

# Communist

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# Voice



Successor to the  
*Workers' Advocate*

## **No to Milosevic, NATO, and the big power Contact Group! No solution in Kosovo without the right to self-determination!**

In the last few days the Serbian state-capitalist government has stepped up the ethnic cleansing of Kosovo, burning villages and towns, and massacring Albanian Kosovars. This is their long-expected spring offensive, and it is a horrible crime against humanity.

Clinton and NATO have also begun bombing military facilities in Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro). They are demanding an end to the massacres. But they also have their own agenda. The Rambouillet agreement they are seeking to enforce, like the Dayton agreement for Bosnia, is an unprincipled and unworkable mess which will leave the big powers the arbiters of the region.

The war between Serbia and NATO is based on disagreement over the fate of Kosovo, but neither side stands for the democratic rights of the Kosovan people. The Serbian government wants to keep Kosovo inside Serbia at any price, especially if most of the price is paid by the Albanian Kosovars. NATO wants Serbia to grant autonomy to Kosovo and to agree to the Rambouillet proposal. This proposal would end the outright slaughter and is better than immediate genocide. But it would deny the Kosovans the right to decide for themselves if they wish to be independent of Serbia. It would continue to prevent the Albanians from being able to defend themselves, while drawing in NATO further as the arbiter of the region.

The reason for the evil veil of ethnic cleansing that has descended over Kosovo isn't simply a miscalculation by Milosevic. It is the inevitable outcome of the policy of denying a democratic solution to the national question. So long as the question of Kosovan independence isn't solved in a democratic way, there will be turmoil and bloodshed of one sort or another. Peoples will be incited against each other, and the conditions for new wars will be created.

The key to the situation is the recognition of the right to self-determination of Kosovo. Given the present situation, this should include the immediate recognition of Kosovan independence, say, of a Kosovan provisional regime or government in exile. This would not in itself overcome the desperate situation of the Albanian Kosovars. But it would facilitate the Kosovans organizing their own defense, and it would take Kosovo off the bargaining table of the big powers. The fate of Kosovo should not be settled by a deal between Milosevic and NATO. Nor should it be settled by a conference of the big powers. It should be settled in accordance with the desires of the Kosovan people.

The conflict between Serbia and NATO is one example of how the oppression of the Albanian Kosovars can lead to a wider war. This war may lead to a deal between Milosevic and

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# What is *Communist Voice*?

*Communist Voice* is a theoretical journal which not only exposes the capitalist system, but deals with the tragedy that has befallen the revolutionary movement. It confronts the thorny questions and controversies facing progressive activists today, and holds that the crisis of the working class movement can only be overcome if Marxist theory again enlightens the struggle for the emancipation of the oppressed. The liberating ideas of Marx, Engels and Lenin have been twisted beyond recognition, not only by outright capitalist spokespeople, but also by the false "communist" regimes of China, Cuba and others today, and of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe of yesterday. *Communist Voice* denounces these distortions (revisions) of the ideas of Marxism-Leninism — whether Stalinism or Trotskyism or reformism — and stands for placing revolutionary theory on a solid basis through the criticism of revisionism and by analyzing the new developments in the basic economic and political structure of the world today. Through this work, the *Communist Voice* seeks to pave the way for communism to once again become the red, fighting banner of the revolutionary working class movement. Only the influence of the real communist theory can help the goal of a classless, communist society again spread among the workers and oppressed here and around the globe. Only the spread of anti-revisionist Marxism can overcome the influence of liberal, reformist and petty-bourgeois nationalist trends and allow the struggle against capitalism to break out in full force.

The revolutionary parties and movements of the working class in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries never achieved their full goals. The working masses fought monarchy, fascism, colonialism, and various capitalist classes, and also made their first attempts to establish a new social system — however these attempts never went beyond the first steps. This class struggle will be renewed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, as the masses are faced with how to escape from the escalating misery brought by capitalist development around the world. To hasten the day

of the revival of the revolutionary movement, the *CV* opposes the neo-conservative and reformist ideologies that are dominant today. It holds that progressive work today requires more than opposing the ultra-conservatives and more than trying to reform the marketplace. It means helping reorganize the working class movement on a basis independent of the liberals and reformists as well as the conservatives. The *CV* sees its theoretical tasks as helping to clear the way for a future reorganization of the working class into, first and foremost, its own political party, as well as other organizations that truly uphold proletarian class interests.

*Communist Voice* thus continues the Marxist-Leninist and anti-revisionist cause to which its predecessor, the *Workers' Advocate*, was dedicated. For a quarter of a century, the *Workers' Advocate* was the paper of a series of activist organizations, the last one being the Marxist-Leninist Party. The demoralization of the revolutionary ranks included the dissolution of the MLP and, along with it, the *Workers' Advocate*. But the *Communist Voice* continues, in a different form, with fewer resources, and with more emphasis on theoretical work, the struggle of the *Workers' Advocate* to contribute to the development of a mass communist party.

The *Communist Voice* is published by the **Communist Voice Organization**, which links together members in a few cities. The CVO calls on all activists who want to fight capitalism in all its guises to join with us in opposing all the bankrupt theories and practices of the past — from Western-style capitalism to Stalinist state capitalism, from reformism to anarchism, from reliance on the pro-capitalist trade union bigwigs to "left" communist sectarianism toward "impure" struggles. It is time to lay the basis for the revolutionary communism of the future by revitalizing the communist theory and practice of today. Only when communism spreads among the millions and millions of oppressed can the struggle against capitalism again become a force that shakes the world!

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# KOSOVO

Continued from the front page

NATO, or it may develop its own momentum, deepen, and include other countries. The price of refusing a democratic solution to the Kosovan people will be high for the entire region.

Some people say that if Kosovo is allowed to become independent, then national movements may demand changes in the borders in Macedonia and elsewhere. But whether or not Kosovo gains its national rights, people elsewhere are going to demand theirs. The question is whether these questions will be settled democratically, or whether they will be settled by ethnic cleansing and by big power agreements.

There are three sides in the ongoing military conflicts: the Milosevic government, NATO, and the Albanians.

\* **The Yugoslavian government, dominated by Serbia, which has dragged Montenegro along with it into the present conflict.** The Milosevic government in Serbia wants a free hand for more massacres against the Albanian people. The Racak massacre of January showed that Milosevic was been stepping up "ethnic cleansing" in Kosovo, and making preparations for a massive spring offensive against the Albanians. That offensive is here today. And it is not based on simply fighting KLA units. It is based on taking revenge on the entire Albanian population.

\* **Clinton and NATO.** Their intervention isn't based on strengthening the ability of the Kosovars to defend themselves, but on reinforcing their own role as arbiters of the region, albeit less bloody ones than the Milosevic regime. They have helped create the present situation by insisting, throughout the 90s, that Kosovo must stay within Serbia, no matter what its people wanted. They insisted that this was necessary in order

to prevent tragedy, but, as can be seen, it was this insistence that paved the way for the present massacres.

Indeed, NATO's present bombing is for the purpose of enforcing the Rambouillet proposal, which was brokered by the "Contact Group" of six imperialist powers (U.S., Britain, France, Germany, Italy, and Russia). If they achieve this, it will mean a pause in the bloodshed. However, it will preserve all the conditions for war to break out again. It still does not give Kosovo the right to self-determination; it dismembers Kosovo into separate national communities; and its scheme for an "autonomous" government is so unrealistic that it will require tens of thousands of foreign troops to hold the Rambouillet arrangements together. Moreover, Russia will do its best to ensure that Rambouillet is modified to the disadvantage of the Kosovars, and Italy too may insist on changing Rambouillet in order to entice Milosevic to make a deal. The possibility exists that Serbia and the Contact Group will strike a deal to partition Kosovo, based on Serbian ethnic cleansing in the northern section of Kosovo.

\* **The Albanian Kosovars, the overwhelming majority of the Kosovan population.** The Albanian Kosovars, who have sought their national rights for over a century, have been united by the brutality of the Milosevic government in the belief that Kosovo must leave Serbia. But since there is little possibility for an immediate outcome in Kosovo which goes against both the Serbian government and the big powers, this is unlikely at this time. Therefore there is every likelihood that the situation in Kosovo will continue to fester. Albanian resistance will continue, but the huge scale of the massacres of the last few days may well leave scars that last for years, and the masses will become more embittered.

The Albanian Kosovars reluctantly signed the Rambouillet agreement. Given the alternative before them, they may have

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had no choice: Rambouillet was the lesser evil. However, if Rambouillet were implemented, it would create such a mess in Kosovo that they would likely increasingly come into conflict with it.

Progressive activists should denounce both the Serbian government and NATO. We must demand the right for self-determination for Kosovo (and the rights of national minorities); it is the only progressive way to resolve the national question in Kosovo and it would also give the best chance to avert a wider tragedy in the Balkans. We must also support the development of class-conscious proletarian trends in Kosovo and Serbia.

### **A decade of the forcible Serbian occupation of Kosovo**

The Kosovo crisis has been a long time in the making. The Albanian Kosovars were already harshly suppressed in the original Yugoslavia that existed in the 1920s and 1930s, between the two world wars. At that time, the most class-conscious Yugoslav workers, organized in the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, supported national freedom for Kosovo and didn't shrink from the idea that Kosovo might wish to join Albania.

The CPY organized a historic anti-fascist partisan movement in World War II, which led to the formation of Tito's Yugoslavia. But the CPY (later renamed the League of Communists of Yugoslavia) followed the Soviet model and built Yugoslavia on state-capitalist lines, with a new bureaucratic bourgeoisie replacing the old bourgeoisie. The break between Tito and Stalin and the development of "self-administrative" socialism changed the form of state-capitalism, but left the basic class relations unchanged. A new bureaucratic bourgeoisie ruled Yugoslavia.

And despite earlier declarations by the CPY, the new bourgeoisie continued to suppress the Albanian Kosovars. However, especially after 1966, when the hated interior security chief Alexander Rankovic fell into disfavor, it pursued a much milder policy towards the Albanians than pre-war monarchist Yugoslavia had. Nevertheless, Albanians remained second-class citizens even during the period of extensive Kosovan autonomy after 1966. (See the article on Kosovo in the last issue of *Communist Voice*.) Kosovo remained the poorest and most backward region of Yugoslavia. This was due partially to national oppression but also to the economic failures of the Yugoslav state-capitalism.

Things took a dramatic turn for the worse in Kosovo in the last decade. The oppression of the Albanians has again reached blood-curdling levels. How did this happen?

Yugoslavia suffered from chronic economic problems that reached crisis proportions in the 1980s. In Serbia, the ruling state-capitalist bourgeoisie sought to divert the attention of the masses from the crisis of their system to resentment against other Yugoslav nationalities who were supposedly oppressing the Serbs. In particular, the Milosevic government came to power in 1987-88 on a wave of chauvinism against Albanians. Milosevic eliminated the autonomous status of the province of

Kosovo. This wasn't simply a governmental reshuffling. A mockery was made of the local political institutions, large numbers of Albanians were thrown out of work and replaced them with Serbs, many Albanian cultural institutions were eliminated, and Kosovo was occupied militarily. This dramatically intensified the long-standing grievances of the Albanian majority in Kosovo.

For example, in order to eliminate Kosovan autonomy, it was necessary to get the agreement of the Kosovan parliament. But Albanian Kosovars were fervently opposed to this change; massive demonstrations throughout Kosovo took place in November 1988 and February 1989, both times spearheaded by the largest contingent of industrial workers in Kosovo, the miners at the huge Trepca complex. But Milosevic had the Kosovan branch of the League of Communists purged and its leaders replaced by new ones; a state of emergency was declared; many arrests were made; federal police moved in to replace Kosovan ones; etc. On the day of the crucial vote, tanks positioned themselves outside parliament, while the delegates inside were illegally augmented by visiting Serbian officials who cast ballots. And so, a vote in favor of eliminating autonomy was obtained. It wasn't the necessary two-thirds vote, but Milosevic isn't a stickler for legalities.

There had been a process of Albanianization in Kosovo since the latter 1960s. It had sought to cure the dramatic underrepresentation of the Albanian majority in the political, state, cultural and economic institutions in Kosovo, which were dominated by Serbs and Montenegrins who were represented out of all proportion to their number. Albanianization was now reversed, with a vengeance. On one pretext or another, large numbers of Albanians who were industrial workers, managers of large enterprises, political leaders, police, judges, health care workers and others, were dismissed. Although Serbs are a small minority in Kosovo, a new law by the Serbian parliament declared that Kosovan enterprises had to hire a Serb for every Albanian hired. Meanwhile Albanian workers had to sign statements pledging allegiance to the Republic of Serbia and Milosevic's Socialist Party of Serbia (the descendant of the former League of Communists of Serbia).

The mass firings of Albanians not only meant unemployment, but the loss of the many social benefits that were attached to employment, such as housing, social insurance, free medical services, etc. When the Alliance of Independent Trade Unions of Kosovo was founded in 1990, already one of its main tasks was developing a fund to support unemployed Albanian workers. Eventually up to 750,000 people, well over a third of Albanian Kosovars, were affected.

Albanian cultural institutions were either closed down, or put under Serbian management and purged of their Albanian content. The official Albanian language newspaper of the past, *Riljinda* (the Awakening), was put to sleep. Albanian-language radio and TV stations were closed down. Theater, ballet and museums were also affected, and the material in the National Library was pruned. There was a passion to Serbianize place names in Kosovo; even the name of the province itself was changed, becoming once again "Kosovo and Metohija" (Kosmet for short), a name irritating to Albanians. And especially, there

was a Serbianization of the schools. A uniform school curriculum was decreed for all Serbia and made compulsory in Kosovo; as might be expected, it downgraded the Albanian language and culture. Knowledge of Serbo-Croatian was made compulsory as a prerequisite for secondary education in Kosovo, while the language of university education was, except in special cases, to always be Serbo-Croatian. (Previously, the school system had been more tolerant of linguistic diversity, and primary education, for example, had been provided in three languages: Albanian, Serbo-Croatian, and Turkish.)

### **Ethnic cleansing**

The Albanian Kosovars were formerly divided in their views about how to deal with national oppression. Indeed, their political and economic elite mainly worked in the Titoist party and state, and helped repress discontent. But the result of the elimination of autonomy has been that most all Albanian Kosovars now want Kosovo independence from Yugoslavia. They have organized their own parallel institutions, such as Kosovo-wide elections (open to all residents of Kosovo, Albanian or not) for the presidency and legislature of an independent "Republic of Kosovo". This was an attempt to achieve independence through peaceful means.

The answer of the Serbian government has been ever increasing repression. Arms were distributed to Serbian and Montenegrin civilians, while Albanians have been disarmed. For the Serbian government, there is no political question in Kosovo—it's simply a question of wiping out Albanian "terrorism". There is no act of repression or "ethnic cleansing" too horrendous for the Milosevic regime to justify as a response to terrorism. When some Albanians turned to armed resistance and formed the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA, or UCK in Albanian), the regime believed it could simply drown the revolt in blood.

Early last year, the Serbian government launched a new round of military terror against Kosovo, with the excuse of wiping out the KLA, which was still a rather small organization. In the course of this, the Serbian police staged a massacre in the Drenica region in March 1998, killing many Albanian women and children. The result was that armed resistance spread like wildfire across Kosovo, the KLA mushroomed in size, and KLA control spread over a large part of the Kosovan countryside, reaching its highest point in July. In reply, Serbian tanks and artillery shelled village after village, and large numbers of Albanians became internal refugees in Kosovo.

As the fighting intensified, the Contact Group and NATO threatened both sides and forced a truce in October last year, which amounted to a scaling back of the war. But the fighting has gradually escalated all over again, mainly due to Serbian pressure on the Albanians. By January 15 of this year, things had deteriorated to the point that the Serbian police staged a massacre in the village of Racak. On the pretext of seeking to arrest an individual "terrorist", the Serbian forces surrounded Racak and went in and slaughtered 45 Albanians. The recent report by Helena Ranta, the head of the Finnish forensic team that examined 40 bodies, verifies that they were shot at close

range, some even as they were kneeling. It was, she says, a crime against humanity.

After Racak, attacks on Albanian villages became more frequent. Serbian police have looted and burned villages, in some cases doing this without shame in front of news cameras. The Drenica region has once again come in for special attention, and on a scale that dwarfs the massacre of last year. All indications are that when foreign observers left Kosovo, and even more so after NATO bombing began, massacres in Kosovo went from being sporadic to being systematic. In preparation for a future settlement in Kosovo, Milosevic has been hurrying to clear as many Albanians from as much as Kosovo as possible.

### **Big power politics**

Meanwhile Clinton and NATO are bombing the Serbian armed forces in order to force Milosevic to accept the Rambouillet deal. They do seek to stop the fighting and the massacres in Kosovo, but they aren't doing this out of sympathy for the Albanian Kosovars, who had to be coerced into signing the Rambouillet agreement, which would leave them defenseless and tied to Serbia. Indeed, the first principle of the agreement is that the will of the local population be damned, there can be no change in international borders. Kosovo must remain part of Serbia. What was set by decision of the imperialist powers back in 1912-913 (the separation of Kosovo from the newly-formed state of Albania and its incorporation into Serbia), and ratified by subsequent boundary agreements, must be maintained. And then to top it off, the agreement's arrangements would leave the "autonomous" Kosovan government it envisions so paralyzed and fractured, that it would require thousands of NATO troops to ensure that the Kosovars weren't still subject to persecution.

So Clinton and NATO aren't doing this out of support for the rights of the Albanians. They are, however, worried about the danger of a wider war in the Balkans. The fighting in Kosovo may well spill over to neighboring Macedonia, by embittering the large Albanian population in Macedonia and/or by Serbian military actions along the border. (There is an Albanian national question in Macedonia; the Albanians were generally treated worse than the Kosovars in the days when Macedonia was part of Yugoslavia; and there are already demands for autonomy.) Albania may also be drawn into the war. Greece, a NATO member, has never recognized Macedonia and has territorial claims on Albania too, so it might well intervene in a conflict involving Macedonia or Albania. Turkey, another NATO member, may posture as a protector of Turkish and Islamic minorities, and it has never been shy to oppose Greece; so Turkey too might intervene, thus setting two NATO members against each other.

There really is a serious danger of a wider war. But by their trampling on the right to self-determination and by their method of leaving the local populations helpless and reliant on begging for outside support, the actions of Clinton, NATO, and the big powers, rather than averting this danger, may well bring it closer.

## Rambouillet—the Daytonization of Kosovo

The Dayton accords, which the U.S. and other big powers imposed on Bosnia, shed light into the prospects of the Rambouillet agreement. The Dayton agreement ended the immediate conflict—at least, so long as thousands of foreign troops remain to ensure peace. Dayton appears to maintain the existence of Bosnia as a state, but it actually divides Bosnia up into a different national areas for Croats, Serbs and Muslims. The guarantees in the Dayton agreement that refugees would be able to return to their homes have remained empty promises, while Dayton solidified the division of Bosnia into ethnic zones. The result has been to reinforce chauvinist tendencies in all regions of Bosnia. The Muslim region, descended from the old central government of Bosnia, used to be the most multinational and tolerant of the regions, and not simply a Muslim zone; however, as a consequence both of the war and of the Dayton agreement, its government too has descended into the chauvinist swamp. Meanwhile the overall governing arrangement for Bosnia is so unrealistic and feeble that the foreign powers have become the arbiters of Bosnia.

The Rambouillet agreement seems to have a lot in common with the Dayton agreement. It doesn't recognize the right to self-determination of Kosovo, but simply strikes whatever deal the big powers think might preserve appearances. The various provisions provide a complex patchwork that is so unworkable that only foreign troops and foreign aid would keep it afloat. The autonomous province would have to coordinate with Serbia on many matters, yet the Serbian government can be expected to seek to undermine an autonomous Kosovo at every turn. The long periods for withdrawal of Serbian forces, the various Serbian military and police forces that will be allowed to remain, the question of what the local police will be, and the assurance that the institutions of the Serbian government will be allowed to provide "assistance" to the national communities, create an unstable situation. It will be particularly unstable as the agreement runs only three years, after which everything is again up for grabs.

Moreover, the agreement appears to divide Kosovo up into separate national communities which will run their own school and health care systems. Proper guarantees for the rights of national minorities in Kosovan institutions would be a fine idea, but, unfortunately, the agreement appears instead to model Kosovo on the Bosnian pattern.

It might be objected that provisions on national communities simply continue what the Albanian Kosovars have already begun with their parallel institutions in Kosovo. But this isn't so. For example, in the elections of May 1992 for the independent Kosovan parliament, all Kosovans of whatever nationality could vote, and seats in parliament were held open for different nationalities. As for the Albanian parallel school system, it was formed due to the imposition by the Serbian government of a new, anti-Albanian curriculum in the official school system. When an agreement was reached on Albanians returning to the state school system, it was Serbian chauvinists—seeking to inflame local Serbs—who staged demonstrations in March last year. They denounced the idea of a joint school system in

Kosovo. Radivoj Papovic, dean of the Pristina University, stated that "Everybody can join our university, but they can study only in Serbian. We will not allow separatist children to be rocked in a Serb cradle." So the provision for separate school systems appears to be a concession to Serbian chauvinism, not a demand of the Albanians. Similarly, the Albanians only set up their own health system after they were increasingly pushed out of the state health system. It is the Serbian chauvinists who have been demanding that if Kosovo is allowed to be autonomous, then the province should be dismembered. Rambouillet also dismembers Kosovo, and would fan the flames of chauvinism in all ethnic communities in Kosovo.

## Kosovar views

The main organization conducting the armed struggle for independence is the KLA. Ibrahim Rugova's Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) also calls for independence, but advocates nonviolence; it used to be far and away the predominant political party, but it has lost a lot of strength due to the failure of its methods to get results. There are also a multitude of smaller parties, including a coalition of parties formed last year, the United Democratic Movement (LBD), which is close to the KLA.

Support for the right to self-determination doesn't imply or require support for any particular one of these groups, but only for the right of the Kosovars to decide their own leadership democratically. We ourselves wish to do everything possible to foster a class-conscious working class trend in Kosovo, and thus contribute to changing Kosovan politics.

We don't have detailed information about the present Kosovar leadership. But it is apparently neither revolutionary and socialist, nor devils. They are predominantly concerned with the issue of independence. It should also be noted that the rapid and dramatic changes of the situation in Kosovo will likely be reflected in turmoil in Kosovar politics.

The KLA itself is presently rather diffuse in its political and ideological makeup. It grew extremely rapidly last year, and just about anyone who took up a gun to defend their village against ethnic cleansing probably called themselves KLA. So no doubt the ideas and action of the KLA vary from one local group to the next. It suffered greatly last year from the Serbian summer offensive, being outgunned by Serbian heavy weapons. To deal with this, there has no doubt been a reorganization of the KLA, and presumably a somewhat tighter structure, at least at the top. Nevertheless, it probably is still rather diffuse politically. Moreover, major events, such as the Rambouillet agreement, if it is ever put in place, will probably force more reorganizations of the KLA.

The Kosovar Albanians have called a number of times for the West or NATO to intervene in Kosovo. However, that does not show that there is anything pro-imperialist about the idea of national freedom for Kosovo. Indeed, the Rambouillet agreement doesn't provide the right of self-determination for Kosovo, and the Albanians had to be coerced into accepting Rambouillet.

Many Kosovars have been looking to the West for a counterbalance to the military power of Serbia, and an alternative to a drawn-out, bloody war. This is partially due to the disgrace of state-capitalism in Yugoslavia, Albania, and other countries around the world making the market capitalist powers look good to the peoples of the region, and partly due to the fact that Russia continues to support Serbian chauvinism. Moreover, given the alternatives facing them, Rambouillet and Western support may appear to them as the only alternative to being slaughtered. But at the same time, this connection to the West is a danger to them. One way or another, whether through Rambouillet or otherwise, they will eventually end up in conflict with the big powers. The lack of clarity about capitalism in the West poses a real danger for the Albanians, as does their unclarity about the nature of the system in Serbia that they are fighting.

But the connections to the West doesn't distinguish the Kosovars from the Serbian government or Yugoslavia. Such connections are a Yugoslav tradition. Tito's Yugoslavia sought and took as much Western support as it could get, and Milosevic himself had Western support until the Yugoslav army intervened in Slovenia. Thus the struggle over Kosovo isn't over the question of who is pro-West. It is over the question of national freedom. And for the working class, the relevant question is: will national freedom for Kosovo help or hinder the working class in the Balkans building up its own struggle? There can be no question that the war on Kosovo is a chain around the neck of the Serbian working class. And in Kosovo, this war overshadows the difference between bourgeois and proletarian interests. It is the working class that will benefit the most from a consistently democratic solution of the national question.

### **For proletarian trends in Serbia and Kosovo**

Presently the Albanian and Serbian working masses are diffuse in their political stands. They are as confused about the West and about the collapse of Yugoslavia supposedly being the collapse of socialism as other peoples in the region. Decades of

state-capitalist rule in Yugoslavia in the name of "socialism" have discredited socialism in their eyes. The Serbian masses face a heavy pressure from the chauvinism that is not only fanned by the Milosevic government, but by a sizeable part of the Serbian opposition. And there doesn't seem, at this time, to be sizeable trend for class struggle in Kosovo. Moreover, the Albanian the working class has been disorganized by mass dismissal of Albanian workers from urban workplaces, and further disorganized by the all-out Serbian war in Kosovo, with its destruction of villages and conversion of many Albanians into refugees.

But it would be important if even small proletarian trends could arise at this time. Only such trends would be capable of defending proletarian interests against the local bourgeoisies; capable of showing that the collapse of Stalinist, Titoist, Hoxhaist and other state-capitalist regimes was not the collapse of socialism; and capable of having a critical view of the various capitalist regimes around the world. With respect to the national question, it is only such trends that could consistently sponsor unity across national lines. In Serbia, only such a trend could solidly support the right to self-determination of Kosovo. In Kosovo, only such a trend could combine support for national freedom in Kosovo with support of national minorities, and only such a trend could oppose the national hatred inevitably generated by the Serbian massacres and by the Rambouillet plan for the Daytonization of Kosovo.

Anti-imperialism doesn't mean supporting a bloodstained tyrant like Milosevic in his struggle to have a free hand to drown Kosovo in blood. Anti-imperialism must mean supporting the masses against their oppressors. It is only the condemnation of U.S. imperialism and the big powers on this basis that is true anti-imperialism. It is the task of class-conscious workers and socialist activists around the world to help the working class movements in Serbia and Kosovo to rise again. This requires standing for a democratic resolution of the national question in Kosovo.

By Joseph Green □

# Indonesia:

## Habibie's reforms fail to quell the struggle of the masses

by Mark, Detroit

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In May 1998 a mighty upsurge of the Indonesian masses toppled the 32-year reign of terror of the U.S.-backed Suharto regime. The masses rose up because they could no longer tolerate being deprived of the most basic rights and because the crisis of the capitalist economy was driving tens of millions of the working people into destitution. The mass demonstrations, clashes and urban rebellions drove Suharto from power. But the May 1998 uprising did not uproot the repressive institutions of the Suharto tyranny. Suharto's protege, B.J. Habibie, came to power with the close backing of General Wiranto, a top general of the Suharto era.

Suharto is gone, but the period of upheaval continues. Behind this lies the struggle of classes, each fighting to determine the outcome of the post-Suharto democratization process. The Habibie regime, which represents the capitalists most favored by Suharto and the system of semi-military rule, has tried to change as little as possible. Besides Habibie's ruling Golkar party, there are the parties of the bourgeoisie which weakly advocated some minor reforms under Suharto, led by figures like Megawati Sukarnoputri of the Indonesian Democratic Party, and Amien Rais, of the National Mandate Party, who has a power base in one of the largest Muslim organizations. They have their quibbles with Habibie, but, since Habibie is offering them more power, and since they too support class exploitation, they are generally satisfied with the pace and scope of reform under Habibie. But the oppressed masses are of a different mind. They want the machinery of the old dictatorship completely swept away and those responsible punished. They want the fullest freedom and are striving to use this period to intensify the struggle for their social demands and building organizations to fight on their behalf. Student activists have organized much of the anti-Habibie protests, but the major

demonstrations have drawn in huge numbers of militant workers and urban poor.

Ultimately, what is being fought over in the streets is to what extent the post-Suharto era will be shaped by a deal between the forces of the old tyranny and the bourgeois reformers, or by the exploited classes.

### Habibie fuels the flames of struggle

Under pressure of continuing protests, Habibie has been forced to back away from several of the most repressive features of Suharto's so-called New Order dictatorship. There is more press freedom and there is room for more political and trade union organizing. But heavy repression continues for groups the regime deems too radical. Habibie's regime continues brutal terror against the masses and is striving to avoid any sudden shift that would upset the wealthy elite that grew fat under Suharto. He has resisted dismantling of the "dual-function" system in which military officers had a hand in all levels of the government as well as in managing the state enterprises. Meanwhile, Habibie is paving the way for more of a role for the spineless bourgeois opposition parties who will provide a safe alternative for the rich and powerful. Now that the masses have deposed Suharto, the former leader of the ruling Golkar party, the Indonesian bourgeoisie (and the foreign capitalists) see the need for some new faces to make minor reforms which, they hope, will be able to make the workers and poor more easily swallow their austerity measures. In short, Habibie wants democratization limited to what is acceptable to the big bourgeoisie.

Meanwhile, the economic crisis takes an ever-heavier toll on the working people. The much-touted capitalist miracle in Asia has gone belly-up. The Indonesian capitalist establishment predicts another major contraction of the economy this year after it shrank by nearly 15% last year. According to government figures, there are 130 million Indonesians now living below the official poverty line of a total population of 202 million, up from 80 million in the middle of last year and 20 million two years ago.

But the Indonesian masses have had a taste of their power and are pressing their own demands. They want their rights now, not if and when it is convenient for the rulers. They want a thorough break with dictatorial methods and semi-military rule, not the cosmetic face-lift that Habibie offers. As well, the workers, urban poor, and impoverished farmers demand relief from abject poverty, while Habibie smashes their protests, rounds up organizers, and offers some inadequate crumbs. So the struggle continues.



## November upsurge: masses demand real change, Habibie replies with bullets

In November 1998, the Indonesian capital of Jakarta was rocked by powerful actions against the Habibie regime. Students were the initial impetus to the protests, but soon the workers and urban poor emptied into the streets and helped give the protests a militant character. Indonesian state radio reported that at the peak of the protests, some one million people took to the streets of Jakarta.

The event that focused the anger of the masses was a meeting of the People's Consultative Assembly (MPR) that was to decide on new election laws. The MPR was nothing but a fig leaf for Suharto's dictatorial rule, and it remains a sham. The MPR has 1,000 members, half of which consist of the Indonesian parliament. 75 of the parliamentary seats are reserved for the military while the others are divided up between the only three legal parties under Suharto: the ruling Golkar party and two meek bourgeois opposition parties. The 500 non-parliamentary members are just unelected appointees loyal to the government. Clearly the masses could not trust such a body to act on their behalf.

At the end of October 1998, a new coalition of student organizations formed to challenge the legitimacy of the MPR, immediately end the military's "dual function" system, and call for the creation of a new transitional government to organize free elections. There was also a demand for lowering the prices on basic necessities. After mobilizing for protests in 12 cities on October 28, the concentrated effort in Jakarta began. In the first week of November, a demonstration of 20,000 was held.

