

Communist

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Voice

Successor to the
Workers' Advocate

No solution without the right of self-determination!

The war is over but Kosovo isn't yet free

The Serbo-NATO war over Kosovo is over, but the fate of Kosovo still hasn't been decided. The Albanian refugees are flooding back into Kosovo, but neither Serbia, NATO, nor the UN grant Kosovo the right to self-determination. Even a partition of Kosovo is still a possibility, although not an immediate one. So the roots still exist for future crises in Kosovo. The time is past when some sort of "stability" in the region can be purchased by ignoring the will of the Albanian people.

A struggle is still going on over whether the Albanian majority will ever rule Kosovo. The big powers may hold that Kosovo should stay part of Serbia or Yugoslavia, but the Albanian Kosovars are seeking by their own action to sever as many of the old ties to Serbia as possible. The Kosovars have set up their own ministries of a national provisional government, unrecognized by the UN/NATO administration. On the local level, they have occupied as many administrative positions as possible, as well as returning to the workplaces and other institutions from which they were ejected in the last decade. Despite the overwhelming military power of the UN/NATO KFOR forces, the Kosovars have taken a good deal of initiative. While their actions are increasingly contested by the UN/NATO administration, the Kosovars are making it difficult to settle the affairs of Kosovo over their heads.

As for the Yugoslav government, dominated by Serbia, it still wishes to reimpose its rule on Kosovo. It has demanded that it be allowed to reoccupy Kosovo. The UN and NATO, meanwhile, wish to maintain as much of the old status quo in Kosovo from before the NATO bombing as possible, the status quo which reflected ten years of throwing Albanians out of all the official institutions of Kosovo. They have sought to get the Albanians to passively wait for them to issue orders. For the time being, the UN and NATO are hampered by the small number of personnel they have sent to Kosovo, but as time goes on they are seeking to impose their own administrative plans with a heavier hand.

At the same time, the Albanians are faced with an immense organizational task. Insofar as, however restricted by the UN/NATO protectorate, they have temporarily seized a certain political power in various localities, will they be able to exercise it in an organized fashion and to satisfy some of the people's needs? Even without NATO interference and Serbian hostility, this would be a daunting task for a population that has been disorganized by massacres and forced flight, and whose villages and neighborhoods have been ravaged. Moreover, the problem of administration raises sharply the issue of what political and class trends dominate among the Kosovars. There is no sizeable revolutionary socialist trend among Kosovars, any more than elsewhere in the Balkans, and bourgeois nationalist trends are mainly out to feather their own nest in the matter of taking over the state administration, and they don't necessarily have much respect for minorities. Today the bourgeois nationalist KLA is the main trend which has succeeded in taking a certain power on

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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 19th and 20th 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 21st 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 isn't free yet

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behalf of the Kosovars. What the KLA does with the power it now exercises will have much to do with how the KLA is seen by Kosovars in the future, and with the immediate prospects of the Kosovar struggle. But the fluid situation that now exists in Kosovo, as well as the prospective formation of political parties, may give rise to rapid changes in political alignments among the Kosovars. Whether or not the Kosovar proletariat develops its own independent trend will be of decisive importance for the future of Kosovo politics.

It is said in the press that before, the Serbs threw the Albanians out of Kosovo, and now, the Albanians are returning the favor. This is a half-truth. There is indeed a serious problem of revenge attacks on Serbs and on the Roma (Gypsy) people. This tragedy seriously impairs unity between the working people of various nationalities. But it is not true that the Albanian Kosovars have obtained power in Kosovo as of yet, that attacks on Albanians in Yugoslavia have ended, or that the presently-dominant Serbian political trends have accepted the rights of the Albanians. By opposing the authority of Kosovar institutions and thus undermining the possibility of an organized Albanian political response to these conditions, the UN/NATO administration has itself aggravated the problem of revenge attacks.

The Serbo-Albanian war

It is often presented that the war in Kosovo was just an 11-week affair, that is, that it was just the Serbo-NATO war. But the situation in Kosovo reached the point of outright warfare a year prior to the NATO bombing. In March of 1998, the Serbian authorities carried out a massacre of civilians in the Drenica region of Kosovo to punish the KLA and to intimidate the Albanian population as a whole. The result was the exact opposite. Armed resistance spread like wildfire across Kosovo;

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the KLA, till then a small group, mushroomed into a large, if diffuse, organization. Kosovo was at war. To regain their authority over the Kosovan countryside, the Serbian army and police attacked villages with heavy weapons, forcing several hundred thousand Albanian Kosovars to abandon their villages.

This was a dress rehearsal for the systematic ethnic cleansing of 1999. The fighting receded after Milosevic withdraw some troops from Kosovo in fall 1998 in response to NATO threats, but the Serbian government complained that the Albanians seized power in the villages whenever the military pressure on them was eased. It began to step up the pressure again. By January 15, the Serbian police carried out a massacre of 45 villagers at Racak, again in the Drenica region. From then on, attacks on one village after another gathered steam. By the time that the Rambouillet negotiations collapsed and the Serbo-NATO war began, the Serbian army, paramilitaries, and police were ready to begin to a full-scale attempt to eliminate the Albanians Kosovars as a people once and for all.

By the time the war had ended, about half the Albanian population had been forced to flee Kosovo, crossing the borders into Macedonia, Albania or Montenegro. Many of the remaining Albanians, still inside Kosovo, had fled their villages and become internal refugees: their homes and businesses burnt or

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looted, some of their family members killed, beaten, or raped, and their lives reduced to the hunt for survival. Today new mass graves of Albanians are still being found all across Kosovo, and so many wells were stuffed with the bodies of murdered Albanians, or intentionally poisoned with the bodies of dead animals, that it poses an environmental problem. But as soon as the NATO-Serbia war was over and Serb troops moved out of this or that area of Kosovo, the refugees flooded back to their home towns and villages, not waiting for NATO's all-clear sign but rushing back to their homeland.

No emergency reconstruction regime for Kosovo

Given the destruction in Kosovo, and the mass homelessness among the Albanians, one might have expected a reconstruction regime to have been established. One might have thought that the existing homes and resources in the villages would be shared out among the residents; that measures would be taken to provide collective help for rehabilitating farms and homes; that the local authorities would be created to unite all the residents in the common struggle for reconstruction; and that measures would be taken to identify those responsible for atrocities against the Albanians. An emergency Kosovo administration should have marshaled all Kosovan resources for reconstruction. It should have replaced the former authorities which not only didn't prevent crimes against the Albanians, but in large part organized and carried them out. While bringing a new day to the Albanian majority, it should have united all Kosovars willing to build a new Kosovo, whether Albanian, Serb, Roma, etc.

But this is not what happened.

The Serbo-NATO war was ended by an agreement over what to do with Kosovo, an agreement about which the Albanian Kosovars, the majority of the population of Kosovo, had no say. In line with this contemptuous attitude to the Kosovars, NATO opposed the Albanian Kosovar provisional government establishing its authority over Kosovo, preferring to see an anarchic situation in Kosovo rather than an arrangement that might imply that the status of Kosovo should be settled according to the will of its people.

NATO justifies its mistrust of the Albanian majority on the grounds that it has to protect the local Serbs as well as the Albanians. But the anarchic situation it has created is precisely the one most conducive to revenge attacks. If NATO's real concern had been protection of the minorities, it would have supported the idea of Kosovar provisional government in the interim before regular elections could be held, removed the insecurity of the mass of the population by granting the right to self-determination, and asked for guarantees that the minorities were being correctly treated. Given the present eagerness of Albanian Kosovar leaders to court the West, such guarantees would likely not have been hard to obtain. But NATO is an imperialist military bloc, and the UN is a coalition of imperialist blocs, and they want to be the arbiters of Kosovo and of the region, not the midwives of democratic change.

What it boils down to is that the Milosevic regime in Serbia and NATO fought a war to impose their own idea of how to handle Kosovo. The Serbian government sought to eliminate the

Albanian Kosovars as a people, while NATO ravaged the Serbian economy to prove that it could be the arbiter of the region. The Kosovars, while allying with NATO, fought for an independence which NATO opposed. The defeat of Serbia has meant that the Albanian refugees could return to Kosovo, while the defeat of NATO is still a matter for the future. Since the peace terms reflect the wheeling and dealing of Serbia, NATO, Russia and the UN, rather than the will of the Kosovars, nothing has been firmly settled.

Serbia still claims Kosovo

The Milosevic regime, while losing the Serbo-NATO war, still lays claim to Kosovo. It is encouraged in this by the peace terms which insist that Kosovo must remain in Yugoslavia; Kosovo is only granted the right to a certain amount of "autonomy" and "self-administration" inside Yugoslavia. In practice, the NATO/UN administration is currently unable to allow Serbia to exercise much of a role in Kosovo, because of the extreme hostility of the Milosevic government towards the Kosovars. But the peace terms envision Kosovo's reintegration into Yugoslavia, and are thus a time bomb for the rights of the Albanians as well as the stability of the region.

Meanwhile the Milosevic government continues a struggle against the Kosovars. It is usual when a war ends that prisoners are released, but no provision was made for releasing Albanians. At least two thousand Albanian Kosovars accused of sympathizing with the KLA were taken back to Serbia from Kosovo jails and now languish in Serbian jails. There is no reason for this if the war on the Albanian Kosovars has really ended. This continued imprisonment not only constitutes a continuing revenge attack by the Serbian government on the Albanians, but it shows that, for the Milosevic government, the end of the Serbo-NATO war is by no means the end of the Serbo-Albanian war.

Indeed, after the agreement with NATO, in the period when NATO troops were entering but Yugoslav troops still hadn't left, a certain amount of house burnings of Albanian dwellings continued. As Serbian troops retreated from Kosovo, they mocked the crowds that were denouncing them. In Kosovo's capital of Pristina, Serbian police continued to harass Albanians, and to obstruct returning refugees from claiming possession or free use of their apartments, until the very day the police left. And the Milosevic government has been demanding that its troops be allowed back into Kosovo to suppress the Albanians and restore "the workings of state in Kosovo". This was reiterated on July 25 by General Nebojsa Pavlovic, who commanded the Yugoslav Third Army Corps in Kosovo during the ethnic cleansing of earlier this year, when he fought "chaos" by emptying the villages of Albanians.¹

Nor has the end of the war brought a change in the local Serb political leadership in Kosovo. In the areas of relative Serb strength in Kosovo, the old attitude to the Albanians continues.

¹Steven Erlanger, "Serbian General Says Peacekeepers Don't Keep the Peace," *New York Times*, July 26, p. 2.

Serbs in Mitrovica have divided the town, preventing the return of Albanian refugees across the Ibar river into the Serb-dominated northern sector of the town, and restricting the Albanians remaining there. There is still the threat of a partition of Kosovo, and, for example, Kosovo from Mitrovica to the Serbian border contains the large Trepca mining complex. There is also a section of eastern Kosovo where some armed Serb civilians try to maintain checkpoints. Moreover, the Serbian government has never acknowledged that what it did in Kosovo is wrong, and it is seeking to maintain a bastion of support among Kosovo Serbs and Serb refugees for a return to the old days in Kosovo.

However, the first victim of the continuing truculence of the Milosevic government may not be Kosovo, but tiny Montenegro. At present, Montenegro is the only other republic remaining in Yugoslavia other than Serbia. It is demanding that it should have equality with Serbia inside Yugoslavia, which should become a much looser union. It is threatening that if the Milosevic government rejects these changes, then Montenegro will vote on whether to declare full independence of Yugoslavia. If this happens, the Yugoslav army may take action against Montenegro.

The UN/NATO protectorate

NATO presents itself as the savior of the Albanian Kosovars, and many people who oppose NATO promote the UN as the proper savior, but the first principle of the UN/NATO administration has been the passivity of the Albanian Kosovars and the disarming of the KLA or any Albanian authority. They refused to recognize the Albanian provisional government, and have sought to build up their own alternate administration. But, while they militarily dominate Kosovo, they don't yet have sufficient personnel to administer Kosovo or even police it. They ended up creating a patchwork system, combining a great deal of anarchy; their own absolute authority at the very top; recognition of whatever old authorities survived in Kosovo; and a certain tacit and temporary toleration of the new Albanian provisional authorities.

An informative example took place in the town of Vitina, a western Kosovan town composed two-thirds of Albanians and one-third of Serbs. The local American military commander McFarlane recognized the position of its mayor, Vesko Piric. But Piric only became mayor when, after the revocation of Kosovo's autonomy in 1989, the Serbian government removed an Albanian mayor and replaced him with the Serb Piric. Moreover, Piric apparently presided over massacres in the towns of Julicar, Smira and Lubic during the Serbo-NATO war. No matter, McFarlane tries to work with Piric. True, he hasn't taken the repressive measures against the Albanians demanded by Piric, but he has propped up an administration that can only be an object of hatred in the area.

The UN/NATO administration also sought to restore the pre-war status quo in matters of employment, ignoring that this status quo was based on mass dismissals of Albanian workers since 1989. At some places of work, the UN/NATO administration sought to restore the situation to that prior to March 22,

1999. Another idea of the UN/NATO administration wanted to impose was that 50% of the workers should be Albanian, and 50% should be Serbian. This might sound even-handed and democratic, until one remembers that the Albanians are 90% of the pre-war population. A 50-50 rule means massive discrimination against the Albanians. It actually would restore a rule that the Milosevic government imposed: after mass dismissals of Albanian workers, it was specified that only one Albanian worker could be hired for every Serb worker hired. Struggles over these issues have arisen at workplaces and city halls. Apparently the Albanians have succeeded in some cases, such as postal workers, medical personnel, and teachers, in getting recognition of the principle that people dismissed in the anti-Albanian purges should be reinstated. It would be important to provide assistance to all unemployed workers, of whatever nationality (although of course free-market imperialists aren't interested in such things), but it is totally another thing to seek to maintain the rules discriminating against Albanians.

The UN/NATO administration seems to have the idea that the ideal situation would be that authority in Kosovo (other than their own, supreme authority) should be split 50-50 between Serb and Albanian communities. This goes against the idea of having a government based on one person-one vote, albeit with strong guarantees for the minorities. Moreover, the UN/NATO idea would mean that the Kosovo administration could not go beyond what was acceptable to the existing Serb political leaders in Kosovo, who were mainly zealous backers of Milosevic's chauvinist policy. This would mark the Daytonization of Kosovo, a paralysis similar to that which the Dayton agreement brought to Bosnia.

The UN/NATO's plan is based on the idea that the conflicts in Kosovo can be ended without dramatic changes, but simply by appealing for calm. Calm, and some aid money, will solve the issue. The UN/NATO idea is to provide some economic reconstruction money for the Balkans, and it doesn't matter if there is no democratic solution to the national question. The idea that economic development will let the national and democratic issues fade away is one that was also widespread in Titoist Yugoslavia. The state-capitalist ruling class couldn't understand why the rapid development of Yugoslavia after World War II from a predominantly agrarian country to an urbanized country with a sizable industrial base didn't result in the national question fading away. Instead national issues persisted, deep economic problems surfaced in the Yugoslav economy, and all the contradictions deepened rather than fading away. Western imperialism is now repeating the illusion of the old Titoist regime (a regime which it had also supported and provided with economic aid). The latest international conference in Sarajevo was based on the idea that economic development alone will allegedly solve the political issues in the Balkans. And of course, having learned nothing from the East Asian economic crisis, these western spokesmen were convinced that their neo-liberal prescriptions would solve all the economic ills of the Balkans.

The UN/NATO protectorate over Kosovo is still in its honeymoon phase, but for how long? As time goes on, more and more contradictions in the UN/NATO plan will come to the surface. As the plan is based on preserving Yugoslav

sovereignty over Kosovo, it must come into conflict with the will of the overwhelming majority of Kosovars for independence. Every new step towards rebuilding a Kosovan administration—from the creation of the new Kosovo police to the carrying out of new elections for a Kosovo authority; from the issue of what currency will circulate in Kosovo to whether Kosovars will be subject to conscription in the Yugoslav army (to serve, perhaps, in subjugating Montenegro)—will raise this contradiction anew. The UN/NATO plan has already come into contradiction with the most basic needs of economic administration, as the protectorate's own administrators try to figure out how Kosovo can be legally and financially part of a larger government, the Milosevic regime in Yugoslavia, which is committed to suppressing it. It is reported, for example, that the UN "recently asked its lawyers to review . . . whether revenues from state-owned enterprises, such as electric and water utilities, must be placed in escrow until Kosovo's legal status is resolved or can be spent without input from authorities in Belgrade, the capital of both Yugoslavia and its dominant republic . . . no one knows for sure what Yugoslavia—and its Serbian leadership—owns or is entitled to control in Kosovo."² But while the UN ponders the legal niceties of an impossible arrangement, it is likely to find that the Albanian Kosovars do not accept that Yugoslavia has any ownership or control in Kosovo at all.

The UN/NATO authorities should get out of Kosovo, and the Yugoslav government should stay out. The fate of Kosovo should be determined according to the will of the people of Kosovo.

Albanian Kosovar trends

The Albanian provisional government, in which the KLA is predominant, is claiming the right to administer Kosovo until new elections which are supposed to be next spring. At the local level, the KLA and other Albanians have seized a number of positions throughout Kosovo. This gives rise not only to differences with the UN/NATO authorities, but to the question of what program—other than striving for independence—the KLA has for the economic and political reconstruction of Kosovo.

Not too much has been reported about the actions of the ministries of the provisional government, but we can note that the KLA, and other major Albanian Kosovar trends (such as the LDK of Ibrahim Rugova), have major illusions in capitalism and the capitalist West. Throughout Serbia, Kosovo, and the neighboring countries, the idea of socialism has been discredited by the collapse of the state-capitalist regimes which claimed to be socialist, and which were taken to be such by the local populations. The Albanian national movement in Kosovar went through a number of ideological changes throughout the years. It has been influenced by trends in the Yugoslavia, by its observation of how well or badly neighboring Albania seemed

to be doing, by ideological developments in the world left, etc. Moreover, there is presently a mass enthusiasm for the West due to the Serbo-NATO war resulting in the expulsion of Serbian troops. This blinds the Kosovars to the real policy of the UN and NATO and to what splits they are likely to try to foment among the Albanians. But even as the Albanian Kosovars enter into various conflicts with the UN/NATO administration, this will not in itself destroy the illusions in Western capitalism. The major Albanian Kosovar organizations today are thus not radical movements, but display a bourgeois nationalist character. This, even aside from being hamstrung by the UN/NATO dictatorship, would retard the possibility of energetic emergency measures to satisfy basic needs of the population. After all, this would require radical reform measures, and while such measures do not go beyond capitalism, they are still something that is foreign to the fashionable neo-liberal prescriptions of today.

As to the Albanian working class in Kosovo, it is not only disoriented ideologically, as other workers in the region are, but it has been devastated numerically. In the years following the revocation of Kosovan autonomy in 1989 there were the mass dismissals of Albanian workers, so that one of the main functions of the independent Kosovar trade unions was finding support for the unemployed. Large numbers of former workers were forced to turn to petty enterprise, legal or illegal. Meanwhile the plundering of the assets of Kosovan state enterprises by the central Serbian government was so great that the living standard of Serb workers in state enterprises was also hurt.

Meanwhile the rise of armed resistance seems to have brought the rural population into prominence, as the KLA's resistance was based in the countryside and villagers flocked into the KLA. The villagers formed, not the leadership of the KLA, but much of its base. True, most Albanian Kosovar families probably have one or more members who have been forced by poverty to seek employment outside Kosovo, mostly as workers in more industrialized countries. But on the whole, the Kosovan countryside is a bastion of small farming and small enterprise.

The problem of the class character and program of the movement has arisen sharply with respect to the revenge attacks against Serbs and the Roma people. However logical revenge attacks may be from the point of view of bourgeois nationalism or of certain traditional modes of thought in the countryside, they do great harm to the cause of uniting the working people of various nationalities and to the cause of democracy in general. But there is no effective socialist trend at this time in Kosovo, among either Albanians or Serbs, and there is little specifically working class organization. At present, the bourgeois nationalist Albanian leadership does not seem to be directly organizing the revenge attacks. While Serb domination of Kosovo requires constant oppression of the Albanians, all that is needed for the right to self-determination for Kosovo is majority rule. It is notable that in the parallel elections for a Kosovar parliament that the Albanian national movement organized in 1992, Serbs and other minorities were invited to participate (and even among the Serbs, some did), and positions were held open for them in the government of the "Republic of Kosova", But the savagery

²R. Jeffrey Smith, "Kosovo's New Adversary: Confusion", *Washington Post Foreign Service*, Friday, July 16.

of the Serbian attempt to eradicate the Albanian presence in Kosovo, and the extreme brutality of the paramilitaries and police composed of local Kosovo Serbs, led to a wave of hatred for anything Serbian and to an attempt by some to get all Serbs to leave Kosovo, and the bourgeois nationalist leadership is probably not doing too much to deal with this other than issuing statements condemning revenge attacks.

It's been suggested that in Kosovo the problem of revenge killings has been aggravated by, or tied in to some extent with, the influence of the old custom of the blood feud, in which retaliation is taken against not just the person who committed some offense, but those who are related to him. Under Yugoslav rule, Kosovo remained not just economically backward, but socially backward. It wasn't until 1990, in the enthusiasm of the struggle to the right to self-determination, that Albanian Kosovars made some attempt to overcome blood vengeance. One author describes this as follows: "The process, which lasted a few months, resulted in reconciliation between some 2,000 families. About 20,000 men confined in their homes, since one feud invariably implicated all the adult males in a family, were consequently released. At great open-air ceremonies, hundreds of feuding families forgave each other and vowed not to perpetuate the cycle of revenge. The reconciliations continued despite the displeasure of the [Yugoslav] authorities, who saw them as evidence of dangerous homogenisation."³ But for a repudiation of the old traditions today would require that the population was mobilized around some view of radical reconstruction in Kosovo, and not just some an appeal for calm or for some abstract forgiveness.

There is presently a fluid situation, and the stands and policies of various trends will be tested. Even the present ambiguous situation, where the right to self-determination has not been achieved although the Yugoslav military and police are no longer present, brings many issues of social policy and of organization to the fore. These issues are no longer overshadowed by the debate over simply resistance by the gun or by peaceful means. But without a voice in favor of working class interests, there will be little clarity on why the policies of various bourgeois nationalist groups fail or on why NATO, the UN and the big powers act as they do. This is why it is an important part of solidarity with the Kosovar masses to support the development of a proletarian trend. The putting forth of a radical program of social demands, the criticism of the cliquish interests of the various groups of bourgeois nationalists, the repudiation of the big powers, the understanding that Titoism was state-capitalism, not socialism, and the consistent effort to defend the rights of the minorities and to make links with the workers of other nationalities, are all vitally needed to strengthen the general struggle for the right to self-determination of Kosovo as well as to promote specifically socialist interests.

The Serbian opposition to Milosevic

The popular movement in Serbia is also affected by questions of its class and political orientation. The Serbian people face a struggle against the Milosevic government, which maintains itself in power by authoritarian means. Serbia's defeat in the Serbo-NATO war has caused yet another deep political crisis for the Milosevic government. But if the Milosevic government has survived these crises so far, this isn't only because of the tyranny it exercises but because of the disoriented state of the mass struggle.

During the war, the Milosevic government stepped up its harassment of the independent media and all opposition groups. Nevertheless, there were many men, mainly youth, who courageously resisted being sent to fight in Kosovo: it has recently been reported that somewhere between 23,000 and 28,000 people are going to put on trial for avoiding military service in the war. And when the war ended, demonstrations against the regime broke out in industrial cities such as Novi Sad in Vojvodina and various towns throughout southern Serbia. Soldiers returning from Kosovo demanded payment. Eventually a loose coalition called the "Alliance for Change" was formed.

But what is the orientation of this coalition and its various components? Overall, the Alliance for Change is a liberal bourgeois opposition. It looks towards western capitalism as its model, and the parties in it were fond of the western powers until NATO began bombing Serbia, which added some undertones to their attitude to the West. But then again, all the major political forces in Serbia, including the Milosevic regime, stand for some sort of transition from the old state-capitalism of the Titoist days to private capitalism. Milosevic himself was a particular favorite of the West until he began his wars against his neighbors. The forces in the Alliance for Change, however, are distinguished from Milosevic in that, in general, they want a political liberalization too.

The general opposition to Milosevic also contains a number of parties and figures who have worked with the regime, but feel that it is tottering now. One of the largest of these forces is Vuk Draskovic's Serbian Renewal Movement. Draskovic was one of the intellectuals who helped create the chauvinist hysteria in Serbia from the 1980s. Later, although Draskovic was part of the opposition in the big 1996-97 demonstrations against the regime, Draskovic was coopted into the Milosevic government. He became one of the vice-premiers of Yugoslavia, in which capacity he was a major spokesperson for the policy of suppressing Albanians and ending their presence in Kosovo once and for all. It was only when it was clear that the war was going to be lost that Draskovic started to distance himself from the regime again, but not too far. There are also a number of generals and other figures who are separating themselves from the regime. Even the Serbian Orthodox Church, which zealously helped incite the chauvinism that kept Milosevic in power, has seen the handwriting on the wall and called for Milosevic to step down.

It is one thing to denounce a lost war, but from what perspective? To denounce the government for incompetence in losing it or denounce the war itself as unjust? Part of the

³Miranda Vickers, *Between Serb and Albanian: A History of Kosovo*, p. 248.

opposition supported the suppression of Kosovo, and objects only to that Milosevic ended up confronting a vastly superior military force from so many other countries. Another substantial part of the opposition believes that the problem in Kosovo is "extremists" on both sides: Milosevic on one side, and militant Albanians on the other. It supports autonomy for Kosovo, but doesn't admit the extent of Serbian oppression of Kosovo, and regards militant Albanians as terrorists. There is no sizeable force in the Serbian opposition that has supported the right to self-determination for Kosovo. At the various demonstration, the main opposition politicians barely mention, if at all, the atrocities committed in Kosovo by the Serbian military, paramilitary, and police forces. As Slobodan Vuksanovic, vice president of the Democratic Party said in early July, "Frankly, we want to avoid the whole subject."⁴

Autonomy is sometimes a reasonable solution to the national question that is acceptable to the local population involved, but the Albanian Kosovars have been demanding independence for some time. After all that's happened, it should be crystal clear that to be willing only to recognize autonomy, means to countenance a policy of keeping Kosovo in Serbia by force. True, the removal of Kosovo's autonomy in 1989 signified that the Milosevic government had adopted a policy of maximum pressure on the Albanians, a policy that inevitably led to ethnic cleansing and mass murder. But even under autonomy, the Albanian Kosovars had been second-class citizens in Serbia, and they had repeatedly demonstrated to become a republic, with equal status to Serbia or any other Yugoslav republic of that time.

Today, with the utter hostility of the Milosevic government to Kosovo, the UN/NATO protectorate will find it hard to restore many ties between Kosovo and Serbia despite the terms of the Serbo-NATO peace agreement. But should the Serbian opposition come to power, the UN and NATO would undoubtedly make serious attempts to incorporate Kosovo back into Serbia. The present stand of the main Serbian opposition parties, if carried out when in office, would lead them to attempt a new oppression of Kosovo.

The NATO policy of pain

NATO, however, carried out the war on Serbia not for the sake of democratic rights, but in order to be the arbiter of the events in the Balkans. NATO had been worried that the fighting in 1998 and the beginning of '99 in Kosovo might end up destabilizing Macedonia, where there is also an Albanian national question, and that various neighboring countries would be drawn into a widening conflict, such as Albania, Montenegro, Greece, and Turkey. NATO members such as Greece and Turkey might end up on opposing sides of a wider conflict. To forestall this danger, NATO didn't look for a democratic solution of the national problem, but simply sought to find a solution that would preserve the status quo.

⁴Richard Boudreaux, "For Many Serbs, No Sense of Guilt Over Atrocities", *Los Angeles Times*, July 2.

NATO's goal wasn't to "dismember Yugoslavia", and in fact the UN/NATO plan still insists that Kosovo remain part of Yugoslavia. Nor, until recently, were the Western powers seeking to depose Milosevic. In fact, Milosevic had been one of U.S. imperialism's favorite Yugoslav officials until the Serbian wars against its neighbors began. Even then, U.S. imperialism sought to make deals with Milosevic. Meanwhile imperialist firms, who did lots of business with Tito's Yugoslavia, also found that they could continue to do business with Milosevic.

In the Serbo-NATO war, NATO applied the policy of inflicting "pain". The plan was to gradually inflict more "pain" on Serbia until Milosevic relented. This is a typical procedure of Western imperialism today. The economy of a country is devastated and the mass of the population is left to suffer while the big powers pursue their squabble with the local government. NATO supposedly aimed at military targets, but it kept expanding its definition of such targets to inflict more pain.

The Western powers also adopted a policy of going after Milosevic personally, leading to his indictment for war crimes. No doubt Milosevic and company richly deserve being condemned for crimes against humanity, but the NATO powers waited until it served their political strategy before encouraging this to go ahead. As well, the UN/NATO administration seems to have the view that the Albanian Kosovars should be satisfied with indictments of a few top Yugoslav officials, and not care about dealing with the mass of armed thugs who attacked them.

Then in late June, Clinton admitted that he had ordered a CIA campaign to overthrow Milosevic. This included encouragement for one of U.S. imperialism's favorite ideas, a military coup, something which U.S. imperialism has also tried to foment in Iraq. This fondness for military coups shows that imperialism cares nothing for the democracy that it swears by.

