

Communist Voice



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Windsor/Detroit demos continue fight vs. neo-liberalism

On June 4, several thousand protesters took to the streets of Windsor, Canada to denounce a meeting of the Organization of American States being held there. An additional 300 activists rallied and marched in Detroit, just across the border from Windsor. The OAS was targeted for its role in the neo-liberal agenda of exploitation and environmental ruin in North America, Latin America and the Caribbean.

Before the June 4 actions, the capitalist authorities tried to intimidate protesters. For instance, 20 activists were arrested in Detroit for the "crime" of riding bicycles on a street. New ordinances, such as banning protesters from covering their faces with bandannas or masks, were passed. Harassment at the border crossings was stepped up. Meanwhile, the bourgeois media kept up a steady drumbeat of hysteria against the demonstrators as "violent" and "terrorists." The day of the action, police in riot gear sealed off several blocks around the OAS meeting, stationing themselves on both sides of a newly-constructed 10-foot high chain-link fence, and lining the downtown streets of Windsor and Detroit.

But the protesters refused to be frightened off. In Windsor, large numbers of workers in trade union contingents marched together with youth and student activists from the surrounding region. This spirited action went right past the OAS meeting area and ended in a rally in a park bordering the Detroit River. Following the march and rally, several hundred young activists attempted to block intersections around the meeting area and temporarily stopped a bus carrying OAS delegates before the police waded in with tear gas and arrested about 40 activists.

The demonstration not only succeeded in exposing the crimes of the OAS, but also provided an opportunity for activists to exchange views on important issues for the movement. The following article was among the leaflets distributed at these actions. It was also distributed at some workplaces in Detroit.

Down with the OAS, free-trade and protectionism! To fight neo-liberalism, target capitalism

Over the past months angry demonstrators have taken to the streets against the atrocities being committed against the masses around the world by various international or regional organizations of the big capitalist exploiters. Massive protests raged in

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Putin's two wars: on Chechnya and Russian workers

It's not in the headlines anymore, but the war continues. The Russian army has captured all the major cities in Chechnya, but the Chechen people continue to resist. In the last issue we said that the capture of Grozny, the capital of Chechnya, wouldn't bring an end to the war. And it hasn't. The Russian army is seeking to bottle up the Chechen fighters in the villages and mountains of the southern highlands, and yet Chechen guerrilla attacks on Russian troops are occurring all through Chechnya. Repeated fighting is taking place in the Argun and Vedeno valleys, but other attacks have taken place well behind Russian lines. Meanwhile, some Chechen fighters have apparently returned to Grozny itself, as the Russian army has reported attacks at night on its outposts there.

Chechnya is a small country of hardly a million people in the northern Caucasus, which is a mountainous isthmus located between the Caspian and Black Seas in the southeast of what used to be the Soviet Union. It was annexed by Tsarist Russia in the mid-19th century. When the Soviet Union broke up, Chechnya declared its independence from Russia, but the Yeltsin free-market government wouldn't accept this, and eventually invaded Chechnya. It devastated Chechnya in a three-year-long conflict, lasting from the end of 1994 to the end

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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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Windsor/Detroit demos

Continued from the front page

the streets of Seattle this past November/December against the WTO. This April in Washington, D.C., tens of thousands of activists targeted the policies of the IMF and the World Bank. Now activists in Windsor and Detroit are gathering to denounce a gathering of the Organization of American States (OAS), an organization of the capitalist rulers of the U.S. and Canada, Latin America, and the Caribbean. The OAS is presently trying to establish a "free-trade" zone throughout the hemisphere through an agreement called the Free Trade Agreement of the Americas (FTAA). This agreement would help accelerate and lock in place the free flow of investment capital and trade that is already extensive between these countries.

Today neo-liberal "free-trade" policy is the fashionable panacea being offered up by the lords of finance and industry and their political representatives. According to the dominant neo-liberal "wisdom" of the last couple decades, just eliminate all restrictions on big business, and all problems will be solved. The reality? The workers and other oppressed are being hammered as profits of the powerful corporations soar. Workers are hit with layoffs, increased workloads, and wage cuts. Workers are also hit by cutbacks in social programs, which particularly ravage lower-paid working families, and the black and Latino communities. Privatization has meant expanding the fields of private profiteering while letting public services and education rot. Already weak environmental measures are being

undermined. At the end of this road lies ruin for the downtrodden and unprecedented wealth for the rich.

Meanwhile just as the gap between the rich and poor has grown within the powerful industrial countries, so the gap between rich and the less developed countries has also grown. The multinationals roam around the poorer capitalist countries not to uplift the masses, but to find ever-cheaper sources of labor, grab resources and markets, and dump their toxic wastes.

It is this legacy of ruining the masses and the environment that has given rise to the outrage expressed against the capitalist agencies and agreements that assist this process.

Capitalism itself is the underlying problem

But to wage an effective fight against the ills that are rightly protested, one of the major issues that activists have to deal with is what is the root cause of the ills we protest? These ills are not mainly the product of this or that trade arrangement. Nor are they just the result of neo-liberal policies in general. The underlying problem is capitalism, a social system whose very operation requires the ruining of the masses and the environment. But what of the global spread of the large corporations and the domination of the world by the major imperialist powers? This too is inherent in capitalism. Just as the competition between capitalists within a country leads to the stronger growing at the expense of the weaker, so the big capitalists who conquer the domestic market must also strive to dominate their competitors on a world scale or be conquered by

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them.

The present neo-liberal crusade is nothing but one form of this system, but not the system itself. In fact, while today the world capitalist agencies are on a free trade kick, world capitalism has gone back and forth between free trade and state regulation of the market. For example, for a long time after World War II, the World Bank and other bourgeois agencies encouraged government-backed infrastructure projects and the building of state sectors in the Third World. Even now, when various monopolies feel threatened by competition, they demand protectionist measures and state subsidies, and a whole system of "corporate welfare" continues to exist. Today, even as the bourgeoisie claims everything is supposed to be solved by the market itself, they are in fact building a system of world rules for economic activity greater than anything seen in the past. Presently, this is mainly for the end of attacking protectionism, but when the world bourgeoisie needs to save itself with a heavy dose of state intervention, the international bourgeois institutions can adopt themselves to that policy too. For example, in the coming years, as world environmental disasters mount up, and several catastrophes force the bourgeoisie to take the question seriously, they will turn to state regulation to save themselves. Of course, just as today they devastate the masses with free trade, they will ensure that the state regulation of the future squeezes the masses to pay for the messes created by world capitalism.

Class struggle is the answer

The answer to the offensive of the bourgeoisie is to build a class movement of the workers and other oppressed. It is the organizations, demonstrations, strikes, mass uprisings and rebellions of the working masses against poverty, cutbacks and all forms of capitalist oppression that is what the world bourgeoisie fears. While the capitalist representatives of Latin America and North America haggle over trade rules, an armed mass rebellion is going on in Colombia which the Colombian bourgeoisie, with massive U.S. military aid, is trying to quell. In Peru, there is also a mass guerrilla movement and recently a boycott of the fraudulent elections held by the Fujimori regime. In Ecuador, mass protests recently toppled the country's president and major strikes and protests have broken out in Argentina. The demonstrations against the world capitalist agencies can help encourage struggles such as these, show the justice in them, and expose the attempts of the bourgeoisie to smother them. They can likewise encourage strikes, the mass demonstrations against racial oppression and sexism, and other struggles that have developed in Canada and the U.S. Support for the class struggle also involves a fight against the class collaborationist trends that often dominate the movement. For instance, the workers in the U.S. and Canada face a struggle against their own entrenched pro-capitalist trade union bureaucracies of the AFL-CIO and the CLC (Canadian Labor Congress).

"Fair trade?"

The trade union bureaucrats are among the reformist forces strongly pushing the idea that the answer to the WTO or the FTAA is protectionist measures ensuring "fair trade". The faulty premise of this slogan is that unfair policies of foreign companies and governments are the cause of unemployment and therefore protectionist measures will preserve jobs and living conditions at home.

But the workers can only defend themselves by fighting their own companies, not begging the bourgeois rulers to save the companies from foreign competition. The "fair trade" slogan can only divert the attention of workers away from their own exploiters. Indeed, it is no accident that while the AFL-CIO misleaders can give bloodcurdling speeches against foreign competition, they have allowed "our" capitalists to steamroller the workers with "downsizing" and wage and benefit concessions. The truth is that everywhere the laws of capitalist competition drive the corporations to automation, speed-ups, increased workloads, etc. Moreover, capitalist production leads to periodic crises of overproduction where the market can no longer absorb what is produced. If unemployment was a product of foreign competition, then everything should be rosy for the workers in other countries. But capitalism has created armies of unemployed everywhere around the world. Meanwhile, in the U.S., even in this period of relatively low unemployment during the present "boom" economy, there is job insecurity and wages are being kept down.

It should also be noted that the protectionist campaign of the trade union bureaucrats and other reformist forces has included cuddling up to arch-reactionary Pat Buchanan and his "American [Capitalism] First" campaign. Buchanan, who is financed mainly by a textile billionaire, has always recognized the value of bashing foreigners to divert the workers from targeting their home grown oppressors. His flirtation with the AFL-CIO heads merely required him to link his chauvinism with a bit of anti-corporate rhetoric.

Reformism and the Latin American bourgeoisie

Another part of the struggle against reformism involves what attitude to take toward the bourgeoisie outside the big imperialist powers. When we look at the OAS, the problem isn't simply U.S. imperialism, the world superpower. The Canadian bourgeoisie and the Latin American bourgeoisies are also exploiters with their own rotten missions. Indeed, it's notable that the Latin American bourgeoisie has already established its own neo-liberal "free-trade" zones such as Mercosur and the Andean Pact. The Latin American bourgeoisie rides roughshod over the workers and poor peasantry who have waged heated battles and uprisings against their local exploiters. At the same time, the masses also target U.S. imperialism which, being the strongest power, has great economic and political leverage with which to squeeze the other countries in the region, make them bend to its will (with the help of agencies like the IMF), and a shameful record of making or breaking regimes.

Despite the many strikes and protests, independent class

organization remains weak in the oppositional movements in Latin America. The dominant trends in the movement may oppose this or that government. But they also tend to look to local capitalism, albeit with some reforms and a relationship with imperialism that provides more room for local bourgeois development. Such ideas permeate not only the more mainstream oppositional trends like Peronism in Argentina or the politics of Cuauhtemoc Cardenas and the PRD in Mexico, but are also strong among radical mass organizations. Indeed, Castroism has long promoted alliances with the bourgeois forces in Latin America.

Anti-revisionist communism and building the anti-capitalist trend

The advance of the class struggle both here and abroad is needed to push back the neo-liberal agenda. But we cannot close our eyes to the fact that most everywhere the mass movements face serious problems of orientation and class organization is very weak. Thus, the fight against the neo-liberal offensive puts on the agenda protracted work to establish new revolutionary class organization.

Building a revolutionary class trend also involves work to show that the liberation of the workers and oppressed is impossible without overthrowing capitalism and establishing socialism. Only when the working masses smash the capitalist machinery of oppression, establish their own revolutionary government and stepwise place economic enterprises under the control of the society as a whole can they become masters of society, not its slaves. Such a society was the vision of the communism of Marx, Engels and Lenin.

But to uphold this perspective requires opposition to the phony "communism" of the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, a system that still exists to some extent in China and Cuba. The revolutions in these countries died out, the working masses lost their say over what was being done and the institutions being built, and instead of socialism a new form of state-capitalism was established. These so-called "communist" societies, and the pseudo-Marxist trends that support them, have revised Marxism beyond recognition. This is why real communism today is anti-revisionist communism. The revisionist societies have considerable state sectors and extensive state economic plans which makes them look like they're not capitalistic. But a closer look shows that beneath the

veneer of planning and state ownership, anarchy of production reigned. Private interests developed between the different enterprises and ministries. The state property became in fact the property of an elite class of bureaucrats who lived high on the hog off the sweat of the workers and enforced a tyranny over them. The development of private interests under state-capitalism paved the way for the eventual transition from state-capitalism to market capitalism, a process that is well under way in China and Cuba. These countries have all become havens for the imperialist multinationals as well.

An example of how state property in such societies is similar to capitalist property can be seen in the current campaign of the Castro regime called "improved management." Under this program, government subsidies to state enterprises will largely end and enterprises will live or die according to their own financial success. Managers are being given extensive powers to determine wages, work hours, job levels and other conditions for their particular factory as national regulations on such matters are being scrapped. Wages will be paid out of the funds of each enterprise, which will be a direct incentive for factory managers who want to survive to slash wages and jobs. Workers whose jobs are eliminated are out of luck as enterprises will no longer be required to offer such workers other jobs or training as this might undermine "efficient production", as a Cuban manager put it. Indeed, officials admit they are copying capitalist methods, stating that this is necessary in part so Cuban enterprises can drum up business in the world markets. Clearly, this is not a society where the workers are in power, but one where the working class is under the thumb of a managerial elite which operates as a bourgeois class.

Socialism is the act of the working class, not something handed to it by benevolent despots. And the struggle against neo-liberalism must be used to encourage a class movement, not relying on squabbles between the ruling classes. This is the path of struggle against world capitalism. The path of encouraging the class struggle is the alternative to the program of the world agencies of neo-liberalism.

**Down with the OAS, "free trade" and protectionism!
Fight the neo-liberal onslaught with class struggle!
Market capitalism and state-capitalism are the enemies!**

—From *Detroit Workers' Voice* #25, June 4, 2000, published
by the Detroit Marxist-Leninist Study Group. □

Under cover of a war on drugs:

Clinton pushes Colombia to attack guerrillas

by Pete Brown

President Bill Clinton is planning a military push into southern Colombia to attack leftist insurgents there. This attack will be carried out by the Colombian military under close supervision by American military advisors, who will train special new "counternarcotics" battalions of Colombian army troops. A front-page article in the *New York Times* of February 6 detailed Clinton's arguments for the program and some of the objections being raised against it in U.S. ruling circles. But despite official objections the plan enjoys bipartisan support from Republicans and Democrats in Congress and is almost certain to be approved soon. In fact one new battalion has already been trained and is already in action in the jungles of Colombia.

Clinton's plan calls for \$1.6 billion in new aid for Colombia for the next two years. But U.S. officials acknowledge that this is only the beginning, that stabilizing the Colombian government will take many years and lots of money. Some liberal groups such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International have raised objections about the Colombian government's atrocious record of human rights abuses. But these voices are drowned out by the "moderate" Democrats and Republicans in Congress; the latter are demanding that Clinton act quickly before he ends up losing Colombia to rebel groups that are becoming increasingly successful in their long war against the government. Even Sen. Christopher Dodd (D-Conn.), one of the most liberal members of Congress, is toeing the imperialist line and supporting Clinton's plan.

U.S. and Colombian officials say the counternarcotics battalions will not be used to fight leftist guerrillas except for those who hire themselves out to drug traffickers. Since Vietnam the U.S. military has supposedly developed a deadly fear of the "i" word ("insurgency") and would never dream of taking military action against a popular, mass political force. Supposedly Clinton is only interested in shutting down coca-growing farms and some coca-processing labs. But this is just a cover story to protect what is in fact a large-scale effort to prop up a teetering capitalist regime. The Colombian government is riven by contradictions between its own ruling parties, between the government and the drug traffickers (who have extensive influence among the ruling parties), and between the ruling bourgeois parties and the working masses, many of whom support the leftist guerrillas. Under cover of the ever-expanding "war on drugs", Clinton is actually helping the Colombian government in its latest counterinsurgency effort. Even Gen. Fred Woerner, former commander of U.S. military forces in Latin America, says, "How do you push into an area dominated by these guys [the guerrillas] without having anything to do with them? Anyone who believes that these counternarcotics

battalions will not be involved in counterinsurgency is naive." (*New York Times*, Feb. 6, p. 4)

War against the masses on behalf of neo-liberalism

Only a small part of the war against the Colombian masses is waged by official government forces attacking openly. Much of it is carried out by paramilitary forces directly associated with the military and police but acting anonymously. During the day, soldiers will carry out raids against peasant villages. By night, the same soldiers will dress in civilian clothes and carry out "disappearances" of anyone they think sympathizes with leftist guerrillas. The death toll from this dirty war is enormous, amounting to thousands of people every year.

The level of violence in Colombia is also driving thousands of people to flee the country. The Colombian government says some 800,000 Colombians have emigrated in the last four years, many of them ending up in the U.S. (See the article "Driven by fear, Colombians leave in droves," *New York Times*, March 5, Section 1, p. 8)

Just as the latest offensive in Colombia's open war against the guerrillas is funded by Washington, the U.S. is also a major backer of the dirty war of the paramilitaries. Many of the army officers involved in political murders have been trained by the U.S. armed forces and CIA. The U.S. has been doing this for decades to protect and enhance its imperialist sphere of interest in Latin America.

Connections between Colombian paramilitaries and the official army and police are decades old. Paramilitary units were first set up in the 1960s and 70s as "self-defense units" similar to the ones organized in South Vietnam. When their abuses were documented and publicized, however, in the 1980s, the government decided to cut official ties to the paramilitaries. In 1989 the government decreed that it would no longer maintain the paramilitaries. But the result was simply that the paramilitaries went underground, and their ties to the military became secret. Meanwhile the dirty war continued worse than ever. In the early to mid 1990s at least five thousand people a year were assassinated or disappeared by paramilitary death squads. (For details see *Colombia: The Genocidal Democracy* by Javier Giraldo, S.J. Common Courage Press, Monroe, Maine, 1996.) This includes many victims of "social cleansing", urban youths murdered by police and local death squads just for being "social undesirables" and a possible breeding ground for guerrilla sympathizers.

Government responsibility for the thousands of deaths has been documented by many groups such as Human Rights Watch, which recently came out with another report condemning the Colombian government. ("Colombia's aid to paramilitary reported to persist", *New York Times*, Feb. 24, p. A10) There is

actually a law in the U.S. which prohibits giving aid to governments with human rights abuses. And the U.S. State Dept. even admits that the Colombian government is involved in massive abuses. But President Clinton's drug policy czar, Gen. Barry McCaffrey, shrugged off the accusations and said aid would escalate anyway. ("U.S. drug czar reassures Colombia on aid," *New York Times*, Feb. 25, p. A8.)

Clinton justifies the massive increase in military aid by saying it is necessary to carry through the war on drugs. But as noted above, much of this argument is just a bogus ruse to carry out a civil war against the masses. But even when the Colombian military really does launch a campaign against drug dealers, that doesn't mean the operation is free of human rights abuses. The government's war against Pablo Escobar in the early 1990s involved murdering hundreds of young men in the crime-ridden poor sections of Medellin. They were targeted by police for the crime of being "social undesirables", possible recruits by Escobar in his army of drug-runners and hitmen. (For background on this see *News of a Kidnapping* by Gabriel Garcia Marquez.) Meanwhile Escobar himself was financing right-wing death squads to assassinate young working class and peasant youths suspected of sympathy for leftist guerrillas.

While there is widespread support for the leftist guerrillas, the struggle has taken a heavy toll. Thus the new president of Colombia, Andres Pastrana, garnered some support when he said that bringing about peace with the guerrillas would be his top priority. Many people, including some of the guerrillas' supporters, looked to some respite from the thousands of murders as a step forward. But at the same time Pastrana is pursuing support for neo-liberal economic policies such as the privatization of Colombia's electric-power industry. These policies are impoverishing more and more of the workers and peasants. His "war on drugs" is wiping out the income of many poor farmers, with nothing to replace coca-growing. Pastrana's attitude is simply to drive these peasants off their land. And while Pastrana organizes new open military offensives with the help of the U.S., the dirty war by right-wing paramilitaries against the masses continues.

The neo-liberal onslaught in Colombia's neighbors

Today Washington is promoting neo-liberal policies in Latin America. The U.S. and international agencies influenced by it such as the IMF, World Bank, etc. push Colombia to privatize state-funded enterprises such as the national electric company. Any opposition to these policies is treated as treason by the Colombian government. The same fight over free trade and neo-liberalism is being waged in Colombia's neighboring countries.

1. Army coup in Ecuador cuts short Indian rebellion

Clinton's planned intervention in Colombia comes right after a rebellion by Indians in Ecuador overthrew the president of that country. The Indians were protesting economic policies of the president that opened up the country to IMF policies. The president wanted to tie the value of Ecuador's currency directly

to the U.S. dollar. This would have meant a severe devaluation of Ecuadoran currency, with the result that savings held by the Ecuadoran masses would be practically worthless. The Indians rose up in January, blocked roads, invaded the capital of Quito and surrounded the presidential palace. The Indians were working in alliance with the Ecuadoran army, which also opposed the president. But after the president fled the country, the army took over and installed the vice-president in his place. And the vice-president promptly announced that he would carry out the same "dollarization" plans as his predecessor. With the army and the U.S. backing the new president, the Indians were stymied and had to call off their protests. They returned to their rural homes but promised to make things more difficult for the government next time around.

This is the second time in less than three years that a president of Ecuador has been driven out of office through a popular insurgency. In 1997 populist demagogue Abdala Bucaram was overthrown by a general strike. Bucaram had promised to stand up to foreign creditors and help the poor working masses in Ecuador. But those promises evaporated once he was in office.

This instability in Ecuador shows that all is not well in South America. American financiers are bragging about their nine years of prosperity, but in fact this has been nine years of growing class differentiation in the U.S. And this process occurs in an exaggerated way in Latin America. There the class divisions are growing in an excruciatingly painful manner. This is producing an increasingly unstable situation.

2. Privatized workers restive in Peru

In Peru, President Fujimori has cemented his hold on power by leaning more and more on the arm of the military while suppressing popular expressions of discontent. In their fierce war against leftist guerrillas the military is committing human rights abuses similar to Colombia. News organizations that try to expose the army's abuses find themselves shut down or censored, and leaders of human rights organizations wind up dead. Fujimori excuses the military for these actions. Meanwhile Fujimori has in effect pulled off a coup against his own government, running for a third term when this is expressly forbidden by Peru's constitution. Fujimori forced a bill through the Congress giving an "interpretation" of the constitution which allows him to run for another consecutive term.

At the same time Fujimori's popularity is dreadfully low because of his neo-liberal economic policies. Fujimori's neo-liberalism has included massive privatization of government jobs. The workers are resisting, and Fujimori is losing popularity every day. On February 23 thousands of municipal workers in Lima rioted, angry about the loss of government jobs.

But Fujimori used his close ties to the military and repressive tactics to ensure victory in the first round of elections in April. Fujimori's opponent in the presidential runoff election withdrew from the race, citing Fujimori's unfair electioneering and electoral fraud. The opponent, a bourgeois politician named Toledo, was popular among the indigenous population; so Fujimori has now managed to lose even more support among

them. There was a mass boycott of the elections, but Fujimori claimed victory in the resulting electoral farce. The result, as in Colombia and Ecuador, is that the government, despite its democratic facade, is becoming more and more autocratic and isolated from the population.

3. The harsh face of neo-liberalism in Bolivia

Neo-liberal policies are also in full swing in Bolivia, where the government is carrying out privatization of state assets, trade liberalization, encouragement of foreign investment, and strict monetary control. As in Ecuador people running for president promise to do something to slow down the neo-liberal policies, but then as soon as they are in office actually accelerate the policies. The big stick of military force is used against anyone who dares to protest these policies. Right-wing paramilitary forces kill off human rights crusaders in the cities, and in the country the army has killed a number of Indians involved in protests against destructive mining operations. In 1998 coca farmers carried out a number of organized protests against the government's drug war and the government's insufficient crop-alternative programs. In one demonstration the farmers clashed with army troops and ten farmers were killed.

"Big brother" or imperialist bully?

The American government likes to portray itself as the "big brother" of Latin American countries. Thus Clinton visited Central America after the hurricanes decimated it, handing out a few pennies in aid and acting like he was oh-so concerned for the welfare of the poverty-stricken people there. But the truth is that the U.S. acts as an imperialist bully toward Latin America and regards the area as its own special sphere of interest.