The regime, fearful of a repeat of the May uprising where protesters occupied the parliament, armed itself to the teeth. Some 30,000 soldiers, along with thousands of paramilitary gangs organized by the government, were sent out to smash the protests. But the demonstrators were not deterred. The students planned their own "street parliament" in the center of Jakarta, but were blocked by the paramilitary gangs. The next day, 5,000 students returned, determined to occupy the location. They began to battle the pro-regime thugs who were armed with sharpened bamboo sticks. The tide turned when workers and impoverished residents of Jakarta suddenly poured out of their neighborhoods to fight side by side with the students. Armed with air rifles and other weapons, they soon routed the government goons and the masses controlled the central square.

Next the students attempted to move on the parliament, where the MPR was housed. By November 12, hundreds of thousands of workers and poor had been mobilized. Protesters had departed from march routes across the city, winding their way through the workers' districts and shanty towns, gathering support along the way. On the night of November 12, some 15,000 protesters fiercely confronted walls of troops guarding the parliament building. At one point the activists broke through blockades and made it to the gates of the building, but eventually they were driven back despite repeated assaults.

The next day the clashes continued. The regime responded with a blood bath. Soldier went on a rampage, firing at random into crowds of demonstrators. The working masses and students

fought back with Molotov cocktails and stones. In the end, at least 15 protesters were killed and hundreds seriously injured. Thus, "democracy" under Habibie and the MPR was enshrined on the bodies of the democratic masses.

The savage repression took its toll. Nonetheless, in Jakarta and other cities, a series of anti-government demonstrations continued in December. Protesters clashed with security forces near the presidential residence on December 10, with 17 students injured and 33 others detained by the police. The next day, a large demonstration in Jakarta raised demands for bringing Suharto to trial, abolition of the "dual function" for the military and punishment for its role in the bloody repression of past protests. Activists also condemned the government's terror campaign in Aceh, Irian Jaya and East Timor, while a group of farmers raised the slogan "land for the people." These protests were relatively peaceful, but a week later militant clashes resumed as thousands of students did battle with the police and soldiers in an attempt to storm the parliament.

## Habibie's electoral reform

The distrust of the masses for the Habibie regime and its electoral reforms was proven correct by the eventual agreement reached in the MPR. The MPR, and not the parliament or the people as a whole, is supposed to select the next president at the end of 1999. But the new election law passed this January fails to abolish the military's heavy hand in the political process. The number of seats in the national parliament reserved for the military was merely cut in half to 38, a number very close to the 40 the military representatives in the MPR had been arguing for. On local and regional levels, the reserved military presence in government bodies was cut from 20% to 10%. The new law reduces the number of seats in the MPR overall and retains a sizable section of unelected appointees. The MPR will be reduced to 700 seats, with 200 remaining government-appointed seats. Although as many as 200 new political parties are now operating, only a few will actually be allowed to participate in the elections due to restrictions on parties that aren't established in an arbitrary number of districts throughout this far-flung nation of many islands. As well, parties considered communist by the regime are banned from running for office while the commission overseeing the elections has the right to exclude parties that don't meet its ideological litmus test. Clearly, simple democratic rights have been sacrificed to placate the old power structure and make sure the new president is someone who won't threaten the establishment. In addition, Habibie has declared a ban on outdoor street rallies and demonstrations by political parties during the election campaign. As for the really militant actions of the masses, Habibie has given permission for troops to shoot on sight, which they have already been doing across the country and in occupied East Timor. While Habibie is generally providing more room for the bourgeois opposition to organize, they too can feel his wrath. For instance, he has already arrested two former generals associated with the bourgeois opposition on charges of treason because they allegedly helped inspire street demonstrations challenging the legitimacy of Habibie's regime.

The election law is typical of how Habibie's reforms are tailored to accommodate the old order. He has changed some things, allowing more press freedoms and parties to exist. But he continues to gun down demonstrators. Meanwhile, Habibie has taken no serious measures to punish the hated Suharto. He continues to hang around with his vast multi-billion fortune and networks of cronies in the Indonesian establishment. It is reported that Suharto has been sending funds to 12 new political parties and has attempted to buy influence in the already established opposition parties. But the Habibie regime has confined itself to investigations which, not surprisingly, have so far been unable to find but a tiny speck of the Suharto family fortune. Kindness to the tyrants, death to the militant masses — this is the democracy of Habibie.

### **Workers' movement advances**

Underneath the upheaval in Indonesia lies the growing strength of the Indonesian working class. Though Indonesia still has a huge rural population, there has been a big leap in the size of the industrial proletariat in the last couple of decades. Despite the banning of all independent unions by Suharto, and until 1990, all strikes, workers began forming unions and waging protests. Since the fall of Suharto, and the liberalization of restrictions on non-government trade unions, there has been an extension of organizing by unions that already existed outside government control. As well, in October 1998, there were reports of a new, 10,000-member union organizing among 100 companies in the Jakarta area. Meanwhile, the union federation created by Suharto, the FSPSI, shattered apart. Leaders of each industrial sector in the FSPSI abandoned the national executive board and regrouped themselves as a new formation.

One of the trends among the independent unions with mass influence is the SBSI, under the leadership of Muchtar Pakphahan. This trend began organizing in 1992, and by 1994, Pakphahan was arrested by Suharto. One of Habibie's first acts was to release Pakphahan. Unfortunately, Pakphahan has rewarded Habibie by trying to kill the militancy in the workers' struggle. For example, in late June Pakphahan intentionally kept down the size and spirit of an anti-Habibie protest he organized. Indeed, Pakphahan proposed that if Habibie called for a national reconciliation meeting between the regime, the armed forces and the reformist leaders, he would give up calling for Habibie's resignation. By early July, he announced he was calling off all planned demonstrations due to appeals from "business" and "the public." Pakphahan demonstrated a similar class collaborationist approach during a June strike of Jakarta bus drivers. He told them to work with management to help make the company profitable. The SBSI leader has formed a new political party called the National Workers Party. But he wanted the pro-capitalist leader of the Democratic Party, Sukarnoputri to lead it. When Sukarnoputri declined, Pakphahan simply threw his support behind her electoral campaign.

There is also a more radical trade union trend which developed in illegal conditions under Suharto and now has semi-legal status. These are the PPBI unions connected to the PRD (People's Democratic Party). This trend has a militant

reformist policy which will be discussed later in this article.

These developments in the trade union movement have taken place amidst a new outbreak of strikes in the post-Suharto era. Of particular note was the strike wave that hit Surabaya, the second largest city, in June. Early that month, 10,000 workers clashed with riot police during a mass march. In the middle of the month, dock workers struck. Near the end of June, workers at local shoe factories hit the bricks. On June 24, some 10,000 shoe workers marched on the local parliament.

In February 1999, workers in this city were still fighting. 3,000 furniture workers protested outside of the Labor Department offices; while at the Maspion food factory offices, 5,000 workers protested, stoning company offices. In the middle of the month, workers launched militant actions to win higher wages and more compensation for transportation and food. Eight days of protest was capped with a march on government offices by 25,000 workers. The police fired tear gas at the marchers, who replied by hurling stones at the cops.

Another notable strike involved 7,000 workers in the city of Solo. When management threatened mass firings, a new workers' committee formed which called for nationalizing the factory. The committee also emphasized the need for workers to involve themselves in the political struggle against the regime and invited student leaders to speak to them.

In early July, 10,000 workers from 14 companies in the Jakarta area went on strike, demanding an increase in the minimum wage. In early August, 5,000 gold and copper miners struck a subsidiary of a U.S. company in Irian Jaya. On September 5, police were sent to subdue 4,000 workers striking a polyester manufacturer in Purwakarta in West Java.

The workers' strikes and their participation in the mass political protests have been a thorn in the side of the employers and the Habibie government. Each step forward in their organization is of utmost importance to the struggle in Indonesia for it is the workers whose interests lie not only in the most resolute fight against the leftovers of Suhartoism, but also the system of capitalist exploitation which lies behind it. For the workers to unleash their potential, however, will require a protracted fight against the class collaborationist influences and for the construction of revolutionary organization.

### **Regional struggles flare up**

The Habibie-Wiranto regime is also encountering stern resistance from particular regional struggles. Rebellion has been strong Aceh, the northernmost province of Sumatra. This region is rich in oil/gas and other natural resources. But the wealth derived from the resources goes to the likes of the state oil company, not the poor masses of the area. This has helped fuel militant anti-government activity and given rise to an independence movement. In December, demonstrators occupied the governor's house and protested at the regional parliament in the regional capital, Lhokseumawe. In early January, the masses burned government offices and a police station in Lhokseumawe before troops opened fire and killed 11 people. The masses have sought revenge for government atrocities such as the recent torture deaths of five people held in custody by the

army. They have formed their own people's militias. In one incident, 18 soldiers were removed from a bus, with six of their bodies later turning up. The cowardly troops have become so spooked at the mere sight of a group of ordinary masses that on January 18 they opened fire on a gathering which approached a police station just to report a traffic accident.

The regime's savage tactics are also in evidence in western Papua. In one recent incident, troops fired on 700 people at a pro-independence rally, wounding 24. For all his brutality, Habibie has not been able to silence the regional movements. Thus, in addition to repression, he has begun to promise that more government revenues will flow into particularly poor regions.

### **East Timor**

Habibie's has also tried his "carrot and stick" approach in East Timor. East Timor won its liberation from Portuguese colonialism in 1975, but this victory was quickly followed by an invasion by Indonesia, which formally annexed it the following year. In subjugating East Timor, the Indonesian armed forces carried out genocide, slaughtering an estimated 200,000 people. (The total population today is about 800,000.) The masses have never given up their hope for self-determination however, and pro-independence guerrilla forces have fought for many years.

In December 1998, massive pro-independence demonstrations rocked East Timor. In the midst of the protests, the special UN envoy involved in negotiations between Portugal and Indonesia to determine the fate of East Timor arrived in the capital of Dili. Upon his departure he was chased through the airport by hundreds of angry protesters. The demonstrators were outraged by the failure of the UN to satisfy their demands for self-determination and for insufficient consultation with representatives of the East Timorese people. (The UN still recognizes Portugal as the legitimate authority in East Timor. and while it maintains contact with East Timorese representatives, any agreement must be acceptable to both the former and present colonial power.)

While Habibie had promised troop reductions, in fact he sent another 3,000 troops at the end of December and the beginning of January. By some estimates, total troop deployment recently reached 17,000, in addition to several thousand paramilitary gangs armed by the regime. There have been brutal massacres of Timorese villagers by the troops and gangs, and the capital city of Dili has seen the influx of peasant refugees forced to flee their homes.

At the same time as the regime keeps its foot on East Timor's neck, it has offered some sort of autonomy for the area. The autonomy plan would involve keeping a certain amount of Indonesian troops around and leave Jakarta in charge of "defense." The Indonesian currency would remain. East Timor would be granted their own local police and its own legislature and judiciary with unspecified limited powers. The autonomous government would also oversee cultural and education matters. This autonomy plan did not satisfy the East Timorese masses who instead demanded a referendum which

would allow them, not Jakarta, to decide what new terms to establish in their relationship to Indonesia or to choose to become an independent country. But the Indonesian government declared it would never allow independence or a referendum on the issue.

### **Habibie's new policy: will independence be granted?**

Recently, however, Habibie's East Timor policy has undergone a further shift. This was precipitated by the peoples' struggle and by certain moves by other capitalist countries. Australia had never accepted the UN stand against recognizing Indonesia's annexation of East Timor. But recently the conservative Howard government started hinting that independence might eventually have to be considered. The bourgeois opposition party in Australia, the Australian Labor Party, which had long backed Indonesia, went so far as to offer financial support to an autonomous or independent East Timor government. This shift by Australian capitalism was not due to a sudden attack of conscience. Rather it marked the recognition that Indonesia was facing a dire crisis they might not be able to control, and that they wanted to make sure that their oil and other interests in East Timor would be safeguarded if an independent regime came to power.<sup>1</sup>

At first, the Habibie regime responded with anger at the Australian government. But soon it introduced a new twist in its policy. Indonesia would continue to refuse to allow a referendum on self-determination in East Timor. But Habibie pledged that should the people of East Timor reject his autonomy plan, he would recommend that after the next elections, the new parliament should consider allowing independence. According to the Habibie government, if East Timor was granted independence, there would be a quick withdrawal of Indonesian forces and Indonesia would turn things over to the UN authority, whose plan is to carry out a gradual decolonization process administered by Portugal. Under this plan, acceptance of autonomy under Indonesia would permanently rule out independence.

Actually, the best solution would be to hold a referendum now that would allow the local population to decide their status, including immediate independence if they so choose. But what appears more likely to take place is a deal for autonomy between the Indonesian government and various of the

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<sup>1</sup>Needless to say, the U.S. Congress's decision in October 1998 to forbid the use of its arms shipments to Indonesia for use in East Timor was hardly motivated by humanitarianism either. The U.S., like most of world capitalism, opposed the annexation by Indonesia in words. But it supported and armed it in deeds, and only after Indonesia's failure to crush the independence movement in 24 years, does it take the token measure of proclaiming its opposition to using its weapons to continue the slaughter of the people of East Timor. Moreover, nothing is said about using U.S. weapons against the people outside East Timor.

liberation groups. If this is an autonomy that is acceptable to the local people, grants them a good deal of self-rule, and guarantees them the right to decide on independence in a time frame they find agreeable, it may resolve the issue reasonably well. But would any deal really be like this?

What the present proposals will offer on such matters when everything is haggled out remains to be seen. But already there are clearly a number of possible pitfalls to present proposals. Indeed, the question that immediately arises is that if Habibie opposes a referendum, how is the will of the East Timor population to be determined? This question was up for grabs for several months. But in early March the Habibie regime finally agreed to a UN-sponsored vote in East Timor to determine its status that would take place this July. Thus, although the Habibie government insists this vote is not a referendum, it apparently has conceded to something similar to a referendum.<sup>2</sup> The mechanics of how this vote will take place are yet to be worked out, however. But even if such a vote takes place, there is the fact that Megawati Sukarnoputri, leader of the Democratic Party, the bourgeois opposition party that might well emerge as the strongest party in the next elections, has declared her horror at the Habibie government's new position and reiterated her support for the legality of the annexation. It's possible that other strong parties may join her in this. The general elections in Indonesia are scheduled for June while Habibie wants the vote in East Timor to be held in July. So the next Indonesian government might kill the present independence option.

Despite the numerous obstacles that still exist, it appears possible that some agreement will be reached between the Indonesian government, the UN and the leaders of the main independence groups. The Habibie regime recently agreed to move the leader of the Fretilin independence organization, Xanana Gusmao, from jail to house arrest to facilitate negotiations. And Gusmao and the other main leaders of the independence forces are quite willing to reach a deal. Gusmao has expressed enthusiasm for Habibie's promise to allow a vote on independence. Moreover, some of the independence leaders prefer not to have the East Timorese people exercise their right to decide on independence immediately, and there are serious questions about what type of deal is being prepared. In the recent past they have expressed their preference for a UN proposal that is supposed to allow independence only after several years of autonomy under a UN authority. Indeed, Gusmao and other major independence leaders previously expressed a willingness to accept a lengthy autonomy under Indonesian rule provided there was a self-determination

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<sup>2</sup>It is notable that one of the reasons behind the regime's fear of conceding to a referendum was that Habibie and the bourgeois opposition parties believe that acknowledging a referendum implies that the annexation of East Timor was illegal. In other words, they don't want there to be any repercussions against the elite which carried out and supported the annexation, and for this they had been jeopardizing the freedom of East Timor. That's the sort of "democrats" they are!

referendum at the end of the process. Habibie's present position of independence or perpetual autonomy under Indonesian rule removes this option for now, however.

If there was a favorable outcome on the question of self-determination, it would be an important victory. It would mean lifting the chauvinist tyranny of Indonesia over the masses. Moreover, the removal of the Indonesian jackboot would create better conditions for eventually establishing a stronger unity between the toilers of East Timor and Indonesia. At the same time even the most democratic solution to the status of East Timor will by no means solve all the problems facing the masses. Class exploitation will remain, and independence will mean the local bourgeoisie will tend to play a greater role in it. Nor will independence mean that the exploitation of the multinationals will come to an end. Indeed, the leaders of the umbrella group of the main independence groups, the CNRT, assured the Australian oil companies operating in East Timor that they could provide them "a more secure and predictable environment" since "their commercial interests will not be adversely affected by East Timorese self-determination." At the same time, however, the new conditions of struggle will assist the development of a distinct proletarian trend.

### **The bourgeois opposition prefers Habibie to the masses**

Habibie-style "democracy" is proceeding with the assistance of the timid, bourgeois opposition parties. When the mass demonstrations challenged the Habibie regime in November 1998, they preached faith in Habibie and urged an end to militant demonstrations. For example Amien Rais, leader of the National Mandate Party (PAN) and former leader of the huge Islamic organization, Muhammadiyah, told student leaders to stop their mobilizations to prevent "chaos" that would lead to the military seizing power. But it is not the demonstrations which brought down Suharto and are hitting Habibie that jeopardize a democratic transformation. But those who compromise with such forces. Indeed, when the mass rebellion in May 1998 threatened Suharto, Rais called off a mass demonstration because the military brass had banned it. Since then, he has advocated letting Habibie "show what he can do." This is essentially the stand of another top Muslim leader, Abdurrahman Wahid of the Nahdatul Ulama (NU), who backs the National Awakening Party, as well as the Indonesian Democratic Party leader, Megawati Sukarnoputri. They are the parties which, together with Habibie and the military, hammered out the rotten new election law and are trying to sell it to the masses.

Wahid has gone so far as to invite Suharto into a joint discussion on Indonesia's future and condemned continuing protests targeting Suharto and his family "for the sake of economic recovery." Clearly Wahid is more concerned with the profits of the bourgeoisie than the rights of the people. Meanwhile Sukarnoputri in an October 10 speech proclaimed her loyalty to the "open market system" of globalization, which delighted the Western imperialist press which was concerned that she might follow the nationalization policy of her father, Sukarno, the bourgeois-nationalist leader toppled by Suharto.

For the bourgeois opposition, the profits of the exploiters are the supreme concern.

On the question of East Timor, while Amien Rais has proclaimed that he will support self-determination, Wahid has echoed Sukarnoputri's defense of the annexation and announced he wants East Timor to remain part of Indonesia. At the same time he has met with independence leader Xanana Gusmao and says some kind of change is necessary. But the defense of the annexation by Sukarnoputri and Wahid shows one of the reasons behind their reluctance to stand up to Suhartoism is that they share with it the chauvinism of the Indonesian bourgeoisie. In fact, even Rais has a hard time hiding his chauvinism on the issue. He has complained that international pressure against the Indonesian government's position on East Timor is an attempt to "divide and rob" Indonesia.

When Suharto ruled, the bourgeois parties were themselves subject to repression. Yet, even then, Suharto was able at times to co-opt them into his New Order. Despite the indignities they suffered, the bourgeois opposition parties were afraid to challenge the regime. Now that the masses have gotten rid of Suharto, the bourgeois opposition feels it will get more positions of power in Habibie's set up, and is willing to sacrifice the demands of the masses for this goal. Thus, while the masses were being slaughtered in the streets of Jakarta, the bourgeois opposition parties reached a rotten deal on the elections with the military and Habibie in the MPR.

### The PRD

Clearly the bourgeois opposition parties will not fight on behalf of the oppressed classes. The workers and poor must wage continue to wage their own struggle. This raises the question of what orientation the mass movement should take. The main group advocating militant protests is the People's Democratic Party (PRD). It has influence among sections of the student activists. As well, this party has devoted much of its efforts to organizing among sections of the workers and urban poor. In 1995 it established its own trade union front, the PPBI, many of whose leaders were jailed under Suharto. Despite this persecution by Suharto, it was able to carry out important strikes, particularly among textile workers.

Unlike the bourgeois opposition, it sees the Habibie regime as the enemy. But it does not put forward a clear picture of the different class stands that are taking shape in the post-Suharto era. In the movement against Suharto, they called, to no avail, on the bourgeois figures like Rais and Megawati to lead the struggle. Now the bourgeois liberals are collaborating with Habibie. But it appears that the PRD had hopes that the cowardly bourgeois parties would come out strongly against the Habibie regime. There were reports that certain student organizations as well as the PRD were trying to convince the bourgeois opposition to refuse to go along with Habibie's plans to hammer out a new election law in the MPR during the high tide of anti-Habibie protests.

At the same time, the PRD rightly called the Habibie

regime unfit to rule. It called for transitional governmental bodies to be formed both locally and nationally to replace Habibie and oversee a democratic transition. But how were these transitional bodies to come about? To accomplish this would require, among other things, that the masses had a realistic idea of what to expect from the bourgeois opposition, which would be one of the obstacles to this plan. But the PRD leadership apparently thought they could get the bourgeois opposition parties to form an alternative government to Habibie. The problem, of course, was that the bourgeois parties had no intention of setting up such a government. When the bourgeois opposition forces failed to carry out the reforms demanded by the masses, the PRD denounced them and continued to organize protests. But creating illusions in Sukarnoputri and Rais undercuts the ability of the masses to see what their tasks are in the coming period.

The tendency of the PRD to look toward a section of the bourgeoisie flows from their overall political stand. While they talk about the evils of capitalism and imperialism, the PRD perspective does not go beyond replacing a dismantled Suhartoism with a reformed capitalism which mitigates some of the worst abuses of the toilers. They put forward the social-democratic myth of an above-class democracy where the relation between the capitalists and the workers becomes harmonious. They want to see the Suharto family business interests expropriated, which certainly should be done. But they couple their denunciation of Suharto's crony capitalism with support for the development of sections of capital not associated with Suharto. Given this overall vision, it is not surprising that the PRD tends to look to the parties of the reformist bourgeoisie.<sup>3</sup>

### Tasks facing the workers

The orientation the masses need is one of class independence. They must have no faith in the bourgeois opposition, but realize that its support of the Indonesian capitalists means they will always try to limit the rights of the masses. An independent class stand is necessary to thoroughly uproot the Suharto-era restrictions. It also means the workers must use the present situation to build up their own organizations to wage the class struggle. The bourgeoisie may carry out a slow liberalization, but even the most reform-minded of them have no intention of doing away with the extreme exploitation and poverty of the toilers. Today, the workers and other toilers are taking advantage of the end of the Suharto dictatorship to begin the arduous task of building up organization. The more the masses realize their enemy is not just Suhartoism, but Indonesian capitalism itself, the stronger will be their impetus toward organization and the more resolute will their organizations be. □

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<sup>3</sup>It should be noted that there are individuals in the PRD who make statements that imply a more radical position than the official PRD stand.

*On recent remarks of Gennady Zyuganov, leader of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation:*

## **State-capitalist politics descends into naked anti-Semitism**

by Mark, Detroit

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The Russian working masses have suffered greatly under the reign of Boris Yeltsin. His headlong dash to replace the former economy run by the old state-capitalist bureaucracy with a privatized, market capitalist economy has been an unqualified disaster. A good deal of the former economic base lies in ruin. Neo-liberalism has gone bankrupt in Russia, and Yeltsin's popularity among the people has sunk to near zero. Workers are going without food and pay, and protests are beginning to break out.

In this situation, the so-called Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF), led by Gennady Zyuganov, has put itself forward as the alternative. As Yeltsin's popularity plummets, the CPRF has been gaining strength. It has become the most powerful party in the Russian parliament, the Duma. The CPRF even has ministries in the Primakov government. Meanwhile, around the world various leftists are preaching faith in the CPRF. For them the growth of the CPRF means the workers will have a powerful champion. They are crossing their fingers and hoping that the CPRF's advances mean that socialism cannot be far behind. But these hopes are misplaced. The CPRF is rotten to the core. It is so politically bankrupt that its main source of notoriety in the past few months has been the virulent anti-Semitic outbursts of its legislative representatives in the Duma and the defense of these atrocities by the party's leader, Zyuganov. The CPRF leaders have reduced the critique of Yeltsin's neo-liberalism to disgusting chauvinist garbage scapegoating "the Jews" for the problems caused by market capitalism. Thus, Zyuganov and company are dragging Russian politics back to the days of the Czarist pogrom. True, the CPRF talks about certain demands of the workers, but this does not distinguish them from a host of outright fascist trends. The Nazis too talked about the needs of the workers and feigned anger at capitalists only to divert the workers' anger away from a real fight against the exploiters and into wild national chauvinism.

How is it that a supposedly "socialist" party could descend to such depths? The trend that gave rise to the CPRF long ago

betrayed the class interests of the workers. The CPRF was formed in 1993 from the tattered remnants of the so-called Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). The CPSU was the ruling party of the former system which masqueraded as socialism while, in fact, the high government and party officials lorded over the workers, denied them their rights, and grew fat by treating the state economy as a treasure chest for the elite. Though the economy was controlled by the state, the state was run by a new class of parasites who ran this state-capitalist order for their own benefit. While under the old system the CPSU represented the rule of the state-capitalist plant managers and central bureaucracy, the growth of private interests among the rulers paved the way for converting state assets into privately-owned companies in the present market system. The present CPRF, like the former ruling CPSU, cloaks itself in the mantle of socialism and communism, but its leadership has no more to do with these things than the former ruling party. Today the CPRF does not oppose private capitalism per se, but merely wants to reform the present system of wanton exploitation a bit. They demagogically denounce the government while they themselves are in the government and their ministers merrily help shove pro-capitalist policies down the throats of the masses.

The corrupt stands of Zyuganov thus flow from the corrupt former state-capitalist politics. And the efforts of those "leftists" who try to explain away the CPRF's anti-Semitism are connected to their inability to see the true class nature of the old Soviet order. After all, if one believes the former system was socialistic, this provides a strong motive to defend the CPRF heirs of the old ruling party at all costs.

### **Zyuganov defends anti-Semitism**

The CPRF has always tolerated national chauvinism in general, and anti-Semitism in particular, in its ranks. But this reached new heights when CPRF Duma deputy General Albert Makashov declared in his October 1998 article "Usurers of Russia" that the "yid" had taken over Russia to "drink the blood of the indigenous peoples [i.e., Russians — Mark] of the state" and this was the reason for "usury, deceit, corruption and thievery" "flourishing in the country." Now if there CPRF had any concern for class solidarity or a real interest in pointing out the real causes of the crisis, they would not even allow the likes of Makashov in their party. But the CPRF, which is the dominant party in the Duma, resolutely opposed even a measure of censure against Makashov. Then, CPRF leader Zyuganov embarked on a campaign to apologize for Makashov.

Zyuganov tried to give the appearance of disagreeing with Makashov by chiding him for some of his cruder formulations. He argued that Makashov should not have equated the political trend of zionism with Jewish people. But Zyuganov's essentially tried to justify Makashov's outburst and wound up spewing a more "refined" version of anti-Jewish hysteria. Soon after Makashov's outburst Zyuganov chided him for ignoring that the CPRF supposedly stands for "friendship of peoples." But he quickly added

" . . . on the other hand, there is not a single audience today — I emphasize, not a single one — that does not ask questions about the subject of the Jews. . . . It is no secret that the personnel policy pursued by Yeltsin violated the principle of national representation in all our country's enforcement agencies, the economy, finances, and journalism. . . . Today it is the Russian people themselves who feel encroached upon." (From Zyuganov's statements of Oct. 19, 1998 on the Russian TV program "Akuly Politpera".)

So according to Zyuganov, it is understandable that "the Jews" are under scrutiny in Russia. After all, Zyuganov holds that it is the "national" composition of government bodies under Yeltsin that is a big problem. He goes on to say that the nationality of certain government members is linked to the justifiable feeling among Russians that they are being "encroached upon."

For good measure, Zyuganov went on to attack other nationalities in general. He complains bitterly that since various non-Russian nationalities that used to be part of the Soviet Union have formed independent states, "there are 25 million Russians who have been left outside the borders of the Russian Federation." In the old Soviet Union, about 25 million Russians lived outside the Russian republic too, but Zyuganov doesn't have a problem with that because he regards that in the old system the Russians as the dominant nationality which got to boss the others around. But now the native bourgeois is dominant in the independent states, and the supremacy once enjoyed by the Russian state-capitalist bureaucrats over the non-Russian nationalities is no more. So Zyuganov is pissed off. He doesn't call for correct treatment of the national minorities either inside Russia today or in the countries dominated by other nationalities. Rather he declares war on Jews in Russia, and whips up sentiment for extending the borders of the Russian Federation to encompass the other countries where Russians live. He can't conceive of correct treatment of minorities, but only one nation oppressing another. Thus, in essence, Zyuganov denounces the right to self-determination of the former Soviet republics which broke away. Lenin rightly denounced Czarist Russia as a prison-house of nations. But Zyuganov actually hails the "thousand-year history" of the old Russian empire which enslaved other nations within its state borders. Thus, Zyuganov's "friendship of peoples" turns out to be nothing but anti-Semitic rot and the enslavement of nations.

Lest anyone think that Zyuganov spoke this way out of haste, two months later he was continuing this chauvinist litany. After going through the obligatory rhetoric against "ill-

considered statements about Jews," Zyuganov announced the fantastic discovery that

"the Zionization of Russian state power has been one of the reasons behind the current catastrophic state of the country, its mass impoverishment, and the extinction of its population." (Zyuganov's statement of December 24, 1998 entitled "On the National Pride of Patriots.") He argued that its people "rightly ask how it can be that key positions in a number of economic sectors were seized predominantly by representatives of one ethnic group in the course of privatization."

For Zyuganov, the problem is the wrong ethnic group allegedly rules, not that capitalist exploitation is being carried out by a handful of exploiters from different backgrounds. So much for his claims to distinguish between Zionism and people of Jewish ancestry. Only a lackey of capital could single out "zionism" as the main feature of the Russian ruling class and the explanation for the suffering in Russia.

Of course, while blaming Zionism for the Russian crisis, Zyuganov himself proudly points to the long-standing support of his political trend for the expansionist and racist state of Israel, the centerpiece of Zionism. Oh yes, he makes sure to add that Israel does some bad things, but that doesn't make him give up overall support for the Israeli state whose entire existence is bound up with the perpetual oppression of the Palestinians and other Arab peoples. Zyuganov's "anti-zionist" rhetoric thus has little to do with support for the Palestinian cause but is a progressive-sounding cover for his campaign of anti-Jewish hysteria in Russia.

Though Israel has annexed Palestinian and other Arab territories, to the best of our knowledge, the Israeli zionist leaders have not occupied Russia. Yet Zyuganov cries hysterically about a so-called Jewish (oops, zionist!) conspiracy for acting "on behalf of another state," presumably Israel. This shows that no absurdity is too big for Zyuganov's anti-Semitic witch hunt.

Meanwhile, by reducing Russian foreign policy to subservience to Israel, Zyuganov distracts from the real way outside powers are affecting Russia. Yeltsin's wheeling and dealing with world capitalist powers is converted into a fairy tale about Russia being turned over to foreign zionists. Actually it is the IMF, dominated by the U.S. and other giant powers, which demands its policies be followed in Russia. Yeltsin is influenced by the neo-liberal dogmas because it has been the fashion of the bourgeoisie around the world, including the Russian business oligarchy, not because some Jewish conspiracy forced this on Russia. But it is indicative of the lunatic ravings of the anti-Semitic campaign that we must spend time explaining the most obvious facts.

However, there is a method to this madness. By diverting attention from how the most powerful capitalist countries are imposing their will on Russia, Zyuganov can hide his own party's role in bowing down before the foreign capitalist powers. While he complains about how allegedly the Jewish conspiracy has sold out to foreign interests, it turns out that First Deputy Prime Minister Yuri Maslyukov, a CPRF

member, has been representing the CPRF-backed Primakov government in Washington, D.C. as it tries to curry favor with the IMF and the World Bank. Masyukov has been begging for more money to pay off the old IMF loans by assuring the international financiers that

“there will be no de-privatizations, crazy nationalizations, uncontrolled monetary emissions and no extremism, in the economy or politics.” (Reuters, Jan.22, 1999.)

