response from the AWL

Page 15: A brief history of capitalist development and the working-class movement in Turkey

Page 30: The revolutionary left in Australia

Page 34: Introduction to the AWL

Page 35: Introduction to the IRMT

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This journal

IRMT and AWL, November 2013

We are starting Marxist Revival as an international discussion journal of revolutionary Marxists — that is, of activists who learn from the ideas of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Luxemburg, Trotsky, and their comrades, and who recognise that the many changes in the world since Trotsky's death in 1940 can be dealt with only by new discussion and analysis, not just by invoking old texts.

Marxist Revival will be an open forum for all activists in that broad tradition. It will not just be an open forum. The two organisations initiating it, the Iranian Revolutionary Marxists' Tendency and the Alliance for Workers' Liberty, have their own ideas, close on many issues but not identical: we will promote the ideas we have in common, debate the issues on which we disagree, and work to draw other groups with a similar approach into the production of the journal. But Marxist Revival will be open for disputations, polemics, and divergent views: we invite both groups and individual activists who disagree with IRMT and AWL, yet are interested in international discussion among revolutionary Marxists, to contribute.

There are almost no other such journals of international Marxist discussion. Arguably today, in the era of the internet, mass air travel, and English as a global lingua franca, activist Marxist debates are more separated off into national silos than they were a hundred years ago, when the technical difficulties were a hundred times greater.

Yet our foes, the ruling classes of the world, have globalised themselves more than ever. The politicians constantly meet and liaise through international conferences, forums, and organisations. They copy policies from each other. The industrialists, more and more, are concentrated in huge multinational corporations, or in the clusters of

suppliers and subcontractors surrounding those multinationals. They all take their cue from the capitalist world markets, and only secondarily from national conditions.

The working classes, and in the first place those who set out to provide policies and organisations which can help the working classes achieve its self-liberation, need to be even more globalised.

When, in 2008, the high days of the "neo-liberal" capitalist triumphalism in full flow since about 1990 crashed into an economic crisis bigger than that of 1997-8, it was the end of an era. That crisis has already led into economic depression more protracted than any since the 1930s. China was the main driver of the limited quarter-recovery that followed 2008, but now has its own economic difficulties, with vast over-expansion of credit and over-capacity in many sectors. More than that: Chinese capitalism now faces the largest and most concentrated working class ever to exist in history, already producing a constant ferment of wildcat strikes.

The new era will be shaped through struggles, not through automatic evolution. It is already clear that there will be no smooth, managed-from-above transition to a regime softer and milder than the neo-liberalism of the previous era. On the contrary: policies of privatisation, contracting-out, stripping labour rights and protections, and union-bashing, are being sharpened. With sharper policies will come sharper conflict with the new forces, new passions, and new aspirations generated among billions of people by the dizzy whirl of capitalist development.

Whether we win or lose the coming struggles will depend on ideas, policies, and organisation. Let us raise our eyes out of our national silos, and discuss and organise with an urgency appropriate to the times.

Why Marxist Revival?

IRMT, 10 June 2012

The big economic crisis of 2008-09 once again exposed the frailty of the ruling class in all countries and the fragile basis of the world capitalist system itself. While the consequences of the crisis continue (even in countries that are technically no longer in recession) the manner in which the bank bailouts and other 'solutions' were carried out created deep dissatisfaction and suspicion among large sections of the masses.

The economic crisis of capitalism and the political problems of the bourgeoisie also highlighted two other crises. First, the traditional mass organisations of the working class — whether the parties that include the words 'socialist', 'labour' or 'democrat' in their names or trade unions that have represented generation after generation of workers in various industries — have been unable or unwilling to mobilise their ranks even to fight an effective defensive campaign against the bourgeoisie's attacks on workers and their families.

Second, the various organisations claiming to be 'revolutionary', 'Marxist' or 'Trotskyist' have generally been unable to contribute to the resistance of the masses against the attacks. In many cases they have directly acted as a left alibi of the bureaucratic apparatus of the traditional leadership, or as sectarian commentators of the class struggle.

What we have clearly seen is that the massive onslaught by the bourgeois state on everything from child benefit to pensions, on jobs and conditions, and on all aspects of social provisions (free healthcare, housing, education and so on) has – so far — mostly been successful. All the hard-won gains that helped hold together the very fabric of working class communities are under threat.

While both the reformist and the 'revolutionary' leaders have been in the depth of their own crises, the masses have had to fight their own battles: most recently in particular in Europe, in North Africa and in the Middle East – all as an expression of a world revolutionary crisis. With the reformist leaders offering no campaign to fight back, or, worse still, taking part in the counter reforms, the masses have adopted new methods of by-passing the traditional leaderships and fighting on their own initiative in the streets of cities and towns all over the world. The present crisis of capitalism has sparked the mobilisation of millions all over the world against the austerity measures that are supposed to stabilise the capitalist system.

'The historical crisis of the leadership of the proletariat' has still not been solved. Even the best of the leaderships still have work to do on the theoretical, political and organisational level. It is not sufficient to be at the forefront of defensive campaigns or pressure groups. We must prepare ourselves for the rebuilding of a revolutionary international capable of leading the offensive to take power and taking the first steps in replacing the capitalist mode of production.

The attempt to build a Fourth International and the method presented in Trotsky's Transitional Programme can be counted as some of the biggest steps forward for Marxism after the demise of the workers' state in the Soviet

Union. But we cannot merely rely on resurrecting them. Just as surely as the struggles of the working class have continued during the past 70-75 years, the long struggle to make new organisational, theoretical and political gains also continues. The revival of an international organisation that is capable of dealing with all the important tasks facing the working class is now the main point on the agenda.

As revolutionary Marxists, in order to make our contribution to the necessary revival of Marxism, we cannot act without an organisational structure and programme that express our previous experiences and direct our new interventions.

We call our very modest structure Marxist Revival (MR) and we declare our readiness to collaborate with the genuine forces striving in the same direction as us.

Marxist Revival is formed by comrades who consider themselves revolutionary Marxists and base their activities on the experiences of Bolshevism in the Russian revolution, the first four congresses of the Comintern, the International Left Opposition and the Fourth International. We struggle for the formation of an international vanguard organisation in order to prepare the world working class for socialist revolution. The MR is not itself an international organisation or even a tendency. The MR is a project for elaborating contributions to a political platform, together with existing organisations and with individuals. In this way we want to contribute, both on a theoretical and practical level, to the building of an international organisation.

Why internal democracy is a precondition for building an international organisation

Maziar Razi, 21 March 2013

Although in discussions about internal democracy tendency rights are accepted in words by many organisations both from Trotskyist and other backgrounds, in practice, however, they are not implemented. In my opinion this question is not a trivial or secondary issue, but is the precondition for building a healthy organisation both on the national and international level that are preparing for socialist revolutions.

Also, the Marxist concept of "democratic centralism" stems from an objective necessity within the labour movement. Many communist organisations and parties have a totally incorrect and non-Marxist understanding of this concept. This incorrect and non-scientific understanding is not exclusive to Stalinist organisations only, but can also be observed in many Trotskyist organisations. These organisations and parties have an administrative concept of democratic centralism. In fact, all these organisations have an organisational structure that is a caricature of a revolutionary party. They all appear to have congresses, members of a leadership, elections and (formal) 'democracy'. The leadership of these organisations appears to be 'elected' on the basis of a majority vote and the leaders and the 'leader' are elected for the period between one congress and the next.

These organisations all have their party organ and the pages of their papers are also adorned with articles by, and pictures of, Marx, Lenin or Trotsky (or other leaders), and organise activities and have their supporters. All these organisations claim to have a so-called 'democratic' organisational structure. However, either they do not allow, in practice, internal rights for discussions of different views, or when the first signs of a disagreement with the leaders or the majority of members appear, a wave of accusations, slander and humiliation of opponents begins immediately; and if these psychological pressures are not effective, organisational manoeuvres, exclusion and slander quickly progress towards expulsion and suspension of membership. No doubt, if such organisations were to have a state position, then these differences would surely result in arrests, trials and even the execution of opponents. According to these 'leaders', by having a majority of the votes inside an organisation it is enough to nip in the bud the voice of any opposition. In fact, the method these so-called 'communist' organisations have for dealing with dissent can be compared with how military regimes in underdeveloped countries treat their opponents.

The common denominator of all these 'communist' parties lies in a fundamental issue: namely, the lack of recognition of 'tendency rights' for the views of minorities. In fact, this very obvious and simple issue separates all these organisations from a genuine revolutionary Marxist organisation. Not recognising the rights of members who reach different views to those of the leadership or the majority of members, is the basis for distinguishing between a deviant organisation and a revolutionary Marxist organisation. These organisations believe that allowing an internal democratic discussion will undermine the unity of the party and eventually lead to splits and result in a weak party that is not capable of leading a revolution. All these arguments are based on theories and ideas of the defeat of the Russian Revolution (Stalinism), and have no resemblance to the organisational theories of the victory of the Russian Revolution (Leninism).

The reason for recognising a place and rights for different and opposing views within a revolutionary organisational structure is this: within a revolutionary organisation the members of this organisation, based on their revolutionary practice in different fields of struggle in society, reach different and sometimes conflicting types of consciousness from each other. Accepting a general programme of the party does not mean that all members, at all times, have to have unanimity of ideas and obey their "leaders". Members can, as a result of their practical struggles, reach a consciousness that is different from some other members of the organisation who are active in other spheres of struggle. Hence members and cadres of a united party, in their daily interventions in between two party congresses, adopt dissimilar and different tactics. Their experiences are relative and even in many cases incomplete. For example, among the worker members of a revolutionary organisation differences may arise on the slogan of 'independent labour organisations' or the 'national question' and how to intervene among workers to achieve it. Perhaps, on the issue of say independence of labour organisations from political parties, some party members come to the conclusion that perhaps this workers' independence should also include their own

party. Others may conclude that no: it should not include their own communist party! This type of differences of opinion may also be seen in other cases. Obviously one cannot be certain in advance as to which view will reach the desired results and is correct. It is only through practical action and experience that theories are eventually proved right. From a Marxist point of view, theory is only concentrated action (practice).

Obviously, to reach agreement and a common position in order to put these tactics into practice, and to bring together the different opinions and implement them in unity, inside the revolutionary party there must be the conditions that facilitate the possibility of dialogue and the formation of tendencies that disagree with the majority's view.

It is under these conditions that internal democracy within a revolutionary party becomes vitally important. A party that from its formation does not recognise the right to form tendencies for differing and opposition views, cannot be a revolutionary Marxist party that is supposed to prepare the workers' revolution. A party that does not understand that only through the exchange of views among members with different types of consciousness and tactics inside the party can the party programme be refined and effective intervention be organised; without a doubt, will deviate in the whirlwinds of the class struggle and will not play a revolutionary role. The Bolshevik Party was a party with internal democracy. The internal democracy practices within this party prior to the October 1917 revolution, and particularly between 1917 and 1919, can be an example to follow for future revolutionary organisations. Those who deny internal democracy and the formation of tendencies and factions within organisations, are not corresponding themselves with the concept of the Leninist vanguard party.

To explore the real meaning of "Democratic Centralism" we need to discuss this issue further. In a vanguard party, members, who during their activity in the struggle reach different views, present their views at the party congress. However, the problem arises when some members (even one person) have differences with the majority's or the leadership's views. In such a situation it is obvious that the revolutionary party must accommodate this minority so that its position can be publicised among all the members through the internal bulletin and planned meetings. This minority must have the right to form a 'tendency'. A tendency that, with the majority's agreement and the setting up of internal promotion tools by the leadership, takes form and, in a reasonable and comradely environment, discusses and promotes its views for the next period. This is because a revolutionary party knows full well that any tactic that is presented by some members (even a majority), will not necessarily be the correct view in practice. Only action in the struggle can show which one of the views has been more consistent with reality. For example, if after one year experience shows that the minority view is wrong, it is obvious that this disagreement will be invalidated and the tendency will declare itself disbanded. But if the minority view has been correct and the majority view incorrect, then the minority view that has become familiar to all members will become the majority view. This way there will be an opportunity for all views to prove themselves.

However, even if in the future the majority's views are shown to be wrong, the minority – while preserving its be-

liefs and its criticisms of the majority – must put into practice the majority position outside the party for a period (until the next congress). Despite its internal differences, this party must act in unity within society and experience the majority's views in action, until their outcome is proved in practice (whether positive or negative). The next party congress can reach a new assessment and conclusion based on the practice of the previous period.

What happens if the disputes of a minority are not resolved after a period (between two congresses)? At this stage, there can be two causes for this. The first is that these differences still remain at the level of tactical issues and more time is needed to prove these views. In this case the opposition tendency, as in the previous period, remains in the party so that the issues can be reviewed in the next period. But in some cases the differences may go beyond just tactical differences. Deep political divisions can also appear in the party. In capitalist society the dominant ideology is the ideology of the ruling elite. There is always the possibility that even members or the leadership of a revolutionary party are influenced by ideas of the class enemy. Therefore some differences can go beyond tactical ones. For example, it is possible that some members reach a decision that the line of the party leadership suffers from class deviations and that it is necessary to have a deeper struggle to obstruct the deviant line. In that case, the party leadership must respect the right of that group of dissidents – according to their judgment – to declare a 'faction'. These members must be allowed to remain inside a revolutionary party and even to participate in the party leadership, according to the number of their supporters. In this way sufficient opportunity will be given to them to publicise their views within the party and at the leadership level. In fact the formation of a 'faction' is a more serious step for combating the deviant line of the majority within a revolutionary party. Forming a 'tendency' is about tactical issues and may be short-lived.

But if after a period the faction reaches the conclusion that the leadership and the majority of the party are about to cross the class line, and that there is no possibility of convincing the majority of members, then, at this stage, it should have the right to form an 'open faction'. In fact, the concept of forming an open faction means that preparations are being made for a split. The open faction can even address the labour movement and make public announcements and let the working class know about the deviation (in its opinion) of the majority. A revolutionary party must also give this minority the organisational opportunity to not only get its views across to all members but to also include them in the official party organ. Obviously, if there is no agreement and the labour movement did not change the positions of the majority, the next step will be a split. But this split can also be reasonable and comradely, without accusations and slander. History will show the correctness or the deviance of the two sides' views in the future. Perhaps when the majority's mistake has been proved in practice the conditions for this minority tendency to re-join the united party will come about. But if they end up clashing, fighting, making accusations and hating each other; these two tendencies, even if they come to have the same views in the future, can never be inside a party together.

Won't all these preconditions, as many so-called Trotskyist claim, weaken the party and its leadership? Aren't these

'liberal' and 'bourgeois democratic' attitudes towards internal democracy? Shouldn't the party be 'iron'-like so that it carries out its decisions in unity? Isn't making a concession to a 'minority' liquidationist? The answer to all these questions is in the negative. Recognition of minority rights not only does not weaken the party but it will lead to strengthening it. Making provisions for setting up a 'tendency', a 'faction' and even an 'open faction' will give the party more credibility and make it stronger in the eyes of the mass of workers. It is enough to just look at the state of the various international organisations and parties to see the severity and depth of their organisational crises – which is largely the result of organisational deviations. In fact, a crisis-ridden situation applies to most parties and organisations at an international level. All the unwanted splits, which have no objective basis, could have been avoided; provided that the rights of minority views inside the organisation were officially recognised. Obviously the basis for organisational separation and collapse are rooted in the deviant and non-democratic approach of the parties, and not vice versa. If the conditions for expressing opinions had been created, perhaps today not only would there be no splits in these organisations, but they would have attracted many forces.

What these deviant organisations do not understand is this: that splits, suspensions and expulsions must only be the last stage in a long process of discussion and joint activity. Expulsions and splits are justified only when a tendency has crossed the class line and that this has also been shown in the labour movement. In other words, the results of the destructive and counter-revolutionary policies of a current (or trend) must not only be clear and transparent for all members of the party but that they have been clearly expressed in society. In the Bolshevik party such rights, including the right to set up a tendency and a faction, were recognised for members. One of the reasons for the Bolshevik Party being successful in the development of a revolutionary programme that was connected to the labour movement, and therefore gaining credibility among the workers' councils which led to the victory of the first and only socialist revolution in the world, was precisely the respect for internal democracy. Only in 1921, during the Civil War, were factions inside the Bolshevik Party banned. Before that, in many cases party leaders and members publicly expressed their positions and differences with the leadership without being expelled or punished. However, the 'necessity' of limiting internal factions at the time of the Civil War in 1920-1921 became a virtue during the Stalin period and was followed by years of Stalinist repression. During the last years of his life Trotsky made a clear 'self-criticism' about this period. Trotsky wrote: "The prohibition of oppositional parties brought after it the prohibition of factions. The prohibition of factions ended in a prohibition to think otherwise than the infallible leaders. The police-manufactured monolithism of the party resulted in a bureaucratic impunity which has become the source of all kinds of wantonness and corruption." (The Revolution Betrayed, 1936)

The Trotskyist movement has also learned many lessons from the 1917 October revolution and therefore cannot repeat the same mistakes. Leon Trotsky's assessment of internal party issues, to which he remained loyal until the end of his life, was as follows:

“It is entirely insufficient for our youth to repeat our formulas. They must conquer the revolutionary formulas, assimilate them, work out their own opinions, their own character; they must be capable of fighting for their views with the courage which arises out of the depths of conviction and independence of character. Out of the party with passive obedience, with mechanical levelling by the authorities, with suppression of personality, with servility, with careerism! A Bolshevik is not merely a disciplined person; he is a person who in each case and on each question forges a firm opinion of his own and defends it courageously and independently, not only against his enemies, but inside his own party. Today, perhaps, he will be in the minority in his organization. He will submit, because it is his party. But this does not always signify that he is in the wrong. Perhaps he saw or understood before the others did a new task or the necessity of a turn. He will persistently raise the question a second, a third, a tenth time, if need be. Thereby he will render his party a service, helping it to meet the new task fully armed or to carry out the necessary turn without organic upheavals, without fractional convulsions.” (Leon Trotsky, *The New Course*, 1923)

In order to organise a revolutionary international, the recognition of the democratic rights of tendencies and factions within the party is crucial. Revolutionary Marxists must remain loyal to this method.



Who is That You All Are Going to Whip, Mr. League?
—By Robert Minor

THE DAILY WORKER
June 27, 1935

Notes on the documents of the Iranian Revolutionary Marxists' Tendency

AWL, 2013

Workers' Liberty has recently begun discussions with the Iranian Revolutionary Marxists' Tendency. The IRMT is a continuation of the Iranian Trotskyist group "Socialism and Revolution", with which our tendency had links in the 1980s. We lost contact with the IRMT after the exile group scattered and the IRMT comrades turned their energies to Iran, returning to Iran itself or to nearby countries; but have recently re-established links.

Political Islam

We in Workers' Liberty have learned a lot from the critique made by the IRMT and its predecessors of political Islam in general and the Iranian regime in particular.

We agree with your comment in the IRMT document, "Modern imperialist domination and Islamic fundamentalism", that the nearest historical equivalent to the Pasdaran was the fascist militias of the 1930s. We agree with the clear condemnation of the Islamic regime in the 1983 S&R document "Revolution and Counter-revolution in Iran": "The present degree of the democratic rights actually practised or recognised by the state is only comparable to what existed before the beginnings of the 20th century... The only 'right' recognised by the clerical rulers is that of complete subjugation of everything to the arbitrary rule of the mullahs. The repressive form of the 'republican' state is such that now the new ruling bourgeois factions can intervene even in the private lives of citizens. What the masses are allowed to believe, wear, eat or drink are all decided by the state... the Islamic state is a lot more repressive than an ordinary capitalist dictatorship... In the last two years alone, the Islamic regime has executed 50 times more socialists than the Shah's regime did in its 30 years of rule."

You also point out that the popular base of Khomeiny's movement was socially similar to that of fascism: "recruited from the huge layers of the urban poor (the unemployed peasant migrants) and the pauperised petty bourgeoisie".