Aside for the plan for a military coup, and probably also for assassinations, Clinton called for additional support for the Serbian opposition. This was a cynical attempt at manipulating Serbian politics, and U.S. support will undoubtedly go to ensuring that the opposition is as moderate as possible, clamps down on any radical tendencies that arise, and mainly aims at simply replacing Milosevic. Unfortunately, the biggest parties in the Serbian opposition are aimed in that direction anyway.

For NATO and western imperialism as a whole, the Serbo-NATO war was a model of a war without NATO combat deaths, but with disruption of the target country. Once the war began, they were more interested in maintaining the credibility of the NATO military threat than in anything else. For them, the war is an example of how to enforce a new world order. For certain other big powers, the war posed the problem of how to ensure that they would have a seat in the governing councils of this new world order, and not let them be monopolized by NATO.

Russian imperialism

Thus Russia was eager to play a role in negotiating the settlement of the Serbo-NATO war, and it is one of the six players in the big power "Contact Group" (U.S., Britain, France, Germany, Italy, and Russia) on Balkan affairs. There are many people who believe that Russia provides a counterweight to

imperialism. But Russia is as much an imperialist power as any of the Western big powers. It is not ruled by the Russian working people, but by a small and rich bourgeoisie, and it differs from the NATO powers mainly in having different geopolitical interests. Russia, for example, as the largest and strongest Slav power, is interested in a certain pan-Slav ideology as a way of extending its influence.

It is not just the Yeltsin government that views matters in this light. The Russian parliamentary opposition is even more nationalistic than Yeltsin. This is true not only of the ultra-nationalist reactionaries of Zhironovsky's misnamed Liberal Democratic Party, but also of the state-capitalist apologists of Zyuganov's even more misnamed "Communist" Party of the Russian Federation. They promoted the view that Slav peoples such as the Russians and the Serbians are especially under attack in today's world, and they regarded the demands of the Albanian Kosovars as a direct affront to Slav national dignity. They urged on a confrontation in support of Serbia, and viewed the rape of Kosovo as a righteous crusade; a number of Russian volunteers (such as a unit called "the Czar's Wolves") appear to have fought alongside Serb paramilitaries in Kosovo. Yeltsin, on the other hand, was constrained by the need for yet more loans from the West, so his government ended up acting as a broker between NATO and the Milosevic regime in Serbia. He may also have been constrained by the consideration that various Muslim peoples inside Russia would not have looked favorably on a policy of directly backing the massacre of the Albanian Kosovars, and these peoples inhabit some valuable oil lands in Russia. (The insurgency that has just broken out in Dagestan, which borders Chechnya, shows the potential for continuing difficulties with the Muslim peoples of Russia.) But Yeltsin was anxious to establish that Russia must be part of any world imperialist consensus.

Moreover, Russia does not want to see the recognition of the right to self-determination of Kosovo for fear that it might affect Russia itself. After all, Russia fought a bloody, if unsuccessful war, to drown the Chechen national movement in blood and keep it inside Russia. While Russia lost this war, the peace terms left many things for future settlement and the ultimate status of Chechnya has not yet been settled. But the analogy to Kosovo is too close, and Russia doesn't want to see anything done that might suggest that its relations with Chechnya and other nationality areas aren't solely its internal affair.

At one time, in the years immediately after the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, the contradiction between Russia and the Western powers was that between revolution and counter-revolution. Later, as the Russian revolution degenerated into a new exploiting system, it became that between two forms of capitalism, Stalinist state-capitalism and Western capitalism. Today, with the transition from state-capitalism back towards private capitalism, there remain separate national interests between the Russian bourgeoisie and those of the Western powers. This is not the difference between imperialism and anti-imperialism but that between rival capitalist powers, even if the rivalry is muted today due to the end of the Cold War and the

immensity of the Russian economic catastrophe.

Anti-imperialism

Anti-imperialists were challenged by a complex situation in the Serbo-NATO war. While NATO is the most powerful imperialist military alliance in the world, its opponent, Serbia, was fighting to annihilate a long-suffering people in order to annex their lands forever, and Serbia received sympathy from two other great powers, China and Russia. If anti-imperialists couldn't support either of these two sides, could they support the Albanian Kosovars? But the Albanians were in alliance with NATO, even though NATO didn't support their demand for independence, because NATO was driving Serbian troops out of Kosovo, at least for the time being.

The solution to this quandary is that anti-imperialism must mean supporting the development of movements of the working masses against their oppressors, and doing everything to overcome the disorganization that afflicts the revolutionary proletariat today. We must support the right to self-determination for Kosovo, and in the Balkans in general, because it is necessary in order to create the grounds for unity of the workers of different nationalities, and because bourgeois tyranny thrives on the national oppression of subject peoples. We must denounce both Serbian chauvinism, and NATO imperialism, which both deny the national rights of the Albanian people and the freedom of the Serbian working masses. Although the Albanian Kosovars allied with NATO in the Serbo-NATO war—and we must seek ways to show them the real nature of NATO and Western imperialism—we must recognize that their struggle for the right to self-determination is necessary and deserving of support.

It might seem easier to advocate that the Kosovo problem doesn't really require the right to self-determination and would be solved if only NATO should be reined in by Russian participation or replaced by a totally UN force, but this means advocating a different imperialist solution, not supporting the development of a movement against imperialism. It might seem easier to pretend that the Milosevic regime really wouldn't have carried out an extended massacre of the Albanians if only NATO hadn't started bombing, but this requires closing one's eyes to the actual class relations in Serbia and Kosovo and the decade of preparation for the massacre. It might seem easier to abandon the Albanian Kosovars because they have illusions in Western imperialism, but this means taking the path of abandoning one people after another, and putting one's faith in the conflicts between the different bourgeois governments of the world. All these shortcuts mean, in essence, trying to avoid dealing with the depth of the crisis in the revolutionary and working class movements around the world, and the protracted and difficult work that will be required to establish new revolutionary trends. But such work is the only work that will really help undermine imperialism.

— Joseph Green □

The demonization of the Albanians

by Joseph Green

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In the recently-concluded Serbo-NATO war over Kosovo, the anti-war left was faced with the question of how to oppose U.S. imperialism at a time when NATO was bombing Serbia with the demand that Serbia stop waging war on the Albanian majority in Kosovo. This presented many difficulties to most of the established trends in the left. Surely it would be wrong to back NATO as the savior of the masses against Milosevic. But should Milosevic then be left a free hand in ravaging the Kosovars? Should the right to self-determination of an oppressed nationality, the Albanian Kosovars, be slighted?

Furthermore, the anti-war forces disagreed on what the Serbian government represented. Was Milosevic a tyrant who should be opposed, or was he defending socialism against NATO? Or did the Serbian government, despite Milosevic, represent an anti-imperialist obstacle to foreign capitalism? Meanwhile some establishment forces in the anti-war movement held that NATO was attacking a government that it should, instead, have courted as an ally.

The main trends in the anti-war movement solved this problem by issuing appeals that papered over these differences. In essence, it was presented that if only the Serbian government and Western imperialism came to an agreement, there would be an end to the crisis. The Kosovars themselves could be ignored: there was no demand put forward for recognizing the Albanian provisional government of Kosovo, or even for including the Albanian Kosovars in the negotiations on the fate of Kosovo. To make this sound plausible and to justify ignoring the demands of the Albanians, the struggle of the Albanians for the right to self-determination had to be demonized. But so long as the democratic rights of the Kosovars are denied, the national question in Kosovo will continue to fester and cause new crises.

A serious struggle against the war crimes of the big powers and of the Serbian government has to center on encouraging the organization and independent action of the masses. It can't be based on demanding that the UN and NATO grant the Serbian

government the same right to oppress the Albanians as is granted to NATO-member Turkey to oppress the Kurds. Nor can it be based on myths about how Serbia and the West would behave reasonably if only they negotiated together, or about how imperialist war supposedly violated "international law" and the purposes of the UN. Agitation that demonized the Albanians could allow sections of the anti-war movement to flirt with various politicians with rival imperialist policies from the current ones, but it couldn't encourage the masses to form new organizations of class struggle.

The demonization of the Albanians was not a sign of anti-imperialist fervor. It did not help the struggle against imperialism and capitalism, whether in the U.S. or in the Balkans, but hindered it. It meant abandoning the struggle to encourage independent action of the people everywhere against their oppressors, and instead advocating that big and little oppressors, big powers and would-be regional bullies, should join arm-in-arm in settling world affairs among themselves.

THE INVISIBLE ALBANIAN

It is notable how little concern there was in most of the anti-war literature for the struggle of the Albanian Kosovars. Noam Chomsky, for example, is well-known as a critic of American policy. His article the "Kosovo Peace Accord" in *Z Magazine*, summing up the Kosovo war, ignores the Albanian movement completely. He mentions the Kosovar refugees, but only in the context of denying that NATO is really motivated by concern for them. And it's true that NATO was hypocritical, only it seems that the Albanians are just as invisible to Chomsky as to NATO. Chomsky does not find anything about the Albanian Kosovars worthy of mention, neither their long-standing struggle for the right to self-determination nor their prospects. He is not interested in charting a course for the struggle in Kosovo. He spends a lot of time on the Serbo-NATO negotiations in March, presenting the myth that the Serbian government was willing to be reasonable about the Kosovars, and he even ends up referring back to the Paris Peace Treaty of 1973 ending the American war in Vietnam and the Esquipulas Accords of August 1987 ("Arias plan") concerning American intervention in Central America. Vietnam is real; Central America is real; Serbia is real; but the Albanians are invisible.

Similarly *Z Magazine's* "ZNet" site on the internet put out a series of talking points for anti-war activists: "The Kosovo/NATO Conflict: Questions and Answers" by Michael Albert and Stephen R. Shalom. The "talking points" say only that Albanian Kosovars "claim" to be oppressed by the Serbs, and take no stand on whether this is true or whether they should have the right to self-determination. They also report that "The previous [Serb] leaders, Milosevic charged, had appeased the Albanians and failed to defend Serb interests." They don't characterize Milosevic's charge as rabid chauvinism, but regard it just as seriously as the claim that Kosovars might be oppressed. So, in

the concluding section of the talking points, "What should we demand for the Balkans?", they do not demand the right to self-determination for Kosovo or ending the oppression of the Albanian majority, nor do they express solidarity with any mass movement in Kosovo, in Serbia, or anywhere in the region. Their highest demand is that Milosevic and the UN should negotiate "an international peace keeping force . . . to stand between the combatants".

Alexander Cockburn is another prominent radical journalist, and he coedits with Jeffrey St. Clair the small journal *Counter-punch*. In his article "Victory?" of June 5 on the outcome of the Kosovo war, he is concerned only about relations between Serbia and NATO. He does not discuss what this war has meant for the Kosovar masses at all. It is of no concern to him whatsoever.

Howard Zinn is another well-known figure in the American left; he wrote *A People's History of the United States: 1492-Present*. His article "Their Atrocities—And Ours" appeared in the July 1999 issue of *The Progressive*. He too discusses the Kosovo war without any reference to the struggle of the Kosovars. He mentions the firebombing of Dresden in 1945, the atomic bombing of Japan in 1945, his own participation in the dropping of napalm in France in 1945, and the suffering caused by the NATO air campaign in Serbia. But he doesn't discuss the history of the annexation of Kosovo by Serbia, the throwing of Albanian Kosovars out of jobs, schools, and medical establishments by the Milosevic government in the years following the revocation of Kosovo's autonomy in 1989, nor the escalation of Serbian oppression to outright warfare in early 1998.

Doug Henwood is the editor of the *Left Business Observer* (LBO) and the author of the critical book "Wall Street". On his web site he still posts the article "This Kosovo thing" from the April 1999 issue of LBO as his polemic about the war. There is no mention of the Albanians at all, other than a sneering reference to people's "self-flattering sympathy for the refugees".

THE DEMON ALBANIAN

There are also a number of articles that discuss the Albanians, or at least the KLA, but only to judge whether Serbia or NATO is right in its policies, or simply to scare the reader with the prospect of a strengthened KLA. But the Kosovo war centered on the issue of the fate of Kosovo and of the Albanian Kosovars. Since the annexation of Kosovo by Serbia in 1912, Kosovo has been a sore point for every Serbian and Yugoslav government, from monarchist Serbia prior to World War I to Titoist Yugoslavia after World War II and Milosevic's Serbia after 1987. There is no way to ignore the Albanian Kosovars unless the Albanians are regarded as not being worth the consideration due to other peoples.

And indeed, aside from the literature that is silent about the Albanians, there is also an extensive literature that demonizes the Albanian Kosovars. The Workers World Party and the CPUSA do this from the standpoint of enthusiastically backing the war of the Milosevic regime against the Kosovars. But there is also an influential literature that leaves the stand of its authors towards Milosevic undefined and instead concentrates simply on

denouncing the Albanians and claiming that all the problems in Yugoslavia are due to outside intervention or to non-Serb nationalities. Among the most influential literature in this regard are the articles by Diana Johnstone and by University of Ottawa professor Michel Chossudovsky; many of these articles can be found in *Covert Action Quarterly*.

The nation of counter-revolutionaries that deserves no rights

The Workers World Party and the CPUSA denounce any Kosovar who stands up against Serbian oppression as a "mercenary", a CIA agent, an agent of Germany, and so on and so forth. This reaches the level of utter hysteria: for example, *Workers World* recently informed its readers that the "many of the leaders of the KLA trace their roots to a fascist unit set up during World War II by the Italian occupiers."¹ This presumably refers to leaders in their 70s and 80s. But another article says that the KLA really "had gotten their start in Germany. Indeed, the initial leaders of this counter-revolutionary terrorist group spoke German as their first language."² And then there were all those documented accounts of the supposedly suspicious fact that Albanian immigrant workers in Germany got paid in German marks and brought them back to Kosovo. German marks, you hear! It's a simple equation. Anyone who stands up against Serbian oppression is KLA, and anyone in the KLA is a drug-dealing, Italo-German CIA agent. Leo Paulsen, a Chicago leader of the WWP, described the Albanian Kosovars as a "nation of contras".

Indeed, WWP's explanation of why Kosovo was kept in Serbia after World War II, despite its desire to be united with Albania, is that the people were too reactionary to be allowed to have their national rights. *Workers World* writes that a "pro-fascist uprising" broke out at the end of World War II, and "faced with this military problem, Kosovo was kept as part of Serbia" and not even granted any meaningful autonomy until 1974.³ Thus the entire population was stripped of the right to self-determination as punishment. Actually, however, the Kosovars weren't fascist, but the Titoist leadership of the Yugoslav partisans put keeping Kosovo in Serbia ahead of the interests of the anti-fascist struggle. They bullied Kosovo so badly that even a major section of the Kosovar anti-fascist partisans rose in rebellion.

A nation of drug-dealers

The CPUSA is fonder of denouncing the Kosovars as drug-dealers. In this, they are backed by professor Chossudovsky in

¹Gary Wilson, "Background of the struggle in Kosovo", *Workers World*, April 8.

²Fred Goldstein, "Yugoslav's past becomes present", *Workers World*, April 8.

³Gary Wilson, "Big power rivalry in the Balkans", *Workers World*, May 14, 1998.

such articles as "Kosovo 'freedom fighters' financed by drug money, CIA" (*Albion Monitor*, April 1999) His article goes into detail into allegations about drug trafficking by Albanians from Kosovo and Albania proper. But a fairly good refutation of this article appeared in the Australian *Green Left Weekly*.⁴ It points out that, while "it isn't that unusual for cash-staved liberation movements to raise some of their funds from illegal sources", Chossudovsky doesn't actually document that the KLA is involved in this—it's supposed to follow from the fact that the KLA and various criminal gangs are both Albanian. Chossudovsky makes use of anti-drug hysteria to discredit an entire oppressed people.

Particularly interesting is the *Green Left Weekly's* discussion of how Chossudovsky tries to tie the KLA to Sali Berisha, the conservative president of Albania who was overthrown by a popular rebellion. Chossudovsky talks about all the criminal activities of Berisha, but manages to leave out some little details, such as that Berisha has, so far, been an opponent of the KLA, not their financier. He also leaves out that Berisha has ties to another player in the drama, although he must be aware of it, since it is pointed out by one of the key sources for his article. It turns out that "until the end of the war in Bosnia these rackets [of Berisha's—JG] included large-scale sanctions-busting via oil sales to Serbia and Montenegro." So it turns out that Berisha did business with the Milosevic regime, not the KLA.

Not enough were killed to matter

It is more common, however, not to directly condemn the Kosovars but to pooh-pooh their plight by talking of other tragedies and wars around the world. The numbers of their dead are frequently compared to some greater mass slaughters elsewhere (the Kosovars are a small people—they would have to be completely annihilated many times over for the slaughter to match some of the numbers elsewhere). The implication is that what's happening to the Kosovars just isn't that important. It may not be directly said that the Albanian Kosovars are a reactionary people, but what comes across is that the Kosovars don't matter. Articles about the Kosovo war, as we have seen, may ignore Kosovo itself, while traveling around the world and throughout history, to the plight of the Kurds in Turkey, to Vietnam, back to World War II, etc. This is done in the name of showing that NATO is hypocritical: it is very selective about which human rights violations it makes a fuss about. True enough, but NATO isn't the only political force that can be hypocritical. Certain political trends in the anti-war movement are just as selective in their sympathies. They talk about the plight of the Kurds in Turkey, for example, but not the Kurds in Iraq. The only non-hypocritical reply to NATO's hypocrisy about the Kurds would be to support *both* the Kurds and the Albanian Kosovars.

A notable example of this tendency to talk about everyone except the Kosovars appears in Michael Albert and Stephen

⁴Michael Karadjis, "Chossudovsky's frame-up of the KLA", May 12, 1999.

Shalom's talking points for anti-war activists, referred to previously. Under the heading of "What should we demand for the Balkans?" (pt. #15), there is no demand at all that directly mentions the Kosovars: at most, they demand that a UN peacekeeping force "stand between the combatants", who they leave unnamed. But while the Kosovars don't appear in their list of demands, they make sure to demand "an insistence that other atrocities, often perpetrated or abetted or ignored by Washington because they serve U.S. interests, receive the same media visibility and humanitarian attention as the atrocities in Kosovo." (Albert and Shalom, "The Kosovo/NATO conflict: Questions and Answers", point #15) Thus one of the key demands about the Balkans is not to worry so much about the atrocities against the Kosovars. Mind you, they don't list any other struggle going on that they think is important. The content of their demand is just talk about any other area of the world, they don't care which it is, just not Kosovo. What can this mean but that the Kosovars just aren't as important as other people?

It's their own fault

Moreover, it's often suggested that if a number of Albanians have been killed, it's mainly their own fault: they supposedly provoked the Serbian military and paramilitary forces. It's suggested that the slaughter of Albanians—if they oppose the Milosevic regime, or support independence, or sympathize with the KLA—just isn't so bad. It's understandable. In this regard, it is still being stubbornly advocated that the Racak massacre of January this year, in which Serbian police executed 45 villagers, didn't really occur. The latest issue of *Covert Action Quarterly* (Spring-Summer 1999) still talks of "an alleged massacre in the village of Racak".⁵

Note that when CAQ, WWP and others deny the massacre at Racak, they are usually not denying that Albanian villagers were killed there. No, not at all. They are, however, saying that the villagers were legitimate targets. After all, the village sympathized with the KLA, and some people in it shot back at the marauding Serbian police. They accept the account given by the Serbian police and military (an account contradicted by the medical evidence), in which the victims died resisting the Serbian raid on their village. But even according to this account, the Serbian forces proudly decimated a village solely because it was a KLA village. (See "The Racak controversy" on pages 18-20 of this issue of *Communist Voice*.) Kosovars who support the KLA presumably deserved to die.

It might seem strange that, after all the other massacres that have taken place, the Racak massacre from January is still being debated. But it's because the Racak massacre shows that, two months prior to the Serbo-NATO war, the Serbian military had already escalated its attacks on Albanians. After Racak, there was an increasing tempo of attacks on villages, and even towns. But in any case, the claim that Racak was not a massacre is another illustration of the line of reasoning that suggests that the Albanians got what they deserved.

⁵Gregory Elich, "Carving another Slice from Yugoslavia".

It's not genocide

This leads to one of the most macabre episodes on the left. A section of the anti-war movement denied that the massacres of the Albanian Kosovars could amount to genocide. There was a good deal of talk about how talking of a genocidal attack on the Kosovars "cheapened" or demeaned the concept of genocide. Yet at the same time that this debate was going on, some people on the left were calling Yeltsin's economic policies "genocide" because of their brutal devastation of the living conditions of the Russian people. No one stepped forward to say that this rhetoric demeaned the victims of the Holocaust; yet, whatever else Yeltsin is guilty of, his goal certainly isn't to eliminate the Russian people. The sudden determination to be strictly precise in the use of the term "genocide" only applied to the plight of the Kosovars.

The argument was that not every Kosovar was being killed. Some were killed, but the mass were being looted, beaten, raped, robbed, removed, but not killed. Supposedly, unless everyone is killed, it's not genocide. But this means setting a new, higher standard for genocide in Kosovo than elsewhere in the world. Elsewhere, a policy to destroy a people is commonly called genocide, even if all the people aren't killed. Thus, just prior to the Serbo-NATO war, the Commission for Historical Clarification in Guatemala came out with a report which "described the government's counter-insurgency policy as 'genocidal' as well as 'racist' and noted that 'the massacres, scorched-earth operations, forced disappearances and executions of Mayan authorities, leaders, and spiritual guides, were not only an attempt to destroy the social base of the guerrillas, but above all, to destroy the cultural values that ensured cohesion and collective action in the Mayan communities.'"⁶

Some of the people who argued against the use of the term "genocide" with respect to the Serbian campaign against the Albanian Kosovars are backers of the UN. The 1948 UN Convention on Genocide, however, defines genocide as any of a series of acts with "the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such". Under this definition, the Guatemalan government did indeed commit genocidal acts against the Mayans, as the Serbians did against the Kosovars.

Another line of argument came from Steven Shalom. He claimed that there wasn't genocide "before March 1999", and so even if there was genocide later, it doesn't matter as far as political discussion goes. Only the events that took place well prior to the NATO bombing (that started in late March) count, as he attributes the genocide that occurred in the Serbo-NATO war to NATO, not Serbia, even though it was carried out by Serbian forces. Clearly Shalom regards the matter from the point of view of allocating points to NATO or Serbia, and not from the point of view of the Kosovar struggle against genocide. But to maintain his point of view, he has to pretend that the escalating Serbian attacks on the Kosovars from the Drenica

⁶Peter Canby, "The Truth About Rigoberta Menchu", *The New York Review of Books*, 8 April 1999, p. 28, col. 1.

massacre of March 1998 to the Racak massacre of January 1999 weren't leading anywhere. It's not a hard connection to see. For that matter, already more than a year ago the Macedonian government was discussing creating a "corridor" to shepherd the expected flood of Albanian refugees through Macedonia to Albania.⁷ But Shalom doesn't see the connection. He also has to forget that everyone had been talking for months of the bloody spring that lie ahead in Kosovo.⁸

WHITEWASHING THE MILOSEVIC TYRANNY

Some trends in the anti-war movement contended that to condemn the tyranny and ethnic cleansing of the Milosevic government was to demonize the Serbian people. According to an influential article by Diana Johnstone on the history of Yugoslavia, "very many people, in the sincere desire to oppose racism and aggression, have in fact contributed to demonizing an entire people, the Serbs".⁹ According to her, condemnation of the tyranny of the Milosevic regime and of its attacks on the Albanians means "demonizing" the entire Serb people. This makes as much sense as claiming that condemning U.S. aggression around the world means "demonizing" Americans. When the policies of the bourgeois ruling class of a country are condemned, this does not necessarily demonize a people, but can be a prerequisite for the unity of the working people of all countries against their oppressors.

⁷Timothy Ash, "Kosovo and Beyond", *The New York Review of Books*, June 24, p.4.

⁸Stephen R. Shalom, "Reflections on NATO and Kosovo", *New Politics*, vol. 7, #3, Summer 1999. This article can also be found on the *Z Magazine* web site, which calls it "Our most complete article, and the best analysis now available in our opinion . . .".

In a footnote, Shalom refers to the internment of Japanese-Americans in World War II, but misses the point. He writes "What would we think of an apologist for Japanese militarism who defended the attack on Pearl Harbor by pointing to the fact that Washington responded by forcing Japanese-Americans into concentration camps?" But it would be absurd to deny that the internment showed the racism of the American bourgeoisie, on the plea of the need to fight apologists for Japanese militarism. The fight against racism in the U.S. could only strengthen the anti-fascist fight. And the internment definitely showed the racism of the American bourgeoisie, a racism revealed in a myriad of other ways in peace time, even though this internment would not have taken place without the Japanese government declaring war on the US. The Serbian attack on the Albanians, on the other hand, was well under way long before NATO got involved in the situation.

⁹Diana Johnstone, "Seeing Yugoslavia Through a Dark Glass: Politics, Media and the Ideology of Globalization", *Covert Action Quarterly*, Spring-Summer 1999, #67

Glorification of the Serbian monarchy

But Johnstone ignores classes and class struggles, and ends up with a chauvinist version of history. Her account of the history of the Balkans ignores the role of the different class and class struggles that exist in all nationalities, and instead presents a history of progressive and reactionary nations: naturally, she makes the Serbs into the progressive nation, and demonizes all the other nationalities that have ever been in Yugoslavia, denouncing them as selfish nations, supported by fascism, etc. She thus avoids directly praising Milosevic by instead embracing Serbian chauvinism and a special Serb role to civilize the other Balkan peoples. According to her, advocacy of the right to self-determination for the Yugoslav nationalities means "legitimizing . . . ethnic separatism" and could only come from those who demonized Serbia.

Johnstone goes so far as to praise the late Serbian monarchy and present it as an embodiment of the ideals of the French Revolution, which heretofore people probably thought included the overthrow of monarchy. She writes that ". . . Serb political leaders throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were extremely receptive to the progressive ideals of the French revolution. While all the other liberated Balkan nations imported German princelings as their new kings, the Serbs promoted their own pig farmers into a dynasty, one of whose members translated John Stuart Mill's 'On Liberty' into Serbian during his student days." So, according to Johnstone, whether monarchy is progressive or not depends on whether it is Serbian. By way of contrast, the socialist movement of the early 20th century, while recognizing the importance of the liberation struggle of the Serbs and other Balkan peoples, denounced all "the dynasties and bourgeois classes" of the Balkans, making no exception for the Serbian one. (See the Basle Resolution of socialist parties in 1912 against the imminent threat of world war.) These monarchies were among the forces that channeled the struggle against Ottoman oppression into ethnic violence.

In fact, the Serbian monarchy, which became the Yugoslav monarchy, and ruled Yugoslavia from its founding after World War I (as the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes) until its collapse in World War II, was quite a reactionary monarchy. It presided over a centralized system of Serbian domination; and it successfully undermined parliamentary institutions and replaced it with royal dictatorship. There is a logic, however, to Johnstone's praise of monarchy. It was under the monarchy that Kosovo was annexed to Serbia in 1912, in the midst of frightful massacres of the Albanians. And if Johnstone admits that monarchist Yugoslavia violated the right to self-determination of the various Yugoslav nationalities, it might suggest that denying that right was still reactionary today.

Meanwhile Johnstone's work has been promoted as the real history of Yugoslavia. Chomsky, for example, has a number of positions that would seem quite different from hers, yet prior to the Serbo-NATO war he recommended that people read Johnstone to understand the complex history of the region. Chomsky and others may discreetly pass over Johnstone's more extreme statements, but her work spreads the atmosphere that the right to self-determination for non-Serb nationalities in

Yugoslavia is suspect, and that indeed the non-Serb peoples themselves are suspect.

The Milosevic regime as socialist

Other trends, such as the WWP, don't glorify Serbian nationalism in itself, but instead whitewash the Milosevic tyranny and its Serbian chauvinism by presenting it in socialist and anti-imperialist colors. Generally even these trends, no matter how enthusiastic for Milosevic's crusade against the Albanians, nevertheless pose as slightly distinct from Milosevic. WWP occasionally drops a few words about Milosevic being a "nationalist" or making some "bureaucratic" error. But it fervently defends his regime, denies the atrocities, and supports his war against the Albanians and the domestic opposition.

Thus WWP has for years been denouncing the Serbian people for demonstrating against Milosevic. Two years ago, for example, when there were massive demonstrations against Milosevic's refusal to abide by election results, the WWP denounced the opposition to Milosevic, claiming that the fall of Milosevic would amount to "imperialist intervention" and "a repeat of what it [U.S. imperialism] did in Grenada, Panama, Iraq, Nicaragua and elsewhere"; indeed, the Milosevic regime was supposedly one of the last "communist experiments in Eastern Europe".¹⁰ So the defenders of the Milosevic regime end up demonizing the Serb masses, as well as the Albanian masses.

It is also presented that the Milosevic regime stands in the way of capitalism and that this is why it is under attack. One of the many problems with this line of reasoning is that the Milosevic regime has itself been privatizing. It inherited a state-capitalist, not socialist, regime from its predecessors, and it has been turning it into a market-capitalist regime. Its difference with the Serbian bourgeois opposition is not over this, but over who shall control the new capitalism and what will happen to the old apparatus of political oppression. Nevertheless, WWP and others do their best to present Milosevic as a socialist.