So it turns out the CPRF leaders think its just fine to grovel in front of the international organizations dominated by the biggest imperialist powers. Evidently Zyuganov's real complaint against the alleged Jewish conspiracy is that it supposedly is betraying Russia to Israel whereas the CPRF wants to grovel in front of the real world power-brokers! A great nation like Russia should only beg to other great nations!

### **Playing into Yeltsin's hands**

The CPRF leadership and its defenders try to fend off criticism by pointing out that Yeltsin and company are using Makashov's remarks and the CPRF reaction to them in order to isolate and possibly even ban the CPRF. Thus, they imply, to accuse the CPRF of anti-Semitism is to support Yeltsin and the neo-liberal agenda. Of course, the Yeltsin's criticism of the CPRF is completely hypocritical. After all, Yeltsin is himself a Russian chauvinist of the first order. It was he who a few years ago spearheaded the crushing of Chechnya, a territory inside the Russian Federation that sought independence. It was under Yeltsin that the Russian army laid waste to the Chechen city of Grozny. Yeltsin wants to take advantage of the present situation so he can promote the particular measures he wants to save Russian capitalism rather than the measures preferred by the CPRF. But it is the CPRF that has played right into Yeltsin's hands. What more could Yeltsin ask for than the chance to portray his rotten policies as necessary to prevent blatant anti-Semites from coming to power? Who, but the Makashov's and the Zyuganov's, could manage to chastise the butcher of Chechnya for allegedly discarding Russian nationalism? Who but the CPRF leaders could make Yeltsin look like Mr. Universal Brotherhood?

The defenders of the CPRF leaders can see only one or the other variety of capitalist policy. For them, the only realistic politics is Zyuganov-style anti-Semitic populism or the neo-liberalism of Yeltsin. The idea that the workers must have their own independent stand opposed to both Yeltsin and the CPRF is foreign to them. They are incapable of understanding, or are opposed to, the idea that if the workers can't develop their own class stand, they will be reduced to helpless pawns at the hands of one or another section of the exploiters. But that task requires bucking the big established trends, it requires rebuilding the workers' movement on new foundations, and those who uphold the CPRF as the alternative lack the revolutionary spirit to do that.

### **The CPRF's sordid alliances**

The recent anti-Jewish tirades from Makashov and Zyuganov show that the various well-known alliances the CPRF has formed with various ultra-racist reactionaries like Vladimir Zhironovsky over the years were not only cynical political maneuvers but reflect certain underlying common views. Indeed, when Makashov shot himself in the foot, arch-nationalist and anti-Semite Zhironovsky came to Makashov's defense by declaring that anti-Semitism was non-existent in Russia. In this he echoes the stand of Zyuganov who declares that “the thesis about ‘Russian fascism’ and a ‘brownshirt-Red’ threat, and about ‘anti-Semitism’” is a nothing but a campaign to “divert society's attention away from the country's catastrophic position and the real culprits for it” and “provoke anti-Jewish sentiment among the masses.” In other words, Zyuganov holds that to raise that anti-Semitism exists is to incite anti-Jewish passions among the masses. Zyuganov sounds like the U.S. racists who complain that all is well in the U.S. and justify racist atrocities on the grounds that they were provoked by those who exposed racism.

Recently, the CPRF has been trying to establish yet another sordid alliance. They are courting the Mayor of Moscow, Yuri Luzhkov, who is often mentioned as a viable presidential candidate to replace Yeltsin. As we have seen, the CPRF attributes to a Jewish conspiracy the widescale corruption and criminality that exists among the Russian rulers. But Luzhkov is the very personification of corruption and criminality. He runs Moscow as his personal business fiefdom and has an army of thugs to deal with anyone who might challenge his power. Compared to him the old political machine of Boss Daley in Chicago, which organized the skull-cracking of anti-war protesters 1968, was a bunch of Sunday school teachers. But according to Zyuganov “Luzhkov is a well-known and authoritative man who knows the specifics of both the old and new systems.” (*Financial Times* article carried in the *Orange County Register* of Oct. 22, 1998) Of course, it is indisputable that Luzhkov is an expert in milking the system for his personal fame and fortune, but somehow Zyuganov omits that little detail. But then again, in the same article, it is reported that Zyuganov counts as his heroes certain figures who ruled in an authoritative manner no matter to what end, including Charles de Gaulle, Stalin and Czar Alexander III (who executed Lenin's brother for being a revolutionary activist).

### **Anti-Semitism and the overall policy of the CPRF**

The scapegoating of Jews by the CPRF shows just how far it will go in order to hide the real causes of the crisis afflicting Russia. Zyuganov and his cronies are “communists” who want to divert the workers from targeting capitalism. The CPRF leaders want to confine the workers' struggle to the most piddling reforms and keep its potential strength from developing, lest it sweep away not only Yeltsin, but all those who would defend the system of exploitation, albeit with a few reforms. It talks about relieving the burden on the masses, but



has thrown its support behind the Primakov government. After all, the Primakov government has given the CPRF some posts and promises to throw a few crumbs to the masses.

Zyuganov's conception of the economy differs from Yeltsin's mainly in that he would like to see the state sector expanded. Thus, Zyuganov argues that "The state must have a controlling stake in all the strategic industries which include energy, the military-industrial complex and scientific enterprises. Otherwise they will serve the interest of certain people rather than the whole country." (*Financial Times* article carried in *The Orange Country Register*, Oct. 22, 1998.) Zyuganov tries to give his nationalization plans a socialist tinge. But nationalization by itself is not socialism. Socialism also requires that the workers administer the economy. The old Soviet Union had the most extensive nationalization but not socialism because the workers were not the masters of the economy but became a subjugated class under the rule of a new state-bourgeois elite. Under the present market capitalist order, an expanded state sector would still be under the control of the bourgeois ruling class as a whole, not the workers. Nationalizing certain key economic sectors has long been commonplace in the capitalist world. Zyuganov's nationalized energy sector would be no more under the control of the masses than the state-run PEMEX oil monopoly has been in Mexico or the state sector of heavy industry in South Korea.

While the idea of expanding the state sector has nothing to do with socialism, nationalizations might be useful as one part of an emergency program to bring some immediate relief for the masses from the total economic chaos now engulfing Russia. But in practice the CPRF has balked at nationalizing particular enterprises out of fear of offending the private oligarchs. And as we have seen above, the "communist" minister Masyukov is guaranteeing the Western imperialist financiers that they have no intention of any extensive nationalization.

Given this program, it is not surprising that the CPRF is not really trying to develop the initiative of the exploited masses. True, the CPRF has been associated with certain demonstrations. But it does not strengthen the independent class organization and consciousness of the toilers, but undermines it. For instance, it is reported that since entering the Primakov government, the CPRF has been especially keen to eliminate slogans in demonstrations which denounce the entire government in favor of those targeting Yeltsin alone. Indeed, with its pronounced Russian chauvinism and anti-Semitism, it cannot even draw clear lines between itself and the ultra-reactionary groupings it often unites with in demonstrations. The CPRF leadership is trying to stave off mass anger with promises of minor relief from the crushing burden of the economic crisis while using virulent national chauvinism to deflect their thoughts from the class struggle against Russian capitalism. In short, these "communists" have no vision beyond

bailing out the capitalist oligarchy.

### **For an independent class trend!**

Neither Yeltsin's neo-liberal capitalism nor the capitalism with more state intervention of Zyuganov offer salvation to the workers. The workers don't need one or another variety of capitalist politics, but politics which serve their class interests. The Russian masses are being ground down, but neither Yeltsin nor the CPRF is interested in doing anything serious about it. Only if the workers can start mobilizing in their own behalf will they be able to wage a real fight for relief from the economic crisis. Today, the Russian workers do not suffer from a lack of bitterness toward those who rule them, but a lack of clarity and organization to direct that anger into a concerted force that can target the class enemy and sort out the role being played by the different oppositional trends.

The development of a workers' trend also involves more than just the immediate fight for relief, however. So long as capitalism exists, whether with more or less state intervention, the will of the profit-mad exploiters will reign over the workers. In order for the workers to chart a course beyond capitalism requires also that they understand the true nature of the former Soviet Union. The Soviet Union, from Stalin to Gorbachev, represented not an alternative to capitalism, but was the most thorough form of state-capitalism the world has seen. Moreover, it was the development of private interests among the state bureaucrats and managers within the old system of state property which paved the way for the transformation to private capitalism. So long as the Russian workers feel that the old Soviet society was the socialist or communist alternative, they will not be able to see what real revolutionary change means. The workers' hatred of Yeltsin's neo-liberalism will be channeled towards the state-capitalist system of the past, and the memories of the oppression of the past system will push the workers back towards private capitalism. Either the workers will be trapped in this vicious circle, or they will simply despair of any solution. This is why it is important to analyze the distinction between state-capitalist oppression and a society moving toward socialism.

The state-capitalist oppression of the past cannot inspire a revolutionary outlook among the workers. To grasp what a real revolutionary alternative is, the workers need to be able to distinguish between the revisionist conception of socialism and the Marxist-Leninist view. The task of developing this critique is not simply repeating the correct views of the past, but further developing these views by learning the workings of the societies that laid claim to socialism while consolidating a state-capitalist system. For the workers to liberate themselves from capitalism, they must free themselves from the dead weight of the revisionist state-capitalism of the past. □

# The rise and suppression of the 'ultra-left' in the Chinese cultural revolution

by Pete Brown

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Assessing the Chinese cultural revolution is a complex undertaking. For one thing it is necessary to oppose the present-day rightist atmosphere that prevails in both the U.S. and China and that labels any movement of the masses as "insanity."<sup>1</sup> It's also necessary to give some credit to Mao Zedong for reforms carried out during this period. As a peasant populist Mao consistently stood for reforms such as improving health care and educational facilities in the countryside, and the cultural revolution did bring about some improvements in this area (at least temporarily).

But it's also necessary to oppose the diehard enthusiasm of the Maoists and "Gang of Four" cheering squads like the RCP, USA, who negate serious analysis of this period. Mao led the cultural revolution, and the cultural revolution spawned a mass movement that was to some degree a genuine expression of revolutionary sentiments. But it doesn't follow that Mao led, or wanted to lead, a genuine revolutionary movement. Such a movement would have smashed up the state-capitalist bureaucracy he headed and established a revolutionary-democratic regime based on the working class and poor peasantry who made up the vast, vast majority of the population. Far from trying to lead such a movement, Mao worked to suppress those who were striving to build it.

From the standpoint of the struggle against revisionism, the most interesting feature of the cultural revolution was the rise and demise of the "Ultra-left," the movement *to the left of Mao* and the other leading Maoists (Lin Biao, the Gang of Four,

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<sup>1</sup>For example a recent issue of *Time* magazine with a special article on prominent statesmen of the 20th century put Mao Zedong in the category of a great *mass murderer* and cited his leadership of the cultural revolution as proof of his fanaticism.

etc.). For even though Mao and the other leaders of the cultural revolution talked a good deal about the masses, and opposition to revisionism, the fact is that from its beginning the movement was never meant by its Maoist leaders to be part of a social revolutionary movement. The Maoists themselves were leading lights of the state-capitalist system that congealed after China's liberation in 1949. This is precisely the system that needed to be revolutionized. Mao, despite his calls against bourgeois elements in the party, essentially backed the system. Hence he ended up with a factional struggle against his enemies — other leading lights whom Mao stigmatized as "Rightist" but whose policies in many cases weren't all that different from his own. As the cultural revolution went on, its sectarian character became more and more clear to everyone; which is why eventually the masses became disillusioned with the whole thing.

But the interesting thing is that, beyond Mao's limited aims, the working masses did take up genuine struggles in the midst of the cultural revolution. They did fight for political and economic reforms. They did target revisionism and capitalism. They did strive to build their own independent political organizations. And outside of China, the cultural revolution did inspire militant activists around the world to seek out new forms for fighting revisionism.

The domination of Mao Zedong, Chinese revisionism and three-worldism was a heavy burden for the newly emerging movement of the late 1960s. It took the new generation of anti-revisionist activists years, sometimes decades, to cast off this burden. Even today groups calling themselves Marxist persist in praising China as "socialist."<sup>2</sup> Thus it is still timely to assess the course and development of the Chinese cultural revolution, as it represents the high tide of Maoism on a world scale and as a pretender to leadership in the anti-revisionist struggle.

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<sup>2</sup>For example the Spartacist League, in their newspaper *Workers' Vanguard* (No. 701, 20 November 1998), declares that they ". . . stand for unconditional military defense of China and the other remaining deformed workers states against imperialist attack and internal counterrevolution . . ." (p. 4). The SL likes to throw around phrases against "the Chinese bureaucratically deformed workers state", but when push comes to shove they will defend that state to the death against not only imperialist attack but also against "internal counterrevolution" — i.e., protest movements that arise from among the Chinese masses and which might threaten the SL's beloved "workers state."

## Chronology: a "bitter decade" or two years of upsurge?

Western journalists of today follow the present-day Chinese regime's practice of depicting the cultural revolution as ten years of uninterrupted horror. The usual picture painted is of kindly old professors and promising graduate students suddenly ripped from their creative work and marched out to the countryside by crazed Maoists, who forced them to dirty their hands with productive labor for an entire decade. Supposedly this ruined China's economy and technological potential; and supposedly China didn't begin to recover until Deng Xiaoping restored order and implemented free-market reforms in the late 1970s and 80s. And besides ruining China, the crazed leftist ideologues ruined the lives and careers of many creative intellectuals and actually killed — who knows? — thousands, maybe hundreds of thousands or even more. As time goes on, the tales get taller and taller.<sup>3</sup>

The Deng regime's final summation of the cultural revolution, which has not been altered since Deng's death, was that it resulted in a "feudal-fascist" type of regime. This is a strange mixing of socio-historical categories. But aside from that, the main problem with this sort of assessment is that it's too simple. The Dengists try to sum up ten years of history and say it was all negative. But in fact a lot happened in those ten years. The cultural revolution had ups and downs, and sideways twists. (And what revolutionaries call "ups" usually refer to what the Dengists would call "downs".)

Both the Maoists and the Dengists refer to the cultural revolution as lasting ten years, from 1966 to 1976. But looking at this phenomenon from the standpoint of the masses, the cultural revolution only lasted for a year or two. There was only one or two years, 1966-67 or -68, in which the masses were involved and trying to develop new forms of political activity. These two years were highly significant, however. During this time the Chinese masses for the first time began to throw off state-capitalist tutelage and to develop forms of political participation on their own.

### The first big-character poster

"On May 25, 1966, Nie Yuanzi and six others of Beijing University put up a big-character poster . . . directed only at the university's party committee." Thus Liu Guokai, a former activist in the cultural revolution, describes the first event of

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<sup>3</sup>A recent reportage-type book on China raises the ante to the level of cannibalism. See *China Wakes: The Struggle for the Soul of a Rising Power* by Nicholas D. Kristoff and Sheryl Wudunn (Vintage Books, a division of Random House, Inc., New York, 1995). Kristoff and Wudunn are two *New York Times* reporters assigned to East Asia in the 1980s and 90s. They assert that fanatic Maoists ate their opponents during the cultural revolution, and forced ordinary peasants to do the same.

that year that gripped the masses.<sup>4</sup> By "only" Liu means that the poster was not directed at any wider target, anyone in higher echelons. But then he goes on:

"Even then this spread shock and alarm among high-ranking party leaders. Previously all purges had been carried out secretly within the party. Even criticism by name in newspapers had to be conducted under the leadership of various party committees. If unauthorized actions spread unchecked, the whole situation would get out of hand."

Liu goes on to explain that in fact this action was not really unauthorized. Mao Zedong had previously talked the CPC's central committee into setting up a Central Cultural Revolution Group to supervise the purging of right-wing ideology from the nation's cultural and educational systems. And the week before Nie's action Mao got the Party's CC to approve the May 16 Circular, which reorganized the Central Group, brought it directly under the CCP's top leaders, and prodded party members to get active in this movement. This Circular was not generally publicized for months, but party members knew about it, and Nie and her comrades were inspired by it. Liu Guokai also asserts that members of the Central Cultural Revolutionary Group visited Nie's campus right at this time. Then as soon as Nie's poster had been put up, Mao called the editors of the national party newspaper *People's Daily* and had them print it. It appeared on the front page along with a laudatory editorial. Mao himself praised it as "the first Marxist-Leninist big-character poster", apparently distinguishing it from big-character posters put up during the "hundred flowers" period of 1957.

So the beginning of the cultural revolution, which may have appeared spontaneous, was in fact the opening shot of a campaign organized and orchestrated by Mao and his close cohorts. Over the previous few years Mao had been searching for various means to purge the party of what he considered to be rightist tendencies, but various measures he had tried had been frustrated or gotten nowhere, buried by the bureaucracy. Now Mao had hit upon a new idea, to go outside party channels and publicly name names of party officials, to subject them to criticism from people outside the party. As Liu points out, this made many party officials nervous.

Further, Liu says, their apprehensions

"were by no means groundless. Once broadcast and carried by newspapers, Nie's poster triggered a chain reaction. A wall-poster movement soon swept across institutions of higher learning in Beijing, with the spearhead directed at their party committees. Wall posters were even put up at the head office of the Beijing Municipal Party Committee to attack the newly

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<sup>4</sup>Liu Guokai, *A Brief Analysis of the Cultural Revolution*. Edited by Anita Chan. M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 1987. See p. 16.

appointed first secretary . . . .”<sup>5</sup>

This was a reaction no doubt beyond the expectations of Mao and his supporters in the Cultural Revolution Group, and it shows a phenomenon that continued to surprise party leaders for the next couple years: given any prodding or support whatever, the masses responded with tremendous enthusiasm to the call to criticize their leaders. This is important to bear in mind when assessing the cultural revolution, because eventually the movement degenerated into a parody of itself. As Liu describes it, China in the early 1970s was turned into a military dictatorship that on formal occasions would trot out the masses to chant slogans deifying Mao Zedong Thought. Mao emerged victorious over all other pretenders to the throne, his cult converted into a state religion. But this doesn't mean that the masses did not feel involved in the movement earlier on; or that the issues they addressed were not real, burning issues facing them. The students at Beijing University didn't need to be told twice to criticize the reactionary academic authorities. Obviously they were fed up with the elitism, the favoritism, and the obscurantist educational theories being fostered on China's campuses. They seized on any approved form, such as a wall-poster campaign, to express their dissatisfaction. And as Liu notes, right away the students began extending this criticism outside of campus to the local political authorities.

### The bourgeois reactionary line

The Chinese head of state at this time was Liu Shaoqi. Liu Shaoqi and the group around him were very concerned about the storm sweeping through Beijing's campuses, so in early June they dispatched party work teams to “supervise” — in effect, to contain — the wall poster campaign. “On June 6, Liu Shaoqi and his group formulated the ‘Eight-Point Decision by the Center,’ which stipulated that ‘a distinction should be made between inside and outside the party’ [i.e., party members should not publicly criticize party members], ‘wall posters should not be put up in the streets,’ ‘meetings should be held on campus only,’ ‘no demonstrations in the streets,’ ‘no large-scale denunciation meetings,’ etc.”<sup>6</sup> To try and appease the movement, Liu Shaoqi allowed the minister of higher education, along with the leaders of many colleges and universities, to be purged. But this did not stop the movement.

“ . . . things did not develop as Liu had hoped. . . . Many students openly attacked the ‘Eight-Point Decision’ as dogma and a rope that tied the hands and feet of the revolutionary masses. . . . Around June 20, students of as many as thirty-nine institutes of higher learning in Beijing tried to kick the work teams off their campuses. . . . Liu and his group were forced to instruct the work teams to launch a counter-attack. From the latter half of June to the middle

of July, the work teams lashed out, launching a drive to ‘oppose disruption’ and struck down a good many students (including some teachers), branding them as ‘Rightists,’ ‘sham Leftists, real Rightists’ and ‘counterrevolutionaries.’ Quite a few students were driven mad by the pressure and persecution, and some even committed suicide. This was what was later condemned by Mao as the ‘bourgeois reactionary line.’ ”<sup>7</sup>

This is a good place to note one thing about the debates that occurred during the cultural revolution. Everyone involved in these debates claims to be a leftist, working-class revolutionary. Everyone involved, including Liu Shaoqi and his group, swears eternal allegiance to Mao Tsetung Thought. They all claim to be supportive of socialism and attack their enemies as bourgeois rightists. So in sorting out trends in the cultural revolution you can't go by general labels, what people call themselves. What's needed is analysis of what they stood for in concrete circumstances.

At this point what Liu Shaoqi was doing, concretely, was trying to direct the mass movement into safe channels, channels long run by the CCP in campaigns past. Since coming to power in 1949 the party had run a number of “anti-Rightist” campaigns. The CCP kept dossiers on politically active people, and if they took a wrong stand on some question, could trot out their entire history to expose them. These dossiers included information about their personal and family history, their class background, etc. It was a fairly standard thing for someone accused of a political crime to be accused of “representing the bourgeoisie.” Now by 1966 the old bourgeoisie had pretty much ceased to exist as a class. Those who did not flee to Taiwan in 1949 were eventually eased out of their economic positions in the mid-50s (the state purchased their properties with low-interest bonds) and they were living out their lives, highly taxed and pretty much ignored. Some of them still held jobs in industry and commerce, where they were organized into trade groups integrated into the state-capitalist economy and under the close supervision of the ruling CCP. So these left-over bourgeois did not represent any kind of a threat to the regime. On the other hand, they made a convenient target during “anti-Rightist” campaigns.

The May 16 Circular authorized by Mao continued some of this standard rhetoric against “representatives of the bourgeoisie”, but it went a little further in insisting that bourgeois Rightism was a trend *within the CCP* opposed to the “proletarian Left.” The Circular pointed out that this was a problem for party committees “all all levels.” And it called for discussion of this problem to be “opened wide.” Liu Shaoqi's counterattack in June and July was aimed at doing the opposite: keeping the discussion narrowed and keeping the party in control, rather than party trends being the target.

It was during this period that the Red Guards made their first appearance. Red Guards were organizations of youths who pledged to carry through the cultural revolution and support

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<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 18.

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<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*

Mao Tsetung Thought. They organized the wall poster campaigns, marches and demonstrations, etc. But Liu Guokai points out that they were basically not a revolutionary force, because they came forward at Liu Shaoqi's call to "oppose Rightism", which was in reality a call to contain the rapidly spreading movement. The Red Guard organizations that emerged in early summer '66 were composed of the children of cadres, the offspring of party and government bureaucrats. They actually came from relatively privileged backgrounds. And they had the confidence of knowing they were following in their elders' footsteps when they took to the streets to condemn the landlord and capitalist classes. Based on their dossiers, they were the cream of Chinese society, while their targets, the leftovers of the old exploiters, were the scum.

### Mao urges the movement to open wide

But Liu Shaoqi's anti-Rightist campaign was cut off in midstream by Mao, who in early August condemned the dispatching of work teams as a 'crackdown on the masses.'

"At the end of July Mao ordered that the work teams be dissolved, and on August 5 he wrote a big-character poster entitled 'Bombard the Headquarters,' in which he openly disclosed his intentions in launching the movement. At the same time he presided over the Eleventh Plenum of the Eighth Central Committee (August 1-12), which formulated the '16-point Decision.' The 'Decision' pointed out that the 'main targets of the campaign were power holders in the party who follow the capitalist road.' The campaign was not aimed at the common people, nor was it to try to single out Rightists from among the masses."<sup>8</sup>

This changed the character of the movement. According to the Central Committee, now ordinary people with suspect class backgrounds could heave a sigh of relief. They were not to be isolated and picked on by Red Guard contingents. Activists instead were supposed to be aiming their fire at party committees themselves. And this was especially true of the higher party committees — i.e., not just those in the schools and universities, but those with responsibilities covering cities, counties, provinces and even higher organs of power. Instead of organizing the anti-Rightist campaign, party committees were now told that they were the targets of the campaign! And instead of containing and picking on the masses, they were ordered to assist the masses in every way possible, to cooperate with the masses when the masses came to denounce them!

This threw party committees into a state of confusion. They no longer knew how to organize or control the movement. On the other hand, this Decision broadened the scope of the youth movement. Many new elements came forward to join Red Guard contingents. And in fact a whole new stratum of organizations was formed, called "revolutionary Red Guards."

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<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 23.

This trend had a sharper, more leftist, political line than the original Red Guards:

"Theoretically, the revolutionary Red Guard movement originated from the theory of 'class struggle.' However, the difference was that instead of the classical theory of 'class struggle,' the movement was based on a theory Mao had further developed. The classical theory had as its targets of struggle the landlord, rich peasant, counterrevolutionary, bad element, and Rightist. The expanded theory added to the hit list bourgeois representatives in the party, or power holders who followed the capitalist road. And according to the theory, the newly added categories constituted the principal danger in support of capitalist revisionism."<sup>9</sup>

From now on the cultural revolution was marked by sharp clashes between competing groups of Red Guard contingents. From the outside these often appear as senseless factional struggles (and some of them were). But those who have studied the development of the movement, such as Liu Guokai and Maurice Meisner<sup>10</sup>, have analyzed a clear difference in membership and orientation between the original, more conservative Red Guards and the revolutionary Red Guards. Members of revolutionary Red Guard contingents were generally *not* the cream of the crop in Chinese society, generally not the children of party cadres, military officers, government bureaucrats, etc. They were not the most experienced and articulate political activists. But they came from strata with very definite and heartfelt grievances about the present system. This included some from "suspect" strata such as small merchants, peddlers, teachers, the urban poor, etc.<sup>11</sup>

From their inception in August 1966, revolutionary Red Guard contingents attacked the party work teams on campuses and tried to get them kicked out. At the same time they tried to expand the focus of their attack to local and higher party committees. Meanwhile, party authorities mobilized some of the more conservative Red Guard contingents to attack the revolutionary Red Guards, to defend party work teams and local party committees, and to brand the revolutionary Red Guards as "Rightist."

In the midst of this upheaval Mao opened the movement wider by ordering the cancellation of fall classes. Millions of students now had nothing to do but carry out political/ideological work. The party CC also ordered transportation facilities to give students free passage, and they took to the trains and highways, traveling all over China and promoting the new cultural revolution. In the next few months Mao personally welcomed Red Guard contingents to Peking, reviewing literally

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<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>10</sup>See Meisner's book, *Mao's China and After: A History of the People's Republic*, published by The Free Press, a division of Macmillan, Inc., in 1986.

<sup>11</sup>Liu Guokai, *A Brief Analysis . . .*, p. 37.

millions of them in gigantic parades in Tien An Men Square. This included more conservative as well as more radical Red Guards; all of them agreed in shouting support for Mao Tsetung.

In September the revolutionary Red Guards became bolder and more confident. They interpreted the 16 Point Decision to mean that people should not be condemned simply for their background, and in fact that the old political dossiers kept by party officials should be taken out of the files and burned. This led to sharp clashes at many party headquarters, as the revolutionary Red Guards tried to force party officials to hand over the dossiers. This line was confirmed by the party's CC, which on November 6 ordered: "Dossiers compiled by the various schools and units during the Cultural Revolution for the purpose of nailing the rank and file should be annulled. They should all be taken out and burned in public."<sup>12</sup> At this time the young activists' regard for Mao was practically boundless, since he seemed to be liberating them from the CCP's spying activity and tyranny.

From October '66 on, revolutionary Red Guards became the majority in the Red Guard movement. The new activists enthusiastically took up the call to criticize Liu Shaoqi's "bourgeois reactionary line" and his attempts to stifle the movement. The more conservative Red Guard organizations tried to fight back, and in November and December they staged a number of provocative actions. In particular, in Beijing they attacked the Ministry of Public Security and tried to take it over. At this point Mao intervened and had these Beijing Red Guard contingents banned. From this point on, the way was clear for the revolutionary Red Guards, which now went by the name of "revolutionary rebels" or "revolutionary young militants."<sup>13</sup>

### The movement spreads to the workplaces

In the fall of '66 the movement also spread to factories and other workplaces. Red Guard contingents were first set up at workplaces in August and September, but these were invariably conservative groups. They were authorized by the local party or trade union officials, and often their main activity was to protect municipal and provincial party officials from the "rebels." "Rebel" groups tried to contact workers directly by visiting factories, but they were often attacked and chased away by the factory Red Guards. The latter were weakened, however, by the late-fall campaign to criticize the "bourgeois reactionary line," and by late November the "rebels" penetrated into factories. At this point a whole new collection of organizations were set up in the factories and offices, and a new "division into two" took place.

Liu Guokai describes the two types of organizations as follows: First were the more conservative groups.

"They, too, criticized the 'bourgeois reactionary line' . . . but in a much milder way. They, too, chanted the slogan of criticizing capitalist roaders, but they only heaped abuse on Liu Shaoqi, Deng Xiaoping, . . . etc., and took a very cautious attitude toward local party organizations. . . . They often sent down orders to their followers to defend the factories, . . . stand fast at their production posts, and guard against disturbance and sabotage. . . . Concerning events in society, they generally took a wait-and-see attitude. They did not approve of or get involved in drastic moves such as closing newspapers, assaulting leading government offices, or seizing 'black dossiers.' Sometimes they even openly expressed opposition."<sup>14</sup> Liu says the leaders of these organizations were generally people of "high political quality" who maintained good relations with their superiors. These organizations mostly called themselves "proletarian revolutionaries."

But there was also

"another type of mass organization whose founders were mostly commoners. These people, carrying no honorable titles, in the past had shown no enthusiasm and had kept a good distance from party organizations. . . . In sum, they were mostly people of a 'lower political quality.' . . . Organizations of this type launched intense struggle to criticize the bourgeois reactionary line, were determined to destroy the black dossiers, and held an unbending attitude toward the leadership. They were the minority in many units, especially in large factories. However, . . . they had enormous capacity to get things done. This kind of organization actively engaged in things outside of their own work units. . . . They also generally took more radical stances toward social events."<sup>15</sup> These organizations generally called themselves "revolutionary rebels" or simply "rebels."

Liu Guokai's sentiments are clearly for the "rebels." Other commentators also note these different types of organizations. And Liu and Meisner, among others, note that the movement was especially strong among semi-proletarian strata, people who were trying to obtain full-time employment but who had been shut out. In China, as in other state-capitalist countries, many benefits were tied to one's status as a full-time state employee. Full-time regular employees had a residence permit which allowed them to live in the city. They were given low-rent housing. Their workplace also provided them with medical care, pensions, and educational facilities for their children.

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<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 35.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 41.

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<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 44.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*

But millions of workers were regarded as "contract" labor — temporary employees who were not eligible for these benefits. Many of them were only allowed to live in cities on a temporary basis; when their job assignment was over, they were forced back to the countryside. There were also millions of former urban workers who had been forced out to the countryside during the "three bitter years" of the early '60s. Urban industrial employment had catapulted during the Great Leap Forward (1958-60), but then fallen drastically again immediately afterwards. During these years millions of workers were laid off and forced to relocate in rural areas. These millions of former industrial workers were seething to return to the cities, where living standards were much higher than in the country. As the cultural revolution spread in late fall '66 and the authority of party and government institutions began to fall, many of these people began returning to the cities on their own. In December this led to major confrontations, especially in Shanghai.

### The January storm

During December and January CCP organizations in many parts of the country became paralyzed by the ongoing upsurge of new mass organizations. Groups of "rebels" took to the streets in massive demonstrations. At the same time they "called out" CCP leaders and subjected them to abuse in large-scale "struggle sessions". Party bureaucrats who had formerly lorded it over the masses were now paraded through the streets with dunce caps on their heads. The breakdown became so severe that in January Mao and his followers in the central party bodies finally gave a call for the new mass organizations to "take power."