The imperialist powers have divided up the globe between themselves into spheres of interest which the other powers generally recognize. Within these spheres the Great Powers have freedom to bully the native inhabitants. Thus the U.S. recognizes Chechnya as belonging to Russia and only utters a few words of protest against the extreme brutality of Russian treatment of civilians there. Other powers recognized the right of France to invade African countries that used to be its colonies, and Portugal is still regarded as the official overlord of East Timor. Since before the Civil War the U.S. has regarded Latin America as its own sphere of interest which European powers had no right to intervene in. But the U.S. has readily intervened itself, sending troops into Latin American countries on numerous occasions.

So when they rebel against exploitation and repression, the working masses in Latin America face not only their own local exploiters and governments, but also the wealth and military power of U.S. imperialism. The U.S. props up local capitalist regimes against the danger of revolutionary overthrow; at the same time, the U.S. insists that local governments take positions favoring U.S. trade interests and U.S.-based multinational corporations.

The U.S. maintains extensive contacts with military services throughout Latin America in order to ensure that these militaries

are U.S.-friendly. Tens of thousands of Latin American military officers have been trained at the U.S. Army's "School of the Americas." Much of the never-ending militarization of the region stems from U.S. arms merchants hawking their wares, supported by lobbyists in Congress. (The biggest disputes in Congress over Clinton's aid to Colombia have been competitive squabbles over which company will get the contract to sell helicopters to the government.)

Pinochet — a classic example

A classic example of the role of imperialist intervention backing up local capitalist reaction is provided by Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet. General Pinochet overthrew the government of Chile in 1973 because it was headed by a social-democrat, Salvador Allende, who was taking some steps against the Chilean rich and foreign (U.S.) corporations. It's been well documented that Pinochet's coup was coordinated with the movement of U.S. naval ships and diplomatic actions. Not only that, U.S. intelligence agents actually coordinated with the Chilean military in locating some pro-Allende American citizens who were residing in Chile, getting them picked up and ensuring they were killed. This was the subject of a popular movie in 1982 (*Missing* starring Jack Lemmon), but the full truth about it is only now beginning to be released from State Dept. files. The State Dept. stonewalled these Americans' relatives for years and refused to admit they knew anything about what happened to the victims. Even when documents about the case were finally released a few years ago because of Freedom of Information Act lawsuits, State Dept. censors went through the documents and blacked out any facts that were actually pertinent to the main questions. (*New York Times*, February 13)

Today the Clinton administration is pretending to be cooperating with the attempt to find out the truth about these Americans' deaths — 27 years after the event! — but the U.S. government still refused to join the cases filed against Pinochet in Spain and some other countries demanding justice for the many murders carried out by him. Besides killing Americans in Chile, Pinochet's agents also carried out at least two murders in the U.S. — the assassination of Chile's former defense minister, Orlando Letelier, and his American aide, Ronni Moffit. Letelier and Moffit were killed in a car-bomb explosion in Washington, D.C., in 1976. Murders in Chile, murders in the U.S. — what does the U.S. government care about such peccadilloes? The important thing is that Pinochet safeguarded the property of ITT, Alcoa and Anaconda. So the CIA is still dragging its feet about releasing documents relating to its Latin American operations in those years. (See the article "There's still a lot to learn about the Pinochet years," *New York Times*, March 5, Section 4, p. 3)

Native people go up against the imperialist machine

As in Ecuador recently, indigenous people in Colombia are also protesting against multinational corporate interests. Indians in northeast Colombia are protesting against Occidental Petroleum's plans to run a pipeline through their territory. (*New*

York Times, February 14) The U'wa Indians organized a mass protest in December trying to halt construction of the pipeline, but Colombian army troops were sent in to clear them away, causing the death of one little girl. Al Gore, the so-called "environmental" candidate for president, has refused to utter a word against Occidental Petroleum's plans to rape the environment in the U'wa's' territory. This may be related to the fact that Gore's family owns a half-million dollars in Occidental stock. Or maybe Gore is just acting out of class (bourgeois) instinct.

Battle against imperialism requires fighting on two fronts

The struggle against imperialist domination of Latin America requires that the people there fight. But it also requires the assistance and support of people resident in the U.S. to expose the atrocious record of U.S. imperialism in the area and to expose and denounce U.S. plans to carry out further wars in the area.

Last November 21st some 12,000 people protested against the U.S. Army's School of the Americas at Fort Benning, Georgia. This was the biggest protest ever against the SOA, which has trained many Latin American officers in torture and mass atrocities. Notorious graduates of the SOA (which the protesters called "School of Assassins") include El Salvador's one-time chief fascist, the late Roberto D'Aubuisson, and the late Nicaraguan dictator Anastasio Somoza. The occasion for this latest demonstration against the SOA was the tenth anniversary of the murder of six Jesuit priests, their housekeeper and her daughter in El Salvador. A United Nations report on the incident implicated 26 Salvadoran army officers, of whom 19 were personally trained at the SOA. (*Peoples Weekly World*, Dec. 4, p. 4)

In congressional debates this year over funding for the SOA, Army leaders maintained that their School has played a big role teaching about human rights, and that they will expand the teaching of human rights in the future. Clinton administration apologists even proposed to "close" the SOA and reopen it under a different, more humanitarian, name. But this is just a tissue of

lies to cover up a brutal history. The SOA's history is littered with the bodies of tens of thousands of leftists, trade union activists, indigenous peoples organizers, human rights protesters and even priests and nuns. The fact that U.S. society is taken as the model for human rights at the SOA shows what kind of classes are taught there — the U.S., with its notorious history of racist repression, stereotyping and profiling; the routine torture of police detainees, especially those of an "unfavored" race or class; the organization of secret vigilante groups inside police forces; imprisonment and legal executions carried out on a massive scale, again directed especially against "unfavored" racial and ethnic groups; the routine assassination of popular leaders who become threats to the status quo; and the routine denial of trade union rights, even those supposedly guaranteed by law. Just look at how the District of Columbia police swooped down on activists who had gathered in Washington recently to protest against the World Bank — closing down their headquarters, confiscating their belongings, arresting thousands on the flimsiest excuses. This is how the police act toward unarmed, totally pacifist protesters. Workers in the U.S. are used to police repression of their strikes; it's simply accepted as "standard operating procedure." SOP at the SOA means schooling Latin American fascists in the latest hi-tech methods of fascist repression.

Mass actions such as the demonstration at Fort Benning can play a role in building up a solidarity movement between workers in the U.S. and the oppressed masses of Latin America. And mass actions such as the "battle of Seattle" and the recent demos in Washington also help bring together activists from different countries to target international capitalism. To liberate the oppressed masses in Latin America, a struggle needs to be waged on two fronts — against the local exploiters but also against imperialism. And to carry this through, the struggle needs to be waged here in the imperialist metropolis as well as in Latin America. In our fight against wage-slavery here in the U.S., we need to support the same fight by our brothers and sisters in Latin America, who face ruthless death squads every day of the week. Workers' international solidarity is the way to defeat the brutal two-headed monster of imperialism and capitalism. □

40 days that shook the world of engineering:

A history of the Boeing engineers' strike in 2000

by Phil, Seattle

Today the workforce comprises professional employees as well as workers, and among the workers there is a labor aristocracy, whose better or more secure position particularly predisposes them towards the reformist stands of the pro-capitalist labor union leaders (labor bureaucracy), as well as a broader mass of workers. In the future, such divisions will exist too, but there are major changes going on in what occupations will occupy these ranks, or even end up as working class jobs and not professional ones. With technical progress wiping out some occupations and adding new ones, with the neo-liberal offensive against the conditions of the working people, and with the results of various attempts of the working people to defend themselves, the numerical weight of different sections of the workforce is changing, and the status which each occupation has is also changing. The technical level of many types of work has increased, while a large section of workers find themselves stuck more firmly than ever at the very bottom of the occupational ladder. Various of the professional strata and of the better-off workers are finding themselves thrown back down in the direction of the mass, as their education and training no longer set them apart as far as before, or as attempts to restrict access to their job category break down, while other new privileged strata are arising. How far these trends will go, and how working people will respond to these changes, will help shape the class struggles of the future. The Boeing strike this year was not only one of the big strikes of this period, but gave these engineers and technical workers their first major experience of such a struggle. The detailed article below by Phil gives the background to this strike, as well as a narrative of its events. It provides a dramatic picture of the Boeing engineering and technical workers caught in the middle of some of these trends.

—Joseph Green

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The strike of the Boeing engineers and technical workers, which began on Feb. 9, 2000, and lasted until March 20, was the largest strike of “white-collar” workers in the history of the U.S.

labor movement. In spite of their previous history as a docile and privileged section of the U.S. working class, the Boeing engineers and technical workers have become involved in a struggle which exhibited a mass character from its very beginnings. And none of this would have happened had not activists at the base been willing to go head-to-head against not only the giant Boeing monopoly but also against the cowardly and thoroughly bourgeois union leaders. The example which it sets, and several of the lessons to be learned from the strike, can encourage the struggles of many other sections of the modern-day US working-class movement.

For generations, the engineering and technical sections of the US. working class have been unable to adopt forms of collective struggle against their employers because of the relative privileges afforded by their education and because of the individualistic psychology arising from their role in the workforce. But large-scale proletarianization of these workers has been going on because of the increasingly widespread nature of technical and scientific work, and the economic differences between the engineering and technical workforce and the rest of the working class have been eroded. The result has been a growing willingness among these workers to understand that they, too, are part of the working class and that it is appropriate for them to also adopt forms of collective struggle and to use these forms to defend and advance their common interests. Now these developments have achieved a qualitative breakthrough, and the class nature of the antagonism between the working class and the capitalist class has become openly apparent, if only for a brief period, in this arena as well.

How the Boeing engineers are organized

The Boeing engineers and technical workers in the Puget Sound area are organized into two bargaining units, one for the engineers and one for the technical workers. Their union is named SPEEA (which originally stood for Seattle Professional Engineering Employees Association, but now it stands for Society of Professional Engineering Employees in Aerospace). The engineers are “exempt” workers (exempted from federal labor-law overtime provisions), while the technicals are “non-exempt” workers (not exempted from these overtime provisions). There are also separate bargaining units in Wichita, Kansas, and Irving, Texas, and scattered groups of SPEEA-represented workers in other parts of the US (chiefly in Portland and Spokane). Until recently, SPEEA was entirely independent of the AFL-CIO, but last fall it became Local 2001 of the IFPTE (International Federation of Professional and Technical Engineers, AFL-CIO). The union works under open-shop contracts, and its membership was less than 50% of the total bargaining

unit population for both units ever since the events of 1993 which will be related below.

While the SPEEA constitution has established a leadership of the union composed of a representative Council and an Executive Board of seven members, real day-to-day power is exercised by a full-time paid staff headed by an Executive Director, currently a former Boeing engineer named Charles Bofferding III, who is appointed by the Board. In its role as the administrators of the contract between SPEEA and the Boeing Company, this paid staff is able to pursue its own agenda, which it usually puts ahead of the long-term interests of the union members. The number-one focus of the staff has been raising the union's dues-paying membership, because the amount of dues collected determines the operating budget of the union and the amount available for staff salaries and other expenses.

This focus on raising the membership has led to a continual litany of "blaming the non-members" for all the ills of the union. It was common to hear Bofferding and much of the leadership excuse many of the less-than-satisfactory features of previous contracts with the plea that if only membership were higher, a better contract could be obtained. Membership drives were ongoing features of Council meetings, and the goal of making the non-members pay an "agency fee" was the Nirvana of Bofferding's exhortations about a good contract. Another focus has been the organizing of unorganized sectors of the Company, not so much for the benefits of organization, but for the increase in the dues which can be collected by the union.

Ordinary capitalist trade unions are run by a bought-off bureaucracy which places its own interests ahead of those of the working class. This may be contrasted with the behavior of a revolutionary trade union, whose staff must be expected to work for the overall good of the class rather than narrow bureaucratic interests. Instead, the paid staff of a reformist labor union has a narrow focus on its own careerist interests. Without the effective, politically conscious, oversight of the rank-and-file, this staff will act as the real repository of power in the union. Its primary interest will be to obtain short-term, practical gains — to establish a contract between the union members and the company and to administer the day-to-day details of adherence to that contract. The staff of a union justifies its existence by the services it renders to the members, and to do this, it must assure benefits above and beyond those ordinarily available on the labor market to unorganized employees. So it must be able to bring a contract to the members that is good enough to keep them as members, but not so good as to displease the company. This implies that the staff must have credibility with both management and the workers in order to perform these functions. It must act as an intermediary between the unionized workers and management, delivering a compliant workforce for a contractually agreed-upon price. It must be able to provide the workers with a way of letting off steam while still not allowing things to get to the point of an open conflict. This sets up its role as the saboteur of all militant working-class struggles. Because of its full-time involvement in day-to-day union business, the staff can gain extensive influence over the nominal union leadership and become a bureaucracy which controls all of the essential actions of the union. And under the present-day

conditions of a low ebb in the working class movement, this union bureaucracy continuously blunts the class struggle and diverts it into reformist directions. Yet from time to time, this role as an intermediary is thrust aside as the antagonism between the workers and management breaks out into the open. And, as the economic features of the current overheated economy push the goal of maximum profits ever more into the forefront, it becomes more and more difficult for the union bureaucrats to accomplish their own goals without coming into open conflict with the company. The recent history of the engineering and technical workforce illustrates the manner in which this conflict develops and the role the union staff has played during these events.

History of the three contracts since 1989

Until 1989, SPEEA had not had a contract dispute with the Boeing Company for many years. However, in that year, the contract as proposed by the Boeing Company did not include lump-sum ("bonus") payments for the last two years of the three-year engineers' contract. The technical unit and the factory workers (machinists) both received bonuses for all three years. The leadership, as usual, nevertheless recommended acceptance of this proposal, but it was rejected by a vote of the membership. During the next month, two rank-and-file picket sessions, which were covertly instigated by the local branch of the late Marxist-Leninist Party (MLP)¹, were held outside company headquarters in Seattle. These pickets raised demands not only for the missing bonus payments, but also for a cost-of-living allowance (COLA) and general wage increases (GWI) as well. (The engineers' contract only contains provisions setting the size of selective salary increase pools — the sizes of individual salary increases are set at each manager's discretion.) The union and the company then agreed on a revised contract proposal which included the missing bonus payments, and the membership approved this contract.

Over the next three years, discontent became more evident, and the demand for COLA became more widespread, because for many engineers the rate of selective increases barely kept up with inflation; and for those who got no raises at all, their real income actually shrank. Since the demand for COLA had originated due to rank-and-file sentiment, and not as a part of the SPEEA leadership's bargaining agenda, the leadership at first did not take it seriously, but ultimately postured as being in favor of the demand while using it as a bargaining chip for other non-monetary changes in the contract. When the next contract offer from the company in late 1992 did not include a COLA, the members of both units rejected these contracts in spite of

¹The Marxist-Leninist Party (MLP) was a revolutionary working-class party which grew out of the progressive and anti-imperialist struggles of the 1960s and 1970s. It was founded in 1980, and participated in many working-class political and economic struggles during its existence. In 1993, it was dissolved because many activists in its ranks had become demoralized and had lost their revolutionary orientation. A few of the remaining revolutionary activists went on to found the Communist Voice Organization (CVO).

recommendations by the leadership and voted strike authorization. After Christmas vacation, the company declared that an impasse existed in the negotiations and imposed the rejected contracts, refusing to negotiate any further. The union leadership at that point called a one-day protest strike which had fairly wide participation, but this was followed by fruitless negotiations with the Company and the same contract proposals were re-voted and accepted soon afterwards. During the next several months, membership declined steeply as many people quit the union, and it remained low until the current events began to develop.

Three years later, in 1995, the Boeing company attempted to require the factory workers, represented by the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers (IAM), to pay part of their medical insurance premiums for the first time. Instead of accepting this contract, the IAM workers struck for 69 days. Meanwhile, the company had begun talks with the SPEEA negotiating team, and the team proposed a scheme of payments to workers who changed from the traditional (fee-for-service) medical care plan to health maintenance organizations (HMOs), as an alternative to requiring premium payments. When the company accepted this scheme as a way of settling the IAM strike, the strike came to an end. Following the settlement of the IAM strike, SPEEA negotiations resulted in contracts accepted by both units.

The merger and the subsequent attacks on the salaried workers

Soon after the settlement of the 1995 contracts, the Boeing Company began an ambitious campaign of acquisitions. First, it acquired a large section of the North American Rockwell Corporation, then soon followed this with a merger with the McDonnell-Douglas Corporation. The merger with McDonnell-Douglas was accomplished by means of a "stock swap" whereby Boeing traded Boeing stock for McDonnell-Douglas stock at the price current on August 4, 1997, when Boeing stock was at about \$59 a share. The merger added four former McDonnell directors to the Boeing Board of Directors, including John McDonnell and Harry Stonecipher, who would become the new President of the Boeing Company. The Boeing stock had reached this price because of the efforts of the previous CEO, Frank Shrontz, to promote the company's business, bringing about an increase in the price of the company's stock to record levels, which meant that he would reap large rewards from exercising his stock options.

Soon after the date of the merger, the price of the stock began to decline and McDonnell-Douglas shareholders were left with devalued stock certificates. In the fall of 1997, reports of serious production problems began to appear in the press, and by the summer of 1998, the price of the stock had fallen to below \$48 a share, meaning that the shares which employees had been promised as a result of the Share Value plan would not be awarded. Cynicism about management's promises became widespread after this event. In the late summer of 1998, the production problems had become so serious that there was a major shakeup in the leadership of the Commercial Airplane Group, and the President of that Group, Ron Woodard, and

several of his top executives were forced out of their positions. The Chief Financial Officer retired around that time as well, allegedly because he would not agree to the financial measures desired by top management.

The contracts with SPEEA expired in early December, 1999. Up until the time that the new contracts were presented to the membership, the SPEEA leadership had alternated between waging a "war of words" against Harry Stonecipher, former CEO of McDonnell-Douglas and current President of the Boeing Co. after the merger, and Jim Dagnon, Vice-President for People, who were seen as responsible for all the detrimental changes that had happened since the merger, and exhorting long-time Boeing executives such as Condit, a chief architect of the merger, to live up to the idea of "Working Together". Essentially, these tactics amounted to speculating on divisions within management circles between the "profit-taking" bad guys and the "pro-engineering" good guys. Because of this speculation, many members had hopes that Condit would also step into the SPEEA negotiations to present a satisfactory contract offer. This hope ignored the fact that Condit would only intervene in these negotiations to avoid the threat of a serious strike, which was the case with the IAM workers, as discussed in the next paragraph. And since the company did not believe that SPEEA would ever mount a serious strike, and that it could never muster the unity of purpose necessary to stop the operation of the company, no action by Condit could realistically be expected. When it became clear that he would not intervene, he became part of the "bad guys" crowd, and lower-level executives were treated as the "good guys" who were going to "save the company" for engineering as opposed to concentrating on the bottom line.

This whole approach flew in the face of the basic economic facts of the Company's position. The major portions of the engineering, technical, and administrative staff of these new acquisitions are non-unionized (although a number of Douglas engineers in Southern California are represented by another union, SCPEA). In order to develop a single system of benefits for all of its non-represented engineering, technical, and administrative workers, the Company significantly reduced the benefits which non-represented Boeing workers had been used to and created a benefits package known as "Total Compensation" which it imposed on these workers as well as on lower management. One of the features of this package is that the workers must pay a percentage of their medical care premiums. After having attacked the non-represented workers in this way, the Company, in the late summer of 1999, faced negotiations for a new contract with the IAM workers. Up until the last minute, it seemed that these negotiations would certainly lead to a strike because the company was insisting on forcing the IAM workers to pay part of their medical care premiums. However, at the last minute, these payments were dropped from the package and the machinists accepted the new contract, receiving a 10% ratification bonus as well. Rumor had it that Phil Condit, the CEO of Boeing, directly intervened in these negotiations to bring about this settlement. The stage was set for the negotiations between the Company and SPEEA to begin in earnest.

It was becoming increasingly clear that management had been proceeding with the "Total Compensation" plan with a

definite goal of forcing it on all the salaried workforce, whether it was organized or not. Thus, it came as no surprise to many of the members that the first offers by the Company to both the professional and technical bargaining units in early December, 1999, included this plan. The entire Council rejected these offers, and soon the membership would follow suit with 98% and 99% rejections and authorizations for a strike by both units. The bureaucracy treated this as a negotiating ploy, but for the members, it was a real statement of their readiness for struggle, and the preparations for a strike by the standing committees involved in this effort intensified. The staff, as led by the Bofferding, refused to take these preparations seriously and repeatedly dragged their heels when asked for assistance. Yet the initiative of the members surged ahead, overcoming many of these obstructions, as the events of the next few months unfolded.

The mass movement for a strike gathers energy

Many members wanted a strike to start as soon as the first contract offers were rejected. However, Christmas vacation was very close, and this meant that the Company would shut down completely for the holidays anyway, and strikers would have been denied their holiday pay. So, the union held off on calling a strike and attempted to restart negotiations, hoping that the high rejection votes would lead to a better offer. It was also true that the preparations for a strike were not ready yet, and the debate over strike tactics within the union had yet to be exhausted as well. Bofferding continued to downplay the advisability and effectiveness of a strike. He said that a strike was not a first or even second option, and that if one were declared, it would be of limited duration (a week or two) followed by a return of the workforce before any new contract was actually won. These ideas aroused intense opposition among the membership and led for many accusations of betrayal and intense arguments against Bofferding's views.

After the beginning of the year, negotiations between the union and the Company resumed once again. One of the chief complaints that the negotiating team had voiced about the first offer was that the Company had entirely disregarded many suggestions they had made to improve the benefits package, and instead included the "Total Compensation" package with its medical-care cost sharing provisions in the offer at the last minute. To many in the union, this seemed to be clear evidence that the Company was trying to break the union entirely, and that their plan to stop SPEEA from organizing the unorganized sections of the Company was to force them to accept the same benefits package that the unorganized workers had and demonstrate that there was no benefit in organizing and that SPEEA was a toothless shell of a union not worth considering. These realizations further encouraged the preparations for a strike and strengthened the resistance of the members to the contracts they had rejected. When negotiations resumed, the Company and the union focused on the benefits package and began to develop an alternate package with some different features. When the second offers were finally presented to the members in late January, the medical-care cost sharing

provisions had been removed, but instead, company-paid life insurance was reduced severely and the "Medicare supplement" which the Company had paid for after age 65 was no longer to be offered. And there was still no bonus in the contract. At first, some of the workers voted for this offer, then as they discussed it further in the workplace, the detrimental features became more and more apparent and a groundswell of opposition began to develop. Once again, strike fervor was in the air. The hopes were that in spite of the initially favorable response, the contracts would again be rejected. Although the votes would not be counted until Feb. 2, the Chairman of the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service (FMCS), C. Richard Barnes, personally asked to intervene in the negotiations in case either or both of the contracts were rejected. When this announcement was made on the day that the votes were being counted, rumblings of "betrayal" were heard around the plants. Instead of the planned walkout on Thursday, Feb. 3, work continued as normal while the mediator held discussions between the union and the Company. These discussions continued all weekend, but by the first of the next week it became apparent that they were being fruitless. The votes on both contracts had indicated a rejection, and a strike was called to begin as soon as it was certain that mediation had failed. On the evening of Feb. 8, news broadcasts indicated that the mediator had left town without bringing about any movement in the discussions, and members were notified by e-mail that a strike was to begin the next day.

The strike begins

At 9 AM on Wednesday, February 9, 2000, engineers and technical workers in all of the Puget Sound Boeing plants stopped performing their jobs, got up from their desks, and walked out of their buildings onto the street. In several locations where there were large numbers of strikers in big buildings, shop workers, unorganized workers, and lower-level managers lined the hallways and applauded and cheered as they marched down the stairs in massive numbers. At 10 AM, the union had scheduled a rally for a stadium in Renton, and the traffic jam in Everett, almost 30 miles away, was so severe that it took workers over an hour to make the drive to attend the rally. As the walkout was taking place, the energy and enthusiasm of the strikers created a thrilling atmosphere. After the rally there was a short march near the Renton Boeing plant, and it was clear from the size of the march that the strike involved large numbers of both members and non-members of SPEEA. From the very first day, the number of people who left their jobs for the strike far exceeded the membership of the union, and this was in spite of the fact that some union members stayed on their jobs, so that the involvement of non-members was even more widespread than the numbers indicated.