For example, the WWP highly promotes Sara Flounders's articles on Kosovo. One of them, "Kosovo: 'The war is about the mines'", discusses the major Trepca mining complex in Kosovo. It talks about how rich these mines are, how "socialist Yugoslavia has attempted to resist privatization of its industry and natural resources", and tells us that the Albanians are simply helping put the mines into Western hands. Why, "This huge complex of mines, refining, power and transportation in Kosovo may well be the largest uncontested piece of wealth not yet in the hands of the big capitalists of the U.S. or Europe." So the reader is given a picture of valiant socialists holding out against those nasty capitalist-minded Albanian Kosovars. But finally at the end of the article she admits that Milosevic is putting this wealth into the hands of the private capitalists: he is privatizing the Trepca complex. His regime is "in negotiations to sell shares in the Trepca mining complex. Forced by the economic crisis, they have been negotiating with a Greek investor—Mytilineos

¹⁰Gary Wilson, "Who & what are really behind Belgrade rallies?", *Workers World*, Jan. 23, 1997.

Holdings SA—for partial ownership." If the Albanian Kosovars were to sell the mines, that would prove to her that the Kosovars were shock troops for capitalist takeover, but if Milosevic does it, it simply means that he was "forced to privatize in order to survive in today's global market".

At the June 5th demonstration in Washington D.C. against NATO bombing, the academic Barry Lituchy delivered a speech, which was the basis for his article "American barbarism and the big lie technique are the winners in Kosovo". He presents Yugoslavia as "the last socialist economy in Europe." But he has to admit that Milosevic has mainly followed a policy of privatization. No matter, claims Lituchy, "Milosevic has moved away from privatization in recent years." It is, however, in these recent years that Milosevic has moved to privatize the Trepca mining complex.

The Milosevic regime as anti-imperialist

If it's hard to present the Milosevic regime as socialist, various authors think it may be easier to present it as anti-imperialist. Thus there are a spate of articles from WWP and other authors to prove that imperialism broke up Yugoslavia. There supposedly weren't any serious internal problems; the national questions and economic problems in Yugoslavia were all foreign plots.

Take for example Chossudovsky's article "How the IMF Dismantled Yugoslavia". He writes that "in the two decades prior to 1980" things were fine. But the 1980s were a "decade of Western economic ministrations", and this destroyed the Yugoslav economy. After all, in 1980 "The U.S. . . . joined Belgrade's other international creditors in imposing a first round of macroeconomic reform in 1980, shortly before the death of Marshall Tito. Successive IMF-sponsored programs then continued the disintegration of the industrial sector and the piecemeal dismantling of the Yugoslav economic state." But how could the IMF have imposed this policy on a country flush with two decades of economic success, and supposedly without its own national capitalists? This is a fantasy to hide the growing economic problems that afflicted Yugoslavia, and that have been studied by economists of various trends. Chossudovsky attributes the influence of the IMF to the pressure of "international creditors"—but such a great influence of creditors would imply that Yugoslavia was already, in previous years, living on foreign loans.

Barry Lituchy presents a similar fantasy. He tells demonstrators that "Despite Western-imposed sanctions Yugoslavia's economy managed to show one of the best growth rates in Eastern Europe last year. Unable to wreck the Yugoslav model through sanctions, the US and its European allies financed mercenary armies in the guise of 'democratic opposition movements.'" So the ailing Serbian economy of the 90s, with its living standards and its industrial base in tatters, is presented as a model of growth, while the opposition to Milosevic is denounced. According to the picture drawn by Lituchy, there are no class struggles in Yugoslavia, there's just the regime versus foreign intelligence agencies.

Reconciling the irreconcilable

The writers around *Z Magazine*, such as Michael Albert and Steven Shalom, don't agree with the glorification of the Milosevic regime. When pressed by the outright supporters of Milosevic, they express some differences. Yet in practice, their agitation isn't that different. How can this be?

Michael Albert discusses his differences with the Milosevic supporters in an addendum to the article "Lend Me Your Ear" in the June 1999 issue of *Z Magazine*. He says that a view "loosely associated with the International Action Center (IAC) and Ramsey Clark" is that the Serbo-NATO war "stems from U.S. imperial designs on the entire Balkan region that have been thwarted by Milosevic" and that therefore "Milosevic and the Serbs . . . are waging a just war and deserve positive support". The opposing position of Albert is that both the NATO bombing and Serbian ethnic cleansing are "criminal and immoral and must also be ended." This seems like a major difference, and Albert says that it involves both tactical questions about whether to raise the issue of Serbian atrocities at demonstrations, and also, those of "principle and truth. In fact, ethnic cleansing is vile, is occurring, and deserves to be opposed."

Bravo, Albert! Only, unfortunately, as we have seen, this point of "principle and truth" is absent from Albert and Shalom's list of points that the movement should demand. The "atrocities in Kosovo" are only mentioned in the point that complains that, really, attention should be directed to atrocities elsewhere. This looks more like an attempt to find the common ground with those who claim that the ethnic cleansing in Kosovo is simply Western propaganda, than an attempt to raise an issue of "principle and truth".

And what about the "Sample Anti-War flyer" (on the ZNet web site) that illustrates *Z Magazine's* idea of proper anti-war agitation? It has no mention of ethnic cleansing against the Albanian Kosovars at all; it is simply an appeal to "stop the war in Yugoslavia" and "end the bloodshed"—let each interpret that as they will.

And what about the idea that Milosevic's regime is socialist and anti-imperialist. Albert never addresses this point at all; he brushes it aside as irrelevant to the needs of demonstrations. He wants to see anti-war rallies "question profit making per se", but he is silent on whether the Yugoslav economy should be held up as model of what we want, although he knows that an influential section of the movement is using the anti-war movement to make such a claim.¹¹ If demonstrators are to question profit-making, it would seem essential that they discuss whether to promote the current Yugoslavian regime as the alternative, or denounce it as another form of the same profit-making, but Albert is silent. Similarly, Shalom expresses disagreement in passing with Diana Johnstone over whether the Serbian police in Kosovo should be denounced.¹² But neither he nor Albert nor

¹¹Z Staff, "Demonstrate: Why & How", June 1999.

¹²See footnote 3 of his article "Reflections on NATO and (continued...)

anyone in *Z Magazine* bothers to refute the Serb chauvinist picture of Yugoslav history that Johnstone paints, although this history has been promoted previously on ZNet. It's not important to Shalom, perhaps because after all he shares with Johnstone a fear above all of an Albanian victory in Kosovo.¹³ The Kosovars must be especially bad, because, when it comes to dealing with them, Shalom forgets about his general panacea of negotiations. He thinks that even a blood-stained tyrant like Milosevic can be restrained by negotiations, but when it comes to the Kosovars, he sees no remedy for their shortcomings.

FLIRTING WITH THE RIGHT-WING

While much of the anti-war left presented their denigration of the Albanian Kosovars as necessary for anti-imperialist agitation, in fact there was a certain flirtation with the right-wing. The Republican conservatives, including leading Congresspeople and sometime presidential hopefuls like Jack Kemp, opposed the Serbo-NATO war, as also did the free-market Libertarians. Discussions broke out among certain conservatives whether to take part in left-wing anti-war actions. Meanwhile WWP, however much it might talk of the anti-imperialist and socialist character of Milosevic, was happy to tailor its slogans at demonstrations towards unity with right-wing Serbs who hated socialism and hearkened back to the royalist Chetniks. A certain idea was in the air, and one of the "stopnato" web sites (www.stopnato.org) consists of a list of links to articles against NATO bombing from the far-right "isolationist" Republican Patrick Buchanan to various Stalinist parties calling themselves "communist"; the individual who produced this web site do it in the hope of "uniting peaceful, thoughtful Americans from across the political spectrum" against NATO and "our role in world domination" and of making "America the leading example of peace and freedom on Earth".

This flirtation was noted in the establishment press. The *Boston Herald* carried an article entitled "Critics of attack form an unlikely coalition" which cited the statement of an activist Christian liberal that "It's one of those cases where the isolationists, the noninterventionists, the socialists and the pacifists are all ending up on the same side together".¹⁴

Z Magazine's Michael Albert also takes note of the right-wing opposition, distinguishing between several different variants. Some of it he denounces and some of it he praises. He refers to part of it, without naming who it is, as "not a moral opposition but a pragmatic one based on the same values as the bombing but a different set of prospects. If these dissenters thought the bombing would yield the outcomes Clinton and they

seek without costs for elites they think he is underestimating, they would be for it." He goes on to highly praise another variant of the right-wing: "A third strand of right wing opposition is principled . . . libertarian rightists who are almost always anti-interventionist. Their values and readings are certainly quite different than a left opposition, though their commitment is serious and their dissent does add to the pressure on Clinton to change course."

Albert's conclusion is to let the right-wing alone: let them do their thing, and we'll do ours. He says: "I don't think left opponents of the bombing have any reason to spend much time trying to argue with or organize such folks, especially now when one must apply oneself where it will do the most good." He doesn't call for agitation that distinguishes the anti-war left from the right-wing; he doesn't even consider this, but only considers whether one could organize together with the right-wing, rejecting it for purely pragmatic reasons. This is reflected in ZNet's sample anti-war flyer, referred to previously, which simply calls for unity of all the activists on the basis of opposing this "ruinous debacle". But naturally, the right-wing as well as the left would agree that the war was a "debacle"; this is exactly what would be said by those right-wingers who oppose the war "for pragmatic reasons". As 1996 Republican vice-presidential candidate Jack Kemp put it, the war "was, in short, a debacle, an 'international Waco,' which no amount of 'spinning' by NATO and the media can erase."¹⁵ Even many of Kemp's particular arguments, like the mythical acceptance of peace with the Kosovars by the Serbian government just prior to the beginning of NATO bombing, coincide with favorite arguments on ZNet.

Albert's concern is only to promote various forms of activity, rather than to spread among activists some clarity as to the different political trends in the movement. It is also notable that key themes from ZNet's anti-war agitation would be, broadly speaking, acceptable to the right. The emphasis on international law that runs through all of *Z Magazine's* anti-war agitation is similar to that in Kemp's article and in Republican criticism in general. It is no accident: international law expresses the general will of the existing governments, and hence today is imperialist law. But *Z Magazine* promotes present-day international law as a check on NATO, rather than examining how international law facilitates the aggression of the strong against the weak. Of course, in their own eyes, *Z Magazine* promotes the law for "moral" reasons, not for the "pragmatic" reasons that the right-wing does.

More generally, it is notable how much of the agitation demonizing the Albanians relied on uncritical acceptance of a few carefully selected imperialist sources. The same agitation that claimed that the Albanian Kosovar struggle for the right to self-determination was an imperialist (generally, a German or American) plot, would cite as proof of how evil the Albanians are that they had been condemned as "terrorists" by this or that imperialist agency. This partly reflected a certain desperation in finding ways to condemn the Albanians, but it also amounted to

¹²(...continued)
Kosovo".

¹³See "Stephen R. Shalom Replies" in *New Politics*, vol. 7, no. 3.

¹⁴Eric Convey's article in the March 25 issue of the *Boston Herald*, citing Rose Marie Berger, assistant editor of *Sojourners Magazine*.

¹⁵Kemp, "Artfully Woven Web of Deceit", *Washington Times*, June 27, 1999.

an implicit appeal to imperialism itself: don't back the Kosovars, they won't play your game. And this is a strange appeal for would-be anti-imperialists, is it not? Both certain establishment authors and some anti-war critics wrote critical articles about the outcome of the war to the effect that "The real winner . . . the KLA". These articles weren't lauding the success of the Albanians, but warning the imperialists to beware a greater threat—the prospect of Albanian militancy. One example is an article by the left-wing journalist Robert Fisk, "The peace that betrays the Kosovar cause".¹⁶ The title makes it sound like it supports the Kosovar cause, but the theme of the article is that "we" thought we won the war, but look out! It ends with a perspective, which Fisk "sincerely hope[s] will prove wrong", that the KLA will do bad things and that "in a few months' time—at most a year—NATO's enemies will be the KLA, who will be raging against the West for abandoning their hopes of independence. Then we shall remember how we thought we won the war."

¹⁶*The Independent* (UK), June 5.

The search for sources to condemn the Albanians took certain people, such as Chossudovsky, very far to the right. Shalom, although no friend of the Kosovar struggle, pointed out the dubious nature of the claim that the KLA had been armed by the U.S. and Germany and said, "Michel Chossudovsky . . . claims CIA backing for the KLA on the basis of an unsupported claim by right-wing conspiracy nut John Whitley (who says that the Bilderbergers planned, financed, and started the Kosovo war) as quoted by another right-wing source, 'Truth in Media,' which reprints 'for what it's worth' an alleged letter from a KLA soldier claiming that the KLA has been dressing up as Serbs and then ethnically cleansing Albanians."¹⁷

Not all that glitters is gold; "anti-NATO" agitation that beckons to the right-wing is hardly likely to be anti-imperialist. The demonization of the Albanians was not only the basis allowing the main trends in the anti-war movement to overlook such differences as whether they supported or opposed Milosevic, but it provided a basis for flirting with establishment and right-wing forces. □

¹⁷Shalom, "Reflections on NATO and Kosovo", footnote 4.

Le Monde: "The [Serbian] police congratulated themselves for the success of an operation"

The Racak controversy

by Joseph Green

To this day, the Milosevic government denies its atrocities in Kosovo. Its defenders deny every massacre that has occurred, or explain them away as justified because the Serbian forces were only killing "terrorists" or separatist sympathizers. An important example is the Racak massacre of January this year. Here the Serbian military forces surrounded a village and slaughtered several dozen inhabitants. It was a signal that the expected spring offensive of the Serbian military had come early; after Racak there was an increasing tempo of attacks on Albanian villages and even town.

Below is an excerpt from an exchange about Racak that occurred on a left Internet mailing list in January this year. Since then, the international (Finnish) team of forensic experts led by Dr. Helen Ranta issued its report, condemning what happened at Racak as a "crime against humanity". It showed that, as far as could be determined by medical evidence, the Albanian story was correct. In his article in the Spring-Summer 1999 issue of *Covert Action Quarterly* Gregory Elich claims that "forensic tests" show that the victims had been engaged in combat. This is a lie. If you check his references, it turns out that he either refers to newspaper stories that appeared before the medical findings, or to the fabricated reports produced to please Milosevic and company.

But the discussion below indicates that, even if one accepts the Serbian account, what took place at Racak was a cold-blooded massacre, just like those in a typical imperialist counter-insurgency war. When *Covert Action Quarterly*, WWP, and other sources defend such actions, it shows that their only objection to imperialist atrocities is which imperialist commits them.

(The exchange below between myself and WWP's Greg Butterfield is reprinted using a similar form to how it appeared on the mailing list, in which it is customary to reproduce in one's reply the statement one is answering, with ">'s" in the margin to indicate that the statement is being quoted.)

From: "Joseph Green" <comvoice@flash.net>
Date sent: Mon, 25 Jan 1999 01:10:26 +0000
Subject: Re: L-I: Kosovo: *Le Monde* casts doubt on Walker's story

Greg Butterfield doubts there was a massacre at Racak and cites a story in the French newspaper *Le Monde*. This story tries to pick at contradictions in the story of the Racak massacre. This story, however, has its own contradictions. It ends with the puzzle of why the Serbian authorities fear an investigation: if the Serbian government's account is really true and verified by TV

film, what did they have to fear?

There are other contradictions in *Le Monde*'s account. For example, on one hand, the Serbian police claim they were just looking to arrest a single "murderer". On the other hand, they had planned out an entire military operation against a village and proudly claimed to have killed "dozens" of "KLA terrorists".

But let's look it at from another angle. Suppose, for the sake of argument, that the *Le Monde* story is basically true. What it says is that the Serbian police and armed forces believed that Racak was a KLA village, where everyone left in the village was KLA. Therefore, in a carefully planned attack, they surrounded the village, shelled it at dawn, forced most of the people to flee into the woods, and then mowed the people down in a crossfire. This is supposed to be justified because the villagers shot back. And there seems to be a note of pride in an operation well-done.

That's the official story from the Serbian police, which is the basis for the *Le Monde* account. It puts the best possible light on the Serbian operation, which more likely was an outright massacre of civilians, particularly as most of the victims were shot at short range in the head and sometimes from the back. But taking the Serbian police story at face value, how does it differ from what the American imperialist troops did in Vietnam's famous "Iron Triangle"?

The American aggressors claimed that the villages in the "Iron Triangle" were "Vietcong" strongholds, which they were. (The American press always talked of "Vietcong", as the Serbian government always talks of Albanian "terrorists".)

The Americans claimed that they came under fire when their troops sought to enter villages in the Iron Triangle, which was also true.

Therefore, the American imperialists claimed they were justified in destroying villages, in shooting down whoever moved, etc. One famous statement, concerning a town whose name I have unfortunately forgotten, was that "we had to destroy the (village) in order to save it". At the time, I and other anti-war protesters thought that these operations in the "Iron Triangle" were fascistic, blood-thirsty, and genocidal. We also believed that if the American troops were meeting this sort of opposition in the villages, this verified our view that the U.S. should get out of Vietnam. If the people opposed the U.S. presence, this didn't justify slaughtering them, but meant that the U.S. was engaged in a war against the Vietnamese people..

Yet time moves on, and now there are "leftists" who apparently believe rationales similar to those used by the American military. Isn't the justification in the *Le Monde* article for the Racak operation the same as the justification for American tactics in Vietnam? And doesn't Greg Butterfield think that Racak wasn't a massacre if it occurred the way the *Le Monde* story indicates?

To kill villagers trapped after they flee the armed invasion of

their village, that's OK. That's supposedly legitimate punishment of "terrorists". To shell a small village, that's supposedly an ordinary part of a legitimate police raid to enforce the criminal law. If previous Serbian operations forced most of the inhabitants to flee, that's not a sign that the Serbian armed forces are fighting the local population. Oh no, it's just supposed to make further attacks on Racak even more legitimate. What else can "terrorists" expect to see in the villages they come from?

The account by the Serb police of what happened at Racak is really cynical and frightening. If the Serbian police think that their account justifies what they did at Racak, it means that they are willing to perform this operation on one Albanian village after another: shell it, enter it in force, attack the people who have fled, and boast about the body count of "terrorists". ◊

Greg Butterfield wrote:

> *Le Monde* casts doubts on Walker's story

>
> On Jan. 21, the French newspaper *Le Monde* ran an article
> by its Kosovo correspondent that cast doubts on the Jan. 18
> massacre story spread by > U.S. agent William Walker and his
> observers. *Le Monde* reports that the Serbian police operation
> was seen the entire time by international > observers,
> it took place in a mountain village that was almost entirely
> composed of KLA combatants, and the absence of both blood
> and shells around the bodies made it likely they were killed in
> combat elsewhere and then gathered by the KLA for
> propaganda use. Following is a translation of that story:

> Thursday Jan. 21, 1999

>
> The Racak dead: Were they truly massacred in cold blood?
> The version of the facts spread by the Kosovars leave many
> questions. Belgrade says the 24 victims were KLA
> "terrorists," fallen in the course of a battle, but refuses
> any international investigation.

>
> A film on the police operation contradicts the version spread
> by the OSCE

>
> PRISTINA (Kosovo) by *Le Monde's* special correspondent
> Christophe Chatelot

>
> Wasn't the Racak massacre a little too perfect? *Le Monde*
> received some new eyewitness testimony on Monday, Jan. 18,
> that throws doubt on the reality of the horrible spectacle of
> heaped-up corpses of dozens of Albanians who were
> supposedly executed summarily by Serbian security
> forces last Friday. Had these victims been executed in cold
> blood, as the KLA says, or were they killed in combat, as the
> Serbs affirm?

>
> According to the version received and distributed by the press
> and the Kosovo Verification Mission (KVM) of the
> Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE),
> the massacres took place in the early afternoon of Jan. 15.
> "Masked" Serbian police entered the village of > Racak, which

> had been bombed since the morning by Yugoslav army tanks.
> They broke down the doors of homes, entered the houses,
> ordering the women to stay there while they drove the men to
> the outside of the village to calmly shoot them with a bullet
> in the head—not without having previously tortured and
> mutilated some of them. According to certain witnesses, the
> Serbs sang as they did this dirty work, before leaving the area
> about 3 :30 p.m.

>
> The account of two journalists from Associated Press TV,
> which filmed the Racak police operation, contradicts the above
> account. At 10 a.m., when they entered the locality in the
> wake of a police armored vehicle, the village was practically
> deserted. They advanced through the streets under fire from
> the combatants of the Kosovo Liberation Army, hidden in
> the woods that overlook the village. This exchange of fire
> lasted throughout the engagement, with more or less intensity.
> The main fighting was in the woods. The Albanians who had
> fled the village when the first Serb shells landed at dawn tried
> to find safety there. There they ran into the Serbian police
> who surrounded the village. The KLA was trapped in a
> pincer.

>
> The place the police attacked so violently on Friday was a
> stronghold of the Albanian KLA independence fighters.
> Almost all the inhabitants had fled Racak during the frightful
> Serb offensive of the summer of 1998. With few exceptions,
> they had not returned. "Smoke came from only two
> chimneys," remarked one of the APTV reporters.>

>
> The Serb operation was neither a surprise nor a secret. On the
> morning > of the attack, a police source tipped off APTV :
> "Come to Racak, something is happening there." From
> 10 a.m. the team was on site, alongside the police, filming
> from a crest jutting out over the village and then in the streets
> behind an armored vehicle. The OSCE was also
> warned of the action. At least two teams of international
> observers were present observing the combat from a hill from
> which they could see part of the village. They entered Racak
> soon after the police departed. They investigated the situation
> by questioning some Albanians, insisting on learning if there
> were any wounded civilians. Toward 6 p.m., they came back
> down to the clinic of the neighboring village of Stimje with
> four people—two women and two elderly men—who were
> very slightly wounded. These verifiers said that they were
> then "incapable of establishing the casualties of this day of
> battle."

>
> The publicity the Serb police gave out about this operation
> was intense. At 10 :30 a.m., it sent out the first communique.
> It announced that it had "encircled the village of Racak with
> the aim of arresting the members of a terrorist group that had
> killed a police officer" the previous Sunday. At 3 p.m., a first
> bulletin estimated four Albanians killed in the combats. The
> next day, Saturday, the police congratulated themselves for
> the success of an operation, which, according to their own
> estimates, resulted in the deaths of dozens of KLA "terrorists"

> and the seizure of a significant cache of arms.
 >
 > The attempt to arrest an Albanian, the alleged murderer of a
 > Serbian police officer, had turned into a massacre. At
 > 3 :30 p.m. the police left the area under the sporadic firing of
 > a handful of KLA combatants who were still holding out,
 > aided by the difficult and steep terrain. Quickly, the first
 > Albanian survivors returned to the village, those who
 > had succeeded in hiding themselves came out of the shadows
 > and three KVM vehicles entered the village. An hour after the
 > police left, night fell.
 >
 > Guided by the KLA
 > The next morning, the press and the KVM came to tally up the
 > losses caused by the battle. It is at this moment, that, guided
 > by the armed KLA combatants that had reoccupied the village,
 > they discovered the ditch where there were lying, piled up,
 > about 20 bodies, almost exclusively men. In the middle of the
 > day, the head of the KVM in person, the US diplomat William
 > Walker, arrived on the spot and declared his indignation at the
 > atrocities committed by "the Serb police forces and the
 > Yugoslav army."
 >
 > The condemnation was total. However, some questions are in
 > order. How were the Serbian police able to gather together a
 > group of men and calmly direct them toward the place of
 > execution when they were constantly under fire from the
 > KLA? How could this ditch—situated at the edge of

> Racak—have escaped the view of the local inhabitants, who
 > are familiar with the surroundings and were present before
 > nightfall? And of the observers present for more than two
 > hours in this extremely small village? Why were there so few
 > shells around the bodies, so little blood in the hollow road
 > where 23 people were supposed to have been shot down at
 > point-blank range with several shots to the head? Is it not more
 > likely that the bodies of the Albanians killed in combat with
 > the Serbian police had been gathered in the ditch to create a
 > horror scene that was sure to cause revulsion in public
 > opinion? Doesn't the violence and rapidity with which
 > Belgrade reacted—it gave the KVM head 48 hours to leave
 > Yugoslavia—in itself mean that the Yugoslavs are sure of the
 > story they are raising ?
 >
 > Only an international investigation above all suspicion will
 > light up all the shadowy areas. Some Finnish and Belorussian
 > forensic specialists were expected Wednesday (Jan. 20) at
 > Pristina to take part in the autopsies carried out by the
 > Yugoslav doctors. The problem is that the authorities in
 > Belgrade have never shown themselves to be cooperative in
 > this affair. Why? Whatever the conclusions of the
 > investigators, the Racak massacre shows that the hope of soon
 > reaching a settlement of the Kosovo crisis seems quite
 illusory.
 >
 >
 > - END - □

From Corrections (CV, vol. 6, #2):

Communist Voice, vol. 5 #2, Aug. 15, 1999:

In the first paragraph of the article, "The Racak controversy" on p. 18, the seventh line should refer to the slaughter of "several dozen inhabitants" not "seven dozen inhabitants". □

How some Trotskyists deny national rights for Kosovar Albanians:

The right to self-determination and opposing Milosevic and NATO

by Mark, Detroit

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The war between Serbia and NATO is over, but the controversies among the left on what stand to take on it remain. There was no justice in the war waged by Serbia. Milosevic's goal was to keep Kosovo inside Serbia at all costs no matter what the population there wanted. NATO didn't care about the democratic rights of the Albanian Kosovars either. They strong-armed the KLA leadership into accepting a solution that denies them the right to secede and effectively converts Kosovo into a U.S./NATO protectorate, with Russia getting a small piece of the new power structure. The conduct of the war was in line with the reactionary aims of each side. Milosevic's forces avoided military clashes with NATO, reserving their weapons for massacring the Albanian population. NATO confined itself to safely bombing everything in site, causing a heavy toll on Serb civilians, while allowing the Serbian armed forces and paramilitary gangs to wreck havoc despite the bombing. The only just struggle was

that waged by the Albanian Kosovars for their independence. However, the war has ended without Albanian rights being recognized and with the KLA being disarmed. The recognition of the democratic rights of the Kosovar Albanians remains essential. Had Milosevic granted such rights, NATO would have had no pretext for its war. The failure to grant such rights by NATO is not only an affront to the Albanian population but will ensure that grounds for further ethnic hatreds and future wars will continue.

Our organization, the CVO has stood against both NATO and Milosevic. But among a large section of the opportunist left, opposition to NATO involvement and imperialism meant lining up behind Milosevic. But Milosevic was not waging a war against imperialism. His main goal was crushing Kosovo. Thus, it is no surprise that support for Milosevic and abandoning the democratic right of self-determination for Kosovar Albanians went hand in hand for the opportunists.

Some groups in the opportunist left basically just repeated whatever the Milosevic regime said. This includes such organizations as the Trotskyist WWP (Workers World Party) and Gus Hall's CPUSA (Communist Party, USA), a trend historically connected to Soviet revisionism. They tried their best to hide Milosevic's "ethnic cleansing." Meanwhile, they reprinted the daily official lies of the Serbian rulers, fawning on Milosevic's supposed heroic stand against the big powers and parroting the regime's foul racist slanders against the Albanian Kosovars.

Others who wound up supporting the Serbian rulers took pains to disguise their support. This includes a section of the groups who base themselves on Trotskyist theory. These trends uttered some harsh words against Milosevic and talked about the right of nations to self-determination. But when it came down to dealing with the concrete issues in the recent war, they tossed aside the Marxist theory on self-determination of nations and wound up taking up much of the arsenal of the more naked defenders of Milosevic.

The following article will focus on the stand of three organizations of the later group whose ideological roots are steeped in Trotskyism. These groups are the Spartacist League (SL), the *Spark*, and the International Socialist (IS) trend founded by Tony Cliff. The IS trend's flagship party is the SWP (Socialist Workers Party) of Britain, and the ISO (International Socialist Organization) is its U.S. affiliate. To put a good face on this nasty business, these organizations drag in the good name of Lenin and attempt to prove that they were merely being loyal to Marxist-Leninist theory on the national question. But in fact the attempts to find theoretical grounds for supporting Milosevic in writings of Lenin actually shows the vast gulf between Trotskyist theory and Leninism. Far from supporting the likes of ethnic cleansers like Milosevic, Lenin taught that recognition of

the right of nations to self-determinations was vital to develop a revolutionary proletarian trend. He emphasized that unless the proletariat of an oppressing nation supported the right of self-determination for those nations its "own" bourgeoisie oppressed, proletarian unity would remain nothing but a pious wish. And Lenin scorned those who downplayed the importance of recognizing the right to self-determination of nations as an immediate practical necessity under the pretense that only under socialism can national antagonisms fully and finally be conquered.

The propensity of such Trotskyist trends to side with Milosevic is also connected to their traditional support for the state-capitalist regimes which have masqueraded as socialist. No matter how many particular crimes of the regimes they may express disagreement with, most Trotskyist groups have portrayed the state-capitalist oppression in countries like the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, China and Cuba as some kind of socialism or workers' state. Some, like the Spartacist League, considered Yugoslavia a workers' state even under Milosevic until the time various nationalities split off to form their own states. Given how they conceived of the old Yugoslav system it is not surprising they still seem to find some merit in its last tattered remnants dominated by the Serbian bourgeoisie. After all, the Milosevic regime still pretends to be "socialist" and is for reuniting (by force) the states that broke away.