"Third Camp" policy in predatory clashes between global imperialist powers and regional imperialist powers

We agree that taking Trotsky's comments from the 1930s about Italy and Ethiopia, or Britain and Brazil, out of context and applying them mechanically today, to justify siding with Iran in a clash between the US and Iran, is false. There, the context was a world in which most territories were colonies or semi-colonies of European powers, and where the question of self-determination for nations subjected or likely to be subjected to colonial rule or semi-colonial domination arose automatically with almost any clash between a big power and a poor country.

The chief change today is simple. "When comparing the general international situation vis-à-vis the national and colonial question during the early twentieth century with today's conditions there is one main difference: the Com-

intern was dealing with dependent countries as opposed to independent nations". Poorer countries still suffer economic disadvantage, but this is not the same as political independence, and can be remedied only by global working-class action to destroy the domination of capitalist market mechanisms, not by some elusive further measure of national (political) independence.

Today, Iran has a developed working class. It not only has political independence: it has its own regional-imperialist sway (over the minority nations under the Iranian state) and ambitions.

You comment that "many workers in the west are repelled by what these regimes [Saddam's Iraq, Islamic Iran, etc.] are doing to their own workers, women, students and so on — and they do not have 'the theory' to excuse these atrocities". To tell those workers that "the theory" demands that they nevertheless regard those regimes as somehow progressive when in conflict with states which concede much wider rights to workers is not to "break them from imperialism", but to convince them that what is called Marxism makes no sense.

We agree that: "In places like Iraq or Iran, therefore, the working class should lead the masses in forming an independent third camp — neither with its 'own' bourgeoisie in defence of a 'national interest', nor with imperialism". The term "imperialism" here presumably means "the USA and its allies", and it would be better to put it that way. The world includes other imperialist or regional-imperialist powers which may clash with the USA.

We believe that in the Kuwait war of 1990-1, the IRMT's forerunners' position — "we did not side with the Baathist regime against US imperialism. We backed the Iraqi masses against both imperialism and its local stooge" — was correct. It was more correct than our position at the time, which contained half-thoughts about siding with Iraq (while opposing the Saddam regime) when US troops entered Iraqi territory. To describe Saddam's regime as "the local stooge" of imperialism seems misplaced here — the regime was acting in its own regional-imperialist interest in trying to seize Kuwait, not as a proxy for some other power — but the gist of the position was correct.

Israel-Palestine and democratic demands

IRMT has posted a document "Zionism declares 'all-out war' on Gaza" (6 April 2012, tagged as first published in January 2009)

The view of Workers' Liberty, in brief, is that in situation of national conflict working-class unity, democracy, and advance to socialism can be realised only by recognising the right of all nations to self-determination.

The Israeli-Jewish nation and the Palestinian-Arab nation are in conflict. Socialists should advocate the right to self-determination for both nations. In other words, two nations, two states.

Only when workers are armed with that democratic programme will progress towards a socialist federation in the region be possible.

In practice, this position means, mostly, campaigning for Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank and for Israel to clear the way for a genuinely independent Palestinian state alongside Israel.

It also implies opposition to the forcible conquest and suppression of Israel by the Arab states. Since in this conflict — unlike almost any other national conflict — there is a large body of opinion on the left which does favour the forcible suppression of one of the nations in conflict (the Israeli-Jewish nation), i.e. the forcible suppression of its national self-determination, it is necessary to be explicit about this.

We are glad to see that the IRMT document strongly rejects any support for Hamas. That is a substantial point of agreement.

However, its positive proposal seems to us to dissolve the immediate democratic issues into a "maximalist" slogan.

"The only way forward for all workers and the exploited and oppressed masses of the region, be they Arab, Jewish, Kurdish, Turkish or other nationalities, is to fight a joint struggle against the imposed and artificial borders of imperialism which have separated and weakened them. The removal of these borders is bound up with the toppling of the stooges of imperialism, whether they are sheikhs, kings or 'hereditary presidents'. Smashing the imperialist yoke weighing down on the region and overthrowing capitalism are part of the same struggle. The 'road map' to true peace and the liberation of the workers and exploited masses starts with the establishment of a federation of workers' states in the region".

But the working class in the region must first organise itself independently and arm itself with a socialist and democratic programme. That "start" has to come before the struggle for the federation of workers' states can even begin.

We would be cautious about trying to judge precise slogans for use in Iran, for example, from faraway Britain. However, we agree with the general idea behind the IRMT article "Call for Constituent Assembly in Iran" that the programme of revolutionary socialists must include democratic demands as well as direct revolutionary-socialist demands. The same necessity for democratic demands holds for the Middle East region.

The programme for the working class in the Middle East region — like the Bolsheviks' programme for the working class in the old Tsarist Empire — must include as a main point the right of all the various nations to self-determination. A socialist and democratic federation cannot be a socialist and democratic federation unless it recognises the right of each nation to secede from the federation if it wishes.

Also, the oppressed nations of the region — primarily the Palestinians and the Kurds — need not and should not wait until conditions are ripe for workers' rule across the whole region in order to demand democratic redress. They can and should be supported in their democratic fight for self-determination now, long before those conditions are ripe. Although circumstances are currently unfavourable, it is not at all inconceivable that they could win self-determination even under capitalism.

To call for the removal of all borders, and then for a federation in the region, is contradictory. A federation, rather than a single unified state, implies internal borders.

We don't know whether the article's call for the removal of the existing borders implies a call for the creation of new ones. If so, it should say so, and which new ones it pro-

poses. Otherwise the call says to every nation in the region: we, the socialists, could well want to transgress your national rights by imposing border changes against the will of the populations involved.

There are clear cases where the existing borders should be changed. For example, the Kurdish people, currently divided between Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Turkey, should have the right to redraw borders to achieve a state of their own.

Other detailed changes could be discussed, on the principle outlined by Lenin: "divisions based on the requirements of present-day economic life and in accordance, as far as possible, with the national composition of the population".

In Israel/Palestine, the democratic demand is rather for the respect of existing borders as outlined by international law: i.e. Israel should withdraw to within the 1967 borders, and let the Palestinians establish the independent state also promised to them by international law.

Which other border changes do the comrades propose?

Many borders were drawn arbitrarily. However, units of population and territory demarcated that way may take on real "national" character over the decades. There is, after all, nothing "natural" about national demarcations anywhere. There is nothing "natural" about the border between Germany and Poland, but we oppose the revanchists who would want to redraw it. And the last nine years or so have shown, for example, that Arab Iraq has a real Iraqi national identity.

Despite strongly denouncing Hamas, the article also gives it undeserved credit.

"Hamas was born of the inevitable need of the Palestinian people to resist the Zionist occupation and the denial of basic national and human rights after Fatah surrendered itself to the needs of imperialism in the region".

Actually, Hamas was born of a drive by the Muslim Brotherhood to develop itself among the Palestinians. At first it grew mainly through campaigns to impose "modest dress" on Palestinian women and so on, and was passive on the national question, so much so that Israeli authorities covertly encouraged it as a preferable alternative to the secular nationalists.

As the strength and prestige of political Islam has risen in the region, so has the strength of Hamas, and its boldness about advancing its programme for an Islamic state in Palestine, suppressing both Jews and Christian Arabs.

Hamas was certainly helped to grow by the notorious corruptness of Fatah in its administration of the Palestinian Authority, and its failure to win concessions from Israel.

But what does the article mean by saying "Fatah surrendered itself to the needs of imperialism in the region"? Islamists and Arab chauvinists hold that Fatah "surrendered" by explicitly, in 1988, dropping the demand for the suppression of Israel and supporting a "two-states" solution.

But that move — prompted by the militancy and confidence of the first intifada, not by demoralisation and defeat — was a move forward, from a dead-end revanchist programme to a realisable democratic programme.

One further point in the article causes concern. It routinely refers to the Israeli state as "the Zionist state" or "the Zionists" or just "Zionism", and to "Zionism and imperialism", as if these were Siamese twins.

Historically, Zionism was the umbrella term for ideolo-

gies and political projects which proposed the creation of a homeland for the scattered Jewish people.

Revolutionary Marxists opposed Zionism (even the left-wing and would-be Marxist strands of Zionism, which existed) because they thought it utopian and in the name of arguing for Jewish workers to join the class struggle in the countries where they already lived. It was a difference of strategies within an assumed common framework of struggle against anti-semitism. The revolutionary USSR undertook to create a Jewish republic within its boundaries. Though this was eventually realised only as a caricature, under Stalin, Trotsky was rightly clear that he supported the principle. Trotsky in his last years declared: "During my youth I rather leaned toward the prognosis that the Jews of different countries would be assimilated and that the Jewish question would thus disappear in a quasi-automatic fashion. The historical development of the last quarter of a century has not confirmed this perspective". A world socialist federation would create a Jewish homeland: "The very same methods of solving the Jewish question which under decaying capitalism will have a utopian and reactionary character (Zionism) will, under the regime of a socialist federation take on real and salutary meaning".

In fact what Trotsky thought impossible happened after World War Two: a Jewish state was created (at great cost to the Palestinians). The Jewish state is no longer a project, but by now a long-established fact. What does Zionism mean now?

It is not clear. Sometimes the simple demand that the Israeli-Jews be allowed self-determination, i.e. to continue their national state, is damned as "Zionist" (though supporting that demand in no way implies supporting Israeli mistreatment of the Palestinians, or any version of Zionist ideology). Let us assume that by "Zionist" the article means "Israeli chauvinist" or something similar.

Why then use the term as the article does? More or less every national state and government is chauvinist in its pursuit of national interests, and Israel is no exception. Why write "the Zionists" in place of "Israel", with an apparent wish by doing so to add weight and venom to the denunciation of Israeli government misdeeds?

The use of the term "Zionism" as denoting a generic global force of evil, akin to and as bad and as potent as "imperialism", was historically an artefact of the Stalinists' anti-semitic campaign "against Zionism", especially at the end of the 1940s and in the early 1950s. Revolutionary Marxists should not take it up.

The Stalinist states

We agree with the view outlined in the 1993 IRMT document "The Crisis of World Capitalism and the Tasks of the Left", when it criticises the would-be revolutionary socialists who saw the collapse of the Stalinist states as a devastating setback. "Whereas in the current situation the tasks of revolutionaries have not diminished, but have actually increased. The barriers that prevented intervention in the workers' movement until now have disappeared with the collapse of the Soviet Union". Perhaps it would have been better to write, "some of the barriers have disappeared", but the basic thought is right. The collapse of the Stalinist bureaucracies, even when they were replaced by weakly

bourgeois-democratic capitalism, as they were, was a collapse of reactionary and powerful ruling classes and of the evil grip they had on the workers' movement worldwide.

We agree with the criticism implied in the document of groups like the French LCR who said after 1991 that it was a "new epoch" needing a "new programme" and "new party". The passage you quote from Trotsky is apt: "The true vanguard, enriched by the experience of defeat, defends with tooth and nail the heritage of revolutionary thought and on this basis attempts to educate new cadres for the mass struggle to come. On the other hand the routinists, centrists, and dilettantes, frightened by defeat, do their best to destroy the authority of revolutionary tradition and go backward in their search for a 'New Word'."

It is not quite right to say, as the 1993 document does, that "Undoubtedly the collapse of the Soviet Union and the eastern European states has changed the international balance of forces in favour of imperialism — especially the United States". The collapse changed the balance of forces in favour of the US for a whole period until it overreached itself in Iraq. But that is not the same as "in favour of imperialism". It changed the balance of forces against Russian imperialism and in favour of US imperialism. Revolutionary socialists had no cause to mourn the old "bipolar" world, and no reason to suppose that the renewed US hegemony would not quickly develop its own contradictions.

It might have been better in the 1993 document to be more cautious about capitalist crisis. In fact the main capitalist powers recovered from the recession of the early 1990s, and there was a period of sizeable expansion of capitalism, especially in China and East Asia, though punctuated by crises like the "Asian crisis" of 1997-8 and the "dot.com crash" of 2001. But revolutionary Marxists do not mourn the expansion of capitalism: we know it also means the expansion of the working class and the expansion of the contradictions of capitalism (which we see coming to a head since 2007).

On the Stalinist states, the IRMT comrades have said that they still hold to the views advocated by the 1980s "Socialism and Revolution" group, expounded for example in a debate with AWL and other groups in 1989 which is recorded in *Workers' Liberty* 12-13.

There the S&R comrade said: "There was a workers' state [in the USSR] but it has degenerated so that it is no longer a workers' state. Fully fledged capitalism has not returned... Has the bureaucracy become a ruling class? I don't think so... We should not be too hasty to abandon Trotsky's framework, because one fundamental question in that approach was that capitalism has not yet returned..."

We had and have agreement that the Stalinist USSR was not a workers' state. We welcome also your comment in the 1993 IRMT document "The Crisis of World Capitalism and the Tasks of the Left" criticising those "tendencies that called the Sandinista regime in Nicaragua a 'workers' state'". That indicate also that you reject the attitude of left-wingers who would admit that maybe the stodgy Stalinist USSR was no sort of workers' state, yet paint up as "workers' states" the fresher and more popular bureaucratic state-monopoly regimes like Cuba. (The theory that Sandinista Nicaragua was a "workers' state" was based on the claim that its regime was moving it towards the model of Cuba).

But there is an unmistakable implication in the view put

forward in 1989 that the Stalinist USSR was not as good as a workers' state, yet not as bad as capitalism. The bureaucracy was bad, but not yet so weighty or so coherent as to be a ruling class.

In our view, the idea that fairly stable and self-reproducing systems like the Stalinist states, with fairly stable and self-reproducing ruling groups, could continue and expand for decades without those ruling groups being ruling classes makes a nonsense of Marxist theory.

In any case, however, the implication that the Stalinist states were somehow "in between" being workers' states and capitalist states gives them false credit. Those societies did not have a vestigial element of historic progress, not enough to make them workers' states, and yet enough to save them from being called capitalist. In the space and freedom they allowed to the working class, in their general standards of culture and civilisation, and even, on the whole, in their development of the productivity of human labour, they were behind, not even vestigially ahead of, routine capitalist states.

The question was put to the test a few months after that summer 1989 debate, with the quick collapse of the Stalinist states in Eastern Europe, followed two years later by the collapse of the USSR. There were bourgeois-democratic revolutions, followed by the installation of routine capitalism. Of course we argued for the working-class mobilisations which took place in those revolutions to gain political independence and strike out against capitalism and for workers' governments; we made links with and offered solidarity to groups in those societies which advocated those socialist aims; we denounced the vast suffering caused by the "shock treatment" privatisation and marketisation of the ex-Stalinist economies.

We supported the revolutions — the democratic changes were gains, and the change of economic regime was no regression. Whatever their theories, almost all would-be Trotskyists also supported the revolutions. Logically, however, why support overturns if what they are about is completing the as-yet-incomplete regression from workers' state to capitalism? Logically, it made no sense. Logically, the 1989-91 overturns oblige those who thought that the Stalinist systems were still in some vestigial way post-capitalist to revise their views.

The 2011 document "Some notes on the Concept of Socialism" describes Yugoslavia, China, Cuba and other systems which were basically modelled on the Stalinist USSR (though with local differences) as "transitional societies", presumably in transition from capitalism to socialism. "What we have experienced hitherto — from the USSR through Yugoslavia to China and Cuba in 20th century — are transitional societies in conditions of socio-economic underdevelopment (with an insufficient degree of development of the productive forces), which therefore show, in various ways, severe or extreme forms of bureaucratic deformation and degeneration..." We do not agree.

As the Turkish group Marksist Tutum has argued in its documents, a transition from capitalism to socialism can only be driven by the working class in power. The working class was never in power in Tito's Yugoslavia, Mao's China, or Castro's Cuba. It was deprived of all possibilities of independent self-organisation and independent intellectual life by a bureaucratic ruling class (even if that bureaucratic

ruling class had at some times fairly wide popular support, in Cuba and in Yugoslavia and among Chinese peasants if not workers).

That same 2011 document talks of “an underdeveloped country, which has carried out its socialist revolution (like China)”. In China in 1949, power was taken by a military-bureaucratic machine based on a peasant army which conquered the cities and then continued and increased the police repression of the working class. That is not a socialist revolution. Only a self-emancipating working class can make a socialist revolution.

The analysis of Stalinist systems is important for assessment of Cuba and North Korea today, and important also for understanding the entire shape of the 20th century. Marxism is not just a set of current political positions, but an overview of history and of where and how our activity fits into it. Understanding the shape of the 20th century no more becomes unimportant because we have passed the year 2000 than understanding the succession of modes of production in history becomes an irrelevance because we now live under capitalism.

A reply to AWL’s Notes on documents of the IRMT

M.S., 4 March 2013

First, we welcome the serious approach of the comrades of AWL in dealing with political differences by writing a critique of the IRMT’s documents.

Unfortunately, because we are forced to play a ‘cat and mouse game’ with the Iranian regime (where regrettably we are – for now anyway (!) — the mouse), our sites are frequently blocked by the regime and we are forced to move sites. This means that some documents are not re-published, or are not easy to find, on the new version of the site. As a result, not all our material can be found on the site.

This makes it difficult for comrades to find some important documents. It seems, from the commentary on our position vis-à-vis the USSR, that the AWL comrades are not familiar with our main document on this subject: The ‘coup’, the concept of socialism and the class nature of the Soviet Union (<http://marxist.cloudaccess.net/pam/139-the-coup-the-concept-of-socialism-and-the-class-nature-of-the-soviet-union.html>). It was published in November 1991 and was widely distributed at the time.

Perhaps some of the misunderstandings could have been avoided if the AWL comrades had asked us for documents on specific subjects before embarking on writing their critique.

Second, the AWL comrades refer to the IRMT as “a continuation of the Iranian Trotskyist group Socialism and Revolution”. This is incorrect. We are not a but the only continuation of Socialism and Revolution. To put it more precisely, we are the sole successor of Socialism and Revolution.

There has never been any other organisation — or even a

publication — that has continued with Socialism and Revolution’s political line. No other “continuation” has taken place even in exile, where the conditions are much easier than in Iran. As for Iran, wherever any workers have heard of Bolshevik-Leninism, Trotskyism and the positions of the former Socialism and Revolution, these are solely through the consistent and patient work of what is now the IRMT (previously IRSL and WSN).

Third, although we turned our “energies to Iran”, we have always maintained a continuing and quite active presence in Europe – particularly in London.

Fourthly, it would have been more constructive for us to have seen these notes before they became public on your website. That would have helped to clear up some unnecessary misunderstandings.

Now we will briefly look at the comrades’ critique.

Political Islam

We are grateful to the comrades of Workers’ Liberty for acknowledging that they have learned a lot from the critique made by the IRMT and its predecessors of political Islam in general and the Iranian regime in particular.

It is very rare for any organisation, even the most loyal Leninists and Trotskyists who are supposed to accept self-criticism as an important principle, to admit that they made a mistake or that they have learned something from another organisation.

The issue of “political Islam” has become much more widespread and differentiated since our initial critiques in the late 1970s and early 1980s. A wide variety of movements, parties, charities and so on, and, of course, many governments, are in some way adherents of “political Islam”. Many of them have competing and conflicting interests and some have even come close to war (e.g., the Iranian regime and the Taleban in 1998).

The velayat-e faghih system in Iran is of central interest to us because this is the unique form that capitalist dictatorship has taken in Iran during the past 34 years, and although it has gone through many changes, it retains its main features. These are the features that continue to engender conflicts within the regime (which have reached their height in the past few months).

Our special interest in this particular form of “political Islam” is because the unique form of the bourgeois state in Iran affects how we will need to build the revolutionary workers’ party, a party that must be able to smash it through an armed insurrection and a general strike.

We therefore do not merely have a ‘theoretical’ interest in understanding this state form but, above all, it is a practical and organisational issue for us.