The 16-Point Decision of August '66 called for the establishment of permanent cultural revolutionary groups. That is, the new cultural revolution was not supposed to be just a temporary campaign, but an ongoing part of Chinese society and, apparently, of the state structure. The Decision called for these bodies to be elected and ongoing groups. But there is no indication that cultural revolutionary groups would, or should, *replace* party committees and the previously existing state structures.

This situation changed during the late fall and winter. Party cadres became paralyzed with indecision, and party bodies ceased to function. And the rebel groups of students, workers, and semi-proletarians began to take on the role of bodies that the masses looked to for leadership on all questions. Even within the CCP itself, the Central Cultural Revolutionary Group began to supersede the authority of the Central Committee and Politburo. Meanwhile the masses were taking to the streets in Shanghai and other cities and bringing commercial activity to a halt. A large strike of apprentices in Shanghai featured a sit-down demonstration right in the center of the city. Thousands of apprentices gathered en masse there in mid-December demanding better pay and working conditions.

Finally, to restore "order" and get workers going on production again, Mao and his leading Group gave the call for a "seizure of power." The rebel groups were urged to hurry up

and take over the paralyzed party bodies, to occupy their offices and to carry out their functions. Thus Mao and the Maoists seemed to be urging a mass revolutionary overthrow of the old system.

But in fact Mao was simply accommodating himself to the new situation which had grown out of his control. The rebel groups were in fact taking over the functions of party bodies in many schools, factories and localities. The only question was, on what basis were the new ruling bodies to be established? Would they become permanent mass revolutionary ruling bodies or not? And on what basis would higher level bodies be established — i.e., on what basis would rebel groups from differing schools and factories unite to establish new ruling bodies for entire municipalities?

Mao and his Central Group eventually provided the answer to these questions, which provided the dismal outcome to the cultural revolution. But as an immediate step they urged the rebel groups on to a rapid "seizure of power" to restore order in Shanghai and other cities. This was coupled with a shift in propaganda from targeting the party bureaucrats to targeting the masses who were slow about "restoring order."

First off came the attack on "economism." As mentioned above, many demonstrations and strikes were being organized with economic demands. The part-time, temporary, "contract" workers and apprentices were demanding better pay, benefits and working conditions. Full-time workers were themselves demanding better housing and more equitable pay scales (at this time favored workers were able, through bonus systems, to earn many times what the average worker did). Workers from Shanghai and other cities were sending delegations to Beijing to demand that the national leadership look into their grievances.

While the average worker suffered, party bureaucrats had been living high on the hog for years. As in other state-capitalist countries, the party bureaucrats had access to specialty stores, higher pay, privileged access to cars, telephones, quality housing and schools, etc. As they organized their rebel groups, workers naturally took up demands for a more equitable system, something that fit better their notion of socialism.

But Mao's answer to these demands was "let them eat cake." The worker delegations in Beijing were ordered to return to their homes. Workers were urged to return to their workplaces, to stop traveling around and exchanging experience, and to do what they could to disrupt the demonstrations of apprentices and other semi-proletarians. All of this was couched in the language of "the working class seizure of power", but there was no question about what Mao's orders were: Get back to work, where you belong!

The Maoists even attempted to paint the struggle around economic demands as a "rightist" struggle. The way they told it, workers who demanded economic benefits were being put up to this subversive activity by old-line party bureaucrats carrying on a sinister plot to undermine the cultural revolution. Now in fact some economic sabotage was being carried out by the old-time bureaucrats and managers. In his book on the cultural

revolution<sup>16</sup> K.S. Karol cites the example of "model workers" at a factory in Shanghai being handed wads of money by managers attempting to bribe them to stay on the side of management. In this example the "model workers" — those who benefited from the old pay structure — had joined a conservative Red Guard organization that supported the factory management. But during the "January storm" workers were inclined to desert these organizations and go over to the side of the "rebels." Managers desperate to maintain the workers' loyalty apparently went to enormous lengths, in some cases, to do so, even throwing their own factory finances out of kilter in the process.

But the Maoist demagogy confused this type of sabotage and Rightist "economism" with the generally legitimate demands of the working class. Of course the workers should have condemned the disruptions, bribery and corruption carried out by the Right. But what has this to do with the Leftist demands and aspirations of the poorest sections of the masses led by their "rebel" organizations? In fact they are exact opposites. But Mao denounced all such demands as "economist", disruptive, tools of the Right, etc. Mao and the Central Group refused to countenance any pay raises, insisted that workers should repay any raises they had received, and said that they wouldn't even consider raises until after the cultural revolution was over. (And according to Mao the cultural revolution was still going on when he died, ten years later.)

This is why Liu Guokai, in his book, is careful to distinguish the "January storm" from the January "seizure of power." Everyone agrees that there was a "January storm" — that the masses were definitely in motion at that time, rapidly forming organizations that were broader and more leftist than anything before. But earlier commentators (for example, Karol) confused this "storm" with the Maoist "seizure of power." The way they saw it, the Maoists' call to seize power grew naturally out of the storm and was its culmination. And in fact the masses had begun seizing power in some local areas beforehand. As we can understand now, Mao's call to seize power was a way of *adapting* to the movement and then subverting it by playing on its weaknesses. Mao's first priority was to get the workers back to their workbenches and keep them divided from the semi-proletarians' movement. And secondly, to get the rebel activists to reconcile with the old Party bureaucrats.

### **Mao orders "unity with all those who can be united"**

Thus the campaign against "economism" in early January was closely followed by a demagogic campaign for "unity". During the cultural revolution's early days, Mao stressed the need to denounce party cadres "taking the capitalist road." Now the focus of propaganda shifted to "uniting with all those who can be united", and the leading Maoists clarified that this

included almost every one of the old party cadres. This strategy was called "narrowing the focus of attack." Earlier, when he wanted to rouse a mass movement to deal with his enemies, Mao encouraged generalized critiques of party bureaucrats. But now the word from Beijing was that only a few — a tiny, tiny few party leaders were really bad. The rest — the vast, vast majority — were actually good-hearted revolutionaries who had simply, perhaps, made a few mistakes.

Mao and his cohorts were desperate to cut off the masses as the latter began to generate a movement denouncing the old party bureaucracy as a whole. From the beginning of the cultural revolution Mao occasionally used the rhetoric of narrowing the target to a mere handful. But it wasn't stressed, and the rebel activists ignored it. But now the workers and semi-proletarians were beginning in practice to act independently, and this is what Mao feared the most. Mao's Central Committee issued a series of directives, propaganda orders, etc. insisting that denunciations be limited to the very few individuals at the top of the party hierarchy who had been picked out by Mao, and ordering workers to reconcile themselves to the mass of CCP cadres.

It was at this point in the cultural revolution that the denunciations of Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping reached mythic proportions divorced from any ties to actual fact. Liu in particular was demonized and blamed for just about every mistake the Chinese party had ever made. Supposedly he had "wormed his way" into the party and somehow sneaked into leading positions (it was forgotten that Mao had supported and nominated him for these leading positions). The history of the CCP was rewritten as a history of the "two-line struggle" between Mao's "leftism" and Liu's "rightism." In any particular case, when it was impossible to construe Liu's position on a subject as "rightist" or different from Mao's, this was then interpreted as one of those times Liu was "covering his tracks."

Roderick MacFarquhar's three-volume work on the origins of the cultural revolution<sup>17</sup> examines these accusations in detail and shows the complete falsity of many of them. First of all, it was totally absurd to paint Liu as a long-time opponent of Mao's. Liu was a firm supporter of Mao's party rectification of the 1940s. Liu was the original promoter of the cult of Mao, giving the call to "study Mao Tsetung Thought" at the party's 7th congress in 1945. Liu and Mao were in agreement on the main policy lines of the Chinese state after liberation in 1949, at least up through the period of the Great Leap Forward (late 50s). In fact Liu was a staunch supporter of Mao's adventurist economic policies culminating in the disaster of the Great Leap Forward. When Mao withdrew from his official role as head of state in 1959, Liu was the natural choice to succeed him, and

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<sup>17</sup>MacFarquhar, Roderick. *The Origins of the Cultural Revolution*. Published for The Royal Institute of International Affairs & The East Asian Institute of Columbia University & The Research Institute on International Change of Columbia University by Columbia University Press, 1983. I have so far consulted Volume 1: *Contradictions Among the People 1956-1957* and Volume 2: *The Great Leap Forward 1958-1960*.

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<sup>16</sup>Karol, K.S. *The Second Chinese Revolution*. Translated from the French by Mervyn Jones. Hill and Wang, New York, a division of Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1973.



it was assumed that he would take over leadership of the party after Mao's retirement. MacFarquhar's work shows how far off many of the Maoist journalistic articles of 1967 are, as they tried to reinterpret Liu's actions in the 1950s as showing "sinister intent."

This does not mean that there were no differences between Liu and Mao. There were, and these differences grew more profound over the years. One of these differences emerged in the party rectification of 1957 which coincided with the "hundred flowers" campaign. Here again Liu agreed with Mao on the main lines of the campaign. Following the 20th Congress of the Soviet party and events in Eastern Europe in 1956 (the Polish party leadership was replaced in an upheaval following the Poznan riots, and the Hungarian government was overthrown by a rebellion), the Chinese party leadership agreed on the need to liberalize the regime and the CCP. And they all agreed on a party rectification campaign to fight against the three problems of "bureaucratism" (stagnation due to vested interests of the ruling party), "sectarianism" (an arrogant attitude towards non-party people), and "subjectivism" (narrow viewpoint due to lack of education and ideological training in Marxism). But while Mao stressed the first two problems, Liu discounted them and stressed subjectivism as the main problem. Mao encouraged non-party people to speak out and criticize the party, while Liu felt that the CCP could reform itself through self-criticism and study. This difference between them was later magnified during the cultural revolution, as we have seen, when Liu thought party cadres should lead and direct the masses while Mao thought the party cadres should be subjected to criticism from the masses.

By the mid-60s Mao had decided to do what he could to purge Liu or at least undermine his power and influence; at the same time Mao promoted to prominence an alternative successor, Lin Biao. Liu's base of support was the civilian party bureaucracy, especially in the cities; Lin's base of support was the army. Judging the cultural revolution as a struggle between these factions, we can see Mao's strategy was to use the army as a base of support and stability; basing himself on that, to rouse a mass movement in the cities against the civilian party bureaucracy; and use the movement generated to purge Liu, Deng and a few other top dogs.

By October '66 Liu and Deng had suffered so much embarrassment and loss of face that they wrote out the first of their "self criticisms" for the Central Committee and were effectively (if not formally) stripped of their official duties. Thus the major tasks of Mao's cultural revolution (that is, what *he* considered the major tasks) had been accomplished, and already at that time Mao began calling for the movement to die out. The party's CC canceled the policy of free transportation for Red Guards and rebel groups traveling around and exchanging experience. And the CC called for the resumption of classes and for students to return to their desks. (As it turned out, the students refused to comply, and it was to be almost another two years before the CC could get classes going again, and they only did so by clearing away an entire generation of university students, forcing them out to the countryside and replacing them with an entirely new crop of students.) So Mao's

enthusiasm for the cultural revolution didn't last long — only through August-September '66, as the students were roused against Liu and Deng. But despite Mao's loss of interest, the masses themselves continued to show enthusiasm for denouncing party bureaucrats right through the fall and into winter, until by January the CCP as a whole was in a state of paralysis.

MacFarquhar shows the inaccuracy of many of the Maoists' attacks against Liu and Deng. But it's also necessary to explain *why* these absurd personal attacks were launched against them. By January-February the main focus of attack wasn't really Liu and Deng; they had already been deprived of power. The ferocious *ad hominem* articles against these two weren't really aimed at them; they were actually aimed at diverting and disorganizing the "Ultra-left". The militant "rebel" groups, the dissatisfied strata among the working population, the unemployed and underemployed — all those striving to organize a campaign against state-capitalist exploitation; *these* now became the "main danger" to the Maoists as they tried to stabilize a new regime similar to the one in the past but without Liu and Deng. "Rebels" who tried to organize campaigns against the party bureaucracy were denounced as "disruptive anarchists", "left' in form but right in essence", etc. Activists were urged to get back to work — in fact, state-capitalist managers were ordered to not allow any more time off work for political activity. Attempting to analyze the role of the bureaucracy was denounced as "wrongly broadening the front of attack", and activists instead were encouraged to spend their time reciting rote formulas of denunciation against Liu Shaoqi and a few other individuals. And instead of doing away with the old party bureaucracy, activists were urged to "unite with all those who can be united with."

### February's adverse current and the Shanghai commune

This campaign was intensified in February and March as the Maoists attempted to consolidate a new regime. This was no easy matter, as the masses were in motion and not enthused about being reconciled to the old party bureaucrats. So at this juncture Mao called on his reliable base of support in the army.

In the fall army units had moved into position around the major cities where cultural revolution upheavals were occurring. But they didn't move into the cities. Army leaders themselves were chary of getting involved in the revolutionary upheavals, since they weren't completely sure how their troops would respond. A mild "cultural revolution" had previously been carried out in the army, with the supposed elimination of ranks and the intensive study of "Mao Tsetung Thought." The army's commander in chief, Lin Biao, was the most dyed-in-the-wool Mao cultist. So within the army there was generalized support for the Maoist cultural revolution. But the army leaders knew that the cities were a maze of political infighting, and it would be difficult to sort out right from wrong and to re-establish order.

But now Mao insisted that the army move in to "assist" the masses in "uniting all those who can be united." Beginning in

February the army was ordered to supervise the establishment of new state organs throughout the country based on the "three-in-one combination." This meant that the new organs of power would be a "united front" of three basic forces:

- 1) representatives from the army, who would play a supervisory and "conciliatory" role;
- 2) representatives from the new mass organizations, the Red Guards and "rebel" groups;
- 3) representatives of the old party bureaucracy.

These new state organs would be called "revolutionary committees"; and until they were firmly established, with all contending groups reconciled, the army was ordered to set up "provisional revolutionary committees" by fiat.

As I've argued above, Mao's recognizing the "rebel" groups as a constituent of the new state power was simply an accommodation to the existing state of affairs. The party bureaucrats and managers had in fact been pushed out of power by the mass movement. So Mao wasn't doing the masses any favors by "recognizing" their organizations; the latter had already proved themselves capable of paralyzing the old regime headed by Mao, Liu and Deng. The question posed by the mass movement in January was, what *form* will the re-organization of state power take? Would the rebel groups headed by youthful activists be able to work out their differences and then take over and re-structure the economy, the military, etc.? — to do so would probably bring them into direct confrontation with Mao, Lin Biao, and other icons of the cultural revolution. Or would the activists be forced into a compromise with the old bureaucracy?

Mao's propaganda machine pulled out all the stops to promote the latter solution. Having made a concession to the masses and endorsed their seizure of power, Mao immediately sought to undermine and negate it by demanding that new state organs take the form of the military-led "revolutionary committees" based on "three-in-one combinations." *But the whole purpose of the "three-in-one combination" was to revive the old-line bureaucrats*, to restore them to power by forcing the new mass organizations to be reconciled with them. This meant restabilizing the old state-capitalist system and diverting the masses from their drive for political independence.

So in February-March army leaders began calling on everyone concerned to chill out, to stop demonstrating and to send their representatives to the provisional revolutionary committees. And they backed this up with threats of force in the cities. Army troops dispersed demonstrations of workers and others in the major cities. This was coupled with a massive propaganda barrage from Beijing about the need for "unity" and denouncing any opposition as "anarchist," "Rightist," etc. There was also a barrage of directives and commands from the Maoist center demanding that students return to their home cities, contract laborers return to the countryside, workers get back in their factories, etc.

This attempt at forming new state organs took off very slowly, however, because of mass opposition. The Maoists' main victory was in Shanghai, China's largest and most industrialized city. And even there they could not form the three-in-one combination right away but instead had to cover

their victory with a lot of demagoguery about the "Shanghai commune."

The call for a commune was in fact a genuine aspiration of the masses in Shanghai, who based themselves on passages in the 16-Point Decision. There it was said that a system of elections similar to the Paris Commune of 1871 would be established. Point 9 of the 16-Point Decision was entitled "Cultural Revolutionary Groups, Committees and Congresses", and it read in part:

"The struggle of the proletariat against the old ideas, culture, customs and habits left over by all the exploiting classes over thousands of years will necessarily take a very, very long time. Therefore, the cultural revolutionary groups, committees and congresses should not be temporary organizations but permanent, standing mass organizations. They are suitable not only for colleges, schools and government and other organizations, but generally also for factories, mines, other enterprises, urban districts and villages.

"It is necessary to institute a system of general elections, like that of the Paris Commune, for electing members to the cultural revolutionary groups and committees and delegates to the cultural revolutionary congresses. The lists of candidates should be put forward by the revolutionary masses after full discussion, and the elections should be held after the masses have discussed the lists over and over again.

"The masses are entitled at any time to criticize members of the cultural revolutionary groups and committees and delegates elected to the cultural revolutionary congresses. If these members or delegates prove incompetent, they can be replaced through election or recalled by the masses after discussion."

During January the various new mass organizations in Shanghai began to take power by forming united fronts taking in a wide variety of "rebel" groups. But in February this movement towards unity was pressured by the Maoist center to take in conservative Red Guards, to call off demonstrations, and to begin reconciling with the old bureaucrats. A pair of personal emissaries from Mao (Chang Chun-chiao and Yao Wen-yuan) were sent out from Beijing to take control of the situation (later, after Mao's death, these two were purged as part of the Gang of Four). These emissaries had the support of army commanders in the Shanghai area and were able to intimidate young activists with their authority of having personal instructions from the Chairman himself. The result was that in the first week of February they were able to announce the formation of the "Shanghai commune" and to call for the end of any mass movement there. The "commune" was originally formed by co-opting representatives from many different mass organizations coupled with the promise that this "provisional" organization would give way to general elections

within a short time. But within a few weeks even the promise of elections, "later on," was dropped; and instead the "commune" began to ease into the Maoist plan of "three-in-one combination."

### Revival and the August storm

February's "adverse current" threw activists around the country into a state of confusion and temporarily stymied the movement. The activists who had looked to Mao for liberation from Liu Shaoqi's party bureaucrats were now being ordered by the Maoist center to reconcile with them. As a result March '67 was a period of lull. But beginning in April activists began to go on the offensive once again. They refused to participate in "three-in-one combinations" and declined offers of "support" from army commanders. The latter were also growing increasingly confused by the movement in the cities and were disinclined to intervene more. The result was a general revival of the activity of "rebel" groups.

Through late spring and early summer the "rebel" groups grew stronger and more active. At the same time the army's top commanders began pushing for more and more intervention by local commanders, to force the activists into "three-in-one combinations." The result was that army units began to clash with "rebel" groups. In many cases members of local army units sympathized with the "rebels." Indeed, soldiers had formed their own "rebel" groups inside the army and in many cases smuggled arms to the "rebels" to assist them in fighting conservative Red Guards. There was a danger to the Maoist state that the army as a whole would succumb to the "ultra-left", go over to the side of the "rebel" groups and scrap the whole plan of reconciliation with the party bureaucracy. At this point (in mid-summer) some army commanders began to try taking a hard line and to establish revolutionary committees by force.

A certain climax was reached with the "Wuhan incident" in late July. In Wuhan the local army commanders formed a three-in-one combination to govern the city but left out the more leftist "rebel" groups. The latter appealed to central authorities in Beijing, who sent out a pair of representatives from the Central Cultural Revolutionary Group to mediate the conflict. In Wuhan these emissaries insisted that the excluded "rebel" groups be taken in as legitimate mass organizations, but the army commanders still refused and instead imprisoned and beat up the two emissaries. Chou Enlai (the government premier) had to personally fly out from Beijing to rescue them.

The result was a wave of revulsion against the army and a new upsurge known as the "August storm." Ch'iang Ching, Mao's wife and a popular member of the Central Cultural Revolutionary Group — she was one of the Gang of Four and had some connections to the "Ultra-left" — gave a speech in which she told young activists, "Attack with words but defend yourself with guns." That is, she counseled them not to take any offensive action against the conservatives or army units; but if attacked, they had the right to defend themselves. "Rebel" groups immediately rushed to get arms and didn't wait until they were attacked, but instead launched offensive actions in

many parts of the country.

### The September clamp-down

At this point Mao clamped down. He threw his support behind the beleaguered army commanders and insisted that no more violence would be tolerated. In early September an urgent communique to that effect was sent out by all the leading bodies, civilian and military, and signed by all the top leaders including Lin Biao (who was generally respected by the "ultra-left" groups). Ch'iang Ching was trotted out to the rostrum in Tienanmen Square and gave a speech in which she repudiated her former call to arms. The Central Cultural Revolutionary Group was purged; the most radical members, who had organized a month-long siege of government buildings in Beijing involving tens of thousands of young activists, were eliminated.

The immediate result was another setback and period of confusion for the "ultra-left", followed by a period of standoff in the fall of '67. By this time some of the more firm mass organizations began to consolidate and to try and sum up the lessons of the last year. They still refused to participate in three-in-one combinations and tried to form their own organs of state power. The result was that in some areas a system of "dual power" existed: on the one hand the army with the three-in-one combination it was sponsoring, and on the other hand "rebel" groups who did what they could to resist the army.

It was during this period that the most prominent of the "ultra-left" organizations, the Hunan Provincial Proletarian Revolutionary Great Alliance Committee, was formed. The Hunan Committee became a special target of attack for the Maoists as they tried to extend the system of three-in-one combinations around the country. By the fall of '67 only a couple three-in-one combinations had actually been formed and consolidated in Chinese cities; the rest were still in a state of relative ferment. And at this period the Hunan Committee was putting out programmatic documents calling for determined resistance against three-in-one combinations. This included the manifesto, *Whither China?*, some excerpts from which are given below. The Maoists fought to suppress this movement and to keep it isolated. To this end they organized a special three-day "seminar" in Beijing in January 1968. At this conference the nation's leading Maoists (including Kang Sheng, chairman of the Central Cultural Revolutionary Group, Chiang Ching and Yao Wen-yuan) denounced the Hunan Committee up and down, "educating" young activists about the need to repudiate "ultra-leftism".

### Suppression of the "ultra-left"

Apparently the Maoists' political attacks on the "ultra-left" had some effect, because by the spring of '68 the army felt able to launch a nationwide offensive against the holdouts. This resulted in large-scale battles with thousands of casualties. The fighting intensified on into the summer, but eventually the "rebel" groups were ground down and dispersed by army

troops.<sup>18</sup> Liu Guokai testifies that leaders of the Hunan Committee were imprisoned or killed. Also at this time the government ordered an evacuation of young activists from the cities. Students and other young people were ordered out to the countryside, and this was backed up with directives about their ration cards, residence permits, student IDs and so forth being revoked. Millions of youths were relocated into remote areas of China, their political movement dispersed. The army, together with conservative organizations from the factories, moved into university campuses and occupied them. (This was when Yao Wen-yuan produced his cynical pamphlet, *The Working Class Must Exercise Leadership in Everything*, meaning that rebel activists must knuckle under to the "proletarian" dictatorship of Mao and Lin Biao). Three-in-one combinations were formed on campuses and at workplaces, and army commanders were finally able to establish the "revolutionary committees" as ruling bodies for China's cities. By August of '68 Mao was able to announce the establishment of revolutionary committees throughout the country; this marks the end of the cultural revolution as an event of interest for the working masses. The rest of the story, through the early to mid-70s, is a story of squalid sectarian infighting between the Maoist top dogs, with military dictatorship for the masses.

An important part of Western pop-journalism's denunciation of the cultural revolution is to confuse the issue of the revolution's casualties. It's said that "thousands were killed" and then as example the case of some prominent scientist or intellectual is given, who was denounced by the Red Guards and forced to make a self-criticism. So the impression is given that leftists massacred thousands of decent, upstanding intellectuals. But actually the great bulk of those who suffered in this way were the "ultra-leftists" themselves who fought rearguard actions against the army in 1968. They were the ones killed, they were the ones forced into the countryside by the millions.<sup>19</sup>

Not surprisingly, given Mao's twists and turns and hypocritical manipulation of the youth, many people in China eventually became sick of the whole thing. By the late 70s the Chinese populace had become quite passive, which helps

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<sup>18</sup>Meisner agrees with Liu Guokai on the basic facts about this suppression, although he's much more sympathetic to Mao than Liu is.

<sup>19</sup>An interesting story is told about Mao's suppression tactics by a number of different commentators. As their campus was being invaded, student leaders at Beijing University made a desperate last-minute appeal to Chairman Mao. The latter deigned to grant them an audience. At this meeting the student leaders insisted they were the foremost champions of Mao Tsetung Thought and were prepared to defend to the death Mao's revolutionary banner. The only trouble, they said, was that some sinister "black hand", unknown to them, was conspiring against them. Mao replied, "That black hand is me." The crestfallen student leaders then peacefully evacuated the campus.

explain the difficulty today in rebuilding a Marxist revolutionary movement there. □

### Addendum: Excerpts from *Whither China?*

Commentators such as Liu Guokai, Meisner and Mehnert have pointed to the Hunan Committee as the most foresighted organization among the "ultra-left". Mehnert's book<sup>20</sup> reprints the Hunan Committee's program, resolutions, and a manifesto entitled *Whither China?*, all of which were written and published in late '67 or early '68. Below we reprint some excerpts from "Whither China?"<sup>21</sup> to give a better picture of the "ultra-left" organizations. A striking point is their worshipful attitude towards Chairman Mao and Lin Biao; this was of course a major weakness at a time when Mao was working hard to smash the "ultra-left". The manifesto's writer has a hard time explaining this and at one point simply says these actions of Mao's are difficult to understand. Many theories were prevalent among the "ultra-left" in those days — that Mao wasn't properly informed, or was being held hostage by enemies, etc. But it's significant that Mao's rightward turn did not deter them; they pursued their policy of opposition to the establishment of three-in-one combinations which they knew meant the death of the revolutionary upsurge, even though they had a limited analysis of the system they were trying to mount opposition to.

#### From section 1, "The Scientific Prediction":

"Even before the Cultural Revolution officially began, Chairman Mao, in his famous May 7 Directive, had already depicted the contents of this new type of political structure — the 'Peoples Commune of China.' But people in general regarded the sketch in the May 7 Directive as an idealistic 'communist utopia.' Everyone thought that it was not practical to take the May 7 Directive as the immediate goal of our recent struggle. . . .

". . . The development of new productive forces in China today has brought into conflict the class that represents the new productive forces and the decaying class that represents production relations which impede the progress of history. Moreover, it will lead inevitably to a great social revolution, and a new society will inevitably be born amid the fierce flames. This objective law is the solid basis for Chairman Mao's scientific — not utopian — prediction. . . . People believe that China will pass peacefully

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<sup>20</sup> Mehnert, Klaus. *Peking and the New Left: At Home and Abroad*. Center for Chinese Studies, China Research Monograph, Number Four. University of California, Berkeley, 1969.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 87-100.

into the society depicted in the May 7 Directive.

"What is the reality? 'Peaceful transition' is only another name for 'peaceful evolution.' It can only cause China to drift farther and farther away from the 'Commune' depicted in the May 7 Directive, and nearer and nearer to the existing society of the Soviet Union. . . . The rule of the new bureaucratic bourgeoisie must be overthrown by force in order to solve the problem of political power. Empty shouting about realization of the May 7 Directive, without any reference to power seizure and complete smashing of the old state machinery, will truly be the 'utopian' dream."

Here we see that the Hunan Committee had a class analysis that described the party bureaucrats as a new bourgeoisie. And they insisted on "smashing" the state machinery of this ruling class — not just reforming it, as Mao wanted, but smashing it up. This is quite different from Mao's reformist analysis; in the Circular of May 16, 1966 Mao's analysis was that "it is . . . necessary to criticize and repudiate those representatives of the bourgeoisie who have sneaked into the Party, the government, the army and all spheres of culture, and to clear them or transfer some of them to other positions." There is nothing in Mao's conception about party cadres as a whole constituting a new bureaucratic bourgeoisie with their own oppressive state machine, but this conception emerges clearly in the Hunan Committee's analysis. (Unfortunately the Hunan Committee also had a fairly shallow conception of what they were up against, seeming to think they would simply seize some arms and wipe out the bureaucratic bourgeoisie. But at least they had a revolutionary conception, as opposed to Mao's reformist ideas.) They carry forward this analysis in section 2, "the January Revolutionary Storm" (referring to January '67):

### From section 2:

". . . Society suddenly found, in the absence of bureaucrats, that they could not only go on living, but could live better and develop quicker and with greater freedom. It was not at all like the intimidation of the bureaucrats who, before the revolution, had said: 'Without us, production would collapse, and the society would fall into a state of hopeless confusion.'

"As a matter of fact, without the bureaucrats and bureaucratic organs, productivity was greatly liberated. . . . All departments of the provincial Party committees fell, but the various branches of their work went on as usual. . . . The management of industrial plants by the workers themselves after January was impressive. . . . Their enthusiasm had never been so high, and their sense of responsibility as masters of the house had never been so strong.

"This was the true content of the class changes in the January Revolution. . . . in this

short period some places realized, though not very thoroughly, the content of the 'Peoples Commune of China.' The society found itself in a state of 'mass dictatorship' similar to that of the Paris Commune. The January Storm told people that China would go toward a society which had no bureaucrats, and that 90 per cent of the senior cadres had already formed a privileged class.

". . . this class of 'Red' capitalists had entirely become a decaying class that hindered the progress of history. The relations between them and the people in general had changed from relations between leaders and the led, to those between rulers and the ruled and between exploiters and the exploited. From the relations between revolutionaries of equal standing, it had become a relationship between oppressors and the oppressed. The special privileges and high salaries of the class of 'Red' capitalists were built upon the foundation of oppression and exploitation of the broad masses of the people. In order to realize the 'Peoples Commune of China,' it was necessary to overthrow this class.

". . . the Cultural Revolution is not a revolution of dismissing officials or a movement of dragging out people, nor a purely cultural revolution, but is 'a revolution in which one class overthrows another.' With relation to the facts of the January Revolutionary Storm, the overthrown class is none other than the class of 'bureaucratism' formed in China in the last 17 years.

"There is no place here for reformism . . . or peaceful transition. The old state machinery must be utterly smashed. . . .

"The problem of system, policy, and guideline touched upon in the January Revolution mainly concerned such capitalist systems of labor employment as contracted labor and temporary labor, as well as the revisionist movement of going to the mountainous areas and the countryside [i.e., the Maoists' attempt to disperse the movement by urging activists to go to the rural areas]."

Note that the author clearly analyzes that the oppressor class is the one formed "in the last 17 years", i.e. since China's national liberation in 1949. Thus when the author goes after the "bourgeoisie", he (she?) is not targeting the old bourgeoisie targeted by Mao as the source of reaction. Mao talked about revisionist individuals who have "sneaked into" the Party, these individuals being "representatives of" the bourgeoisie. But the Hunan Committee targets the Party bureaucrats themselves as the oppressor class, the new Red bourgeoisie. Note also, in the last paragraph above, that the Hunan Committee supports the economic struggles of the working class being waged at this time that were denounced by the Maoists as "economism."

### From section 3:

Section 3, "The Revolutionary Committees", examines the question of the new organs of state favored by Mao, the Revolutionary Committees based on the three-in-one combinations. The author has trouble explaining why Mao came out in support of these organizations. But despite Mao's endorsement, the author maintains opposition in this section's last paragraph:

"The three-in-one combination is the concrete content of the Revolutionary Committees. Proposing the three-in-one combination is tantamount to helping the reinstatement of the bureaucrats already toppled in the January Revolution. Moreover, the three-in-one combination will inevitably be a type of regime for the bourgeoisie to usurp power, in which the army and local bureaucrats will play a leading role. . . ."