The International Socialist trend's position on the war is similar to the Spartacists. But unlike most Trotskyists, they correctly call the former Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, etc., "state-capitalist" countries. At first glance it would seem there would be no reason for the IS to have any sentimental attachment to the remnants of the old Yugoslavia. But their description of the economic system in these countries is very much like that of the other Trotskyist trends. For instance, most Trotskyists consider the economic base of the state-capitalist systems in countries like the former Soviet Union to essentially still be socialist, despite having a bad political bureaucracy running them. The IS trend, despite correctly seeing that a new class of exploiters runs these societies, ignores how the state economies actually ran in these countries and instead attributes socialist traits to them, such as the overcoming of anarchic production. This wrong economic analysis is at odds with the correct "state-capitalist" label for countries like Yugoslavia, and makes it hard to take on consistent stand on the state-capitalist regimes that called themselves socialist. Therefore, it is not as surprising as it might seem that in this case, the IS too has become nostalgic about the Yugoslav regime and take positions on the war that are not so different than the Trotskyists who portrayed the state-capitalist regimes as workers' states. For example, despite labeling Yugoslavia as "state-capitalist" the Cliffites cannot resist painting the NATO war as the only way the West could gain economic influence in Eastern Europe, conveniently forgetting years of Western connivance with Milosevic precisely because of his market measures and opening of state industry to foreign capital.

Now let's examine some of the Trotskyist stands in more detail and see how they depart from Marxism-Leninism.

Spartacists line up behind Milosevic

The Spartacist League (SL) tried to appear to uphold the right to self-determination for the Kosovar Albanians. They acknowledged the national oppression carried out by Milosevic against them and that Kosovo had a right to secede. But they added the following condition to their support for the right to self-determination: "However, should the imperialists stage a military intervention over Kosovo, the issue of self-determination would be subordinated to our military defense of Serbia against U.S./NATO forces." (*Workers Vanguard*, July 3, 1998) When NATO bombs began to fall, the SL remained true to these words, took Milosevic's side against NATO, and abandoned any pretense of support for the struggle of the Albanian Kosovars.

To try to distance themselves from the naked supporters of Milosevic like the WWP, the Spartacists used the typical Trotskyist excuse that while they stand for defense of Serbia militarily, they had "no political support to the bloody regime of nationalist Serbian strongman Slobodan Milosevic." (*Workers Vanguard*, May 28, 1999, p.10) In practice, this slogan can only mean support for the Serbian military, a military under the *political leadership* of Milosevic. Not only is it atrocious to back the Serbian war of annihilation against the Albanians, but this support no doubt serves the political interests of the Serbian rulers.

By talking about supporting Serbia militarily while opposing Milosevic politically, the SL tries to make it sound like they are merely trying to express the idea of defending the Serbian masses, as opposed to Milosevic. But if one is talking about building a revolutionary class trend among the masses, there would be no reason for withholding "political support". Indeed, really defending the Serbian masses would mean not only opposing NATO's bombing of them, but giving them the fullest "political support" to use the crisis brought on by the war to build up a powerful class movement *against* the "Serbian strongman." Clearly the military "defense" the SL is talking about is support for the military conflict waged by the Serbian armed forces and paramilitary militias. Or does the SL expect us to believe that there is another military struggle that deserves support being waged from the Serbian side which doesn't involve the Serbian armed forces and paramilitary thugs?!

When all is said and done, it appears that there is no more to the idea of "military defense of Serbia" than rallying behind Milosevic's war drive. Beneath all the word juggling of "military but not political support" for Serbia there is only one real meaning: Serbia is waging a just war against imperialism. This, of course, is just what the WWP claims, too. Only the WWP doesn't waste much effort pretending they can separate Milosevic's war from the politics that led Milosevic to war, namely, a decade-plus of rabid anti-Albanian racism and oppression. The Serbian side in the war was fighting not for liberating itself from imperialism or even to preserve its national independence. Insofar as it came into military conflict with the U.S. and NATO, it was for the purpose of defending its extreme barbarity against the oppressed Kosovar Albanians.

In judging the character of a war, every real Marxist believes in the famous saying that "war is the continuation of politics by

other means." The SL does not apply this method, however. The SL itself knows full well that "Milosevic himself rode to power in 1987 on a Serbian-nationalist drive against the Kosovo Albanians." (*Workers Vanguard*, Oct. 23, 1998, p.9) Indeed they are well aware that the life-blood of his regime has been rabid Serb chauvinism against the "lesser" nationalities to divert the Serbian workers from the class struggle. Yet they evidently believe that his resistance to NATO was unconnected to his desire to crush the Albanians of Kosovo. By the same token, what antagonized the Western powers was not that Serbia ruled over Kosovo, but that the extreme terror of Milosevic was threatening to *undermine the status quo* in the region (including Serb domination of Kosovo) by leaving the Albanians the option of independence or a combination of mass exile and annihilation. U.S. imperialism feared Kosovo's independence would lead to many unhappy consequences for some regimes they liked and exacerbate divisions among their allies in the region (e.g. Greece and Turkey). This was the politics that led to the Serbian-NATO war.

Of course, it is theoretically possible for the character of a war to change. Let us say, for instance, that the war crisis gave rise to a revolution that deposed Milosevic and granted Kosovo the right to self-determination. Yet, NATO continued to wage war. Then one really could talk about justice being on the side of Serbia. But in fact there was no basic change in the character of the war waged by Milosevic after the NATO bombing. Let's take the testimony of pro-Milosevic forces as evidence. It was common for defenders of Milosevic to point out how the bombing led Milosevic to step up the pace of slaughter of the Albanian population. Very well. But this only shows the absurdity of implying, as the SL does, that once the NATO bombing began, suddenly there was something just about the Serbian war effort. In essence, there was no difference between the SL's "military but no political support" to the Serbian war drive and those open apologists of Milosevic who tried to portray the Serbian rulers' war as a heroic fight against imperialism.

SL tries to turn Lenin into a supporter of Milosevic

But if the Spartacists can find no solace in the political facts behind the war, can they find some in Lenin? The SL attempts to do this by drawing an analogy between the Serb-NATO war and the situation in Poland during the First World War. Here's how they put it:

"Our position toward Kosovo today is analogous to that of Lenin's Bolsheviks toward self-determination for Poland during the First World War. The right of Poland and other oppressed nations to secede from the Russian tsarist empire had been a central element of the Bolshevik program. However, with the outbreak of the war in 1914, the Polish left petty-bourgeois nationalist Josef Pilsudski organized military units which fought with the Austrian army against Russia under the banner of restoring 'Polish independence.' In the context of interimperialist

war, Lenin rightly argued that calls for independence only served as a 'democratic cover for German imperialism.'" (*Workers Vanguard*, May 28, 1999, p.11)

So according to this analogy, the SL argues or implies:

1) Since Lenin considered incorrect the slogan for independence of Poland during WWI, it was correct to defend Milosevic in the NATO-Serbian war.

2) While the right of self-determination of Poland and other nations oppressed by Czarist Russia had been correct before the war, Lenin stood against this view during WWI.

3) The concrete conditions in which it was correct to oppose a call for independence of Poland during WWI are analogous to those that exist in the recent conflict.

As we shall soon see, the SL is wrong on all these points. They confuse the right of an oppressed nation to self-determination with the question of whether, under all circumstances, to call for a struggle for an independence struggle. Lenin never held that the inadvisability of advocating independence means one should support the regime of the oppressing country. They wrongly imply Lenin no longer recognized the right to self-determination of Poland when WWI broke out and that Lenin's position against advocating the independence slogan for Poland reversed his pre-war stand. As well, the Spartacists err when they ignore the different conditions between when Lenin was writing about Poland and the recent conflict in Kosovo. Lenin's position on Poland around the time of WWI was conditioned by expectations of an imminent proletarian revolution in the major European countries and a revolution in Russia. In the Balkans today, however, the proletarian movement is weak and disorganized, and there is no genuine mass socialist trend.

Leninism or "defend Serbia"

Let's begin with the idea that the Polish analogy justifies the SL stand of "defend Serbia" and "military, but not political support" for Milosevic. It is true that Lenin was not in favor of advancing slogans for the independence of Poland in the midst of WWI. We shall go into the reasons behind this stand later in this article. But whether or not one feels that a call for independence under a particular set of conditions is appropriate, this does not mean one can toss aside the *right* of the oppressed nation to independence, that is, to secede from the state oppressing it. That would be tantamount to supporting the right of the oppressor state to forcibly hold on to its possession. This is the basic Marxist approach to the question. Now let's look at how Lenin applied this stand during WWI.

Did Lenin's opposition to the independence slogan at that time mean activists today should support the Serbian government in its recent war to crush the independence aspirations of the Albanian Kosovars? In fact, the lesson from Lenin's stand during WWI is just the opposite. Lenin did not support either German imperialism or Russian czarism, both of which claimed Poland as their own. Rather, he fought vigorously that not only before the war, but during the war, it was the duty of the Russian and German workers to uphold the right of Poland to self-

determination. Lenin was hoping that a united revolutionary struggle of the Polish, German and Russian workers would topple the powers oppressing Poland. He considered upholding the right of Poland to self-determination to be crucial to developing this proletarian unity.

Applying Lenin's stand to the recent war means opposing those who deny the Albanian Kosovars their right to secession and in particular, opposing the use of force to keep the Kosovars under their thumb. It would mean opposing the Serbian rulers, not "defending Serbia." And just as Lenin's opposition to Russia's enslavement of nations did not mean he had any sympathy for German designs on Poland, so opposition to the Serbian regime in the recent war does not mean one has to support the U.S./NATO alliance. A truly internationalist and Leninist stand would require opposition to both the NATO and Serbian sides in the war.

Far from supporting one or the other oppressor of Poland, here's how Lenin dealt with the question in July 1916, in the middle of WWI:

"The Polish Social-Democrats cannot, at the moment, raise the slogan of Poland's independence, for the Poles, as proletarian internationalists, can do *nothing* about it without stooping, like the 'Fracy' [the organization led by Pilsudski — Mark.] to humble servitude to *one* of the imperialist monarchies. **But it is not indifferent to the Russian and German workers whether Poland is independent, or they take part in annexing her** (and that would mean educating the Russian and German workers and peasants in the basest turpitude and their consent to play the part of executioner of other peoples).

The situation is, indeed, bewildering, but **there is a way out in which all participants would remain internationalists: the Russian and German Social-Democrats by demanding for Poland unconditional 'freedom to secede';** the Polish Social-Democrats by working for the unity of the proletarian struggle in both small and big countries without putting forward the slogan of Polish independence for the given epoch or the given period." (Lenin, *Collected Works*, vol.22, p.351, boldface emphasis added)

In their newspaper, *Workers Vanguard* the SL emphasizes only that Lenin was against pushing the slogan of independence of Poland at the time. They omit that also **during** the imperialist war Lenin stood for recognition of the right of Poland to secede from its Russian and German overlords. And the SL omits such information with good reason. If they were to stress this it would immediately be clear that their slogan of "defend Serbia" in the present war would be akin to "defend Germany" or "defend Russia," or "military but not political support" to the Kaiser or the Czar in WWI. It would be obvious that what they are raising is not merely whether under certain conditions a particular struggle for secession is advisable, but are supporting the oppressing states themselves. Indeed, while at one time the SL talked about the right of Kosovo to secede from Serbia, during

the war they hinted strongly that Serbia had a right to Kosovo. Thus, they attacked another organization for allegedly only feigning support for Serbia in the war because "They formally claim to oppose NATO and defend Serbia — 'though not in Kosova which they have no right to occupy' . . . But their support to the separatist Kosovo Liberation Army (UCK), which is simply a pawn of NATO, is nothing but *support to the imperialists' war aims in the Balkans.*" (*Workers Vanguard*, May 28, 1999, p.11)

Here the SL links the idea that the KLA (or UCK in Albanian) is nothing but a pawn of NATO with the idea that Serbia has a right to occupy Kosovo. But while the KLA formed a military alliance with NATO, this does not change the fact that the independence struggle was not a creation of NATO, which opposed it, and that the struggle launched by the KLA reflected the sentiments and enjoyed the active support of the Albanian masses. Moreover, no matter what one thinks of the KLA leadership, that can in no way provide a justification for the Serbian occupation. Let's make believe, for the sake of argument, that the KLA leaders were basically CIA agents, as a considerable amount of pseudo-leftists claim. This would not change the fact that the mass of the population has risen up to demand independence. It would not necessarily mean the aspirations and struggles undertaken by the people are suspect. Nor could it possibly justify Serbia's slaughter in Kosovo. After all, does the existence of a sell-out trade union leadership in the U.S. negate the legitimacy of the workers' struggles that break out? Certainly not. Far less would the existence of such labor traitors justify the capitalists' attacks on the workers. But in the case of Kosovo, that is how the SL reasons. They don't reject the policy of the KLA leadership to support the masses, but to justify the Serbian oppressors.

The SL logic is that since NATO has no noble motives in this war, then whoever NATO attacks must be fighting a just war. But even if we imagine that despite Serbia's oppression of Kosovo there was no insurgency there, and it was just a question of who would control Kosovo, Serbia or the NATO alliance, there would be no justice on either side. But the SL thinks that one should "defend Serbia" in its military efforts and ignores that even if the only other side in the conflict was a rival power which also wants control over Kosovo, this cannot justify Serbian oppression there. In short, even if we accept the SL appraisal of the KLA, their position winds up boosting the Serb chauvinist rulers. The twisted logic of the SL ends up implying that Milosevic's bloodthirsty rampage through Kosovo has become a liberation struggle against imperialism. Hail the Serbian occupation of Kosovo! This is what lies behind the theoretical fog created by the SL.

Perhaps someone will object that revolutionaries in the U.S. need merely oppose "their own" imperialists and whether or not they support Milosevic is irrelevant. But it was not considered irrelevant by Lenin. His Bolshevik party certainly did its internationalist duty against "its own" bourgeoisie. But Lenin also supported the struggle of the workers of Russia's rivals, not the rival ruling elite as SL does in the present case. Can anyone imagine Lenin, as a representative of the Russian proletariat, trying to build working class unity between the German, Polish

and Russian workers through backing the Kaiser? Likewise, support for Milosevic's carnage in Kosovo under slogans like "defend Serbia" undermines efforts to encourage opposition to U.S. and NATO imperialism. It also undermines the proletarian internationalist duty of class conscious workers here to encourage an independent proletarian trend in Serbia. The SL makes sure to accompany its "defend Serbia" position with talk about the great day when the workers rise up and establish socialism. But advocacy of "defend Serbia" does not encourage the development of a revolutionary trend in the U.S. or Serbia, but makes abandonment of the class struggle against the Serb rulers a requirement of the SL version of opposition to imperialism.

The "right to self-determination" and advocating independence

Another problem with the SL's attempt to use an analogy with Lenin's stand on Poland during WWI to justify support for the Serbian regime today is that it confuses the "right to self-determination" with whether or not one supports particular calls for independence.

It would not violate general Marxist theory to, in specific cases, be against pushing for a secessionist struggle, while steadfastly recognizing the *right* of the oppressed nationality to secede. For example, there may be cases where the oppressed nationality strives to rid itself of national oppression not by seceding, but through a united struggle with the workers of the oppressor nation to overthrow the oppressor nation. There may be cases where though there is national oppression, the growth of the class struggle in the oppressed nation puts the question of national independence on the back burner. There are times when a particular independence struggle would create such difficulties for the development of the class struggle on a regional or world scale, that it is the proletariat's duty to oppose calls for independence under such circumstances. Whereas bourgeois nationalists promote national independence (at least for their nation) as the highest goal and pretend that all social ills and class contradictions can be resolved through it, the revolutionary proletariat's highest priority is the development of the class struggle, and it is from this angle that it must determine the advisability of supporting particular calls for independence. But all this does not mean giving up unreserved recognition of the *right* of the oppressed nations to secede. In the midst of a polemic by Lenin aimed largely at the independence call of the Polish Socialist Party (the 'Fracy' of Pilsudski referred to above) we find the following passage:

"In our draft program we have advanced the demand for a republic with a democratic constitution that would guarantee, among other things, 'recognition of the right to self-determination for all nations forming part of the [Russian — Mark.] state'. . . . The Social-Democrats will always combat every attempt to influence national self-determination from without by violence or by any injustice. However, our unreserved recognition of the struggle for freedom of self-determination does not in any

way commit us to supporting every demand for national self-determination." (*Collected Works*, vol.6, p.452)

The SL talks about how before WWI Lenin considered recognition of the right to self-determination of Poland important. But in dealing with Lenin's stand during the war, the SL only talks about Lenin's opposition to advocating an independence struggle for Poland. By avoiding what Lenin's stand on the right of Poland to secede was during the war they create the impression that in opposing independence slogan for Poland, Lenin was negating the importance of upholding the right of Poland to secede during the war. As we have seen this is not true. Lest there be any doubt on this score, here is another example of Lenin's stand written during the war:

"'Recognition' of the independence of nations can be regarded as sincere *only* where the representative of the oppressor nation has demanded, **both before and during the war**, freedom of secession for the nation which is oppressed by *his own* 'fatherland'." (*Collected Works*, vol.22, p.164, boldface emphasis added)

If the SL had merely discussed whether the struggle against national oppression in Kosovo should assume the form of an independence struggle, this in itself would not have violated a Marxist approach. Instead they used Lenin's view that a particular struggle for independence was not advisable in order to negate the principle of the right of nations to self-determination during the NATO-Serbian conflict and justify Serbian oppression. Lenin defended the principle of subordinating all democratic demands, including national independence, to the overall interests of the class struggle. The SL has subordinated independence to the guns of the Serbian army.

Do the grounds on which Lenin opposed the slogan of independence for Poland during WWI apply to the Kosovar Albanian struggle?

This brings us to the question of what attitude to take toward the demand for the independence of Kosovo. Since the SL insists on the analogy with Lenin's stand on Poland, it would be worthwhile to review the conditions which led Lenin to his stand on Polish independence and see if the conditions in which the Albanian Kosovar struggle took place merit similar conclusions. In my opinion there are a number of important differences in these two situations which point to the fact that it makes sense to support the independence struggle in Kosovo.

In Lenin's writings one can find a number of references to the fact that he opposed the slogan for independence of Poland if the cost of achieving this independence was an all-European bloodbath like WWI. For instance he stated "to be in favor of an all-European war merely for the sake of restoring Poland is to be a nationalist of the worst sort, and to place the interests of a small number of Poles above those of the hundreds of millions of people who suffer from war." (*Collected Works*, vol.22, p.350) The Polish Socialist Party, also referred to as the "Fracy", were adherents of this nationalist policy, which Lenin opposed.

The idea of winning Polish independence by allying with one capitalist power against another was a long-standing policy of the Fracy. Its leader, Pilsudski, sought to gain assistance from Japan when the Russo-Japanese war broke out in 1904. Later Pilsudski began cultivating ties with Austria-Hungary, a Russian rival for control of Poland. This was the prelude to Pilsudski's policy during WWI of having his Polish units fight on the side of the alliance of Austria-Hungary and Germany. Pilsudski had also considered an alliance with France, Britain and the U.S. against Germany, but these powers were not interested in alienating their ally, Czarist Russia, which was not about to recognize an independent Poland. Lenin was wholeheartedly against the Fracy policy of inciting inter-imperialist war under an independence banner. Although it was not some independence uprising in Poland that initiated WWI, this general principle guided Lenin. He felt that even if Poland for one reason or another managed to become independent during WWI that this could not be a justification for perpetuating the general inter-imperialist slaughter.

When we look at the Kosovo independence struggle, we see that if the issue was solely preventing the greatest suffering for the masses, it was Milosevic's rampage against the Albanian people in Kosovo that was the source of by far the most extensive slaughter. Indeed Milosevic's efforts to try and physically exterminate or remove the Albanians from Kosovo left the Albanian population little choice but to rally to the independence struggle and flood the ranks of the KLA. The military involvement of NATO caused a number of casualties among the Serbian populace and greatly disrupted the economy. But the main source of bloodletting remained Milosevic's efforts to forcibly prevent the Albanian Kosovars from exercising their democratic rights.

Thus, while in the case of Poland, Lenin opposed the sacrifice of tens of millions of the working people for the sake of its independence, in the case of the independence movement against Milosevic's regime, the wholesale slaughter left the Kosovar Albanians no choice but to resist it. True, Milosevic was defeated only when NATO intervened. But the NATO intervention, reactionary though it was, was certainly not a more serious blow to the overall interests of the international class struggle than the Serbian regime destroying an entire people.

There are also arguments that class conscious workers should not be recommending an independence struggle because if independence was won this would lead to wider war. Such a possibility exists, but the denial of national rights in the region by Serbia, NATO and others has not only already led to one bloodbath after another, it has kept the cauldron of national antagonisms at the boiling point. NATO military involvement is an example of how the conflict has already spread, not because Kosovo is independent, but because the Milosevic insisted on continually ratcheting up the level of oppression in Kosovo. After all, the SL admits that Milosevic and NATO were in agreement on keeping Kosovo from gaining independence and maintaining it as part of Serbia. The U.S. and NATO were mainly trying to convince Milosevic that the best way for him to hold on to Kosovo would be to step back from the ethnic cleansing being used against the Albanian Kosovars. Had this

been done, there would have been no pretext, nor any reason from the imperialists' own standpoint, to hurl bombs at Serbia.

It is true that had an independent Kosovo been won, the oppressed Albanian population in Macedonia would likely be clamoring for their national rights. This was what the imperialist powers were hoping to avoid. They feared the spread of conflict into Macedonia, which might bring Albania into the fray on one side and Greece on the other. This would raise the threat of Turkey entering to oppose Greece and set these two NATO members at each other. But whether or not the Kosovar Albanians won independence, the oppressed nationalities in the region are still going to demand their rights. Meanwhile, the longer the Kosovar Albanians are denied their democratic rights, the deeper the national conflicts will become.

It also should be noted that there is a glaring contradiction between the SL's claims that it is worried about the Serbia-Kosovo war leading to a regional and maybe even a world war, and its stand of defending Serbia. If they were serious about avoiding a wider war and believed an independence struggle in Kosovo would touch off such a war, they would have been urging both the Kosovar population and the Serbian regime to back down, not celebrating the Serbian war effort.

At one point the SL themselves recognized the legitimacy of the independence struggle in Kosovo "so long as the separatist struggle is not subordinated to direct military intervention by the imperialists." (*Workers Vanguard*, Oct.23, 1998, p.9) In fact when NATO bombing began, the SL justified the Serb war against the Albanians of Kosovo. So evidently since Serbia is not a big imperialist power, only a regional capitalist bully, they fully support subordinating the independence struggle to *Serbian* military intervention. But no matter the sordid reasoning of the SL, this raises the issue of what attitude to take toward a separatist struggle that links up with NATO. To the extent that the leadership of the independence movement subordinates itself to the NATO's aims, the movement suffers. But this does not necessarily mean that a struggle itself is no longer valid, but that the leadership has not been able to keep its own independent stand. There are many cases where the bourgeois or petty-bourgeois leaders of various independence struggles undermine the struggle and make bad concessions to imperialism, but by itself this does not mean there is something suspect about the demand for independence in these instances.

Why Lenin opposed orienting the struggle in Poland toward independence *before* WWI

Actually, contrary to the SL presentation, Lenin did not suddenly change his mind on whether the Polish workers should advocate independence when WWI broke out, but had formed an opinion against pushing for a secessionist movement long before the war. If we are to draw a serious comparison between Lenin's stand and the Kosovar struggle, we must take account of the reasons behind Lenin's stand on the Polish struggle before the war, too.

Lenin's opposition to orienting the Polish struggle toward independence was not based on callousness toward the national oppression of the Poles by "his own" Russian imperialists.

Rather, it was his evaluation that there would be a united revolutionary struggle of Polish and Russian workers whose aim was not merely splitting Poland off from the Czarist empire, but overthrowing Czarism itself along with its Polish bourgeois allies, and the establishment of a new revolutionary-democratic power. The struggle would raise the banner of complete democratic rights for the Polish population, including the right to secede.

Among the particular factors involved in this judgment was the growing revolutionary trend in Russia. The Russian workers had established their own revolutionary class party, and this party considered it a principle to recognize the right of self-determination for all the oppressed nations within the Russian Empire, which amounted to the majority of the population under Czarist rule. It was also Lenin's opinion that it was unlikely that the Polish bourgeoisie itself would take up the independence movement. Rather it was developing its alliance with the German and Russian ruling classes. This, along with the growth of the proletarian movement, meant that a class struggle between the united working classes and the alliance of the bourgeois rulers was in the works. Lenin pointed out that when Marx and Engels correctly backed the Polish independence struggle of the 1860s, these conditions did not exist. For instance, at that time, Poland was a hotbed of the bourgeois-democratic revolution while the struggle of the Russian masses was in a relative stupor. In Lenin's opinion, the conditions that would merit advocating a secessionist struggle had ended around the end of the 19th century. At least as far back as 1903, Lenin polemicized against the approach of the "Fracy", which amounted to making the main issue Poland's separation from Czarist Russia, while whether Czarism itself fell was a matter only for the Russian workers.

In the case of the Kosovar Albanian struggle, there is not a class conscious revolutionary trend either in Serbia or Kosovo. The bourgeois opposition trends to Milosevic in Serbia themselves spread chauvinism and do not recognize the right to self-determination. Meanwhile, a proletarian trend has not yet developed to combat the chauvinism of the bourgeois trends. As well, the oppression of the Albanian Kosovars has become so extreme that they can hardly survive as long as they are under Serbian rule. Along with the lack among the masses of a revolutionary class trend distinct from the elite, there is great interest in independence among the Albanian bourgeois elements. Under the autonomy system set up by Tito in the late 1960s, a section of the Albanian elite was co-opted by the Yugoslav authorities. But the dismantling of this system has pushed the Albanian bourgeois elements toward independence, too. Many of them backed the KLA. In these conditions, there was little chance that the struggle against national oppression would assume anything but the form of a secessionist struggle. If there was a likelihood of a united proletarian struggle, then it would be reasonable for the class conscious workers in Serbia and Kosovo to campaign for it as opposed to secession. But to reject the independence struggle when no other type of resistance could have taken place and when the struggle was forced upon the Albanian population, is back-handed support for the Serbian aggression.

The unity of the proletariat of Serbia and Kosovo remains of paramount importance. But in this case separation would help facilitate this unity by allowing the Albanian workers to approach the Serb workers as equals and helping free the Yugoslav workers from the burden of being used to put down their class brothers and sisters in Kosovo.

General theorizing against the right to self-determination

The SL, for all its phrases about the right to self-determination, actually theorizes against it. Not only in Kosovo do they deny this right. For instance, the SL denies this right to the nations that made up the former Soviet Union. They promoted a leaflet for circulation in Russia which talks about "the right of every nation **with an anti-counterrevolutionary leadership** to whatever self-determination it considers necessary."¹ With their own little addendum, "with an anti-counterrevolutionary leadership", the SL assaults the stand of Marxism which considers as a general principle the right of oppressed nations to self-determination. Rather they preach denial of such rights to any oppressed people whose leadership they do not like. In practice, this has meant supporting the counterrevolutionary leadership of the bourgeoisie of the oppressing nations. Thus, for instance, they cheered on the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and wanted to see the Soviet Union militarily crush any nation that chose to split off from the old Soviet Union (even though they themselves supposedly considered the leadership of the Soviet Union counter-revolutionary!). This also shows that when the SL talks about not supporting an independence movement that is subordinated to the military intervention of imperialism in Kosovo they are lumping together the question of what attitude to take toward the various stands of the leadership and the actual struggle of the population against national oppression.

Contrary to the way the SL presents things, Lenin supported many independence struggles despite his misgivings about their leaderships. Far less did he deny the oppressed nation's freedom to secede on these grounds. Rather, he emphasized the need to recognize the different class trends in these struggles so as to insure they achieved the most thorough victory. He sought the development of proletarian parties in the oppressed nations and recognized the tendency of the bourgeois elements to betray the movement. Lenin wrote:

"All national oppression calls for the resistance of the *broad masses* of the people; and the resistance of a nationally oppressed population always *tends* to national revolt. Not infrequently (notably in Austria and Russia) we find the bourgeoisie of the oppressed nations *talking* of national revolt, while in practice it enters into reactionary compacts with the

¹*Workers Vanguard*, Nov. 30, 1990, emphasis added. This quote and related material can be found in *Communist Voice*, vol.2, #5, Oct. 1, 1996, p.40.

bourgeoisie of the oppressor nation behind the backs of, *and against*, its own people. In such cases the criticism of revolutionary Marxists should be directed not against the national movement, but against its degradation, vulgarization, and the tendency to reduce it to a petty squabble." (*Collected Works*, vol.23, p.61)

The SL further theorizes on national self-determination in the following way:

"The formation of the classic nation-states in West Europe of the 17th centuries was also a bloody, protracted process. But it was linked to the extension of trade, the development of the national market and the rise of the bourgeoisie. However, under imperialism, in relatively backward capitalist countries the development of the national economy and the emergence of a vigorous bourgeoisie are stifled by imperialist exploitation and domination. Thus national consolidation under capitalism has been reduced to its stark component of communal savagery to drive out or eliminate minority nationalities." (*Workers Vanguard*, Oct. 23, 1998, p.9)

In other words, according to the Spartacists, the formation of nation-states was OK for the major countries of West Europe, despite the horrors involved. But today, those oppressed nations which seek to form independent states are simply engaging in pointless carnage because they can't eliminate all forms of domination of the imperialist powers. Such reasoning makes a mockery of the SL claims to recognize the right of nations to self-determination. Nor does the reasoning make sense. First of all, the right to self-determination of nations means nothing more than the right to a separate state. It is a democratic political demand which redresses one of the forms of national oppression that exists under capitalism. To deny it has any importance on the grounds that it won't stop the economic domination of the most powerful capitalist countries is like denying any importance to blacks or women getting the right to vote, or women having abortion rights, because these things do not eliminate economic exploitation. Secondly, if demanding political independence is just meaningless bloodletting if a country is economically dependent, this means granting that privilege only to the most powerful economic countries, which would exclude all but a handful of nations. Taking this seriously means mocking at all the independence struggles which destroyed the old colonial system in most of the world, among which were some of the most profound revolutionary movements of the century.