“Third Camp” policy in predatory clashes between global imperialist powers and regional imperialist powers

Again we are grateful to the comrades for acknowledging that they have learned a lot from the critique made by Workers’ Socialist Notebooks (a predecessor of the IRMT) and its position on the Kuwait war of 1990-1, when “we did not side with the Baathist regime against US imperialism. We backed the Iraqi masses against both imperialism and

its local stooge". As to how much a stooge Saddam (or Noriega, Gaddafi and a host of other dictators who were 'useful' for a time) was, we can debate later.

Yes, when we just say "imperialism" it is usually shorthand for "the USA and its allies". We are fully aware of clashes between other imperialist or regional powers with the US and have on many occasions argued about how the collapse of the USSR has led to the resurgence of inter-imperialist rivalries that had been suppressed during the Cold War. These are bound to produce more inter-imperialist clashes in the future.

Israel-Palestine and democratic demands

The IRMT's document Zionism declares 'all-out war' on Gaza (January 2009) was written as commentary on a brutal war and published immediately after it was concluded. It is our editorial on the Gaza war and, in addition to the conflict, briefly deals with a number of issues, including the bankruptcy of Arab nationalism.

As the AWL position is very different to the IRMT position, something we have known since our initial contacts with Socialist Organiser in the 1980s, we will write a full critique of the AWL comrades' position, as expressed in the *Two nations, Two states* pamphlet.

Here we will briefly cover a few points: (1) The comrades' position, even though it has the right intentions, does not deal with the issue concretely. This is something we have noticed on a number of issues, including Greece. So the comrades start with the correct general position of "recognising the right of all nations to self-determination" but then equate this with "two nations" needing "two states" as the solution to the conflict.

(2) The AWL position does not fully recognise that an oppressed people with no state apparatus (especially a military armed with high-tech weaponry) cannot be equated with an oppressor nation with its state, army and so on. The Palestinian-Arab people do not have their nation-state.

This democratic demand is blocked (through the might of the Israeli military, through US imperialism's financial, military, diplomatic, technical and other backing [which also extends into international organisations like in the UN]) by the bourgeoisie of the Israeli-Jewish nation that rules their nation-state.

We therefore have to look to organising and mobilising the forces that can break this block on the path to the Palestinians reaching that democratic demand. These forces are the Palestinian masses as well as the Israeli-Jewish workers. What does this alliance have to do? It will have to smash and overthrow the capitalist state in Israel.

That is why the workers and all exploited and oppressed masses of the region cannot even achieve their most basic democratic rights without overthrowing capitalism in Israel – and preferably a few more countries in the region.

There is no short cut; no easy fix.

Some comrades think that socialism is "maximalist", or that saying that Palestinian nationalism within the context of capitalism is doomed to failure might bring about 'despair' among the Palestinian masses. This type of reasoning shows how wide and deep the gulf between our positions is.

(3) Faced with the reality of the lack of many democratic

rights in a vast part of the world we have seen that many 'Trotskyists' have in practice backpeddled on the socialist revolution.

This has been taking place for a number of years but its noisiest manifestation was during the so-called Arab Spring 'revolutions'.

So while as 'Trotskyists' these groups officially declare that they reject the two stage revolution, they then, by making a big deal of achieving democratic demands before the workers' revolution, add a further new phase into their position through the back door. At best they end up with what can be called a 'one-and-a-half stage revolution'. In today's world, however, you either have a socialist revolution (i.e., the working class coming to power and exercising its revolutionary dictatorship through soviets) or you have some kind of a bourgeois transfer of power which eventually produces yet another capitalist dictatorship.

Either the working class must come to power and begin genuinely resolving long-standing democratic demands, including press freedom, basic workers' rights, national rights and so on, or these long-denied demands are used to bring another bunch of capitalists or bureaucrats to power.

A socialist revolution with a combination of democratic and socialist demands (and perhaps some demands that have become like a hybrid of the traditional democratic and socialist demands) is what should be the perspective of revolutionary Marxists anywhere in the Middle East.

As you know, we have a disagreement within our ranks about the relevance of a constituent assembly in today's Iran (and similar countries). We will be writing documents on this and hope that through this debate we will not only manage to clarify many longstanding issues but contribute something of use to other organisations and tendencies.

Just one final point: the comrades object to our use of "Zionism" in Zionism declares 'all-out war' on Gaza.

In the article there are 28 mentions of Israel/Israeli(s) and 15 mentions of Zionist(s)/Zionism. That is nearly a ratio of 2:1. We think that the comrades have discussed Palestine-Israel with too many anti-Semitic groups and have perhaps become oversensitive about the use of Zionist(s)/Zionism. More importantly, we will have to discuss what Zionism means in today's world.

The Stalinist states

As stated above, our official position on the USSR has been stated in this document: The 'coup', the concept of socialism and the class nature of the Soviet Union. (<http://marxist.cloudaccess.net/pam/139-the-coup-the-concept-of-socialism-and-the-class-nature-of-the-soviet-union.html>).

Our analysis is mainly about the USSR.

This is because: (1) We believe in taking theoretical positions with a view to programmatic and practical conclusions. We also believe in being as concrete as possible – obviously within the constraints placed on us. We do not have an all-encompassing and general theory of the Stalinist states. We hope that the future international we all build together will have that.

(2) In addition to the reasons that Marxists throughout the world attach to their position on the USSR, for Iranian Marxists there is another important reason too: "In this cen-

tury alone, the four most important political developments all had deep Russian connections: the Constitutional Revolution (1905-11); the Soviet Republic of Gilan (1920); the revolutionary situation and the coup in 1953; and the February Revolution of 1979 and its defeat. The first two benefited from the positive contribution of the Bolsheviks, and the latter two were the victims of the machinations of the Stalinists' Foreign Ministry and its local agent the Tudeh Party." (The 'coup' ..., footnote no.1)

As to deciding whether the USSR was "behind", "ahead" or running in parallel with capitalism; or whether it was "not as good as a workers' state" or "not as bad as capitalism"; these are rather meaningless unless they are within the context of trying to formulate our programmatic conclusions.

The main point was that the workers had lost state power in the mid-1920s and they could only regain it through a workers' revolution and then forming a workers' dictatorship. This revolutionary workers' dictatorship could only come about through getting rid of the bureaucracy. Only after that could the transition to socialism begin.

Our official position on Yugoslavia, China, Cuba and so on is that they were not in transition to socialism. If they were in any way "transitional" then this was towards full capitalist restoration. We also do not think that there was a socialist revolution in China.

We also believe that an "analysis of Stalinist systems is important for assessment of Cuba and North Korea today, and important also for understanding the entire shape of the 20th century" and "an overview of history and of where and how our activity fits into it". However, we differ with you in that we believe that this is part of the massive task of Marxist Revival and goes far beyond the practical and theoretical capabilities of any individual organisation.

Response from the AWL

AWL, 2013

Israel-Palestine

You write that: "The Palestinian-Arab people do not have their nation-state.

"This democratic demand is blocked (through the might of the Israeli military, through US imperialism's financial, military, diplomatic, technical and other backing [which also extends into international organisations like in the UN]) by the bourgeoisie of the Israeli-Jewish nation that rules their nation-state.

"We therefore have to look to organising and mobilising the forces that can break this block on the path to the Palestinians reaching that democratic demand. These forces are the Palestinian masses as well as the Israeli-Jewish workers".

You agree that the crucial "democratic demand" in the situation is for the Palestinian-Arab people to have their own nation-state, and that we should look to an alliance of "the Palestinian masses [and] the Israeli-Jewish workers" to win that demand.

Thus, AWL and yourselves are on the same side in the

major arguments on the left about this — against those who argue that the Palestinians having their own nation-state is impossible or harmful, and that the necessary demand is for the establishment of an Arab state across the whole territory now Palestinian or Israeli, by way of Arab or Islamic conquest.

We have agreement on the central issue. What are the disagreements?

You say that "recognising the right of all nations to self-determination" — which, here, means the rights of both the Palestinian-Arab and Israeli-Jewish nations to self-determination — is a "correct general position". But you complain that it is wrong to "equate this with 'two nations' needing 'two states' as the solution to the conflict".

We do not understand the complaint. You agree that there are two nations involved. You write about "the Israeli-Jewish nation", thus distancing yourselves from those many on the left who argue that the Israeli Jews do not qualify as a nation and thus cannot have the rights of a nation.

If two nations both have the right to self-determination, i.e. to form their own states if they wish, then that means... two states.

We wish to see, as soon as possible, a fading-away of national divisions and national identities. One welcome step along that road will be the voluntary merger of neighbouring nations into joint states. We wish for that all over the world, not only in Israel-Palestine. After many decades of war, open or subdued, between the two nations there, the merger of those nations is bound to come later than many other mergers of neighbouring nations across the world.

For this generation, at least, "two states" is a concise synonym for "recognising the right of all nations to self-determination" in Israel-Palestine.

Of the alliance between "the Palestinian masses [and] the Israeli-Jewish workers", you write that "it will have to smash and overthrow the capitalist state in Israel".

We want the capitalist state in Israel, as elsewhere, smashed as soon as possible.

We reject the old idea of making democratic demands a separate "stage" of politics, with distinctively working-class or socialist struggle postponed to a walled-off later "stage". But that rejection is very different from claiming that no democratic demands can be won short of the smashing of the capitalist state.

In his polemics on the national question, Lenin repeatedly rejected the idea that it was impossible for oppressed nations to win self-determination short of the overthrow of capitalism. He pointed to the winning of independence by Norway from Sweden as showing there was no impossibility.

Since then over 100 nations have won independence from the powers that once made them colonies or semi-colonies, without the state in the once-dominant power being smashed.

The Iraqi Kurds have won de facto independence, without the Iraqi capitalist state being smashed.

That the Palestinians do not yet have their own state shows that the struggle faces exceptional difficulties. So do the struggles of some other peoples: the Kurds in most countries, the Tibetans, the Chechens, the people of Western Sahara, etc. Those struggles are difficult; it does not fol-

low that they are impossible short of the socialist revolution.

The level of struggle required to force the Israeli state to release its hold over the Palestinian territories is less than that required to smash that state completely — just as, for example, the level of struggle required to force the French state to release Algeria was less than that required to smash capitalism in France.

Telling workers in any capitalist country that they have no hope of winning better wages, or gaining democratic rights to organise, unless they can first smash the capitalist state, would hurt rather than help working-class organisation and assertiveness. Likewise, telling the Palestinians that they can win no redress until first the Israeli Jewish workers can overthrow capitalism would hurt, not help, their struggle. It would hurt because it is untrue.

In any case, even if we estimate that demands will not be won short of the socialist revolution, Marxists still seek to mobilise workers around specific and partial demands as well as around the general call for socialist revolution. As you point out, you raise the demand for a constituent assembly in Iran.

You comment on our objection to the use of the terms “Zionism”, “the Zionists”, or “Zionism and imperialism” as synonyms for “the Israeli government”. “We will have to discuss what Zionism means in today’s world”.

Precisely! Historically, Zionism was an ideological project to build up a Jewish nation in Palestine and a state for that nation. The nation and the state have now existed for over 60 years. They are no longer a question of an ideological project to be approved or disapproved. “Zionism” now has no clear meaning.

The term “Zionism” is often used to throw the true and democratic idea that the existing Israeli-Jewish nation has rights into the same bag as aggressive Israel-chauvinist ideologies. Many, probably most, of the young Israeli Jews who refuse to serve in the Israeli army in the West Bank, and are jailed for it, consider themselves “Zionists”, because while opposing the occupation they support their right of their nation to have its own state. Equating “the Zionists” with the Israeli government is false.

You also write that “the AWL position does not fully recognise that an oppressed people with no state apparatus... cannot be equated with an oppressor nation with its state, army and so on”.

We do not equate them. Our frontline slogans are directed against the Israeli government: get out of the West Bank, concede Palestinian rights! We have often protested outside the Israeli embassy; we have had PLO speakers on our platforms.

Why do we mention Israeli-Jewish rights at all? In other national conflicts, no-one demands that the oppressor nation be suppressed or overrun. Algerian nationalists never demanded that France be wiped off the map. Kurdish nationalists do not question the national rights of the Farsi-speaking heartland of Iran. Tibetan nationalists do not want China erased.

However, the Arab states (which, in aggregate, greatly exceed Israel in population and wealth) have long demanded that Israel be wiped off the map. They have three times (though ineffectually) made war to try to achieve that. Two Arab states, Egypt and Jordan, now have peace

deals with Israel, and others signal that they will make peace if Israel concedes Palestinian self-determination; but in the meantime non-Arab Islamic states such as Iran have joined the demand that Israel be erased.

Many on the left (and on the right too!) respond to these governments’ threats against Israel not by denouncing the threats but by criticising the governments for not following through on the threats. We must differentiate.

The Stalinist states

We welcome your clarification that there has been no socialist revolution in China, and Yugoslavia, China, Cuba and so on have not been in transition to socialism.

You add: “if they were in any way ‘transitional’, then this was towards full capitalist restoration”.

They were capitalist before the Stalinist or Castroist revolutions. Then what? The mission of the ruling bureaucracies was to carry through a transition... from capitalism to “full capitalist restoration”?

This has meaning only in the terms of the old East European joke. “What is communism, comrade?” “Communism is the longest path from capitalism to capitalism”.

The term “transition” indicates that Yugoslavia, China, and Cuba were made into some other social formation in between times, from which they could then be “restored” to capitalism.

And the observation that the bureaucracies have developed the formations (China, the component parts of Yugoslavia) or are developing them (Cuba) towards a return to capitalist norms indicates that the new social formation was not a historic step forward beyond capitalism, but a detour within the world-historic epoch of capitalism.

That is what we think. We would add that the detour was a reactionary one, since it suppressed the most basic working-class, civil, and cultural rights for a whole epoch. The workers of East Germany suffered, not benefited, from being taken through that detour rather than going straight from capitalism to capitalism with their brothers and sisters in the West.

A full theoretical analysis of the Stalinist systems is yet to be written. Unlike most Trotskyist groups, AWL does not officially commit itself to a specific analysis. What we have voted on, what is an official AWL position, is a programmatic attitude: the Stalinist systems were and are reactionary detours within the historic epoch of capitalism, and their ruling bureaucracies were and are as much our class enemies as the capitalist classes of the West.

We continue our discussion on the theoretical analysis. Some of us, myself for example, argue that the Stalinist systems were and are a species of state capitalism. Others, the majority I’d guess, argue that they were and are better defined as bureaucratic collectivist. All of us are aware that the simple labels “state-capitalist” and “bureaucratic-collectivist” say little: there are many varieties of both “state-capitalist” and “bureaucratic-collectivist” theory, and some politically very different from ours. We are glad to find that the comrades of Marksist Tutum have an attitude to the Stalinist systems very similar to ours.

In your 1991 text you complain that: “Those who advocate the thesis of a new class society or social formation” beg the questions “where was this newly discovered soci-

ety heading? What type of relations of production were the maturing material conditions leading to?"

But you yourselves depict the Stalinist systems as "a new social formation"! Otherwise there could be no talk of "transition to full capitalist restoration". And you yourselves have given answers — answers similar to ours — to the questions: "where was this newly discovered society heading? What type of relations of production were the maturing material conditions leading to?"

If the Stalinist systems were not a new social formation, then they must have been a species of capitalism. You reject that idea: "As to those who claim that the Stalinists restored capitalism, albeit in a state dominated form, all evidence is to the contrary..."

For myself, I believe that the arguments you give against "state capitalist" theories can be and have been answered. We can leave that issue to future theoretical discussions. What is certain, for now, is that if you reject the idea that the Stalinist system were any species of capitalism, however aberrant, then that is only another way of saying that you recognise them as a new social formation.

You write that the Stalinist bureaucracy was "not a class". Even if you were right on that, it would show only that the Stalinist systems were an even newer sort of social formation than we might otherwise think — one in which previous rules about class structure ceased to operate — not that they failed to be a new social formation.

In the 1991 article you write that the "historic (but unconscious) mission" of the Stalinist bureaucracy was to "deliver the vast resources and market of the Soviet Union to the bourgeoisie". If you review what you yourselves have written about the other Stalinist states, that cannot be right.

The Russian bureaucracy converted Eastern Europe on its own model. If its mission was only to deliver the terrain to the bourgeoisie, it could have saved itself much trouble, and left the existing bourgeoisie in place. The militarised Stalinist formations (the cores of the future bureaucracies) which fought, and fought bravely, to take power in China, Yugoslavia, etc. did not do that in order to keep those countries for the bourgeoisie. If they had only wanted to do that, they could simply have supported Chiang Kai Shek or the Chetniks, and saved themselves many casualties.

For that matter, if the Russian Stalinist bureaucracy had wanted only to return the territory to the bourgeoisie, it again could have saved itself much trouble, and negotiated a deal with the Nepmen, kulaks, and emigre capitalists in the late 1920s instead of embarking on a huge and risky process of forced collectivisation and industrialisation.

The Stalinist bureaucracies, in all countries, created new social formations, but new social formations which were able to develop only detours within the world-historic epoch of capitalism.

The bureaucracies had a defined relation to the means of production: they monopolised them. They had a distinct economic status: the gap in standard of living between them and the workers was bigger than that between capitalists and workers in most countries. They were able to reproduce themselves as social groups from generation to generation (by advantages in education and job preference rather than through bequeathing individual wealth: social mobility was less in the USSR than in some West European states). They had a strong sense of collective identity.

This is not the place to repeat the discussion which we undertook in our book *The Fate of the Russian Revolution* of Trotsky's arguments in the 1930s against calling the Russian bureaucracy a ruling class. One thing, however, is clear. Those arguments rested heavily on the observation that the bureaucracy was acutely unstable and torn by frequent huge purges which reached right down into its depths. That ceased to be the case for the Russian bureaucracy from the start of World War 2, and was never the case for the other Stalinist bureaucracies. Individuals were purged within them, of course — Djilas, Beria, Deng, and so on — but then the fact that the Shah and his cronies were forced into exile does not mean that the Iranian capitalist class is not a class.

You write that the bureaucracies' policies showed "zigzags, halts and attempts at backtracking... blind step-by-step moves". To be a class, even a ruling class, is no guarantee of lucidity or consistency of policy! In fact the bureaucracies' policies, despite aberrations, on the whole showed more consistency and logic than many capitalist classes'. For an initial period they focused on building an autonomous heavy-industrial base for each country, through borrowed technology and the severest exploitation of the working class. Once that base was established, they tried to diversify through cautious extension of market mechanisms and external trade.

Like every class in history, the Stalinist bureaucracies had their special features. But even if you could make an argument that those special features exclude them from previous Marxist definitions of "class", that would solve nothing.

It would raise the question of whether it would be scientifically better to modify those previous Marxist definitions in the light of the unexpected new development, rather than to cling to them.

And if we didn't modify? Wouldn't we then need to coin a new term — "category", say — to cover all previous social classes, and also the Stalinist bureaucracies? If we then went back over all previous works of Marxist theory and substituted the word "category" for "class", we would have a much more lucid theory than if we reserved one word, "class", for non-Stalinist societies and had to use another word (what? caste?) for the Stalinist systems.

Imperialism

In other documents you have explained the different political conclusions that follow in a world of politically independent countries — in which, of course, the mistreatment of the economically weaker by the stronger continues — and the world of "classic" colonial imperialism.

We understand the conclusions of your new article in IIDIB 4 to be similar. The dividing line between "native" and "comprador" capitalism disappears. In place of the old ruling elites of the dependent countries, "made up of large landowners, merchants, and moneylenders", we have authentic bourgeoisies — bankers and factory owners. "Capitalism itself is in power".

We want, however, to flag up two points.