As picketing began at all the major Boeing plants, it became apparent how well the workers who had organized for the strike had prepared for a serious struggle. Many of these preparations had been carried through despite the opposition of the union bureaucracy, who had never taken the idea of a strike very seriously. Before the strike began, the preparations committee had arranged for the installation of portable bathrooms ("porta-

potties") at all the major picketing sites. Each site was equipped with a walkie-talkie, and soon some sites even had cell phones. Volunteers drove vans around to all the sites carrying coffee and hot chocolate, and some members brought barbecues to the sites to cook hot dogs.

The strikers communicated with each other through e-mail discussion networks, keeping informed of important events and each other's opinions in this way. There were frequent mass pickets at the bigger plants, and the lack of disruptive incidents gave Boeing no reason to obtain any injunction against this mass picketing. Often, the picket lines had the atmosphere of a party — people were dancing, music was playing, and the level of camaraderie was an invigorating experience. And this was in spite of the tremendous uncertainty about the duration of the strike or how successful it would be. For a long time, many of the engineers had been unable to convince themselves that a strike would have an impact. On February 9th, their mass outrage at the shoddy contract offers had caused them to take a huge gamble — a leap into the unknown, possibly sacrificing entire careers for the seemingly crazy possibility that a strike by an open-shop union of "nerds", without a strike fund, could bring a major industrial manufacturer to a halt.

Yet bring it to a halt they did. Every day, the union published summaries of the unbelievable impact the work stoppage was having. Partly this was due to certain fortunate aspects of the strike. One such aspect was the assistance of the IAM factory workers, who stayed on the job and wrote rejection tags on airplanes on the assembly line, which could not be lifted unless an engineer was available to work the tag. Another aspect was the crucial role of the "designated engineering representatives" or DERs. These highly experienced engineers, most of them SPEEA members, are authorized by the FAA to certify that all of the engineering on an airplane met federal standards. Their integrity and meticulous attention to detail are well-known at Boeing, and they play a crucial role in the production of large airliners. There are somewhat over 400 DERs working for the Boeing Commercial Aircraft Group, and during the strike approximately 370 were out on the street. This impressive participation by the DERs, and the fact that their expertise turned out to be practically irreplaceable, played a major role in the success of the strike. Yet in every plant, in every program, work ground to a halt; schedules were missed, customer service stopped, and even workers on overseas duty ceased to work and caught the first airplane home when they heard the strike had begun.

The continuous reporting of small victories had a buoying psychological effect on the strikers. In the middle of the night, on all the picket lines, workers from different programs would regale each other with stories of how their programs had been brought to a dead stop, and it began to dawn on the strikers that their gamble was paying off, that they could have a major effect on the Boeing company, and that there was a possibility that they could win this strike. And as their optimism grew, so did their determination, and the number of weeks they stayed out on the street grew from one to two to three, and it seemed that the company would have to settle the issue somehow; that it could not ignore it, because it would not go away.

However, the atmosphere during the strike did not display a great deal of militancy because the union did not have to organize to face injunctions or concerted strike-breaking and attempts by the police to crush the strike. Some of the leaders of the strike treated these possibilities as due to provocations by the strikers, rather than as evidence of the role of the police and the state as allies of the company for crushing the strike. It was clear from many of these attitudes that the strikers had many lessons still to learn about the real experience of striking. If these events had occurred, the rank-and-file might well have been forced to develop more of an independent organization, because the regular union leadership and the bureaucracy would not have been of any assistance in organizing the defiance of the strike-breakers or the police.

The company continues to adopt a hard-line attitude

Yet the Boeing corporate leadership was not an easy adversary to overcome. Since they had not believed that the strike would happen, and since the conciliatory and treacherous actions of the SPEEA leadership had caused them to believe that any strike would be weak and short-lived, they tried to act as if nothing was happening and that they could continue on with business as usual. This only reinforced the impression that they were completely out of touch with the real impact the strike was having, and with the serious sense of outrage which existed among the strikers. One story, recounted early in the strike, told how the president of an airline called Harry Stonecipher on the phone to ask him why telexes were not being answered. Stonecipher in turn called Service Engineering, to find out that there were no engineers present to answer the messages.

At first, management acted as if the workers would be back in a few days, but when this did not occur, they tried to settle the strike quickly in various ways, including trying to intimidate the strikers. They made another attempt to negotiate a settlement with the help of the FMCS, by proposing on Feb. 26 a contract which included 100 shares of Boeing stock for each employee to be awarded over a five-year period. This offer still retained the medical care premiums, so it was still regressive. It was greeted with utter contempt, and the SPEEA negotiating team did not even dare to lift it from the table because they knew that the members would try to recall them if they did so. As March 1 approached, the company announced that they would terminate medical and dental insurance, hoping this would cause people to return to work rather than lose their insurance. The company sent out letters to all Boeing employees represented by SPEEA reiterating that no more improvements could be made to the contract offers, and that they ought to return to work. This only caused greater indignation among the strikers and several of them returned the letters unopened to the company.

Next, the company resorted to a method they had used previously to settle the brief strike in 1993. They declared an "impasse" and announced they would implement the salary increases included in their last offer. By this means, they hoped that the strikers would return to work to see what the amount of their raises would be. This tactic had very little effect, because

most of the strikers realized that they could not be forced back to work by an impasse, and that the raises would probably be unsatisfactory anyway and they could collect them after the strike was settled. Throughout most of the strike, the company spokesmen kept up with the litany that "no more money could be expected" and that the strikers should return to work, but this only served to strengthen the strikers determination because the news from inside the plants indicated a growing sense of crisis throughout every program. They could see the evidence of the impact they were having, as undeliverable airplanes filled every corner of Boeing Field, easily visible from the main I-5 freeway entering Seattle from the south. So for a while it seemed that a sort of stalemate had developed, with neither side able to force the other to come to an agreeable settlement, and the backlogs and customer complaints grew as the strike lengthened.

The AFL-CIO takes an interest in the strike

The leadership of the national IFPTE and the AFL-CIO had begun to take an interest in the development of the strike when they first obtained the involvement of the FMCS in the attempt at mediation shortly before the strike actually began. This was in line with their desire to avoid the strike because they were as skeptical about its prospects as everyone among the local SPEEA leadership was. But after the strike began, they started to realize that it might actually be won, and that a victory by SPEEA could enhance their reputation among "white-collar" workers. So they began to support some of the forms of mass participation which occurred during the strike, including mass marches and demonstrations which were enthusiastically attended by the strikers. These sorts of tactics varied from the tactics favored by the SPEEA leadership, who were afraid of mass struggles and sought to curtail them at every chance they got. The SPEEA leadership favored petition-passing campaigns, promising an effort at the upcoming Boeing stockholders meeting to "take back Boeing" (as if there was some sort of stockholder democracy in effect which would bypass the power of the large finance capitalists — a clearly fantastic idea). They also focused on filing "unfair labor practice" grievances with the NLRB. These legalistic tactics had no teeth whatsoever, but were presented as great contributions by the union leadership. But the marches and demonstrations proved so popular and militant that it was hard to bypass them. One especially militant picket was held at a downtown Seattle hotel where the Boeing Board of Directors was rumored to be meeting. The march surrounded the hotel during rush hour and lasted for several hours, involving several hundred strikers.

High-level AFL-CIO officials, such as John Sweeny and Richard Trumka, as well as both major Democratic Party Presidential candidates, Bill Bradley and Al Gore, showed up at the picket lines for speeches and photo-ops with the strikers. The politicians were full of empty promises about their ability to assist the strikers. It was typical of these false "friends of labor" that they would use the strike as a cynical effort to curry favor with the workers with the hope of getting their votes in the coming election. But behind the scenes, a lot of political pressure began to develop to settle the strike before it had a

serious effect on important defense contracts and relations with major airlines who were Boeing customers. The company could not deceive major stock analysts who could see the effect the strike was having on production, and the result of this was a significant dip in the stock price on the New York Stock Exchange. All of this increased the pressure on the company to settle the strike.

In the fifth week of the strike, the SPEEA leadership, in conjunction with the leadership of the IFPTE, began efforts to persuade the FAA to suspend the company's certificate for the production of aircraft. While this was going on, the Boeing Company's Vice President for People, Jim Dagnon, indicated that he was ready for some serious discussion of another contract offer. Unlike the previous attempts to settle the strike, this attempt took place in secret, with the active involvement of the AFL-CIO. On March 17, another offer was announced which did not include employees paying the medical premiums and restored most of the benefits of the previous contract that had been cut in the other offers. This offer also included guaranteed wage increases during all 3 years, a \$2500 bonus stretched out over the next year, a vote on agency fee, and the establishment of a "leadership council" with IFPTE involvement. After a day of hurried meetings called to discuss the offer, it was accepted on March 19, and the strike ended the next day, as it had begun, with a mass march into the plants at 9 AM in the morning on Monday, March 20.

The offer which the strikers accepted was not all they had wished for, because the bonus was much smaller than the 10% received by the IAM factory workers. Yet in most other respects it was a victory, and several of its features actually benefited the lower-paid, less well-off engineers and technicals, more than the more highly-paid ones. Since the bonus was a given as a dollar amount rather than a percentage, it benefited the lower-paid workers more than the more highly-paid ones, and since guaranteed wage increases were part of the former selective salary increase pools, the selective portion of the salary increases would be narrowed and the increases would be more evenly spread throughout the whole work force. These facts make it possible that some of the wide inequities in the salary distribution will be narrowed during the three years it will be in effect. The gains won by the struggle were modest, but they could have been greater if the union leadership had not neglected to prepare for a strike with a strike fund, and if it had not been so eager to settle at the first possible moment. It was also clear that since they had achieved one of their primary goals, a vote on "agency fee" (which insures that even non-members must pay a fee to the union), they were willing to cease the struggle for any further financial gains at this point.

A few remarks should be devoted to the "leadership council" which was added to the contract at the insistence of the AFL-CIO. This provision is a face-saving feature for the company, so they can issue high-sounding pronouncements with the blessing of the top union leaders, all the better to delude the rank-and-file with smoke and mirrors. If it accomplishes anything, it will be a surprise, because the leadership of the Boeing Company has shown no inclination since the strike to remedy the major issues that brought it about in the first place. On the contrary, after the

strike they gave Harry Stonecipher, who was so reviled during the strike, a year's extension to his service as President of the Company beyond his normal date of retirement in the spring of 2001. The low pay-increase rates, the favoritism, and the rush to off-load business to outside vendors still remain as they did before the strike. But the workers have learned many important lessons about class struggle, and the experience of the strike will remain a popular topic of conversation for years to come.

Lessons of the strike

The experience of the strike has taught the engineers and techs many very important lessons about capitalism. Before the strike, the paternalistic atmosphere at Boeing reinforced the timidity and complacency of many of the workers. Having become used to the idea that Boeing would fulfill its part of the social contract, provide satisfactory benefits, and leave them free to believe in a capitalist Utopia, many have experienced a rude awakening into the facts of the real world. The new executives such as Stonecipher sought to make Boeing a "team" instead of a "family", but instead what has happened is that the "family" has been replaced with class war. The fundamental lesson of the strike was that this class war is inevitable, and this development has brought about a transformation of the engineering and technical workers, blowing away many of their illusions and replacing them with some of the truths of a more mature working class movement.

Another lesson of the strike is that the labor bureaucracy and the sold-out union officials typical of a reformist trade union cannot be relied on to wage a determined strike or to sincerely prepare for it before it begins. The rank-and-file workers had to take their own initiative in organizing this strike, and they found that they repeatedly had to fight the timidity and short-sightedness of the union leaders in doing so. Time and time again, both before and during the strike, the workers had to prod the union leaders to give them adequate resources and follow through on the defense of the workers' genuine interests. And the leaders were always searching for ways to reconcile the interests of labor and management, and curtail the effects of the strike as much as possible. They promoted legalistic activities such as filing "unfair labor practice" grievances with the NLRB, as an important way of fighting the company. In contrast to this, the workers learned that mass consciousness provides the strength of a strike, and that they needed to be watchful for all the attempts of the union leadership to betray the interests of the workers and bring about a premature end of the struggle.

At the same time, the aims of the strike had to be understood clearly. A strike is a very pragmatic thing — it has concrete goals and if these are not understood clearly and grasped by the mass of the workers, they would not be aware of an appropriate moment for ending the strike and securing their gains when they are truly ready to be secured. It is not the aim of a strike to shut down the employer's operations for a long period of time. This is only the means to an end, the weapon which workers can use, not the objective. When that weapon has served its purpose, it must be put aside, and the workers must understand the best time to do this. Given enough time, an employer can outlast

most strikes — large corporations have very large financial and material resources and the resources of most unions are quite limited. So the workers must make use of all the forces at their disposal, while at the same time understanding the limitations of their position and the differing interests of the various kinds of labor bureaucrats and government officials who can be used in maneuvers to bring the strike to a beneficial conclusion. It is important not to have illusions in these people — they are acting in their own interests or in the interests of the large corporations, but even in doing so, they can be used by the workers to secure their gains.

As in other types of war, a strike involves the use of force to change an adversary's policies. The kind of force used during a strike is the force of mass social disobedience. It is not always necessary for this force to be overtly violent, and in the case of the Boeing strike, there was practically no physical violence involved. Yet the confrontation between the strikers and the Boeing Company was a clash between two contradictory social forces; the force of the tradition of working for a living and the habits of domination by the company against the force of a united mass desire to obtain acceptable working conditions.

In order to support such an operation, the strikers need enormous moral energy, unity of purpose, and the willingness to make sizable sacrifices to gain a long-term strategic advantage. This kind of moral energy can be sustained by the continuous flow of information about the successes and victories of the strike. The moral support of other sections of the population can also be important in sustaining the spirit necessary for carrying on a strike. Suitable material supplies, such as good quality burn-barrels, "porta-potties", food, rain gear, and other comfort items all have their place in keeping the morale of strikers high and feeding their determination.

Another way in which a strike is like a war is in the role of information about the effects of the strike on the company, and also of the lack of information which the company has of the psychology of the strikers. In this respect, the ideas of the union leaders before the strike about giving it a pre-determined, limited duration would have been very harmful if they had actually been attempted (luckily, the members were able to force the leaders to abandon these ideas). When the strike began, the company had the misconception that the strike would quickly disintegrate and that they could force the strikers back within a very short period of time. When this did not happen, it set the stage for a better agreement because they could see no other way of settling the strike.

The element of "friction" is important in a strike, just as it is important in war. Friction is the everyday occurrence of unexpected and unpredictable events which can sap the strength of one side or the other, and information about these events and the ability to take advantage of them can frequently mean the difference between defeat and victory in a strike. While it is true that the preponderance of long-term advantages in a strike usually lies with the company, the strikers may be able to take advantage of many short-term advantages and press these home to a victorious conclusion if they are aware of the importance of these events.

Yet even if a strike is defeated, even if strikers must

eventually settle for a contract that is no better than the one they had originally been offered, or even a worse one, they emerge with important lessons about the importance of organization, a class-conscious viewpoint, strategy, and tactics. While victory may breed unwarranted euphoria, defeat may lay the basis for future struggles with the legacy of bitterness which it leaves behind. In this sense, the defeat of the 1992-93 struggle for COLA laid the basis for the 2000 strike because workers who had experienced both struggles were aware of some of the tactics that the company could use, were aware of the likelihood of treachery by the union leaders, and were determined not to let the talk of a "limited strike" be used to turn the strike into a charade instead of a real struggle. The modest victory of the recent strike has left some in the union with a feeling of greater power and energy, but as a matter of fact, the company has still kept up with the same agenda which could lead to destruction of the workers' livelihood. The workers need to maintain continuous vigilance and not let the company leaders or the union leaders lull them into complacency again.

The union leaders also emerged from the strike with a strengthened agenda. Their objectives consist of expanding the union by organizing more sections of the workforce and winning the upcoming "agency fee" vote, thereby assuring a larger budget for the union. In this respect, a recent controversy about increased pay and a large bonus for Bofferding, the SPEEA Executive Director, was an embarrassing reminder of the real priorities of these bureaucrats. Bofferding was eventually forced to accept a lower pay raise and forgo his expected bonus because of the outrage of the union members and the possibility that they might just defeat the "agency fee" vote if were too clear whom it might actually benefit financially. So new chapters of this struggle continue to appear.

All in all, the recent events at the Boeing Company have taught the workers many useful lessons, and continued attention to these lessons can strengthen their ability to guard their wages and benefits against the desire of the company executives for increased profits and greater exploitation. □

On the courtship between Alexander Cockburn and Pat Buchanan: **Join the devil**

by Mark, Detroit

Today there are a variety of right-wing trends seeking to build up their reactionary cause by appealing for alliances with the left. Such alliances with the right have long been the practice of the Democratic Party liberals and organizations which are closely tied to them who shamefully join hands with open reactionaries. Leftist critics of the liberals have justly pointed to the liberals' unity with the right as confirmation of how the liberals constantly betray their promises to help the oppressed masses. But today there are some on the left who fancy themselves radical critics of the liberals, who themselves have been seeking unity with the right. In this article we focus on one example, that of left-wing journalist Alexander Cockburn's courtship with the Buchananite/libertarian crowd. But, as we shall soon see, Cockburn is part of a trend that has developed among a section of the left. The new-found rightist "friends" of these leftists promote themselves as "anti-establishment" and rail against the liberals and certain mainstream conservatives. But they do so from the standpoint of raving supporters of American capitalism. Their charge against the establishment is that it has betrayed American capitalism by having some social programs or by allowing U.S. imperialism to allegedly be put upon by foreign countries or international organizations dominated by foreigners.

Nevertheless, this alliance is presented by both its right and left-wing participants as a new politics "beyond left or right." Actually it shows that while some "leftists" disagree with many liberal politicians on this or that policy, their general approach trails in the wake of the liberals, who are masters at conciliating the right. After all, there are liberal forces in the pro-choice movement that have been searching for common ground with the anti-abortion crusaders. Various liberal reformers and some trade union bureaucrats in the anti-WTO movement have been cozying up to Buchanan's chauvinist campaign to divert that struggle away from targeting capitalism and into a chauvinist crusade to beat back a supposed loss of U.S. imperialism's national sovereignty. Al Gore has used the Elian Gonzalez case to kiss up to the reactionary Cuban organizations in Miami, just as Clinton did by uniting with arch-reactionary Jesse Helms a couple of years ago to pass the notorious Helms-Burton bill.

Such alliances with the right, whether by the Democrats with Helms or by alleged left critics of the liberals with Buchanan, have nothing to do with helping the masses break out of the stranglehold of bourgeois politics. To really fight the capitalist establishment means helping the masses organize against their class enemies. But it is impossible for Cockburn to take such a stand when he is engaged in establishing warm relations with bigoted, "America First" chauvinists like Buchanan or the defenders of complete freedom for exploitation of the workers like the libertarians. The development of an independent class

trend requires taking a distinct position against both the right-wing and the liberal/reformist milieu. The "left" proponents of right-left unity fail on this account. For all their pretensions of a new politics, they are trapped in the traditional framework of the American bourgeoisie which confines politics to the choice between liberals and conservatives. The only thing new that unity with the Buchananite/libertarian crowd accomplishes is to attempt to legitimize among the oppressed some of the most backward and fanatical defenders of their capitalist oppressors.

The "right-left" alliance during the NATO-Serb war

The complex situation created by the NATO-Serb war over Kosovo provided new opportunities for the development of this "right-left" courtship. The U.S./NATO war against Serbia was another example of imperialism's so-called "humanitarian interventionism." Serbia had unleashed a terrible military campaign against the Albanian Kosovars for the "crime" of wanting to escape Serbian national oppression by establishing their own national state. Actually, U.S./NATO imperialism's concern wasn't Albanian suffering per se, which they ignored for years when they were making deals with Milosevic, but that either an extended massacre or an independent Kosovo would threaten the stability among their allies in the region. Thus, they sought to insert themselves as the arbiter of events there. Meanwhile, the NATO bombing campaign added a new set of horrors on top of those created by Milosevic. The dilemma was how to oppose imperialism, when imperialist intervention helped stop the Serb onslaught against the Albanian Kosovars, but had its own rotten motives and created its own havoc? Many liberal/reformist types supported NATO military intervention as an effort to save the Albanians from Serb terror and more or less accepted Clinton's imperialist "humanitarian interventionist" policy. In Congress, many arch-imperialist Republicans criticized the war because it served their rivalry with Clinton. Further to the right, Mr. "American imperialism first," Pat Buchanan, also declared against the war. None of these trends was opposing imperialism.

In this complicated situation, what then would a class stand in the interest of the workers be? It had to be based on support for the mass movements against oppression. Such a stand would oppose both Milosevic and NATO and encourage the development of new revolutionary trends among the workers in Kosovo and Serbia, and in the countries of the imperialist NATO alliance. Recognition of the right to self-determination for the Kosovars is critical to the task of rebuilding the class trends. This is because the present distrust of the Kosovar masses toward their Serbian counterparts cannot be overcome without this, and because to do otherwise would help tie the Serb workers to the tyrannical rule of the state-capitalist Milosevic.

regime.

Without an orientation based on supporting the oppressed and encouraging the rebuilding of revolutionary organization among the workers of all the nationalities, confusion on what anti-imperialism meant was bound to reign. This confusion went in several directions, but for a section of the anti-war left it led them to conclude that the only alternative to the liberal cheerleading for NATO imperialism was to join forces with ultra-reactionaries of the "anti-war" right. "Anti-imperialism" for these "leftists" was reduced to condemning the Clinton/NATO war from whatever angle. They claimed that recognizing the legitimacy of the struggle of the Albanian Kosovars for independence from the state-capitalist Milosevic regime, or, in some cases, even acknowledging the atrocities of Milosevic, was tantamount to lining up with U.S./NATO imperialism. Such trends failed to recognize that anti-imperialism without recognizing the rights of oppressed masses is a sham. True, under the auspices of the post-war NATO protectorate, there has been horrible treatment meted out against the non-Albanian minorities. But the need to respect the rights of the minorities in Kosovo can not justify toleration of the Serbian oppression of the Albanian Kosovars, and the justice of a struggle opposing such oppression. It only highlights the need for encouraging proletarian trends opposed to the bourgeois nationalism that has created havoc in Kosovo and Serbia.

But while certain left trends insisted that demonizing the Albanian Kosovars and covering for Milosevic was necessary to prove one's anti-imperialist credentials, a mutual flirtation was developing between them and a section of the right-wing reactionaries. Anti-war writings by "left" apologists for Milosevic like Diana Johnstone could be found on left and right-wing anti-war web sites alike. Certain anti-war web sites promoted the idea of right-left unity against the war. The "www.stopnato.org" site promoted everyone from parties calling themselves "communist" to the Buchananites for the stated purpose of "uniting peaceful, thoughtful Americans from across the political spectrum." The "anti-war.com" site run by right-wing libertarian supporters of Buchanan promoted that right-left designations were out of date and that they were open to unity with the left. Alleged left-wing "anti-imperialist" Jared Israel produced and promoted a film meant to exonerate Serbia of all crimes by showing how some particular Western claims against Milosevic were lies. He boasted of how so many different trends loved the film, stating that even "conservatives love it" including "the Buchananites at antiwar.com." It is hardly a badge of honor to produce materials that are adored by the right, however. Meanwhile, the leftist *Z Magazine* advised activists that there was no point in agitation that distinguished the stand of the right from that of the left in the anti-war movement. True to its word, *Z Magazine's* "ZNet" web site carried a "sample anti-war flier," that in its efforts to sidestep the controversies in the movement, called for unity of all activists on the basis that the war would be a "debacle." Opposition to "debacles" however, could hardly serve as a line of demarcation between anti-imperialist sentiments and pragmatic pro-imperialist opposition from rightists like Jack Kemp and Buchanan who considered the war a debacle because they think their own policies are better suited to help

U.S. imperialism succeed. Left unity with the right also included the phony socialists of the Workers World Party who, their love of Milosevic as a supposed socialist aside, tailored their slogans at demonstrations so that they would be acceptable to anti-Milosevic Serb chauvinists who pine for the good old days of the Serbian monarchy.