### From section 7:

This question is further elaborated in section 7, "The Political Enlightenment of the Proletariat", where some shortcomings of the movement so far are discussed:

". . . the Revolutionary Committee is a product of the 'revolution of dismissing officials.' In Hunan, [two leading party bureaucrats] were dismissed from office, but that did not remove the acute antagonism between the new bourgeoisie and the masses of the people. . . . A new bourgeois reactionary line, and a new adverse current of capitalist restoration, have again appeared. A complete and stable 'distribution of property and power' has not been realized. The revolution of dismissing officials is only bourgeois reformism which . . . changes the new bureaucratic bourgeois rule prior to the Cultural Revolution into another type of bourgeois rule by bourgeois bureaucrats and a few representatives from several attendant mass organizations. The Revolutionary Committee is a product of bourgeois reformism.

"Problems cannot be solved by merely dismissing a few officials. Bourgeois reformism will not work. . . ."

Section 7 also calls for a new proletarian revolutionary party to be formed:

". . . During the violent class struggle in July and August [1968], a very small number of 'Ultra-leftists' put forward the demand that the 'Ultra-left should have its own political party.' It was felt necessary to have the basic level organizations of a revolutionary party . . . to actuate the people to overthrow the new bourgeoisie . . . [This] became, for the first time, a practical and steadily growing demand of the fighting proletariat . . . ."

And as seen in the following quote the author expresses strong skepticism that the old CCP could ever be re-formed as a genuine revolutionary party. Here again the author goes against the Maoist grain: at this time Mao and Chou Enlai were working desperately to rebuild the CCP and had announced that the Party's 9th Congress would take place in 1969:

". . . The convening of the 9th National Congress of the Party is not expected to settle completely the question of whether the Communist Party is going. The political party that will emerge in accordance with the provisions promulgated by the present Central Committee for rehabilitation, regulation, and rebuilding of the Party (if such a party can be formed) will necessarily be a party of bourgeois reformism that serves the bourgeois usurpers in the revolutionary committees. The convening of the 9th Party Congress will be only a reflection of local 'revolutionary committees' in the Central Committee . . . This determines the fact that the '9th Congress' can never thoroughly settle the question of whether China is going . . . ."

Unfortunately these predictions turned out to be only so true. By smashing the "Ultra-left" in 1968 the Maoists were able to go ahead and rebuild the CCP and hold their 9th Congress. This Congress, which starred Lin Biao as the hero, was billed as the "victory congress" of the cultural revolution. What it actually signified was the victory of military despotism over the masses, the consolidation of the three-in-one combinations and the restoration of the old bureaucrats. For the masses it left the question of "whether China?" unresolved to the present day. □

Book review:

# Alan Sokal's new anti-postmodernist book: *Fashionable Nonsense*

by Tim Hall

*Fashionable Nonsense*, a book by the physicists Alan Sokal and Jean Bricmont attacking postmodernism's misuse of science, which first appeared in France, has now appeared in English, both in Great Britain and the U.S. (The title of the British edition is *Intellectual Impostures*.) In 1996 Sokal published an article in the postmodernist journal *Social Text* parodying many pomo (postmodernist) ideas and supporting them by false references to science. The pomos not only published this parodic mish-mash without investigating its truth, but later defended their actions on the grounds that Sokal's false scientific references did not invalidate the postmodernist conclusions. Sokal's latest book, co-written with Belgian scholar Jean Bricmont, has two aims: 1) to attack the wholesale misuse of scientific concepts by a variety of writers popular in postmodernist circles, and 2) to attack the philosophical relativism expounded by these and other authors in the postmodernist current.

My knowledge of modern science is very limited so I will make some brief comments on Sokal's first aim and then dwell a little longer on the philosophical drift of the book.

Sokal reproduces lengthy quotes from the (predominantly French) writers Jacques Lacan, Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, Bruno Latour, Jean Baudrillard, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, and Paul Virilio. These pomo gurus rely heavily on apparently scientific concepts to support their postmodernist conclusions. Devoting a chapter to each, Sokal asserts that these writers' use of scientific terminology is almost entirely false and inaccurate. Sokal explains some of the inaccuracies to the lay reader, but in many cases the reader is left with argument from authority, the authority being Sokal himself. However, the reader is readily inclined to believe Sokal because these writers make complete asses of themselves, constructing piles of the most obscure and ridiculous gibberish imaginable. And the pomo followers of the world have failed to notice this misuse of science by their leaders, just as the editors of *Social Text* missed the absurdities in Sokal's parody. Immersing oneself in the study of these frauds must have broken the hearts of many a poor graduate student. Imagine throwing away all of your knowledge of the real world and of clear expression to build a career speculating in such obscurantism! If anything, Sokal is too kind with the pomo gurus, only using the word "charlatan" once; they should be mocked as frauds and demanded to express their idiocies in clear language.

Sokal's exposure of the fraudulent nature of these authors' use of science is a real blow to the postmodernist current. Knocking a few bricks out of a foundation can destabilize a

whole building. When geological science long ago exposed the falsity of the Bible's genesis version of the history of the universe, this only discredited a small part of the Bible, but still it shook the entire foundation of the credibility of the Christian religion. Similarly, Sokal's exposure of the pomos' misuse of science sharply raises the question of the philosophical foundations of the entire postmodernist current.

Interestingly, Sokal asserts in his preface that the pomos' misuse of scientific concepts is only loosely related to their philosophical relativism. On the contrary, these seem to be quite tightly related. If knowledge is completely a social construct, as the relativist pomos assert, and not a reflection, more or less accurate, of the objectively existing material world, then it is perfectly logical to play fast and loose with scientific concepts and not to feel constrained by truth based on evidence. Perhaps this reluctance to see the connection between the two targets of his book is the reason why Sokal, in his chapters on Baudrillard, Deleuze and Guattari, and Virilio, refers to long quotes as utterly meaningless. In terms of precise reference to scientific concepts, these writings certainly seem to be nonsense, but if one looks at their over-all drift they are all asserting the same thing in different ways: that the subject determines the object, that the material world is socially constructed — the very relativism that Sokal denounces in his chapters on relativism. (I am referring to the last several quotes in each of the chapters, pp. 150-3, 166-8, 174-5 in the U.S. edition.)

Be that as it may, Sokal strikes a serious blow at the illogical, irrational and unsupportable pomo trend of thinking. As I pointed out in an earlier *CV* article ("Postmodernist philosophy is old subjectivist wine in new bottles" in the *CV* of Oct. 25, 1997), pomo attempts to destroy rational assessment of the real world, thereby removing any basis for science, democratic decisions, progressive struggle and, especially, the revolutionary theory of Marxism. Pomo thereby opens the door to all sorts of reactionary religious, national-chauvinist and other dogmas, which enforce many varieties of oppression and exploitation of the working people. Sokal's parody and his new book show that the pomo emperor has no clothes. This blow for clear expression, logical thought and the necessity of evidence is a blow for the materialist world view. As such it not only tears away the mantle of scientificity worn by the pomos but makes the debate over such matters far more accessible to the working class and other ordinary people. Sooner or later (if it hasn't already happened) the pomo rhetoric was sure to erode the clarity of the work of science itself; consequently, Sokal's defense is also a defense of scientific research.

The fact that Sokal and Bricmont first issued the book in

France, in the French language, was a bold stroke, since the fountainheads of the pomo stream are largely French. Taking the fight against the lion into the lion's den shows an admirable boldness. And the complaints by some of the French press that Sokal is an American imperialist trampling an oppressed France are absurd. Poor little French imperialism, only able to slaughter Africans nowadays! Since the gurus of pomo are French, and not Anglo-American, what was Sokal to do — issue the book only in the U.S.? Would the French chauvinists then have shelved the "imperialist" charge? Of course not! This illustrates how national chauvinism and postmodernism work together: apparently there is a French science, a French rationality, a French logic, not open to question by anyone else. And if pomo relativism were true, that would indeed be so, as well as a French method of suppression of African neo-colonies, plus — by logical extension — an American method of imperialist oil war, none of which are open to question by anyone from anywhere else. Not imperialist Sokal, but imperialist pomo!

But Sokal's book, while a real blow to the pomo gurus and their relativism, seems to me to have weaknesses which leave unanswered a number of serious questions on the minds of progressive people and which may leave his book vulnerable to a certain line of criticism by the pomos.

The attack of subjective idealism on the materialist world view of science has been going on for a long time, actually since the scientific revolution began at the end of the Middle Ages. But by the middle of the 19th century Newtonian science had won wide victory and seemed to have found a great number of certainties within its mechanical system. However, toward the end of the 19th century, and continuing into the 20th, a whole series of discoveries of the mutability of things hitherto thought changeless threw Newtonian mechanics into a crisis. Since the old materialism had lost some of its adequacy and new phenomena were hard to explain or were as yet inexplicable, subjective idealism (what Sokal calls "epistemic relativism") leapt into the breach and reasserted its old saw of the unknowability — or non-existence — of the material world. This can now be seen as the beginning of a long crisis in science and philosophy.

Engels, writing in 1886, pointed out that materialism "has to change its form with each epoch-making discovery in the sphere of natural science." (*Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*, Peking, 1976, p. 22) This means that while new discoveries cannot compel the materialist (and most scientists are instinctive materialists in the philosophical sense) to reject the existence or knowability of the external material world, they require that materialism itself cannot be satisfied with merely reasserting its old truths (though that does play a positive role, a role that Sokal is playing). Materialism must adapt its form to the new knowledge without throwing away its essence.

This problem seems to arise with respect to Sokal's parody and his book. *Fashionable Nonsense* is quite helpful in exposing the unsupported nonsense of the pomo gurus and in reasserting the indispensability of physical evidence for theory. But in the beginning of his parody Sokal cites several of the major discoveries of quantum mechanics which I think are fundamental

to recent science but which may seem to the lay person to confirm relativism. These are: 1) Heisenberg's uncertainty principle, which is supposed to show that the behavior of a particle cannot be separated from the process of its observation and that there is an unbreakable interaction between the scientific observer and the quantum particle. Heisenberg's principle has long been cited as overthrowing the objectivity of materialism/science. 2) The quantum-mechanical "principle of complementarity or dialecticism" (Sokal, *Fashionable Nonsense*, p. 216), which expresses the observed fact that the components of material reality behave both as waves and as particles and that neither characteristic alone sufficiently describes the behavior of the components. This seems, to relativists, again to defy the objectivity of observation and hence of knowledge. Finally, 3) quantum physics recognizes "discontinuity or rupture" (Sokal, *ibid*, p. 218), expressed in the popular term "quantum leap." This concept has been used by relativists to attack the continuity and logic of Newtonian and all science.

In his parody, Sokal cites these discoveries as supporting relativism. As far as I know, these are well-known discoveries of quantum mechanics; as a (very) lay person I do not know whether or not they have been either disproven or re-interpreted. In the parody, these are left standing as a foundation of the false structure of postmodernist philosophy. Sokal certainly adds a lot of gibberish to this false structure as he goes on, but the problem is that these first three concepts do seem to raise questions about the adequacy of scientific materialism. Then comes Sokal's book, but it contains no explanation of these discoveries in the light of a materialist world view. Instead it devotes itself to dismissing what seem to me to be much easier targets — outright absurdities cloaked in obscure double-talk. Thus, the much bigger challenges thrown by 20th century science to materialist philosophy remain unanswered. Sokal's book exposes much pomo rhetoric as nonsense, but major questions remain. The crisis in science and philosophy continues.

I do not pretend to be able to answer these questions. But I will make a few tentative remarks. The world view of science, while largely materialist, has long been and, I think, remains, largely mechanical. While scientists may, in their specialities, deal with leaps, abrupt changes, flux and indeterminacies, they generally have an overall mechanical view of their fields and of science in general. This is why — in part — the discoveries of quantum mechanics were such a shock to the 19th century scientific world view. But Marx and Engels had long since challenged this mechanical materialism in the social sciences and in natural science with another materialism, one more flexible, more able to explain change, breaks, dualities — in short, a materialism of a new form, a materialism which sees matter as essentially in motion, in transformation, generally following a few principles which are in sharp contrast to the inflexibility of the earlier materialism. This is the change of form of materialism required by a scientific revolution of which Lenin spoke. It is still only beginning to take place, provoked by such discoveries as quantum mechanics. These scientists, who are not dialectical philosophers, are themselves beginning to express this. (Sokal in his parody, speaks of "dialecticism.")



In this situation it's not enough to simply reassert the centrality of empirical evidence. That's fine, Sokal does it well, and it dispenses with a lot of pomo garbage. But if the above-mentioned quantum discoveries (and possibly others) still stand, here are examples of empirical observation seemingly contradicting science's previously-held view of material reality. They are not apparently results of the intervention into science of relativism, but are products of science itself. The relativists, of course, leap into the apparent breach in materialism, asserting that the new discoveries refute materialism. (They conveniently forget that the new discoveries are themselves products of a very high level of development of materialist science and its instruments of observation.) But what to do when the fruits of materialism seem to defy materialism? That is the question. If one does not want to abandon materialism, one can re-investigate materialism itself to see whether perhaps some of

its philosophical principles were insufficiently or incorrectly developed, leading to a contradiction which is real enough but which only expresses the need of a revolution of form.

That revolution can be provided by dialectics.

Certainly, upon mention of this term, a whole chorus will arise denouncing Soviet science and declaring that it demonstrated the falsity of dialectics when applied to science. To this I can only answer that many articles in *Communist Voice* and its predecessor *The Workers' Advocate* have shown that in social and political theory the Soviet leaders since the early 1920's have mangled dialectics in many ways. Is it hard to imagine that they might have also done so in the natural sciences? I am not equipped to make that study but some day it will be made, if it has not already been started somewhere. For reality is dialectical and it confronts us. □

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## Correction:

In the last issue of *Communist Voice* (vol. 4, #4), the last line of the following paragraph at the bottom of page 39 was inadvertently omitted. This is from the article "On Walter's Daum's *the Life and Death of Stalinism: Competition among Soviet enterprises and ministries, and the collapse of the Soviet Union*":

Take the question of competition among the Soviet bourgeoisie, for example. As we have seen, he regards this as a mere "surface" phenomenon, which only petty-bourgeois theorists could put too much emphasis on. He does briefly give some important examples of Soviet competition, but he does not see the theoretical significance of this.

# Postmodernism versus materialism

by Joseph Green

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The left-wing scientist Alan Sokal became the center of controversy in 1996 when his spoof on postmodernism, an article with the pompous title "Transgressing the Boundaries: Toward a Transformative Hermeneutics of Quantum Gravity", was accepted as a serious article by the postmodernist journal *Social Text* and published in its Spring/Summer 1996 issue on the "science wars". This article denied, in the name of "science", the basic materialist view that people live in an external world, whose existence and features are independent of the desires and feelings of human beings. It was full of pseudo-profound assertions about science that were ludicrously wrong. But as it repeated all the postmodernist catchwords and referred in glowing terms to various postmodernist authors, the editors of *Social Text* couldn't tell it from an ordinary postmodernist article. Indeed, they were so impressed by the article that, even after Sokal revealed that it was a hoax, one of the editors, Bruce Robbins, still felt it was a serious contribution to postmodernist philosophy.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Bruce Robbins and Andrew Ross responded on behalf of the editorial board of *Social Text* to Sokal's revelation that his article was a hoax in a statement published in the July/August 1996 issue of the journal *Lingua Franca*. They pointed out that one of the editors "suspected that Sokal's parody was nothing of the sort, and that his admission represented a change of heart, or a folding of his intellectual resolve." Bruce Robbins, writing in the September/October 1996 issue of *Tikkun*, went still further and approvingly cited someone who wrote that

The next year Sokal, now joined by Jean Bricmont, a theoretical physicist from Belgium, continued to poke fun at postmodernist ignorance of science. They published in France a book entitled *Impostures Intellectuelles* which showed the many leading postmodernist writers, including the famous psychologist Jacques Lacan and the sociologist of science Bruno Latour, were spouting nonsense in the name of "science". For many postmodernists it is a point of honor to write in an obscure language that is difficult to understand. Sokal and Bricmont showed that the passages about science in various works of these authors were incomprehensible not due to their depth of thought, but because they were mistaken or even meaningless. A good deal of serious postmodernist writing is indeed hard to distinguish from Sokal's spoof of 1996.

*Impostures Intellectuelles* brought the debate to a new level, spreading it from the U.S. to France, and the book is currently being translated into about a dozen languages. Many postmodernists were outraged that their favorite authors were being judged by the standards of rational thought and objective knowledge whose relevance postmodernism denies. Meanwhile the book finally appeared in English last year in Britain; and at the end of year it was published in the U.S. under the title *Fashionable Nonsense: Postmodern Intellectuals' Abuse of Science*.

The book centers on two subjects. Besides puncturing postmodernist windbagery about science, it also sets forward some basic materialist views about the nature of science and its relation to the external world. Mind you, Sokal and Bricmont rarely use the word "materialism", although it is not clear whether they are simply bowing before the general prejudices of academic circles against such an allegedly crude doctrine as materialism or whether they themselves share these prejudices. They avoid the term "materialism" by instead emphasizing that they are attacking "a potpourri of ideas, often poorly formulated, that go under the generic name of 'relativism'" (p. 51). "Relativism" however is a rather broad term that covers many different concepts. Sokal and Bricmont distinguish between "moral or ethical relativism" about value judgements, "aesthetic relativism" about beauty, and relativism about the existence of an external world ("cognitive or epistemic relativism"), which is the only relativism that they analyze in this book. They criticize the views on science of such "relativists" as T.S. Kuhn, Paul Feyerabend and Bruno Latour.

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<sup>1</sup>(...continued)

Sokal's article had "proposed that superstring theory [a speculative new theory in physics—JG] might help liberate science from 'dependence on the concept of objective truth'." In reference to this, Robbins claimed that the editors of *Social Text* had thought that Sokal had a good point in this interpretation, "and we still do." (emphasis added)

Sokal and Bricmont limit their analysis of postmodernism to these two points: pseudo-scientific jargon, and "relativism" about the existence of scientific truth. For example, they don't discuss or pass judgment on the general psychological theories of Lacan, only his mathematical claims, such as "psychoanalytic topology". But for now, their narrowness serves a useful purpose. Their object is not to assess everything that a postmodernist author may have said or done, and certainly not to oppose every political cause that a postmodernist may have championed, but to focus attention on some basic theoretical issues. They accomplish this with an admirable flair for irritating the high priests of obscurity.

*Fashionable Nonsense* is certainly not the last word on the "science wars". Sokal and Bricmont ignore the question of dialectics; they have little conception of how to apply materialism outside the sphere of the physical sciences; they don't know how to deal with the crisis in the left other than to urge rational thought; they don't deal with how the official scientific establishment bends before the bourgeoisie and does its will; etc. But it is long overdue that two scientists should demolish the scientific pretensions of the postmodernist philosophers; indeed, Sokal and Bricmont laughed at them. For myself, I found the book not just useful, but rather enjoyable as well.<sup>2</sup> It will be welcomed by all those who have felt oppressed by the high-flown verbiage and double-talk with which postmodernism has sought to silence criticism. It has also come as a great relief to some people who had made a serious attempt to understand the supposed scientific basis of what the postmodernist authors have been saying.

### One, two, three, many realities

But is it really possible that postmodernism doubts the existence of an external or objective world? Do they really believe that "reality" is simply whatever a group of people agrees to accept as reality (i.e., that reality is a "social construction" or a "social text")? Well, the editors of *Social Text* published Sokal's spoof "Transgressing the Boundaries" because they liked the philosophical points it made. What did they like about it? Well, they could hardly have missed that, in the very first paragraph, it denounced clinging to

"the dogma . . . which can be summarized

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<sup>2</sup>Of course, having a basic grounding in mathematics and physics is helpful, or even essential, for understanding a number of the examples that Sokal and Bricmont use; the more background one has, the more ludicrous the examples will appear. Sokal and Bricmont try hard to help the reader by providing, for example, simple explanations of a number of technical terms which are misused by Jacques Lacan and other postmodernist authors. But this is hard to do in a few words. Those readers who can't verify for themselves various of the technical examples in the book may, however, be interested in the fact that no one has disputed these examples, not at least in the debates that I have seen. Based on my own assessment of these examples, I am not surprised by this in the least.

briefly as follows: that there exists an external world, whose properties are independent of any individual human being and indeed of humanity as a whole; that these properties are encoded in 'eternal' physical laws; and that human being can obtain reliable, albeit imperfect and tentative, knowledge of these laws by hewing to the 'objective' procedures and epistemological strictures prescribed by the (so-called) scientific method."<sup>3</sup>

The latter part of the article has a section entitled "Transgressing the Boundaries: Towards a Liberatory Science". It proposes a "postmodern science" to replace current sciences. One of its features would be to

"liberate human beings from the tyranny of 'absolute truth' and 'objective reality'."<sup>4</sup>

Is it possible that the editors of *Social Text* were unaware of these assertions in Sokal's article? In any case, they repeated them later in their own words. Bruce Robbins echoed the idea that one had to overthrow the "tyranny" of reality in his reply to Sokal entitled "Anatomy of a Hoax" in *Tikkun*.<sup>5</sup> He wrote that "truth can be another source of oppression".

Sokal's article "Truth or Consequences: A Brief Response to Robbins", appeared in the next issue of *Tikkun*.<sup>6</sup> He analyzed Robbins' argument as follows:

"Is it in the interests of women, African Americans, and other super-exploited people,' Robbins asks, 'to insist that truth and identity are social constructions [i.e. whatever is agreed upon by this or that group of people—JG]? Yes and no,' he asserts. 'No, you can't talk about exploitation without respect for empirical evidence'—exactly my point. 'But yes,' Robbins continues, 'truth can be another source of oppression.' Come again? How can *truth* oppress anyone? The existing social arrangements may indeed be oppressive, but how can telling the truth about them make things worse? 'It was not so long ago,' Robbins explains, 'that the scientists gave their full authority to explanations of why women and African Americans . . . were inherently inferior.' But *that* isn't truth — it's ideology posing as truth, and objective science demonstrates its falsity.

"This error is repeated throughout Robbins'

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<sup>3</sup> *Fashionable Nonsense*, pp. 212-13. (Appendix A of this book reprints Sokal's spoof article from *Social Text*.)

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* p. 235.

<sup>5</sup> This was his article in the September/October 1996 issue of *Tikkun* that I have referred to in an earlier footnote, where he maintained that Sokal's spoof was actually a serious argument against the idea of "objective truth". By the way, this article and many others in the debate can be found at Sokal's web site at < <http://www.physics.nyu.edu/faculty/sokal/> > .

<sup>6</sup> *Tikkun*, November/December 1996, p. 58.

essay: he systematically confuses truth with *claims* of truth, fact with *assertions* of fact, and knowledge with *pretensions* to knowledge. These elisions underlie much of the sloppy thinking about 'social construction' that is prevalent nowadays in the academy, and it's something that progressives ought to resist. Sure, let's show which economic, political and ideological interests are served by our opponents' accounts of 'reality'; but first let's demonstrate, by marshalling evidence and logic, why those accounts are objectively *false* (or in some cases true but incomplete)." (emphasis as in the original)

What do the postmodernists put in the place of objective reality? For them, what is true depends on one's "values and beliefs". Stanley Aronowitz, one of the founders of *Social Text* and an editor until 1997, put forward his view of reality in the article "Alan Sokal's 'Transgression'".<sup>7</sup> He proclaimed that *Social Text* "questioned the naive old materialism that holds that knowledge simply reflects reality." He denounces the "doctrine [that] there are 'objective truths' since the earth revolves around the sun, gravity exists and various other laws of nature are settled matters." Instead, Aronowitz says, even the facts of physics vary, depending on "the values and beliefs of scientists as well as the political imperatives of ruling groups who fund scientific work."

Naturally people are influenced by their values and beliefs and by who funds their work. But the question is: is it possible for humanity to gradually sort out truth from error and get closer and closer to what really exists in the world? Not according to Aronowitz. He states that

"... Sokal readily agreed that facts must be interpreted, but maintained that proper scientific method filters out social and cultural influences in the process of discovery. This, it seems to me, is an article of faith akin to a religious belief."

So Aronowitz insists that what is true depends on one's values. He mixes together, as Robbins does, the question of fact with the question of what people believe. For example, he raises the question of "theories of racial and gender inequality", including the views of "nineteenth-century mainstream scientists who held women to be incapable of reason because of their biology". And he states that these theories are wrong, not just because they are factually wrong, but mainly because "they violate the criterion of humanistic universalism". (However, as we shall see in a moment, another *Social Text* editor apparently differs from "humanistic universalism", since he assumes that some of the prejudiced nineteenth-century views are correct, that scientific rationality is "androcentric", and that women think in accordance with private, subjective experiences.)

What about quantum mechanics and solid state physics? Aronowitz discusses the truth of these fields. He denies the "flatfooted statement that the 'objective truth' " of such science "has nothing to do with its

[science's—JG] alliances with the military."

Thus we are to judge quantum mechanics according to our anti-militaristic values. Unfortunately, he doesn't give any example of what this means concretely. How, for example, do we judge whether quarks and other subatomic particles really exist depending on our political and ethical judgments?

Andrew Ross, another editor of *Social Text*, developed a similar idea in the introduction to the issue of *Social Text* on the science wars. He denounced "reason, divorced from value". He wanted to replace "empirical rationality" (reasoning based on fact) with

"different ways of doing science, ways that downgrade methodology, experiment, and manufacturing in favor of local environments, cultural values, and principles of social justice."<sup>8</sup>

Here Ross mixes together the question of determining what is true about the world, with the issue of how much manufacturing should occur in a local area. But the basic idea is clear. He holds that one need not look at the hard facts about the world, but can instead assume that the world conforms to one's value and sense of justice.

Indeed, according to Ross's logic, one should not follow the scientific method of investigating the facts about the external world, because

"the androcentric [male-centered] rationality of the scientific method has served not only to exclude women professionally but also to re-inforce their social subjugation through its subordination of the private, subjective realm of experience with which they were socially identified."<sup>9</sup>

Here again we see the an editor of *Social Text* confusing beliefs about facts with facts. Because women were "socially identified" in the past by conservatives as being incapable of logic and completely involved in "private, subjective" concerns, therefore Ross holds that women must actually have a "private, subjective" form of reasoning separate from the supposedly male rationality. On this basis, Ross denounces rationality as supposedly androcentric and oppressive of women.

As we see, it's not that the postmodernists altogether deny reality; they believe in a reality of sorts. Indeed, Ross, Robbins, and Aronowitz like reality so much that they believe that every group with different beliefs and a different sense of justice has its own reality, just as real as any other group's reality. They believe in not one reality, but two, three, many realities. But all these realities are subjective realities; the postmodernists deny the existence of an objective truth, separate from the beliefs and values of people. In their view, it is not people who must make their beliefs conform to the external world, but the external world that they regard as a "social construct" that must conform to whatever values people have.

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<sup>7</sup>See in the Winter 1997 issue of *Dissent*, pp. 107-110.

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<sup>8</sup>*Social Text*, Spring/Summer 1996, p. 4.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 5.

## Ad hominem attacks—the new “rationality”

But if reality depends on one's values and beliefs, then how can disputes be solved? If one can't appeal to a rational investigation of the world, then what criteria are left to resolve disagreements among people? If one's values and preferences and sense of justice are the real criteria of truth, how does one decide between the views put forward by people who have different values and preferences and views of justice? All that can be done is to praise how good one's own motives and values are, and to denigrate the motives and intentions of one's opponent. A good deal of postmodernist writing thus ends up as ad hominem attacks on the intentions and characters of their opponents.

For example, the “science wars” issue of *Social Text* was devoted in large part to refuting the book *Higher Superstition/The Academic Left and Its Quarrels with Science* by Paul Gross and Norman Levitt. Bruce Robbins and Andrew Ross themselves said that the point of the issue was “to gauge how science critics were responding to the attacks of Paul Gross and Norman Levitt, and other conservatives in science.”<sup>10</sup> Yet there is little about the content of the *Higher Superstition* in *Social Text*. A number of articles complain about the *Higher Superstition*, but what is notable is how little attention the articles pay to the main examples and arguments of the book.<sup>11</sup>

*Social Text* concentrates on smearing Gross and Levitt's political stand. Moreover, it turns out that *Social Text*'s political characterization of these authors are based mainly on saying that whoever opposes postmodernism must be a conservative. In reality, at least one of the authors of *Higher Superstition*, Norman Levitt, belongs to the same leftist political trend, the moderate reformists of the “Democratic Socialists of America”, as *Social Text* editor Stanley Aronowitz. Gross and Levitt are angry at the “academic left”, but they distinguish between leftists in general, including those in the universities, and the “academic left”, their name for the postmodernists; they distinguish between postmodernism and various left-wing causes, although they are crusaders against radicalism.

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<sup>10</sup>See their reply to Sokal in the July/August 1996 *Lingua Franca*.

<sup>11</sup>*Higher Superstition* has a number of cutting attacks on the philosophical absurdities of postmodernism, but they aren't directly discussed in *Social Text*. It has, in addition, a number of sharply-expressed opinions of varying quality on a variety of social, environmental, and political issues, which *Social Text* also ignores. In the course of their book, Gross and Levitt also display a grudge against Marxism and revolutionism, and pose as opposed to the extremes of the right and the left. But *Social Text* wasn't concerned with their anti-Marxist bias, since postmodernism has its own anti-Marxist biases; postmodernism is, in effect, “post-Marxism”. Nor could political moderation bother *Social Text*; as we shall see, the shriller the call of *Social Text* for a new “rationality”, the tamer its basic political stand.

So how does *Social Text* analyze their stand? Andrew Ross, in its introduction to the science wars issue of *Social Text*, sets the tone. He simply denounces Gross and Levitt as “stalking horses for social conservatism” whose work “belongs fair and square to the tradition of Alan Bloom, William Bennett . . . and Dinesh D'Souza”. He knows, of course, that Gross and Levitt have different views and aims than these social conservatives. Nevertheless, this doesn't matter to Ross. Why, he says, they are fervent, and so are the social conservatives, so clearly they're really the same. He complains that they have issued a “wake-up call” against science-bashers “in the same systematic fashion” as the conservatives “fingered the defilers of their Great Books tradition.” Moreover, Gross and Levitt are running “lockstep in style if not influence with the pitbull moralizing of the Buchanans, Doles, and Gramms of the moment.” Style, not substance, that's how Ross approaches the question. Other articles in *Social Text* also evade the theoretical issues. Based on style, and not on any position of Gross and Levitt concerning abortion rights, Sarah Franklin concludes that “Like Randall Terry and Operation Rescue campaigners, Gross and Levitt espouse a paternalistic Right-to-Life discourse concerning the vital essence of the scientific ethos, and the importance of its salvation on behalf of our children's future.”<sup>12</sup> A good deal of the argumentation seems to be squabbling over university positions. George Levine argues in *Social Text* that “turf is Gross and Levitt's real concern”.<sup>13</sup> This is echoed by Langdon Winner, who opens his article by complaining about how “malicious” Gross and Levitt are, never gets beyond this level of attack, and mainly complain that Gross and Levitt's views would harm the funding of postmodernist work by the establishment.<sup>14</sup>

*Social Text*'s whole approach to the “science wars” is that the truth is whatever is politically useful to them at the moment. Ross opens this issue of *Social Text* with the words

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<sup>12</sup>“Making Transparencies: Seeing Through the Science Wars”, *Social Text*, p. 154.