You write of "increased underdevelopment of the peripheral countries". That is not true. Development remains very uneven, with vast and expanding inequalities. But on the

whole capitalism in the “global South” is growing faster than in the “North”. Indeed, the residue from colonial relations that remained true a decade ago, when we published the article of ours on imperialism printed in IIDIB 6 — that South-South trade was growing more slowly than South-North trade — is no longer true. South-South trade is now on track to surpass North-South trade by 2030.

You write that the new bourgeoisies “were imposed by imperialism on society”, and you note elsewhere that you use “imperialism” as a synonym for “the USA and its allies”. But the bourgeoisies of what are now called the “emerging economies” came out of the capitalist development in those economies (which was, of course, often spurred by colonial or semi-colonial intervention). They were “imposed by imperialism” only in the same sense that e.g. the US bourgeoisie was “imposed on” the USA by Britain.

Taking a term used by the Marxists of Lenin’s and Trotsky’s era to describe a system, and adapting it to refer instead to particular states, is particularly unhelpful here. It obscures the development of what the comrades of Marxist Tutum, rightly we think, called “sub-imperialism”. Of course the poorer capitalist countries are “dominated by imperialism” in the sense that they are subordinated to a world market dominated by the richer capitalist countries and by multinational corporations based in those countries. That is a separate question from whether they are politically dominated by imperialism-aka-the-USA, and a separate question from whether they have their own imperialistic drives.

The equation of “against the USA” with “against imperialism” is often politically disorienting, as you can see from the case of those many leftists who support or semi-support the Iranian regime because it clashes with the USA.



A Brief History of Capitalist Development and the Working Class Movement in Turkey

Marxist Tutum

The process of the capitalist development of Turkey is a rather belated process with respect to the West. This historical delay flows from the peculiar socio-economic structure upon which Turkish capitalism developed. For this reason, in order to understand the peculiarities of Turkish capitalism, it is necessary to have an overview of the economic and social history of the Ottoman Empire that forms the historical background of modern Turkey today.

The Ottoman state was established at the beginning of the 14th century (in the year 1300). It became a genuine empire only after the conquest of Istanbul (1453). Examining the history of the Ottoman state, we can speak of three different periods, each having its own properties, covering the 600 years between its establishment and its collapse.

The first period, which lasted until 17th century, was a period of rise into a colossal empire in which the Ottoman State was expanding territorially, with conquests both in Asia and Europe. From the standpoint of its socio-economic and political structure, the Ottoman State reflected the traits of a classical Oriental despotism in this period, which took shape on the basis of an Asiatic mode of production.

The second period that lasted from 17th century to 19th was a period of faltering before the rising capitalist West. The land system, which constitutes the economic basis of the Ottoman despotism, starts to spoil; corruption and disorder increases in the administration of state; struggles for power among the ruling state class intensifies.

And finally the third period, covering the whole 19th century, is the period of collapse in which the empire began to dissolve and disintegrate in every sphere, gradually becoming a semi-colony of the West.

The Ottoman society and Asiatic mode of production

While investigating the historical evolution of pre-capitalist forms of property and production relations, Marx paid much attention to “Asiatic mode of production” and “Oriental despotism”. This socio-economic formation seen in the East was similar neither to the ancient slavery nor medieval feudal mode of production.

The common feature of ancient slavery and medieval feudalism, which appeared under certain historical conditions in the West, is that both these modes of production were based on individual private property. It was the noble private landowners who extracted the surplus created by the direct producers [slaves and serfs] working on the soil in these societies. The state both in slavery and in feudal society was a special instrument of oppression, organised to insure the big land owners’ rule over the direct producers.

Yet, when we look at the historical evolution of these Eastern societies, both in the property forms and the production relations, the formation of classes and a state devel-

oped rather differently because there was no individual-private property on land in these societies, and there was no private property owning class either, as existed in the West. In Eastern societies the property of all land and natural resources belonged to “the higher unity”, that is the state, at the head of which sits the despot. As the real owner of all land, the state was also the real owner of the surplus produced by the direct producers (agrarian communes). The despotic state was the centre of gravity for all agrarian communes and it appeared as “a holy father”, safeguarding the order before these communes. Being the ruling power of Eastern societies, the despotic state had three basic functions; war and conquest (foreign loot), taxes on land (domestic loot), and the public works, which are necessary for reproduction.

Marx examined the “Asiatic mode of production” and “Oriental despotism” in his *Grundrisse* and in *Capital*, and in his many writings on this subject assessed the history of Ottoman society as a history of Oriental despotism, similar to the histories of India, China, Iran and Russia. Indeed the Ottoman society, at least until the 19th century, constituted a typical example of Oriental despotism from the standpoint of both the mode of production and the structure of the state.

In the period of its founding and further expansion, the Ottoman state was to conquer many lands, which then became the property of the state, with both the Muslim and non-Muslim populations [direct producers] becoming the taxpayers bonded to the land [reaya]. A military bureaucracy [sipahi] was installed to carry out the administration of these lands.

The military bureaucracy in the Ottoman Empire was the most important and significant section of the state ruling class. Sipahi who represented the central authority (sultan-state) in the land they administered were responsible for management of the land, collecting the surplus (in the form of taxes) produced by reaya and looking after soldiers for the Ottoman army in case of war. This production relation established on land was very important for the Ottoman state, because its economy was based on war and land conquests and this production relationship enabled it to foster a big army.

No individual ruler, military or civil, in the Ottoman society could be the owner of land property in his own right. He was, consequently, unable to use the right of individual exploitation on producer peasants. The established status quo did not allow individuals to accumulate individual wealth and to use it as they wished. That means that there was no relationship similar either to a “seignior-serf” relationship or to a “patrician-slave” relationship in the Ottoman order. The central despotic structure of the Ottoman state and the overwhelming state ownership of landed property never allowed an independent force, that is seigniorisation, to develop against the central authority. The only possessor of the landed property and the sovereignty was just the monolithic state personified in the monarch (sultan).

Thus the system of exploitation in the Ottoman Empire was working collectively rather than individually and it was taking place through the state. The surplus taken from direct producers in the form of taxes was first gathered in the treasury and then distributed to the ruling state class

(the high officials in the palace, the top military-civil bureaucracy and the religious ulema) in the form of salaries and grants. At the top of this ruling class pyramid, organised in a highly centralised and hierarchic-bureaucratic manner, sits a despot (sultan), who is alleged to “rule over the land in the name of god and therefore promoted to a holy position”. The sultan is the symbol of the centralised and concentrated state power.

The social composition of Ottoman society consisted of a state ruling-class at the top and the direct producers at the bottom (agrarians and craftsmen). Both the agrarian communes and the craftsman guilds in towns were under tight control of the central state.

There was not, and could not be, a matured merchant class of Western type in the social organism of the Ottoman Empire. Almost all of the surplus was concentrated in the hands of the state and was used to satisfy the needs of the state. Thus there were no commodities left for private trade and free exchange. Under such conditions, accumulation of a merchant capital and formation of a merchant class within the system was impossible. The trade in Ottoman society consisted of long distance trade to satisfy the needs of the palace (of the despot), army and the high level military-civil bureaucracy, which inhabited the towns. However this kind of trade was performed, either by the officials charged by the state or by the merchants coming from abroad (who were not part of the Ottoman system). Thus, what the state did was the exchange of use-values to satisfy its needs rather than commodity trade.

As for the situation of producers at the bottom, who work in the agrarian communes that constitute the essential basis of the Ottoman economy, they were completely out of the economic and social life of the towns, and were living an isolated life. In these Asiatic agrarian communes, private property, commodity and exchange relations had never developed. A very low level of division of labour, the undivided unity of agriculture and crafts, and the satisfaction of every need from within the commune; all these kept these communities in a position of being self-sustaining and isolated economic units. Due to these features, the agrarian communes reproduced themselves and vegetated during hundreds of years under the Ottoman despotism.

Marx said that these Asiatic agrarian communes, innocent and harmless in appearance, formed the economic basis of Oriental despotism wherever they existed. The development of market and capitalist relations was impossible in a place where there was no private property and free exchange. Therefore, Marx pointed out, the inner dynamics that would develop capitalism were lacking in Eastern societies that were under the reign of an Asiatic mode of production, and that capitalism could break through only as a foreign agent in these societies.

The evolution of Ottoman society constitutes an outright contrast to the Western development. The state in the West has taken shape along with the evolution of society itself, that is, according to the supremacy of the social classes in economic relationship. Yet, on the contrary, in the Ottoman society the social relations and classes were moulded in the hands of the state.

The proportion of unproductive (parasitic) elements (officials in the palace, the top military and civil bureaucracy and the religious ulema) in the Ottoman society was bigger

than that in the medieval European feudal societies. Thus they were to play an essential part in the formation of the towns in Ottoman society. But these towns were not the "autonomous towns" that had formed independently from the central authority in the West. On the contrary, they were built by the state itself and were some kind of administrative headquarters where the state-class populate. The necessity of satisfying the needs of the ruling class led to the organisation of industry and trade in these towns. But both industry and trade developed as a function of state rather than a private activity of independent individuals. Thus the industrial and trade activity were under the absolute control of the state in Ottoman towns. This uncompromising statism prevented the formation of a market system, and the development of exchange as in the West, for a long time. Thus the process of primitive capital accumulation and development of capitalist relations that was developing in the West in the 16th and 17th centuries could not be experienced in the Ottoman society.

In this kind of social structure the inner dynamics that would allow capitalism to develop was absent. As Engels said in an article he wrote in 1890 in *Neue Zeit*: "In point of fact, Turkish, like all Oriental rule, is incompatible with Capitalist Society; the appropriated surplus-value is not safe from the hands of rapacious Satraps and Pashas; the first fundamental condition of profitable trading is wanting — security for the person and property of the merchant" (*Die auswärtige Politik der russischen Zarenthums, Die Neue Zeit* 8(1890), H.5, S.193).

Period of vacillation of Ottoman despotism

After the discovery of America and opening of new paths of trade, there was a process of rapid development of trade and of primitive accumulation of capital in Western Europe. Especially in Britain, where in the 16th and 17th centuries, the feudal production relations were dissolved, a new class (bourgeoisie) arose and the preconditions (manufacture) of the future industrial capitalism came into being. This period of mercantilism was accompanied by a policy of colonialism all over the world. This feverish process of capitalist development kept going on growing by leaps and bounds in 18th and 19th centuries.

Yet the situation of the Ottoman Empire was completely different in the same period. Because of its stagnant structure the Ottoman state lost its power before the developing West and entered a period of standstill, beginning from the 17th century. The Asiatic land system of the Ottomans began to disintegrate in this period. Absence of new land conquests, the declining importance of Eastern trade routes, increased smuggling, inadequacy of agrarian production etc., led to decreases in the revenues of the Ottoman state. At the beginning of the 17th century the expenditures of the Ottoman state had inflated to a level of three fold its revenues. Being gripped in such a financial shortage the Ottoman treasury must have immediately recourse to new sources of revenue. But there was no source to be squeezed other than the land revenues. In order to raise the revenues the state was compelled to offer its right to collect taxes for sale by way of competitive bidding. Thus taking the administration of the lands from the hands of its military bureaucracy (sipahi), the state began to hand

it over to private individuals who were called *multezim* (they were influential people who had accumulated individual wealth in some way or another). This was a very important development that would lead to the complete degeneration and dissolution of the Ottoman land system. So important, that the power to control the agrarian production and the surplus was changed. Now private individuals were replacing the state that had been directly expropriating the surplus in the agriculture, under the form of taxes. In this way new elements sharing the revenues of the state emerged. This situation would lead to the formation of new political forces alongside the state class (sultan and military-civil bureaucracy). After a while the property of the lands that essentially belonged to the state had de facto, though not de jure, passed to the hands of the *multezims*. Thus, along with the old Asiatic land system, based on state property, now a new land system (some kind of local despotism and landlordism), based on de facto property of private individuals (i.e. land usurpation) and relations of private exploitation had emerged. These influential people began to form their private armed forces with time and defy the central authority. From the 18th century on, the central authority (sultans) became increasingly desperate against this local despotism and its lords and was unable to overcome these centrifugal forces.

Other sections anxious to participate in obtaining the state owned lands were the high officials such as viziers, pashas, and provincial governors and the religious ulema, who were part of the state class itself. According to the Ottoman laws, these officials were prohibited from possessing individually, private land property. But the officials had found a solution to this obstacle. In the Ottoman Empire it was possible to allocate land to the "waqfs" (some sort of foundation) that were established for "religious charities" and "social solidarity", and the right to run the lands could be handed over to these waqfs. Having established such waqfs, the governors and pashas were able to get hold of the state owned lands through these waqfs. Thus the state owned lands began to be looted by the top state bureaucracy along with the local despots and lords in the provinces. In the economic history of Turkey this system of waqfs has played a very important role in looting the public property. Strangely enough, this system of waqfs has continued to exist in the history of the republic, and is even still in existence under the wings of the bourgeois state. Possessing assets of millions of dollars and hundreds of undertakings, these state waqfs, the relics of the Ottoman tradition, still remain, able to be plundered by the ruling bureaucracy. Of course the ones that suffered most from the spoilage of the Ottoman land system were the producers working on the soil (*reaya*). *Reaya* were formerly responsible only before the state and for paying the taxes, but now they were subjected to the merciless repression and exploitation of the local despots. Before long, this merciless repression and exploitation of local despots, landlords and usurer *multezims* (special tax collectors) became intolerable for the *reaya*. As a result of this transformation, the peasants left the soil and got unemployed in the 17th and 18th centuries. But because there was not an industrial development in the Ottoman system, capable of employing these masses ejected from the soil, they either formed gangs of bandits or went to the towns to form the unemployed herd

of idlers. In the remote regions, far from the centre of the Empire, a complete anarchy, disorder and chaos prevailed.

The process of dissolution

A more substantial dissolution in the traditional structure of the Ottoman Empire took place in the 19th century, through its relations with Western capitalism. This process ended with the Ottoman Empire becoming a semi-colony and its collapse. Therefore we can say that the crucial role in the final dissolution of the Ottoman Empire was played by Western capitalism, which was an external agent.

With the 19th century the Ottoman market was opened to Western capitalism. At the same time the dependence of the state on Western bankers through foreign debts increased. On the other hand, the railways and a network of communication were established in the same period, by the foreign capital as the sine qua non basis for the development of a capitalist market. Maritime transportation, shipbuilding, the opening of some mines and factories for military purpose, etc. are some other developments in this period. Alongside these processes measures were taken to develop the private landed property, together with a growth of a comprador bourgeoisie, primarily composed of non-Muslims around the seaports

At the beginning of 20th century when capitalism reached its imperialist stage, this long process of dissolution of the Ottoman Empire entered its last phase. In this phase, the Ottoman Empire became a semi-colony in the real sense of the word, just like Iran and China. For example the Ottoman Bank that had been established by the French capitalism, gradually began to function as a central bank, taking over the management of the Ottoman currency. Likewise, after the severe debt crises, the Ottoman treasury was handed over to an international council called Düyün-u Umumiye (the General Debts), which was comprised of the representatives of the Western states.

But the Ottoman ruling class did not accept this process, which amounted to a general decline, passively, neither did it act in a monolithic manner. To keep up they were compelled to introduce reforms like those in Tsarist Russia, to reinforce the state apparatus (most of all the army). All these developments led to the formation of roughly two wings within the Ottoman ruling class in general, which had opposite interests and views. Both these wings had the intention of saving the Ottoman state in their own ways. While one of them contended that this goal could be achieved by maintaining the old despotic traditions, the other one stood for the way of "Westernisation" and "modernisation". Having materialised as the Young Turk movement, this reformist wing established its independent political organisation under the name of the Committee for Union and Progress. After a long process of struggles and clashes, this wing managed to take power in 1908 and proclaimed a constitutional monarchy. Almost all the cadres who would later lead the establishment of the bourgeois republic came out of this movement and organisation.

The nationalist leadership of the Committee for Union and Progress reckoned that the remedy for salvation was to approach the rising German imperialism, and to side with it in the world war. The rising German imperialism had established, at the expense of its imperialist rivals, a great in-

fluence over the Ottoman Empire and condemned it to a financial slavery at the turn of the century. The Ottoman state entered the world war with its weak economy and feeble armed forces, and was defeated and ruined. After the war the imperialist forces occupied all the lands of the Empire, except a small region in the central Anatolia. This led to the sharpening of contradictions within the Ottoman ruling class, and hence the decisive breakaway of the wing that would lead the establishment of the bourgeois republic later.

The War of Independence and the foundation of the bourgeois republic: 1919-1923

The bourgeois republic was established in 1923, and this represented an historical turning point pertaining to the beginning of the development of capitalism in Turkey. For reasons we pointed out above, there was not a Western type capitalist development in the Ottoman society until the end of the First World War. Therefore a national bourgeoisie, as in the West, had not been developed adequately. Thus the officers of the Ottoman army were the only coherent force able to maintain the tradition of being the old "state class", and took upon themselves the leadership of the national independence struggle against the European imperialist, who were occupying Anatolia after the First World War. First among these Ottoman pashas was Mustafa Kemal, who set out to create a Western type capitalist nation-state in the liberated parts of Anatolia. Thus the historical mission of the national bourgeoisie was to be carried out by the Ottoman pashas!

The establishment of a bourgeois republic and the transition to capitalism in Turkey was being carried out in the imperialist age. This period was also a historic period in which the great October Revolution broke the imperialist-capitalist chain. Establishment of the power of the workers and peasants' soviets had immediately become a source of inspiration for the liberation of oppressed peoples. Therefore the national independence struggle in Turkey, a neighbour of the USSR, developed under the influence of two different tendencies: October revolution and Bolsheviks on the one hand and bourgeois nationalism on the other.

This resulted in two separate movements for independence against the occupying imperialists. First was the nationalist movement led by Kemal, which was composed of the officers of the Ottoman army, Anatolian merchant bourgeoisie and big landowners from Anatolia. The second one, which was called the Green Army, was under the influence of the revolution in Russia and the peasant soviets, and it waged essentially a guerrilla war, basing itself primarily on the peasantry. This movement was also, to some extent, in contact with the still young communist movement.

The nationalist movement led by the Ottoman pashas and bureaucrats achieved its aims through successfully exploiting the new world balances created at the end of the world war and by the existence of the Soviet Union. Although the imperialist powers occupied a large part of Anatolia, in fact they had been greatly weakened as a result of the world war. A great revolutionary unrest and revolt had arisen among the working class in Europe and also powerful movements of independence in the colonies had begun to rise. Moreover a revolutionary International had

been established under the leadership of the new revolutionary regime in Soviet Russia, which was trying to embrace and lead both these dynamics. Both the objective ground and the fear and threat caused by the Communist International and Soviet Union were disadvantageous factors weakening the ambitions of the imperialists. The nationalist leadership in Anatolia was skilful in stepping over this weakness of the imperialists, and at the same time in showing utmost zeal in toadying to the Soviet Union, and in getting vital financial and military aid from her.

The nationalist leadership, which behaved independently from the government in Istanbul under British occupation, created some sort of a situation of dual power, by establishing a new National Assembly and a government in Ankara as early as 1920. Yet even at this stage the nationalist movement led by Kemal started diplomatic contacts with British imperialism. In these contacts the British asked them to stay away from the Soviet Union, get rid of both the young communist movement and the guerrilla forces of the Green Army, composed of peasants. All these elements were liquidated at the turn of 1921, as the British had wished, and the Ankara government then achieved its aim of being invited to the conference held in London in February 1921.

Contrary to what is alleged, the regular army led by Kemal did not fight directly with the imperialist forces. After the London Conference Western occupation armies began to withdraw their forces from Anatolia. The so-called War of Independence was in fact a war against Armenians in the east and mostly against the Greek occupation in the west. Neither the British, who occupied Istanbul and its environs, nor the Italians who occupied the Aegean and the Mediterranean region, nor the French who occupied southern and south-eastern parts of Anatolia, were waged war against. Although there was a small-scale armed resistance against the French forces, we must remember that in reality those French troops were composed of Armenians.