But what of the argument that state independence no longer has anything to do with consolidating the rise of the bourgeoisie and consolidating the national capitalist market because imperialism prevents this? The history of this century disproves this. The destruction of colonialism had everything to do with the consolidation of the home market by the national bourgeoisie of the oppressed nations. This didn't mean that the economic domination of the world by a few of the biggest powers disappeared. But it is also true that the downfall of the old

colonial relations was accompanied by an explosion of capitalist development in the former colonies and semi-colonies and the growing strength of the national bourgeoisie.²

The history of the 20th century bore out the opinion that Lenin gave in the early years of this century. In combating the "imperialist economism" of those who argued like the SL today that the independent national state is a myth or reactionary quest in the colonies, Lenin stated:

"We cannot say whether Asia will have time to develop into a system of independent national states, like Europe, before the collapse of capitalism, but it remains an undisputed fact that capitalism, having awakened Asia, has called forth national movements everywhere in that continent too; that the tendency of these movements is toward the creation of national states in Asia; that it is such states that ensure the best conditions for the development of capitalism." (*Collected Works*, vol.20, pp.399-400)

The SL position is that national independence has nothing to do with the economic development of native capitalism. Lenin's position is that the national movements striving for their own

²The SL is wrong when it contends that national liberation struggles don't assist the development of capitalism and the bourgeoisie in the oppressed nations. But, it might be asked, if capitalism and the bourgeoisie are strengthened, why are the national liberation and democratic revolutions in the interest of the working class?

Any democratic revolution, no matter how radical, cannot do away with class exploitation but rather will lead to the development of capitalism in one form or another. Only socialism can uproot economic exploitation. But doing away with a particularly severe form of national oppression takes a major burden off the shoulders of the working masses. In so doing, it helps the workers and poor peasants see that the source of their oppression is not simply foreign domination, but capitalism itself. By abolishing a particular form of national enslavement, the national liberation struggle clears the way for a more direct class struggle.

The growth of class consciousness is a reflection of the growth of capitalist economic relations. The democratic and independence revolutions have generally meant more room for the development of the bourgeoisie of the oppressed nation. This is not just a matter of a relatively few larger local capitalists getting stronger. The democratic revolutions can offer better conditions for the growth of peasant production, which gives rise to further capitalist relations in the countryside. Competition among the peasant producers leads to class differentiation among them, with a relatively small group of peasant bourgeois exploiters at one pole, and a mass of landless wage workers at the other. In short, the democratic revolutions, by paving the way for a fuller capitalistic development, have helped create the huge growth of the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, and prepared conditions for the class struggle which eventually will end capitalist exploitation itself.

states creates the best conditions for the development of capitalism. Capitalism and the domestic bourgeoisie were very little developed in most of Asia in Lenin's time. But the development of national states there has everything to do with the rapid development of capitalism there out of which any number of quite vigorous national bourgeoisies have developed, the so-called "Asian tigers" for example.

While denying the right of self-determination, the SL writes that:

"A democratic and equitable resolution of the conflicting national claims in the Balkans can only be achieved through socialist revolution which brings the multinational proletariat to power." (*Workers Vanguard*, Oct. 23, 1998, p.9)

There is no doubt that it takes the abolition of capitalism and its class oppression to completely do away with all forms of national oppression. But how are the toilers from the oppressor state and those of the oppressed nation to be unified in the future socialist state? It's fine to talk about the future proletarian power uniting all the nationalities. But if that unity is not a free, voluntary unity, then national antagonisms will fester and the so-called "socialism" discredited. Simply talking about socialism solving national conflicts while belittling the right of the oppressed nations to form their own separate states means tolerating a form of national oppression. It means unifying the different nations without regard to the will of the people who are to be incorporated in the new state power. Such an outlook befits an organization which "defends Serbia" in the recent conflict. But it has nothing in common with Lenin's outlook. In reply to those in his day who saw the right of self-determination as being in conflict with uniting various nations within larger proletarian states, Lenin stated:

"The aim of socialism is not only to end the division of mankind into tiny states and the isolation of nations in any form, it is not only to bring the nations closer together but to integrate them. And it is precisely in order to achieve this aim that we must . . . demand the liberation of oppressed nations in a clearly and precisely formulated political program that takes special account of the hypocrisy and cowardice of socialists in the oppressor nations, and not by way of 'relegating' the question until socialism has been achieved." (*Collected Works*, vol.22, pp.146-47)

The SL too avoids a clear formulation as to the relation of the right to self-determination to overcoming various nation antagonisms in the Balkans. It too "relegates" the issue away behind socialist phrases.

The *Spark's* reluctance to support the right of Kosovo to self-determination

In contrast to the SL, the *Spark* group does not give slogans like "defend Serbia." In their agitation intended for wide distribution, they have a few words condemning Milosevic, but their appeal is confined to condemning NATO's bombing campaign while avoiding the question of the right to secession

for the Albanian Kosovars. So while they don't openly support Milosevic, they don't challenge the Serb regime's right to control Kosovo either.

In their magazine, *Class Struggle*, which contains their more authoritative articles, they carry an article entitled "Kosovo-Serbia: Against the barbarism of ethnic war, against the barbarism of the bombing, for the right of self-determination of all people". (May/June 1999) From the title one might imagine that at least in their theoretical journal, the *Spark* will take a clear cut stand for the right of national self-determination for the Albanian Kosovars. But if you look at the article closely, it's hard to see how it defends this right at all. Indeed, the only place in this article where it clearly spells out this right of "the Kosovar people to decide for themselves whether to be independent or to attach themselves to Albania" is where it points out that this right is denied by the Rambouillet agreement. True enough, Rambouillet keeps Kosovo as part of Serbia and under a NATO protectorate. So even where the issue is raised, the issue of the Serbian bourgeoisie's denial of this right is used mainly to show that we must oppose NATO. Thus, the issue of denial of the right of self-determination by Serbia independently of anything that NATO wants is downplayed.

For the same reason, the same *Spark* article emphasizes that the issue in this war is the "right of self-determination of all people". But which people were fighting for self-determination in this particular conflict? The Albanian Kosovars certainly were. What about the Serbian side of the conflict? Were they waging a battle for the self-determination of Serbia? Was the fight against NATO a liberation war? Most certainly not. But the *Spark's* hazy formulation about this being a conflict involving self-determination for "all people" leaves open that possibility. And in their leaflet of May 17, 1999 distributed in Detroit, the *Spark* describes NATO's war with Serbia as a "war against all the peoples of Yugoslavia" while maintaining silence on the question of Serbia's denial of the right of self-determination for the Kosovar Albanians. So, according to the *Spark*, the Serbian government's denial of the national rights of the Kosovars is not at stake in the war, only the contradiction between "all the peoples of Yugoslavia" and NATO. Thus, while they speak of the "evil" of Milosevic, the war is basically portrayed as if it were a liberation war in which the Serbian side is fighting on the same front against foreign imperialism as the Albanian and other nationalities. Certainly unity between the Albanian and Serbian masses is desirable. But this has nothing to do with the content of the *actual* war against NATO because the conflict was between Serbia's right to oppress versus NATO's right to oppress.³

But even if we grant that somewhere the *Spark* sort of recognizes the right of the Albanian Kosovars to national self-determination, we must also note that these instances are overwhelmed by a host of other *Spark* arguments against the

³The *Spark's* assertion that the war was between NATO and all the peoples of Yugoslavia also ignores that Montenegro is still a part of Yugoslavia, and that Montenegro did not support the Serbian war effort.

right to national self-determination in general.

Is national self-determination an imperialist plot?

One of their arguments is that the demand for nation-states by peoples in the developing world is simply an imperialist plot. They state:

"Since the days of the rise of nation-states in Europe two centuries ago, the capitalist class has always supported the idea of dividing the world into such political entities. Within their own borders, this has provided the native capitalists a home market which they can use as a base from which they can compete with rival capitalists from other countries. In the underdeveloped and colonized regions of the world, on the other hand, the existence of rival nation-states has enabled the capitalists based in the rich countries to control and exploit local populations. To this end, the capitalists have always supported — and played against each other — local nationalist leaders." (*The Spark*, Oct.12-26, 1998, p.5)

So while the *Spark* finds it reasonable that the big powers formed nation states, the same desire by other nationalities they consider suspect. After all, they reason, haven't the big states "always" supported the idea of the colonial peoples forming their own states? In order to "prove" that the formation of any new states is bad, the *Spark* merely has to deny the whole history of the more powerful states efforts to forcibly deny freedom to their subject peoples to form independent states. They merely have to forget the entire system of colonialism and semi-colonialism when the big European, American, and Japanese states massacred their subjects who demanded independence. It's true that one imperialist power may give some assistance to the liberation movement of a nation oppressed by its rivals. But this does not negate the basic content of the struggles against the old-style colonialism. It merely shows that at best the bourgeoisie only supports self-determination in an inconsistent and hypocritical fashion.

The end of the old colonialism meant that the imperialists were forced to recognize independent states, but the big imperialist powers continued to exercise economic and political domination over them in other forms. As well, the imperialists do continue to play one state against another both among the developing countries and among themselves. But how does that discredit the abolition of the old colonialism, one of the most odious forms of national oppression? One may as well argue that ending Jim Crow segregation was pointless because the American capitalists still oppress black people in various other ways. Just like the SL, the *Spark* ignores that the drive for political independence has its source in the desire of the masses to free themselves from the worst type of oppression. They also ignore that the bourgeoisies (or aspiring bourgeoisies) in the oppressed nations which seek independence, do so for the same reason that the bourgeoisie in the established powers long ago sought their own national states, namely, to consolidate the development of

native capitalism.

Perhaps it might be thought that the struggle for national liberation from the big imperialists is good. But today the bourgeoisies of some of the former colonies and other countries themselves face independence movements from peoples they oppress. Are these struggles just an imperialist plot to divide and weaken these countries? Actually, the big imperialist powers are often quite happy to tolerate the national oppression in the less powerful capitalist countries. The U.S. and its NATO allies involved themselves in the Kosovo-Serbia conflict to deny the Albanian population the right to self-determination, as the *Spark* itself acknowledges. There are many other instances where the imperialists are more than happy to sacrifice the national ambitions of oppressed peoples to preserve the state boundaries of some other country. In the case of the Kurds, for example, U.S. imperialism not only has supported its ally Turkey rather than the Kurds, but also has betrayed the Kurds of Iraq who suffer at the hands of Saddam Hussein regime, a government on the State Department hit list. Historically, U.S. imperialism had hardly been in the forefront of liberating the East Timorese people from the oppression of Suharto's Indonesia, thereby missing another opportunity to divide up a country. This does not mean that imperialist powers always oppose a nation seceding. But even in these cases, it hardly proves the independence struggle was a creation of imperialism. Whether one day some imperialist country recognizes an independent Kosovo, or whether in the near future the imperialists broker a deal with the Indonesian government that results in independence for East Timor, this does not change the fact that these struggles arose on their own basis, and that these peoples are entitled to their own national state if that is their desire.

If we apply this bogus *Spark* theory to the case at hand, we can only conclude that the independence demands of the Kosovar Albanians are something invented by NATO. But now the *Spark* runs into the problem that they themselves point out that NATO does not want Kosovo to be independent. To extricate themselves from this dilemma the *Spark* concocts the incredible theory that the idea of national self-determination is responsible for NATO's denial of national rights in Kosovo!

The *Spark* explains that:

"... the same powers who wrote and sponsored the 1995 Dayton Accord, partitioning Bosnia along ethnic lines, now have all of a sudden become champions of Yugoslavia's 'national sovereignty.'

"Is this a contradiction? Not at all, if one understands the motives of these great powers.

"Since the days of the rise of nation-states in Europe two centuries ago, the capitalist class has always supported the idea of dividing the world into such political entities." (*The Spark*, Oct.12-26 1998, p.5)

So according to this theory, both the rotten partitioning of Bosnia on ethnic lines, and the opposition of NATO to Kosovo independence, can be blamed on the big European powers inventing the concept of nation-states. But what do the Dayton Accords and the NATO support for Serbia's desire to forcibly

enslave Kosovo have to do with the right of self-determination? Not a thing. They are merely expressions of NATO's cynicism about the right to self-determination. But in the *Spark's* desire to create a bogey man out of national self-determination, any nonsense will do.

The *Spark* frets over the alteration of Yugoslavia's former borders

While the *Spark* acknowledges Serb domination in the former Yugoslavia and the horrific crimes of Milosevic against the other nationalities, it's highest principle is the retention of the old Yugoslavian state. Thus, the will of the people of the non-Serb nationalities within this state is dismissed as a minor matter. With this attitude, the *Spark* sees nothing in the break-up of the old Yugoslavia but tragedy. They raise that the separatist movements were led by nationalist cliques backed by imperialism which committed their own atrocities. Thus,

while "the transformation of administrative boundaries into true borders between different states which came out of the former Yugoslav federation" . . . "seemed to be a harmless, innocent change" . . . "it's consequences were to become catastrophic." (*Class Struggle*, May/June 1999, p.3)

But what caused the catastrophe? Did the Albanian Kosovars' desire to escape the brutal national oppression by splitting from Milosevic's Serbia cause the tragedy? Milosevic and his supporters think so. Actually it was the failure of the Serbian state to recognize the democratic rights of the other nationalities which has set the whole region on fire. The former state unity of Yugoslavia that the *Spark* weeps for could only be maintained at gunpoint. Clearly, it is impossible to uphold the right of oppressed nations to secede, while fretting about the alteration of state borders that necessarily accompany independence.

What about the "nationalist cliques" in the oppressed nations?

But what of the bad things done by the non-Serb nationalist cliques? Any crimes of the rival nationalist cliques should be opposed. But that cannot be an excuse for, in effect, supporting the borders demanded by the dominant Serbian nationalist clique at the expense of the oppressed populations. There are two ways to counter the atrocities of the non-Serb nationalist cliques. One is to long for bringing back the "good old days" of Serb domination. The other is to work for building the unity of the proletariat of Serb and non-Serb workers, which requires support for the right to secession of the oppressed nationalities.

Lenin knew full well the propensity of the bourgeoisie in the oppressed nations to themselves mistreat other nationalities. But he ridiculed the idea of using this to oppose the right to self-determination. Thus, in arguing against those who complained about what the bourgeoisie in the oppressed nation might do if that nation waged a liberation struggle, he stated:

"It looks as if the Polish comrades are *against* this type of revolt on the grounds that there is *also* a bourgeoisie in these annexed countries which *also* oppresses foreign peoples or, more exactly, could oppress them, since the question is one of the '*right to oppress*.' Consequently, the given war or revolt is not assessed on the strength of its *real* social content (the struggle of an oppressed nation for its liberation from the oppressor nation) but the possible exercise of the '*right to oppress*' by a bourgeoisie which is at present itself oppressed." (*Collected Works*, vol.22, p.332)

Applied to the Kosovar Albanian struggle, this means that while revolutionary activists should oppose any persecution of Serbs in Kosovo on the basis of their nationality, by no means should such a possibility be used to deny the basic liberation content of the Kosovar Albanian struggle to split off from Serbian-dominated Yugoslavia.

Was unity in the old Yugoslavia achieved by "ignoring ethnicity"?

The *Spark* likes to talk about the unity of the old Yugoslavia, but ignores that such unity must be on a voluntary basis. It would have been good if all the nationalities could be united within the borders of the old Yugoslavia on this basis. But state unity cannot be the highest principle. If nationalities feel compelled to leave, complaining that it's a tragedy means respecting state borders more than the wishes of the peoples. The *Spark's* sentimentality for maintaining the old Yugoslavian borders continually betrays a lack of understanding of how to foster unity among the nationalities. Take for example the following claim:

". . . Tito's Yugoslavia provided a framework which went beyond that of the former micro-states; it allowed the different peoples finally to ignore ethnicity and, instead, simply declare themselves Yugoslavs." (*Class Struggle*, May/June 1999, p.3)

Tito had a milder policy toward the non-Serb nationalities than did Milosevic, and this no doubt helped keep Yugoslavia together. But this was not due to "ignoring ethnicity" but, to a certain extent, recognizing national rights. For example, as regards the Albanian Kosovars, in the late 1960s the Tito regime extended their autonomous rights, though they were still second-class citizens. The granting of partial rights however, did not mean that now national issues would henceforth be of minor importance, but tended to make the remaining national indignities all the more intolerable and the demands for complete democratic rights for the nationalities all the more urgent. The Titoite framework had prevented the nationalities in Yugoslavia from splitting up, but also led to further national demands. Milosevic, on the other hand, undid what national rights existed for the Albanian Kosovars and thereby guaranteed the desire for independence would grow.

The Tito example shows that it was not because all the

different nationalities could call themselves Yugoslavs and ignore their particular national conditions that accounts for more feelings of unity among the different national groups. Rather, the various nationalities were willing to call themselves Yugoslavs due to at least a partial recognition that there was a need to extend certain national rights. For the *Spark*, the way to maintain state unity of the old Yugoslavia is to pretend that there are no national issues to deal with, and hence, no need to deal with matters like whether or not a particular nationality wants to secede, and no need to grant rights to do such.⁴

The Cliffites theorize against the right to self-determination

The same general theoretical approach to the right of nations to self-determination of the SL and the *Spark* is taken up by the International Socialists (IS), the followers of Tony Cliff's theories. The Cliffites too, claim that NATO military intervention means that the right of self-determination for the Kosovar Albanians can be shelved, at least temporarily. For instance, in a joint declaration of the IS affiliates, it claims that while they support the right to self-determination for Kosovo,

"Nevertheless, we don't believe that the Kosovar Albanians' right to self-determination can at the present time be counterposed to NATO's war against Serbia. For it is quite likely that, if the war continues, the Western powers will reverse their opposition to the establishment of a Kosovan state." . . . (Socialist Worker, New Zealand, April 26, 1999, p.6)

What does the IS declaration mean when it says the right of self-determination can no longer be "counterposed to NATO's war"? In an adjacent companion article by Alex Callinicos they argue that "the KLA is becoming an instrument of NATO" and therefore "this is NATO's war". According to the IS, since this is NATO's war, and since the West might recognize an independent Kosovo, we can no longer hold that in this war NATO is a force counter to the "right to self-determination." So, the IS argument goes, if NATO wants independence, then the Kosovar Albanians should have no right to be independent. Presumably the IS is now breathing a sigh of relief as it has become clear that Kosovo won't become independent as long as the Western powers have any say in the matter.

Judging whether an oppressed nation has the right to political independence on whether or not this or that imperialist supports

it, even hypocritically, can only lead to vacillating on the question of national self-determination. Rather than repeat the arguments previously made, let's look at another independence struggle to see the absurdity of this position. East Timor won its liberation from Portuguese colonialism in 1975, but the fruits of victory were snatched away by Indonesia, which quickly annexed East Timor through a genocidal war. A mass independence movement has since been continuing on against Indonesia. The big Western powers generally supported the Suharto regime, despite whatever formal declarations against the annexation of East Timor they may have issued. Yet in recent years there has been a push by the UN and the former colonial occupier of East Timor, Portugal, along with the main independence groups in East Timor, to negotiate an end to Indonesian colonial rule. Meanwhile, some independence groups have been tempting the wealthier capitalist states with lucrative economic concessions on East Timor territory in return for their support for independence. The final result of this process is still unknown. But regardless of whether the foreign capitalist countries wind up supporting political independence for East Timor or not, this does not undermine the legitimacy of the right to self-determination for East Timor. Likewise, the fact that NATO *may* support independence, doesn't change whether the Kosovar Albanians deserve the right to national self-determination.

Of course it could be argued that in East Timor there has been no military intervention by foreign capitalist countries. But what if the upcoming UN-organized vote in East Timor on independence was accompanied by the stationing of "peace-keeping" troops from foreign capitalist countries? No doubt the left is obligated to point out the dangers and false promises that will arise from such foreign capitalist intervention. But on no account could this be used to justify Indonesian rule. Just because some capitalist countries may agree to it doesn't mean that there is no right to self-determination for East Timor. As it turns out, the UN deal will, shamefully, allow the Indonesian government a big role in the security arrangements for the elections. This will be a great assistance to the anti-independence paramilitary gangs who are trying to intimidate pro-independence voters. Nevertheless a contingent of UN military and civilian forces are heading to East Timor to oversee the elections. If it turns out that a fairly free vote takes place and the vote is decided in favor of independence, a UN protectorate will be created by international capitalism which is supposed to eventually allow for independence. Will the UN authority wind up really accepting East Timor's independence? In any case, this would not affect the legitimacy of its right to secede from Indonesia.

The same IS joint statement, anticipating the possibility that NATO would back a ground war where the KLA did most of the fighting, adds that,

"In a protracted war, Kosovan fighters may come to seem attractive proxies for the Western ground troops Clinton and his allies are so desperate to avoid committing. Their role would be, like the mujahedin in Afghanistan and the contras in Nicaragua, to fight and die on Washington's behalf."

⁴In contrast to the *Spark's* attitude, Lenin said the following:

"It is our duty to teach the workers to be 'indifferent' to national distinctions. There is no doubt about that. But it must not be the indifference of the *annexationists*. A member of an oppressor nation must be 'indifferent' to whether small nations belong to *his state or to a neighboring state*, or to themselves, according to where their sympathies lie" (Collected Works, vol.22, pp.346-347.)

When this joint statement criticizes NATO for not supporting the right to self-determination, they note that "the U.S. State Department described the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) as 'terrorists', giving Milosevic the green light to go on the offensive against them." But what is the IS doing when it tries to equate the KLA with the Afghani mujahedin and the Nicaraguan contras?

In attempting to equate the contras with the KLA, the IS trend manages to overlook that the contras were not fighting for the independence of Nicaragua, but to overturn a revolution against the U.S.-backed Somoza dictatorship. The KLA is wrong to promote illusions in Western capitalism and the NATO war effort. But if they are the same as the Nicaraguan contras, then their attempt to fight the Serbian occupiers was also wrong regardless of NATO military intervention. After all, the contra cause was counterrevolutionary whether or not the U.S. backed them. Indeed, the attempt to equate the Albanian Kosovar cause with that of the contras has been the stock-in-trade of the naked Milosevic supporters like the WWP. Equating the contras and the KLA amounts to discrediting the very notion of a struggle by the Albanian Kosovars against Milosevic.

What then of the comparison between the Afghani mujahedin and the KLA? The forces that came to dominate the resistance to the Soviet Union's imperialist invasion of Afghanistan were divided among different feudal chieftains, some of whom wanted to restore the monarchy and some who wanted an extreme medieval Islamic theocracy. Massive U.S. funding helped assure that these backward trends were the most powerful forces in the fight against the Soviet occupation. After the Soviets left, various factions fought for control of Afghanistan, with the most fanatical theocrats now imposing their own tyranny over the masses. This experience showed that both during the fight against the Soviet invasion and afterwards, the Afghani masses had to find their own independent path, not that fighting the Soviet invasion was unjust.⁵

While it's true that both the mujahedin and the KLA accepted Western capitalist aid, the implication that the KLA stands for building a monarchy or a strict theocratic regime is not based on serious evidence. In fact it is not even true that the mujahedin were simply fighting on Washington's behalf. Indeed part of the U.S. fears over arming the KLA were that there would be a repeat of their experience in Afghanistan where, despite their aid, they wound up with little influence after the Soviets left. Nevertheless, *if* the IS merely criticized the KLA support for NATO while continuing to show enthusiasm for the Albanian Kosovar fight for independence, that would be useful. Instead, when NATO bombs began to fall, they dropped their

⁵It's interesting that the Cliffites currently fret about a struggle against the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Most Trotskyists groups felt that since the Soviet Union was some kind of workers' state or socialist, the Soviet Union's war on the Afghani people was progressive. The Cliffites, however, say that the Soviet Union is "state-capitalist," but also can't seem to understand that this huge state-capitalist power was conducting an imperialist war.

slogans in favor of the Albanian Kosovar cause and replaced serious criticism of the KLA with hysterical accusations. Rather than seriously dealing with the actual problems of the KLA leadership, they have taken up any slander in the manner of the open defenders of Milosevic. This type of "criticism" is not assisting the Albanian Kosovars, but Milosevic's propaganda campaign against them.

Once again on Polish independence and WWI

The Cliffites also try to justify withdrawal of support for the right to self-determination in the midst of the NATO-Serbia war by referring back to Lenin's stand on Poland during WWI. Since their arguments are very similar to those of the Spartacists earlier described, we will not repeat them in detail all over again. But to confirm the general similarity, let's briefly glance at the article by Chris Harman of the SWP of Britain entitled "Divide and conquer: Chris Harman on self-determination and national liberation."⁶

This article starts off emphasizing the general principle of support for the right of nations to self-determination, quoting Marx's statement that "A nation which oppresses another cannot itself be free." But then we learn that when the Polish nationalists aligned themselves with the Kaiser, Lenin opposed the slogan of Polish independence. Thereafter the article is simply silent about whether the opposition to pushing a slogan for independence at that moment meant Lenin opposed recognizing the right of Poland to secede at that moment. As we demonstrated earlier, Lenin castigated those who denied this right during the war.

Harman obscures this point. He writes that "the whole international socialist movement had traditionally identified with the demand of the Poles for national rights" but implies they gave this up after the Polish nationalists aligned with the German imperialists. Lenin's stand was that it was vital to recognize Polish national rights, including the right to secede, even during the war. But he was not for advocating the Polish independence slogan during WWI because: 1) he had been against it before the war, expecting the struggle against national oppression in Poland to be solved by a united revolutionary struggle against Czarism itself, rather than an independence struggle; and 2) during the war he emphasized, as the Harman article itself mentions, that if support for WWI was required for Polish independence, support for Polish independence would sacrifice the general interests of the world's masses for the sake of a relatively small population of Poles. Not only do the Cliffites echo the Spartacists' distortions of the underlying principles of Lenin's stand on Poland. The IS, like the Spartacists, ignore that the particular conditions in which Lenin took his stand recommending the struggle in Poland not be fought as an independence movement do not prevail in the present conflict. There is no general proletarian interest, like

⁶This article was found on the SWP of Britain web site (www.swp.org.uk). It is carried in hard copy form in this party's *Socialist Review*, #230, May 1999.

opposition to WWI or the expectations of imminent socialist revolutions, that is being sacrificed because the Albanian Kosovars choose not to be completely decimated by Milosevic's stormtroopers.

Once again on the right of oppressed nations to form their own states

Like the other trends we have examined, Chris Harman also sees the right of self-determination of nations as nothing but a Pandora's box, ready to inflict horrors on the innocent. He does not refer to a single good thing happening from the liberation of oppressed nations. Rather, referring to the national movements in the Balkans, Harman states, "In each case, the other side of the establishment of the national state was the oppression of national minorities within it." So for Harman, presumably the establishment of an independent Kosovo should be opposed not merely because NATO started bombing Serbia (the former excuse), but because national self-determination is itself suspect. Applied to the present situation, this would mean that under no conditions could independence for Kosovo be raised. Yet, the IS trend itself feels uneasy at consistently applying this theory because they themselves gave the slogan "Independence for Kosovo!" even as they were issuing slogans against the NATO war, though later the pro-independence slogans were withdrawn.⁷

Of course, it is possible to show that not only in the Balkans, but around the world, discrimination against national minorities still exists in countries that won independence from the old colonial system. But that does not show that the abolition of the old colonial system was bad, but that to abolish *all forms* of national inequality requires abolishing capitalism. The struggle against the old colonialism greatly assisted this process in that, by clearing away that form of national oppression, it cleared the ground for the class struggle against the national bourgeoisie, which often discriminates against other nationalities. Indeed, the IS trend calls for independence for East Timor from Indonesia. That's fine. But do we have to take this back until we come up with a new ruling bourgeoisie there that isn't possibly going to discriminate against other nationalities? By the same token, if it turns out that the native bourgeoisie of East Timor is fairly tolerant, doesn't that prove how ridiculous it is to frighten people with the bogeyman of national self-determination?

But what of the Balkans? Is this a place where national self-determination must be discarded? Harman refers to the Balkan national struggles of Lenin's time as being mere vehicles for national oppression and says that the existence of weak states there meant there was nothing to do but "form close alliances with the major imperialist powers." Since Harman wants to claim Lenin would have supported his views, let see what Lenin said. Lenin opposed Rosa Luxemburg's views opposing the right of self-determination in general and her views on how this applied to the Balkans in particular. Luxemburg, Lenin wrote,

held that

"... the 'right to self-determination' of small nations is made illusory by the development of the great capitalist powers and by imperialism. 'Can one seriously speak,' Rosa Luxemburg exclaims, 'about the "self-determination" of the formally independent Montenegrins, Bulgarians, Rumanians, Serbs, Greeks, partly even the Swiss, whose independence is itself a result of the political struggle and the diplomatic game of the "concert of Europe"?!' The state that best suits these conditions is 'not a national state, as Kautsky believes, but a predatory one.'" (*Collected Works*, vol.20, p.398)

Lenin argued that in this matter, Luxemburg was wrong and Kautsky correct:

"The example of the Balkan states likewise contradicts her, for anyone can now see that the best conditions for the development of capitalism in the Balkans are created precisely in proportion to the creation of independent national states in that peninsula.