Indeed, there were any number of congressional conservatives and other right-wing demagogues who opposed the war in the U.S. Anti-imperialism had nothing to do with it, however. Rather, some rightists believed that U.S. imperialist interests would be best served by preserving its war machine for other regions of the world they thought were of more "vital interest" to imperialism. Likewise, the alleged anti-interventionism touted by the right is a policy they believe will better defend U.S. capitalist interests at home and abroad. Thus they emphasize not getting involved in various international bodies and alliances they feel will be more beneficial to foreign capitalist rivals. While these days even Buchanan talks about "neo-imperialism," such a policy aims to strengthen U.S. imperialism, not undermine it.

Left-right love blooms in San Mateo, CA

The flirtation of a section of the left with the right has been developing toward an outright alliance. Symbolic of this was the decision of some ostensibly left opponents of the war to attend a so-called anti-war conference in San Mateo, California in late March at which the featured speaker was Pat Buchanan. The conference billed well-known columnist Alexander Cockburn as the main leftist speaker. Cockburn's column, "Beat the Devil" appears in *The Nation* and some mainstream bourgeois papers, and he co-edits the *CounterPunch* newsletter. The conference was organized by the aforementioned Buchananite libertarians at "antiwar.com", whose Justin Raimondo functioned as chief host and publicist for the conference. According to Raimondo, the list of left participants was to include Jared Israel. Mr. Israel, who thinks anti-imperialism requires accepting that the idea that Milosevic has mistreated the Albanians is simply a CIA plot never showed however. In explaining his non-appearance, Mr. Israel voiced no opposition to alliance with Buchanan and said he was busy making his above-mentioned film which was so loved by the right.

Beat the Devil or join him?

Cockburn likes to argue that there is nothing wrong with a leftist attending a gathering of right-wing groups. But as we shall see, Cockburn did not go to expose the phony anti-war pretensions of Buchanan and various other right-wing demagogues who spoke. Instead he portrayed Buchanan as a real anti-war fighter taking on the pro-war establishment. Indeed, he promoted the possibility of further unity with racist, religious bigot Buchanan and assorted libertarians on a range of issues including the environment and defending democratic liberties. (Elsewhere in this issue, we reprint Cockburn's article "Life and libertarians: beyond left and right", which includes his remarks at the San Mateo, CA conference with Buchanan, from the April

3 issue of *CounterPunch*.)

In his speech before the overwhelmingly right-wing gathering in San Mateo, Cockburn insisted that one must look past whether people label themselves "right" or "left" and see what actual political positions they hold. But while Cockburn pointed out the gap between words and deeds by the liberals, when it came to Buchanan and other right-wing reactionaries, he accepted their anti-war claims at face value. He announced to his right-wing audience that: "you [anti-war activists] really do start looking for allies and I have noticed you find them increasingly in people like yourselves. People who would conventionally be regarded on the libertarian right or people like Buchanan." And he added: "Can we unite on the anti-war platform? We have already, in the case of Kosovo for example." Buchanan is against the NATO war against Serbia, and that's evidently all Cockburn wants to examine the matter.

But to leave matters at that level is to hide Buchanan's actual position. Among other things, Cockburn failed to note that in San Mateo, Buchanan's position on Kosovo was that the U.S. should prod the European imperialist powers to become the police for that region.¹ In his San Mateo speech, Buchanan declared he was against "neo-imperial foreign policy" and Cockburn became all starry-eyed, ignoring that Buchanan's actual policy on Kosovo is pro-imperialist domination, only with the capitalist powers of Europe, not the U.S., doing the dirty work. In one breath Buchanan declares against the war and in the next he is justifying it. After all, what purpose was there to NATO's war except to establish imperialist policing of Kosovo? Buchanan thinks NATO should not have warred with Yugoslavia, but seeing the results, he urges NATO to carry on with their mission, only without U.S. troops. Nor does it matter to Cockburn that Buchanan could care less about the oppression of the Albanian Kosovars and considers it more important not to offend the more powerful Serbian rulers over such a "trivial" matter.

Of course, if one does not care whether or not the anti-war movement opts for the alternative imperialist views of Buchanan or really opposes imperialism, the less one examines Buchanan's stand, the better. Thus, Cockburn's speech in San Mateo and his subsequent April 3 article on the subject studiously avoid mentioning the expressions of love for the U.S. war machine that Buchanan reiterated in his San Mateo address. For instance, Cockburn's "anti-war" ally declared:

"I speak as a proud Cold Warrior who supported every great anti-Communist initiative from JFK to Reagan. And I support a U.S. defense that is second to none and a foreign policy whereby America responds resolutely to any attack on American citizens, honor, or vital interests."

Buchanan's history of flag-waving militarism, from his days

as a speechwriter for Nixon during the war against the Vietnamese people and the invasion of Cambodia, through his public relations work in the Reagan administration in its efforts to strangle the Nicaraguan revolution, bomb Libya, invade Grenada, etc., are well-known to Cockburn. But when talking before his right-wing friends on the subject of opposing war, Cockburn dodged the issue. The only time Buchanan's war-mongering history was mentioned in Cockburn's speech was when he remarks how a reporter questioned him about Buchanan writing a speech for Nixon justifying the invasion of Cambodia. And even then, Cockburn answered the reporter not by condemning Buchanan, but by speculating about how then-anti-war protester Clinton was probably on the CIA payroll back then.

Clearly Buchanan has not repented his past support for U.S. military adventures. He openly declares his support for a war machine "second to none" and justifies using it against any regime he decides has interfered with the "vital interests" of the U.S. ruling class. Clearly, Buchanan believes the U.S. has the right to destroy any movement he believes is communist. For Buchanan, "communist" could include not only genuine communist political trends really loyal to the liberation of the working class, but the state-capitalist regimes masquerading as "communist," various Third World governments that engage in "anti-imperialist" rhetoric, and just about any revolt of the oppressed or government in the world. If Buchanan speaks out against certain military interventions today, it is not due to opposing imperialism, but because he differs with Clinton on where and when to impose imperialism's will by force. In Cockburn's right-left anti-war alliance, it is not polite to bring up such things, however.

Capitalism and war

While the bulk of Cockburn's remarks lavish praise on the right-wingers, he does briefly lecture them that, unlike the left, the right-wing fails to see that capitalism gives rise to war and the desire to crush revolts like the Zapatista peasant movement in Mexico. Capitalism is indeed the root cause of war today. But Cockburn doesn't really attach much significance to it. His whole theme is that it matters little if one's opposition to some war comes from the right or the left. He's beyond all those supposedly meaningless categories. What's really important for Cockburn is to accept the sincerity of Buchanan or the other pro-capitalist zealots of the right when they proclaim against war. That's why he didn't bother to expose Buchanan's lengthy war crimes, but only those of the liberals. At one point in his April 3 article (but not in his speech in front of the Buchanans) Cockburn even concedes to a critic that Buchanan may be a fascist. But he sees no conflict between this and Buchanan's anti-war pretensions. Rather, he euphemistically describes this fascism as merely a "funky" feature of "American isolationism." Cockburn mocks a message he received from a left-wing anti-racist activist who had the nerve to protest an alliance with Buchanan. He responds as follows: "Nor do I think B [Buchanan] is any more of a fascist—in practical terms—than Albright and Clinton and Gore and Bradley, with the first three

¹Associated Press writer Scott Lindlaw reported in a March 25, 2000 article entitled "Buchanan attacks U.S. foreign policy" that Buchanan made this point at the San Mateo conference in remarks after his speech. Buchanan explained he was for getting Europe to police the region so as not to "walk away" from the situation in Kosovo.

literally with the blood of millions on their hands." So its only Clinton-style fascism that is guilty of any serious war crimes, whereas Buchanan's fascism is peace-loving and funky—so harmless only a stick-in-the-mud would oppose unity with him.

Finding "shared moral ground" with slaveholders

Should anyone doubt that the left-right unity schemes mean anything more than prettifying reactionaries, accepting whatever they say about themselves as the gospel, and reducing the struggle to what is tolerable to the right, consider Cockburn's attitude toward the slaveholders of the past. On this matter Cockburn's speech cites some awful reasoning by Noam Chomsky according to which you can unite with reactionaries "on every issue." Cockburn finds these passages from Chomsky "provocative and stimulating." He quotes the following from Chomsky:

"... you find shared moral ground on which you can work things out. That's true on every issue. Take a look at the debate over slavery. It was largely on shared moral ground, and some of the arguments were not so silly. You could understand the slave owner's arguments. The slave owner says, 'If you own property, you treat it better than if you rent property, so I'm more humane than you are.' We can understand that argument. You have to figure out what's wrong with it, but there is a shared moral ground over a range that goes far beyond any experience. ... It means that there must be principles that are embedded in our nature or at the core of our understanding of what a decent human life is, what a proper form of society is and so on."

Oh how touching! The slaveholder says chattel slavery is based on his concern for a decent human life — and Cockburn promotes this as a "provocative" idea! Of course, a decent life for the plantation owner was predicated on unspeakable crimes against the black slaves. In other words, the slaveholders' actions and morality were rooted in their own class interests. It was because there were class interests at stake that the issue of slavery wasn't settled through appeals to the slaveholders' morality, but was abolished through a bloody struggle of the slaves and the Civil War. Yet according to Chomsky, the key thing wasn't whether one was for or against slavery, but unity with the slaveholders on the high moral ground of empty humanitarian phrases. The Chomsky/Cockburn analysis boils down to the idea that since pro- and anti-slave forces both lay claim to being moral, there was a basis for unity. One may as well argue that the mutual use of guns by each side in the Civil War was also a basis for unity.

Of course, Cockburn doesn't go into the exposition on slavery for its own sake, but to illustrate the validity of cozying up to reactionary dregs today. Clearly the intent of the discourse on slavery is that the left should accept Buchanan into its heart because: 1) he says he's a good guy; and 2) everyone, regardless of class or political stand, has the same basic interests at heart.

While Cockburn ponders moral unity with the slaveholders from the theoretical angle, his pal Pat is putting the idea into practice. In a recent article entitled "White flag or battle flag" in *The Washington Times*, Buchanan argues that during the Civil War, "the cause of the war was, thus, not slavery." Thus, the South didn't fight for slavery and, concludes Buchanan, the flag of the Confederacy was "a banner of bravery and defiance" and it is wrong to demand its removal from the South Carolina capitol building and elsewhere.

Groveling before free-market arguments against government interference

In appealing for unity with his Buchananite and libertarian audience, Cockburn made sure he sounded a host of favorite right-wing themes. For the free-market advocates, he (again relying on passages from Chomsky) struck the theme that society's problems emanated from those who want to reform society because they think "that people don't have an instinctive nature." The free-marketers could not agree more. They too insist that human values and behavior are a product of an unchanging, innate human nature. If capitalism is presently dominating the world, that is simply the result of this human nature. They too warn against the menace of reformers, or government measures that might at least slightly mitigate the ravages of the market on the working masses. The free-market zealots hold that any restriction on profiteering, or any government program which slightly improves the conditions of the masses, is tyranny by (socialistic) dictators who foolishly think social maladies can be cured by improving social conditions.²

Cockburn quotes Chomsky to the effect that these bad people who think that how people think and act is shaped by the society they inhabit have the "managerial impulse" or the "technocratic impulse." Chomsky argues that human behavior is a fixed entity, and not a reflection of the particular stage of societal development, so it would be natural for the defenders of market capitalism to understand him as agreeing with them that innate human nature is responsible for capitalism. Actually, however, it's likely that Chomsky's criticism was aimed not only at government officials, but also at managers of corporations.

In any case, Cockburn makes sure that Chomsky's words are understood in a way most pleasing to the rightists. Just in case anyone was wondering who those with the evil managerial-technocratic impulse were, Cockburn assured his right-wing pals that it's the liberals. He tells the rightists the "defense of liberty" means taking on "the liberal humanitarian interventionist spirit

²Buchanan's position is somewhat different than the libertarians who advocate a more pure free-market approach in that he advocates various protectionist measures for American capitalism. Cockburn's speech didn't raise the matter, but he apparently is not in agreement with Buchanan's protectionism.

at home.”³ The liberal spirit at home, according to the free-market enthusiasts, means shifting wealth from those who “earn” it, i.e., the capitalists, to those who don’t, i.e., the workers and poor. It means some incursions on unbridled capitalism. When Cockburn appealed to the rightists that they must wage war against the liberals, he is not appealing to some imaginary higher moral unity, nor for “liberty” in the abstract, but to the basest class instincts, namely, capitalist greed. Complete liberty for the capitalist means no liberty for the workers and poor. Not only does it mean no limits on exploitation, but placing no restrictions on the owners of capitalist property inevitably results in undermining democratic rights for the oppressed.

Uniting with the rightists to “defend liberty”

Only by avoiding the question of the right-wingers’ fanatical defense of private capitalist property, can Cockburn pretend that they represent a great potential source for defense of democratic liberties. Can anyone really take seriously that the notorious racist, anti-woman, anti-gay, avowed leader of a theocratic Christian “cultural crusade” like Buchanan will stump for the rights of the oppressed? Or that Buchanan, who’s main financial backer is an union-busting textile billionaire named Roger Milliken, is really going to pave the way for workers organizing against their employers? His chauvinist, protectionist appeals may echo those of the labor traitors who run the union bureaucracy, but this only reinforces the point that he opposes organization that really defends the workers. But what of the libertarian right? They are supposedly the most ardent defenders of freedom from any government impositions. For instance they rail against the government’s so-called “war on drugs” and point out its repressive aspects. But they are also vehemently opposed to legislation that requires that businesses don’t practice racial, sexual or anti-gay discrimination. That’s a violation of property rights, they argue. While they supposedly want equal rights for all, they jump on the racist reverse discrimination bandwagon that wants to abolish affirmative action programs. A Michigan spokesman for the Libertarian Party actually argues that affirmative action is no good because it is “social engineering” which imposes itself against “students who tend to prefer congregating and interacting within their own ethnic group.”⁴ The present affirmative action programs in reality have not done nearly enough to overcome discrimination, but for the Libertarians, a little is too much. After all, as the Libertarian spokesman reasoned, if blacks and Latinos start increasing their numbers on campus, that in itself is “forcing” oneself on white students who only want to have to deal with other whites. Meanwhile, Libertarian presidential candidate Harry Browne boasts that with the end of federal support for schools and subsequent tax cuts,

parents can send their kids to private and religious schools, i.e., private entities that the Libertarians would allow to practice racial and sexual discrimination.

Moreover, while the Libertarians talk about the evils of the “war on drugs,” they don’t care that their beloved free-market has created the conditions that help drive the masses to addiction to dangerous drugs. Their “cure” for crime precludes even the slightest public efforts to alleviate misery, or provide for drug rehabilitation, or decent legal representation, or rehabilitation of prisoners in general. Beyond recognizing certain formal rights, the Libertarians oppose anything that would allow these rights to be exercised by the workers and poor. The fact that the justice system is inherently stacked against the poor, who, whatever their legal rights, have little resources to enforce them, is of no concern to them. But without these resources, these rights exist only on paper. If you’re rich on the other hand, the well-healed judges will look favorably on you, or you can bribe the authorities, and hire high-powered lawyers to get you off the hook.

While turning a blind eye to the million and one obstacles for the poor to achieve justice, Libertarians are coming up with inventive “free-market” ways to make the class prejudice of the legal system more pronounced. One suggestion they have would require not only having prisoners serve their sentence, but requiring them to have a heavy bond posted on their behalf in order to get out of prison, say \$30,000 bond for stealing a car, and \$1 million for murder.⁵ If you can’t afford the bond, you just rot in prison forever. Prison terms according to wealth — that’s justice for the Libertarians.

The Libertarians, for all their talk against abuses of government power, can be outright apologists of police terror. For example, the Libertarians whitewashed the brutal murder of black worker Malice Green by two white Detroit cops for the “crime” of being near a drug house. The cops were also “victims” they argued, presumably because were it not for laws making drugs illegal, they never would have come into contact with Green. But even if one grants that Green and these cops would not have met were it not for drug laws, how does this explain why the cops beat Green to death? Meanwhile, a top Libertarian in Michigan, Jon Coon, hosted a testimonial dinner for a freelance libertarian “talk radio” reactionary who relentlessly argued that the police behaved properly in killing Green and was a major promoter of a legal defense committee for the “innocent” killers!

Cockburn doesn’t challenge the Libertarian approach toward “liberty”, however, but glorifies it as the basis for a great new fight for the rights of the oppressed. He creates a panacea out of the idea of juries deciding cases on the basis of their conscience even if it contradicts the law. Actually, jurists often do this right now, with the results being both good and bad, and the legal system continuing to chew up the poor. But Cockburn isn’t interested in seriously examining the issue. His only purpose is

³For more on Chomsky’s attempt to equate Lenin and McNamara as interventionist, technocratic managers, see the appendix to this article.

⁴Op-ed column by Tim O’Brien, Executive Director of the Libertarian Party of Michigan, published in the *Detroit News* of Sept. 16, 1999.

⁵Op-ed column by Tim O’Brien, Executive Director of the Libertarian Party of Michigan, published in the *Detroit News* of Jan. 19, 2000.

to create hysteria that only his right-wing friends like juries, while the left supposedly hates them, along with the idea of following your conscience. All he actually succeeds in doing is pretending that justice will arrive without building up the mass movement by the left, whom Cockburn's speech ridicules.

Friends of the environment?

Just as Cockburn ignores that fanatical defense of capitalist property rights is bound to clash with the rights of the workers and oppressed, so he also imagines that ardent defenders of capitalism will rally to the defense of the environment. Cockburn's speech rightly attacks the record of the liberal environmental establishment, but not the right-wing capitalist trends, whom he assumes will really be interested in saving the environment. In typical right-wing fashion, he avoids the free-market destruction of the environment, and only rails against "coercive regulation" and "big government". Do away with this, says Cockburn, and we will stop the destruction of "small ranchers" and "small farmers." Once again, Cockburn is just preaching to the free-trade choir. The free-traders always argue that it is government regulation that has killed the private entrepreneur, conveniently ignoring that without any government regulation at all, the small producers are always driven to the wall by competition with the bigger capitalists. No doubt there are government regulations that favor the powerful agricultural interests over the smaller farms. But the right-wing doesn't call for meaningful measures against the *big* capitalists. And, interestingly enough, neither does Cockburn's speech. If the liberals have gutted militancy from the environmental movement, Cockburn's adaptation to the right-wing should kill it altogether.

Cockburn's general presentation bears a good deal of similarity to that of Libertarian Party presidential candidate Harry Browne, who also spoke at the "anti-war" conference. According to Browne, were it not for government-controlled properties there would be no environmental problems because,

as Browne assures us, the profit-motive assures that private businesses will not do something so foolish as to pollute. As for Buchanan, here's an example of how he expresses in practical terms what Cockburn's general perspective means. Buchanan's San Mateo speech argued that "Mr. Gore is also an acolyte of the New World Order, every ready to cede American sovereignty, and an architect of Clinton's Kyoto Treaty, under which global bureaucrats would dictate America's use of fossil fuels." The 1997 Kyoto Treaty, which is supposed to alleviate global warming through restricting carbon dioxide emissions in the U.S., Europe and Japan, is supported by the Clinton administration, but has never been ratified by Congress. The treaty has all sorts of loopholes for corporate polluters in the industrial countries. But for Buchanan, the problem with the treaty is the alleged threat by "global bureaucrats" to the sovereignty of American capitalism, whose industries are the largest source of fossil fuel emissions in the world. Buchanan's stand is "America First — in polluting the world."

Fight the right and left-wing servants of capitalism

Given Cockburn's constant capitulation to the right-wing perspective, it is no wonder he got an enthusiastic reception from the rightists. The "anti-war" conference organizer, Justin Raimondo, an apologist for the fascist sympathizers of the Old Right isolationists of the 30s and supporter of Buchanan, cooed "Alexander Cockburn" thrilled and delighted an audience made up primarily of conservatives (and even outright reactionaries like myself)." Cockburn's stand has nothing to do with helping build up powerful movements of the masses, but undermines efforts to really develop a class trend against the capitalist exploiters. Indeed, welcoming the likes of Buchanan into the mass movements will help discredit the struggle in the eyes of the workers and other oppressed who rightly see Buchanan as their oppressor. □

Appendix:

Chomsky's attempt to equate Lenin and McNamara

In the passages Cockburn quotes from Chomsky, there is an attempt to equate Lenin and Robert McNamara as examples of managers or technocrats who think human attitudes are not set in stone, but change as social conditions change. Cockburn doesn't himself say that, and even gave credit to Lenin for connecting capitalism to war. Yet Cockburn makes it clear he thinks highly of Chomsky's analysis here. In the absence of any further explanation of Chomsky's views by Cockburn, a right-wing audience would get the idea that Lenin and McNamara are the same because both think government can do something worthwhile. For the ultra-right audience Cockburn is addressing, both Lenin and McNamara would be considered "lefts" as McNamara served in the cabinet of the liberal Democratic administrations

of Kennedy and LBJ, while Lenin is their communist devil incarnate. And the gist of Cockburn's speech is that the left is generally bad while the right is full of new and wonderful ideas.

Actually, Chomsky's equating Lenin and McNamara is, in his own misguided way, an attempt to also criticize modern capitalist corporations. According to Chomsky, the capitalist corporation constitutes a mean dictatorship over the masses, which is Chomsky's mistaken conception of what Lenin stood for. Cockburn's speech does not explain that Chomsky also intended to critique big business, however.

As for Chomsky's lumping together Lenin and McNamara, it's absurd. His argument is that the main evil that needs to be fought against is "centralized management," which is raised both

by Lenin and McNamara as necessary in the modern productive process. (For this and other quotes from Chomsky in this footnote see excerpts from Chomsky's 1977 work "Intellectuals and the state" called "Lenin and state capitalism" on the ZNet-sponsored Chomsky archives web site at www.zmag.org/chomsky/.) For Chomsky, a controlling force over economic functions is a horror in itself. He doesn't attach much importance to the class nature of the central management, i.e., whether it is a tool of the capitalist exploiters, or is supported, and actively participated in, by the working masses. For Chomsky, centralized management precludes the masses running things. This ignores that the real cause of tyranny over the masses has its roots in capitalist production itself. McNamara, who has served as president of the Ford auto monopoly, as warmongering Secretary of State under Kennedy and Johnson, and as president of the World Bank, has been for central management which was a vehicle for capitalist businesses. Inevitably capitalist management means dictatorship over the workers. After all, the capitalist must conquer the market to survive, and this impels the capitalist to exert all means to keep the workers down both through company management and the state apparatus.

Lenin's goals and actions were geared to the liberation of the workers. He stood for smashing the bourgeois state and the workers establishing their own state power based on mobilizing the working masses to run all facets of society, stepwise undermining the vestiges of capitalism, eliminating all class distinctions, and with it, the state. In short, Lenin stood for wiping out everything McNamara held dear. Chomsky will have none of this, however, because it involves the leadership of a political party. He, quoting Anton Pannekoek, a representative of the semi-anarchist theorizing of the "left" communists, castigates Lenin for wanting "to bring to power, by means of the fighting force of the workers, a layer of leaders who then establish planned production by means of State-Power." Thus, the crime of Lenin, according to Chomsky and other adherents of anarchist views, is that he and the Bolsheviks had an organization to "lead" the workers. This "leading" they consider in itself an act of oppression akin to the treatment of the workers by the capitalists. Then, Lenin and his party, *with the support of the workers*, had the nerve to take power. So when the workers support a revolutionary party these workers are, by anarchist logic, depriving themselves of their rights — mainly the right to be leaderless! Of course, eventually the ruling party in the Soviet Union decayed and became an oppressor of the workers under Stalin. But Chomsky doesn't hold that therefore new revolutionary leadership is required, but that the workers must not have their own organized leadership. Presumably Chomsky holds that the workers can vanquish the bourgeoisie without a highly-trained, well-organized leadership.