After succeeding in defeating the Greeks (incidentally, the British gave up supporting the Greeks soon after the London Conference) in Western Anatolia, the government led by Mustafa Kemal in Ankara was recognised officially by the imperialist states, at the Lausanne Conference in 1923. With the proclamation of a republic (29 October 1923) three months after the Lausanne Agreement, which had been signed in July, the birth of the Turkish bourgeois republic on the Anatolian soil, replacing the ruined Ottoman Empire, was accomplished.

The Turkish bourgeoisie was very weak and cowardly in its attempt to establish the Republic. It was struggling for its national independence against the imperialist West on the one hand, and yet was fearful of carrying out the requirements of the bourgeois democratic revolution on the other hand, because it feared a people's movement in Anatolia similar to the Soviet revolution. That's why the Turkish bourgeoisie did not totally abolish the old despotic, Asiatic state traditions of the Ottomans. On the contrary, it has taken them all, and mixed them together and garnished them with a little republican sauce. So the democratic content of the new bourgeois republic established by Mustafa Kemal was very weak. On the other hand, its oppressive and totalitarian character was very apparent.

Thus the social and political reforms necessary for modern capitalism to develop in Turkey were carried out from

above, with Bismarckian methods! They were not the result of a radical bourgeois democratic revolution. The new bourgeois republic compromised with the landlords and shared the power with them. Therefore they followed a Prussian way of capitalist development until the 1960's. So the development of capitalism in Turkey has been an extremely belated, painful process.

The class base of the new political power was composed of the following elements: military-civil bureaucracy, which still maintained its traditional position (in the Ottoman fashion) of ruling class; merchant bourgeoisie; and big land owners in Anatolia. The hegemonic element in this ruling class block was the military-civil bureaucracy led by Kemal. The Kemalist power had already proclaimed, in the Economy Congress in 1923, that it would follow the capitalist way. By doing this the new government declared that it was in favour of a capitalist economy on the basis of liberal relations, and that it had no problem with the foreign capital. Accordingly, the Ankara government undertook responsibility for the Ottoman debts and gave assurances that during the six years ahead it would not touch the customs privileges and exemptions of the imperialist states that they had obtained in Ottoman times.

The founding of the Communist Party of Turkey

The Communist Party of Turkey (TKP) was founded in 1920 as a section of the Comintern, under the direct influence of the October revolution. Its founding congress was held in Baku under the auspices of the Bolsheviks. But after only one year, Mustafa Kemal's bourgeois nationalist movement, in agreement with British imperialism, was to carry out several conspiracies against the fledgling Turkish communist party. It was terrified at the prospects of the growth of the Turkish CP and the possibility of a worker-peasant revolution leading to a soviet type government. And in one conspiracy, 15 leading members of the CP, including the first secretary-general of the party, Mustafa Suphi, were killed on 28 January 1921 by being drowned in the dark waters of the Black Sea.

This page of history is a complete tragedy for Turkish communists. The bourgeois nationalist movement of Mustafa Kemal was following a hypocritical policy of secret agreements with imperialism to crush the Turkish communist movement, by resorting to intrigues and conspiracies, whilst at the same time it pretended to be an anti-imperialist, populist movement, seeking help from the Soviet Union. And unfortunately it was quite successful in its tactics. In fact this historical reality was a striking example of the mistake of trusting the bourgeoisie in national liberation movements and of regarding it as an ally. A similar example would be experienced by the Soviet Union in China with Chiang Kai-shek.

As a matter of fact, the socialist movement in Turkey could not understand, for a long time, the mission of the Bismarckian type bourgeois leader Mustafa Kemal, and the real character of Kemalism. The fundamental weakness of the great majority of the left in Turkey is a conception of anti-imperialism without an anti-capitalist content. That is why the left in Turkey considered Kemal's movement as really anti-imperialist for years, and even today there is sympathy for Kemalism among the left. Another misconception

of the left is to equate, more or less, the state capitalism of Kemalism with socialism. So the left movement in general considered as its duty to look after that statism, which nurtured the capitalism in Turkey and provided the native bourgeoisie with capital accumulation. What a pity! But it's the reality. This is a most important point. Because of this mistaken approach towards Kemalism, the Turkish left are blind in many spheres, particularly in the Kurdish question, where they have assumed a chauvinist attitude up until today.

The history of bourgeois republic in Turkey is the history of never-ending persecutions, prohibitions and state terror on the working class and socialist movement. For example, the Turkish Communist Party [TKP], the oldest left party of Turkey, during its 70 years history could legally work only 2 years. The rest was under conditions of illegality and secrecy.

The TKP followed the official Stalinist Soviet line throughout almost its whole existence. Although some opposition groups did emerge in the TKP in the past, none of them could break with Stalinism. There was only one exception to this in the history of the TKP, which was the "Workers' Opposition", organised in 1932 and supported by the great Turkish poet Nazım Hikmet. But this opposition group was accused of being Trotskyist, and liquidated by the Stalinist party leadership.

The first phase of the Kemalist power: 1923-1930

The economic policies pursued in the first years of the bourgeois state were liberal economic policies, in the framework of seeking to develop its relations with the Western capitalism. The main purpose of these policies was to create a national economy, by proceeding along capitalist development. But there was neither a national bourgeois class nor an adequate accumulation of capital in Turkey, to initiate the capitalist investments. Therefore, the centrality of the economic policies of the state during this period was to encourage and support private capitalist entrepreneurship. The young bourgeois state, established under the leadership of the Ottoman officers, wanted to prevent the capital that had been flowing to Europe, sent by the non-Muslim comprador bourgeois, from leaving Turkey. It was the native bourgeoisie in Turkey that should use this capital, and for investment in Turkey, rather than have it continue to flow to the West.

The political power remained largely in the hands of military-civil bureaucrat cadres during this period. These cadres were in a sense patronising the nascent national bourgeoisie. This is a peculiar aspect of the process of capitalist development in Turkey. Their aim was to create a bourgeois class and a bourgeois state of Western type. And the same state cadres established the Republican People's Party (CHP) for this purpose.

But despite both liberal policies and the enactment of encouraging laws, neither a capitalist industrial advancement nor a desired level of a "national" bourgeois class could be created. There was not an adequate amount of native capital accumulation for this, and there was not an inflow of foreign capital from the West either. Although the Kemalist general policy aimed at Westernisation (which means to become a capitalist country), the Western capitalist states still

approached with caution the young Turkish Republic. As a result, during this first phase, Turkey remained largely an "agrarian country" with pre-capitalist production relations.

In these first years some super-structural reforms, which formed the framework of capitalist development, were carried out. Pioneering this movement of reforms, Mustafa Kemal presented the aim of the young bourgeois republic as follows: "to reach the contemporary level of Western civilisation". But these "Westernisation" reforms, tried by Mustafa Kemal in the social sphere, were indeed difficult to be acquired by a society that is the continuation of Ottoman society. Moreover, for these reforms to be viable there must have been appropriate transformations on the base (industrialisation, land reform etc.). But these were the ones that Turkey lacked! Landlordism was still there, especially in Eastern and South-eastern parts (Turkish Kurdistan). However, rather than liquidating this landlordism, the Kemalist bureaucracy had allied itself with this landlordism. Therefore, most of the super-structural reforms in the social sphere remained as superficial reforms, that could not go beyond formal limits and that are "alien to the people".

The capitalist world crisis and the period of "state capitalism" in Turkey: 1930-1946

In the year 1930 the economic plight of the young Turkish Republic was not promising at all, and this was during the period of the outbreak of the deep crisis of the world capitalist system [1929-1933]. This crisis affected the Turkish economy through its foreign trade. Since the exports of Turkey were primarily based on agriculture, decreases in the prices of agricultural products lessened the revenues of both the state and the landowners. Turkish currency lost its value significantly in this period. Moreover, the Turkish treasury was in difficulty owing to Turkey commencing to pay the Ottoman debts at this unfortunate time! These debts devoured nearly one tenth of the budget.

These unfavourable conditions forced the young bourgeois state to develop a new economic strategy. And this strategy involved the direct intervention of the state on economic life (statism) to start the industrialisation and to build a national economy. And the mood of the military-civil bureaucrat cadres, who were in the hegemonic position in the state, was also similarly inclined to implement this strategy. Because they had already been in the position of a ruling class, now they found themselves as both the owner of the state and the protector of the society. The Kemalist bureaucracy believed that a "national" capitalism in Turkey could only be established through the state. The world conjuncture reinforced them in this view. The economy of the Soviet Union, a neighbouring state, which seemed to be based on statism, was not significantly influenced by the crisis, but on the contrary, kept on growing, and Turkey's leaders were noticing the growth of the USSR during this period.

Under these conditions the Turkish state started to prepare its first five year economic plans, similar in a sense to those in the Soviet Union. This period, extending from 1930 to 1946, was a period of absolute "statism" that existed in all spheres of the economy. The political life was under the one-party dictatorship of the official state party, the Republican People's Party (CHP), which represented the rule of

the bureaucracy. Although the name of the party included the word "People" it had nothing to do with the people and its interests. On the contrary, this party was the representative of the block of "bureaucracy-bourgeoisie-big landowners", against the working people.

Capitalism developed in this period under state management and guidance. Therefore there was no competitive period of capitalism in Turkey, contrary to the West. In this period state enterprises spread rapidly and their share of the industry in the economy doubled. Until 1950, banking, big industrial institutions, mining, energy, chemistry, transportation, communication, textile, alcoholic drinks, cigarette (tobacco) etc. were run by the state. The basic and long term aim of this practice of statism and "state capitalism", was to create the ground for the development of a native capitalist industry and a "national bourgeois" class, by means of a rapid capital accumulation, through overexploitation of labour inside the nation.

This statism in these years was implemented in an utmost authoritarian and repressive political framework, and the labouring masses were not permitted to have a say, nor there was a worthwhile improvement in their standards of life. But the state could implement this capitalist policy, based on overexploitation of labour, only under the veil of a general rhetoric of "populism" and "anti-imperialism". These practises of Kemalist power were supported by some of the leaders of the Communist Party of Turkey (TKP) that was by then a Stalinist party. They (among them was the then General Secretary of the party) wanted the party to tail end the Kemalist power. Some of these leaders left the party to publish a paper (Kadro, meaning cadre) in support of the statism of CHP. They applauded this state capitalism as a populist and anti-imperialist policy, disregarding the bourgeois nationalist class nature of Kemalist power. They defended the following idea: "Our statism is such a national statism that it is not based on any class and can be an example for the peoples of the world that wage an independence war." This profound illusion, that identifies statism with socialism and classless society, has remained alive in left movements in Turkey from that period, and still exists today!

After Mustafa Kemal's death in 1938, who had been previously proclaimed as "the eternal chief", there did not occur even the slightest change in the structure of the one-party dictatorship, and another ex-Ottoman pasha, Ismet Inonu, given the title of "national chief", rose to the presidency.

Although Turkey did not participate in the Second World War, the labouring masses were drawn into unprecedented misery, as if they were in a war. Steep increase in military expenditures, shrinkage of production by 5-6% on a yearly basis, recruitment of the productive population largely to the army, with proliferation of war profiteering all over the country, aggravated the misery and deprivation. Moreover the labouring masses were tormented under a system of severe repression and terror. And the minorities living in Turkey, such as Greeks, Armenians, Jews etc., also got their share of this repression. Their properties and assets were seized, many of them being exiled to labour camps as a result of operations like the one carried out under the title of "Tax on Wealth", reminiscent of Nazi Germany.

These conditions, together with economic and political

measures taken against some sections of the ruling class, aggravated the discontent and contradictions within society, preparing the way for the political splitting of the ruling class block in the aftermath of the war.

It should be noted that although Turkey did not take side in the war, she did not refrain from making her preparations to sell herself to the imperialist camp that would probably be victorious. For example, they let a racist fascist tendency develop within the state, which was in collaboration with the Nazis, just in case of a victory of Nazi Germany. Only after it became clear that Germany would be the loser was this current liquidated.

Post-war period: new world balances and Turkey (1946-1950)

Since Turkey followed an unreliable attitude during the Second World War, and did not take part in the war against Nazism alongside her European allies, her position was regarded as ambiguous by the allies. But once the defeat of Germany became certain, Turkey hypocritically declared war against Germany, in order to compensate for her slippery record. This declaration was made very late, just before the collapse of Germany itself.

In the new world juxtaposition, the Turkish ruling class was to find that it was facing a considerable changed world relationship. Liberal winds were blowing in Europe after the defeat of Fascism, and Turkey was thus compelled to introduce liberal measures of her own in the political sphere, in order to adapt to these changes. The Turkish bourgeoisie, faced with serious economic problems, was desperate for economic aid from Western capitalism, and in this context she was especially keen to approach the American Imperialism. However, appreciating that a one-party dictatorship could not be continued in this new world conjuncture, in 1946 Turkey was compelled to accept the establishment of new political parties.

In short, both the new circumstances all over the world, and the new relationship with the US imperialism, would have their repercussions on the political life in the coming period. As a result the CHP, which had been dominated by the bureaucracy, now ceased to be acceptable for some sections of the ruling class (especially for big landowners and merchants). Therefore the coalition that had been formed by the ruling classes around the CHP underwent an essential split. The big landowners and merchants left the CHP and formed the Democratic Party (DP). The creation of the DP was an essential step by the big landowners and merchants to free themselves from the political patronage of the Kemalist bureaucracy. And in 1950, with the coming to power of the Democrat Party, the one-party dictatorship of the CHP, that had lasted almost 30 years, came to an end. It also meant the closing of a period in the history of republic.

Having been sick of the severe oppression of the one-party dictatorship, the broad popular masses had voted for the Democratic Party in the 1950 elections, and carried it to the parliament with an overwhelming majority. Yet the DP, reflecting the interests of the big landowners and capitalists, was in fact a genuine party of the existing order. Since the regime did not permit any other alternatives to appear before the people, they clung to the DP to get rid of the CHP at all costs. The DP was used to channel the anger of

the masses by pretending to be in favour of democracy and liberties. Yet quite soon after its victory the DP proved that it was as capable of being as cruel an enemy of the working class and the left in general, as was the CHP during its long dictatorship.

In 1946 some left parties had also been established, along with the DP. For example, the TKP had created two legal socialist parties, because it was still illegal to create a political party with the word “communist” in its title. One of them was the “Socialist Workers and Peasants Party of Turkey” and the other was the “Socialist Party of Turkey”. However the cowardly and slippery Turkish bourgeoisie was soon to demonstrate how intolerant it was of left parties. With the Kemalist CHP still in power, whilst still claiming that liberal reforms were being carried out, it closed these two socialist parties just six months after their launch.

On the other hand, the Turkish working class also made use of the new political conjuncture after the war, and established legal unions. It was the first time that labour unions were permitted since the beginning of the Republic. Hundreds of local unions were established and thousands of workers were organised in these unions. It was clear that this union movement was going to flourish. But the Turkish bourgeoisie panicked. After just six months, the legal unions established by socialists and communists were closed and their officers were arrested. Thus the bourgeoisie managed to suppress this emerging union movement.

The history of the Turkish republic has been a history of hindrance, prohibition and oppression from the standpoint of the economic and social rights of the working class. A Labour Act, setting the legal framework of industrial relations, was passed only 13 years after the proclamation of the Republic in 1936. Nevertheless this law did not include the right to set up unions, collective bargaining or going on strike. Only in 1947 did the workers win the right to set-up unions. Even then the right to go on strike and collective bargaining were made illegal. These were achieved only in 1963, 40 years after the proclamation of a Republic. On the other hand, the bourgeois state did not permit any legal socialist parties until 1960. However, the articles that prohibited the “communist propaganda”, taken from Mussolini’s fascist penal code in 1936, were not abolished until 1990, and even after these specific acts were abolished, the articles taken from Mussolini’s penal code were incorporated into the new acts, containing the same prohibitions.

The period of Democratic Party rule: 1950-1960

As a result of an economic policy in favour of big landowners and import-export merchants, a frenzied capitalist development in agriculture took place in this period, and the increase in agricultural production resulted in a widening of the sources of foreign debt. This frantic development of agriculture and also a considerable advance in industrialisation was dependant on the development of the world economic conjuncture. The driving force of this development in 1950s was the opening of new lands to agriculture, and the use of advanced techniques in agriculture, that is, the development of capitalism in agriculture.

As for the developments in the political sphere, the liqui-

ation of the traditional military-civil bureaucrat cadres from the state administration – who were in favour of full-fledged intervention of the state in the economy – began in this period, when the political power passed to the coalition of merchant bourgeoisie and big land owners. But the conflict between the traditional block that was in favour of interventionism in the economy, and the bourgeois section that was in favour of liberalism, continued without reaching an accommodation.

Relations between Turkey and the US imperialism became much closer. Affiliation to NATO (1952), the US’s decision to include Turkey into the Marshall Plan, formation of CENTO etc., all these took place in this period. And also in this period Turkey actively supported the US’s cold war policy through sending troops to the Korean War, and became one of the closest allies of the US in the Middle East.

As for the class relations, the Turkish state sought to control the trade union movement because they considered that on the existing level of capitalist development it was not possible to stop the trade union movement of the working class other than through continued prohibitions and oppressive measures. Thus, with the guidance of the US, they had the Confederation of Turkish Labour Unions (Turk-İş) organised in 1952, which would operate under state control. This organisation had some semi-official status and sought to install an American style business trade unionism on the Turkish working class, plus liberal amounts of finance from the USA, with the Turkish Ministry of Labour playing midwife to its birth. It made great strides in recruiting the public sector workers into Turk-İs.

The period between 1950 and 1955 is a period of extreme liberalism. But it also prepared the preconditions for an economic and financial crisis that was on the horizon. The bourgeois government had increased the foreign debts to a great extent and followed a one-sided policy of investment, primarily in agricultural investments, counting on the revenues from agricultural exports. This suited the interests of the imperialist capital, with both the US and the European capitalist preferring to lending money with high interest rates, and making profit from selling their goods, instead of direct investments. And this would soon draw Turkey into a downright economic and financial impasse.

The first serious crisis of Turkish capitalism broke out in 1958. Both a financial and foreign debts crisis prepared the way for the overthrow of DP rule. Foreign trade deficit reached 60% of the total exports. The import of the necessary inputs for industry (machines, equipment, raw material) became impossible. Thus the investments decreased and the economy shrunk, and social expenditures were reduced. Finally, Turkey fell into such a position that she could not repay her foreign debts. Of course the labouring classes suffered the most from these developments. But on the other hand the conditions of the lower rank officers in the army and the other officials within other state departments were also worsened on a daily basis.

The DP continued to pump finance from state funds and banks to the big landowners, despite the economic crisis, yet it did not support the industrial capitalists adequately. Naturally this caused a reaction among the industrial bourgeoisie. Foolishly the DP also alienated the army by cutting the grants of the military bureaucracy and weakening their political influence.

The industrial bourgeoisie had had enough and was seeking a way to remove the domination of the big landowners. Coincidentally, the imperialists were also in favour of putting an end to the power of the big landowners, which was an obstacle to the capitalist development of Turkey. Imperialism now supported the implementing of a planned capitalist development, under the lead of the industrial bourgeoisie. But it was also clear that such an essential transformation in the economy could not be brought about whilst the DP ruled, because they were not in favour of such a development.

The new period opened by the Military Coup of May 27: 1960-1970

Many large student demonstrations erupted against the government in the last days of DP rule, giving rise to major contradictions within the urban middle and working classes, very soon to be followed by a coup by the middle and lower ranking officers. Not long after this coup the ex-Prime Minister Menderes and two of his prominent ministers were summarily tried and hanged. Whatever else it achieved, both the Turkish industrial bourgeoisie and imperialism welcomed this coup, because, whatever the intentions of these lower ranking officers, it was ultimately to their benefit, in the long term, that the coup had taken place.