<sup>13</sup>“What is Science Studies for and Who Cares?” in *Social Text*, p. 120.

<sup>14</sup>“The Gloves Come Off: Shattered Alliances in Science and Technology Studies” in *Social Text*, pp. 81, 85, 88. Gross and Levitt do devote a few pages in their book to the hiring, firing and promotion process in universities and propose that scientists should take part in judging work done in the humanities that claims to analyze the content of science. But Winner doesn't discuss the pros and cons of this proposal, but instead pretends that *The Higher Superstition* demanded the elimination of all “science and technology studies”, to “shut the whole thing down”. It is true, however, that Gross and Levitt do harbor a grudge against the academic positions of the postmodernists; they do not have the same charitable attitude to their ideological opponents in the “science wars” as Frederick Engels. (In his preface of 1885 to his famous book *Anti-Duhring* that exposed Duhring's pretensions, Engels condemned the actions of the University of Berlin against their one-time instructor Duhring.)

"At the end of July 1995, Republican moderates in Congress broke ranks to help defeat a brutal package of antienvironmental legislation. . . . The significance of this moment is worth dwelling on."

According to Ross, this vote was a victory for the "rise in popular technoskepticism", which Ross associates with a denunciation of scientific "rationality". Thus, whoever promotes "technoskepticism" and denounces scientific "rationality" is supposedly progressive, while supporting materialism means being a stalking horse for conservatism and ravaging the environment. This is why it is not necessary for Ross to examine what his opponents say; so long as they are not "technoskeptics" in his sense of the word, they are automatically anti-environmental monsters. But at the same time, Ross inadvertently shows how supposedly radical claims about the need to do away with the old materialism can go hand in hand with the most moderate and servile politics. Ross poses as a flaming red because he denounces the old rationality, while he is worried about coalition-building within establishment.

*Social Text* has had a bit more of a problem smearing Sokal, however. Sokal concentrates on certain basic questions of materialism, while Gross and Levitt swing the ax in every direction. While Gross and Levitt wrote against the "academic left", Sokal repeatedly insists that his intention is to strengthen the left. He is also known as a leftist; for example, during the period of Sandinista rule, he went to Nicaragua and spent some time teaching at the Universidad Nacional Autonoma. *Social Text* was proud to list him as one of the authors in their Spring/Summer 1996 issue, and eager to do so because he was one of the few scientists among the authors in their issue devoted to the "science wars". (According to *Social Text*'s own thumbnail sketches of their contributors, only two others were physical scientists: Ruth Hubbard, a biologist, and Richard Levins, an evolutionary ecologist.) Having printed an article from him once, makes it harder for *Social Text* to later simply dismiss later as a conservative. Harder, but not impossible.

The basic defense of the postmodernists remains that their opponents must be ultra-rightists. As one writer noted:

"at an academic conference on 'Left Conservatism' I attended this spring at University of California at Santa Cruz, Sokal was called an 'ignoramus,' an accomplice to conservatives, and compared to Newt Gingrich."<sup>15</sup>

He was also compared to the notorious Rush Limbaugh. Similarly attacked at the conference were liberals such as Michael Moore (of "Roger and Me" fame), Barbara Ehrenreich and Katha Pollitt.<sup>16</sup>

### Postmodernism's charlatanism

Let us pass from the debate over Sokal and Bricmont's work to the content of their book *Fashionable Nonsense*. The bulk of

the work is devoted to ridiculing the nonsensical passages about mathematics and physics in a number of famous postmodernist works. The postmodernist authors didn't just refer to science in a few, minor passages. Instead claims about science are often a key part of their theories, and sometimes, perhaps, the sole proof of the validity of these theories. So when it turns out that these authors are actually ignorant of science, and that their scientific musings range from the irrelevant to the fraudulent, it strikes at the heart of their work.

Two of the passages cited by Sokal and Bricmont will suffice to give the reader some idea of the flavor of this material. Let's begin with Jacques Lacan, to whom Sokal and Bricmont devote a chapter. Here is an excerpt from a seminar by Lacan on "Desire and the interpretation of desire in Hamlet":

". . . human life could be defined as a calculus in which zero was irrational. This formula is just an image, a mathematical metaphor. When I say 'irrational,' I'm referring not to some unfathomable emotional state but precisely to what is called an imaginary number. The square root of minus one doesn't correspond to anything that is subject to our intuition, anything real—in the mathematical sense of the term—and yet, it must be conserved, along with its full function."<sup>17</sup>

Sokal and Bricmont point out that Lacan apparently believes that the mathematical concept of an imaginary number is the same as that of an irrational number, which is not true. Lacan also seems to identify the mathematical meaning of the terms "irrational number" and "imaginary number" with the ordinary meaning of "irrational" and "imaginary". Moreover, a metaphor should bring some image or idea to the mind, yet one might go further than Sokal and Bricmont and question if there is any meaning or imagery at all in Lacan's phrase "a calculus in which zero was irrational".

But the very absurdity of such passages from Lacan usually serves as a defense against criticism. Since such mathematical gibberish has so little meaning in itself, the postmodernist master can pose as the only one who knows what it really means, and so the critic can be denounced as not having penetrated into its full, rich, profundity. One has to accept such postmodernist pronouncements in the same worshipful attitude as a novice accepts the supposed word of God.

Moreover, Lacan doesn't just use mathematics as a metaphor. He claims that higher mathematics is important for his psychological theories, and Sokal and Bricmont criticize a number of these psychological passages.

But let's pass on to the criticism of "androcentric [male-centered] rationality of the scientific method" that Andrew Ross is so excited about. Sokal and Bricmont devote a chapter to the writings of Luce Irigaray. Among her varied interests is the criticism of science as having a masculine nature. Let's see how she argues about Einstein's famous equation concerning the relation of energy and matter:

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<sup>15</sup>Kristina Zarlengo, "Idiotsavants?" in *Salon*, Nov. 2, 1998.

<sup>16</sup>*Fashionable Nonsense*, p. 210.

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<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 25.

"Is  $E = Mc^2$  a sexed equation? Perhaps it is. Let us make the hypothesis that it is insofar as it privileges the speed of light over other speeds that are vitally necessary to us. What seems to me to indicate the possibly sexed nature of the equation is not directly its uses by nuclear weapons, rather it is having privileged what goes the fastest . . ."18

Thus the very fact that the equation singles out a particular speed,  $c$ , the speed of light, is supposed to suggest that it is based on a specifically masculine form of reasoning. Oh? Is it really harder for women to use this equation than men? Or is Irigaray proposing that the speed of light doesn't really occupy a special position in nature and hence the equation is false? In that case, what about the numerous confirmations of this equation in practice?

These and other assertions of the postmodernist authors about science are so absurd that many students of their literature probably can't believe that eminent people could write such nonsense as these passages appear to be. A student might feel that well-respected authors couldn't really be making some blatant errors, and might spend years searching for some deeper meaning in these passages. Other people are likely held back from evaluating the claims of these authors, because they do not have training in the various scientific fields, despite the fact that these authors don't know much about science either. And imagine the plight of someone, interested in psychology but convinced that Lacan pointed the way forward, who spent years learning algebraic topology and differential geometry, rather than learning about people, only to discover that these fields had nothing to do with helping people recover their mental health. So precisely at this time, when these authors are influential, it is necessary to emancipate intellectual life from such blatant fraud.

### Relativism and science

The longest chapter in *Fashionable Nonsense*, comprising almost one-quarter of the main body of the book, and related comments in subsequent chapters, deal with the relation of science to the external world. Sokal and Bricmont refute the "relativist" views that science (and human knowledge in general) can not provide increasingly accurate knowledge of the external world.

It is well-known that science depends on observations of the external world and on experiments. But the relationship between experiments and scientific theory is a bit complex (indeed, it's dialectical). Experiments and observations can't give rise to a theory by themselves, without the intervention of human theorizing. For example, the results of an experiment, taken in isolation, can often be explained in several ways. To see which is the correct explanation may take a good deal of more thought and further experimentation. Take the simple question of measuring the freezing point of water and seeing if

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<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 109.

it is really 32 degrees Fahrenheit (or 0 degrees Centigrade). One might cool down water to a lower and lower temperature and note when it freezes, but this experiment doesn't always give the same result. If the water isn't pure enough, the contaminants might act as an anti-freeze and let the water stay liquid well below 32 degrees Fahrenheit. Even if the water is pure, it may sometimes only freeze below 32 degrees; under special circumstances water can become "supercooled" and remain liquid below its normal freezing point, although it will freeze immediately if it comes into contact with the smallest crystal of ice. So the result of even a simple measurement can sometimes require a good deal of investigation to see what it really means.

Thus the evaluation of experimental evidence and the formulation of theories are not automatic procedures. Sokal and Bricmont refer to lack of existence of cookie-cutter patterns for this work as follows,

"there does not exist (at least at present) a complete codification of scientific rationality, and we seriously doubt that one could ever exist. . . . Nevertheless, . . . we think that well-developed scientific theories are in general supported by good arguments, but the rationality of those arguments must be analyzed case-by-case."<sup>19</sup>

But the lack of automatic rules, and the other complexities that arise in the course of scientific investigation, are used by the postmodernists to argue that science doesn't really reflect the world. Sokal and Bricmont focus particular attention, from a materialist point of view, on three characterizations that have been made of these complexities and that have been used to deny that science can reach objective knowledge: the "theory-ladenness of observation", the "underdetermination of theory by evidence" and "the alleged incommensurability of paradigms". Along the way, they critique the attempt of Karl Popper and the "Vienna Circle" to reduce the practice of science to formal rules as well as the relativist views of Quine, T.S. Kuhn, Paul Feyerabend, and Bruno Latour.

### The "strong program" in the sociology of science

Of particular interest, with respect to the issues about reality raised earlier in this article, is Sokal and Bricmont's critique of "the strong program" in the study of the history and present role of science. Scientific institutions are part of the overall social structure of a society, just as much as any other institutions. The economic and political factors that determine whether these institutions are built and affect their work can and should be studied. Scientific disputes are also affected by the overall class struggles and ideological atmosphere of a society, and this too is an interesting area of study. But the "strong program" goes much further than this. Sokal and Bricmont point out that its "aim was to explain in sociological terms the *content* of

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<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 58.

scientific theories."<sup>20</sup> The extracts given in *Fashionable Nonsense* from the advocates of the strong program, such as David Bloor, clarify that the aim of the "strong program" is to explain the outcome of scientific debates and to study how scientific theories evolve, without any reference to the truth or falsity of these theories.

This means that the "strong program" doesn't regard scientific theories as reflecting physical reality, but only as reflecting social conditions. For example, it doesn't only seek to examine what social conditions favored or retarded the discovery and acceptance of Newton's theory of universal gravitation theory or even influenced the way it was formulated, but it seeks to explain all of Newton's theory itself solely in "sociological terms". It doesn't simply point out the social factors that manifest themselves in scientific debates, but demands that these debates should be studied entirely independently of whether the theories under dispute are better or worse descriptions of reality.

It is one thing to note that scientific debates are affected by factors other than scientific truth, that sometimes wrong theories are accepted, or even that famous scientific advances have often been accepted while the evidence for them was still iffy. It is another to try to explain the history of science totally independently of the truth or falsity of the scientific fields under discussion and of the accuracy of their description of nature. For example, take the question of the debates over the nature of light. One important phenomenon is that a beam of white light can be broken up into a spectrum of colors by inserting a glass prism in its path. Any reasonable theory of light has to be able to explain this. But why have scientists with varying views concerning the nature of light accepted the existence of this phenomenon? Surely the fact that this phenomenon actually takes place and is easily verified has something to do with it.

But Bloor, one of the founders of the "strong program", demands that the sociology of science should "be impartial with respect to truth and falsity, rationality or irrationality, success or failure" of the theories it examines.<sup>21</sup> (p. 80) Sokal and Bricmont even point out Bloor sometimes defines "knowledge" as simply meaning whatever is accepted. Bloor writes that:

"Instead of defining it [knowledge—JG] as true belief—or perhaps, justified true belief—knowledge for the sociologist is whatever people take to be knowledge. It consists of those beliefs which people confidently hold to and live by."<sup>22</sup>

But can Bloor really mean that anything a person's believes should be called "knowledge"? Well, no, he does distinguish between personal beliefs and group beliefs. Anything that a group believes is "knowledge". He writes that

". . . Of course knowledge must be distinguished from mere belief. This can be done by reserving

the word 'knowledge' for what is collectively endorsed, leaving the individual and idiosyncratic to count as mere belief."

Here, by the way, we see that "relativism" has a strong conformist flavor. Despite its veneer of liberating one from the standards of one's society with pluralism, it provides no basis for the individual to fight against the dominant "knowledge" of any group one is in.

But whether one is talking about a belief or a social standard, Bloor demands that the sociologist should not worry about whether it has any rational basis. He writes that:

"For the relativist there is no sense attached to the idea that some standards or beliefs are really rational as distinct from merely locally accepted as such."<sup>23</sup>

Bruno Latour similarly demands that the truth or falsity of scientific theories must have no place in the study of the history of science. His "Third Rule of Method" states that Nature itself is simply whatever people think Nature is. He writes, concerning scientific debates:

"Since the settlement of a controversy is the *cause* of Nature's representation, not the consequences, we can never use the outcome—Nature—to explain how and why a controversy has been settled."<sup>24</sup>

This leads Latour to some funny conclusions. Sokal and Bricmont point to where

"Latour discusses what he interprets as the discovery in 1976, by French scientists working on the mummy of the pharaoh Ramses II, that his death (circa 1213 BC) was due to tuberculosis. Latour asks: 'How could he pass away due to a bacillus discovered by Robert Koch in 1882?' Latour notes, correctly, that it would be an anachronism to assert that Ramses II was killed by machine-gun fire or died from the stress provoked by a stock-market crash. But then, Latour wonders, why isn't death from tuberculosis likewise an anachronism? He goes so far as to assert that 'Before Koch, the bacillus has no real existence.' He dismisses the common-sense notion that Koch *discovered* a pre-existing bacillus as 'having only the appearance of common sense.'<sup>25</sup>

However strange Latour's argument, it is a natural conclusion from the idea that truth is whatever people believe it to be, and that debates over scientific theories are what actually create the truth of these theories. In 1213 BC, the TB bacillus wasn't known. Therefore, by postmodernist logic, it didn't exist. It was only when the scientific and medical community accepted the existence of TB, that—according to the

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<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 85, emphasis as in the original.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 86.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 88, in footnote 113.

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<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 88.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.* p. 93.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 96-7, footnote 123.



"strong program" in the sociology of science—it really existed.

Sokal and Bricmont point out that Bloor is inconsistent in his use of such terms as "knowledge". Bloor slips back and forth between the view that truth is whatever people say it is, and the ordinary view of truth. This, no doubt, is typical of the practice of "relativists". Indeed, the very method of these relativists is inconsistent. They insist that the historian should not talk about "knowledge" but about what people accept as knowledge. But to know what the people of a certain time period accepted as knowledge is itself knowledge. To study the "sociological" factors involved in the history of science assumes that the historian can know many facts about history, facts that are often harder to demonstrate than the facts about nature that advocates of the "strong program" insist should be banished from discussion. Sokal and Bricmont express this as follows:

" . . . Research in history, and in particular the history of science, employs methods that are not radically different from those used in the natural sciences: studying documents, drawing the most rational inferences, making deductions based on the available data, and so forth. If arguments of this type in physics or biology did not allow us to arrive at reasonably reliable conclusions, what reason would there be to trust them in history?"<sup>26</sup>

But, inconsistent or not, the "strong program" in the sociology of science has a view of reality that is similar to those of the editors of *Social Text*. The "strong program" illustrates what it means to say that truth or knowledge is simply a "social construct".

### The paradigms of T.S. Kuhn

*Fashionable Nonsense* also discuss the work of Thomas Kuhn, whose best-known work is *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Written in 1962, it still exercises a considerable influence. For example, last year the *Chicago Workers' Voice* group discovered this book, and their ideologist Sarah sought to replace the Marxist materialism of Plekhanov with the viewpoint of Kuhn.<sup>27</sup>

In *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Kuhn distinguishes between what he calls "normal science", where work proceeds within certain basic frameworks which Kuhn calls "paradigms", and "revolutionary" periods where the basic theories and frameworks are challenged, which Kuhn calls a change of paradigms. Kuhn had introduced a new terminology, but was this really a new conception about how science develops? Sokal and Bricmont remark that

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<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 77.

<sup>27</sup>The August 1, 1998 issue of *Communist Voice* contained an exchange of views about materialism. It reprinted an article from the *CWV*'s Sarah entitled "A review of Kuhn's book 'The Structure of Scientific Revolutions'/Some thoughts on the Left and modern philosophy" as well as a critique of this article by Mark, Detroit, entitled "*Chicago Workers' Voice* discards the Marxist 'paradigm'".

"This vision of things fits so well with scientists' perception of their own work that it is difficult to see, at first glance, what is revolutionary in this approach . . ."<sup>28</sup>

They go on, however, to point out that:

" . . . The problems arises only when one faces the notion of the *incommensurability* of paradigms. . . . though one can give several meanings to the word 'incommensurable' and a good deal of the debate about Kuhn's work has centered on this question, there is at least one version of the incommensurability thesis that casts doubt on the possibility of rational comparison between competing theories, namely the idea that our experience of the world is radically conditioned by our theories, which in turn depend upon the paradigm."

This means that Kuhn seems to advocate that, given that one holds to a certain paradigm, one can interpret the results of an experiment, whatever these results are, so that they fit this paradigm. Kuhn jumps from the fact that some experimental results can be explained in different ways, to assuming that the entire weight of experimental results can be explained away. Thus, in his conception, the change from one paradigm to another isn't a matter of an advance in knowledge (which one might assume to be the case when the new paradigm really is more accurate than the old one), but simply is a change in what is socially accepted as true. Sokal and Bricmont characterize this aspect of Kuhn's position as being that

"changes of paradigm are due principally to nonempirical factors and that, once accepted, they condition our perception of the world to such an extent that they can *only* be confirmed by our subsequent experiences."<sup>29</sup>

But if scientific theories didn't reflect the world and lack empirical content, then what would they reflect? They would simply be a social construct. Scientific truth would be whatever the scientists said it was.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>*Fashionable Nonsense*, p. 72.

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 75.

<sup>30</sup>This latter view of Kuhn's dovetails with the way that the *Chicago Workers' Voice* looks at things. Sarah's article on Kuhn and the left discusses the concepts of Marxism and socialism as meaning simply what they are taken to be by certain groups. She doesn't say what she believes them to really be. The *CWV* came out of a political trend that denounced what the apologists of state-capitalist regimes (such as the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia yesterday and China and Cuba today) called "Marxism" as "revisionism", and it denounced what they called "socialism" as a new form of state-capitalism. The *CWV* has retreated from such a sharp break with revisionism and state-capitalism, seeing that anti-revisionists are such a small minority in the left today. Sarah now thinks that the errors of  
(continued...)

## Overcoming the crisis of the left

*Fashionable Nonsense* writes that among the "principal negative effects" of postmodernism is "a weakening of the political left".<sup>31</sup> Indeed, Sokal has consistently described his motive for attacking postmodernism as to help cure a sickness in the left. Replying to the editors of *Social Text* over his spoof of postmodernism, he stressed:

"My goal isn't to defend science from the barbarian hordes of lit crit (we'll survive just fine, thank you), but to defend the Left from a trendy segment of itself. Like innumerable others from diverse backgrounds and disciplines, I call for the Left to reclaim its Enlightenment roots." From this standpoint, he opposed the *Social Text* editors for "setting up an opposition between science and progressive politics. They describe science as a 'civil religion' that supports existing social and political structures. It is of course true that scientific research is skewed by the influence of those with power and money. But a scientific worldview, based on a commitment to logic and standards of evidence and to the incessant confrontation of theories with reality, is an essential component of any progressive politics."<sup>32</sup>

Sokal held that left-wing politics is undermined by the abandonment of the commitment to truth. Correctly criticizing *Social Text* editor Robbins, he wrote that:

" 'Those of us who do cultural politics sometimes act,' Robbins candidly admits, 'as if . . . truth were always and everywhere a weapon of the right.' That's an astoundingly self-defeating attitude for an avowed leftist. If truth were on the side of the right, shouldn't we all—at least the honest ones among us—become right-wingers? For my own part, I'm a leftist and a feminist *because* of evidence and logic (combined with elementary ethics), not in spite of

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<sup>30</sup>(...continued)

the revisionists were probably not "simply rigid interpretations" of Marxism, but Marxism itself, and apparently she feels the same way about the official "socialism" of the state-capitalist regimes. So on one hand, she feels the need for "a new way of looking at many things", but for now, she takes official Marxism as real Marxism. She doesn't see any need to give any evidence for these views, or to refute the detailed work which supports the anti-revisionist position; she believes that Kuhn's general work on paradigms backs her up. For Kuhn, scientific truth is whatever the scientists say it is, and for Sarah, Marxism and socialism are whatever the larger left forces say they are.

<sup>31</sup>*Fashionable Nonsense*, *Ibid.*, p. 206.

<sup>32</sup>From "Sokal's Reply to *Social Text* Editorial" in the correspondence section of *Lingua Franca* for July/August 1996.

it."<sup>33</sup>

Sokal and Bricmont connect the spread of postmodernist "relativism" to several causes, including

"the desperate situation and general disorientation of the left, a situation that appears to be unique in its history. . . . Never before have the ideals of justice and equality seemed so utopian. Without entering into an analysis of the causes of this situation (much less proposing solutions), it is easy to understand that it generates a kind of discouragement that expresses itself in part in postmodernism."<sup>34</sup>

Indeed, Sokal and Bricmont really don't propose solutions to the crisis of the left. Their practical proposals consist mainly of urging people to think better. Thus, in order to achieve "a real dialogue" between the physical and the social sciences they recommend seven things, such as "It's a good idea to know what one is talking about".<sup>35</sup>

What can this achieve? Sokal and Bricmont end *Fashionable Nonsense* by looking into "what will come after postmodernism". They give some possibilities of what intellectuals will turn to: a more extreme irrationalism? abandoning any serious criticism of existing conditions for a couple of decades? or bringing about an "emergence of an intellectual culture that would be rationalist but not dogmatic, scientifically minded but not scientific, open-minded but not frivolous, and politically progressive but not sectarian. But this, of course, is only a hope, and perhaps only a dream."<sup>36</sup> One can only agree that, as they restrict themselves to chiding people to think more clearly, they don't provide much basis for judging whether one or the other possibility will take place. Sokal and Bricmont don't suggest any way of influencing the outcome, other than refuting postmodernist charlatanism, and that, however valuable at this time, is obviously only part of the story.

## The Enlightenment

The lack of any perspective for dealing with the crisis of the left is related to shortcomings in Sokal and Bricmont's analysis. For example, they repeatedly suggest that the Left "reclaim its Enlightenment roots". To some extent, they are simply reacting to the postmodernists, who justify their attack on materialism and rationality as a repudiation of the Enlightenment.

The Enlightenment refers to the philosophical and intellectual ferment in Europe of the 17th and the 18th centuries. The boldest Enlightenment philosophers, such as the French materialists of the 18th century, risked persecution by the monarchy in their struggle to subject all the despotic and backward institutions of their world to the acid test of reason.

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<sup>33</sup>"Truth or Consequences: A Brief Response to Robbins", *Tikkun*, November/December 1996, p. 58.

<sup>34</sup>*Fashionable Nonsense*, p. 201.

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 185-9.

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 211.

No doubt, the Enlightenment helped break through the medieval and religious rubbish that was a lead weight on human thought; it remains of considerable interest in the history of world philosophy. But progressive thought has advanced quite a bit since those days.

Sokal and Bricmont are particularly concerned with certain general truths of materialism concerning the existence of an external world and the ability of human thought to increasingly comprehend it. By no means were all Enlightenment figures materialists. But even the materialists of the Enlightenment were limited in their outlook.

\* For one thing, the materialism of the Enlightenment only succeeded in dethroning religion and explaining facts about nature, but it faltered in its attempts, however ardent, to explain human behavior and institutions. Even the most advanced among these materialists couldn't provide a materialist explanation of the evolution of human society, and couldn't find a materialist base for how to change society. For the Enlighteners, despotism and exploitation were explained simply by ignorance of the true path, by blunders in reasoning, or by mistaken ethics.

\* Even with respect to nature, the materialism of the Enlightenment was static and not yet dialectical. For example, there was little or no idea of evolution in nature, of the transformation of apparently separate things into each other, or of the role of contradiction in nature.

\* The Enlightenment also had a narrow class basis. It was based on a section of thinkers who constituted only a relative handful of the population. For them, the masses were an inert or unconscious mob; despite the sympathy of its best figures for the sufferings of the masses, they shared a disdain or even horror of the radical action of the masses.

\* Moreover, the Enlightenment philosophers had not yet heard of, to say nothing of having dealt with, the problems of organizing against capitalism and attempting to build a socialist society. The proletariat hadn't yet emerged as an independent political force at the time of the Enlightenment. And the Enlightenment could not have dealt with the new problems of the revolutionary movement in the 20th century, such as the evaluation of state-capitalist regimes in Russia, China, etc.

Thus the left has to do a lot more than simply reclaim its Enlightenment roots. The postmodernists call on people to go *backwards* from the Enlightenment, which is absurd; the reply of the left can't be to stand pat on the Enlightenment, but to go forward from it.

Moreover, however subversive some of the Enlightenment figures may have been in their own time, today the Enlightenment is utterly respectable. Its defense is one of the trends of official philosophy. Today, the best spirit from the Enlightenment, the spirit of subjecting all the institutions of the day to the acid test of criticism and striving for alternatives, can only be maintained by going beyond the Enlightenment.

## Historical materialism

Sokal and Bricmont's advice that people should think better is quite in line with Enlightenment prescriptions. By itself, it is more or less a platitude. Unfortunately, Sokal and Bricmont not only don't go further than this, but they shrug off attempts to go further than this. It's just a peripheral part of their book, not one of its key points, but it is something that they seem to feel strongly on.

Thus, while defending the relevance of materialism for science, Sokal and Bricmont are skeptical about its relevance to the study of human society. In their view, natural science alone is the realm of materialism, while social issues are the realm of speculation. They say that their book has

"defended the idea that there is such a thing as evidence and that facts matter. However, many questions of vital interest—notably those concerning the future—cannot be answered conclusively on the basis of evidence and reason, and they lead human beings to indulge in (more-or-less-informed) speculation." In their view, "the principal lesson to be learned from the past is that predicting the future is hazardous" so that all one can do is put forward "our fears and our hopes".<sup>37</sup>

As we have seen, they put forward their fears and hopes about what might follow postmodernism, but they don't even try to indicate what factors might influence what actually happens.

Now, surely, not everything about the future is unpredictable. The scientific laws about nature which are discovered today are likely to be valid tomorrow, or else there would be little point in science at all. But what about human society? Doesn't its evolution obey certain laws as well? There will be always be a great deal that is unpredictable or even random in human action, but aren't there basic features about how society is evolving that can be determined? For example, the class struggle in capitalist society is not an accident, which might just as well be replaced by class harmony and mutual solidarity tomorrow. There are certain laws of economic and social development which put limits on future possibilities. For example, it has been verified repeatedly that the spread of commodity production and marketplace relations in the countryside leads to differentiation between rich and poor, the ruining of many peasants and the enriching of a minority. More generally, it is quite clear that the various social classes act in different ways and play different roles in societal evolution.

If there really were no regularity to societal development, or if this regularity were beyond human understanding, then there would be nothing to do but cross one's fingers and put forward "fears and hopes" about the future. If there is such regularity, it is important to study how society is evolving and to direct our activities according to what we discover, and not according to our whims.

Even in the Enlightenment, the French materialists of the

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<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*, pp.210, 211.

18th century were inspired by natural science to seek a materialist explanation of society itself. They failed to find a satisfactory explanation, but they did not feel materialism could be cordoned off simply into the sphere of nature.<sup>38</sup> They were excited about Newtonian physics because they didn't regard it as solely a technical accomplishment, but felt that what it showed about the world reinforced a materialist world-view that had implications for social issues. But Sokal and Bricmont imply that materialism has little to do with explaining the way human society works and with figuring out how to change it. They think materialism with regard to history extends only to the belief that past history actually had an objective existence, and that various events can be documented. But that's all. In seeking to refute the Marxist view of social change, they argue that just about any view about society is compatible with materialism. They write that:

"... as Bertrand Russell observed long ago, there is no logical connection between philosophical materialism and Marxian historical materialism. Philosophical materialism is compatible with the idea that history is determined primarily by religion, sexuality or climate (which would run counter to historical materialism); and conversely, economic factors could be the primary determinants of human history even if mental events were sufficiently independent of physical events to make philosophical materialism false."<sup>39</sup>

Now, it is true that philosophical materialism, the view that there is an objective external world—if taken apart from the huge mass of facts and observations about that external world which have been accumulated by humanity—does not imply any particular views about societal evolution. Indeed, it does not imply any particular views about whether the earth is round or flat or whether atoms exist or not or whether the earth is the center of the universe or whether human beings are mammals. After all, one might imagine that there is an external world, and yet that the earth is the center of the universe or that humans have no connection with other animals. But materialism naturally gives rise to the desire to investigate and change the world. If materialists stopped at the bare recognition of an external world, without examining that world, then they would be irrelevant to human thought, and materialism would be a

sterile and useless dogma. In fact, materialism, to be true to itself, has always been involved in judging the world according to the information humanity has accumulated.<sup>40</sup>

Let's consider an example raised by Sokal and Bricmont. They consider the question of how people first populated the Americas. The bulk of scientific investigation suggests that humans have only lived in the Americas for a relatively short time, compared to how long they have inhabited Africa, Asia and Europe. Thus it is believed that humanity migrated to the Americas from elsewhere. But the creation myths of various indigenous peoples in the Americas claim that their ancestors first appeared on the surface of the earth in nearby areas. Sokal and Bricmont criticize a British archaeologist, Roger Anyon, who has studied the Zuni people, for saying that "science is just one of many ways of knowing the world. . . . [The Zunis' world view is] just as valid as the archeological viewpoint of what prehistory is about."<sup>41</sup>

But from the standpoint of Russell's discussion of materialism, how can Sokal and Bricmont criticize Anyon for violating philosophical materialism? Isn't materialism, when taken independently from the mass of information that humanity has accumulated, compatible both with the view that humanity arose in the Americas and with the view that humanity migrated to the Americas? Sokal and Bricmont hold that Anyon should take account of the full extent of today's knowledge with respect to anthropology and conclude that Anyon fails to do so, most likely, because he "quite simply allowed his political and cultural sympathies to cloud his reasoning". But haven't Sokal and Bricmont allowed their political and cultural antipathies to Marxist radicalism to cloud their reasoning when they suggest that materialism is compatible with any view of societal evolution, including that it is determined primarily by religion? The present level of knowledge of history is quite sufficient to dispense with that hypothesis.

The ironic thing is that while the materialists Sokal and Bricmont say that materialism is compatible with any historical theory whatsoever, orthodox academic historians, who have in the main fought materialism as a dangerous doctrine, have nevertheless gradually come to pay more attention to the economic basis of historical events. Their view of economics and its influence is different from that of Marxism, but they have had to deal increasing with economics. The leftist reformist historian Eric Hobsbawm comments on this as follows:

"The trend . . . is not in doubt. You have merely to compare a standard British inter-war textbook of European history like Grant and Temperley's *Europe in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* with a standard contem-

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<sup>38</sup>An excellent account of the attempt of the French materialists to analyze human society can be found in Plekhanov's *The Development of the Monist View of History*. A thumbnail summary of Plekhanov's description can be found in *Communist Voice*, vol. 4, #3, Aug. 1, 1998 (in the article "Chicago Workers' Voice discards the Marxist 'paradigm'"). Another and even more detailed account of the French materialists of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and in particular of the views of Holbach and Helvetius, can be found in Plekhanov's "Essays on the History of Materialism" in vol. 2 of his *Selected Philosophical Works*.