"Therefore, Rosa Luxemburg notwithstanding, the example of the whole of progressive and civilized mankind, the example of the Balkans and that of Asia prove that Kautsky's proposition is absolutely correct; the multinational state represents backwardness, or is an exception. From the standpoint of national relations, the best conditions for the development of capitalism are undoubtedly provided by the national state. This does not mean, of course, that such a state, which is based on bourgeois relations, can eliminate the exploitation and oppression of nations. It only means that Marxists cannot lose sight of the powerful *economic* factors that give rise to the urge to create national states." (*Collected Works*, vol.20, p.400)

So it turns out that Lenin did not think that national self-determination was simply a fiction or a dead end in the Balkans. Lenin was well aware of the problems connected to the Balkan liberation struggles due to the fact that they were led by the native exploiters rather than the worker and peasant masses. But that did not cause him to shrink from recognizing the progressive content of the struggles for national freedom that broke out, regardless of their shortcomings. Rather, Lenin strove to strengthen the imprint of the toilers in the liberation struggle so as to ensure the most thorough type of democratic revolution. For example, Lenin analyzed the 1912 liberation of Macedonia from Turkish rule with the aid of Serbia and Bulgaria. Lenin expressed hope that this might help contribute to the

"undermining of feudal rule in Macedonia, the formation of a more or less free class of peasant landowners, and a guarantee for the entire social development of the Balkan countries, which has been checked by absolutism and feudal relations." (*Collected Works*, vol.18, 397-398)

⁷See, for example, the *Socialist Worker*, New Zealand, April 12, 1999, p.1.

At the same time, Lenin saw that because the liberation had been accomplished not by a thorough-going social revolution of the masses, but a more limited struggle dominated by the exploiting classes, the cost in lives among the toilers of all nationalities was unnecessarily high. Thus, for example, he emphasized the need to fight not only the Turkish landlords who dominated Macedonia, but unity with the Turkish toilers against the landlords of all nationalities in the area. This is what he meant when he wrote in the same article on the liberation of Macedonia that

"If the liberation of Macedonia had been accomplished through a revolution, that is, through the Serbian and Bulgarian and also the *Turkish* peasants fighting against the landlords of *all* nationalities (and against the landlord governments in the Balkans), liberation would probably have cost the Balkan peoples a hundred times less in human lives than the present war. Liberation would have been achieved at an infinitely lower price and would have been infinitely more complete." (*Collected Works*, vol.18, p.398)

Lenin does not refer specifically to the plight of the Albanian population in Kosovo at that time. But this was an example of the unfortunate bloodshed Lenin refers to. In 1912, in the course of Serbia's fight against Turkish oppression, the Serbian monarchy took the occasion to brutally annex Kosovo amid savage massacres of the Albanians, thus betraying the Albanian Kosovars who had waged a partially-successful revolt against Turkish oppression several months earlier.

Lenin did not deny the problems that existed in the liberation struggles in the Balkans. But his answer to these shortcomings was not to deny the importance of the actual struggles for national self-determination, but to strengthen these struggles by emphasizing the need for the toilers to put their class stamp on them.

The Cliffites try to prove Milosevic is not fascist

The spurious theorizing of the Cliffites on national self-determination seems to have played a role in undermining whatever reasonable stands they had on the Kosovo independence issue. One moment they were hailing the independence struggle. Then that was dumped on the grounds that liberation struggles are always pointless, at least in the Balkans. One moment they write articles explaining how the ruthless tyranny of Milosevic was developed. The next moment they deny the very points on which they had criticized Milosevic in order to prove that his regime is not fascist.

In an article entitled "The Nazis, the Serbs and the truth" the IS author basically argues that anyone who isn't exactly like Hitler in every detail can't be considered "fascist." Thus, Milosevic isn't fascist. Why does the article want to avoid the fascist label for the Milosevic regime? It says that some people say you have to support NATO if Milosevic is fascist. The tragedy is the article accepts this false premise because it is devoted to finding any miserable excuse to separate Milosevic from fascism. It never dawns on the author that one can be

opposed both to the regional tyrant Milosevic *and* the imperialist bullies of NATO. To be consistent, if consistently wrong, the author goes on to extricate the likes of the Argentine military dictator, Galtieri, and Saddam Hussein from the fascist label as well. Of course, the issue isn't to argue over which is the better term, "fascist", "bloodthirsty butcher", or whatever, but that the article feels it necessary to prettify Milosevic in order to prove its anti-NATO credentials.

The most incredible arguments are used, such as that Milosevic can't be fascist because Hitler used "modern industrial methods" such as gassing people in concentration camps to carry out his Holocaust whereas "ethnic cleansing in the former Yugoslavia has been carried out by men in uniform using small arms in the main"!! No doubt the victims of ethnic cleansing are grateful to be killed by non-fascist primitive methods, not to mention the comparatively primitive, and presumably more humane, methods of raping and pillaging!

The amazing thing is the article is contradicted virtually point for point by another article that appeared in the SWP of Britain's *Socialist Review* of May 1999 entitled "The resistible rise of Slobodan Milosevic." The instances are too numerous to mention them all here. But the following example is typical. The article which tries to distance Milosevic from fascism boasts "there is a broad range of organizations, from trade unions and human rights groups to opposition radio stations and newspapers, still in existence." Wow, what a democrat Milosevic must be! The article exposing Milosevic paints a slightly different picture. It says:

". . . this corrupt and unstable regime could only survive through a system of constant purges of suspect institutions and terror against its opponents. The paramilitary police was reinforced to act as Milosevic's personal guard against the army and to discourage dissent, and the media pumped out disinformation. . . .

". . . in October 1998 an information law was passed allowing Milosevic to crush the independent media."

Thus, the overall stand of the Cliffites winds up not only theorizing against the right to self-determination in general, but abandons the Albanian Kosovar cause in practice and even stoops to promoting that opposition to NATO requires giving Milosevic a semi-democratic face-lift.

Proletarian internationalism and the conflict over Kosovo

Many left trends talk about the need for class unity between the nationalities and the wonderful future when the socialist republic comes to the Balkans. But such fine goals become empty phrases if the groups uttering them do not take a proletarian internationalist stand today. Such a stand in regard to the conflict over Kosovo requires not only opposing NATO's war, but not using opposition to NATO to "defend Serbia," curtail calls against the Milosevic regime in one's mass agitation, or finding one argument after another to discredit in general the right of nations to self-determination. If we really

want to see class unity between the Albanian and Serbian workers, we must support the right to secession for Kosovo and oppose every attempt to forcibly prevent the Kosovar Albanians from carrying this out. Only such a stand can help combat the terrible weight of chauvinism on the Serbian workers which is encouraged by not only Milosevic, but the main bourgeois opposition trends in order to divert them from the class struggle at home. Recognition of Albanian national rights also undercuts the narrow nationalist sentiments that are bound to exist among the Albanian exploited classes. Breaking this narrow nationalism is essential for the Albanian workers to have an independent class stand from their own exploiters and to see the Serbian workers as their allies.

Assisting the proletariat of Serbia and Kosovo today also means helping them overcome the massive confusion that exists on the difference between state-capitalist systems, like the old Yugoslavia, and genuine socialism. The old state-capitalist Yugoslavia, which billed itself as socialist, was understandably widely discredited among the workers of all the nationalities within it. Developing a desire among the workers for Marxist socialism therefore means clarifying the difference between it

and the revisionist, state-capitalist counterfeit of socialism. Trotskyism, by promoting the state-capitalist systems to one degree or another, undermines the growth of real socialist consciousness.

The confusion of state-capitalist Yugoslavia for socialism not only undermines the socialist goal, but has negative practical consequences today. As we have seen, for a number of left-wing activists, sentimentality over the old Yugoslavia is connected to softness toward the Milosevic regime in the present war. As well, among the masses who were unhappy with the old system in Yugoslavia, confusion about the old revisionist pseudo-socialism plays into the hands of Western market-capitalism, which presents itself as the alternative to the old system. Thus, the anti-revisionist critique of Yugoslav state-capitalism helps combat the influence that the Western imperialists have gained among the masses of all nationalities, and particularly among the Kosovar Albanians.

Without defending the right to self-determination and exposing the state-capitalist nature of the old Yugoslavia, the revival of revolutionary proletarian politics in that region will remain an empty phrase. □

On anti-war work during the Kosovo war

Below is the leaflet which Seattle members of the Communist Voice Organization (CVO) distributed at May Day actions this year in Seattle along with a condensed version of the article "No to Milosevic, NATO, and the big power Contact Group! No solution in Kosovo without the right to self-determination!" from the March 28, 1999 issue of *Communist Voice*.

For a rebellion against established political trends

To build an anti-war movement with potential we think the prevailing politics of today's actions need to be opposed. The following is a brief survey of some of those politics:

The Nonviolent Action Community of Cascadia

This group organizes demonstrations, leafletting, etc., under the slogans "Stop the Bombing Now!" and "No War". But when it comes to providing an orientation to the masses it preaches reliance on the big powers, fills the air with illusions regarding the alleged wonders of diplomacy, the United Nations and international law, and conveniently develops a big case of forgetfulness while doing so. It's no surprise then that these champions of democracy shamelessly cast aside the question of the democratic right of the Kosovars to self-determination. Consider the following from one of the Nonviolent Action Community's flyers: "The only method to end the violence is through international diplomacy—which must include the Russians—forcing a cease-fire and providing for monitors (not NATO troops), thereby allowing the safe return of refugees. Then the process of reaching a negotiated settlement between Milosevic and the Kosovars can begin." The same leaflet demands "the illegal and exacerbating bombing be halted, and that the mechanisms of the UN and international law be pursued vigorously".

But diplomacy has failed and the US/NATO and the Serbian governments are now at war. This didn't happen because these two sides didn't understand the arts of diplomacy, "conflict resolution", etc., nor because they didn't think of "providing monitors" instead of NATO troops. Certainly, meetings of the diplomats of these two sides will undoubtedly take place again when the conflict reaches a critical stage. But they both already agree that the Kosovars have no right to decide their own future and thus any "negotiated settlement between Milosevic and the Kosovars" implies that the Albanians of Kosova should just give up their rights and bow down to the government which has been butchering them. And what about the "mechanisms of the UN"? If we remember correctly this wondrous organization brought us the Gulf War and the continuing starvation of the Iraqi masses

through sanctions.

Pacifism in general

The Nonviolent Action Community..., Peace Action, Seattle Women Act for Peace, American Friends Service Committee, and the Fellowship of Reconciliation have declared "We oppose weapons sale or other transfers of weapons to any of the parties in this conflict." Well one of the parties is the Yugoslav state and it already has tons of weapons which it has used to suppress and drive out the Albanians. Another party is the Albanian Kosovars themselves, along with such popular organizations as the KLA. Pacifism would deny the latter guns with which to fight for their freedom and even guns with which to defend themselves from fascist atrocities. This is the same stand that the imperialist Clinton Administration and NATO took during the diplomatic maneuvering before the war.

Eat The State

Geov Parrish of *Eat the State* writes the following: "(let's all repeat, loudly: IMMEDIATE CEASEFIRE, NEGOTIATE.)" The April 7 article from which this is taken is full of denunciations of both the Clinton and Milosevic governments. He raises the issue of the United States being a "rogue superpower . . . a military bully that has launched unprovoked acts of war against four countries . . . since last August", castigates the leaders of both the Democratic and Republican parties as being war criminals, and more that one can agree with. Yet in writing for an "anti-authoritarian" political newspaper all he can do is hand everything back to the authorities he denounces. They should negotiate over the wasteland they've created. And the right of the Albanian population to decide their own destiny be damned! Clinton and Milosevic will decide their fate.

Further, to his credit the editor of *Eat The State* calls for actions in the streets, etc., and for organizers to give people opposed to the war something to do. And although he has some criticism of the present left this criticism is not really aimed at the left's dominant politics (including pacifism). Instead his criticism is that the left should be searching for some right-wing opponents of the war to build rallies with. It seems that he's stuck on this idea because he presently doesn't see enough the necessity for organizing the workers, youth, and other oppressed people for a really new and revolutionary anti-war politics, nor the potential.

The Freedom Socialist Party

The FSP calls for "the voluntary reunification of Yugoslavia's former republics and provinces on the basis of equality" and says it supports "the right of the Kosovar Albanians to self-determination". But it then turns around to kick itself in the face with the following carefully crafted statement: ". . . we also

believe that the only way that all the peoples of the former Yugoslavia will be able to coexist is if the goal of socialism that motivated them during their period of greatest harmony once again becomes a common aim." This sloughs over the fact that the "socialism" of the former Yugoslavia (Titoism) was a state-capitalist bureaucracy which lorded it over the working class and peasantry. The people grew to hate it. And although Tito's regime didn't commit the wholesale atrocities against the Albanian Kosovars which the Milosevic regime has, it still suppressed them. (It also killed, imprisoned or hounded those it even perceived as being genuinely socialist or communist.) Further, Milosevic himself is an inheritor of the Titoite political machine and drapes a socialist banner over his criminal actions.

These bankrupt political stands must be overcome

The economic and political interests of the Serbian ruling class versus those of the US/NATO ruling classes have driven their governments to war. These governments are all tools of an exploiting bourgeoisie which everywhere rides on the backs of the workers and other toilers. They everywhere disproportionately tax the workers and poor to pay for high-tech weaponry, they everywhere pare as much out of their national budgets which goes to benefit the masses as they dare while shoveling money to the ruling bourgeoisie, etc. And leaving aside the question of officers and hot-shot pilots, its mainly the sons and daughters of the working class who are sent to fight and die in the interests of their capitalist governments. (And it's the masses of ordinary people who suffer the most from displacement and civilian casualties as well.) True, Clinton and his NATO partners would like this to be a short and "clean" air-war (one in which only the sons of Yugoslav workers do the

dying) but preparations are also under way to send NATO troops if this fails. Hence this is no scholastic question for the sons and daughters of the American working class either, the largest class in society.

So it's obviously our view that the fundamental interest of the working class in all the countries involved in this war is to oppose their governments. Because of its position in society this is the most consistently anti-war class, the class which the anti-war movement has to learn to address and win over—win over with a politics opposed to those mentioned above however. Of course the ruling bourgeoisie everywhere works to line the workers up behind its "national interests" (exploitation and plunder) and in times of war it howls for supporting the troops and yells "traitor!" against its opponents (as anti-war activists in Serbia today are well aware). Yet just as during the wars in Vietnam, Iraq, and elsewhere, we cannot let this deter from struggling to use analysis and persuasive argument aimed at bringing into being a fighting movement that can upset the dominant politics of today. During the war in Vietnam this took years to accomplish despite the relatively high number of U.S. casualties. A revolutionary critique of imperialism had to be developed. And only after thousands of activists had rejected the politics of the establishment and begun to take up and propagate an increasingly independent politics did the movement really begin to explode. The present war may be relatively short (or it may not be), nevertheless the task of building an independent political trend should be taken up. And crucial in this is to develop the criticism of revisionism (phony Marxism-Leninism) a la the CPUSA, Maoists, Castroites, etc., and Trotskyism (the FSP, SWP, WWP, and others).

—Seattle members of the Communist Voice Organization (CVO)

□

On the roots of the Communist Voice Organization and the Chicago Workers' Voice group:

Distortions in a history of the Marxist-Leninist Party, USA

by Frank, Seattle

Jake of the liquidationist *Chicago Workers' Voice* group has begun a series of articles "assessing the history of the Marxist-Leninist Party, USA".¹

The founding of the Marxist-Leninist Party (the MLP) in the beginning of 1980 marked a victory for anti-revisionism. Taking the stand of the working class more consistently than any other organization of the time, throughout the 1970s the members of its predecessor organizations had struggled to apply Marxist-Leninist theory to the problems confronting the revolutionary movement. This process led to their working out Marxist-Leninist tactics for work in the working class, work in the African-American movement and work in other mass movements as opposed to the reformism and semi-anarchism practiced by the various revisionist² trends, as well as being opposed to the disdain for the mass movements held by various scholar-despots of the left and the "left" revisionists. This was a protracted process which led to their eventual criticism and abandonment of numerous wrong theories and formulae popularized by those who raised the anti-revisionist banner for pragmatic reasons—particularly the Communist Party of China and the Communist Party of Canada (M-L)—and to their public polemic against the pseudo-Marxism of these trends. It was a process in which—particularly in the later 1980's and early 1990's—the comrades began to deepen their critical study of the state-capitalist systems oppressing the masses in the USSR, China, Cuba, etc. Deepening this criticism, and the connected question of elaborating what proletarian (really Marxist) socialism is are crucially important to the development of future revolutionary movements.³ Further, those who were to later

¹See *Chicago Workers' Voice Theoretical Journal* numbers 14 (Feb. 18, 1998) and 15 (Nov. 9, 1998).

²By revisionists we mean those who smuggle bourgeois ideas and practices into the revolutionary movement and pawn them off as being Marxist-Leninist. Essentially good and brave people or trends may err in this way and we distinguish between them and hardened revisionist currents. But in either case revisionism must be exposed and fought if a truly communist movement is to be built.

³But overcome with demoralization, the *Chicago Workers' Voice* group has lost all enthusiasm for such anti-revisionist theoretical tasks. For example, it now searches for ways to

found the MLP fought hard against the sectarianism of both the revisionist and partway "anti"-revisionist leaders who dominated the movement. They only founded their own organizations after investigating the existing organizations then proclaiming themselves Marxist-Leninist and finding them wanting. And they worked hard for years to unite all those who proclaimed themselves to be real Marxists.

The latter was a necessity thrown up by history and it involved crisscrossing the county seeking out activists, holding discussions with them, etc., as well as organizing one campaign after another under the slogan "Marxist-Leninists Unite!".

Thousands of participants in the mass movements which shook the country in the late 1960s and early 1970s had come to the conclusion that Marxist-Leninist theory and organization were necessary. This was a new Marxist-Leninist movement in several senses: its members were mainly very young and politically inexperienced; it opposed the practical tactics of the old-line revisionists in the mass movements (as well as Trotskyism) and, most importantly, it began a criticism of the theories behind their rotten practices; it saw the need for a new Marxist-Leninist Party. But the criticism of modern revisionism was hampered by the ideas and practices of the Communist Party of China and the leaders of the several American and Canadian organizations which represented Maoism in North America (all of which declared themselves parties, and of which only scattered ghosts remain—the Revolutionary Communist Party being the prominent exception). To unite the movement meant that the politics of the several trends within it had to be clarified in a careful way.

But one of the first notable things about Jake's articles is that he falls down where the MLP soared. Rather than taking the nonsectarian approach of carefully clarifying disagreements in order to provide the basis for a principled Marxist-Leninist unity he fouls the air in an attempt to make the Chicago group look as pure as driven snow while others are just written off as being splitters. This leads him to not telling the truth regarding the origins of the Communist Voice Organization and the origins of his group. He *hides* the fact that the CVO even exists; and hides the political disagreements which led the members of the Chicago group to refuse to join the CVO and its anti-revisionist effort. Let's see how this is so.

Jake writes the following: "Only three small organizations

³(...continued)

defend Castro's oppressive and repressive state-capitalism . . . and calls for no more criticism of it. (See *Communist Voice*. Vol. 4, No.2, articles beginning on pages 22 and 28 for example.)

came out of the MLP's dissolution. The Chicago Branch continued on, and several of its former members and supporters publish this journal. Some members of the Detroit Branch worked with us the first year after the MLP died but then split to put out their own journal *Communist Voice*. The *Los Angeles Workers' Voice* activists were members of the MLP and are still politically active." Really? True enough, "some members of the Detroit Branch" enthusiastically worked with the members of the former Chicago Branch of the MLP to publish the *Chicago Workers' Voice Theoretical Journal* for more than a year. *But so did comrades from the East Coast and Seattle*. All were united in a very loose-knit group (the "minority") which set it's main task as carrying forward the Leninist theoretical work of the MLP. And true enough too is the fact that there was a split. The Chicago members of the "minority" refused to commit themselves to any firm set of Marxist-Leninist principles and refused to consider any suggestion for creating an organization in which the majority ruled. Organization and democracy would mean that the theoretical journal would no longer be their private preserve. It would have an elected editorial board, the editorship might not come from Chicago, and it would be expected to respect the wishes of the majority of the organization. The Chicago "minority" members were adamantly opposed to this idea because of ideological and political differences (which they were none too forthcoming about) with the rest of us—the majority of the "minority". For example, those who were to form the CVO opposed rushing into print what was really a political endorsement of a petty-bourgeois-nationalist group in Mexico. Written by a person in Chicago, this endorsement tried to dress up the Mexican group in flaming red "Marxist-Leninist" colors while hiding the fact that the group promoted Cuban society as being socialist. Using various excuses, others in Chicago rushed to defend publishing this article without waiting for responses to be written to it. And by fiat the Chicago group did publish it in this manner. (See *Communist Voice*, Vol. 1, No. 1, for more on this controversy.) Furthermore, bound up with the split which occurred was the growing theoretical and organizational complacency of the Chicago comrades.

When the Central Committee of the MLP announced that it was throwing in the towel in the fall of 1993 the Chicago Branch issued a resolution outlining a program of local work (including various theoretical tasks) and speaking of maintaining E-mail communication, literature exchanges, etc., with the remaining active membership, whatever their political tangent might be. This plan was not radically different from some of those put forward by the ultra-liquidators. It tended to downplay the divergent political tendencies which had been building inside the MLP. It showed little concern for finding a way to regroup the forces determined to carry forward the anti-revisionist cause in various parts of the country. Accept the status quo and "keep on truckin'" was it's essence. In late 1994 and early 1995 the Chicago group maintained this same view. One of its members (Rene) had split after charging that the anti-revisionist theoretical work of the "minority" was nothing. He wanted to tail after whatever plan the Zapatistas or the Mexican *El Machete* publication were promoting at the moment and argue that this was "real" anti-revisionism. Another one of the Chicago group

showed great sympathy for this view. Yet this was generally treated as "no big thing" with an important exception: one member's slandering any criticism of "Rene's . . . good or bad points" (he should have said "Rene's liquidationist political views") as amounting to "a lot of public name calling". The controversy over the endorsement of the Mexican group was similarly treated. So too was the fact that although the *Los Angeles Workers' Voice* group associated itself with the "minority" it never attended meetings and already indicated worrisome ideological tendencies in its writings. And in summing up the crisis and fracturing of the "minority" on March 31, 1995 Jake said that this was "no big deal" either. He castigated Joseph Green for having earlier written of a critical juncture facing the "minority" and wrote the following in response: "one could make a case for the death of the MLP being a very critical juncture for its former members who wanted to be active". Just "a case", and for those "who wanted to be active." But active with what politics?

In 1999 Jake continues to "truck on" in much the same way. For four years the CVO has time and again exposed that the theoretical complacency of the Chicago group has led it to depart from Marxism-Leninism on one issue after another. The *Chicago Workers' Voice Theoretical Journal* still flies the hammer and sickle on its masthead but inside of it one finds members of the group who take the stand "Lenin said it, I believe it, question settled!" while others look through books such as Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* for arguments to jettison Marxism-Leninism in favor of a new "paradigm", "a new way of looking at many things" (very much like the worst liquidators of the MLP). These things sadden us but we must fight the ideological battle against them nonetheless. Yet with one exception, Jake is silent (when not actually defending the views himself)⁴ He maintains the sectarian "group front" against critical examination of the views of his comrades. And today he covers all political differences up with his bland statement that "only three small organizations came out of the MLP's dissolution" and that "here and there a few other former MLP members and supporters continue with left political work of one sort or another". He covers up the fact that the fractured MLP eventually gave rise to several political trends. These include: (1) an anti-revisionist one organized around a consti-

⁴This refers to a short letter Jake wrote saying he didn't share Jack Hill's (of the *CWV*) enthusiasm for the Working People's Action and Education Network in Chicago (see the *CWVTJ*, #13). Jack Hill has admittedly capitulated on the anti-revisionist tasks facing our movement and he floats in any group or coalition in the Chicago area which is a little bit to the left of the trade union bureaucrats and Democratic Party. But he's a full-fledged member of the Chicago group nonetheless . . . and Jake treats his views oh so nicely in the letter referred to. In it he lectures Jack on the need for revolutionary consciousness and organization, Marxism and socialism. But these remain empty words (and sectarian liquidationist words in Jake's case) if they're not linked to the decisive anti-revisionist tasks thrown up by history and the movement today.

tution and definite statement of purpose (the CVO), (2) a "left" communist one which shouts Marxist phrases while shouting even harder against Marxist-Leninist work in the real life struggles of the oppressed (the increasingly passive *Los Angeles Workers' Voice* group), (3) a more or less reformist one which still struggles on various workplace issues but which has given up on the crucial task of working for the rejuvenation of communism (scattered individuals who succumbed to liquidationism), (4) a "Leninist" anarchist enamored with the Internet and his own eloquence, and (5) a centrist (essentially liquidationist and revisionist) group which solves every political question by weighing its "good points" against its "bad points" (while never having the courage to elaborate to the movement what the principles are upon which it judges "good" and "bad"), a group which has no stated political platform and which split from the founders of the Communist Voice Organization when the latter agreed to unite as an "organization dedicated to help establishing anti-revisionist Marxism-Leninism as a trend in the world" and placed "helping reestablish the theoretical basis of Marxist communism" as the central task on their agenda (the *Chicago Workers' Voice* group).

In winter 1994-95 Jake opposed us with talk of the necessity of building a national agitational press. This wouldn't have been the agitational press of a defined political trend. Instead it would have been national leaflets written on "selected topics" and perhaps "local organizations (could) provide some regular coverage of particular topics". And it just sloughed over the fact that more defined and opposing political trends were developing out of the "minority", and sloughed over such thorny questions as *whom* would "select topics", edit the press, etc. The Chicago group had just shown that it opposed the majority deciding such questions. In fact it was a blind last-gasp call demonstrating that behind the Chicago group's "keep on truckin'" attitude lay disagreement over what the pressing demand of the revolutionary movement today really is. To us it is to place anti-revisionism on a firm foundation. This means concentrating on theoretical tasks above all others. But to Jake the main demand of the time is for more agitation. Theoretical work is fine but more mass work is what is really important and revolutionary.

The real test for determining who is actually Marxist and who is erring is whether they correctly judge, take up and accomplish (to the extent objectively possible) the decisive tasks thrown up by the movement at a particular time. In my view the CWV group waffled (at best) on what these tasks were from the days of the dissolution of the MLP and then Jake opted for just more agitation, throwing this against working to resolve the ideological and theoretical crises facing the world movement. Jake's choice has a logic to it: "The liquidationist majority of the MLP wanted to (and did) give up all revolutionary work among the masses. We're not going to do that." Etc. But this is a very narrow logic which sloughs over the complex issues behind the majority of the MLP going over to liquidationism to begin with. (At one point Jake wanted to lay this to simple questions like "too many 'preppies' on the Central Committee"—which was also factually wrong.) Earlier on the CWV group had said these issues were "mainly in the realm of ideology". To militant Marxists this could only imply that some big ideological or

theoretical tasks lay before them. Yet the Chicago group must not have thought the implications of their own words that important. In fact Jake now says in the first article of his series that "the MLP's death was largely a dissipation of forces". Simple enough, that. Returning to the question of more agitation. As Jake knows, this doesn't come from a vacuum. The Chicago group has had four years in which to follow his advice to organize more agitational work while the CVO has during the same period concentrated on helping to reestablish the theoretical basis of Marxist communism. Yet a perusal of the pages of the *Chicago Workers' Voice Theoretical Journal* alongside those of the *Communist Voice* indicates that the CVO comrades may actually be doing quite a bit more agitational work than Jake and his comrades. These efforts are very paltry. They're not too collectively of thought out and organized. We don't think they're the decisive thing we need to do. Yet why have we been writing and distributing more agitation than the CWV group? I think its because our theoretical work uplifts our spirits and provides us the basis for confidently saying more things. But without advancing on this front one gets stuck either repeating old formulas or tailing after revisionism and opportunism when they adopt some "new and exciting" guise. Neither inspire agitational work. I rather think the CWV group has gotten itself into this kind of fix.

Looking closer at Jake's "history"

In my view Jake's present practical error (sectarian attacks on the CVO and the editor of *Communist Voice* while wedding himself to a group of demoralized souls who have given up the anti-revisionist struggle in favor of drifting in and tailing after various movements that arise—or in favor of writing long articles on the history of the Russian revolution that say almost nothing new while saying a good deal that is wrong), his practical counterposing the building of the mass movements to the particular theoretical and other tasks necessary to accomplish Marxist-Leninist unity show through in several of the things he says in his history of the MLP. Such counterposing was one of the main fallacies in the thinking of the Revolutionary Union (R.U.) a quarter century ago of course—something which the founding members of the MLP had spent years fighting against in the Marxist-Leninist movement.