In the opinion of these officers, they had carried out a revolution to defend and protect the liberties and institutions of the Republic, introduced by Atatürk, and against the undemocratic practices of the DP! Nevertheless, these “revolutionary” officers quickly outlined their real intentions, in the first political statement they made immediately after the coup: “We are respectful to all international treaties. We are loyal to NATO and CENTO.” Such a statement from a “revolutionary” junta must have quickened the hearts of the imperialists, assuring both the US and the Europeans that it was business as usual and that there was no need to worry!

Shortly after the coup, the CHP, the party created by Mustafa Kemal, was called on by the officers to take power. The CHP represented the urban bourgeoisie gathered around İş Bankası (meaning Business Bank) – which was, and still is, almost the biggest bank of Turkey, partly owned by CHP itself – and the bourgeois intelligentsia and military-civil bureaucracy. These circles wanted a planned capitalist industrialisation to be launched (they called it “mixed economy”), and also for foreign capital to be attracted. For this they founded a “state planning organisation”, to prepare a five year plan with the help of the imperialist West. Through these plans it was intended to carry out the liquidation of pre-capitalist production relations, a land reform and a transfer of resources from agriculture to the industry, which was basically a measure against the big landowners.

After this brief excitement, the regular routine of the parliamentary regime in Turkey began to operate, including the electoral process, and in 1965 the Justice Party [AP] came to power. Though it had been founded as an extension of the DP, now, unlike in the past, it also represented the industrial bourgeoisie. The AP followed the policy of giving priority to industry, especially to the assembly-line industry. This led to the inevitable growth in concentration

and centralisation of capital.

The year 1960 is an important turning point from the point of view of the development of both capitalism and also of the development of the working class movement, into a mass movement. A new constitution had been launched as a result of the military coup on 27th May 1960. A new period was opened, with the coming of a relative democratisation in both political and social life.

During the first 40 years of the republic, the native bourgeoisie flourished thanks to the capital accumulation supplied by state capitalism. And it started private industrial investments. The private capitalist industry developed by leaps and bounds in this period. And parallel with this, the working class began to grow rapidly and stir as well. In the 60's the whole society showed a tendency to prosper politically and culturally. All sections of the society began to set up its organisations, associations, co-operatives, etc. For the first time for 40 years the prohibited and suppressed leftist books began to be published publicly. The socialist ideas attracted attention of the broad intellectual sections. Although these developments began an unstructured process, with leaps and bounds, how belated a process it was compared to the history of the proletarian movements in European countries!

There were important developments concerning the working class movement after 1960. In 1961 a legal socialist party TIP (Workers Party of Turkey) was founded, which would become the first mass party in the history of the republic. It was founded by trade unionists at first and then joined by socialist intellectuals. Attracting immediately the attention of the active workers in the unions, from the very beginning TIP was very popular, both in the towns and in the rural areas. In 1965 the TIP achieved the election of 15 Members to Parliament, taking advantage of the more democratic system then available. These successes encouraged the workers, and in 1963 a Code of Strike and Collective Bargaining was won. The working class continued its struggles after 1963, encouraged by its successes. At this time there was only the state controlled confederation, Turk-İs, and it became quickly apparent that it was unable and unwilling to support the rising economic struggles of the working class. It proved itself alien to the cause of the workers, and very soon a strong opposition developed within the Turk-İs itself. The new generation of workers and their leaders were critical about the kind of unionism that is servile to the bourgeois state, under the guise of “supra-party and non-political unionism”, and they sought to open a new channel for the trade union struggle. Four unions (Maden-İs, Lastik-İs, Basın-İs, Gıda-İs) were expelled from Turk-İs and founded a new confederation, the DISK (Confederation of Revolutionary Workers' Unions) in February 1967. These unions had always been in the forefront of the struggles and organised particularly in the private sector.

The DISK became a centre of attraction in the union struggle all around Turkey, and also became a focus of the socialist circles working within the proletariat. And then another important turning point in the history of the Turkish working class was reached: the year 1968.

The actions of youth and the wave of general strikes in Europe in 1968 immediately influenced the youth in Turkey and mobilised them. And the wave of struggles of the

working class that begun at that time, also went beyond the legal framework of the bourgeoisie, increasing in intensity and breadth, using such tactics as factory occupations, boycotts, and outlawed strikes. Although they were developed spontaneously they all contained a revolutionary essence. These were immediately accompanied by the rising demands of the youth in favour of national independence and the demonstrations and land occupations of the peasants in the rural areas. The DISK got stronger, and also the workers belonging to Turk-Is began struggling to leave it and become members of the DISK.

In 1968 the only legal mass left party was TIP. Many left-ist circles and individuals, having different political tendencies were carrying out political work within this party. The illegal TKP, on the other hand, did not try a separate organisation until 1973 and it worked within TIP, too. In fact the majority of the leaders of TIP were the old TKP members. In spite of this, there was a complete gap between the old cadres of TKP and young generations, ignorant of the history of the TKP. Yet the TKP was the oldest, and in some senses the historical party of the Turkish working class, and continued to have an effect, directly or indirectly, on many political formations in Turkey, not excluding the TIP.

In the 60s, in the process of political mobilisation in Turkey, guerrillaism and Maoism began to be organised, particularly within the youth movement, as in many other countries at that time. Because of this and other factors, TIP, which had united various left fractions in its body at first, gradually began to experience a chronic split. Since then there has never been a comparable mass legal party of the working class in Turkey, as in the first growth period of TIP. An unfortunate but inevitable split took place within the TIP: guerrillaism and Maoism on the one side and the proletarian revolutionists who continued to defend working in the proletarian organisations, on the other side.

At this time the state started to organise the religious reactionary movements and direct them against workers and students, in order to suppress the rising left movement. The Arab-American oil companies – like ARAMCO – in the Middle East, directly financed these reactionary organisations.

The bourgeoisie began preparing to attack not only the trade union organisations of the working class, but also against union rights in general. The bourgeois government started the attack by bringing forward legislative measures to close the DISK, and the working class immediately responded with massive count-attacks. On June 15 and 16 a workers demonstration took place, involving over 150,000 workers in Istanbul and Izmit. These dates, June 15 and 16, 1970 are very significant dates in the history of struggle of the Turkish working class. The streets of Istanbul and Izmit, which are the cradle of the modern Turkish working class, were shaken by the strength and virility of the demonstrations during these two days. On those days, the bosses either hid themselves in their homes or immediately left Istanbul. The police and army attacked the workers with guns, resulting in 3 deaths and over 200 injured. Martial law was declared, prohibiting the masses from leaving their homes, implementing a virtual curfew! This curfew was to last for two months, in an attempt to suppress all demonstrations, but despite all these measures it could not break the resolve of the working class, now rising on an enthusi-

asm for change. Never before had there been such a strong left wing wind blowing.

1970-1980: The period of the monopolisation of capital in Turkey

This period is the period of the acceleration of the monopolisation in industry. The fusion of bank and industrial capital, the formation of finance-capital groups like in the West, and the rise of their role in politics, took place in this period. And the differentiation among the capitalist class developed further. For example, the big bourgeoisie that is based on bank and industrial capital created its own separate organisation, TUSIAD, which is now called “Club of Riches” in Turkey. It was established in 1970 and has become a decisive element on political power ever since.

The distinctive characteristic of capitalist development in this period is the implementation of an industrialisation model, based on foreign debts and “import substitution”. The concrete expression of this was the rapid development in assembly-line industry in the 1970s. For example, the automobile industry and durable consumer goods industry in Turkey were installed as assembly-line industries from the beginning. The components were imported from abroad and then assembled here. Those capitalists who invested in these industries made a huge capital accumulation in a short period of time through giving very low wages to the workers and increasing the rate of exploitation.

The Military Coup of 12 March 1971

Having considered that it had managed to pacify the working class through oppressive policies since the beginning of the republic, the Turkish bourgeoisie felt comfortable for a long period of time. However, when the bourgeoisie saw that the opposition of the working class was growing by leaps and bounds in a period of relative freedom, then it immediately began to develop a strategy to counteract this opposition. Thus, after only ten years, a second military coup came. The fact that the workers’ movement had developed by leaps and bounds and became increasingly militant, with the anti-American acts of the youth increasing etc., scared both the ruling classes in Turkey and the US imperialism. Moreover, the currents of anti-Americanism and national independence had also been developing within the army. The ruling powers found the solution in staging another military coup (12 March 1971) and closed the parliament. As it was first portrayed as a leftist coup, certain petit-bourgeois revolutionists were extremely misled. In fact it was a reactionary (rightist) coup, carried out under the guidance of the US!

In this period of extraordinarily oppressive, semi-military regimes, between 1971 and 1974, both the workers’ movement and the developing socialist movement received a harsh blow. The only legal party of the working class, TIP, was closed. The activities of the trade unions that were DISK affiliates, and the youth associations, were banned. Thousands of socialist intellectuals, workers, revolutionary youths, unionists etc. were arrested and tortured. The leftist movement was completely disintegrated and the organisations scattered. The Turkish bourgeois state hanged three leaders of the youth movement, who were university stu-

dents at the age of just above 20, on the charge of violating the constitution. The aim of the bourgeoisie was to intimidate the revolutionary youth and to isolate the socialists and revolutionaries from the people. The Turkish bourgeoisie turned this extraordinary political regime (oppressive police state practices) almost into a regular regime in order not to give a respite to the working class.

This period of the second military dictatorship lasted 3 years and it was the rehearsal of the bourgeoisie for the military fascist regime of September 12, 1980. It had drawn many lessons for its own sake, not least the introduction of new prohibitions to obstruct the development of the left. It changed the relatively more liberal Constitution of 1961 entirely, by abolishing all the democratic articles of the old constitution. It introduced new anti-socialist articles into the Penal Code. On the other hand, it dressed the People's Party, the 50-years old state party, to make it seem like a social democratic party, to mislead the working class. The architect of this manipulation was the Prime Minister Ecevit.

After 1973 and the rising workers' movement

In 1973 new elections were held and in 1974 Ecevit's seemingly left party came to power. A new political conjuncture was to begin, both for the bourgeoisie and the left. The left movement was now entirely disintegrated and split into tens of new organisations.

Ideologically and politically there were two main tendencies among this disintegrated left. First, the traditional Stalinist left tendency that aimed at organising among the working class and trade union movement, and followed the line of the official CPSU. Secondly, the revolutionary populist tendency, which was organised among the student youth, and the petty bourgeois layers of towns and provinces. Of course the ideological nurturing source of this tendency was also Stalinism. Their political line was embodied in Maoism and guerrillaism.

Unfortunately, there was not an internationalist communist tendency, organised on the basis of revolutionary Marxism, in that period. Although there were some tiny intellectual circles defending Trotsky's ideas and criticising Stalinism, they could not form an active political organisation among the left movement, or even a current of thought, because the Stalinist current was so very strong among the Turkish left movement, and the conception of "Stalinist state socialism" was so widely accepted among the socialist intellectuals. At the time, among the leftists of Turkey there was, and still is, a strong negative prejudice against Trotsky and Trotskyism. In their opinion Trotsky is an "enemy of Leninism", "an adventurist", "a traitor", etc.

In 1973 the TKP, which had existed only as an external bureau in Moscow for years, decided to organise anew on an illegal basis within the country. This was a big step forward for the TKP, but even with illegality it enjoyed a rapid and improving popularity. The principal reason for this was, that, beside its illegal organisation, it had also created a broad legal mass movement on its periphery, which was able to affect the trade union movement to a great extent, by dominating the leadership of DISK. Between 1970 and 1980 many members of this illegal TKP managed to be elected to the executive committees of many unions and legal mass organisations. Alongside there were also legal

associations of youth, teachers, technical employees, and women, having tens of thousands of members, founded directly under the party's control. And of course, there were hundreds of secret party cells composed of workers in the factories.

This method of organising by the TKP was, as a matter of fact, correct. Unfortunately, both its political line and leadership were entirely social reformist and class collaborationist. Because the leadership of the TKP was dependent on the Soviet bureaucracy, and followed the line decided by Moscow without challenge, the inevitable result was a split in the party, between those wishing to take a more revolutionary road and the reformist. At this time there were many legal and illegal socialist parties formed, but none of them had the effect on the workers movements as did the TKP.

In the period between 1970 and 1980 the growth in the working class movement was unprecedented, and at the same time, socialist ideas were spreading among the working class. The DISK, under the direction of the TKP, organised for the first time a mass rally in 1976 to celebrate the Mayday, which had been prohibited for the past 50 years, and driven almost entirely out of the proletariat's mind. 200 thousand people joined the rally and the trade union movement organised strikes, which were the most prolonged strikes in the history of Turkey. The most militant union of DISK, the union of metal workers, started the strikes, which covered 120 factories in the private sector, with 40 thousand workers, and would last 11 months. A wide and strong solidarity movement formed around these strikes. The youth movement, the movement of labouring women, intellectuals, etc. all kept solidarity watch around the strike tents, together with the striking workers, during the months of the strikes. The strikers' families were not isolated and left to themselves, but were offered support from all these groups.

The Turkish bourgeoisie were terrified at these events and correctly anticipated that even larger numbers would support the next Mayday celebrations. There was now a leftward swing in the industrial and political perspectives, the bourgeoisie could see it, and in May 1977 over 500 thousand people, from every section of society, took part in the Mayday celebrations. However the bourgeoisie had already taken its counter measures, preparing every kind of provocation in order to obstruct the moving leftwards of the masses, coinciding with the growth of the trade union power. In this counter-revolutionary action the Turkish bourgeoisie was aided by US imperialism's secret services.

This great Mayday rally was to witness a bloody provocation, staged by the American and Turkish secret services, when the 500 thousand demonstrators were subjected deliberately to volley fire by contra-guerrilla teams, placed in the surrounding buildings. The shooting, or being run over by special police vehicles, killed around 40 workers.

The memory of the Mayday of 1977 has never been forgotten in the minds of the workers and revolutionaries, and is an historical event, when the Turkish and American bourgeoisie set out to massacre workers and revolutionaries demonstrating their solidarity. And to celebrate the Mayday, whatever the circumstances, has become a tradition for the revolutionaries of Turkey.

The political atmosphere began to change after 1977 Mayday, with the bourgeoisie stepping up its counter-revolu-

tionary provocations. Once more, it was preparing to block the rising of the leftward movement with a military coup, as it always does. But before that, the false social democrat Bulent Ecevit and his party, the Republican People's Party (CHP), started anticommunist attacks. Ecevit was already preparing to break the influence of the TKP in DISK and to pacify DISK.

On the other hand, workers' leaders and revolutionaries began to be attacked by paramilitary-armed gangs, led by the fascist MHP (Nationalist Movement Party) in the cities, especially in the working class districts. They began to kill selectively the known figures in the revolutionary struggle and in the workers' movement. Death lists were being published in the fascist papers, naming the people being targeted for the next murder. And then political assassinations by these contra-guerrilla forces, trained by the CIA, began targeting important political figures. Everyday dozens of people were being killed. A complete mass pacification was intended in this way. In this process and in the counter-revolutionary campaign nearly 5,000 people were killed.

Eventually, they killed the president of DISK, Kemal Turkler, who was the leader of the metal workers. The metal workers are the leading section of the Turkish working class, and Kemal Turkler was well known and respected by the whole working class and his assassination meant an important turning point along the road to the military coup. There were over 500 thousand workers in his funeral from both Istanbul and outside Istanbul, unionised workers and non-unionised workers. But unfortunately the working class movement lacked a really revolutionary leadership, which would carry the struggle forward and resist the military coup. The bureaucratic leadership of the TKP was retreating to a position of complete surrender, compromising shamefully with the Ecevit government. The TKP tried to play the role of a priest pacifying the working class.

The military coup of September 12

Under these unfavourable circumstances the working class movement began to retreat, becoming pacified after Mayday 1977, and the result was a mixture of horror, pacifism and exhaustion on a mass scale, just as the putschists intended. The Turkish bourgeoisie had decided to control the economic and political crisis, intensified just before 1980, by tanks, cannons and guns. And in September 12, 1980 Turkey witnessed the third military coup. The Constitution and the parliament was abolished, all parties, including also the bourgeois parties, were closed. The party leaders were arrested, the DISK was shut down, unionists were arrested, and all the collective agreements signed by unions were cancelled, and then the workers wages were frozen. In the 12th September coup, the military dictatorship arrested tens of thousands of people who were then tortured, with hundreds killed, hanged and disabled. Here are some figures:

- 650 thousand people were arrested, the majority of them were tortured,
- Over 50 thousand people were forced to migrate to European countries as political immigrants,
- 700 death sentences were demanded, 480 of them sentenced to death, 216 were suspended in the parliament, 48

were hanged,

- Around 200 people were killed under torture,
- 23,677 association were banned.

The military coup of 12th September is the counter-revolutionary response of the bourgeoisie to the rising leftward movement of the working class and left political movements. This fascist military regime has not only saved the bourgeoisie from its impasse, but also restructured the bourgeois political order on reactionary bases, the effects of which are still continuing now. While an impression was being given that, with the calling of parliamentary elections in 1983, the military regime had ended, in reality nothing has changed in Turkey. Unable to smother their fear of the working class and the left, the bourgeoisie is still trying to maintain its oppressive regime by dressing it with a so-called parliament. But even this cannot save the bourgeois order from its impasse; on the contrary, it brings it deeper into the swamp. Now the bourgeoisie with its so-called parliamentary regime can neither deceive the people at home nor the world. Therefore it is struggling desperately in its economic, social and political crises.

In short, the various experiences of the past experienced by the European countries; rise and fall in the workers' movement, massacres, fascist attacks, bloody military dictatorships, etc.; all were experienced successively and intensively within the last 40 years in Turkey.

One of the objectives of the 12 September regime has been to surpass the domestic market oriented capital accumulation regime, which was prevalent until the 80s. The "24 January Decrees" that were the symbol of the military regime in the economic sphere, have given way to a new economic structuring, oriented towards exports. The Ozal line (the Turkish version of Thatcherism) that overturned all obstacles to restructuring, has taken many serious steps towards the integration of Turkey to imperialism. One of these steps is the question of membership to the EU, which is still a big problem.

The development of capitalism in Turkey took a different path from the classical path in the West. It is not the civil political forces that marked the foundation of the bourgeois republic, but mainly the military bureaucracy. For this reason the bourgeois regime in this land has never worked like the bourgeois democracy in the West. Whenever felt in trouble in the face of any escalation of the struggle of the working class and the toiling masses, the bourgeoisie has called on the military to its rescue and abandoned the political arena to an extra-ordinary form of regime wherein the military rules supreme. It was also the case when the bourgeoisie carried on its affairs taking refuge behind its traditional saviour, i.e. the military, and the military-fascist regime throughout the period of feverish structural change of Turkish capitalism in the 1980's. It is common place that the military tutelage regime which constitutes the peculiarity of Turkish political life has by no means arisen recently.

In Western countries, which are the classical terrain of capitalist development, the political sphere has taken shape and served as a means to develop capitalist private property and civil society as an expression of it. But in Turkey the traditional bourgeois political sphere has generally been hostile to civil society and supported only a kind of capitalist process of development which is under state protection. This mode and structuring of politics which is an extension

of the tradition of despotic state tradition has increasingly become hindrance to changing needs of Turkish capitalism and the new process underway.

The need to overcome this hindrance is the real motive behind the fact that certain sections of the bourgeoisie in Turkey has begun to defend civil politics, which is very late in comparison to the Western countries. On the same historical ground, let alone the fact that Turkish capitalism has been unable to create a Social-Democratic Party, it has not even given chance for a liberal tendency to develop in the political sphere.