<sup>39</sup>*Fashionable Nonsense*, p. 200.

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<sup>40</sup>As a matter of fact, materialism itself couldn't arise until humanity had accumulated a great deal of experience. This was necessary even to have a conception of what a "material" cause is as opposed to a spiritual cause. Thus the very idea of a logically pure materialism, separate from all concrete knowledge of the world, is suspect.

<sup>41</sup>*Fashionable Nonsense*, p. 195.

porary work like John Roberts' *Europe 1880-1945* to see the extraordinary transformation in this type of literature since I was a student: and I am deliberately picking a modern author who would pride himself on being a sound middle-of-the-road man, or even a shade on the conservative side. The old book begins with a brief, sixteen-page chapter on Modern Europe which sketches the state system and the balance of power and the main continental states, adding a few remarks on the French *philosophes*—Voltaire, Rousseau and so on—and Liberty, Equality, Fraternity. The new book, first published forty years after the old, begins with what is essentially a long chapter on the economic structure of Europe, followed by a shorter chapter on 'society: institutions and assumptions', political patterns and religion: both these chapters—before we even reach international relations—cover some sixty pages each.<sup>42</sup>

Indeed, even Bertrand Russell, who is neither a philosophical nor a historical materialist, concedes a good deal of truth to historical materialism. In the same work cited by Sokal and Bricmont, where he argues that there is no logical connection between philosophical and historical materialism, he concedes that "Treated as a practical approximation, not as an exact metaphysical law, the materialistic conception of history has a very large measure of truth." In another work, he reiterates the same point of view, listing a number of ways in which he thinks historical materialism is faulty, but also stating that "In the main I agree with Marx, that economic causes are at the bottom of most of the great movements in history, not only political movements, but also those in such departments as religion, art, and morals." His criticism concerns such matters as "time-lag", which he claims materialism can't handle. He writes that "I think it may be conceded that *new* doctrines that have any success must bear some relation to the economic circumstances of their age, but old doctrines can persist for many centuries without any such relation of any vital kind." He also has a narrow view of what historical materialism is, asserting that "The materialist theory of history, in the last analysis, requires the assumption that every politically conscious person is governed by one single desire—the desire to increase his own share of commodities; . . ."<sup>43</sup> Thus the self-

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<sup>42</sup>Hobsbawm, Eric, "Has History Made Progress?" in *On History*, 1997, p. 63.

<sup>43</sup>See Russell's *The Theory and Practice of Bolshevism*, Part II: "Bolshevik Theory", 2nd edition, 1949, Chapter I. "The Materialist Theory of History", pp. 81, 84 and *Freedom versus Organization: 1814-1914*, 1934, Chapter XVIII "Dialectical Materialism", pp. 197-200. Russell's view that materialism means that everyone is motivated by the search for personal wealth has been refuted many times in advance by Marxist (continued...)

sacrificing zeal of socialist activists to organize the working masses would be taken by Russell as a refutation of historical materialism! It seems that Russell never made a serious study of historical materialism. But his rejection of historical materialism goes hand in hand with his rejection of philosophic materialism, and thus inadvertently is more evidence of the connection between philosophic and historical materialism.

Sokal and Bricmont's denigration of historical materialism is one of the causes of the shallowness of their view of the crisis of the left. They are left with nothing to say about historical change and evolution at all, except that the future is uncertain. As we have seen, they raise that the left has been disappointed by many recent economic and political events, but they do not raise that this calls for deepening and rectifying the analysis of the left. Instead they retreat to a realm of hopes and fears, separate from the materialist method.

### The dialectics of nature

Sokal and Bricmont also overlook that modern materialism differs from the materialism of the Enlightenment even with respect to science. Nowadays science has to deal with a multitude of contradictions and transformations, something which is foreign to the conception of 18th century materialism. While few scientists speak of dialectics, modern science has uncovered many surprising dialectical features of nature.

Sokal and Bricmont, however, like most of those who work in the natural sciences, deny the role of "contradiction" in science. They write that

"For example, a sociologist friend asked us, not unreasonably: Isn't it contradictory for quantum mechanics to exhibit both 'discontinuity' and 'interconnectedness'? Aren't these properties opposites? The brief answer is that these

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<sup>43</sup>(...continued)

writers. For example, in work *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, Marx criticized the petty-bourgeois democratic party of the time, but added: "Only one must not form the narrow-minded notion that the petty bourgeoisie, on principle, wishes to enforce an egoistic class interest. Rather, it believes that the *special* conditions of its emancipation are the *general* conditions within the frame of which alone modern society can be saved and the class struggle avoided. Just as little must one imagine that the democratic representatives are indeed all shopkeepers or enthusiastic champions of shopkeepers. According to their education and their individual position they may be as far apart as heaven from earth. What makes them representatives of the petty bourgeoisie is the fact that in their minds they do not get beyond the limits which the latter do not get beyond in life, that they are consequently driven, theoretically, to the same problems and solutions to which material interest and social position drive the latter practically. This is, in general, the relationship between the *political* and *literary* representatives of a class and the class they represent." (Sec. III, pp. 40-41)

properties characterize quantum mechanics *in very specific senses*—which require a mathematical knowledge of the theory to be properly understood—and that, *in these senses*, the two notions do not contradict one another.<sup>44</sup>

Now, there are different types of contradictions. There are absurd contradictions, such as when a man living in the 20th century imagines that he is a soldier in the late 18th-century or early 19th-century armies of Napoleon Bonaparte, Emperor of the French. Scientists generally regard contradiction in this light. A common method of proof in mathematics is *ratio ad absurdum*: assume that what you want to prove is false, and show that this assumption leads to a contradiction, an absurdity. Within its proper range of application, it is a valid, and indeed indispensable, method of reasoning. But there is another type of contradiction, in which the opposites involved interact with each other. In history, for example, serfs and lords are in a contradiction with each other, but this proves neither that serfs and lords didn't exist, nor that feudalism didn't exist. This contradiction tells more about what exists, than about what didn't exist. In this contradiction, the very existence of one side of a contradiction presupposes the existence of the other side: there can't be lords without serfs to exploit, and peasants can't have the social status of serfs unless there are being oppressed by feudal lords. This and other social contradictions, far from being absurdities that prove that feudalism is a myth, are key to explaining how feudalism worked, how it arose, and why it ended.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup>*Fashionable Nonsense*, p. 187, footnote 250.

<sup>45</sup>Strictly speaking, it isn't so much that there are two types of contradictions, but that under particular conditions a contradiction may be absurd, while under other conditions, it can express something profound about the world. Consider, for example, the contradiction between life and death. If, say, Mr. A is trying to prove that he didn't commit some act on Jan. 15, 1995 because Mr. B did it, and if it turns out that Mr. B died after an lingering illness in a hospital in 1990, then Mr. A is in trouble. It would be absurd to imagine that Mr. B could have committed the act five years after he died, and all references to a dialectical relationship between life and death would be in vain. But if we wanted to find, instead, the precise moment when Mr. B died (for example, it could be a question of deciding when to turn off machines providing medical support to Mr. B), then the situation is different, and suddenly the boundary between life and death can become a very tricky thing. Here we are concerned with a situation in which we are no longer dealing with life and death as static and separate things, but with motion, with a person passing from one state into its opposite, from life into death, and contradictions start to abound. To this day, there are legal, medical and biological arguments about precisely when death occurs. Similarly, there are arguments about precisely when human life begins (and it becomes ugly because reactionaries seek to use these arguments to ban abortion): at the moment of conception, at the

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Sokal and Bricmont presumably believe that there are only absurd contradictions, and therefore there can be no contradictions in quantum mechanics, or in nature generally. But it certainly looks like there are contradictions in quantum mechanics, and the only answer that they have to this is that quantum mechanics is very technical and, trust them, once you study the details, the contradictions will all vanish. But will they?

Take one example of the question of "discontinuity" and "interconnectedness", that of whether light consists of separate particles ("photons") or is a wave. This was a major controversy in theoretical physics for some time, with Isaac Newton being the founder of a corpuscular theory of light while the development of the theory of electromagnetism eventually seemed to give victory to the wave theory. It certainly appeared to everyone that light would have to be either a wave or a particle, as the corpuscular and wave theories are contradictory. The quantum theory, however, was a startling development in this controversy; it turned out that light was, in some sense, both a wave and a particle.

One can avoid the *appearance* of contradiction by saying that light is neither a wave or a particle but a different sort of entity entirely, behaving like a wave in some conditions and like a particle (the photon) in other conditions. But describing light in this way is just another way of saying that we are not dealing with an absurd contradiction. For those who believe that the only type of contradiction is absurd contradiction, all dialectical contradictions must appear as merely "apparent" contradictions. One could also say, *cum* Sokal and Bricmont, that knowledge of this entity requires some very technical and mathematical knowledge (as it does indeed). But the fact that wave-particle duality requires serious study doesn't mean that this phenomenon doesn't illustrate the existence of contradiction in nature.

Now, if light were the only entity having both a wave-like and particle-like character, this might, perhaps, appear to be a mere accident. But it turns out that such dualities are

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<sup>45</sup>(...continued)

quicken, at birth, or whenever? Moreover, the reason that Mr. B died at a certain time presumably has something to do with the outcome of a struggle (a "contradiction") between those factors keeping him alive and those factors (the disease) that is sapping his strength and killing him.

Mechanical materialists only see absurdity in contradiction. In other contradictions, they merely see the difference of two separate things. They may even recognize the existence of opposites (for example, that plus and minus in mathematics are opposites), but they don't see these opposites as in a contradiction. Thus, scientists and mathematicians deal with many pairs of opposites in practice, while most of them deny the existence of dialectical or material contradictions, contradictions of the real world (as opposed to absurd contradictions). Of course, the recognition of contradictions would only be the first step of dialectics; dialectics leads one to investigate and analyze these contradictions.

characteristic of matter and energy generally. Quantum scientists have learned how to deal with this duality; they usually know when to treat an entity as a particle and when as a wave; and they can and do obtain extremely accurate results in their calculations and predictions. These successful results demonstrate, as Sokal and Bricmont point out, that physics really is dealing with an objective external world, and is not simply some ideological construct.<sup>46</sup> But these results do not prove that current physics has fully mastered the wave-particle duality. There are still vexing problems about the meaning of the basic concepts of quantum mechanics, which Sokal and Bricmont try to shove under the rug with their remarks that these are all technical matters.<sup>47</sup> Nowadays, in practical work most quantum physicists simply leave the more troubling questions of interpretation aside. But even this doesn't remove all difficulties. The problem of how to integrate quantum theory with the rest of physics, such as relativity theory, is still an active research topic, which shows that the contradictions involved in the various dualities of quantum mechanics, set aside in one form, appear in another.

Dualities, "complementarities", and contradictions weren't at the heart of science at the time of the Enlightenment. Back then, mechanical physics was the model science, the science which had achieved the most brilliant development, as shown in the work of Isaac Newton. One might, perhaps, compare the mechanical picture of the world to a billiards game, where a group of indestructible balls bounce off each other. The balls aren't changed or altered during the game, and different positions are distinguished simply by a different number or position of the balls. The calculations needed to see how the game was evolving might be quite complex, but they involve unchanging entities that simply change their position. Mechanics sought to explain various aspects of the world by showing how they reduced to a certain arrangement of particles, each of which had no more internal life than an idealized billiard ball. It achieved a number of successes. Other fields of science used methods of investigation that were similar in a number of respects. The study of plants and animals, for example, sought to categorize species that were regarded as eternal and unchanging and completely separate, one from the other.

Already by the 19th century, the advance of science began to revolutionize people's conceptions. In place of the idea of eternal, unchanging entities, the idea of the transformation of one entity into another began to come to the fore. Engels talks of various "immense advances in natural science", including "the three decisive discoveries—that of the cell, the transformation of energy, and the theory of evolution named after Darwin" which "have enabled our knowledge of the interconnections of natural processes to advance in giant

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<sup>46</sup>*Fashionable Nonsense*, p. 57.

<sup>47</sup>See, for example, the celebrated question of "the collapse of the wave function".

strides."<sup>48</sup> Suddenly the old rigid walls between eternally unchanging entities started to come down; species evolved while the barrier between chemical, electrical, mechanical and other effects fell.<sup>49</sup> Not only was living nature seen as evolving from one form to another, but even the earth itself was seen as evolving. Nature, not only biologically but also geologically, was now seen to have had a history, in which one time period differed from another. All this may seem rather tame today, due to long familiarity, but it marked a definite change in worldview at the time.

Thus dialectics penetrated into 19th century science. But mainly science became used to transformation and various dialectical phenomena without regarding this as dialectics. Even some of the modes of expression of the Hegelian idealist system of dialectics infiltrated science, but in doing so lost their connection to any system of dialectics. Engels refers to the one phase of this process in the 1830s, "It was in this very period that Hegelian views, whether consciously or unconsciously, most profusely penetrated the most varied sciences and even leavened popular literature and the daily press, from which the average 'cultured' person derives his mental pabulum."

But transformation alone isn't the key to dialectics, which centers on the role of the internal contradictions within an entity as the cause of an entity changing or transforming itself. Engels wrote that dialectics, and hence contradiction, could be seen in the physical world, but few scientists adopted this view. Marx and Engels stressed the need to replace the old mechanical materialism with a dialectical materialism. But the tremendous successes of mathematical methods probably encouraged mechanical materialist ideas, perhaps even what one might call a "calculational materialism", even if there was now a broader view of the role of transformation than in the earlier mechanical materialism of the 18th century.

Then came the revolutions in physics of the early 20th century: relativity theory and quantum theory. Now contradictions abounded, such as the wave-particle duality which we mentioned above. Dialectical materialism being a negligible trend among scientists, the immediate philosophical effect of the new discoveries was to promote idealism. It was now seen that matter did not simply transform into other forms of matter, energy into other forms of energy, but that matter could transform into energy and vice versa. This additional dialectical property was taken by idealist philosophers to mean that "matter had disappeared", and with it, materialism. The surprising properties of energy quanta and subatomic particles

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<sup>48</sup>Engels, Frederick, *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*, Foreign Languages Press, Peking, 1976, see section II, pp. 44, 24, 43.

<sup>49</sup>True, various engines, such as windmills and water wheels, had long used one form of natural power to create a different sort of power. Now, however, the law of conservation of energy was based on seeing that different and separate powers and forces were, on one hand, all connected by being simply forms of energy, and on the other hand, were in constant transformation from one form to another.

was taken to mean that the material world had vanished.

One of the main advocates of a subjective interpretation of quantum mechanics was the famous Danish physicist Niels Bohr, the founder of the "Copenhagen school" in quantum physics. Bohr put emphasis on the principles of duality and complementarity: in essence, on what amounted to a form of dialectical reasoning. Bohr had a good deal of success with this, since quantum phenomena are indeed dialectical. But he combined this with an idealist interpretation of quantum mechanics in which physical reality was replaced by human consciousness. He had no conception of materialist dialectics, but was philosophically inspired by psychological tracts and idealist philosophical theories like vitalism.<sup>50</sup>

A number of scientists were upset by the Copenhagen school's subjective or idealist interpretations. Einstein's debates with Bohr are famous among physicists. Some physicists have worked on alternate formulations of quantum mechanics in an attempt to avoid philosophical implications that they do not like. One weakness of their effort, however, was that they usually seemed to have a view of materialism that excluded dialectics. Their attempts at reformulating quantum mechanics, while often interesting in their own right and opening up new lines of research, had much less to do with saving materialism than they imagined. Among the talented physicists involved in this work were David Bohm, who suffered persecution for his left-wing political views, and John Bell, who, despite the fact that "Bell's inequality" is sometimes taken to refute attempts at reformulating quantum mechanics, was himself a critic of the orthodox interpretation of its basic concepts.

A bad role in these discussions was played by Soviet revisionism, especially under Stalin but later as well. While promoting the term "dialectical materialism", the official ideologists of the Soviet state actually promoted a rigid and often mechanical interpretation of materialism.<sup>51</sup> For

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<sup>50</sup>David Wick, *The Infamous Boundary: Seven Decades of Heresy in Quantum Mechanics*, pp. 185-8, discusses the philosophical sources which seem to have captured Bohr's imagination, but Wick himself has no conception of dialectics.

<sup>51</sup>This was in line with the revisionist view that the state ownership of industry in the Soviet Union proved that it was socialist. Instead of examining the relationship of the state sector to the working class, the revisionist apologists reduced socialism to simply state ownership. This is a materialism of sorts, but it is mechanical materialism. A number of articles in the *Communist Voice* discuss the theories of Marx and Lenin and show that revisionism has to trample on them in order to justify the oppressive practice of the Stalinist state-capitalist order which consolidated on the grave of the Russian revolution. *Dialectical* materialism would orient one to search for the underlying reasons for the degeneration and collapse of the state-capitalist countries like Russia in their internal contradictions; it would orient one towards making a serious study of their class structures and of its relation to the Soviet state sector. The mechanical materialism of the Soviet

example, at one time, the Soviet revisionists suspected that various resonance phenomena in chemistry contradicted materialism; and they also believed for some time that investigating the role of genes and chromosomes in heredity violated materialism.

Sokal and Bricmont's book represents yet another twist to the story. As physicists have gotten use to quantum phenomena, it now appears to such orthodox quantum physicists as Sokal and Bricmont that quantum mechanics merely describes some very technical and complicated phenomena of the material world. They are apparently impatient of discussion of the vexed questions concerning the foundations of quantum mechanics, possibly because they don't see such discussions as of any importance to their own research work. Thus it turns out that, while quantum mechanics was the main field of science used earlier this century to denigrate materialism, at the end of the 20th century two quantum physicists end up writing a book defending materialism from postmodernism and relativist skepticism of one sort or another.

### Does science teach anything but technical lessons?

However, the moment one goes beyond saying that quantum phenomena are very technical, one can't avoid seeing that contradictions have appeared in the most general and powerful laws of physics. This is one of the major differences between the science of the Enlightenment and that of the 20th century, and every indication is that contradiction is here to stay and will be a feature of 21st century science as well. It is also one of the features that has interested masses of people. It is notable that many of the postmodernist passages about science cited by Sokal and Bricmont, while meaningless or false as Sokal and Bricmont correctly point out, refer to the contradictions revealed in science. The first stage of wisdom is to show that the postmodernists don't know what they are talking about. The second stage would be to note that the postmodernists are playing the old game of referring to dialectical phenomena in order to negate materialism: until the Marxist development of dialectical materialism, dialectics was generally associated with idealist philosophies. The third stage would be to show that only materialism can provide a correct way to deal with

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<sup>51</sup>(...continued)

revisionists and their apologists can't see further than the struggle between the market capitalist countries and the state-capitalist countries; it attributes the problems of the state-capitalist countries mainly to outside pressure or to general backwardness. It looks at the internal politics and economy of these countries from the point of view of over-simplified definition: if industry is owned by the state, then by definition it supposed can't be run by a new bourgeoisie. *Dialectical* materialism shows how systems change over time, while the mechanical materialism of the revisionist apologists insists that since 20th-century state-capitalism differs from the mid-19th century capitalism of Britain, it must not be capitalism.



dialectical phenomena. But Sokal and Bricmont fail to progress to the second or third stages, instead fleeing back to the good old days of the Enlightenment.

For *Fashionable Nonsense*, all the fascinating new phenomena in science are just technical matters. Sokal and Bricmont don't see that the modern discoveries in science might be helpful to people in developing a deeper understanding of the world. Their only advice is not to worry too much about the natural sciences. The fourth point of their prescriptions for good thinking is "*Don't ape the natural sciences*". They write that "The social sciences have their own problems and their own methods; they are not obliged to follow each 'paradigm shift' (be it real or imaginary) in physics or biology."<sup>52</sup> This is not wrong in itself, if it is taken as referring to each small advance in the natural sciences, but it is their main view on the question. At most, they also see a role for pondering "hidden ambiguities" in the sciences which "philosophical reflection" might "clarify".<sup>53</sup> But that's all. In fact, the overall picture shown by the natural sciences must be taken account of by anyone who has a serious attitude to the world. In the Enlightenment, Newtonian physics played a major role in encouraging materialism and belief in the power of reason. Today, it is a serious question among many people as to what to conclude from the picture of the material world shown by modern science. Sokal and Bricmont evade this issue.

### Dialectics, motion, and infinitesimals

As we have seen, Sokal and Bricmont's denial that the advance of science since the Enlightenment has added something essentially new to materialism is connected to their denial of the role of contradiction and dialectics in science. Therefore it may be in order to dwell a bit more on the role of contradictions in nature.

It is a commonplace of literature on dialectics to point out that motion itself is a contradiction. When an object is in motion, it is, at any one time, simultaneously at a definite place, and *not* at that place. Moreover, over 2,000 years ago, the philosopher Zeno showed how a series of contradictions arose out of the idea of motion ("Zeno's paradoxes"). His intention seemed to be to show that motion must be an illusion of the senses, as the school of philosophy he adhered to believed that the real "being" of the universe was timeless and unchanging. From the materialist point of view, which would start from the premise that motion is a fact of nature, these paradoxes would instead support the idea that motion does, in fact, involve dialectical contradiction.

It might be thought that science has, however, long since resolved the paradoxes of motion. Mathematics, notably the differential and integral calculus, has long learned how to take account of motion. Physics, in its turn, doesn't talk about a particle both being at a point, and not at that point, but about the position and the velocity of a particle at any one definite

time being two separate and distinct parameters. The modern advocates of dialectics, such as Marxist materialists, continued to insist that motion cannot be explained without looking at the internal contradictions of the system that is changing. But many other people might have thought that the accomplishments of calculus and physics had sufficed to banish contradiction from the idea of ordinary motion, at least.

Then came 20th century physics. For one thing, the famous Heisenberg uncertainly relations connected the position and the velocity (or rather, momentum) of a particle in a way that was completely unexpected. For an object of an ordinary size, one can determine its position and velocity simultaneously to any reasonable degree of accuracy, and the position and velocity at any one moment remain distinct and separate. For small particles, which manifest quantum effects, the more accurate the determination of the position, the more one has disturbed the velocity of the particle; conversely, the more accurate the determination of the velocity, the more one has disturbed the position. This occurs in a strange way that goes against everyday experience with large objects, and so it requires study of a good account of quantum mechanics to get a feel for this phenomenon. For the purposes of this article, suffice it to say that in quantum mechanics, the idea of the position of a particle becomes more indefinite, and this indefiniteness is related directly to the velocity of the particle. Indeed, it is related in a precise way shown by the mathematical formulation of the uncertainty principle. This is a dialectical relationship of two opposites (on the one hand position, and on the other, motion, which consists of a change in position, or negation of the previous position). The paradoxes of motion are back, and they are even more profound and puzzling than those raised by Zeno. Moreover, they are discussed and studied by people who are otherwise completely contemptuous of the idea that motion involves simultaneously being at, and yet not at, a definite position at a definite time.

But if nature has turned out to be a source of contradictions about motion, it may be thought that in mathematics, at least, everything is clear. Here, it might be believed, that all contradictions have been banished. True, in the early history of calculus, the dread "infinitesimal" was used: infinitesimals were numbers which were infinitely small, so to speak, and yet not zero. This is impossible for any ordinary number, and so what were these things? "Ghosts of departed quantities", as the anti-materialist Bishop Berkeley said in ridiculing the mathematicians of his time? But, Sokal and Bricmont assure us, the infinitesimal was banished from mathematics long ago, and everything has "been well understood for over 150 years".<sup>54</sup> This assertion occurs in their comments on some painful passages from Deleuze on infinitesimals and the calculus. They say:

"... At two places in this book [*Difference and Repetition*—JG], Deleuze discusses classical problems in the conceptual foundations of differential and integral calculus. Since the birth

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<sup>52</sup>*Fashionable Nonsense*, p. 187.

<sup>53</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 185.

<sup>54</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 165.

of this branch of mathematics in the seventeenth century through the works of Newton and Leibniz, cogent objections were raised against the use of 'infinitesimal' quantities such as  $dx$  and  $dy$ . These problems were solved by the work of d'Alembert around 1760 and Cauchy around 1820, who introduced the rigorous notion of *limit*—a concept that has been taught in all calculus textbooks since the middle of the nineteenth century.<sup>55</sup>

Deleuze's absurdities aside, Sokal and Bricmont are themselves factually wrong. For one thing, infinitesimals, far from being solely of historical interest, are once again used in mathematics.<sup>56</sup> Since the early 1960s, Abraham Robinson and some other mathematicians have developed a field called "non-standard analysis", in which infinitesimals are once again used in the solution of the problems of the differential and integral calculus and a number of other fields of mathematics. This time the infinitesimal rests on a solid, logically rigorous, foundation. This is not the work of some cranks, but is respectable, orthodox mathematical work. So far, non-standard analysis only plays a peripheral role in mathematics, but one can still say of the infinitesimals that, "they're back".

Moreover, infinitesimals were never fully banished from mathematics. Instead, they were, so to speak, the "illegal aliens" of mathematics: banned in theory, in practice they were always employed on some field of work or other.

True, Sokal and Bricmont insist that the method of limits eliminated the infinitesimal. They are presumably referring not just to the use of limits, but the particular  $\epsilon, \delta$ -method of dealing with limits that is generally used in most first-year calculus courses today. Robinson, who made a study of the history of infinitesimal methods, pointed out that while d'Alembert set forward the idea of eliminating infinitesimals from the calculus, Cauchy was still making use of them in 1820; Cauchy did not replace infinitesimals by the use of limits, but "regarded his theory of infinitely small quantities as a satisfactory foundation for the theory of limits". It was finally Weierstrass, later in the 19th century, who succeeded in getting most mathematicians to accept the  $\epsilon, \delta$ -method handling limits.<sup>57</sup> Until then, it seems to me, calculus had resembled quantum

mechanics, in that mathematicians obtained a plethora of accurate results and made many new discoveries on the basis of methods whose foundations were theoretically troublesome. Nevertheless, the eventual replacement of infinitesimals by the  $\epsilon, \delta$ -method of defining limits solved most of the difficulties that had worried mathematicians about the logical basis of the calculus. There was one problem, however: infinitesimals proved harder to remove from mathematics than was expected. As Robinson pointed out:

"... with the spread of Weierstrass' ideas, arguments involving infinitesimal increments, which survived, particularly in differential geometry and in several branches of applied mathematics, began to be taken automatically as a kind of shorthand for corresponding developments by means of the  $\epsilon, \delta$ -approach (or, later on, for some more sophisticated method). Usually, this assumption has turned out to be correct although in several cases its justification was complicated and hard to achieve."<sup>58</sup>

Here Robinson refers to the fact that, with respect to certain fields of mathematics, mathematicians continued to obtain results via infinitesimals. They didn't obtain results by other methods and then abbreviate them by use of infinitesimals. Instead they continued to reason with infinitesimals, with their mathematical conscience soothed by the thought that probably the infinitesimals could be replaced by other methods, although they didn't necessarily see the point of actually bothering to do so. In fact, when discussing differential geometry, Robinson puts it as follows:

"Even now there are many classical results in Differential Geometry which have never been established in any other way [than through use of infinitesimals—JG], the assumption being that somehow the rigorous but less intuitive,  $\epsilon, \delta$ -method would lead to the same result." He adds that "So far as one can see without a complete check this assumption is usually correct." That is, there hasn't been a complete check.<sup>59</sup>

Indeed, even in the second half of the 20th century, work continued on the problem of replacing infinitesimal methods. It is not possible simply to mechanically translate any mathematical assertion that uses infinitesimals into an argument that uses the epsilon-delta method. New methods, such as Temple's theory of "generalized functions" and Laurent Schwartz's "theory of distributions", had to be developed to deal with particular uses of infinitely small and large numbers as new uses popped up.<sup>60</sup> So there is no one simple replacement for

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<sup>55</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 160-61.

<sup>56</sup>Although for brevity I usually just talk of "infinitesimals", not only are infinitely small numbers involved, but infinitely large numbers as well. The reciprocal of a small number is a large number, and so the reciprocal of an infinitesimal or infinitely small number would be an infinitely large number. These infinitely large numbers are not the kind of infinite cardinal and ordinal numbers used in set theory, but numbers that obey the usual laws of arithmetic calculation.

<sup>57</sup>Robinson, Abraham, *Non-Standard Analysis*, 1996, Chapter X "Concerning the History of the Calculus", sections 10.4 "Lagrange and d'Alembert", 10.5 "Cauchy", and 10.6 "Bolzano, Weierstrass, and after".

<sup>58</sup>Robinson, p. 277.

<sup>59</sup>Robinson, p. 83.

<sup>60</sup>For example, these theories have been used to provide a mathematically rigorous interpretation of Dirac's delta function (Dirac being a prominent quantum physicist). This function is (continued...)

infinitesimals, and the increase in logical rigor obtained by eliminating infinitesimals is sometimes accompanied by a loss of intuitive clarity. Indeed, the development of non-standard analysis was motivated in part by the hope that resurrecting infinitesimals might restore the intuitive content of some mathematical methods and help achieve new results.<sup>61</sup> However, although non-standard analysis allows direct use of infinitesimals in a mathematically precise and logically rigorous way, it comes at the price of adding quite a few complexities to the naive idea of infinitesimals.

The persistence of infinitesimals in mathematics is a sign that motion, and the concepts that express motion, really do involve dialectical contradictions. Sokal and Bricmont to the contrary, it isn't all cut-and-dried. Nor is this a bad thing. Recognition of the contradictions in nature can suggest new lines of endeavor or new things to investigate. It does not

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<sup>60</sup>(...continued)

zero everywhere but at the origin, but has an integral equal to one. It is not hard to show that this is impossible behavior for any ordinary function, but the delta function is regarded intuitively as a function whose value is infinite at the origin. If, as Sokal and Bricmont insist, "a rigorous exposition has existed for more than 150 years" (p. 163, footnote 212) that eliminated *all* use of infinitesimals and infinitely large numbers, it would be difficult to understand why 20<sup>th</sup> century mathematicians and physicists like Temple, Schwartz and Dirac were unaware of this fact.

<sup>61</sup>One mathematician working with infinitesimal methods writes as follows ". . . all the results we obtain can be proved by standard methods [i.e. without infinitesimals, etc.—JG]. Therefore, the subject can only be claimed to be of importance insofar as it leads to simpler, more accessible expositions or (more important) to mathematical discoveries.

"As to the first, the reader must be the judge. The best evidence for the second is the Bernstein-Robinson theory of invariant subspaces of infinite dimensional linear spaces, which settled a question that had remained open for many years. Quite simple standard proofs of their results now exist. Nevertheless, we develop part of their theory not only because this was the path of discovery, but also because it gives us an opportunity to exhibit the truly beautiful idea of approximating an infinite dimensional space from *above* by a space to which the results of *finite* dimensional linear algebra are applicable." (*Applied Nonstandard Analysis*, Martin Davis, 1977, Introduction, section 1. Why nonstandard Analysis? p. 1)

So what he says is that, although it can be shown that every result obtained using infinitesimals (if the reasoning is in accord with the rigorous requirements of "non-standard analysis") can be obtained without infinitesimals, using infinitesimals may result in much easier proofs or even so spur the imagination of mathematicians that they make new discoveries. And he gives an example, in which mathematicians were able, by use of the nonstandard methods, to make a discovery by transferring various ideas that make sense for a finite dimensional space to an infinite dimensional one.

replace hard work on scientific problems; nor does the return of infinitesimals mean that the important work on the foundations of calculus since the original days of the infinitesimal could have been avoided by simply recognizing that motion is a contradiction. But dialectics provides a better framework for comprehending the results of scientific work than mechanical materialism, one more in line with the results of modern science. One can, of course, do scientific and mathematical work while closing one's eyes to all philosophical implications and trying to explain away all contradictions as merely technical matters. Wouldn't this be equivalent, however, to walking through an art museum with one's eyes closed?