Thus something which immediately struck me in reading Jake's first installment was the assertion that the MLP "hoped to recruit (activists), but at the same time, the MLP learned that it would hurt the mass movement if it drained the best activists out of it and directed them towards other fronts". This was some real news! I'd never heard this conclusion expressed by any COUSML or MLP comrade while those organizations existed. Nor had I seen it written in any party document. In fact, the only place I had ever heard this line of thought before was when I was a member of the R.U. some 27 years ago. The occasion was my suggesting that we think about recruiting this or that activist. I had been reading some of the writings of Lenin and it just seemed logical to me that we should be talking more about socialism and building a party of the working class with the activists we were constantly in contact with. In my arguing I

directly questioned what our role was if not to do this. And although I maintained wrong views on other issues at the time, the heart of the matter was that I was saying we should build the party *in* the then-existing mass movements whereas the R.U.'s opportunist line was that the party would somehow emerge from the mass struggles at some time in the future. For now, it was said to me, we should just fight harder at what we were doing: supporting militancy wherever it occurred, "linking up" various struggles⁵, building the mass movement. (And I can't help but adding that some of the people I argued with on this were most notorious in their fawning on militant phrase-mongering and giving anything that sounded revolutionary a big coat of bright red paint . . . sort of like some of the CWV people have done at times.) The final line of argument against my view has been repeated almost word for word by Jake more than a quarter-century later: I would "hurt the mass movement" by "drain(ing) the best activists out of it and directing them towards other fronts".

Obviously no one in their right mind would suggest that a real Marxist-Leninist organization would shout "Hold it! Stop organizing in the movement. Join our organization and immerse yourself reading books full of revolutionary theory." And, in fact, the MLP itself was certainly not adverse to canceling scheduled meetings or other activity in favor of participation in big mass struggles. The Seattle Branch, for example, did this many times. But, as Jake well knows, the mass movements have their ups and downs even when at a much higher level than now. What shouldn't be done this week—or even this month—can be done in the following weeks or months. There's another side to this too: mass movements are a cauldron for revolutionary thought and the expression of the most deep-felt feelings when white hot. They're the ground upon which the wheat is separated from the chaff. Indeed, some of the most memorable political discussions I've ever had have been on long afternoons or evenings when we were embroiled in quite sharp struggles against the reactionary status quo and—horrors!—the activists themselves directed the discussion toward "other fronts": African-Americans embroiled in a battle against discrimination in the construction unions raised the issue of the oppression of Native Americans and people on welfare, farmworker organizers from the fields discussed the struggle of the Vietnamese people and went to demonstrations against the war, Native Americans supporting and participating in the Wounded-Knee occupation

⁵The R.U. pushed its "link up" theory hard among revolutionary-minded activists. According to this theory one should work to unite activists from various mass movements into joint activities, do propaganda for various struggles which were occurring within other mass struggles, etc., and that was communist work. (And, depending on what is said and done, it can be *part of* the work of communists.) This line had a certain appeal because it cut against the insistence on single issue politics by the more rightist of the Trotskyists and reformists in the movement. But it negated the necessity of socialism being brought into the mass movements from without and, hence, the necessity for a real communist party.

brought up discussion on China and socialism . . . and listened very intently to my views on why a proletarian revolution would eventually break out in the U.S., why Marxism-Leninism was right, what the role of a revolutionary party was, etc. I could go on and on in this vein but I'm sure that we've all had similar experiences.)

Yes, it would be wrong to recruit activists from the mass movement and "direct them toward other fronts" where their efforts were effectively wasted (i.e., to do major theoretical work if they had very low capabilities on that front, or to organize some section of the oppressed people where the potential for organizing was very low, and so on). But the "other front" which most concerned the R.U. was Marxist-Leninist party-building itself. Real revolutionary theory—and building a party of the proletariat based on it—weren't seen as being all-important. I think Jake errs in the same direction. There's more to his assertion that the "MLP learned that it would hurt the mass movement if it drained the best activists out of it and directed them towards other fronts" than worry about past mistakes (either imagined by him or real). The "other front" which most concerns him is anti-revisionist theoretical work today, and the popularization of its results (party-building in the present circumstances). That's a big drain away from what is most important to him.

Some further ideas about the R.U. also seem relevant.

From the beginning the R.U. talked of organizing the workers at the point of production and by the mid-70s the Revolutionary Communist Party (the RCP—which was founded on the basis of the R.U.'s work and ideas) was heavily concentrated in the factories (even though it didn't think proletarian socialist revolution was the strategy for revolution in the U.S.—at least for a lot of this period). But at the same time it was a very petty-bourgeois organization in its class origins and it maintained a very elitist attitude toward the working class akin to that of many anarchists and reformists. Hence its "talking down" to the workers in its agitation, its members adopting some of the more backward customs of the class in order to opportunistically gain favor (with the more backward workers), its "workerism", etc. It tossed around phrases about the workers rising in revolution but its beliefs in this regard weren't very deep. It saw the backwardness in the working class (which conformed to petty-bourgeois elitist prejudices from the past—prejudices supported by various "new left" or SDS theories many of the members continued to hold, i.e., they saw what they thought they would see) and applied Mao's dictum "from the masses . . . to the masses" in such a way that it did little to raise the workers from the backwardness it saw everywhere. (It was shamefaced about its socialism.) In this earlier period the R.U./RCP had an economist approach to the working class (often from the "left", but also from the right) but a few years later it went into its anarchist phase where it wore its "socialism" on its sleeve, where it "confronted" the workers, where it resorted to various publicity stunts aimed at shaking the workers from their sleep, and so on. The petty-bourgeois revolutionist R.U./RCP was appalled by many of the crimes of imperialism at home and around the world and it wanted a revolution. It understood (a little bit, and in a distorted way) that the working

class had to play a role in this revolution. But its elitist standpoint led it to denigrate the potential of this class and concentrate on the backwardness within it. Thus the R.U./RCP was faced with reconciling its desire for revolution—and partial and distorted understanding that the working class had to play a role in it—with its wrong ideas about this class. This led it to staking the future upon some “elemental outburst”, a “break-out”, and to its unduly draping of the red flag on various militant events.⁶ Certainly spontaneous upsurges of the masses are necessary if there is to be a revolutionary change. They’re inevitable in bourgeois society and we welcome them. But they will not suffice for there to be a lasting change. For there to be a socialist revolution the working class needs socialist consciousness and organization. It was these which the R.U. failed to provide.⁷

In his series (and in his eclecticism) Jake stands up for organizing in the factories, drawing workers into party work, study circles, political demonstrations and meetings on other issues than those immediately concerning the workplace, etc. He stands up for the efforts to build a pro-party trend in the workplaces and to recruit activists there. He says that the point of organizing in the factories is not just to fight in that particular workplace and that “revolutionaries must organize the workers for a political revolution to overthrow capitalism, something that is not a trade union endeavor”. And in his second article in

⁶A notorious local example of this was the RCP’s treatment of the “Fat Tuesday Rebellion” in Seattle. This long-ago event began when Fat Tuesday celebrators in the downtown area started to show disrespect for capitalist private property and the reactionary authority of the police. The police responded with the club and a big street battle with them ensued. The masses, many of whom just wanted to freely walk in the streets and express themselves, undoubtedly had justice on their side, and the police beatings were an outrage. But the RCP treated their rebellion almost as if it were the eve of the revolution itself—“one, two, many Fat Tuesdays!”. And not in one or two leaflets or newspapers, but for many months on end.

⁷The R.U. did a flip-flop in the mid-1970s and founded a party (the RCP). But this was a sectarian maneuver conducted under pressure from at least two directions: on the one hand another neo-revisionist group (the October League) stood in favor of building a party and was gaining adherents around the country, on the other hand the work of the predecessor organizations of the MLP had gained respect from those wanting to fight the revisionism and opportunism which continually misled and divided the mass movements. “You want a party?”, said the leaders of the R.U. “Well here it is. The line for the American revolution has now been sorted out and discussed so back to organizing the masses. And pay no attention to those ultra-left wreckers of the COUSML!” Well, actually the RCP did pay some attention to the latter. In Seattle this often took the form of vandalizing the COUSML and MLP bookshop, attacking comrades distributing literature or putting up revolutionary posters, etc.

particular, he associates himself with, elaborates on, and argues for many of the anti-revisionist stands of the MLP on organizing in the workplace. (The R.U. would never have said many of the things Jake says.) But when the largest section of former MLP members has embraced liquidationist ideas in order to become politically passive while another section has given up on anti-revisionist work and produces occasional leaflets on workplace issues, when Jake’s own comrades have begun the journey down similar paths, and when these are but manifestations of a seemingly overwhelming political tendency in the United States and all countries it would seem that the test of anti-revisionism is what one does in practice. Yet the many good and fine things Jake says in his articles on the history of the MLP suddenly come unraveled when it comes to his present-day practice (as we’ve seen). It seems to me that the ideological framework behind this clash of correct ideas with erroneous practice leads Jake to make some troubling formulations which also have a certain R.U. flavor to them: the MLP “was a party that unrepentantly urged the masses to be ‘troublemakers’”⁸, its agitation was published as “something that would spread the news and get people riled up”, the organizations it built in the places of work were of “the workers themselves and not necessarily owned by the trade union or even the Party”. Besides a certain R.U. flavor (or consistent with that flavor), is the fact that the latter formulations could be put forward by any militant trade unionist (even bureaucrats of a certain type in at least the first two cases) and, as they stand, they’re also wrong. The party certainly supported and encouraged activists to “make trouble” in a certain sense, e.g., along certain lines; and never with the despairing idea that this was all that one could do, or all that was needed to be done to achieve either an immediate victory or some longer-term victory for the working class. In fact, the phrase “make trouble” most often implies a reformist outlook, most often implies acceptance of the overall political and economic status quo. And regarding Jake, it seems he reduces things to militant-sounding phrases like this as a substitute for giving the movement a concrete political orientation which will really advance it. Further, the party wanted its agitation to get people “riled up” (if you must) on the immediate issues involved but this was seen as a “by-product” (if you will) of something even more important: the presentation of a materialist analysis, or materialist suggestions for action. For the party was most interested in getting workers “riled up” about what was behind these (Marxism-Leninism and the party). In other words, the MLP didn’t sacrifice the long term and general interests of the proletariat for immediate “gains” which might be had by bowing to the political status quo. Unfortunately the “riled up” terminology takes something away from this. When it’s used in bourgeois society it’s usually associated with the idea that this is all the masses are capable of (of being riled up). If there’s

⁸When Jake writes that “it was a party that unrepentantly urged the masses to be ‘troublemakers’” he may actually be quoting a social-democrat he alludes to. Nevertheless he clearly likes this way of putting things despite the quotation marks around “troublemakers”.

conscious revolutionary activity it must be the work of "outside agitators". And lastly, the idea that communists would think in terms of "owning" mass organizations is an idea propagated by the bourgeoisie and attempted by various revisionists.

On activism and militancy

Jake says that for himself, organizing in the workplace was his reason to live. This seems somewhat narrow, and were he to give it more thought he might qualify it some. At any rate, he says that for "many Party militants" this was the reason for living. I think this is a one-sided and therefore wrong attitude. In my opinion, if everyone in the MLP had held it the MLP would never have existed. For example, when Jake writes of the activism or militancy of the party he generally leaves it at the level of activism in the mass movements. He doesn't write of militancy or activism on the theoretical front for example. Yet were it not for this much of what he says that is correct in his second article would not be there, nor would he have been able to accomplish as much as he did when he was organizing in the workplace along the anti-revisionist lines worked out by the COUSML and MLP. Moreover, he leaves out of his discussion the fact that many of those who supported or joined the party did so precisely on the basis of its militancy on the theoretical front. When I first became interested in the COUSML, for example, was when it began to publish some works on ideological and theoretical questions confronting the revolutionary movement of the time. Others also joined our trend's work particularly because they thought it had an approach no one else had, and was saying something no one else was saying, on theoretical questions confronting the revolutionary movement. Further, it was reported around the time of the Founding Congress of the MLP that quite a wave of activists had come forward on the basis of the polemic against the American social-chauvinists parading as "anti-revisionist Marxists".

More regarding Jake's articles

First, Jake set an extremely ambitious task for himself with his first article. In it he asked twenty-seven questions (if I counted right) which he implies the series will tackle. But that's not enough. He says that "I want to make the point that offshoots of the MLP, even bastard ones, will have to be considered when

making a summation of it" too. Yet the groups he gives as examples "were not exactly splits . . . (were) founded by former members, who, after a period of demoralization, found a new political purpose . . ." etc. Jake may have some sectarian axe to grind concerning these particular "not exactly splits" but seems to me, from what he writes, that he proposes a wild goose chase. But while he's on the subject of individuals or groups the MLP or COUSML dealt with in its history it would seem that for him (and not just him) it would be much more valuable to deal with the politics of the E.H. clique which developed in Chicago. Here was a group which counterposed the party-building tasks of the time to "militant" trade unionism, trade unionism draped with a lingo and style then thought to be communist. It opted for the latter and became liquidationist, liquidating the national tasks charged to it in favor of local, militant appearing, reformist agitation, etc. The COUSML waged a struggle against this tendency which led to a good deal of clarity on what communist work in the working class entailed.

Secondly, Jake's version of the history of the MLP—particularly its last years—is narrow and self-serving. Thus in the first article of the *CWV* series he takes up his old refrain: "If only the party had adopted his proposals for bylines and signed articles in *The Workers' Advocate!*" Never mind that both *The Workers' Advocate Supplement* and the Party's *Information Bulletin* had many signed articles. And never mind that the Chicago Branch during this period became so concerned with defending the wrong views which had arisen within it (including traveling to other cities to argue them) that it was essentially a non-participant in the struggle against ultra-liquidationist views coming from Seattle and elsewhere.

Thirdly, Jake writes that the MLP "did not succeed in building a working class political party, nor in rescuing communist theory from revisionism and opportunism." Well, yes, the MLP was finally defeated by revisionism and opportunism after 23 years of work. But throughout those years it continually "rescu(ed) communist theory from revisionism and opportunism". That's much of the basis upon which we're struggling to advance now. Not the only basis however. The work of the past few years—including the years since the Chicago group split from our anti-revisionist effort—shouldn't be belittled. □

Briefly on quantum mechanics and dialectics

Remarks on quantum mechanics by Phil, Seattle

Dear Joseph,

You asked me to tell you what I think about Quantum Mechanics and your "non-standard" analysis of it. In your recent article in CV¹, you comment on the attempts of early 20th century physicists to create a philosophy based on quantum theory, and how they frequently resorted to idealism to do this. A long time ago, I read a book by Werner Heisenberg (of the Uncertainty Principle fame) called "Physics and Philosophy", in which he went to great lengths to refute simple materialism and explain how the Copenhagen Interpretation of Quantum Mechanics was the only possible one. However, I do not believe he refuted all forms of materialism here, because he had no conception of dialectics and the only so-called "dialectical materialists" with which he dealt were two Soviet scientists, Blochinzev and Alexandrov, who quote Lenin and attempt to reformulate QM in a way that does not threaten their concept of materialism. To do so, they must expel the observer from any role in the experiment — a concept which I think misses the point of QM and results in a misconception of materialism as well.

Observation is an act of the flesh, not of the mind. In the macro-physical world, this statement may seem to have little practical effect, but in the micro-physical world its effects are profound. When I engage in a physical measurement, I am using material means to discern material facts, and the reaction of the material equipment with which I am measuring with the object of my measurement is the essence of measurement. Usually (in the macro-physical world) the elements of this reaction are present in the system under observation, regardless of the presence or absence of the observer, and the introduction of the observer into the system constitutes an infinitesimal perturbation whose results are included in the margin of error of the observation. Not so in the micro-physical world. There the presence of the observer is a major alteration of the system under observation, for he must introduce elements which are not there under normal conditions, and which are included for the express purpose of performing the observation. Furthermore, the terms in which the interaction is described need to be modified — in the macro-physical world the difference between "particle" and "wave" are clear and distinct, whereas in the micro-physical world these two terms lose their distinctive character. A particle is a point-mass, whose diameter and physical dimensions are not commensurate with the scale of its activity

¹This refers to Joseph Green's article "On Sokal and Bricmont's book *Fashionable Nonsense/Postmodernism versus materialism*" in *Communist Voice*, vol. 5, #1, March 28, 1999, and in particular to the sections entitled "The dialectics of nature" and "Dialectics, motion, and infinitesimals".—CV.

— it is perfectly elastic and entirely limited in extent. A wave is, on the other hand, of diffuse character, with indefinite boundaries and physical dimensions which may interact with its surroundings. In the micro-physical world, these opposites form a unity — they complement each other rather than being in conflict. So it is also with such concepts as chance and certainty, chaos and causality, succession and simultaneity. time and space.

Does this vitiate the objectivity of science? No, it merely forces us to reformulate this objectivity in terms given to us by nature, by the material world, rather than to impose terms upon it which are created in our heads. "Paradigm shifts" (as described by Kuhn) may indicate the relativity of scientific terminology OR they may indicate the inadequacy of this terminology and the need to develop a better, more accurate set of terms, grounded in the reality of the world rather than in our conception of it.

I would appreciate more discussion of the ideas presented above.

Revolutionary regards,
Phil, Seattle.

□

Response by Joseph Green

June 12, 1999

Phil,

Thanks for the comments on quantum mechanics. You hit the nail on the head with your remarks that "Observation is an act of the flesh, not of the mind" and "the reaction of the material equipment with which I am measuring with the object of my measurement is the essence of measurement." The idealist interpretation is that the consciousness of the observer has altered the physical situation and caused the "collapse of the wave function", but actually, it is a physical interaction between two material entities that has done so. We may be using one of these entities (such as a stream of photons/ray of light) to make an observation on a beam of electrons, but it is irrelevant to the physical interaction whether we have caused the photons to be present (or whether something else did), whether we are using the photons to make a measurement, or whether we are conscious of the results of the observation. All that matters is that the photons are there, and are interacting with the beam of electrons.

The issue of whether it is our consciousness that causes the collapse of the wave function or a material interaction, is, as you point out, the issue of idealism versus materialism. (It would be transcendental ignorance of the debates among physicists, to present this as an issue of "agnosticism" [referring to a third party mentioned in previous letters — JG].) If there were doubt about whether it was physical interaction or consciousness that caused the collapse of the wave function, it would seem that it could actually be decided by experiment. (The famous two-slit

experiment could be performed in such a way—perhaps it has been?—to see whether it is the interaction of photons with an electron beam that changes the way the electrons act, or whether it is our observing the result of the interaction of the photons with the electron beam.)

An interesting sidepoint to this, is that there has been some controversy among physicists about whether protons can be “observed” by neutrons inside the nucleus (this clearly being an “observation” that goes on independently of human consciousness). The issue involves why protons inside the atomic nucleus are stable—why don’t they decay? Certain physicists have proposed that the reason is that they are continually jostled by neutrons, which thus “observe” whether they exist. The result is an immediate collapse of the wave function. This constant collapse of the wave function doesn’t give the wave function of the protons enough time to evolve to the point where proton decay would be probable. This interpretation is not universally accepted, and is denied by other physicists. But it shows that the idea of explicitly considering “observations” as a material interaction, independent of consciousness, may eventually force itself upon physics. (See David Wick, *The Infamous Boundary*, pp. 168-170. The author has no conception of dialectics, but he does discuss some useful things.)

I was also interested in your discussion of the attempt to reformulate quantum mechanics by Blochinzev and Alexandrov, where you point out that they didn’t properly understand what materialism is. This seems to be one of the early examples of the continual attempts at reformulating quantum mechanics out of the belief that this was needed to preserve quantum mechanics. (The issue, of course, isn’t that it is forbidden to try to reinterpret quantum mechanics, but that these physicists believed that this was required by materialism.) By the way, when you say that “they must expel the observer from any role in the experiment”, does this mean that they were upset by the phenomenon of the “collapse of the wave function”, couldn’t see any alternative to an idealist interpretation of it, and so believed that they had to reformulate quantum mechanics to avoid it?

As I understand it, your approach to the Copenhagen interpretation and the collapse of the wave function is about the same as mine. You separate the issue of idealism or materialism (whether our consciousness causes the collapse of the wave function or a material interaction causes it) from the issue of the dialectical relations involved. I think this separation of the two issues is crucial; it is the key issue.

You also go on to say that the wave-particle duality in the micro-physical world is an example of the unity of opposites,

that is, that it is dialectical. And you connect this to other such dialectical relations. Precisely so.

One minor point. You say that the opposites “complement each other rather than being in conflict”. I agree with the content of what I think you are saying here, but you run up against a certain terminological problem that is similar to one I ran up against in my article with respect to the “absurdity” of contradictions. In stressing the duality, which the mechanical materialist finds hard to understand, the struggle of opposites can’t be ignored. The complementary opposites are also “in conflict”, but not in the way that mechanical materialists suppose. For the mechanical materialist, wave and particle natures being “in conflict” would mean that they couldn’t form a complementary duality, and an entity must be definitely one or the other; but for a dialectician the wave and particle natures could be “in conflict” and yet also complementary aspects of one entity—indeed, this would be what one would expect of complementary aspects. The unity of opposites can and does involve a struggle of opposites. I tried to deal with a similar terminological problem in my article by the distinction between absurd and dialectical contradiction (see p. 46, col. 1 [CV. Vol. 5, #1]). The mechanical materialist sees only absurd contradictions, and not opposites which affect each other and are in unity. But my distinction between “absurd” and dialectical contradiction has its own terminological problems. One of these problems I try to deal with in a footnote, where I point out the issue isn’t so much that a particular contradiction is absurd in itself, but that under certain conditions, it is absurd, and under other conditions, it is not. But beyond that, upon reflection, I am not sure that dialectical literature refers to the problem with the same terminology I have used. It may perhaps sometimes describe the unity of opposites as absurd contradictions, as the unity of things which it is absurd to consider as combined, and yet which really are combined. And there would be a point to doing so. True, after years and decades of working with certain contradictions (such as wave/particle duality) it is hard to think of this as “absurd”. But that something is both a wave and a particle is absurd. So, maybe, after more thinking about the problem and more restudy of other dialectical literature, I will have to surrender the term “absurd contradictions” and go to a formulation like “sterile” contradictions versus dialectical contradictions—with the mechanical materialist thinking all contradictions are sterile and “disjoint”.

So much for now,
Regards,
Joseph

□

Only rank-and-file organization can save letter carriers

Mass struggle is the way to a decent contract!

The National Association of Letter Carriers (NALC) organized a national information picket against the pitiful contract offered by the U.S. Postal Service (USPS). But, in fact, the NALC leadership isn't doing much except sitting on the militancy of the postal workers. The following leaflet was distributed in Detroit at, among other places, the local NALC picket on June 9. It is reproduced from *Detroit Workers' Voice* #23, May 12, a publication of the Detroit Marxist-Leninist Study Group.

On June 9, letter carriers around the country will be carrying out informational picketing to back up their contract demands. Letter carriers, like other postal workers have been abused by management for too long. Unfortunately, the postal clerks and mail handlers have already been stuck with poor contract settlements. But it's important for all craft workers to support each other. If one section of workers can start beating back management's onslaughts, this will help all of us fight for the wages and working conditions we all deserve. Likewise, if management is able to crush another section of postal workers, this will encourage them to launch new attacks on all of us. So let all postal workers unite to help the letter carriers win a decent contract. Letter carriers and all postal workers: participate in whatever mass actions are called by the union leaderships. Keep in mind, however, that the leaderships of the NALC, the APWU [the postal clerks' union] and the NPMHU [the mail handlers' union] have a long history of betrayal. Even though the NALC leadership has called the June 9 events, they watched management kick the rank and file around for years before taking even this modest action. So don't limit yourselves to whatever the union leaderships want to do. The key thing is to use your independent initiative to organize among your coworkers.

Crushing letter carriers = fat profits

USPS management has been spitting on letter carriers. They have doubled their workloads through DPS automation. Letter carriers are being forced to carry twice as much mail as before DPS and must simultaneously carry two bundles of mail in one hand, along with balancing mail on one arm, while carrying still more mail in their satchels. Under the phony excuse that DPS automation has eliminated the need for much time to set up routes in the office, routes are being made longer and carriers are forced to carry not only their route, but constantly "pivot", i.e., carry parts of other routes. Such DPS work methods have left carriers with crippling injuries. Management harasses and intimidates letter carriers who stand up for their rights. But USPS bosses don't give a damn because their war on postal workers has been a profit bonanza — \$6 billion in profits in the last several years. And after all the sacrifice of letter carriers, what did they offer in a new contract after the old one expired

six months ago? A big, fat nothing. Now the letter carriers' contract is being determined by the arbitration process which has resulted in rotten contracts time and again.

Can we rely on the NALC leadership?

While management has been running roughshod over letter carriers, the union leadership, led by NALC president Vince Sombrotto, has been letting them get away with it. It was Sombrotto who signed the agreement that allowed the DPS system to come in without any protections for carriers. Even when management made their insulting contract offer, the NALC officials refused to mobilize the rank-and-file to do anything about it. While the DPS system is decimating the health of carriers, the NALC leaders have fallen silent on demanding meaningful limits on workloads.

Of course letter carriers deserve major pay hikes. The NALC leaders talk about this, but can't be trusted to really follow through on it. Meanwhile, the union bureaucrats' silence on crushing workloads is deafening. If workloads continue to soar, pay hikes will be little solace to carriers whose health is ruined or are forced out of the craft.

Of course, even the meek contract demands of the NALC leadership were rejected by the USPS. Now, after failing to put any pressure on management whatsoever throughout 10 months of fruitless contract negotiations. Sombrotto has called for informational picketing at post offices around the country on June 9.

Letter carriers and other postal workers should participate in these demonstrations and give them a militant character. Although the union leadership intends them as simply a token measure, rank-and-file carriers should use the occasion to build up networks of letter carriers who are interested in a serious struggle against management. If the rank-and-file can make use of the June 9 actions to start building their own networks that can operate independently of the weak-kneed union officials, this will be an important stride forward. Our struggle will only be as strong as the strength of rank-and-file organization.

Rank and file must organize independently

The point of the rank-and-file getting organized on its own is not just to condemn the cowardly NALC leadership. It is the only way that we can prepare for the type of struggle that really puts pressure on management. If the rank-and-file mobilizes itself, it can offer effective resistance to the daily abuses perpetrated by management. And by learning how to organize together in these smaller battles, we will be in a much better position to launch militant actions during major national battles such as contract negotiations.

Many postal workers dream about sticking it to management with militant actions like local and national strikes, but see no

way to carry this out since postal strikes are illegal and the union leadership fears a serious struggle as much as management. But the way out of this dilemma is rank-and-file organizing. It is the only way we can prepare ourselves to overcome the "no-strike" laws which deprive us of our basic rights. Ordinary postal workers uniting together on our own terms prepares us both to fight to abolish the "no strike" laws and to defy them.

Independent organization is needed because the methods of the union leadership are completely bankrupt. Take the question of worker solidarity. The NALC leaders talk about it, but don't practice it. What happens when a letter carrier tells the union about some management abuse. Do the union leaders mobilize the rank-and-file against management? No. Almost always they keep things confined to filing a grievance. Then what happens? Months or years go by. Management keeps right on abusing the worker. Not only are the workers' coworkers kept passive, so is the worker himself. Then what happens? Even when the grievance is won, there's no punishment for management so the abuse continues. The NALC (and APWU and NPMHU) leaders say "we've done all we can do" and the ordinary workers are left feeling hopeless and isolated. Having demoralized the rank-and-file, the union leaders then hypocritically complain that the problem is more workers don't get active in the union! Of course

the real problem is union bureaucracy is set up to insure that the workers don't take collective action but fight only as individuals.

In contrast, independent organization means collective action against management. It means finding the ways and means to mobilize one's coworkers. It may mean such things as getting together to produce and circulate leaflets exposing management. It may mean drawing ordinary workers together to spread protests from station to station. It means such things as collective work slowdowns or other forms of resistance to management's efforts to drive us like dogs. It means using such things to temper us for bigger battles, such as local and national strikes.

Today letter carriers are facing off against management in a contract battle. Let's use this time to unleash our anger against management. Demand what is rightfully ours. Don't rely on the union bureaucracy — build independent organization to back your demands.

Major hikes in base pay!

Limits on workloads! Case DPS mail, longer lunch and breaks!

End pivoting!

Right to strike! □

Correspondence

Continued from page 54

a struggle at a particular stage. He doesn't deal with whether some specific alliance will help or retard the proletarian cause. He does not consider that in any alliance, the proletariat must maintain its own independent class organization and stand even when it forms alliances with other class forces. He does not see that genuine Marxists disdain to hide their unique class stand on immediate issues or their ultimate goals in order to win favor with other social forces. Thus, when ZN raises "no one can trust you" as an argument against communists having any cooperation with any non-communist forces, he is only battling a parody of genuine Marxist policy. This parody has long been used by the bourgeoisie to frighten the masses away from the communists who, it is claimed, aren't really interested in their present struggles, but are only tricking them in order to achieve their evil communist goals.

Perhaps it will be said that ZN is not objecting to the proletariat having alliances with any other class forces, only the national bourgeoisie. But from the standpoint of ZN's moralism,

alliances with the peasantry in the democratic revolution are also out of the question. After all, in this struggle the peasantry is not fighting for socialism, but may be fighting for land, the end of feudal encumbrances, and democratic rights. Wouldn't the proletariat, by ZN's standards, be deceiving the peasantry if it strives to lead such a struggle? Wouldn't we also have to discard Lenin's tactics in the Russian revolution because he considered the peasantry as a whole as allies in the democratic stage, while in the socialist phase, Lenin made clear that the rural proletariat and poor peasants would have to conduct a class struggle against the peasant bourgeoisie? But there wasn't an ounce of deception in this policy. Lenin emphasized the need, even during the democratic revolution, for the rural workers to have their own class organization and to explain to the peasant masses the limits of land reform, which despite the progress it would bring, would lead to further competition among the small producers, class differentiation among them, and an eventual misery for the vast majority. This example of how a real Marxist allies with another class force has nothing in common with ZN's parody.