In fact it is only after structural economic change carried out under extra-ordinary regimes in the wake of 1980 that the bourgeois circles took up and promoted these issues in the form of debates. It is quite opportune here to remind our analyses on this aspect of the process going on in Turkey. (For an extensive reading see E.Çağlı, *Bonapartizm-den Faşizme [From Bonapartism to Fascism]*)

When we look into the period preceding the 12 September military-fascist coup we see that the big bourgeoisie with its various elements in manufacturing, commerce, banking etc. was now more strengthened and fully established in a synthesis of finance-capital. 1980 is a crucial turning point which sets the scene for finance-capital to force all realms of life under its hegemony through its octopus-like tentacles and the long-craved leap forward towards foreign markets.

At this turning point big capital made its preparations for a fully-fledged blow to overcome the hindrances in its way to accomplish a huge capitalist breakthrough inside and go outside at full speed to foreign markets. From the standpoint of finance-capital which has now fully grown and become hegemonic it became inevitable to overcome the bottleneck created by the mode of accumulation based on domestic market and carry out structural changes. Because, coupled with the tendency of recession in world capitalism at the time, the structural crisis of Turkish capitalism created by its long-time autarchic mode of operation now became mature and the heap of problems reached to great dimensions as the solution had been delayed.

Because of the severe tension between its quest for a breakthrough and the existing situation, big capital went into offensive in all fronts, economic, political, etc. And while it started its move of structural change by the January 24 Decisions to remove the hindrances on its way, on the other hand it aimed to stop the rise of the working class movement and end the revolutionary situation that threatened the bourgeois order through the military regime of 12 September. The 12 September fascism was a serious blow hard to recover from, resulting in the working class being atomized, intimidated and made deeply fearful of organized struggle.

The period after 12 September 1980

The role of the military in the political life of Turkey, which had already been a major one, has become more intense and consolidated with the 12 September regime. With the blows inflicted by the military bureaucracy to the parliamentary regime and the new legislation brought by it (the 1982 constitution being the foremost which is still in effect) they aimed to construct such a military dictatorship

that would guarantee the role of the military in political life as if almost eternally. This situation has resulted in a strengthened position of the military chiefs in politics that has been going on for so many years despite the fact that by 1983 elections the military junta seemingly abandoned power, leaving it to parliament.

Although the bloody military dictatorship of September 12 — which was portrayed as a mild military regime in the West — has begun to dissolve with time, its legacy continues today. For example, the code of laws installed by the military junta is still basically in force, although some amendments to the constitution have been made recently.

Another important fact besides all these is that the military-despotic aspect of the Turkish state has been strengthened more and more during the period of the national liberation struggle of the Kurdish people in the Turkish part of Kurdistan.

During this war, waged by the Turkish army against Kurdish national resistance, thirty thousand Kurds have been killed, ten thousand have been put in jail, thousands have been tortured, hundreds of thousands of Kurdish peasants have been forcibly evicted from their homelands and their villages have been burned. Forced to migrate to the big cities, these people have been condemned to unemployment and hunger.

After 1983 there was a kind of bourgeois rule with a parliamentary mechanism on the one hand and those institutions and practices established by the extraordinary regime on the other hand, which on the whole was a freak of nature, up until the general elections of 2002. In other words the Turkish parliamentary system, which already had a crippled democratic content in comparison to the Western European examples, was much more crippled due to the impact of the 12 September regime up until the elections on 3 November 2002. And broad popular masses taught a lesson to those political parties whom they see as representatives of the statist, oppressing and pro-status quo forces by bringing AKP to power.

In the aftermath of the 1983 parliamentary elections when neo-liberal winds were blown throughout the world Özal was at the steering wheel of economy. He was now the prime-minister and had been the architect of the January 24 Decisions. And the rules of the economy that had been in the list of untouchables for long were changed according to the demands of TÜSİAD. For instance nationalist and protective measures such as the law that protects the Turkish currency was abolished and the regime of foreign trade was liberalised. Under Özal, at the expense of decomposing society, Turkish capitalism underwent a structural change (going international, a deeper integration into imperialist system) in the interests of finance-capital.

Turkey's peculiarities are no secret. Military chiefs have always been at the centre of politics which is unprecedented in European countries. This military bureaucracy has always regarded bourgeois civil attempts to lessen its role in politics as a domestic threat to the regime and has taken a stand against such attempts. When we consider the period since 1980 it is in a sense indeed difficult to pinpoint when the extraordinary mode of rule of the bourgeoisie ends and when the ordinary bourgeois parliamentary regime begins in Turkey, which is different from European countries.

Hence after 1983 we had a kind of bourgeois rule with a parliamentary mechanism on the one hand and those institutions and practices established by the extraordinary regime on the other hand, which on the whole was a freak of nature, up until the general elections of 2002. In other words the Turkish parliamentary system, which already had a crippled democratic content in comparison to the Western European examples, was much more crippled due to the impact of the 12 September regime up until the elections on 3 November 2002. And broad popular masses taught a lesson to those political parties whom they see as representatives of the statist, oppressing and pro-status quo forces by bringing AKP to power.

While these times seem to have gone it must not be forgotten that the big bourgeoisie and its organisations like TUSIAD were the main supporters of the fascist dictatorship headed by the military junta and subsequently the Bonapartist regime under Ozal. These forces watched in happiness and submission the moves carried out by the extraordinary regimes to open up the economy and suppress the revolutionary movement and the workers' movement.

There are important issues not to be overlooked when we discuss the 12 September regime. The end of fascism in Turkey does not resemble the processes in Spain, Greece, Portugal or some Latin American countries. There was a blow coming from below in these countries when the fascist dictatorships got weakened, which was not the case in Turkey. Likewise, there were other things that were lacked in Turkey which happened in those countries, such as a mass movement of toilers, revolutionary uprisings or feverish mobilisation of political forces to divert such a kind of rise from the road of revolution and revive bourgeois democracy.

In cases where masses revolted to overthrow the fascist military dictatorship, the putschist generals were brought to the court with the force of the wave of revolt. But the fascist putschists in Turkey have shifted to their comfortable resort places with swollen wallets obtained thanks to state posts.

Speaking of the past, there is another important fact not to be forgotten. While the fascist regime was in the process of being liquidated the bourgeois order in Turkey began to be rocked by the national liberation movement of the oppressed Kurdish nation. Coward and cruel Turkish bourgeoisie did not speak of democracy and speak up for a long time with the hope that its holy army would suppress this movement. However the surfacing of Kurdish question, which the Turkish state had refrained to face thanks to the bloody policy of suppression for many years, changed all given political balances and paradigms, and worked as a historical-social catalyst.

Complaints of big capital organisations about the military tutelage regime that marked the political history of the country have begun to surface only after this regime began to act as a hindrance for their interests. The fact that voices have started to be heard from among the bourgeoisie arguing for a European model of bourgeois democracy in Turkey is an expression of this fact. There is also a tendency of political liberalism flourishing in this terrain with certain writers and publications taking the lead.

There is no doubt that when groups of big capital speak of democratisation what they mean is creation of a political

atmosphere that would save them from autarchy and enable them to open up towards outside world. And the extent to which they are interested in certain grave problems that have turned into gangrene is determined by that. This kind of class interests lie behind the "democratisation" drive pursued by the TUSIAD bourgeoisie, which is completely geared to the EU and extremely inconsistent.

The kind of wider democracy that could only be achieved through the struggle of the working class, revolutionaries, Kurdish people is no doubt ruled out of the content of the "democratisation" package of the big bourgeoisie! On the contrary, the attitude of the big capital circles on the democratic openings is extremely shifty and erratic due to the class worries for a possible rise of mass struggles for these demands. In any case it is completely misplaced to expect an extensive and consistent attitude from a pure big capital organisation like TUSIAD.

TUSIAD still has a shifty attitude and frequently changes discourse according to the situation of the anti-system struggle and the conjunctural priorities of the infighting going on within the bourgeoisie. Liberal left columnists, on the other hand, expect a determined and consistent attitude from TUSIAD over democratic reforms. Yet nowhere on earth organisations of big capital have such an attitude over these kinds of issues. They need democracy only as long as, and in so far as, it guarantees and increases their profits. It cannot be overlooked, however, that the positions of liberal left writers who have been pursuing a persistent bourgeois democratic agenda and the positions of the organisations of big capital over the "democratic solution" do not completely coincide.

For left liberals the struggle for political democracy that would result in a bourgeois parliamentary system in Turkey in the model of the West is a very important matter of principle. For big capital, however, implementation of certain "democratisation" packages can become urgent only depending on time and circumstances (mostly with pressure from abroad!). But there is a negative side to be emphasized in left liberals' attitude as well.

Left liberals distort the consciousness of working masses by preaching overconfidence to the demands of "democratisation" on the part of the organisations of big capital like TUSIAD. To spread the illusion that democracy could be brought by big capital obscures the fact that workers and the Turkish and Kurdish poor need to fight to achieve a wider democracy. Big capital, on the other hand, acting on its own class interests by its nature, makes its way without paying so much attention to what left liberals say.

Problems such as the liquidation of the military tutelage regime and democratisation of Turkish political landscape have become items on the agenda of big capital in connection with its drive for going international and economic exigencies. Likewise, to find a solution to the Kurdish question and Cyprus question has become the agenda of the big capital due to the factors like Turkey's drive to join the EU or undertake new missions in the Middle East in collaboration with the USA.

But successive bourgeois coalition governments before the general elections of 2002 did not solve these problems. Actually they turned these problems into deadlocks in many respects. And these problems, aggravated as they are, again came out as problems on the table to be solved by

AKP which came to power single-handedly after 2002 elections with promises to bring a solution. The first and second terms of AKP governments seem to constitute a new period in which these problems have started to be solved.

However, as we explained above, the relationship between economy and politics in Turkey has peculiar aspects in comparison to the Western countries. As explained by the course of historical development a military tutelage system based on the military and civil bureaucracy has taken shape in this land and continued its influence. As a consequence of this situation the military-guided bourgeois political landscape in Turkey, unlike the Western capitalist countries, has created peculiar redlines and points of resistance incompatible with the exigencies of the economy.

Because of the despotic-statist tradition Turkey's prevailing official history is quite different in comparison to the western countries. There are serious differences between official discourse and facts in this country in terms of even naming and analysing things in bourgeois political arena. For instance, if you look at the official discourse, he who defends Kemalist secularism is regarded as modern, democrat even revolutionary. Yet, this line which is represented for many years by the military-civil bureaucracy and the state party, i.e. the CHP, in politics, is pro-status quo and politically reactionary.

And those "out-of-centre" sections who have been constantly tried to be kept away from political life by the Kemalist bureaucracy who branded them "reactionary" for many years, created a political current and forces that want an end to the military tutelage regime and defend liberalism to that extent. Moreover, those political parties, the main example being the Democratic Party (DP) of the 1950's and AKP the most recent one, which contain this feature have received overwhelming majority votes and formed bourgeois governments.

It is from this perspective that we need to look at today's realities. True, military-civil bureaucracy is pro-status quo and reactionary. And the AKP exhibits a liberal political quality with its apparently populist aspects vis-à-vis Kemalist state-worshipping and opposition to traditional statist status quo. With these qualities AKP has overwhelmingly outflanked the defunct statist parties like CHP which are exposed in political arena. And on the basis of the same qualities it managed to present itself as liberal-democrat and on the side of poor popular masses. It goes without saying that all these appearances are but illusions.

Here is the fact of the matter: had there not been a peculiar question as military tutelage regime in Turkey the lack of bourgeois democratic notions and political liberalism on the part of the AKP and political circles that rely on it would easily be revealed. AKP is not the representative or protector of the working masses but a bourgeois party proper. And a genuine party of big capital voicing the interests of nascent groups of capital thrived on the basis of a wild exploitation of the working class.

These nascent groups of big capital and their political spokesmen or representatives form those bourgeois forces craving for imperialist expansionism in the region along with the accompanying theses of neo-Ottomanism now popular. On the other hand these imperial ambitions cannot simply be regarded as an empty reflection of nostalgia. Despite the intense infighting going on within the ruling

class, the economic driving forces behind this ambition for expansion have made the AKP government proceed a long way towards integration into the world economy. No matter what adverse reactions AKP receive on the part of would-be secularist groups of big capital and those who support military tutelage regime, it is the AKP government that eventually managed to represent a bigger scale Turkish capitalism overall.

The issue of "strategic partnership" which has been recently voiced also by the US ruling circles has got a real substance within the framework of the role Turkey is considered to play. AKP presents and upholds this situation as a demonstration of its success. This attitude is an indication of Turkey's ambition to consolidate its sub-imperialist position.

AKP and its milieu are now proud of the process of Turkey's transformation into a sub-imperialist power ceasing to be a peripheral country. As a matter of fact this process actually began in the Özal period. The new war of division stretching out from Balkans to the Middle East and Turkic republics that began with the collapse of the Soviet Union coincided with the now sub-imperialist Turkey's plans for expansion. And the ideological disguise of the new bourgeois sections' move for expansion over these regions has become neo-Ottomanism.

Turkey, which was once an underdeveloped capitalist country, became one of the medium-level developed capitalist countries as a result of feverish capitalist development after 1960. And after 1980 there was a process of feverish structural change in the direction of opening up towards outside world under extraordinary bourgeois regimes which created a nearly trouble-free environment for capital by repressing the working class and toiling masses. In consequence Turkey climbed upwards among medium-level capitalist countries and became a sub-imperialist country.

It is crucial to understand correctly the change the capitalist countries such as Turkey have passed through within the global workings of capitalism. Although dependent on imperialist powers Turkey has now become a sub-imperialist country where capitalism has developed with leaps and bounds. As a consequence of this process of change the bourgeoisie in Turkey has been experiencing pains of a skin change. The infighting within the bourgeois power bloc that has been going on for long is a reflection of this. Today the Turkish bourgeoisie is basically divided into two in terms of perceiving the outstanding problems in Turkish and world politics and thus developing corresponding political attitudes.

The general rule is undoubtedly is that economic base and economic needs are in the final analysis decisive. However to break the traditional political crust in Turkey and establish a new political landscape compatible with the global economy comes about in an extremely belated, troubled and conflicted way. We can summarise the developments along this way in a few points as conclusion.

First, although these economic motives put a strong stamp over the last period of Turkey the tension in the political sphere is still going on. Although the party that stands for the military tutelage regime is objectively losing ground, the political infighting between them and the liberal forces that stand for demilitarisation has not been decisively concluded yet.

Second, given Turkey's realities, it is not a bad but a good thing that there are political forces standing for bourgeois democracy such as left liberals etc. in the political arena, although they do not ultimately go beyond the bourgeois frame.

Third, it is a positive step in this land to demand a normalisation, in a bourgeois sense, of the political landscape which has been for many years under direct command or indirect shadow of military tutelage regime. But that left liberals present it in an exaggerated way by, for instance, speaking of "civil revolution", "democracy revolution" etc., should not be tolerated.

Forth, while such a change is a positive thing, given the realities of Turkey, it should not be forgotten that it is extremely belated. In a world where capitalism is rocked by crises and thus even the framework of traditional bourgeois democracies is narrowed, it is extremely dangerous to create an illusion of "bourgeois democracy" to work smoothly.

Fifth, and last, the "democratisation" brought forward onto the agenda of Turkey and demanded from the government of AKP takes its motivation, including the position of left liberals, largely from big capital's need for going global. Yet what is needed today is a kind of struggle for democracy which takes its *raison d'être*, its legitimacy and strength from the revolutionary struggle of the working class, toiling masses and Kurdish poor... Moreover, as we try to emphasize in every occasion, regardless of the kind or content, only those gains achieved and protected through organised struggle can be lasting!



The revolutionary left in Australia

Riki Lane

The RSP (Revolutionary Socialist Party, a splinter from what was the DSP and is now the Socialist Alliance) merged at Easter into Socialist Alternative. S Alt held a joint public meeting with Socialist Alliance in Melbourne recently to discuss further possibilities of unity or at least collaboration.

Workers' Liberty, for our part, has written to S Alt thanking them for their cooperation in the defence campaign for our comrade Bob Carnegie, and saying that we want more practical collaboration between our group and theirs. S Alt has agreed, and we are discussing a series of areas of activity.

We think — and S Alt, in their response to us, agreed — that at present the political differences between Workers' Liberty and S Alt make a merger impractical.

It is not that these differences, ranging from different views of the very purpose of a revolutionary party to specific arguments about Israel-Palestine, rule out unity in principle; rather, that a merger of two small groups with such differences would lead to such a consumption of energy and time by debate as to make the merger reduce rather than boost external activity.

Better collaborate and debate as separate groups.

Mick Armstrong of S Alt opened the Melbourne meeting. The scene, he said, is set by thirty years of attacks on the Australian working class, with the ALP at the forefront of those attacks rather than resisting them.

And the Greens? Propping up the Gillard government.

This underlines need for a large socialist fighting force, particularly as a catalyst for a class-struggle current in the unions.

One small but important step would be for existing socialist forces to get together and lay the basis for a fighting alternative. The issues that have divided the movement are not irrelevant, or things not to be talked about. But they don't rule out unity, or at least exploring the possibility of unity.

If two years ago someone had predicted the RSP/ S Alt merger, we would have asked: what have you been smoking. But it has happened, and with no abandonment of strongly held opinions.

The programmatic basis for unity does not need to go into every detail, just to cover some main points.

One, get rid of capitalism, not just get a few reforms.

Two, self-emancipation of working class. Three, liberation of all the oppressed. Four, an environmentally sustainable economy.

Unity needs more than a piece of paper. It has to be made in practice, by training members in Marxist politics, intervening, establishing a democratic party with thorough debate and ample room for minority positions.

Syriza is an inspiring model. But the basis does not exist in Australia for large numbers of revolutionaries and reformists to unite in one organisation. There is no large radical reformist organisation for revolutionaries to merge

with. But the coming-together of small revolutionary forces is possible.

Unity now is important for the future when more opportunities open up. We can't expect big turnaround in struggle here soon, but there are some openings.

The unity process can inspire people to be involved.

We should push on, not leave unity for the never never land of five years' time.

Sue Bolton spoke for the Socialist Alliance. That union leaders in Australia are looking to Katter, and that the right as well as the left is growing in Greece, shows the urgent need for the left to put forward a credible alternative. The left has to go beyond propaganda to put forward demands that can attract workers into struggle.

Climate change is an issue which affects the working class. We should phase out fossil fuel industries, but workers need guaranteed alternative jobs, and we won't get that under capitalism.

In the 1970s there was a significant left in the ALP. It flooded out in the 1980s. Very few joined socialist groups. There is still a large pool of ex-members or disillusioned members of the ALP and Greens, many of them repelled by sectarianism of the existing left groups. Orienting towards those people does not mean softening our politics, but it does mean an effort to explain.

The Socialist Alliance was always revolutionary in its politics, although that was not always explicit. It has always been explicitly socialist. SA's recent national conference altered its document "Towards a socialist Australia" to be explicit about the need for revolution.

SA has never made agreement with Marxism a condition for membership, but has always promoted the study of Marxism. We need a programme and platform that are clear, but also accessible and in modern language.

And we need a weekly paper. Green Left Weekly is a broad rather than a party paper, but still builds SA.

We should stand in elections, but not be electoralist.

Struggle is the only way to change society, even if you win government. In Venezuela, said Sue, there is a revolutionary government at the head of a capitalist state.

But elections provide an opportunity to make our programme more concrete, with clear demands that point away from neo-liberalism.

Left unity is a necessary step towards breaking workers from the ALP. SA/ SAlt unity would be big step forward, but it would need to be a new organisation, not the absorption of one by the other.

SA politics has been based on working together around the issues of the day. S Alt has shaped itself round a more extensive programme. We don't need to agree on everything. We can build on the involvement in campaigns of both groups.

For our part, as Workers' Liberty, we hope the talks between S Alt and SA lead to joint practical steps to build the working-class movement. One thing that could be done now is collaboration in the current EB and anti-cuts campaign of the NTEU, a union where there is a very particular relation of forces between the left and the officials.