## The Enlightenment and the masses

So far, we have discussed two of the ways in which the hearkening of Sokal and Bricmont back to the Enlightenment reflects the limitations of their materialism: the refusal to extend materialism to the sphere of social relations, and the denial of contradictions in nature. Their idea the left should "reclaim its Enlightenment roots" also ignores the narrow class basis of the Enlightenment.

Even the most left of the Enlightenment figures did not look to the radical action of the masses for social progress. For them, the working people were an inert, if oppressed, mass. The French materialists of the 18th century undermined the ideological basis of the old regime and paved the way for the historic French revolution that began in 1789, but they themselves did not call for mass struggle. No doubt their ideas influenced public opinion and a relatively widespread and illegal literature that increasingly developed as the French monarchy decayed, but they did not look towards the mass movement as a force for change, and certainly didn't look towards mass revolution. For example, Plekhanov points out that Friedrich Grimm, a German associate of the French materialists, lived to see the overthrow of the monarchy by the popular uprising of August 10, 1792—and recoiled from it. And Plekhanov discusses the views of Holbach, one of the French materialists whose writings were almost always "imbued with an inflexible hatred for despotism", and says:

". . . would Holbach's behavior have been any better [than Grimm's—JG] after August 10? [Holbach died in June 1789, not even seeing the fall of the Bastille in July of that year.—JG]...

"Holbach had a respect for liberty, but he was afraid of '*disturbances*', and was convinced that, 'in politics just as in medicine, drastic remedies were always dangerous'. He would have willingly had dealings with a monarch, if only the latter were in the least '*virtuous*'. Though he said that such sovereigns were very rare meteors, he was constantly dreaming of a '*sage on the throne*'. There was a moment, during the ministry of Turgot, when he thought that his dream had come true. He dedicated his book *L'Ethocratie* to Louis XVI, 'just, humane, and beneficent Monarch; friend of truth, virtue,

and simplicity; enemy of flattery, vice, pomp, and tyranny;...’, and so on and so forth. He may have consequently changed his opinion of Louis XVI, but his fear of the ‘*disorderly*’ popular movement remained with him. . . . The tyranny of democracy is ‘*the cruellest and the least reasonable*’ of all tyrannies. In the class struggle in ancient Athens, Holbach saw only ‘*mob violence*’. The first English revolution aroused in him only horror of the ‘religious fanaticism’ of the people.”<sup>62</sup>

The Enlightenment philosophers’ attitude to the masses reflected their class basis. The work of the French materialists was part of the preparation for a revolution that would clear the way for bourgeois domination of France. They may have been philosophical revolutionaries who desired the liberation of all the people, but the framework of their ideas did not go beyond glorified pictures of a coming bourgeois society. Engels describes the fate of the ideals of the “great French philosophers of the eighteenth century” as follows:

“The great men who in France were clearing the minds of men for the coming revolution themselves acted in an extremely revolutionary fashion. . . . All previous forms of society and government, all the old ideas handed down by tradition, were flung into the lumber-room as irrational; the world had hitherto allowed itself to be guided solely by prejudices; everything in the past deserved only pity and contempt. Now for the first time appeared the light of day; henceforth, superstition, injustice, privilege and oppression were to be superseded by eternal truth, eternal justice, equality grounded in Nature and the inalienable rights of man.

“We know today that this kingdom of reason was nothing more than the idealized kingdom of the bourgeoisie; that eternal justice found its realization in bourgeois justice; that equality reduced itself to bourgeois equality before the law; that bourgeois property was proclaimed as one of the essential rights of man; and that the government of reason, the Social Contract of Rousseau, came into existence and could only come into existence as a bourgeois democratic republic. No more than their predecessors could the great thinkers of the eighteenth century pass beyond the limits imposed on them by their own epoch.”<sup>63</sup>

## The rise of Marxism

As the 19th century progressed, the bourgeoisie came to power throughout Europe, while a new revolutionary movement, that of the organized working class, was born. At first, the criticism of the new bourgeois society was based, on its theoretical side, on attempts to extend the ideas of the Enlightenment and take them further. But a materialism that subjects the bourgeois institutions of exploitation and oppression to criticism could hardly restrict itself to the ideas derived from the old struggle against monarchy and aristocracy; nor could a class struggle of the working masses be based on the tradition of disdain for mass radicalism. The old materialism was insufficient.

By the middle of the 19th century, however, a new materialism arose. It shared with the old materialism such basic defining features of materialism as upholding the existence of an external world and the ability of human beings to obtain knowledge of this world. But it had absorbed the new advances of science and history; had wrested dialectics away from the most advanced idealist philosophy of the time; and had emerged from the midst of the revolutionary struggles against oppression. This was Marxist materialism, which was a dialectical and historical materialism.

Of course, not all 19th century materialism was Marxist materialism, any more than all Enlightenment figures were materialists and opponents of the monarchies of their countries. In the 19th century, a limited and mechanical materialism was the dominant materialism in scientific circles, and academic circles were mainly involved in the struggle against materialism. Most of the defenders of the new materialism were class-conscious workers and socialist activists, and there were only a few theorists of the new materialism among writers on philosophical questions. But Marxist materialism was the most advanced materialism of the period, the only materialism that could take account of the new tasks of the bourgeois era.

\* The new materialism laid stress on historical materialism, on applying materialism to human society. In seeking to use materialism to criticize social conditions, it was in line with the attempts of the 18th century French *philosophes* to use materialism as a weapon against the tyranny of its time. But unlike the Enlightenment materialism, it succeeded in showing the material causes for societal evolution. It was no longer a matter of simply contrasting existing society to whatever ideals or ethical standards a thinker had, and of condemning everything else as “superstition”, but of analyzing what the economic structure of society was, how it was evolving, what class struggle could arise under those conditions, and what outcomes it could have. In this regard, historical materialism not only showed the contradictions in the existing society, but how the development of these contradictions gives rise to societal change.

\* The new materialism laid stress on dialectics, both with respect to nature and human society. The orientation that Marxism gave to the arising socialist movement was saturated with dialectical contradictions, such as that

— no mere political change, but only a profound social

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<sup>62</sup>Plekhanov, *Essays on the History of Materialism*, ch. I. “Holbach”, pp. 63-64 in *Selected Philosophical Works*, vol. II.

<sup>63</sup>Engels, *Anti-Duhring*, Chapter I. “General”, paragraphs 2 and 3.

revolution, could emancipate the working class, and yet the working class had to organize a political party and seize state power in order to inaugurate this social revolution;

— the working class had to be politically organized to achieve its aims, and yet the trade unions and the economic struggle were of tremendous importance for this political organization; and

— the working class movement was international in essence, but proletarian internationalism included the resolute support of the right to self-determination of oppressed nations.

\* The new materialism, in contrast to the narrow class basis of the old materialism, based its activities on the consciousness of the masses. It not only found favor mainly in the socialist movement, but it developed in good part through consideration of the problems of this movement. Moreover, it called for developing a form of political party in which the workers were not just the foot soldiers for an elite but themselves pondered and decided the political and theoretical questions of the movement.

Leninism, the struggle to actually build socialist countries, the attempt of the Third International to build mass revolutionary communist parties around world, and the major role of this movement in the world anti-colonial revolt, amounted to a high point of this movement. But the socialist movement, like everything else, develops dialectically. The greatest victories and widest extension of the movement would prove the precursor to its deepest and most agonizing crises.

### The current crisis

For example, the Soviet regime created by Bolshevik Revolution would eventually lose its revolutionary character, and a state-capitalist regime was consolidated under Stalin. Assessing the state-capitalist regimes in Russia, China, Cuba, and elsewhere is one of the major questions raised by the experience of the 20th century revolutionary movement. Were these regimes really communist regimes, as they claimed, and so does the oppressive nature of these regimes, and the eventual collapse of most of them, show that Marxism is flawed and socialism is impossible? Or does the class structure of these regimes verify their state-capitalist character, and does their evolution towards private capitalism verify the Marxist views about the nature of state-capitalist economies?

If materialism is to survive in the 21st century, it has to deal with such issues and other vexed problems of our times. It cannot restrict itself to repeating that there is an external world, however useful this is in the struggle against postmodernist absurdity. Nor can Marxist materialism restrict itself to repeating the basic principles of Marxism, however useful this is in order to refute various caricatures of Marxism. It also must develop further by analyzing the new conditions of the class structure, the experience of the communist movement of the 20th century, and the distortions introduced into Marxism by the state-capitalist ideologists (such as the Stalinists, the backers of Castroism, etc.). The slogan can't be to go back two centuries to the old materialism, but forward to the challenges of the future.

For this reason, we at *Communist Voice* have spent a lot of time looking at the economic analysis of the Soviet, Cuban, and Chinese regimes, and of how they have evolved over the years. This work isn't based on simply pointing out that these regimes followed bad policies, but on examining what the actual class structures in these countries are and on examining the nature of their state sectors. It has verified not only the state-capitalist nature of these so-called "communist" regimes, but that Marxism-Leninism can only survive as an anti-revisionist doctrine that combats the distortion of Marxist principles made by the apologists of these regimes.

Sokal and Bricmont evade any direct assessment of the vexed issues of the twentieth century revolutionary movement. They retreat to ambiguity via their repeated appeals to unspecified "ideals of justice and equality" or "justice and progress", which is their only answer to the type of society they think the left should work for. Do they talk about "ideals of justice and progress" because they believe that the socialist goal is flawed and all that is left is seeking to try to make capitalist society live up to the old Enlightenment ideals of rationality and progress? Or do they use such terms simply as a way of saying socialism without scaring away bourgeois readers, which is perhaps why they usually talk of "realism" instead of "materialism"? Or do they think that the left can overcome the differences between different political positions, thus uniting liberals, reformists, and non-dogmatic socialists, if everyone simply agrees to unite around what they supposedly have in common, their humanistic ideals?

But by appealing to "ideals" rather than calling for a materialist assessment of what has happened to the revolutionary and workers' movements of this century, Sokal and Bricmont are following the post-modernist style of replacing a study of facts by an assertion of "values and beliefs". They object to postmodernist "relativism" with respect to natural science, but when it comes to social issues, they see nothing but "more-or-less informed speculation" in which one asserts one's own ideals. It is no accident that they that say that they recognize that "many 'postmodern' ideas, expressed in a moderate form, provide a needed correction to naive modernism".<sup>64</sup> Their specific criticisms of Marxism, such as their denigration of historical materialism, owe much to postmodernism. They join with postmodernism in denouncing Marxism as "scientism", which they define "as the illusion that simplistic but supposedly 'objective' or 'scientific' methods will allow us to solve very complex problems".<sup>65</sup>

Materialism can only be a force when it deals with the burning questions of the epoch and is attached to a social movement. But for Sokal and Bricmont, it is "scientism" to believe that materialism can provide any basis for the popular struggle. It's not just that they don't have solutions to the questions raised by the fall of the state-capitalist regimes, the bourgeois reality of independence in the post-colonial world, and the subordination of the mass left to reformist and social-

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<sup>64</sup>*Fashionable Nonsense*, p. 183.

<sup>65</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 191.

democratic politics. What's notable is that they don't call for materialism to deal with these issues, and to apply the scientific method to their solution.

### **In defense of materialism**

The best and the worst of Sokal and Bricmont's attitude is expressed in the same passage where they chide the postmodernists for their "relativism" removing the obstacles to obscurantism and religious fundamentalism:

"At a time when superstitions, obscurantism, and nationalist and religious fanaticism are spreading in many parts of the world—including the 'developed' West—it is irresponsible, to say the least, to treat with such casualness what has historically been the principal defense against these follies, namely a rational vision of the

world. It is doubtless not the intention of post-modernist authors to favor obscurantism, but it is an inevitable consequence of their approach."<sup>66</sup>

On one hand, the passage breathes passion against the postmodernists for their being, even if inadvertently, part of a reactionary wave around the world, a wave that must be fought. And passion in refuting postmodernism is sorely needed. But on the other hand, it is an astonishing denial of world history to say that "a rational vision of the world", and not the mass movement of the oppressed for social change, is the principal defense against reaction. The "rational vision of the world" becomes a force only when it becomes associated with the class struggle of the masses against their oppression. □

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<sup>66</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 208.

# **Postal workers: Vote NO! The tentative contract settlement is an insult!**

Last November, contracts for the three largest postal unions expired. The *Detroit Workers' Voice* leaflet below (Dec. 9, 1998, #21) exposes the miserly contract agreed to by the sell-out leaders of the clerks (APWU) and mailhandlers (NPMHU) unions. It calls on the workers to develop their own initiative in opposing the contract and not rely on various dissident union officials who were forced to admit that the contract was no good but feared rousing the rank-and-file for a serious protest.

Besides circulating the leaflet, supporters of the Detroit Marxist-Leninist Study group helped mobilize workers in various ways. They involved the workers in developing slogans against the contract for buttons that the workers then circulated throughout the large General Mail Facility in downtown Detroit. As well, they helped lead workers to expose the contract at a union meeting and pushed for protests. Workers at the meeting so welcomed the idea of holding a picket-line protest that even the local union leadership of the APWU was forced to agree to one. In the ensuing days, the local APWU leadership tried to back out, but the pressure of the workers wouldn't let them.

Since this time, the clerks and mailhandlers have voted on their contracts. No settlement has yet been reached between management and the letter carriers' union which has also done nothing to mobilize the rank-and-file for a serious fight.

The contracts were passed by about a two to one margin. But it should be noted that the majority of workers did not even vote on the contract. Thus, out of 290,000 clerks, only 74,000 voted for the contract. The contract passed not because postal workers thought it was fair, but because most of them felt there wasn't any alternative. For one thing, postal workers have no right to strike. If the contract was voted down, it would automatically go to an arbitrator. The last several postal contracts were settled by these pro-management arbitrators, producing rotten results for the workers. Indeed, in this contract the union bureaucrats threatened the workers that if they did not vote "yes", then they would do even worse in arbitration. Not only do the union bureaucrats cower before the no-strike laws, they generally refrain from even legal forms of mass protest. Nor do they mount any serious struggle against the no-strike laws. Thus, the workers are not only under the pressure of repressive laws, but have been systematically demobilized by the union misleaders for many years. The last significant national contract protest was 21 years ago, when wildcat strikes broke out against the will of the union leaders.

The way out of this dilemma is the development of a trend based on the rank-and-file organizing independent of the union bureaucrats. But at present this trend is very small. Thus, the widespread sentiment against the contract mainly took the form of passive cynicism rather than active opposition. This is why the contracts were able to pass.

Tentative contract agreements have just been reached between USPS management and the unions representing clerks and mail handlers. As we write, an agreement with the letter carriers' union has yet to take place, but it likely will be patterned on the other agreements. These contracts are a complete insult which should be voted down by the rank and file.

Over the last four years USPS management has made some \$5 billion in profits. These profits come from the sweat and blood of postal workers. They come from ever-heavier workloads, from keeping a tight lid on wages and benefits, and from farming out postal work in various privatization schemes. Does USPS management reward the workers for their efforts? No. They offer us a contract which offers us a few tiny crumbs, which does nothing to protect us from increased work burdens and allows even more privatization. They are saying in effect that "we got away with treating you like dirt for the last four years (and more), so we will continue to treat you like dirt with this new contract."

USPS management is trying to ram this rotten contract down our throats with the help of the national postal union leaderships. The APWU (clerks) and the NPMHU (mail handlers) national leaderships are bragging what a great contract they have won. Here's what they consider a great victory:

## **Billions for management, peanuts for the workers**

While profits have been pouring in hand over fist, this new contract contains a pitiful wage increase of 2.0% in the first year and 1.4% in the second year. Wow, how generous! This amounts to a puny \$12 per week increase in the size of a Level 5 workers' paycheck after 2 years. Originally management offered no wage increase but only two lump-sum payments totaling \$1900. This sucked. But isn't it also an insult that the total amount of basic wage increases a worker would get in the present agreement is only about \$1.37 per week more than management's original lump-sum offer? Meanwhile, outgoing Postmaster General Marvin Runyon got a retirement package worth over a million dollars for his brief stay as chief slave-driver and was treated to a retirement party that cost \$150,000.

The union leaders also tout a tiny increase in the share of health insurance costs to be paid by the USPS, resulting in the employees' share being reduced to 15%. But this doesn't begin to make up for the fact that, before the last contract, the employees' share was only 10%. So with this new "victory" workers will still pay 5% more of the share of health costs than 5 years ago!

## **More privatization**

The APWU and NPMHU leaders are boasting that this contract contains powerful protections against privatization. This is a lie. There is a so-called 18-month "moratorium" on new national privatization agreements. But it's not worth the paper it's written on because the proposed contract also allows management to establish 25 new privatized priority mail centers. Moreover, what happens after the 18 months? That doesn't even cover the length of the contract. So management could privatize whatever it damn well pleases in the last 6 months of the contract!

True, one of the 25 subcontracted facilities will use postal employees. But this is just an experiment to see if the work can be done just as cheaply by postal employees. It's a lose-lose situation for the postal workers. If the work isn't done as cheaply, privatization goes ahead. But if postal workers work just as cheaply, this means they will have to accept increased workloads and poorer compensation. In other words, this is just another attempt at driving down postal workers' conditions by threatening them with privatization. It's a method of pitting one group of workers against another to the detriment of both.

### **Increasing use of casuals**

In its never-ending drive for slave-labor, management would like to replace as many career workers as possible with low-wage casuals who work only at management's whim. The NPMHU agreement states that the cap on the percentage of casuals employed at an installation will rise to 12.5%.

**Vote NO on the sellout agreement,  
prepare for struggle!**

Management has been running roughshod over us for too long. Now is the time to stand up against them. Let's have a massive NO vote against the contract.

But we cannot simply vote NO and rest easy. If the contract is rejected, management and the union leaderships will then take the contract to arbitration. History has proven that contracts that go to arbitration come back with little for the workers. That's why management in the past has shown little inclination to reach a negotiated settlement. The arbitration boards are closely tied to the same fat-cat capitalist establishment that has been on a rampage against the jobs and conditions of the workers across the country.

If there is to be a serious struggle for a decent contract, the rank-and-file must mobilize themselves for mass action. The more a protest movement against the contract can be built, the more pressure will be put on management and the arbitrators to give us what we deserve. Who will organize such a movement? Some local union leaders like the APWU's Roger Holbrook have voiced criticism of the local contract. But the track record of the local leaders show they cannot be relied upon to build serious resistance to management or that they are interested in mobilizing the bulk of workers for a real fight. That task must be undertaken by the rank-and-file itself.

As we encourage our co-workers to vote NO, let's also discuss what forms we can use to build up a mass protest movement. True, postal strikes are illegal. But this is only another reason that we must get organized. If workers are not yet prepared to defy the anti-strike law, let's organize other protests to help unify our ranks and put us in a better position to use even more powerful forms of struggle in the future. We don't have to sit passively by while others decide our fate. Let's take matters into our own hands. □



# Denounce the bombing of Iraq!

The following leaflet was produced by Seattle members of the Communist Voice Organization in December.

After years of starving the Iraqi people through sanctions the U.S. government has once again unleashed a war which will only bring them more suffering. This is a repulsive fight between the late-20th-century super-bullies headquartered in Washington and the Pentagon and the small and weak bullies of the Saddam Hussein regime. It's a fight over how oil profits are to be divided and what the political pecking order should be in the oil-rich Gulf region, a fight between regimes representing capitalist exploitation and robbery, a fight being waged against the interests of the masses of workers and other oppressed people in the United States, Iraq, and throughout the world.

## Clinton's lying hypocrisy—

The hypocrisy of Clinton, Albright, and Co., just like that of the Bush administration, knows no bounds.

\*\*\*The administration feigns concern for the bombing-caused deaths of Iraqi civilians...but it has knowingly and cold-bloodedly murdered thousands of these same civilians (and most often children at that) through sanctions. In general, one of the biggest condemnations of the capitalist system is its ability to produce an abundance of food while millions of people go hungry or starve because they don't have money. And, indeed, today American and other farmers have glutted the market with wheat, apples and other produce which rots while millions of Africans, Asians and others are starving to death. But that is not enough. Denial of food is also a political act aimed at achieving political ends. The Iraqi masses must be starved, and starved, and starved until the Iraqi government (with or without Saddam Hussein) submits to the dictate of Washington, London and the giant oil monopolies. The ordinary Iraqis are just being used as pawns in this imperialist game. (We should add that a lifting of sanctions now would eventually result in an even bigger glut of the world oil market than presently exists, more downward pressure on crude oil prices—which are the lowest in 80 years, etc.)

Of course the U.S. government has never really given a damn about the lives of the ordinary citizens of Iraq, the Middle East, or anywhere else. For example, to further its game of imperialist domination it played Iraq and Iran off against each other in the 1980s and actively supported Saddam Hussein in the long and bloody war which developed. Finally, why should we only be concerned about *civilian* casualties Mr. Clinton? If a U.S. soldier is killed fighting in your "national interest" (imperialist domination and plunder) you, out of your political interest (fomenting national chauvinism), wail and scream. But if an Iraqi soldier is killed are we supposed to think that's O.K.? No, only those trying to lie for the capitalist-imperialist establishment adopt such a hypocritical stance.

\*\*\*Clinton decries weapons of mass destruction in Iraq (they must be there someplace!)...but maintains the biggest arsenal of such weapons the world has ever known. (All along these inspections have been a pretext for further pressuring the

Saddam Hussein regime to toe the line on Western economic objectives, and when that failed, they became a pretext for launching further aggression.) And the U.S. has become the world expert on their use. In the 19th century expanding American capitalism used germ-warfare (small-pox infested blankets) against the Native Americans and in the 20th century the American monopoly capitalists dropped atomic bombs on an already defeated Japan. During the Gulf War the U.S. dropped seven times the equivalent of such a bomb on small and relatively weak Iraq using high-tech weaponry of every description. Meanwhile, U.S. allies (and oppressors of whole nations, such as the Israeli zionists) develop and stockpile tons of such weapons without a whimper coming from Washington. And remember what happened when India and Pakistan exploded nuclear weapons earlier this year? No threats of war against them. No bombings in the middle of the night. Some sanctions were initially imposed but when American agribusiness complained that these hurt their profits the sanctions immediately began to be lifted.

When the Saddam Hussein regime itself used mustard gas against the Kurds or against Iran in the 1980s there was no uproar from U.S. officials because his actions weren't politically and economically threatening the interests of the U.S. ruling class and its allies.

\*\*\*Clinton condemns the dictator Saddam Hussein and supports democracy in Iraq...but the biggest U.S. government allies (its friends) in the Middle East have always been monarchists, tyrants, and militarists (theocratic and other)—from the Shah of Iran to the present-day rulers of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and other states. The workers and poor of these countries (especially immigrant workers) are brutally oppressed. Women are subjected to an unending nightmare. And that cornerstone of U.S. alliances in the region (the Israeli state) wages an unceasing military campaign against the Palestinian masses. In fact, when Clinton supports the opposition in Iraq he really means any opposition which will not infringe too far on the "rights" of the oil companies of the U.S. and its allies, any opposition which does not upset the imperialist-imposed balance of power in the region.

## What is to be done?

The mountain of lies and hypocrisy issuing from the White House and Pentagon needs to be exposed and denounced among the masses of American people and the capitalist-dominated mass media isn't going to do it. Nor are the politicians of the Democratic and Republican parties, whether liberal or conservative. Thus all those revolted by the latest imperialist savagery must rely on word-of-mouth, leaflets, and other means to spread the truth. Protest demonstrations have already been organized and we need more of them. They play a role in getting out the truth and inspire others into action. Moreover, a movement against imperialism which can sustain itself has to be developed if we are to ever be in a position to *prevent* new rounds of bombing and war in the interests of the oil and other monopolists. For this to take place we need to become clearer

on how the capitalist system is the root cause of these wars...and clearer on how it is that the interest of the working class is not only to oppose them but to overthrow the system giving rise to them. This demands the study and development of revolutionary theory. We think that this theory is Marxism-Leninism and that only by overthrowing the imperialist system

can new and worse wars than the present one be prevented.

**Denounce the bombing!**

**Condemn both Clinton and Saddam Hussein!**

**No to the sanctions!**

**Build the movement against imperialism!** □

## This is a boss's war!

The following leaflet was written by a supporter of the Communist Voice Organization to encourage discussion among his co-workers of the issues behind the U.S. bombing of Iraq in December. The Detroit Marxist-Leninist Study Group has published numerous leaflets under the *Detroit Workers' Voice* masthead. It also produced this leaflet, but in the form of a *Detroit Workers' Voice Discussion Forum*. The masthead states that the DMLSG "encourages workers to use our Forum leaflets to express their ideas or ask questions about the fight against capitalist oppression. It circulates mainly among those who actively participate in the discussion. The views expressed are those of the authors, not necessarily those of the Detroit Marxist-Leninist Study Group, which produces the leaflet."

This leaflet gives an impassioned class call to stand up to the war hysteria of the U.S. bourgeoisie and to condemn the U.S.-Iraq conflict as "a boss's war in which neither side deserves the support of the workers." It also contains some minor inaccuracies. For instance, it gives a somewhat exaggerated view of the political character of the resistance that developed among sections of the Iraqi people during the First Gulf War when it portrays them as leftist revolutionaries who were opposed to U.S. imperialism.

The massive air bombings against Iraq carried out by the Clinton administration in recent days are being presented to us by the media and government spokesmen as blows "for the country" which we should support "as Americans". This is baloney. What we are seeing is just another oil war called by the big corporations which control the government. Their goal is continued domination of the oil-rich Persian Gulf. "Desert Fox" is no different from "Desert Storm". They are both bosses' wars, in which the filthy rich use American workers and slaughter Iraqi workers while these same rich parasites laugh all the way to the bank.

This war is being sold as the way to remove Hussein's weapons of mass destruction. This, too, is baloney. India, Pakistan, Israel and many other nations have weapons of mass destruction. Is the U.S. military going to bomb them? Obviously not. In fact, the U.S. military is the main possessor of weapons of mass destruction in the world today — and the quickest to use them. The real issue behind the Persian Gulf war is that Hussein, like Noriega before him, got a little out of control of the inter-imperialist network of rich men's governments. It's like a small mafia boss, filled with dreams of glory and wealth, breaking loose from the big mafia. This is a boss's war in which neither side deserves the support of the workers.

This war is being sold as a blow against Hussein's dictatorship. Hussein is, of course, a vicious dictator. But so were Pinochet of Chile, Mobutu of Zaire, the Shah of Iran, Marcos of the Philippines, Suharto of Indonesia and so many others installed and backed by the CIA. Hussein himself was certainly a dictator when the U.S. was supporting and arming him only a few years ago. The only effective way to remove Hussein is to support a revolution of the Iraqi people against him. During the First Persian Gulf War one was brewing but the U.S. feared it would bring a leftist regime to power. Such a regime would threaten U.S. control of the Gulf region in an entirely different way from the rogue Hussein, so support was withdrawn, and Hussein slaughtered the revolutionaries. The U.S. military admits that today's bombing will not dislodge Hussein. Rather than fighting dictatorship, Clinton's bombing is only making the Iraqi people pay for the crimes of their rulers.

The bosses have been planning this war for months, but Clinton has obviously called it now to take the heat off himself in the face of impeachment. This may backfire on him. But in any case, it is most instructive to see (once again, as in Vietnam) a Democratic president carrying out a bosses war. Isn't it the Democrats who claim to be for the workers, the minorities, the little man? Yet here they go again, sending workers to slaughter workers for the bosses' profits! Shouldn't this teach us workers the need of a movement and a party of our own, independent of both Democrats and Republicans?

Some workers feel that this war cannot be opposed because brutal power politics is just "the way it is." Yes, it is the way it is in the world of imperialist power politics, and this is the kind of politics that is dominant in the world today. But there is another kind of politics based on the resistance and struggle of the workers and other oppressed people. This politics is not so evident today due to the low level of the mass movements, but it was obvious in the 1930's, 40's and 60's. Before the union came in at General Motors and Ford, complete brutality was the way it was for the workers. But, led by communists and other radicals, the militant workers — through sit-downs and other strikes — were able to break through the bosses' control and establish the union, resulting in great improvement in the workers' lives. The "way it is" just isn't the same any more. A similar process took place in the 19th century Abolitionist movement, the 1960's Civil Rights Movement and the Anti-Vietnam War Movement. And so it is today. Clinton's brutal war can — and will — be resisted.

# Struggle

## A magazine of proletarian revolutionary literature

*Struggle* is an anti-establishment, revolutionary literary journal oriented to the working-class struggle. We seek to reach "disgruntled" workers, dissatisfied youth and all the oppressed and abused and inspire them to fight the rich capitalist rulers of the U.S. and the planet.

*Struggle* is open to a variety of artistic and literary forms and anti-establishment political and cultural views. We look for works with artistic power which rebel against some element of the capitalist power structure or against the system itself.

**Current issue:**     *the Winter 1998-99 issue (Vol. 14, #4) — The Struggle Continues*

**Editors's Notes by Tim Hall:**

Whose Weapons of Destruction?

More on

poem *The Devil's Cathedrals*

On the great response to the urgent fund appeal

**Fiction and prose:** Gunfight at the OK Corral  
Chapters 17 ("The Battle at Gower's Gate, 1935") and 18 from the novel  
*Thunder on the Mountain*

**Poetry:** The Devil's Cathedrals  
Chaotic Order  
The Abingdon Argument  
Moloch Loves the Little Children  
If  
Marxist Human  
A Class Act

**Cover:** By Don M

*Struggle's* editor is Tim Hall, an activist and Marxist-Leninist since the 1960's. *Struggle* is a non-profit magazine, produced and distributed by the voluntary labor of a very few people. *Struggle* welcomes poems, songs, short stories, short plays, line drawings. Manuscripts will be returned if accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope. It pays its contributors in copies.

Sub rates are \$2 per issue (\$2.50 by mail), \$10 for a subscription of four, \$12 for four for institutions, \$15 for four overseas, free to prisoners. The current issue is an ordinary one, but there are also *double issues* (such as the last issue, vol. 14, #2-3, "fiction about women"), which are twice the normal length, and cost \$4 (\$5 by mail). Bulk discounts and back issues (on anti-racism, against the Persian Gulf War, depicting the postal workers' struggle) are available.

Checks or money orders must be made payable to Tim Hall—Special Account.

*Struggle* can be reached at P.O. Box 13261, Detroit, MI 48213-0261.

The economic basis of the brutal "way it is" today is the wealth of the big capitalist corporations. They control the governments of the world and they launch the wars. They can be resisted and their crimes can be hindered here and there — as the anti-Vietnam War movement did — but so long as these parasites control their vast wealth, their brutal politics will continue. The workers are the most numerous and most disgruntled section of the population. We must challenge the power of the fat cats with a movement of our own. But we

cannot challenge their power if we fall right in behind them every time they call a war.

**Let's defy Clinton's brutal air war!**

**Let's begin to build a workers' movement independent of the capitalist fat cats—Democrat or Republican!**

**Let's move toward the day when the workers run the country ourselves—and live in peace with the workers of all countries!** □

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