— Mark, for the *Communist Voice* □

Correspondence

An exchange on Maoism, the state sector, the three-worlds theory, and realpolitik

5 April 1999

Dear *Communist Voice*,

The latest *Communist Voice* touches on the Big Picture, and so I thought I might comment on it from my own Leninist perspective. You yourselves roundly condemn just about everyone since Lenin's time, except the oppressed working masses themselves, and I can't say that I disagree with that attitude too much. Lenin stressed the importance of leadership more than Marx did, and I do believe that the decay of the planet since Lenin's death has been largely due to a lack of great leadership. We agree that Stalin was a tyrant. I myself feel that he ruined Soviet socialism, by converting it into something very like fascism, under the influence of Mussolini. Mao was unfortunately influenced by Stalin, but I think you misinterpret Mao, and deny his great accomplishments. You ignore several major points of Maoist thought, to wit: anti-colonialism, the united front against colonialism and its explicit inclusion of the national bourgeoisie, and the struggle of two lines. All of these concepts are repeated ad infinitum in Maoist propaganda — repetitio mater memoriae — so it's impossible for anyone who has done even a cursory study of Maoism not to be familiar with them. So how can you say that all the bourgeoisie went to Taiwan? I myself feel that Mao's embracing of the national bourgeoisie was a mistake; certainly it is anti-Marxist and anti-Leninist. But one must consider that Mao was a non-white person enraged by Western colonialism, and how it had turned his beloved China into the "sick man of Asia." His first priority was to free China of colonialism, Western and Japanese. He hated those bourgeois who colluded with the colonial powers and China's struggle was so difficult that he placed the anti-colonial struggle above socialism, and welcomed the national bourgeoisie — those who wanted Chinese capitalism independent of colonial powers — into the Communist party. Ultimately the Chinese bourgeois who supported colonialism were expelled to Taiwan, but the Communist party was a conglomeration of socialists and national bourgeois. Mao then promoted the struggle of two lines, against the bourgeois faction within the party, which I myself feel he should never have embraced in the first place. But he had felt he couldn't free China of colonialism without them. It's true that, as a Stalinist, Mao saw, on the one hand, a "deviation of the right" — the national bourgeois within the party, and also a "deviation of the left." This included stricter Leninists who put more faith in the people than Mao did. They wanted a less Stalinist/fascist power structure to the party, and more dependence on the spontaneous revolutionary explosiveness of the people. And they had no use for the national bourgeoisie.

The "deviation of the left" also referred to anarchists.

After the revolution succeeded, Mao saw himself as a mediator between what he saw as the extreme left and right elements in the party. Psychologically, one can see how egoism might lead him to cling to Stalinist/fascist type power and personality cult for himself. In fact his power was limited, and he had to make concessions to both sides, both to maintain his own position, and to prevent the national bourgeoisie from taking over — as they have today.

During the 50's, the CIA set up who knows how many thousands of agents in China. The original intent of the Cultural Revolution was to weed out these agents. As things developed, the country became chaotic. Mao condemned the chaos as being "anarchistic" in the sense of being a real threat to the integrity of China and its independence from the West — if the party were defeated and China fell apart, the CIA would have succeeded, and China would fall into neo-colonialism. And Mrs. Mao's later activities in the Gang of Four clearly demonstrate that she was not in fact any kind of "ultra-leftists" from the Maoist point of view.

For all of Mao's faults, he did see the post-WWII world as divided into the camps of Western capitalism, Russian Stalinism, and the Third World of non-whites, whom both the West and Russia were trying to dominate. So while he himself was too much corrupted by both the national bourgeoisie and by Stalinist ideas, I don't see how his three-world analysis can be faulted. He saw himself primarily as the leader of the Third World versus colonialism Western and Russian, and in this he was quite successful. In regressing to capitalism under the domination of the national bourgeois in the party today, China at least does maintain its independence from the West. And the leftist line in the party still exists. When economic conditions worsen, as the current shrinkage of world capitalism continues, the leftist line in the party will have an opportunity to come to power, and perhaps cut the national bourgeoisie out of the party once and for all. Then Mao, for all his faults, will have succeeded, and his contribution to humanity will be great and lasting.

When criticizing Russian socialism, it is also necessary to consider the Big Picture and the balance of power. Lenin's socialism was purer than Mao's by a large degree. But the corruption here also took place, and a more complete collapse. Nonetheless, here too, the structure of the Russian Communist party is something that leftists can build upon when the conditions are ripe. By the next presidential elections, early or on schedule, Russians may be ready to elect Zyuganov. Sincere Leninists will have an opportunity to work back to a Leninist system, and to evolve it without Stalinist warpage this time.

As for anti-Semitism, it is typical that during capitalist booms, as during the 80's, racism against working class minorities, such as blacks, is rampant. During capitalist depressions, such as the 30's, and now in Russia, and soon world-wide, racism against bourgeois minorities such as the Jews runs rampant. We see it in Southeast Asia and Oceania against the Chinese bourgeoisie in the current depression there. If it has infected the Russian Communist party in this period of Russian misery, don't take it as essential — it's not — a return to real Leninist values will solve the problem. It is, as Marx explained, only a surface phenomenon of economically troubled times under capitalism.

The play between the capitalist West and Russia — now no longer communist — is now a factor in the Kosovo situation. In this small situation, as in the macro pictures of Russia and China, you fail to point to practical solutions, because you offer theoretical generalizations as answers to specific problems. You don't discuss things on a practical strategic level. This is hardly socialist Realpolitik. You talk about the spontaneous uprising of the people as the solution. In Kosovo, they have already done that. But there are only 2 million of them, up against 10 million Serbs, heavily armed, and supported by Russia, while the West also prevents the Kosovars from being armed. The extermination of the Kosovars would be a great victory for racist fascism, and a defeat both for humanity and for NATO. Thus, Realpolitik demands that NATO be used to defeat Milosevic in Kosovo. What we the defenders of the interests of the working class and peasants must do is to clamor for the arming of the Kosovars. The more powerful the Kosovars, the smaller the influence of NATO in a Kosovo State. A small victory for the peasants is possible, because NATO's "credibility" is at stake. A victory by Milosevic would be a disaster for the whole world. Milosevic's power must be confined to Serbia. Let the Serbs deal with him in their good time, or suffer the misery they support. The "leader" who led the last Serb uprising against Milosevic is now in the Serb government, supporting the genocide against the Kosovars in the world media. The Serbs cannot be allowed to exterminate the Kosovars before they themselves achieve class consciousness. Thus generalization about working class revolution do not meet the Realpolitik needs of the situation.

The working class has no interest in post-modern gibberish at this time. I don't know why you waste space on this controversy among bourgeois lackey pseudo-intellectuals. Nobody cares, least of all the productive classes.

...

Sincerely,
ZN

CV replies

April 29, 1999

Dear ZN,

I was glad that you took the time to send your thoughts on the issues raised in the last issue of *Communist Voice*. You express many disagreements with our views, but we hope you

find further discussion on these matter fruitful.

To begin with, you raise the question of Maoism. Our recent article pointed out that during the Cultural Revolution, Mao undermined the efforts of the masses to carry out a thorough struggle against the state-capitalist bureaucracy that had developed there. You don't say much about the content of this article however. Rather, you tell us that Mao also had accomplishments, namely, he led an anti-colonial revolution. That much we agree on, however. That Mao led a revolution is true, and it was not only anti-colonial, but involved a vast peasant revolution against semi-feudal conditions. Of course, the article you were referring to was talking about another subject, the course of China after Mao's new order was established. This is why it did not discuss the accomplishments of Mao from a much earlier period.

You note that there was a united front against colonialism which included the national bourgeoisie in China, but say including the national bourgeoisie was a mistake. At the same time you maintain that uniting with the national bourgeoisie was a necessity of the anti-colonial struggle. Furthermore, you seem to attribute the "two-line" struggle inside the Chinese party to Mao having to fight the private capitalists who were welcomed in to the party by Mao.

I find this analysis both puzzling and wrong for several reasons.

It appears to be true that sections of the Chinese bourgeoisie had at times some interest in participating in the Chinese revolution in its bourgeois-democratic stage, i.e., when it was aimed against imperialism and the semi-feudal system. So some form of alliance with this section was possible. But the question after the 1949 revolution was whether or not the revolution would go on to establish socialism. We don't believe this happened, though the leadership of the CCP to this day pretends that China has been socialist. But as far as the issue of class alliances goes, it would be ridiculous to think the national bourgeoisie anywhere would support the proletariat in the struggle against capitalism itself. This would be tantamount to the bourgeoisie committing suicide.

Pete Brown's article is talking about China when it was supposedly building socialism, many years after the democratic revolution of 1949. Hence, even if Mao was right to form certain alliances with the national bourgeoisie prior to 1949, it would be a betrayal of the socialist cause to imagine a perpetual alliance with the bourgeoisie through the transition to socialism. The class alliances that might be appropriate in the bourgeois-democratic stage of the revolution are, of necessity, different, if the revolution is to embark on a transition to socialism.

In your analysis, however, you do not bring up that there are distinct stages in the revolution, instead arguing the pros and cons of allying with the national bourgeoisie regardless of what the general goals of the struggle are at the various stages. But talking about what class alliances are appropriate independent of what type of struggle you are undertaking is bound to create confusion. Thus you wind up with the following muddle: Mao was right to unite with the national bourgeoisie, but it was also a mistake to do so.

In dealing with the question of the Cultural Revolution, I

think the main difference between us is that you fail to take note of the fact that the party/state bureaucracy developed into a new type of bourgeoisie, a new class of state-capitalist rulers. The issue was whether the masses would be able to launch a new revolutionary onslaught against this pseudo-communist (what we call "revisionist") power structure, or whether Mao would be able to contain it, as ultimately was the case. You ignore this, which is the issue at the heart of Pete Brown's article, and instead talk about the old bourgeoisie. You say the old bourgeoisie was brought into the party by Mao, and so a fight had to be waged against them. But Mao did not bring the OLD bourgeoisie into the CCP, they had their own parties, and the bulk of them eventually fled to Taiwan. What excited the Chinese masses in the Cultural Revolution was that Mao claimed he would launch a struggle against the new bureaucratic bourgeoisie whose power and privileges didn't come from the old system, but were developed under the new one. A section of the masses took Mao at his word and set about a struggle against the state-capitalist bureaucrats in earnest. But Mao really wasn't interested in a thorough struggle against the system that he himself since taking power, so he soon squashed the mass motion.

While Mao undermined the struggle against the new revisionist state-capitalist oppression, you glamorize this as a great fight against CIA agents and anarchists. It's hard for me to figure out what you are referring to here because you don't say who these CIA agents were, what they supposedly did, or what Mao did about them. But more importantly, you completely ignore the issue of whether China would be socialist or state-capitalist — so long as it is an independent oppressor of the masses, you don't seem to mind. Even regarding today, when you yourself acknowledge the capitalism is being built, you promote that the key thing is that China is independent.

Your ignoring the consolidation of a state-capitalist order under Mao (and your mistaken notion that the CCP under Mao included the national bourgeoisie) is also reflected in your idea of how things will change in China. You think that the left-wing of the party will discard the national bourgeoisie in a two-line struggle and all will be well. But with the consolidation of the state-capitalist order, the class struggle was no longer mainly against private capital, but against the ruling state/party bureaucracy. Today, the state-capitalist bureaucrats in China are giving more and more room for private capitalism, and, their political independence notwithstanding, also for foreign imperialist corporations and capital. China wants to be welcomed into the organizations of world capital such as the WTO. There may be those in the CCP who want to carry out the transition from state-capitalism to private capitalism in a slower way or who are sentimental for the old state-capitalist institutions. But the salvation of the Chinese toilers does not lie in either the old Maoist state-capitalism or the private capitalism that is expanding presently, but in opposing both and charting their own independent course. Thus, the issue is not to hope that the Chinese "C"P will reform itself, but to build a trend independent of and opposed to these fake communists.

You ask what was wrong with Mao's three-worlds theory. After all, you say, Mao succeeded in fighting colonialism and in

being a leader of the Third World. But what of the class struggle after the issue of political independence is won? The victory over colonialism in many countries was important, but political independence by itself does not solve the class exploitation of the worker and peasant masses. The struggle against colonialism facilitated the development of capitalism in the Third World and new domestic elites coming to power. Many of the domestic capitalist rulers were closely allied with imperialism and were downright tyrants to boot. The three-worlds theory is anti-Marxist precisely because it hides the class struggle in the third world. For the three worlds theory, the only problem was the 2 superpowers, but not the national bourgeoisie. Thus, under this theory the Maoists could make common cause with everyone from Pinochet in Chile to the Shah of Iran and Mobutu in Zaire. For some, including Mao, the three-worlds theory even became a way to embrace Nixon and U.S. imperialism under the theory that of the 2 superpowers, it was the Soviet Union that was the most dangerous. Thus, while Mao certainly did have accomplishments, Maoist theory is an assault on the basic principles of Marxism-Leninism.

I am also puzzled by your hopes in Zyuganov's phoney brand of "communism." You excuse its racism by arguing that racist scapegoating may flourish in times of economic crisis. But are we to have faith in a party that bows down before a racist atmosphere and has mightily contributed to fostering it? Of course you also argue that racism flourishes in times of economic boom. So evidently we will have to wait for a capitalism without economic fluctuations in order to rid Zyuganov's party of racism! Meanwhile you write as if this were just an unfortunate blot on an otherwise fine record. Once again you ignore the question of what the Soviet state-capitalism was. When you talk about Stalin, you say how bad the state-capitalist system was. But Zyuganov's party is a remnant of the old Soviet ruling party that created the social system you earlier decry. This party was abolished by Yeltsin, but various of its fragments reformed it in the early 90s. This regrouped party has generally gone along with the Gorbachev-Yeltsin path that led the Soviet Union from state-capitalism to market capitalism. These "communists" are participating in the Primakov government that is crushing the masses on behalf of the new Russian robber barons and the IMF. Yet, you evidently consider this a fine tradition from which a "return to Leninism will take place."

On Kosovo, you assert that we are daydreaming about an immediate workers revolution that will solve everything. You contrast this to your view that we must support NATO in order to aid the Albanian Kosovars. But we have never claimed that there is some workers revolution just over the horizon. All we have talked about is how important it would be for even a small workers trend to arise in Serbia and among the Albanian Kosovars.

Meanwhile, I think our main duty as regards NATO is to expose what it is up to. We agree that a Serb victory would be a horror. As well, you are right in pointing out that NATO motives are, among other things, to show that NATO threats are credible. But this brings out why our main job as regards NATO is to show that it is playing a cynical game, puncture its

ZN responds in favor of Maoism and looking towards the present Chinese and Russian CPs

May 1, 1999

Dear *Communist Voice* —

democratic pretensions, and expose how their imperialistic motives means in practical political terms. For instance, our article in the last CV exposes the Rambouillet agreement which would create the same type of mess created by the Dayton settlement in Bosnia and was predicated on the disarming of the KLA so as to pave the way for NATO to be the final arbiter in Kosovo. Events have since put Rambouillet on the sidelines, but still the Western powers are not willing to grant the Kosovars their rights. Rather they are contemplating things like turning Kosovo into their own protectorate, or even diving Kosovo into two parts, the north to Milosevic and the rest where NATO makes the law. Of course it is true that just about any settlement will be better than the complete ethnic cleansing of Milosevic. But for the national question to be solved in some reasonable fashion requires having a perspective beyond the rotten "solutions" NATO has in store.

You claim that the practical thing to do is to demand NATO arm the KLA. It is conceivable that in the future NATO will find itself forced to arm the KLA. But even in this case, the Albanian Kosovars will still have to oppose NATO's aims in this conflict so long as it does not recognize their rights. The KLA, as far as I can tell, does not tell the masses what NATO is up to however, but promotes it as a liberating force. This does great harm to the Albanian Kosovar cause, and merely getting some NATO arms will not remedy this situation. If the Albanian Kosovars are going to reach a solution in accord with their own desires, they must be clear about NATO, and clear about what NATO is up to even should NATO find itself compelled to arm the KLA. This is not some abstract theoretical question, but a most practical one.

I know it is impossible to deal in depth with the wide range of issues you have raised in your letter in this short reply. Hopefully, this will be of some assistance in further clarifying our stand. It might also be helpful to you in understanding our views if you look at some previous articles dealing with the question of revisionist state-capitalist society. You will note in CV a listing of our previous articles, a number of which deal with the development of state-capitalism in the Soviet Union and Cuba and those that deal with some theoretical issues regarding the transition to socialism. If you need these back issues for further study, please let us know.

In closing, it seems that a common theme of yours is that our stand is not practical. But is it realistic for the proletariat to place its hopes in whatever is powerful or prominent today (the CCP, Zyuganov's party, NATO)? What is realistic is facing the truth about these forces and realizing that both the immediate and long-term interests of the proletariat require it to develop its own independent class stand so that it can think and act for itself and does not remain a helpless pawn of the exploiters.

Revolutionary regards,
Mark, for the *Communist Voice* □

I said before that you discuss issues too abstractly. Let me add a second criticism: you see what you want to see — not what's there. I never said that Mao was correct in uniting with the national bourgeois. I said that he felt it was necessary for the anti-colonial struggle — I said I felt that was wrong. This leads to a second point — the idea of stages of revolution. I believe in consistently following correct principles throughout the various stages of revolution. The Shining Path advocated something like what you have stated: work with the national bourgeois in the anti-colonial stage, & then stab them in the back when it comes time to build socialism. There are at least 4 problems with that: 1. it's anti-Marxist; 2. it's unethical; 3. no one can trust you; 4. it's not so easy to dislodge the national bourgeois once they've got their foot in the door. You argue too abstractly. Some of the bourgeois did join the party, both to help the anti-colonial struggle, & to create a kind of insurance for capitalism. Capitalists are, after all, people (?). By joining the party, they did not commit literal suicide. They gained power within the party. They were able to introduce greater class inequality into the system, the same kind of class inequality that Stalin perpetuated in Russia after Lenin's death. They were able to maintain a higher income & lifestyle within & under the rule of the communist party. What you call "state capitalism" — & Lenin sometimes did use the term — is a part of what Marx called "socialism" — the first post-revolutionary stage, where a graduated income tax is set up, land is seized, a national bank is established, government industries are created & developed. This is the program of the Manifesto, but you brand it "state capitalism," & condemn it because it is not communism, the withering away of the state, the final stage of communist revolution — & then you criticize me saying that I don't understand the stages of revolution. Thus you wind up with the following "muddle": you condemn "state capitalism," at the socialist stage of revolution, for not being communism, which you call "socialism." All communism is socialism, but not all socialism — including the first post-revolutionary, "state capitalist" stage — is communism. The point is that the national bourgeois who joined the party did not commit suicide — they gained individual power. They maintained a ruling class standard of living. They corrupted the party. They introduced the "line of the right" within the party (which Mao called "revisionism"). And they struggled constantly to bring China back to capitalism. Eventually they succeeded. So it was hardly suicide. But in the meantime Mao did set up government-operated industries, which you condemn as "state capitalism," but which Marx called for in the Manifesto as part of the first post-revolutionary stage of socialism. It's hard to understand what your intentions are here. Needless to say, Mao also created many other social & economic benefits for the peasants, which are associated with socialism, in the areas of public education, health care, infrastructure. So in your over-abstraction, you miss many basic, solid socialist realities (the loss of which post-

socialist Russia is suffering quite concretely today). When "state capitalism" is used by fascists, or people with fascistic attitudes, with resulting inhumanity & brutality in administration — & the Stalinists were guilty of this — this gives nationalized industries ("state capitalism") a bad name. But to deny that nationalized industries were part of Marx's 1st stage of socialism is more than mere "muddling." So I hardly ignore the bourgeois element in the Chinese party power structure — but neither do I misrepresent the nationalization of industries. You then repeat that Mao did not bring the old national bourgeois into the United Front — another "muddle." As I said, Mao was perhaps excessive in quashing rebellions which he felt would lead to chaos & the collapse of socialism, & in fact, many of these rebellions were instigated by the CIA. I don't have a list of CIA agents. Even the CIA itself works on a "need to know" basis, & the right hand doesn't know what the left hand is doing — a system as efficient as it is democratic. (But on this side I think you can safely list Richard Gere & David Letterman.) As I say, I don't absurdly condemn the system of nationalized industries as being anti-socialism. I do condemn the fascistic brutality of Stalinism. And yes I do look at the balance of power from a Realpolitik point of view. Revolution is not for the squeamish.

Again, by maintaining China's independence from Western imperialism; by maintaining the party structure with its leftist branch, now in the opposition; by maintaining some nationalized industries, which the workers defend when the rightists try to dismantle them — this maintains a situation where, with the continuing collapse of world capitalism, there is the easiest path back to the left — to the ascendancy of the left in the party, to more nationalized industries & fewer private industries, to more services for the people, & a stage much closer to the classless society than if the Chinese party were dismantled & a situation similar to that in Russia were created.

The truth of Mao's three-world theory continues to be demonstrated by the fact that today most of the Third World is puppet pseudo-democracies of the West, like Nicaragua, Nigeria, Algeria, or out-right puppet tyrannies like Uganda & Saudi Arabia, versus anti-colonialist states, whether socialist (e.g. N. Korea), Islamic (e.g. Iran), or a mixture of the two (e.g. Libya). You say that where the CIA-operated Western neo-colonial empire does not reign, capitalism will develop. This hasn't been demonstrated, either in "state-capitalist" Korea, or in theocratic Iran. Western imperialism creates strong reactions. In a less authoritarian, less Western-dominated Third World, popular struggles now quashed by the CIA, popular leaders, so often assassinated by the CIA, might thrive. The three-world theory does not say that imperialism is the only problem. It expresses the fact that it is the primary problem of this stage of history. It only obscures the class struggle when it advocates including the national bourgeois in the United Front, which I have already condemned, & which you deny that Mao said & did — another "muddle." Pinochet & the Shah were Western puppets quite in accordance with the three-world theory. Here too you are "muddling."

The party in China & Russia provides a structure that the people can use once again when the time is ripe. That's my story, & I'm sticking to it. The destruction of these two forces

would simply shore up the decaying world capitalist system. You may be assured that no amount of abstract "muddling" will convince me to support that. Perhaps communists should worry more about attacking world capitalism, & less about destroying its already weakened, less-than-perfect opponents. Yes, that's what I mean by considering the Realpolitik balance of power.

First I want to save the lives of 2 million Kosovars. Then I'll worry about exposing NATO. Here I am apparently both more Realpolitik and more compassionate than yourselves — you would sacrifice millions of lives for the sake of a leftist fashion statement? Where's your sentimental squeamishness for the needs of the people here? My goal is a free Kosovo, which NATO may have to deliver against its will. (And as I said, the stronger the KLA is, the more a free Kosovo will be free of NATO.) I cannot create the spontaneous uprising of the masses. I can try to help create the conditions for such — that is in the fine Leninist tradition.

As long as you continue to condemn the Manifesto's measure 7, "extension of factories & instruments of production owned by the state" as being anti-Marxist, I don't know what good reading more articles "muddling" this issue would do.

Yes, it's realistic to try to save 2 million lives via brute NATO forces. Yes, it's realistic to try to maintain the structures of decadent parties for future use by the people. I hate to think what Russia would look like without even a communist opposition — something like the US since 1970, perhaps — Marx forbid! Let me repeat, Marx never considered the threat of Nazism as the alternative to capitalism, because it didn't exist in his time. It does today — in the US, in England, in France, in Russia, in Israel. It seems that only the decadent left is capable of wooing the people from those psychopaths, & that's what I try to do. Don't expect me to give up any time soon. It's a question, as you say, of stages. The classless society isn't built in a day.

...

Sincerely,
ZN

□

Our comments on ZN's response:

ZN's reply to my letter of April 29 demonstrates one of the most widespread misconception in the left today, namely, that any regime that combines nationalization of the means of production plus some progressive social measures is building socialism. ZN cannot see that these features alone do not suffice for making a transition to socialism, and that side by side with their development in the former Soviet Union, China, North Korea, Cuba, etc. there also developed a new form of state-capitalist oppression by a new ruling elite. ZN considers these societies socialist and opposes our terming them "state-capitalist." As these allegedly "socialist" countries have either collapsed, nearly collapsed or are more and more adopting market-capitalist economics, ZN does not work for the revival of Marxist socialism, but clings to the very ruling parties and remnants of the former ruling parties that led these countries to disaster. This is the "realpolitik" he prides himself on.

ZN's assertions to the contrary, we have never put forward the idea that the transition from capitalism to socialism could take place without the revolutionary state step-wise nationalizing the means of production. But we have pointed out that this alone is insufficient to move toward socialism. To achieve socialism, the working masses must be able to exercise control over the entire economy. They must not only see to it that their particular enterprise produces in accord with an overall societal plan, but they must develop the ability to determine the overall policies and run the central institutions as well. Without this, anarchy of production will assert itself now matter how extensive the planning bodies grow. Our studies of the Soviet Union and Cuba have, among other things, shown the many ways in which anarchy manifested itself within the state economy. Thus, it is not merely the extent of state economy that determines whether these countries were moving to socialism, but whether a real social control of the masses over the economy was developing. In our articles, we did not oppose the idea of nationalization, but emphasized how this must go hand-in-hand with the development of social control over the nationalized industry. In our studies on the Soviet Union, China, and Cuba we have found that the process of social control of production did not continue to develop, but rather the new state bureaucracy hardened into a new exploiting class that lived in relative splendor. It was this new class of exploiters that ran society, while the workers were relegated to carrying out their orders.

Instead of attaching much importance to the underlying class stratification in the revisionist societies, ZN is content with the existence of various social programs. Thus, according to ZN, Stalin was an "inhuman," "brutal" and "fascistic" leader who introduced "greater class inequality" akin to that introduced in China. But this doesn't cause him to question whether these were socialist societies or not, because there were social programs. Of course, in the transition to socialism there will be social programs. But once again, the issue is that the existence of social programs do not prove that a country is on the way to socialism. In fact, while the revolutions in countries like the Soviet Union, China and Cuba did establish a fairly extensive social "safety net," the continued existence of such programs did not prevent a new class stratification from developing, and the gap between the haves and have nots from growing. A good amount of social benefits were not even national programs, but were tied to the success, or lack thereof, of the workers' or peasants' particular economic enterprise. Social programs were subject to being slashed as the state-economies went into crisis. Today, where the state-capitalist bureaucrats still rule, the defense of social programs has to be carried out in struggle against the so-called "communist" rulers. This is the final result of the class stratification that grew up in these societies and marks their last gasp as they make the transition to a much more privatized economy.

ZN argues that since nationalization is "part of" the process of establishing socialism, since "public education", "health care" and "infrastructure" are "associated with socialism", therefore a country with these things has a socialist regime. These things, which can be found in modern capitalist countries, make up the "solid socialist reality" for ZN while our efforts to examine the

question of what role the workers are playing in the society, whether or not a new class society has formed, or whether or not the state economy is run using capitalist methods are, for him, just examples of our "over-abstraction."

On another subject, ZN is unhappy that I allegedly distorted his views by accusing him of supporting Mao's decision to form a united front with the bourgeoisie at certain points in the anti-colonial struggle. But what I actually said in my April 29 letter was that he took the contradictory stand of "Mao was right to unite with the national bourgeoisie, but it was also a mistake to do so." And indeed, both views do coexist. For instance, right after saying Mao was wrong to form an alliance with the bourgeoisie, he presents a justification for it, namely, that it was understandable because Mao wanted so badly to fight colonialism. Moreover, ZN introduces the issue by arguing that I "misinterpret Mao, and deny his great accomplishments" including "anti-colonialism, the united front against colonialism and its explicit inclusion of the national bourgeoisie, and the struggle of two lines." That's a puzzling way to express disagreement with Mao. Furthermore, ZN hails Mao's "three worlds theory". This theory, which is Mao's prescription for the struggle in all the dependent countries, is notable for downplaying the struggle against the home-grown exploiters in the Third World.

After implying that Mao's explicit inclusion of the national bourgeoisie was a good thing, ZN then argues the exact opposite. ZN argues that the three worlds theory is good except when it obscures the class struggle by bringing the bourgeoisie into the United Front. Of course, without the idea that the national bourgeois rulers in various third world countries are really part of the "anti-imperialist" united front, there is no three worlds theory. Some versions of the three worlds theory express this idea openly while other versions do this by painting every struggle against the national bourgeoisie in the third world as primarily a struggle against foreign imperialism. ZN proves this point by promoting even the Islamic clerical tyranny over the Iranian masses as "anti-imperialism" along with the crumbling state-capitalist repression in North Korea and the bourgeois nationalist regime in Libya. For that matter, ZN hails the phoney "communists" in Russia, who unite with the Russian fascists on a platform of Russian big-power chauvinism, as anti-imperialists. When proponents of the Three Worlds theory, like ZN, want to promote a regime or trend, they do not analyze the role of these forces in the class struggle inside the country or to imperialism overall, but whether they have any sort of complaints or rhetoric against the big Western powers.

As far as ZN's efforts to clarify his views on the matter of what class alliances are appropriate at different stages of the revolution, he doesn't have any means to even approach the question. He simply rules out any consideration of the matter as being "unethical" while pretending that this has something in common with Marxism. He doesn't broach the question of analyzing what the general conditions and tasks facing the oppressed masses are at any particular point, what the general stage of struggle is, and what attitude various classes have toward those tasks. He doesn't raise the issue of whether or not some non-proletarian force is or is not actually participating in

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