We hope also that S Alt and SA will openly debate the big political questions, and involve the rest of the left in that debate. S Alt and SA are the two biggest groups on the socialist left, but there are others. S Alt and SA have a respon-

sibility to reach out to other groups, for example to Solidarity and Socialist Party, and engage them in debate on controversial issues like 457 visas, local council electoral strategies etc.

Appendix: what sort of platform?

Chris Reynolds

Socialist Alternative has adopted a new Statement of Principles, to form the programmatic basis of the merger into S Alt of the RSP. Extracts are below, and the full text is at bit.ly/sa-rsp.

These notes will review some issues with the statement in the light of discussions at S Alt's Easter event in Melbourne.

This is not the first merger between left organisations from different backgrounds. Workers' Liberty in Britain has a history which includes two mergers with groupings from backgrounds different from that of our main forerunner, the "Cannonite" Workers' Fight group of the 1960s. Those were with the IS Left Faction (from a "Cliffite" background, in 1976), and with the old WSL (from a "Healyite" background, in 1981).

In both cases the mergers were prepared for by extensive political discussions- minuted, and with the minutes distributed to all members of the groups which were merging. At the end of those discussions, we drafted merger platforms which codified quite fully the political points on which we agreed, with a focus on practical class struggle policy for now, and explicitly listed the remaining disagreements and how we proposed to handle them.

S Alt and RSP instead chose to draft a generic statement of common-stock ideas picked out of the history of the Trotskyist movement.

For example, point 3 of the Statement is about Stalinism.

But only Stalinism in Russia up to World War Two! As if the last 73 years haven't happened. As if it's good to unite on the basis of agreeing about developments prior to 1939-40, but disagreeing on what's happened in the 73 years since then.

It may be workable to merge with a group which thinks Cuba is socialist. But it would be better to have a general statement about Stalinism which covers Stalinism in our lifetimes, rather than in the lifetimes of our great-grandparents, and an explicit note that there are disagreements about how the generalities relate to Cuba (and to Vietnam?).

Point 6 outlines a more or less "conventional wisdom" view on what a revolutionary socialist party is for. But that the wisdom is conventional does not necessarily mean that it is wise.

"6. For workers to be won to the need for revolution, and for the working class to be cohered organisationally and politically into a force capable of defeating the centralised might of the capitalist state, a revolutionary party is necessary. Such an organisation has to cohere in its ranks the decisive elements among the most class-conscious and militant workers. Laying the basis for such a party is the key strategic task for socialists in Australia today".

If the situation is revolutionary or near-revolutionary,

then on all precedents, almost all workers will have come to accept “the need for revolution” in general. In Russia 1917, or Portugal 1975, almost everyone was in favour of “revolution”. The issue was not revolution vs not-revolution. It was what “revolution” meant. What a revolutionary Marxist party was needed for then, and will be needed for in future revolutionary situations, is to develop and promote a clear understanding of what sort of revolution we need, and how.

To derive the need for a centralised revolutionary socialist party from the centralisation of the bourgeois state is false. The reasons for a revolutionary socialist party being centralised (political sharpness) are quite different from the reasons for the bourgeois state being centralised, and it is or at least should be a quite different sort of centralisation.

Moreover, a successful socialist revolution almost certainly requires that the bourgeois state has substantially ceased to be centralised (the armed forces and the civil-service machine are disrupted by rank and file revolts, etc.) Not even the strongest revolutionary socialist party could take on and defeat a still-centralised bourgeois state in one-to-one combat.

And the formulations in the statement tell us little about what to do now, since there is very little small socialist groups can do immediately to win the broad working class to the general idea of revolution (which to most workers as yet suggests Cambodia or Iran rather than 1917); and it would be wrong and foolish for our small groups to try take on the bourgeois armed forces in direct combat.

Presumably in S Alt’s thinking that gap is filled by formulations put forward in previous S Alt articles, discussed in a previous issue of Workers’ Liberty: workersliberty.org/salt-party.

Those articles argue that the job of the revolutionary socialist party is to go along to every struggle and argue for more militancy against the reformists who argue for less. But, in the first place, that it begs the question of exactly which aims we should be militant for. In the second place, when class struggle really explodes, it is not at all the job of revolutionary socialists always to argue for the most militant tactics. For a large part of 1917, from early June to late August, the Bolsheviks in St Petersburg were strongly advising workers against militancy on the streets. Their watchword was “patiently explain”.

Maybe the link between the always-more-militancy theory and the formulations in the statement is an idea of socialist revolution as strike action stirred up by a revolutionary party and escalated to the point where it overwhelms the bourgeois state. In any case, the formulation is inadequate — and the issue here is not about this or that question of policy, but rather the core question of what we see as our overall purpose when organising as revolutionary socialists.

In Corey Oakley’s session on Syria at the Easter event, he distanced S Alt substantially from the sort of “anti-imperialism” — “the USA’s enemy is our friend” — which has dominated the thinking of S Alt’s mentors, the Socialist Workers Party in Britain, since 1987 (when it changed its attitude on the Iran-Iraq war to side with Iran on the grounds that the US was favouring Iraq).

Oakley said that opposing imperialism should no longer be the all-shaping priority — though he added, mysteri-

ously, that it had been correct to take it as the all-shaping priority up to around 2001 — and that we should uphold the right of Syrian oppositionists to seek and get military supplies from imperialist powers.

However, point 11 of the statement, on imperialism, is written as if by some Rip van Winkle who has just been shaken awake for the task after dozing off some time between 1914 and the early 1920s.

For the last epoch, the dominant imperialist trend has not been to divide the world between different spheres of influence, but more to unify it into a single world market policed by the USA. That dominant trend has not excluded simultaneous counter-trends, sometimes very important; and it is arguable that the balance may be changing. But that is the reality of the last epoch.

The final sentence commits S Alt to “oppose the imperial power” (and implicitly to support the antagonist) where war or diplomatic dispute puts “non-imperialist nations” in conflict with “imperial powers”.

It states the ground as to “defend the right of national self-determination”. Good. But what about when a conflict is between an old imperialist power and a capitalist state which is not yet a world-imperialist power, but is, or has realistic aspirations to be, a regional-imperialist power, and the conflict is about those regional-imperialist ambitions rather than about the national self-determination of the opponent state (Argentina, Serbia, Iraq, Iran, whatever)?

Point 14 commits S Alt to oppose racism. Good. It adds a “particular” commitment to “reject racism towards Muslims”.

Here as in other debates the word “racism” is used loosely to mean not racism (oppression or discrimination or prejudice on the basis of ascribed “race”) but any sort of nationalism or xenophobia.

The usage serves to conflate sectarian-secularist insensitivity towards Muslim concerns with racism towards people racially stereotyped as “looking Muslim”.

We should certainly oppose racism towards people racially stereotyped as “looking Muslim”, and sectarian-secularist insensitivity towards Muslim concerns.

Only, in the world of today, those oppositions must be combined with a defence of secularism, and with a political hostility to political Islam.

That there is a real issue here was shown in the Easter session on Syria. At the start of his talk Corey Oakley praised the “Arab Spring”, and then listed the obstacles and difficulties faced by workers’ and peasants’ struggles in the Arab world. He couldn’t or didn’t recognise political Islamism as being an obstacle or a difficulty.

A Workers’ Liberty speaker in the session argued that the Syrian opposition has degenerated and fragmented to a point where Sunni-sectarian, Islamist, gang-warfare, and anti-Kurdish elements are a large part, or dominate. Corey Oakley heard this argument in a garbled way — as if it were an assertion that the Islamist coloration of the opposition automatically means that it can’t be supported even against Assad, and launched into declamations about the need to oppose the Islamists only on their neo-liberalism and friendliness to the USA and (so he claimed) “collaboration with Zionism”, not on the religious issue.

This misses several points.

Islamism in the Syrian opposition is not merely religious,

but by its very nature religious-sectarian (Sunni-sectarian).

We oppose religious sectarians because they are religious sectarians, and not just because they are or may be neo-liberals, etc. We oppose political tendencies seeking to establish totally-Islamised states not just because they are or may be neo-liberals. The Khomeinists in Iran in 1979 were not neo-liberals, but took vast areas of the economy into state ownership. We oppose such trends because, neo-liberal or not neo-liberal, they suppress workers', women's, and all democratic rights.

Generally, the Syria debate, towards the end, degenerated into a series of speeches offering no evidence that the Syrian opposition is better than described, but rather declaring in general that the opposition is fighting a reactionary regime and therefore it is illegitimate "purism" to examine it more closely to see what it is in positive political terms, in its own right. The lesson of Iran 1978-9 has not been learned.

The platform

1. Socialist Alternative is a revolutionary Marxist organisation.

We stand for the overthrow of capitalism and the construction of a world socialist system.

2. By socialism we mean a system in which society is democratically controlled by the working class and the productive resources of society are channelled to abolishing class divisions...

3. Stalinism is not socialism. We agree with Trotsky's characterisation of Stalin as the "gravedigger" of the Russian Revolution. The political character of the regime established by the Stalinist bureaucracy in Russia most closely resembled that placed in power in capitalist countries by victorious fascist movements – an atomised population ruled over by a ruthless bureaucratic dictatorship masquerading behind social demagoguery.

We stand in the tradition of the revolutionaries who resisted Stalinism, and we fight today to reclaim the democratic, revolutionary politics of Marx, Engels, Luxemburg, Lenin, Trotsky and others from Stalinist distortion.

4. Socialism cannot be won by reform of the current system or by taking over the existing state. Only the revolutionary overthrow of the existing order and the smashing of the capitalist state apparatus can defeat the capitalist class and permanently end its rule. A successful revolution will involve workers taking control of their workplaces, dismantling existing state institutions (parliaments, courts, the armed forces and police) and replacing them with an entirely new state based on genuinely democratic control by the working class.

5. The emancipation of the working class must be the act of the working class itself. Socialism cannot come about by the actions of a minority. The struggle for socialism is the struggle of the great mass of workers to control their lives and their society, what Marx called "a movement of the immense majority in the interests of the immense majority".

6. For workers to be won to the need for revolution, and for the working class to be cohered organisationally and politically into a force capable of defeating the centralised might of the capitalist state, a revolutionary party is necessary. Such an organisation has to cohere in its ranks the de-

cisive elements among the most class conscious and militant workers. Laying the basis for such a party is the key strategic task for socialists in Australia today.

7... Revolutionaries have to engage reformist organisations via the method of the united front...

11. The imperialist phase of capitalism has ushered in an era of military conflict that has no precedent in human history. The core element of imperialism is the conflict between imperial powers, or blocks of capital, which attempt by military, diplomatic and commercial means to divide and redivide the world in their own interests. In the conflicts between imperial powers (open or by proxy), revolutionaries do not take sides, least of all with our own ruling classes. Nor do we call for the resolution of inter-imperialist conflict by the "peaceful" methods of international diplomacy. Instead we fight for international working class solidarity and unity, and embrace Lenin's revolutionary call to "turn the imperialist war between nations into a civil war between classes". In the case of wars waged or diplomatic pressure exerted by military threat by the imperial powers against colonies and non-imperialist nations, we oppose the imperial power and defend the right of national self-determination....

(Full text: bit.ly/sa-rsp)



Introduction to the AWL

The Alliance for Workers' Liberty is a Trotskyist organisation active in Britain, with co-thinkers and small co-thinker groups in other countries.

We are "Third Camp" Trotskyists: that is, we work for independent working-class political action, independent from all the rival camps of the exploiters.

We believe that the Stalinist states were exploitative class systems, and not progressive compared to capitalism. We reject the drift in Trotskyism after Trotsky which made most "orthodox" Trotskyists, in very varying degrees, orient to the more radical and revolutionary strands of Stalinism as "immediate" alternatives to capitalism.

We also reject the associated drift that has made many Trotskyists today into "kitsch anti-imperialists", ready to support even reactionary Islamist formations so long as they are in conflict with the USA. Our enemy's enemy is not at all necessarily our friend.

We give priority to activity in the workplaces, workplace bulletins, activity in the unions, and more generally patient work to develop and educate a solid base for revolutionary socialists in the working class and the labour movement. We set our aim as transforming the real historically-developed labour movement — a transformation which of course requires a radical change in methods and leadership, and the drawing-in of millions of new activists — rather than imagining that we can find a short-cut through establishing "our own" little labour movement in parallel.

We also put effort into activity among young people and students. Every revolutionary socialist tendency depends for its vitality on winning fresh young activists.

We produce a weekly paper, *Solidarity*, supplemented by occasional pull-outs and pamphlets and some books, notably "The Fate of the Russian Revolution" (1998).

We came to our present political attitudes not by some sudden revelation, but by learning as we went from the big events of world class struggle since the beginnings of our tendency, in the mid-1960s.

The tendency which is now the AWL originated in the British Trotskyist movement in the mid-1960s, with some young activists who rebelled against the political degeneration of the Socialist Labour League.

The SLL was at that time, maybe, in relative terms, the strongest Trotskyist group in the world. It had won activists from the crisis of the British Communist Party in 1956-7, from work in the Labour Party and the Labour youth movement, and from work in the then-militant British trade unions.

The SLL was "orthodox Trotskyist". Since 1953 it had been aligned with James P Cannon and the SWP-USA, which then represented the more sharply anti-Stalinist wing of "orthodox Trotskyism".

In the early 1960s, thrown off balance by its own small relative successes, the SLL became more and more sectarian and erratic in politics. Our comrades rebelled against the sectarianism.

Finding the other would-be Trotskyist groups also inadequate, they called for a Trotskyist regroupment on a new basis. But they did not want to wait for that regroupment. They started a small mimeographed magazine, *Workers'*

Fight.

In 1968 the *Workers' Fight* group took up a unity appeal made by the SWP (then called IS), which was growing rapidly, and much more open to debate and non-sectarian involvement in the labour movement than it is now. We did not and do not agree with the SWP/IS's theories, or its basic view of what a revolutionary socialist organisation should be, but we did want to maximise our practical effectiveness and our ability to take part in real debate.

In December 1971, after various other political conflicts, the IS expelled us for challenging the political about-turn they made that year on Europe, switching from a long-standing line that "In or Out, the Fight Goes On" to "keep Britain out" on the basis that this would enable them to "vote with the left". That expulsion turned out to be the decisive turn on the road which took IS/SWP from being a relatively open and lively organisation to its present plight.

We have made some mergers since then — with the former IS Left Faction in 1975, and with the former *Workers' Socialist League* in 1981 — though not without problems. At the end of the 1970s and in the early 1980s we were able to play a big part in the then-lively left wing within the Labour Party, and to work together with other activists in producing a new paper, *Socialist Organiser*.

From 1998 until the SWP forced its winding-up in 2003, we participated actively first in the preparatory moves towards, and then in the actual organisation of the Socialist Alliance, which briefly, around 2001, brought together most of the main activist revolutionary socialist groups in Britain in limited practical collaboration.

We have also systematically sought collaboration and dialogue with revolutionary socialists in other countries, and believe we have learned something from the patchy dialogue we have been able to achieve.

From the end of the 1970s, and during the 1980s especially we rethought many aspects of what appeared to be a given Trotskyist "orthodoxy", but which turned out to be tainted by Stalinist excrescences. Our paper carried open discussions and debates with other leftists and between our own supporters.

For example, we denounced Russian foreign policy in 1979-80 when Russian invaded Afghanistan.

We reckoned, and rightly, that the Russian invasion would lead to a colonial war akin to the French war in Algeria, and with methods similar to those of the US in Vietnam.

We sided with those resisting Russian rule in Afghanistan. We didn't back them politically. When the question arose after the Russian withdrawal, we sided with the towns in Afghanistan against the rural reactionaries. But we argued that solidarity with those resisting colonial conquest must be a bedrock principle, and could not be offset by speculations about the supposedly progressive nature of Russia's economic regime.

In 1988, after many years in which we had been increasingly and openly dissatisfied with the old "orthodox Trotskyist" view of the Stalinist states as "degenerated and deformed workers' states", we explicitly rejected that view and asserted that the Stalinist states were exploitative class systems, and not progressive compared to capitalism.

We did not then know that in 1989-91 most of those Stalinist states would collapse in the face of popular revolt or

begin to reorganise themselves from above on capitalist world-market patterns. But that is what happened: and it strengthened us in our conclusions.

We see ourselves as a faction or nucleus of the mass revolutionary socialist working-class movement which needs to be built both in Britain and internationally. We seek openings for dialogue and collaboration where we can work together with others towards that end.

But we do not wait. Aspirations for unity and for large movements in the future become something other than mere wishful thinking only if their advocates build serious militant organisations now, and do their activist duty in the class struggle now.

There is much for us to do — producing and circulating our weekly paper, producing and distributing workplace bulletins, organising in the unions, and maintaining a socialist presence on the streets and the doorsteps. And, in the longer perspective of renewing the left, we have an epochal task ahead of us, of self-education, self-clarification, and helping to clarify the rest of the left.

Introduction to the IRMT

Although formed in September 2008, the Iranian Revolutionary Marxists' Tendency (IRMT) is the only organisation that can trace its political, theoretical and organisational lineage directly back to the Iranian Commission in the USFI (United Secretariat of the Fourth International) in the early 1970s and Hezb-e Kargarane Socialist (HKS) that was active during the Iranian revolution.

The Iranian Commission, the first Iranian Trotskyist group, was founded by students and exiles who had become active in Britain in the late 1960s. These activists wanted to have an organisation that could intervene in the exiled student milieu and eventually in Iran, in opposition to the policies of the Stalinist, Maoist and guerrillaist tendencies that were prevalent within the Iranian left in the 1970s.

Basing their activity on the Transitional Programme and the first four congresses of the Comintern, they published *Kand-o Kav*, a theoretical and political journal, as well as translating many works by Trotsky and other major Marxists. They were also very active in organising solidarity action for all those struggling against the Shah's dictatorship and were the main force behind the Committee Against Repression in Iran (CARI), set up in 1976.

During the Iranian Revolution of 1979, there was a unity congress of the Iranian supporters of the USFI in Europe and the supporters of the American Socialist Workers' Party (SWP). As a result the HKS was launched in early 1979. Within a few months, however, the SWP tendency (led by Babak Zahraie) began to have illusions about the Iranian bourgeois-clerical regime of Khomeini. The group from Europe was very critical of the USFI for its de facto support of a group that was tail-ending Khomeini's reactionary regime. A split took place and the Babak Zahraie group



continued its class-collaborationist activities under the name of the Revolutionary Workers' Party (Hezb-e Kargar-e Enghelabi — HKE) until it was disbanded a few years later.

After 1983, when some HKS members were forced into exile, they produced a document (*) that was critical of the USFI's policy. After presenting the document at a USFI congress in Europe they requested that the Babak Zahraie group be expelled. Although they had some sympathy among a few delegates, their resolution received no votes and they then formally left the USFI. From then until 1990 they produced *Socialism va Enghelab* (Socialism and Revolution), a theoretical journal.

In 1991, Maziar Razi, one of the founders of HKS and SE, together with a group of comrades, reorganised themselves and began publishing a regular workers' paper, *Daftarha-ye Kargari Socialisti* (Workers-Socialist Notebooks), which sub-

sequently led to *Kargar-e Socialist* (Socialist Worker) and the formation of the Iranian Revolutionary Socialists' League (IRSL). In 2008 the IRSL and two groups of its supporters that had been formed inside Iran fused to form the Iranian Revolutionary Marxists' Tendency (IRMT).

The IRMT is currently the only Iranian Trotskyist organisation. The other 'Trotskyist' groups have all disappeared. The orientation of the IRMT is towards building a workers' organisation in Iran. Nashr-e Kargari Socialisti, the IRMT publications team, has an extensive programme of re-publishing the classics of Marxism and also translating works never before translated into Persian. *Militaant* is the IRMT's monthly journal (<http://militaant.com/>).

(*) See Revolution and Counter-revolution in Iran: <http://marxist.cloudaccess.net/history/59-iranrev.html>

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