"Planned production by means of state-power" is another tyrannical measure according to Chomsky. No doubt the expropriation of the capitalist owners is tyrannical — for them. As for the workers, putting the formerly capitalist enterprises in the hands of the state was a means by which they could plan and control production. What Chomsky omits is that Lenin never considered state control sufficient in itself. For this state property to really be run in the interests of society as a whole, Lenin emphasized that the working masses must actively oversee the economy and the affairs of state. But Chomsky doesn't distinguish the bureaucratic leadership of McNamara, meant to keep the workers from deciding anything, and the leadership of a truly revolutionary workers' party, which works to develop the self-motion of the workers.

If the workers, upon coming to power, were to ignore the need for a centralized management of the economy, to use Chomsky's term, they would be committing a fatal mistake. Without some mechanism of central control reflecting the overall interests of the workers, supported by them, and based on the voluntary submission of each group of workers to the overall interest of the class, there is no way for workers to have any influence outside their own workplace. Each enterprise can do as it pleases, whether it is run by private interests, a collective, or is state property. Unless the workers can establish a unified control of the economy as a whole, overall economic planning will prove impossible, and the anarchic relations characteristic of capitalism will reassert themselves. Chomsky denounces capitalism, but his anarchist railing against central management of any type will inevitably lead society in that direction.

Whatever Chomsky's intentions, his central point — that the solution to the problems of the present system lies in avoiding centralized forces that control the economy — also happens to fit in nicely with the free-market prejudices of the right. True, Chomsky includes powerful corporations as part of the forces he opposes. But then again, this is not necessarily a violation of free-market theory either, provided that one avoids mentioning that competition inevitably gives rise to monopoly. Free-market theorists also worry about the abuses committed by monopolies, though it must be admitted that often free-market rhetoric is used as a hypocritical cover by the corporate CEOs and their political representatives.

To be sure, neither Chomsky nor Cockburn loves the capitalist corporations, while the rightists that Cockburn has befriended really do. But the anarchist views in Chomsky's theorizing share certain basic assumptions with free-market ideology, and may, as in the case of Cockburn's use of Chomsky, serve as a bridge to practical unity with the right. □

Reference material for the article: "On the courtship between Alexander Cockburn and Pat Buchanan: Join the devil"

Life and libertarians: beyond left and right

by Alexander Cockburn

The following article by Alexander Cockburn is from the political newsletter *CounterPunch* of April 3, 2000. Cockburn is a co-editor with Jeffrey St. Clair of this publication, whose web site can be found at www.counterpunch.com. This article attempts to justify Cockburn's unity efforts with the arch-reactionary Pat Buchanan and other right-wingers. It also contains the speech that Cockburn delivered at the March 24-25 "anti-war" conference in San Mateo, California at which he and Buchanan were the featured speakers. For a critique of "Beyond left and right", see Mark's article "Join the devil", which starts on page 18.

I got an invitation to speak a couple of months ago from an outfit called *antiwar.com*, which is run by a young fellow called Justin Raimondo. "Antiwar.com is having its second annual national conference March 24 & 25, and we'd like you to be the luncheon speaker," Raimondo wrote. "The conference will be held at the Villa Hotel, in San Mateo (near the airport). The theme of the conference is 'Beyond Left & Right: The New Face of the Antiwar Movement.' We have invited a number of speakers spanning the political spectrum. Confirmed so far: Patrick J. Buchanan, Tom Fleming (of *Chronicles* magazine), Justin Raimondo (*Antiwar.com*), Kathy Kelly (*Iraq Aid*), Alan Bock (*Orange County Register*), Rep. Ron Paul (R-Texas), representatives of the Serbian Unity Congress, and a host of others."

Raimondo seasoned his invite with a burnt offering, in the form of flattery, always pleasing to the nostrils: "All of us here at *Antiwar.com* are big fans of your writing: we met, once, at a meeting during the Kosovo war where you bravely took up the fight for the united front left-right alliance against imperialist war. We can promise you a small honorarium, a lunch, free admission to all conference events — and a good time."

As a seasoned analyst of such communications, my eye of course fell sadly upon the words "small honorarium" — a phrase that in my case usually means somewhere between \$150 and \$350. I'd already noted that even though our task was to transcend the tired categories of left and right, I was the only leftist mentioned, with the possible exception of Kathy Kelly, from that splendid organization, *Voices in the Wilderness*, which campaigns to lift the UN sanctions on Iraq. Being a libertarian Justin had boldly added the prospect of a "good time". Leftist invitations rarely admit this possibility in formal political communications, even in the distant days when the left supposedly had a lock on drugs and sex.

I said I'd be happy to join in such an enterprise, and in due course got some angry e-mails from lefties who seem to feel that

any contiguity with Buchanan is a crime, even if the subject was gardening and Dutch tulipomania in the seventeenth century.

"Dear Alexander Cockburn: I read with horror that you are speaking at an event (the Anti-War .com conference) where Pat Buchanan is the keynote speaker. How could you knowing that PB's policies are what could only be called fascist? I generally agree with your opinion on imperialism, and supported your view of Seattle. However speaking at an event which will amongst other things help to give Mr. Buchanan respectability, is unconscionable. I hope you will reconsider. If not, we will probably be able to greet each other, when you cross our picket line.

Dean Tuckerman

P.S. I am a member of Anti-Racist Action Bay Area."

"Dear Dean, thanks for yr note. So far as Buchanan is concerned, I assume he was invited because he opposed the war in Kosovo, and calls for the lifting of sanctions against Iraq. There is a lot that's funky abt American isolationism, but frankly, I don't mind sharing a conference schedule with someone who opposes war on Serbs and on Iraqi kids. Nor do I think B is any more of a fascist — in practical terms — than Albright and Clinton and Gore and Bradley, with the first three literally with the blood of millions on their hands. Go find Mailer's interview with Buchanan in *Esquire* a few years ago. See you on the picket lines. Best Alex Cockburn"

I pondered what to wear, deciding finally on a t-shirt advertising the Fully Informed Jury Association, a group upholding the powers of the jury to set aside the law and rule as the jurors' understanding of the case and their consciences dictate. FIJA is also anathema to lefties, who equate juries with redneck juries in the south in the early 1960s. It's useless to point out to them that northeastern juries were overturning laws and setting fugitive slaves free long before the Civil War, or that an all-male jury supported Susan B. Anthony's right to vote, only to be overruled by the judge. If a judge screws up, lefties don't call for the abolition of judges. But let one jury come in with an unwelcome verdict, as with Diallo, and you'll hear mumbles that the jury is — as Michael Lind so memorably put it after the O.J. decision, "a barbaric Viking relic".

At the last minute Barbara said the Villa Hotel is relatively swanky and a T-shirt might not cut it. I grudgingly switched to

white shirt, chose the 67 convertible as properly defiant of the auto-safety lobby and headed south from Berkeley. Barbara was right. This was most emphatically a shirt-and-tie, skirt-and-nice-shoes. Justin Raimondo was draped in the sort of gray pinstripe favored by London gents when they want a holiday from blue. But all the same the folks were unmistakably libertarians, not Democrats or Republicans. Democrats would have been more casual, Republicans far more assertive. From the podium I gazed out at white faces, seeing only two black countenances, one of them unmistakably that of yet another liberal bete-to-hate, Lenora Fulani.

An excellent crowd! Their amiable hilarity at my sallies reminded me of Goldsmith's lines in the *Deserted Village* about the pupils of the country schoolmaster: "Full well they laughed with counterfeited glee / At all his jokes, and many a joke had he." (How many people have read the whole of that wonderful poem, one of the most savage denunciations of free trade ever written?)

And here now, cleaned up a bit, is what I said.

"Hello to you all.

W.H. Auden, poet, wrote a verse once about a rather mysterious character called Gerald Hamilton who was actually the origin— if any of you have read Christopher Isherwood's novels—, Mr. Norris Changes Trains. And he wrote a little poem which said: "So it's you that I now raise my glass to, though I haven't the slightest idea / what in God's name you're up to, or why in God's name you are here".

And I feel a little bit like that looking out on your pleasant faces. I've been on the left, you know, and I can usually come to an audience and pretty much characterize it. I could save the FBI a tremendous amount of money. They go to extraordinary expense bugging people, going out in the hotel parking lot, and writing down all the license tags. I could say the three old ladies on my left there, they're all commies, they've been commies for sixty years. The people over there carrying a copy of *The Militant*, they're Trotskyists. But when the Feds come up after this one, I don't know what I'm going to say. I'm going to throw in the towel.

People talk a lot about the need for new thinking, and the need for new ideas. But mostly on the left, if you actually raise a new idea, it's a bit like arriving at a town in the year 1348 with spots on your face saying, "Let me in".

I remember some years ago I was in Detroit, a town I like a lot, and an anarchist friend of mine said there's a terrible event on the weekend called "Gunstock", and I said, "Oh, that sounds interesting, what's that?" He said, oh, it's people against the UN, and people who are in favor of guns. I said, "Let's go and look, let's go and talk to them, and see what's going on". And he said, absolutely not. I said, "I thought you were an anarchist". So I went to "Gunstock", and of course it was filled with amiable characters. There was a definite sympathy for guns but not oppressively so. So I wrote a column in *The Nation* saying actually there'd always been the talk of new ideas and I had a new idea that was that our people should go to gun shows. *Nation* readers should go to gun shows, carrying copies of *The Nation* and converse with people. There was an absolute torrent

of outrage. People didn't think that was a good idea at all.

Before this event I got called by a reporter from the *Examiner*, and he asked what I thought about Buchanan, and he said Buchanan had written the speech for Nixon about going into Cambodia in 1970. Where were you, he asked. And I said, oh, I was outside the American embassy in London—probably standing next to Bill Clinton, who may or may not have been reporting to the FBI. He probably was. Or the CIA.

And the *Examiner* reporter said, "how would you describe yourself?" And I said "well, how about radical?" He wasn't totally happy with radical, and I aid all right, left, but then the word "left" can mean anything. There was probably a left to the Nazi party in 1935, wanting to wipe out only half the Jews. The word left does not mean much unless it is cashed in real currency, real positions, like being against war on Serbia, for example. And if you're opposed to that, you really do start looking around for allies and I have noticed you find them increasingly in people like yourselves. People who would conventionally be regarded on the libertarian right or people like Buchanan.

In any intervention there's a moment when the intervening power is trying to achieve critical mass in its propaganda. The American people, generally, say at first, 'huh, intervention, no, it doesn't sound like a very good idea.' And then you get the usual arsenal of propaganda goes into motion. In Iraq, for example, there was the incubator story. Human rights, of course, was really brought into currency in the era of Jimmy Carter. The idea of the moral mission. Of course, its historical antecedents are much, much longer, but it's my belief that with that when the liberals began to try to regain the moral confidence that they'd lost in the wake of Vietnam it took them from 1975 to the Carter era, in other words no time at all, to reestablish or to begin the work of reestablishing their moral credentials. We had the rhetoric of human rights. Jimmy Carter pronounced the rhetoric of human rights just as he was mandating the first Argentinean torturers into the creation of the contras. The rhetoric, and the reality. And since that time, we've seen the gradual accretion and accumulation of confidence of the intervention in the cause of human rights plus a fairly impressive armory of techniques and accomplices.

Can we unite on the anti-war platform? We have already, in the case of Kosovo for example. But where would you as libertarians want to get off the leftist bus? A leftist says "Capitalism leads to war. Capitalism needs war". But you libertarians are pro-capitalism, so you presumably have a view of capitalism as a system not inevitably producing or needing war. Lefties have always said capitalism has to maximize its profits and the only way you can maximize profits in the end is by imperial war, which was the old Lenin thesis.

Leftists say that corporations must plunder the earth. Corporations will brook no resistance. Corporations don't care for interference with their ways, whether it's by the Zapatistas or by insurgent groups around the world. The minute you have a insurgent group then the capitalists, the corporations say, enough, and whistle up the state to do their bidding. In the early days of the newsletter I coedit, *Counterpunch*, we ran across a Chase Manhattan bank memo. You know, occasionally you

think, 'God, it's so tiring trying to find news, let's just like think of what they would say and then write it and say they said it.' I've never done that, but sometimes they say so exactly what you want them to say, you're worried that other people will think that you made it up.

So a fellow hired by Chase Manhattan bank wrote a little memo, which had the line, "the Zapatistas must be eliminated", simple as that. Must be eliminated. It turned out to have been written, that memo, by a professor, a liberal professor, as I recall, from Johns Hopkins.

So, my libertarian friends, at what point do you get off the train? You say, 'we like corporations, the right for people to associate and form a corporation and issue publicly held stock and maximize profits. This is part and parcel of the economic package we favor.' Then you have to do battle with leftists, those who say corporate greed will lead to war and waste.

Take Pentagon spending. Is the economy basically underpinned by Pentagon spending, defense spending, and has been ever since 1938-roughly when the New Deal failed, which it did, effectively. Then they had to turn to war spending to bail the whole system out, and ever since then we've had Pentagon spending underwriting everything. Keynesianism. Military Keynesianism, at that. Now that's another bit of left analysis, I wouldn't go on to tedious length with the various weapons of argument in our arsenal. I'm saying that one could have and should have important debates about why we think wars start.

I was asked by Justin to give a talk here. He cunningly billed my speech as "The psychology of liberal interventionism", thus removing it from the corporate economic plane to the mentally nutty plane.

A while back I did an interview, actually for a terrific book which I happen to have written myself called "The Golden Age Is In Us", and I was interviewing Chomsky. It was for a magazine called *Grand Street*, and the theme we were meant to talk about was models. And so Chomsky and I were very pleased, we thought we were going to talk about models, you know, in the normally *Vogue* magazine sense of the word. But they said, no, they wanted us to talk about intellectual constructs. Boring. But some of what Chomsky says is interesting. Bear with me, I'll just read a couple of things he said.

"The same is true of intellectual development and the same is true of moral life. You're constantly making choices and decisions and judgments. Sometimes you don't know quite what to do, but over a wide range you know what's right. And even when you disagree with people, you find shared moral ground on which you can work things out. That's true on every issue. Take a look at the debate over slavery. It was largely on shared moral ground, and some of the arguments were not so silly. You could understand the slave owner's arguments. The slave owner says, If you own property, you treat it better than if you rent property, so I'm more humane than you are. We can understand that argument. You have to figure out what's wrong

with it, but there is shared moral ground over a range that goes far beyond any experience. And this can only mean, again short of angels, that it's growing out of our nature. It means that there must be principles that are embedded in our nature or at the core of our understanding of what a decent human life is, what a proper form of society is and so on".

Now, he goes on, "the idea that human beings are malleable and that people don't have an instinctive nature is a very attractive one to people who want to rule, and to control. If you look at the modern intelligentsia over the past century or so, they're pretty much a managerial class, a secular priesthood. They've basically gone in two directions, one is essentially Leninist. Leninism is the ideology of a radical intelligentsia that says we have the right to rule. Alternatively, they have joined the decision-making sector of state capitalist society as managers in the political economic and ideological institutions. The ideologies are very similar", says Chomsky who went on, "I've sometimes compared Robert McNamara to Lenin, and you have only to change a few words for them to say virtually the same thing. That's why people can jump so quickly from being loyal communists to celebrating America, to take the *Partisan Review's* famous phrase back in the early Cold War." "All of this," Chomsky concludes, "was predicted by the anarchist, Bakunin, probably the only prediction in the social sciences that's ever come true."

Now that is a very provocative and stimulating set of propositions. This idea of the managerial impulse, the technocratic impulse. What I'm sure is attractive about the idea of the left-right opposition to war is the idea of a shared moral outlook, which of course then has to confront or perhaps gloss over temporarily economic and political differences. And I think the shared moral outlook should extend beyond war into other very, important areas. I might just suggest a few. To me they are enormously important.

If you're paralleling your opposition to intervention, to the liberal humanitarian interventionist spirit at home, what are you talking really about? You're talking about defense of liberty. What we are seeing at the moment is the rise of the prosecutorial state, a ferocious onslaught on substantive liberty, almost everywhere you look. Its reached epidemic crisis and emergency proportions.

You can look across the country at one example after another of the cops, of the prosecutorial system being out of control. Lying by cops in court is endemic. Lying and snitching, that's the underpinnings of law enforcement. And it is reaching, I think, a major crisis. And in this crisis constitutional protections are going by the board.

The fourth amendment is gone. Absolutely gone. In a car you have no rights whatsoever. They can do anything they want. The sixth amendment is gone. Now your kids are driving down the

road to San Francisco. No rights in a car, right away. A cop sees them, thinks they're driving a V.W. with a hip hop beret on or something like that, or a tail pipe is out, they'll stop them, it's a pretext stop. They're got no protections. And then you've got, of course, all this driving while black stuff, crowding in on top of that. Now you get into court, you're confronted with cops perjuring themselves and jailhouse snitches saying you confessed all to them in your cell. You've got people told to snitch or they'll face 20 years, you've got the mandatory sentences, you've got the crack disproportion, a 100 times disproportion in sentencing on powder cocaine and crack cocaine. Take every instrumentality and abuse of the drug war, and there's something on which everybody in this room could unite.

How many times have we heard a real debate thus far this year? On basic issues of liberty and freedom? Not one bleat, except, I hope, from Mr. Buchanan when he gets going. And Ralph Nader, hopefully when he gets going.

Now take the environment, and what we've seen over the last 20 years since that great Green president Richard Nixon brought in EPA, is a steady conversion of the militant organizing defense of nature, defense of open space, defense of things we all like, into a collusive operation between extremely rich NGOs and the government. Look at the big environmental organizations. Totally undemocratic, socked in with major foundations like the Pew Foundation, like Rockefeller, like Ford, like the MacArthur Foundation, whose processes are secretive, the politics of manipulation, and ultimately coercive regulation which causes huge offense to people who should be the allies of the Greens. I'm talking about small ranches, I'm talking about small farmers who see themselves being destroyed by big government.

So, in area after area, these things have to be argued through in an amiable and pleasant and energetic way.

I think the old categories are gone. I see no virtue to them. I see Bernie Sanders listed as an Independent Socialist in the U.S. Congress. I see what Bernie Sanders has supported, starting with the war in Kosovo. And then I see Ron Paul, on the other hand, writing stuff against war which could have been written by Tom Hayden in 1967. I say what is the point of fooling around with

the old categories? Bernie Sanders says he's an economic populist. What's he trying to do? He's trying to export the nuclear waste of the northeastern states to a poor Spanish community in Texas. And that effort was stopped by George W., figure that one out. Of course George W. had a Democratic opponent in Texas who was making a stink about it, so he wanted to outflank him, that's why he did it. We live in exciting times. There's no question about it. It's been a long process. I think I met my first libertarians back in the early 70s. I've seen these shivering of the old categories go by the board over this period.

I don't know how much will happen this year. These are periods of action, periods of creative effort. We've got two things to do: one is to cement our basic capacities for alert resistance at the next specter of war, have our troops ready, our messages ready, have our propaganda ready, have our alliances and our coalitions prepared.

And beyond that, through functions like this and the stuff that Justin's been organizing, and hopefully something from the left, we have to reforge our ideas and hopes, based on those simple ideas of Chomsky or the French Enlightenment and move forward from there.

Thank you."

Hardly had I stopped before a Serb came up and said angrily that I wrecked everything I'd said with my kindly allusion to the French Enlightenment. He spat out the word Rousseau with the sort of indignation I imagine he attaches to the name of Wesley Clark. I was trying to defend myself but then was sidetracked by the effort of exchanging comradely greetings not only with Lenora Fulani but of Ron Paul. Raimondo lived up to his promise. It was fun. And it was fun later that afternoon to listen to Fulani give an interesting address on the decline of the anti war left and to Raimondo talk about the 30s isolationists. Alas, the Libertarians' presidential candidate, Harry Browne, was repetitive and a bit of a bore.

Driving back to Berkeley with \$300 in cash in my pocket, I mentally toasted antiwar.com. Alas, not many leftists will ever want to have much to do with them. □

Putin's two wars

Continued from the front page

of 1996, but it lost this war and signed an agreement with the Chechnya, the Khasavyurt Accords. This agreement, however, left Chechnya's status indefinite. Today the free-market regime in Russia, this time under Yeltsin's hand-picked successor, President Putin, is once again invading Chechnya.

This is a brutal war, which the Russians are seeking to win by force of numbers and overwhelming firepower. 100,000 Russian troops have entered a country of less than a million people. They use heavy bombardment of cities and villages from planes and artillery as their standard operating procedure. Grozny, which was devastated by the earlier war and never rebuilt, was systematically destroyed, with block after block of buildings in the city center leveled. Towns and villages have been ravaged and looted repeatedly; up to 200,000 refugees have been forced to flee from place to place; and all Chechen males over the age of 12 have been regarded as fair game for savage interrogation in "filtration camps". The Russian government, declaring that it is not fighting a foreign war, but just "criminals" and "terrorists", feels free to throw aside even the most elementary humanitarian considerations, and even harasses doctors who dare to treat Chechen wounded. This is a war against the people.

Meanwhile Clinton and the Western powers, although they grumble every now and then about the brutalities of this war, are themselves accomplices in the ravaging of Chechnya. They insist that Chechnya is indeed a part of Russia, no matter what the Chechens themselves want, and they have stressed their sympathy with the suppression of supposed "terrorists" and "criminals". So long as they are in a partnership, if a somewhat uneasy one, with Russia, they will merely advise Russia to lighten up a bit in how it suppresses Chechnya. Should, however, a serious conflict break out between the Western powers and Russia on other issues (which isn't likely in the immediate future, but can never be absolutely ruled out), they may start shouting about Chechnya, but only as part of renewed squabbling with Russia over spheres of influence. The Western imperialist powers have no concern for the Chechen people themselves; and their attitude to Chechnya depends on the far more important objectives in their game of world power politics. The struggle against the Chechen war must base itself on building international solidarity among the working masses of all countries, and increasing their ability to oppose all imperialism, Western as well as Russian.

War abroad, reaction at home

If the war is devastating Chechnya, it is also a disaster for Russian working people. Under the banner of a patriotic war to avenge the defeat of 1994-6 and restore the prestige of the Russian army, the free-market Russian bourgeoisie has used the war to drown out opposition to its exploitation of the Russian workers. The economic "shock therapy" carried out by then-President Yeltsin in the 90s slashed the living standards of the

majority of Russians, while enriching a thin upper crust of Russians. The Russian health care and school systems are in tatters; millions of workers still don't get paid for months at a time; retired workers have seen their pensions shrink to next to nothing; and the percentage of Russians under the poverty line exceeds that in the U.S. during the Great Depression of the 30s. The Russian population actually declines from year to year. But under the banner of the war, the present Putin government has achieved a mandate to step up the policies that have brought this disaster. The last few months have seen the following developments:

● Yeltsin having resigned as President at the end of last year, Premier Putin became Acting President. He was elected president on March 26, as the Russian bourgeoisie rallied behind him as the strong man who can bring tiny Chechnya to its knees (even if this accolade is somewhat premature). Earlier, on December 19, the Yeltsin/Putin government had done unprecedentedly well in parliamentary elections. Prior to the new invasion of Chechnya, these had been expected to be rough elections for the Yeltsin government.

● After the outbreak of the new Chechen war, there was a campaign of harassment of Chechens and other Caucasians living in Moscow and other areas of Russia. (Moscow is the city with the second-largest numbers of Chechens, after Grozny.)

● Putin is on the verge of asking parliament to pass a new labor code that would allow outrageous prerogatives to employers. It would legalize and generalize the miserable conditions facing workers today. It would allow 12-hour days and 56-hour weeks; give the OK to child labor; eliminate protections for women with small children; cut maternity leave in half; eliminate the need to obtain trade union consent for firing, work schedules and workplace norms; cripple trade union organizing; and so forth. This labor code, approved by the IMF, would establish the type workplace relations that capitalist bosses love. The 40-million-strong Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia, which stems from the old Soviet trade unions, is holding the workers back from mass protests against the proposed labor code, but small trade unions and militant activists organized demonstrations against the labor code. About

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300,000 workers in dozens of places across Russia on May 17 came out to picket or stop work or otherwise demonstrate their discontent. For example, there were 4,000 protesters in the Moscow area, and the largest demonstration was 150,000 in Kaliningrad.

● Under the slogan of establishing the "dictatorship of the law", Putin has enhanced the dictatorial aspects of the Russian government. He has strengthened the secret security police. He has sought to increase government control of the newspapers and TV: he has begun Moscow subsidies to 2,500 regional papers; he has dramatically restricted media coverage of the Chechen war; and in May his government raided the headquarters of the largest private media conglomerate, Media-MOST, which has been quarreling with the Yeltsin/Putin government for awhile.

● Putin didn't make many promises during his campaign for the Russian presidency, except to repeatedly demand the elimination of the special powers of the 89 constituent parts of Russia (which is officially a federation of its constituent "subjects", each subject being a territorial governmental unit). Just over a third of these areas are Russia's republics, autonomous areas, and one autonomous region, and these republics and autonomous zones are supposed to allow consideration to be taken of the needs of various small nationalities.¹ But Putin's

campaign will probably spell the end for the consideration for such national rights, and the nationality zones are apparently going to be treated just like any other administrative subdivision of Russia. Indeed, the invasion of Chechnya is part of his campaign against Russia's constituent regions, and it shows his utter disdain for the right of self-determination. The rights of minorities will go by the wayside, as will the right to local self-government of the predominantly Russian regions.

The mainstream Russian opposition

The mainstream Russian opposition can roughly be divided into the liberals (or forces of the "right"), the Stalinists (such as Zyuganov's "Communist" Party of the Russian Federation, which is not actually communist, but state-capitalist), and the ultra-nationalists (such as Zhirinovsky's fascist "Liberal Democratic" Party). It may seem somewhat charitable to call any or all of these forces an "opposition", since these forces repeatedly have been allied with the government or in it, but the history of the 90s was that of constant quarrels between the Yeltsin government and parliament, which was dominated by one or the other opposition coalition. Yet whatever squabbles they forces had with Yeltsin, all these forces have, so far, fallen in line behind Putin's war on Chechnya.

● The *free-market liberals* liked to think that they stood not just for privatization, but for political freedom. So long as the Soviet system stood, they could imagine themselves as fighters for human rights. But the history of the Yeltsin regime is a

¹The other almost two-thirds of the constituent parts are ordinary administrative divisions of Russia, consisting of 49 "regions" (*oblasts*), 6 "territories" (*krais*), and two "cities of federal significance" (Moscow and St. Petersburg). According to the Russian constitution, they have equal status with the autonomous areas (autonomous *okrugs*), the one autonomous region (autonomous *oblast*), and the republics. (When there is said to be 89 of these entities in Russia, this includes Chechnya, which shouldn't really be included, but is, of course, included by Putin and the present Russian constitution.) However, there have also been a series of treaties with some of the republics and various ad hoc practices that give special rights to the nationality areas; it turns out that Russian constitutional life is governed by a series of treaties, constitutions, and agreements that are not mutually consistent. Indeed, widespread practices of the ordinary regions, territories and cities of federal significance also contradict the Russian constitution.

The complicated Russian constitutional system could no doubt use reform; moreover many governors rule autocratically over the local population. But Putin's proposals don't provide more democracy for rank-and-file Russians; instead Putin's declared aim is simply to develop a system of centralized control from the presidency. After bombarding parliament with tanks and defeating the parliamentary opposition in October 1993, Yeltsin used a referendum to replace the then-existing Russian constitution with a new one that vastly increased the powers of the presidency and degraded those of parliament. Putin's plans to extend presidential rule into the Russian localities would be another step in the process of creating one-person rule. The first proposals Putin has submitted to the Russian parliament to carry out his planned reorganization roughly include, if expressed in terms of the American political system, such things as having the president able to fire governors, and allowing governors to fire mayors and local officials (thus enhancing the present autocratic tendencies among the governors, once they are turned into pawns of the presidency). He has already appointed officials to head seven new super-regions; this is roughly

(continued...)

¹(...continued)

similar to if American states were grouped into seven regional confederations, presided over by super-governors appointed by the president, while the governors themselves could be fired by the president. Reports aren't yet clear as to what the powers of the new super-regional heads will be, but they are expected to yield great authority; it can, for example, be noted that most of Russia's localities are dependent on federal subsidy, which would presumably now be channeled through the super-regions. There is also concern that the boundaries of the super-regions match closely Russia's military districts, and moreover five of seven super-regional heads are either generals from the Chechen wars or ex-Soviet secret police (KGB) officials. It seems that as all the reins of power are being concentrated in the hands of the Russian presidency, this very process may be preparing conditions for the presidency to be toppled by the military. In any case, it is feared that it will subject the country to a military-style authoritarianism.

Finally, although the 89 entities (or, to use the obscure constitutional term, "subjects") of the Russian Federation are divided into regions, territories, autonomous areas, republics, etc., in Western journalistic accounts they are usually all called "regions". While this may in part be due to the lack of any other convenient term, and it may be almost unavoidable since the use of some other term risks incomprehensibility, this general use of the term "region" obscures the distinction between the mere administrative subdivisions, such as the ordinary "regions" and "territories", and the nationality zones. On the other hand, the use of the term "region" for all the subdivisions may accurately reflect the fact that the rights and needs of the nationalities are not going to be respected.

history of the liberals selling their souls to the devil: they repeatedly backed the Yeltsin presidency, no matter what outrages Yeltsin committed, so long as he was carrying out free-market "shock therapy". The alpha and omega of their politics was to get appointed to high positions in the Yeltsin administration. When squabbling with Yeltsin, the liberals were the weakest of the opposition forces, due to their callous attitude towards the mass poverty resulting from privatization and "shock therapy", and their willingness to see repressive measures carried out against any political force that might slow privatization.

As a result, the liberals sold out Chechnya as they sold out every principle but faster and faster privatization. The process of liberal disillusionment can be traced in the worried writings of a prominent liberal, Sergei Kovalev, who has one of the best records with respect to Chechnya of any of the liberals in the Duma. A dissident in Soviet days, he was appointed presidential Human Rights Commissioner by Yeltsin, and in that position he bitterly attacked the atrocities committed during the first Chechen war. But, writing just after that war, he had to admit that the liberal forces had been "too broken" to mount any effective protest. Contrasting the passivity of most of the liberals during the first Chechen war to the mass protests of 1991 (supported by the liberals but not restricted to them) against using force to retain the Baltic Republics inside the Soviet Union, he wrote:

"We turned out to be too exhausted, too broken and disillusioned, to shake Moscow with a 500,000-strong demonstration in the first days of the Chechen adventures—as we did in January 1991 after events in Vilnius. The price of our civilian passivity was 100,000 corpses in the North Caucasus [where Chechnya is located—JG]."

He could take pride only in the activity of "several dozen honest journalists—just a few dozen" and in "a few dozen, nongovernment organizations all across the country" (nor were these forces all liberals). He consoled himself with the thought that, at least, "we turned out to be sufficiently sober not to let ourselves be deceived by the government."²

Three years later, Kovalev has lost this last consolation. Now his assessment of the liberals, including the particular liberal party he himself belongs to, is even bleaker. He shows their prominent leaders clinging for dear life to President Putin, and to war chauvinism against Chechnya. He writes that:

"The so-called 'rightists' (i.e., the 'Union of Right Forces,'—which includes my own party, the

'Democratic Choice of Russia'), had in effect announced their support of Putin's candidacy in the presidential elections before Yeltsin resigned. Indeed, the fact that the Union of Right Forces passed the 5-percent barrier in the parliamentary elections, an accomplishment which was more than doubtful just a couple of months ago, is largely owing to the fact that a number of its prominent leaders, including such reformers as Anatoly Chubais and Sergei Kiriyenko, publicly supported Putin and the war. . . . a deal between Putin and the rightists seems highly likely. Putin's administration will accept the liberal program of economic reform that the rightists insist on. The rightists will refrain from excessive criticism of the authoritarian and police features of Putin's government. And perhaps they will even support more stringent police measures, as they have already supported the second Chechen war. There is nothing new under the sun. Something similar happened in Chile during Pinochet's dictatorship."³

● Throughout most of the 90s, the heart of the parliamentary opposition has been *Zyuganov's "Communist" Party of the Russian Federation* (KPRF) and its allies, such as the Agrarian Party.⁴ Its behavior towards the first Chechen war was ambiguous at best. The war opening with the Russian army suffering a devastating fiasco in Grozny, the KPRF was anxious

³Kovalev, "Putin's War", *The New York Review of Books*, February 10, 2000, with the parenthetical remark being Kovalev's. Kiriyenko, mentioned by Kovalev as one of the liberals who had publicly supported Putin and the Chechen bloodshed, was recently rewarded by being appointed the one of the seven super-regional chiefs.

Meanwhile, it might, of course, be argued that Kovalev is almost ten years too late in recounting the capitulation of the liberals to the government. Are the present tactics of the free-market liberals with respect to President Putin really so different from those they followed with respect to President Yeltsin throughout the entire decade of the 90s, whether it was a matter of the power of the presidency or the waging of the first Chechen war?

⁴I have called these the Stalinist forces, but the fervent defenders of Stalin constitute only a part of these forces. What all these forces see as "communism" or "socialism" is, however, the old Soviet state-capitalist system, originally set up under Stalin. They appeal, among the masses who have been cast into poverty under Yeltsin, to nostalgia for the old system. What they aim for today, however, is not the resurrection of the old system, but a mixed system, with a greater role for the state in the economy than today's privatisers want, a more authoritarian political system, and more positions and influence for the section of the old Soviet bourgeoisie that the KPRF and its allies represent, namely, the diehard sections of the old Soviet and Party officialdom that fought its liberal sections. Thus, as far as their appeal among the elite goes, it is directed in large part at former officials in various fields that have suffered heavily in the 90s, such as industry (including military industry), agricultural enterprises, and the military itself. (The Agrarian Party represented particularly that section of the old Soviet bureaucracy and managers from the collective farms and agricultural enterprises.)

²Kovalev, "Russia After Chechnya", *The New York Review of Books*, July 17, 1997. Actually, some prominent liberals ardently supported the first Chechen war, "provoking a split" among the liberals. Moreover, among the liberals actually in the Yeltsin administration, some were unhappy with the Chechen war, but they only squirmed, tried to avoid direct responsibility for the bloodshed, and sacrificed their convictions to staying within the Yeltsin administration. (Shevtsova, Lilia, *Yeltsin's Russia: Myths and Reality*, pp. 118, 121. She refers to the liberals as the "democrats".)

to discredit Yeltsin, but its leadership reined in any real support for the Chechens. As one writer put it:

"The KPRF . . . confined itself to criticising the conduct rather than the principle of the war, while discreetly voting funds to continue it and pleasing the army by extending the draft."⁵

Another writer notes that, while a KPRF member of the Duma, Leonid Pokrovsky, "went to Chechnya with human rights commissioner Sergei Kovalev and worked alongside him trying to expose the reality of the army's war on Chechen civilians", the party leader Zyuganov bitterly denounced such work. Zyuganov "accused Kovalev of 'one-sidedly' supporting Chechen separatists and intrigued to procure his dismissal."⁶ As the Russian army suffered one fiasco after another, the Chechen war became very unpopular. In this situation, Zyuganov advocated the impeachment of Yeltsin for his "criminal" war in Chechnya, but also denounced the peace settlement as a betrayal of Russia! Indeed, he "was by far the most strident critic of Yeltsin and Chernomyrdin for surrendering [to the Chechens—JG]"⁷.

While the KPRF leadership would flay the incompetence of the Russian war effort, it did not support the Chechen right to self-determination. Indeed, there was no way the KPRF could champion the rights of the Chechens when this would have required them to admit that the old Stalinist regime had committed a monstrous crime against the Chechens in deporting them from their homeland in 1944 (they weren't allowed to return until several years after Stalin's death). Instead the KPRF engaged in nationalist rhetoric, which was its veiled way of bemoaning the hard times that Russian imperialism had fallen on. The KPRF is not a party of the class struggle, but instead paints a picture of a Russia in which the Russian nationality is allegedly persecuted, and a world in which Slavs are allegedly persecuted. It joined together in parliamentary alliances with the ultra-nationalists of Zhirinovsky's "Liberal Democrats", and it even allowed anti-semitism in its own ranks. By 1998 a KPRF parliamentarian, General Albert Makashov, declared that the country's economic problems were the result of the "yids" being "the usurers of Russia" and "drink(ing) the blood" of the Russian people".⁸

It's no wonder, then, that the KPRF has been backing Putin's new war on Chechnya. There is no immediate political advantage in opposing it, and the KPRF has no motivation to do so. It didn't even protest the campaign of racist harassment of

Chechens that accompanied the opening of the war.

● In the mid-90s, *Zhirinovsky's ultra-nationalist Liberal Democratic Party* was one of the main sections of the parliamentary opposition, and often in alliance with Zyuganov's KPRF. The ultra-nationalists supported the first Chechen war, and they support the second one as well.

Anti-war voices in Russia

If the main parliamentary leaders of all the mainstream political trends are currently supporting Putin's war on Chechnya, this is not a coincidence. They all represent different factions of the Russian bourgeoisie, and this ruling class is deeply committed to the chauvinist war on Chechnya.

But there is another Russia, the Russia of the working masses. This is the Russia that is hurt both by the war and by the domestic reactionary actions of Putin. They have no large organizations to speak for them, and their political views aren't yet clear. Yet this is where the future of the struggle against the Russian bourgeoisie lies.

And today it is among these masses, and among the small groupings that try to orient themselves to them, that one can find heartfelt cries against the war. As an example of this, we reprint elsewhere in this issue of *Communist Voice* a statement denouncing the Chechen war from the activist journal *Chelovechnost* (Humanity), which is produced by a coalition of different trends involved in anti-war demonstrations in Moscow. There has also been the formation of committees of soldiers' mothers, and an increase in already large number of Russian youth seeking to evade military service.

The anti-war actions and organizing is, for the time being, quite small (except for the evasion of the military draft). Nor has there yet been a convergence between the anti-war movement and the larger protests against Putin's proposed new labor code. The political views of the activists are quite varied, and there is no sharp break with the mainstream and other opportunist trends. For example, the liberal parliamentarians may be bowing to Putin, but small groups of the "rightists", the free-market liberals, as well as number of the closely-associated "human rights" groups, are among those in demonstrations. Meanwhile, among the leftist activists, there is confusion about Trotskyism, anarchism, and the nature of the old Soviet Union. Nevertheless, it is here at the base, among the activists protesting the Chechen war, among the workers protesting the labor code, among the masses suffering poverty as a minority of Russians become rich, that the real basis for struggle will be laid. Every step towards the development of a movement of the workers, independent of the establishment trends, and every step towards political clarification of what's going on in Russia, is worth far more than the empty words and political maneuvering of the parliamentary heroes of the Russian bourgeoisie.

Western imperialism and sphere of influence politics

If the war isn't mentioned that often in the Western news anymore, it's not just that, ever since the fall of Grozny, the

⁵Devlin, Judith, *Slavophiles and Commissars: Enemies of Democracy in Modern Russia*, p. 177.

⁶"Red-brown cesspit: Michael Malkin examines the Great Russian chauvinism and anti-semitism of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation", *Weekly Worker* #317 (the CP of Great Britain's journal), Dec. 16, 1999.

⁷*Ibid.*

⁸See "On recent remarks of Gennady Zyuganov, leader of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation: State-capitalist politics descends into naked anti-Semitism" in *Communist Voice*, vol. 5, #1, March 28, 1999.

battles are smaller. It's also that the Western bourgeoisie cares as little about the freedom of the Chechen people as it cares about the sufferings of the poverty-stricken masses elsewhere in the world. Clinton and the other Western leaders see the Putin government continuing on the general course set by Yeltsin of building a free-market Russia, and this is far more important for them than whether a small country is crushed. Putin has appointed free-market liberals to economic posts, is putting forward a labor code that will push the workers to the wall, and plays along with the West on various diplomatic issues. So the Western regimes regard free-market Russia as a fellow capitalist regime, even if one about which they are a bit uneasy. So Russia is granted the rights of a fellow imperialist power, and that includes the right to its sphere of influence. True, these spheres aren't permanent. The last century saw many wars to redraw the spheres of influence, as well as economic and political squabbles between the wars. Nevertheless, during periods of calm among the predatory powers, there is a certain recognition of each other's spheres.

It's not of course that the West won't seek to extend its financial, political and diplomatic influence in every corner of the world, including the Russian sphere of influence, indeed even into Russia itself. But they will not get alarmed at the Russians throwing their weight around in the Caucasus, because it's their area. Here the West distinguishes between the north Caucasus (which includes Chechnya), which is accepted as part of Russia, from the southern or Transcaucasia, with its presently independent republics of Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan. What's acceptable (to the West) in the North Caucasus would not be acceptable in Transcaucasia: for example, the West would not accept an invasion of this or that Transcaucasian republic. But even here, nothing much was said during the 1990s when Russia threw around its military power a bit more circumspectly (for example, covertly arming secessionist movements and then offering peacekeeping troops to the countries concerned).

Thus the Western powers have insisted that Chechnya is part of Russia. They object only to the savagery of the war waged against Chechnya, and only because this savagery threatens to destabilize the region. Even at the height of the battle in Grozny, these objections were quite muted. And at other times, they can barely be heard. Should the rivalry between Russia and the Western powers heat up, however, then the Western powers would sing a different tune. It is a hypocritical game for them.

For workers and socialist activists in the west, opposing the Russian invasion of Chechnya is an important part of building militant ties both with the Chechen people and the Russian

workers. This doesn't mean that we in the West should urge on the Western bourgeoisie to squabble harder with Russia: the Western bourgeoisie's aims are just as predatory as those of the Russian bourgeoisie. But neither should we refrain from denouncing Russian imperialism for fear of giving comfort to Western imperialism. Such a stand would harm the struggle against world imperialism, and end up undermining the struggle against western imperialism. Not only would such a stand ignore the fact that Western and Russian imperialism are presently in an alliance or partnership, even if a loose and shaky one, but it would mean abandoning the class stand in the struggle against world imperialism. It is only the development of the class struggle throughout the world that can defeat imperialism, and that requires building solidarity with Russian workers, not with the Russian bourgeoisie. And the denial of the existence of Russian imperialism amounts to nothing else than solidarity with the Russian bourgeoisie.

Meanwhile, for the building of an independent workers movement in Russia, recognition of the existence of Russian imperialism would be especially important. It would expose both the presidency and the main parliamentary parties as bourgeois forces, for they serve imperialist policies. Indeed, even those elements among the liberals and Zyuganov's "communists" who recoil from the bloodshed of the Chechen wars don't admit the existence of Russian imperialism, and cover up for it. And it would encourage support for the right to self-determination of Chechnya, something which is necessary if the Russian workers are to build bridges to the Chechen people.

It is also important for there to be clarity about the state-capitalist nature of the Stalinist system in the old Soviet Union. Once it is understood that the old Soviet Union wasn't socialist, it becomes clear that the source of the tyranny of the old days was the existence of a ruling bourgeoisie. This makes the origin of the current free-market Russian bourgeoisie clearer, as it combines the former Soviet bourgeoisie with new elements. It helps show that not only the present government, but all the mainstream political forces in the opposition are representatives of different sections of the bourgeoisie, as one can then identify the bourgeois nature of the Stalinist forces as well as of the liberal free-market forces. It also clarifies the source of Russian imperialism, both the free-market imperialism of today and the Stalinist imperialism of yesterday, in the predatory interests of a exploiting class. Only with such clarity, can a consistent class struggle be waged. Only with such clarity, can Marxism and real communism regain influence among the Russian working masses.

-- by Joseph Green □

Russian activists denounce the war

While all the bourgeois political trends in Russia (the government, the free-market liberals, Zyuganov's Stalinist "Communist Party of the Russian Federation", etc.) have stained themselves with the blood of the Chechen people, there are small activist groups who have passionately denounced the war. They have demonstrated in the streets, and addressed manifestoes to the public. These groups are composed of people from a number of different left trends, and we are not endorsing any particular group among them or all the views of any such group. We are reprinting excerpts from the leaflets of the *Chelovechnost* (Humanity) group, which is itself a coalition of different trends, simply to show that activists in Russia are fighting the war. They are not speaking in the parliamentary double-talk of the bourgeois politicians, but directly denouncing Russian imperialism and calling for the development of a movement from below.

Solidarity against war — February 2000

As we enter the 21st century, Russian society is confronted with the shameful fact of the bloody colonial war in the north Caucasus. The whole might of the 'democratic' Russian state has been thrown into subjugating a small people, that volunteered to join neither the Tsarist or Stalinist empires nor Yeltsin's 'Federation'. Tens of thousands killed or physically or spiritually maimed; masses impoverished or turned into refugees with no rights; towns and villages reduced to ruins; this is the price paid to satisfy the political ambitions of a Russian ruling class bent on reinforcing and redoubling its dominance.

This war, cynically presented as an 'anti-terrorist operation', is in fact an act of state terror on a grand scale by Russia's rulers, which, in its turn, will lead to armed revenge by desperate Chechen people who have been deprived of everything they had and lost relatives and friends. The federal armed forces ravaging and burning everything in their way, are not 'rooting out fundamentalism' but plunging Chechnya socially and economically into the middle ages—and thus creating the conditions for reactionary radical-Islamic political forces to gain influence.

The aggression mounted against Chechnya, the genocide against its people, brings to the people of Russia itself the threat of a military-police regime, the repression of civil rights and the prospect of living in something like Lukashenko's Belarus or a Latin American dictatorship. '*A people that oppresses another people can never itself be free*'; these words of Frederick Engels take on real meaning today.

This war is fraught with no less catastrophic consequences socially and economically. Waging war and installing a regime of occupation requires vast resources—and these can only be taken from the working people, who even without this have been condemned to crushing poverty. While many millions live in want, tens of billions of rubles are spent on murder and destruction. Truly the cynicism of the ruling class and its political representatives—all the Putins, Chubais and

Zyuganovs, competing with each other to play the hangman—knows no bounds.

The crimes of Russian imperialism against all the peoples who have been drawn into its military adventure must be stopped, before it is too late. We call for:

- * An immediate end to military operations and the withdrawal of occupying forces from Chechen territory.

- * For the Chechen people's right to decide independently its future; the status of Chechnya must be freely decided by its own population, observed by international human rights organizations;

- * The payment of sufficient compensation to all victims of the war, regardless of their nationality, out of the money set aside to fund the war;

- * The punishment of war criminals at all levels.

We can not count on Russian politicians' good will. And it would be equally naive to rely on the ruling circles in the West, who condemn the Russian military machine's actions in words only, and have never upset their own plans or their partnership with the Russian establishment for the sake of defending the lives and rights of those who are suffering. Military barbarism can be stopped only by the growth of a social movement of protest in Russia itself. A democratic solution to the conflict in the north Caucasus will be achieved only by means of popular action *from below*.

To start such action and do everything to help it develop, is the duty of all democratic and antitotalitarian left-wingers, who take a principled stand—in pursuit of the ideals of freedom, social equality and respect for every human being—against the exploitation and great-power interests who are running this war.

We call on all people of progressive convictions, good will and common sense to do all that they can to give help, including material help, to the victims of the imperialist adventure in the Caucasus, and to take part in a campaign of practical solidarity with the Chechen people—a campaign against the war.

The alternatives for our future are simple: either humanitarian civil society declares itself in Russia, or we will be left with a great-power police state, ready to make new wars and capable of the most monstrous crimes. It's time to make a choice! □

March 2000

To all organizations of working-class people, left political organizations, all those who have an internationalist and humanitarian outlook. A call to help the victims of Russian imperialism.

From the editorial board of the antifascist newspaper *Chelovechnost*

... The military action, which is no more nor less than genocide against the people of Chechnya, is accompanied by a growth of authoritarianism in Russia itself. The attacks on freedom of speech, the inflammation of hysterical great-power chauvinism, the growing political designs of the military-police

apparatus—all this is a real threat to the civil society taking shape in Russia and, above all, to the independent movement of working people that forms the basis of that society. The ruling circles who today sanction mass murder of civilians, tortures and beatings in concentration camps and the "disappearance" of people the regime disapproves of, could tomorrow use the same methods against movements of social protest.

All the political groupings of the Russian ruling class—from the "communists", who dream of returning to the days of Stalin's empire, to the liberals, whose demagoguery about human rights amounts to empty words—have united in support of the colonial adventure in Chechnya. Only a small number of left-wing and human rights groups, who demand the immediate withdrawal of the army of occupation from Chechnya and the right for its people to decide their own future independently, have been consistent in their opposition to the barbaric military onslaught.

In February 2000 two left groupings, the Praxis center and the editors of the anti-fascist newspaper *Chelovechnost* [Humanity], set up an action group in Moscow with the aim of starting a campaign of practical solidarity for the victims of the Chechnya war. This group has already begun the collection of material and financial aid for refugees from Chechnya, who have lost their homes, their property and their basic human rights.

We address to all organizations of working-class people, left political organizations, all those who have an internationalist and humanitarian outlook a call to help the victims of Russian imperialism. They must know that they are not alone, that the international workers' movement is staying true to the traditions of international solidarity and struggle for the liberation of the oppressed and is on their side! □

Cold War-style scholarship

Continued from page 45

American politicians regard this as a horrible scandal, the same politicians regard anything but the open deployment of U.S. troops on foreign territory as a sign of U.S. moderation and restraint. Free-market Russia itself, while still regarded with some suspicion by the Western imperialists, is for the time being granted imperial rights in the Caucasus and a lot of the Russian "near abroad" (Russian neighbors that were part of the former Soviet Union). The Western imperialists complain only about what they regard as Russian excesses, and gloss over the

consistency of the hostility of the Yeltsin and Putin governments toward Chechnya.

Dunlop, on the contrary, documents the history in the early 90s of "black" operations, destabilization campaigns, assassinations, and the installation of "puppet" regimes", but pretends that this is something which is different from the usual practice of capitalist imperialism. For him, it is simply a "resort to Brezhnev (and even Stalin-era practices". (pp. 222-3) Isn't it really capitalist imperialism, no different in principle from the streams of blood the U.S., France, and other powers have shed in Vietnam, Algeria, Central America, and elsewhere? Perish the thought! □

Corrections:

Communist Voice, vol. 6, #1, Feb. 4, 2000:

A one-sentence paragraph was accidentally deleted from the lead article "The importance of the 'battle of Seattle'", which appears on the front page. Insert the following sentence between the present first and second paragraphs:

Who were these protesters, and where did they come from?

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". □

The Chechen wars through the Western bourgeois prism

by Joseph Green

The last issue of *Communist Voice* contained a chronology of Russian-Chechen relations. It focused on the period between the half-century long Caucasian war of the 19th century, in which Chechnya and the surrounding regions were devastated and the main resistance to Russian annexation broken, to the Russo-Chechen wars of the present with which Russia is attempting to reannex Chechnya and obliterate the independence won by the "Chechen revolution" of 1991. (The first Chechen war was November 1994 to November 1996, and Russia lost it. The second Chechen war is proceeding today.) In this issue, we review several books inspired by the first Chechen war in order to provide further background material.

Why bother to look into the background of the Chechen crisis? For one thing, it shows that the Chechen struggle for sovereignty isn't the result of a few adventurers or criminal gangs or the concoction of Western intelligence agents seeking to destabilize Russia. Extreme Russian nationalists present the events in the Caucasus as outside interference in Russia, reminiscent of how American segregationists in the South presented the civil rights movement as simply "outside agitators" stirring up otherwise contented black people. (For that matter, Chechens and other Caucasian peoples are called "blacks" by Russian racists, who regard the word "black" as an insult.) But the Chechen struggle for their rights is actually rooted in long decades of oppression under Russian domination.

The books that are reviewed here provide some information about this, but they are books by pro-capitalist scholars and journalists. This doesn't just affect their conclusions, although of course they share the biases of the present capitalist ruling classes of the West. It also limits the very questions they ask and the material they look into. There is, for example, a lot of detail about various personalities, the precise bureaucratic maneuvers taken by the government, and the ebbs and flows of political events, but little interest in tracing the major class changes and developments in Russia and Chechnya. And yet the story of Russo-Chechen relations spans a period of immense change: at the time of the Caucasian war, there were no Chechen workers or capitalists, while Chechnya developed a more modern class structure in Soviet days; and Russia itself saw the development of an immense working class and of several different types of capitalist exploiting classes.

Most surprising, perhaps, is that these authors can write at length about the Chechen revolt, and express sympathy with the Chechen people, and not express any opinion about what a democratic solution to the national issue in Chechnya would be. Indeed, Gall and de Waal even denounce "the rash project of defying Moscow" (i.e. declaring independence) (1) as bearing responsibility for the first Chechen war, even if Yeltsin was

more responsible as Russia was "the bigger party" to the war.¹ None of these books make any attempt to judge what the Chechen revolt shows about the relevance of the right of self-determination of nations to today's world.

This doesn't just reflect an indecision in these authors about what to say about Chechnya. It reflects the Western bourgeois attitude that, the Western industrial countries having won the Cold War, Western capitalism has (in their eyes) proved itself to be the end point of human social and political evolution. This is the supposed perfection beyond which no advance is possible, and all that is left is perpetual minor tinkering. The world has supposedly moved beyond the days where some principles might be at stake in human conflicts (other than the principle of maintaining and extending the free market). Instead everyone but madmen are supposed to be fundamentally agreed, and reasonable world politics is supposed to be simply the realm of pragmatic adjustments to allow the market to conquer all. This was expressed theoretically by Francis Fukuyama in his famous article and book about *The End of History*. He asked,

"Have we in fact reached the end of history? Are there, in other words, any fundamental 'contradictions' in the human life that cannot be resolved in the context of modern liberalism, that would be resolvable by an alternative political-economic structure?"²

His answer is that there are not: so all that is left is, basically, "the endless solving of technical problems".³ He himself

¹ Carlotta Gall and Thomas de Waal, *Chechnya: Calamity in the Caucasus*, "Introduction", page x.

² "The End of History?" in *The National Interest*, issue of Summer 1989, p. 8.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 18. He also includes, among future tasks, "economic calculation, . . . , environmental concerns, and the satisfaction of sophisticated consumer demands". Studying and cleaning up the environment may be an exciting prospect to some people, such as myself, and so also would be eliminating the material deprivation that afflicts so many people around the world. But it is clear that, for Fukuyama, these are merely additional examples of technical problems, just a lot of calculations to be left to experts, or commercial deals to be carried out by the businessmen. (This is aside from the question of whether market capitalism can actually accomplish such goals.) So he worries about the prospect of "centuries of boredom". He writes that there will be nothing that could call forth "daring, courage, imagination, and idealism" and "there will be neither art nor philosophy, just the perpetual caretaking of the museum of human history."

By way of contrast, Marxism holds that the achievement of a classless society would not be the "end of history", but the end of "the prehistory of human society" (Marx, *Preface to a Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*). A truly human history would then begin. Human ingenuity and courage could then be devoted in full to a

(continued...)

wouldn't necessarily regard that either Chechnya or "the vast bulk of the Third World" had yet reached this capitalist nirvana. But then again, we are concerned not so much with his precise formulations (in the books reviewed here, only Anatol Lieven's even mentions Fukuyama briefly), but with the general intellectual atmosphere now current among journalists and historians writing books on Chechnya.

Thus, even though these books about the Chechen war deal with a national revolt, there is no concern with major principles such as the right to self-determination or with understanding the major trends underlying historical development. For them, these are obsolete concerns. All that is left is a view of world events that divides people into reasonable ones, and unreasonable ones. The books are more about who the bourgeoisie should support and who to condemn, and not about what solution to the national question makes sense. Tsarist crimes can be condemned; and the Stalinist state capitalist system (wrongly called "communism") is denounced by all of these authors as the highest evil. But since the installation of a regime of privatization in Russia, the problems facing Russia and Chechnya must be laid on individuals and on remnants of the old system, and never on the rise of Western-style capitalism. Massacres and wars can be condemned, but the alternative is simply that leaders should come to better and more humane pragmatic decisions. Foreign to these authors is any thought that the continuing massacres and wars might have something to do with the present economic and social system, and not with the foibles of individual leaders or their willful refusal to follow the latest prescriptions of Western capitalism.⁴

³(...continued)

wide range of fascinating pursuits, other than money-grubbing or fratricidal war. The protection of the environment, for example, is not simply be a technical problem, but requires imagination, idealism, and inspiration. Under capitalism, the majority of people around the world are submerged in daily sacrifices just to ensure that their families eat and survive. In what Marx envisions for the future, more and more people will see the connection between their work, and the major social, environmental, scientific and other goals and projects of the epoch. The dramatic increase in mass participation in major social goals such as protecting the environment is, in fact, a condition for obtaining these goals. Far from art dying under such conditions, it is likely to experience a renaissance.

⁴Lieven is a bit of an exception in that he raises that Russia's current economic misery is not something abnormal for capitalism. This appears, on the surface, different from the ordinary Western view that the Russian leaders have simply bungled privatization. But the exception is more apparent than real. Lieven's view is only that most capitalist countries can't simply duplicate Western capitalist conditions, and so Russia's economic mess isn't due to a willful refusal of its leaders to follow Western economic prescriptions. He has no intention of carrying out any class analysis of what is going on in Russia, and insists that one can't really even talk of a Russian bourgeoisie. He ends up with the same concern of the other authors that the only issue is whether this or that leader is reasonable. So, seeking to reassure the Western bourgeoisie that they should accept post-Soviet Russia as a partner, he argues that its leader are likely to be "pragmatic" people,

(continued...)

Thus while these books provide information about the events that have taken place in Chechnya, they ignore some of the most important questions that should be asked. They don't even try to investigate the major class and economic trends that lead to crises and great clashes. The reviews of these books don't attempt to summarize the useful material they do contain. Instead they seek to fill in a few of the gaps left by these books, illustrate some shortcomings in their method, and show how their conclusions are often in contradiction even with their own description of the situation. In so doing, these review also dwell on certain issues which are controversial in the left as well. For example, the reviews point to the importance, for the working class, of recognizing the right to national self-determination. And the example of Lieven's book shows that denial of the existence of Russian imperialism isn't necessarily a proof of anti-U.S. imperialist fervor, Lieven simply being an advocate of an alliance between the Western and Russian bourgeoisies. A true internationalist stand is that which helps unite the Russian, Chechen and Western working masses and inspire their class struggle, not that which unites the bourgeoisies of all the major powers at the expense of the Chechens and other victims of national oppression. □

⁴(...continued)

even if they turn out to be dictators. He writes that, in the future, "both a Russian 'democracy' and a Russian 'dictatorship' would desire to restore Russian hegemony over the other states of the former Soviet Union, but both would be headed by pragmatists (this is clear from the present line-up of potential future leaders—Lebed, Chernomyrdin and Luzhkov may be personally disagreeable, but they are all in their different ways rational and sensible men, and certainly not fanatics)..." (Lieven, *Chechnya: Tombstone of Russian Power*, pp. 10-11) The bottom line for Lieven is simply pragmatism versus fanaticism.

A journalistic account that wishes the national question would go away

by Joseph Green

Chechnya: Calamity in the Caucasus (1998) was written by two Western journalists, Carlotta Gall and Thomas de Waal, who have also worked for *The Moscow Times*. True to its journalistic origins, *Calamity* reads smoothly and provides an easy-to-follow account of events leading to the first Russo-Chechen war, the course of this war, and as much about Chechen conditions as one is likely to find in bourgeois literature. Some of the events read like today's news, such the savagery in the "filtration" camps where the Russian military interrogates and brutalizes Chechen males whom they have rounded up on the slightest pretext, or no pretext at all, or the description of the anarchic economic conditions in Chechnya.

The Bolshevik revolution and Chechnya

But if *Calamity in the Caucasus* is the most readable of the books reviewed here, it shares with them the same prejudices and biases. For example, along with other bourgeois books, it seeks to present the history of the Soviet Union as an anti-communist morality tale. So, after tracing the history of the savage tsarist annexation of Chechnya, it presents Soviet history simply as a continuation of that oppression. However, in the course of asserting that the Bolsheviks wanted to build a new empire, Gall and de Waal grudgingly admit that the early Soviet history was rather different from the latter Stalinism. They write:

"The Caucasus became a battlefield for the differing conceptions of nationalities policy of Lenin and Stalin. Although both were in effect set on rebuilding the Russian empire, Lenin favored a more equitable relationship between Russia and the other republics, whilst Stalin, although an ethnic Georgian, was implacably in favor of centralization and keeping a tight rein on the regions. The milder Leninist model broadly prevailed until the late 1920s. The Party cadres were staffed with many natives and no attempt was made at the redistribution of land. There was the beginning of the policy of *korenizatsiya* or 'indigenization'. For the first time the policy explicitly linked ethnicity and boundaries with an administrative system. It had some positive effects: books and newspapers were published in written Chechen, in a new script formed from the Latin alphabet in 1924, and literacy rates, which had been below 2 per cent before the Revolution, jumped enormously." (p. 54)

That's pretty much it for Gall and de Waal's discussion of

the more theoretical aspects of the early policy of the Soviet regime towards Chechnya, or for the theory of the national question altogether.¹ Yet the Bolshevik revolution had marked a fundamental change in the national question, not just from tsarism, but also from the ideas held by previously by many socialists concerning the national question. Lenin struggled to put into effect a policy which had many different facets:

● Lenin, following Marx and Engels, held that the right to self-determination must be respected under socialism. Back then some leftists disagreed with this, just as now some hold that proletarian internationalism means that a workers' regime should disregard all national issues as outdated "ethnicizing" and as, no matter what the national policy, racism from the past. Lenin, on the contrary, held that the unity of different nationalities had to be built up on a voluntary basis, and to achieve this the dominant nationalities had to recognize the right to self-determination of the other nationalities.

● Moreover, Leninism held that, besides the right to self-determination (which concerned peoples who formed a majority in their national areas), there also had to be special attention to protecting the rights of people who lived as national minorities scattered among majorities of different national and ethnic background.

● Leninism also advocated that various regions, for whom the right to self-determination wouldn't make any sense, should have an autonomous status. (For example, there are nationalities which were a minority in their own historic areas, as well as tiny nationalities whose national areas are completely mixed up with that of others.)

● At the same time, Leninism also held that the workers in any one area should unite across national lines. This might seem to contradict Leninism's recognition of the national question, but it does not. Lenin advocated a policy of national freedom as the only policy capable of uniting the world working class. Moreover, it is not sufficient to advocate a democratic solution of the national question, it is necessary to find the class force

¹Gall and de Waal's disregard for the national question is reflected in their ignorance of some very basic facts of Soviet history. They write, with respect to the various "Union Republics" that made up the Union of Soviet Social Republics, that "under a little-noticed article in the 1922 treaty forming the Soviet Union, these republics had nominally joined the USSR voluntarily and therefore had the right to secede." (p. 89, but it should be noted that Checheno-Ingushetia was not a Union Republic, but an autonomous republic which was part of the Russian Union Republic). Actually, it was hardly "little-noticed" that the Union Republics were supposed to have the right to self-determination. Lenin advocated it; it became a major point of Soviet doctrine; and the Stalinist state-capitalist regime paid lip-service to it, maintaining it in the "Stalin Constitution" of 1936.

that could support such a policy consistently. It is the revolutionary movement of the working masses which is the best guarantee of such rights. To organize such a class movement and ensure its greatest strength, and along with this foster the greatest solidarity of workers of one nationality for those of other nationalities, it is important to unite workers organizationally across national lines. But for this to be true unity, these workers' organizations must themselves respect the needs of the national minorities; this must not be the unity of neglect, of closing one's eyes to the existence of national oppression, but the unity of a joint struggle against national oppression. So Leninism held that the workers of differing nationalities should be united in a number of common institutions, such as trade unions, the socialist political party, schools, etc., but that these institutions must pay attention to the language, culture and other needs of the minorities and should support the right to self-determination of the oppressed nationalities.

● Leninism also held that there had to be support for the class struggle of the toilers of the minority nationalities, and not a hands-off policy to the revolutionary struggle in these nations. Gall and de Waal seem to suggest that the Leninist policy meant to abandon such support ("no attempt was made at the redistribution of land"—but in fact little progress was made in collectivization throughout the Soviet Union in the early and mid-20s). Lenin's policy was rather different. He advocated that the communists had to maintain the class struggle, but recognize how the different national conditions modified its pace and methods. In a letter of 1921 to Caucasian communists (including those of Chechnya, which was then in the "Mountaineer Republic" of the North Caucasus), he wrote of the importance of the transition to socialism in those areas, but he said that they must

"refrain from copying our tactics, but thoughtfully vary them in adaptation to the differing concrete conditions . . . You will need to practice more moderation and caution, and show more readiness to more concessions to the petty bourgeoisie, the intelligentsia, and particularly the peasantry. . . . What the Republics of the Caucasus can and must do, as distinct from the R.S.F.S.R. [Russian Republic] is to effect a slower, more cautious and more systematic transition to socialism. . . . Do not copy our tactics, but analyze the reasons for their peculiar features, the conditions that gave rise to them, and their results; go beyond the letter, and apply the spirit, the essence and the lessons of the 1917-1921 experience."²

In the complex situation in the Soviet Union, there were many obstacles to carrying out this many-faceted policy:

■ The Leninist policy itself was controversial among the Bolshevik activists, and was only applied to a certain extent. Other policies were applied by activists who either weren't

familiar with the Leninist stand, or who disagreed with it.

■ Although there were a number of examples of democratic solutions of the national question previously, the wide range and scope of the measures proposed by the Leninist policy was new. Moreover, the situation in the Soviet Union was extremely complex, with many different nationalities, at different stages of development, and inhabiting the most diverse sort of territories. It took a lot of effort to work out what this policy should mean in practice, and these ideas had to be modified in accordance with on-going experience.

■ Pre-capitalist conditions were much more prevalent among the Chechens and a number of other former subject nationalities of the Tsarist empire than among the Russians. Thus the economic conditions and class struggles of the Russian toilers differed from those of these nationalities. This retarded unity between the toilers of these nationalities, as well as facing the Bolsheviks with a number of complicated questions of tactics concerning social conditions which differed dramatically from the ones in which their earlier tactics had been worked out. There were some revolts of traditionalist forces in Chechnya against the revolutionary regime in Russia, but there were also Chechens who fought for social change in Chechnya.

■ The harsh conditions facing the revolution, including the attempt by the outside capitalist world to strangle it, also affected relations with the non-Russian nationalities. Thus, the emergency measures and the system of so-called "War Communism", which developed during the Civil War, adversely affected relations with the peasantry. Such measures as the confiscation of all agricultural surpluses were bound, over time, to result in peasant discontent. This sharply affected predominantly agricultural regions such as Chechnya, and was the cause of the traditionalist revolt in 1920.

■ Moreover, the overall revolution, overwhelmed by the pressures against it, ultimately decayed into Stalinist state-capitalism. The rise of a new bourgeoisie resulted in a new nationalities policy which only gave lip-service to the right of self-determination and the rights of national minorities. Places like Chechnya suffered disproportionately from the forced collectivization, the mass arrests, and the whole weight of Stalinist oppression. This reached the point of the criminal mass deportation in 1944 of all Chechens from Chechnya. The Stalinist regime attempted to wipe out the very name of "Chechen" from the Soviet Union. Amidst several massacres, it transported Chechens in cattle cars to places of exile, mainly in Kazakhstan. It wasn't until 1957, several years after Stalin's death, that Chechens could start to go back to Chechnya.

As a result, several different trends on the national question were evident in the early Soviet Union. Nevertheless, prior to Stalinism, the Leninist policy had enough of an influence to demonstrate that it not only marked a major break with Tsarist imperialism, but the most promising policy for forging links across national lines. Soviet nationalities policy has, in fact, had a major influence on the policies followed in other revolutions this century. All in all, the history of the Bolshevik revolution with respect to the nationalities is complex and worthy of study.

If Gall and de Wall devote little attention to theory of the national question underlying early Soviet policy, they don't

²Lenin, "To the comrades communists of Azerbaijan, Georgia, Armenia, Daghestan, and the Mountaineer Republic", April 14, 1921, *Collected Works*, vol. 32, pp. 316-8.

discuss any other conception of the national question either. They have no intention of establishing standards that might be held up against the current Russian government or the Western bourgeoisie. Their attitude is simply that some type of solution should be found that avoid open conflict, and, presumably, let's get on with more important things, like privatization.

It's Not Important

Thus Gall and de Waal have a very simple plan for settling the national question. They wish to brush it aside as irrelevant. They think that if "Moscow repeated the slogan of 'territorial integrity', [while] Chechnya repeated the slogan of 'independence'", all that was necessary was to satisfy both slogans simultaneously with a face-saving "constructive compromise" on a term like "special status".³ Mind you, they don't even suggest what such a "special status" should have been. Doesn't their support for the term "special status" imply that they actually agree with Yeltsin that Chechnya had no right to leave Russia, no matter what the will of the majority of the people living in Chechnya? Not in Gall and de Waal's eyes, since they held that all that was important was to have an agreement signed, not whether anyone actually followed it:

"The tragedy of Chechnya is that the war could have been avoided and pride satisfied on both sides if the Chechens could have struck a deal with Moscow on 'special status' or a moratorium on independence in 1992 and 1993.

The Chechens could have agreed to it even if they didn't intend to observe it."⁴

Thus it doesn't matter what the terms of an agreement are, since you don't have to follow it: just get any agreement, and all will be well. Amazing! But if the Chechens would be able to defy the agreement, then surely the Russians would also be able to defy it. If the agreement meant nothing and resolved nothing, then how would it have ended the crisis in Russo-Chechen relations?

Gall and de Waal's plan implies that they really think that the national question is irrelevant, and will go away if it is simply swept under the rug. Thus, in their views, disagreements are simply the fault of a few stiff-necked individuals who don't know how to write nice-sounding, diplomatic documents that mean nothing but keep everyone happy. Such agreements would allegedly allow the wool to be pulled over the eyes of the major class forces fighting over the national question, and allow the issue to dissipate. Gall and de Waal don't see that there is an issue of what principles must be embodied in an agreement if it is to have a chance of being durable. Nor do they examine what are the major class and political forces involved in the struggle. They don't see that there really is an issue of the drive to domination by the Russian free-market bourgeoisie under Yeltsin, and not simply of Yeltsin's arrogance. And they don't see that the "freedom and human rights of a long-oppressed

people", which they claim to believe to be the real issue, requires that this oppressed people actually have the right to decide on the issue of independence.

As a matter of fact, history hasn't been kind to Gall and de Waal's idea that any agreement, whether the contracting parties intended to follow it or not, could have averted the tragedy of the first Russo-Chechen war. After all, this war was ended by an agreement, the Khasavyurt accords. In line with Gall and de Waal's advice, it resolved everything and nothing—it ended the war while leaving Chechnya with a totally ambiguous situation: the Chechens were left with an independent government that was recognized by no one and still suffering economic and political pressure from Russia. The agreement followed Gall and de Waal's advice in putting a moratorium on independence, which was left for decision by December 31, 2001. And what has been the result? It turns out that, when the time was ripe, the Russian government tore up the accords, denounced the Chechen government as criminals and terrorists, and invaded Chechnya all over again.

The Tatarstan model

This, of course, hadn't yet happened at the time that *Calamity* was written. So Gall and de Waal thought they could prove that any agreement, no matter what it said, would do by referring to the fact that "The Kremlin signed a power-sharing treaty with Russia's only other rebel region, Tatarstan, in February [1994—JG] after two years of negotiations, which gave the Tatars broad economic and political rights but kept them within the federation." (p. 143) They don't say anything else about the conditions—political, economic, or national composition—in Tatarstan. They didn't examine whether these conditions were similar to those that had existed in Chechnya, or give any reason to believe that similar solutions could be applied in Tatarstan and Chechnya. For that matter, they didn't look much at the agreement itself. Hey, it's an agreement, that's all that matters.⁵

But will this agreement even last? In order to reach agreement, the agreement with Tatarstan called for matters to be regulated by the constitutions of Russia and Tatarstan, which

³*Ibid.*, p. 370.

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 370, emphasis added.

⁵Similarly Robert Cottrell, a Western journalist in Moscow in 1995-9, writes that "Perhaps the possibilities for real regional autonomy within Russia were not quite so obvious in 1993 and 1994, when regional governments were still learning to flex their muscles. But they were clear enough to Mintimer Shaimiev, president of Tatarstan, who, like Dudaev, resisted signing the new Federation Treaty on which Mr. Yeltsin insisted. Unlike Mr. Dudaev, Mr. Shaimiev, eventually agreed to sign, but he also secured from Mr. Yeltsin a 'power-sharing agreement' which guaranteed Tatarstan—in effect, Mr. Shaimiev himself—a free hand to run its affairs more or less as it chose. Tatarstan has been collecting the powers and attributes of statehood ever since. . . . Had Mr. Dudaev signed the Federation Treaty on Chechnya's behalf, he too might now be president of a republic with its own flag, its own language, its own economic policies, and its own constitution—a part of Russia in theory, but a law unto itself in practice." ("Chechnya: How Russia Lost", *New York Review of Books*, Sept. 24, 1998, p. 46, col. 3)

contradict each other, and moreover, this agreement was never properly ratified in Russia.⁶ These facts may suddenly be remembered if the Russian government decides to tear up the agreement. Legal irregularities aside, Putin, the new Russian President, is now on a drive to cut down the prerogatives of Russia's regions, and to bring them back under central authority. In a desperate attempt to placate him, many regional leaders, such as Tatarstan's leader Mintimer Shaimiyev, mobilized support for Putin in the parliamentary elections last year and in presidential elections this year. Journalistic observers now predict that the regions will be brought further to heel, one saying that

"From the beginning, Tatarstan was the pioneer. It was the first to get results with its declaration of sovereignty, and now it will be the first to make corrections [i.e. lose various of its prerogatives—JG]."⁷

Co-authors of the war

Despite their sympathetic account of the sufferings of the Chechens at the hands of the Russian army, and their condemnation of pre-1990s Russian governments, Gall and de Waal blame the Russian invasion of Chechnya on the Chechens almost as much as on the Russian bourgeoisie and present-day Russian free-market government. They reconcile these positions by suggesting that the outbreak of war was simply a matter of the quirks of individuals, and they hold that Dudayev and Yeltsin were "co-authors of the Chechen war" with Yeltsin bearing more responsibility solely because "the bigger player must take more responsibility".⁸ In essence, they regard the Chechens as guilty of the assertion of the right to self-determination, which "provoked Russia". But, in order to avoid explicitly denouncing the Chechen struggle, they attribute this provocation mainly to Dudayev as an individual. They regard that he was too insistent on independence, "reject[ing] the evolutionary approach in favour of a Bolshevik-style seizure of power."⁹

Thus Gall and de Waal make a lot of Dudayev's well-known penchant for long, raving speeches (although they seem

particularly upset at his affronts to the dignity of Russia's government). They write that

"The Chechen President liked producing an effect on his listeners. . . . On this occasion, coming away from the interview, it was hard to convey anything but the impression of a man possessed. In Russia they accused the Chechens of banditry and of organized crime. Here it was the other way around...In Moscow people were suggesting that Dudayev was crazy, but he turned the accusation round on Yeltsin. . . . Sometimes when he [Dudayev] softened his tone, the demands he was asking for seemed quite acceptable. But then the flights of fantasy, the accusations and the threats persuaded Kremlin politicians they could not talk to him."¹⁰

So Gall and de Waal accept the pretexts of Russian free-market politicians, while ignoring the fact that these politicians hadn't accepted the right to self-determination of Chechnya.

But struggle between Yeltsin and the Chechen government didn't start because Yeltsin was offended by something Dudayev said. As late as August 1991, Yeltsin was allied with Dudayev and the Chechen nationalists in the struggle against the attempt of the old guard of the Soviet "Communist" (actually, state-capitalist) Party to stage a coup d'état in the Soviet Union. But by October Yeltsin publicly denounced the Chechen movement, and in early November declared a "state of emergency" in Chechnya, that is, threatened to subdue Chechnya by force. These acts were due to Yeltsin's refusal to accept any Chechen government that wasn't both in Russia and his pawn. From then, right up to the Russo-Chechen war, one threat and accusation after another poured out from the Yeltsin government and Russian Duma. These threats were backed up by an economic blockade of Chechnya and financial and military aid to opposition forces in Chechnya, similar to Reagan's "contra" war against the Sandinista government of Nicaragua. Gall and de Waal's own account shows that the timing of the war followed from the Yeltsin government's insistence on the overthrow of the Dudayev government and its search for a "small victorious war" to prop up Yeltsin's failing popularity. They also show that the Chechen government repeatedly asked for negotiations and that Dudayev envisioned maintaining some sort of association with Russia. Any Chechen president who didn't bow down to Yeltsin would have faced the same problems.

But Gall and de Waal think that a different Chechen president would have made a big difference. Dudayev having finally been killed by the Russians in March 1996, during the latter part of the first Russo-Chechen war, there were new presidential elections after the war ended. The winner was one

⁶Dunlop, *Russia Confronts Chechnya*, p. 187.

⁷Lev Ovrutsky, quoted in Celestine Bohlen's "Russian regions wary as Putin tightens Control", *New York Times*, March 9, 2000.

⁸*Calamity*, p. x.

⁹*Ibid.*, p. 370. Here there is the absurd hint that Dudayev was some kind of Bolshevik on the grounds that the Chechen national movement declared independence rather than proceeding like Tatarstan. An actual "Bolshevik-style seizure of power" requires not just that one government overthrows another, something carried out by governments of many different political and social trends, but that working class organizations seize power. Dudayev, however, led a bourgeois nationalist movement. The Chechen working masses were just as confused as the Russian workers about the nature of the Soviet system, and they were unable to organize any independent mass struggle for their own class demands; they were mainly swept along in the existing trends.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 138-9. The occasion was the day after the Yeltsin government had announced that it backed the Chechen "Provisional Council" which was seeking to overthrow the Chechen government. This marked the beginning of stepped-up Russian military intervention in Chechnya.

of the main generals of the war, Aslan Maskhadov. Gall and de Waal wrote that

"His victory was a vote for peace and pragmatism. . . . Chechens are no different from anyone else in wanting a peaceful future for their children, jobs and stability. They saw Maskhadov as the man who could deliver that, as the man who could work with the Russians. . . . In Maskhadov, in contrast to Dudayev, Moscow had a leader it could work with. Even before the final tally was announced, Yeltsin had sent Maskhadov a telegram of congratulations carefully phrased to be ambiguous about Chechnya's status." (pp. 366-7)

Here again, history hasn't been kind to Gall and de Waal's views. Maskhadov is still president, and yet Russia has invaded Chechnya again. But Maskhadov still insists on Chechen independence. So no matter how moderate he is in speech, no matter how much he seeks to placate Russian demands, Putin still denounces Maskhadov, and all Chechens who support independence, as criminals and terrorists.

In conclusion

Gall and de Waal end up with such superficial views about the causes of the Chechen war because they don't believe that free-market capitalism can give rise to catastrophes and bloody clashes. If such catastrophes and wars exist, then they must, in their view, be due to this or that personal failing of some individual, or to hang-overs of state-capitalism (which they regard as "communism").¹¹ The politicians may foul up the

wonderful possibilities supposedly bequeathed them by the new market conditions, but it doesn't strike Gall and de Waal that the market conditions themselves may devastate the masses or generate exploitative and aggressive ruling classes. So convinced are they of the virtues of modern market capitalism, so self-evident does it seem to them, that they don't bother to argue about it, or even to state it: they just apply this view of the free-market to every situation they come across.

This is how the ultimate cause of the Chechen war becomes, in their summation, the personal failings of Yeltsin and Dudayev. It is how the history they recount about the national oppression of the Chechens becomes irrelevant, except to create some sympathy for the Chechens. It is why they don't see much point to discuss the theory of the national question, neither the innovations and new experience of the early Soviet days, nor what role national conflicts are playing in the world today. And this is why their conclusions and summations clash so often with their own narrative of historical events. □

¹¹They do speak a couple of times of "imperialist habits" in Russia and of Moscow's "historic ignorance of the region and imperialist arrogance", but these are mainly references to carryovers from the past. The Western bourgeoisie isn't entirely certain whether free-market Russia will play along with Western imperialism, but if it doesn't, this can be explained away as a failure to sufficiently embrace the free-market. Thus Gall and de Waal, who aren't fond of Dudayev, seek at times to paint him as a follower of the old system, whether in regard to price subsidies or his "Bolshevik-style" declaration of independence. They cover up the fact that he is actually a bourgeois nationalist. Meanwhile they say nothing about remnants of the old state-capitalist system in Tatarstan, because for the time being they are holding up the Tatarstan agreement as a model for Chechnya.

Russia Confronts Chechnya: Roots of a Separatist Conflict

Cold War-style scholarship on Chechnya in the era of free-market Russia

by Joseph Green

John Dunlop's "Russia Confronts Chechnya: Roots of a Separatist Conflict" (1998) deals only with the situation up to the full-scale Russian invasion of Chechnya in December 1994, soon after the onset of the first Russo-Chechen war. The most notable part of the book is the detailed account of political events in 1990-4. But detail isn't equivalent to thoroughness; the book's narrow focus on political details, combined with an utter lack of interest in the economic and social issues involved, create a narration which makes this intensely turbulent period into something shallow and even, at times, boring. It is "history" in the old-style of the word, emphasizing the recitation of the smallest acts of leaders, and the narration of events without consideration of the conditions underlying them. However, its account of the repeated warmongering acts of the Yeltsin government towards Chechnya, during the entire period from the declaration of Chechen independence at the end of 1991 until the outbreak of war, does provide a refutation of the view that Yeltsin exercised restraint towards Chechnya until allegedly provoked into action by Chechen president Dudayev's extravagant rhetoric.

The book also includes a narration of general Russian-Chechen relations prior to 1990. But Dunlop, a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution, sought to make this part of the book simply a list of "communist" atrocities, and the book reeks of the flavor of the Cold War. He has no concern to trace the rise and fall of the Bolshevik Revolution, and the consolidation of Stalinist state-capitalism, because it is all "communism" for Dunlop. He has no concern to trace the social structure in Chechnya either. This isn't basically that different from the other books we review on Chechnya, but Dunlop takes it to an absurd extreme.

Literacy? Who cares?

Thus, in his zeal to present every act undertaken in the Soviet period as unrelenting evil, Dunlop presents even the spread of literacy as an act of Soviet genocide. Prior to Soviet days, there was no written Chechen language. The overwhelming majority of Chechens were illiterate, and a small number of religious leaders could read or write in Arabic. This was a tremendous chain enslaving the majority of Chechens to backwardness.

But Dunlop writes that:

"The regime soon undertook, through deceit and trickery, to detach the mountaineers [Chechens and various other North Caucasian peoples—JG] from the Arabic language. During the years 1923-25, Latinized alphabets were constructed

for all of the North Caucasian languages. An orthography in the Latin alphabet had been devised for Chechen as early as 1923. In 1928-29, it was mandated that all languages previously written in Arabic script now had to be transcribed into the Latin alphabet. This clear-cut aim behind this move was to remove Arabic as a *lingua franca* and an entree to Islam while avoiding the stigma of too obvious Russification, which would have resulted from a decision immediately to shift over from Arabic to Cyrillic." (Dunlop, p. 47)

Dunlop is unconcerned that previously a few thousand Chechens at most could read or write. He tries to present the matter as not one of education in the Chechen language, but of what script is used to write Chechen, and he denounces the fact that Arabic was not made "the official language of education". Actually, Chechen is not a dialect or variant of Arabic; it isn't even in the same language group as Arabic, nor is any other of the East Caucasian-Dagestani group of languages.¹ Whatever the script used for writing Chechen, it would seem that having education and literature take place in a written form of the actual language of the mass of Chechens would be essential for mass education and rapid progress.

¹For that matter, according to Anatol Lieven, it was not Arabic, but Avar and Azerbaijani Turkic that were used historically by Chechens to communicate with their Caucasian neighbors. (See Lieven, *Chechnya: Tombstone of Russian Power*, pp. 305, 416.) Neither language is in the same language group as Arabic, Avar being a Dagestani language, and the Turkic languages being in the Altaic language group, but both were written with an Arabic script until the twentieth century. It may be noted, however, that in the 1920s not just the Soviet Union, but Turkey abandoned the Arabic script.

In any case, Chechen itself is a Nakh language, which is part of the East Caucasian-Dagestani language group. It is not clear what, if any, connections these languages have to any language outside the Caucasus. Some scholars have proposed a link to Basque, itself an isolated language, others to some other unique languages of the Middle East, such as Sumerian.

It is only a matter of detail, but Lieven differs somewhat from other authors on when the Chechen written language was developed. He claims that a Cyrillic-based script for Chechen had been devised in the late-19th century; however he agrees with others that the written form of Chechen was "introduced into the school system under Soviet rule in the 1920s, as part of a general process underway at that time among the numerous Soviet peoples whose languages did not possess a written form." (pp. 415-6) Indeed, it wasn't just Chechen, but other languages too, which were given a written form under Soviet rule. However, Lieven to the contrary, it seems what was introduced in the 1920s was the Latin-based script for Chechen; the Cyrillic-based script was introduced later.

In the years prior to the Bolshevik revolution, as well as in the early years of the Soviet regime, there was a good deal of discussion and debate about how to eliminate the tsarist oppression of subject nationalities and about the relation of the right to self-determination to revolution. Dunlop is unconcerned about this. He does not evaluate this, nor show how these ideas were later betrayed.

One issue facing the Caucasus was how to deal with extremely small ethnic groups: for example, there were less than 100,000 Ingush at the time, and there were even smaller ethnic groups in Dagestan. Dunlop refers briefly to the policy of seeking to consolidate very tiny groups into larger ethnic groups which might develop into nationalities which actually retain their own identity. His only comment on the experience of such a policy is that supposedly the groups created were still too small to resist Russification, and hence this was really a policy of "Russianization and Russification". (p. 46) Why, the very formation of the Autonomous Republic of Checheno-Ingushetia was supposed to be an act of Russification, because allegedly only the entire North Caucasus as a region could maintain itself. (p. 48)

Stalinist oppression

But as Stalinist state-capitalism consolidated in Russia, policies of Russification really did make a comeback, while the Chechens were among those who suffered disproportionately from the general Stalinist repression. This culminated in the mass deportation of all Chechens and Ingush from the lands of the Autonomous Republic of Checheno-Ingushetia, a republic which was now replaced by ordinary Russian administrative regions. This fascistic act was carried out amidst a number of massacres with great savagery, and the deportees suffered under harsh conditions and police supervision. The Chechen exile would last from 1944 until 1957 (Stalin having died in 1953).

The mass deportation of the Chechens and Ingush is not only one of the brutal crimes that will go down in history, but it is a dramatic illustration of the oppressive nature of Stalinism, which, despite retaining the terms "socialism" and "communism", destroyed everything that the Bolshevik revolution had originally brought. The revolution brought an autonomous republic for the Chechens and the Ingush, and Stalinism obliterated the republic. The revolution brought written languages, and Stalinism sought to wipe out the very names of the Chechen and Ingush peoples.

It might be thought that given this history, even Dunlop could have restricted himself to the facts. But Dunlop gives unreliable figures, which seem to lack even internal consistency, while neglecting to mention anything that happened to the Chechens other than the atrocities. Thus, for example, one discovers the existence of Chechen officials only when Dunlop describes their being removed. His book does, however, alert one to a number of the atrocities of note against the Chechen people.

Moreover, a major fault of Dunlop's method of approach is that it leads to a very poor account of the period between the end of the Chechen exile in 1957-60 and the fall of the Soviet regime

in 1990. The majority of Chechens politically active in the 1990s, indeed all Chechens of that decade unless they were at least in their latter 50s, grew up in this period (or in the immediately preceding exile). And the class structure among the Chechens was recast in this period. Moreover, the Soviet nationalities policy in general went through substantial changes in this period. Dunlop is simply unconcerned with these developments in Chechen social conditions or Soviet policies. His only concern is to show that the Chechens remained oppressed, which is true, but he gives no overall feel for what is going on in this period. He mainly skips over this period, covering it in only a few pages, dwelling on a few incidents and statistics from 1959 or the early 1960s. Such a procedure simply begs the question of what happened in the following decades.

It might be asked, what difference does it make if Dunlop isn't too accurate, or forgets to examine the changes in Chechen class structure? And what difference does it make if actually a few more or a few less people were killed? As far as it being an atrocity, nothing. But one would suppose that a real attack on national oppression would, for example, involve establishing some principles that should be upheld. Other than that things shouldn't get too bloody, Dunlop doesn't put forward any principle that he would uphold against any other government provided it wasn't "communist".² In particular, he never says that Chechnya should have the right to self-determination.

Free-market Russia and the Chechens

Thus, when Dunlop's narrative reaches the 1990s, and he begins to relate the deeds of post-Soviet Russia and of the Yeltsin administration, his tone changes. Gone is the talk about the evils of Russification. Gone are the lamentations about the fall of Arabic. Gone is the desire to describe every act, even the correction of past injustices, as just another intensification of the evil plots of Moscow. Gone is his longing for a "Mountain" or North Caucasian republic. Instead, let Russia retain Chechnya in

²A small but notable example is that he denounces the Soviet government for making the "the study of Russian as a second language obligatory in all schools of the USSR" in 1939. He doesn't examine what this decree meant in practice, but presumably regards the very idea of instruction in Russian as a second language as evil in itself. Meanwhile he wrote this in the U.S., where English is the obligatory *first* language of instruction; moreover, under the banner of "English only", bilingual education has been purged from much of the school system. Yet this contradiction doesn't bother him, or even occur to him. He doesn't try to show why imposing Russian as a second language in the Soviet Union should be bad, while imposing English as the compulsory first language in the U.S. should be good. Nor does he care about what language of instruction Yeltsin's regime imposed in Russian schools.

However, Dunlop's hypocrisy aside, it's not that the language situation in schools in 1939 in Chechnya, or the decree of 1939, was necessarily proper. It is likely that Chechen was only used in the primary grades, and Russian was needed for all higher education. The 1939 decree might well have indicated a shift towards Russification, but Dunlop's so crude in his denunciation that he doesn't give the necessary information about it.

any way it can manage to pull off. His only criticism of the free-market Russian regime is that it didn't achieve its aims via negotiations. Any solution that it could have imposed on the Chechen people by arm-twisting would be fine, if only it didn't involve a lot of bloodshed.

Thus Dunlop's criticism of the free-market Russian government is simply that "a significant section of the Russian leadership" believed that they could solve the matter "through the use of force and through 'black' operations rather than through patient negotiation." (p. 223) The idea of "patient negotiation" may sound like an alternative to force and war, but without the Russian bourgeoisie recognizing Chechen rights, negotiations might simply be the public complement to economic blockade, covert force, and secret operations. This is documented in the course of Dunlop's book, but denied in his conclusions. To pretend that negotiations in and of themselves, no matter what stand the various parties to these negotiations are upholding, would solve the problem is simply a way of glossing over the tremendous pressure that Russia was applying on the Chechens. And when Dunlop says that this was simply "a significant section of the Russian leadership", rather than the dominant opinion of the Russian bourgeoisie, he is glossing over the ugly features of the free-market bourgeoisie.

Dunlop, however, has no intention to call for either Russian or world respect for the right to self-determination of Chechnya, and his one guiding principle is to denigrate state-capitalism (which he calls "communism") and glorify the free-market. So, as soon as it is a question of a free-market regime, there is no longer impassioned denunciation written in large letters. Instead, there is infinite detail on exactly what each leader said and at what meeting. There is no consideration of whether the war against the Chechens stemmed from the new phase of capitalism in Russia; it's just a matter of some leaders overreacting to "separatism".

The myth of restraint

But Dunlop's detailed account does have some use. It helps refute a number of Western commentators who go further than Dunlop in whitewashing the free-market regime in Russia. As one author put it,

"... as Ben Fowkes remarks in his short but perceptive introduction to *Russia and Chechnia: The Permanent Crisis*, a collection of essays by various writers, the striking thing about Russian policy between 1991 and 1994 is the consistency with which Russia resisted taking action to subdue Chechnya and topple Dudaev. As late as August 1994 Mr. Yeltsin was saying that 'forcible intervention in Chechnia is impermissible. . . . There will be so much turmoil and blood that afterwards no one will forgive us.'"³

On the contrary, what is notable is how rapidly Yeltsin and

his entourage turned to bloody methods of suppressing Chechnya. The Chechen militants had backed Yeltsin for a time, seeing in him the path to the fastest breakup of the old Soviet regime. In turn, Yeltsin backed them for awhile, as they mobilized vigorously against the old-guard forces who attempted a coup in the Soviet Union in August 1991. But as soon as Yeltsin saw that the Chechen nationalists weren't his pawns, and as soon as he saw Chechnya declare independence, Yeltsin's very first impulse was to use force against them. By October 1991, Yeltsin publicly denounced the Chechens, and on November 7, 1991, he prepared for their forcible suppression by declaring a state of emergency in Chechnya.

Dunlop, summarizing a period which he had earlier given in detail, refers to "the times when Russia appeared seriously to be contemplating an invasion (November 1991, March 1992, November 1992, November-December 1994)" (p. 212). But in 1991-3, Chechnya was not yet isolated from its neighbors, and a Russian invasion might have been an even larger fiasco than the first Russo-Chechen war. As Dunlop remarks:

"While the leadership of the Russian Federation adopted a conscious decision to invade Chechnya in both November 1991 and November 1992 (and there was, in addition, a tentative coup launched in Grozny in late March 1992, while an invasion of sorts seems to have been attempted by MVD [Russian Interior Ministry—JG] 'crimson berets' in September 1992), Yeltsin and his entourage were, in hindsight, fortunate that all of these earlier incursions had to be aborted. The devastation and loss of life occurring during the Russo-Chechen war of 1994-96 would, one suspects, have been quite small in comparison with what might have happened if, say, a war had broken out with Chechnya and the Confederation of Peoples of the Caucasus (KNK) in late 1992." (p. 214)

When the Yeltsin government wasn't plotting the invasion of Chechnya, it was engaged in various forms of "low-intensity conflict", bearing some resemblance to the American imperialist "contra" war against Nicaragua in the 80s. It blockaded Chechnya, provided weapons and money to opposition groups in Chechnya, and engaged in Russian secret operations, including attempts to assassinate Chechen President Dudayev (eventually killed by the Russians in 1994). This was stepped up in 1994, in the name of the "half-force" strategy.

So that's what Yeltsin's "restraint" amounted to: the nonrecognition of Chechnya, a blockade, assassination attempts, arming of hostile factions, and military pressure. Clearly this paved the way towards the first Russo-Chechen war. When certain Western authors regard this as "restraint", they are implicitly granting market-capitalist Russia similar rights as other members of the Western imperialist club. The imperialist powers regard it as natural to subvert and ravage an area in their "sphere of influence". Thus, while if someone from another country simply makes a campaign contribution in the U.S., the

Continued in middle of page 35
See "Cold War-style scholarship"

³Robert Cottrell, "Chechnya: How Russia Lost", *The New York Review of Books*, Sept. 24, 1998.

Chechnya: Tombstone of Russian Power

Lieven's apology for Russian imperialism

by Joseph Green

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In *Chechnya: Tombstone of Russian Power* (1998), Anatol Lieven is more interested in making various points about the nature of Russia in the 1990s than in tracing the course of the Chechen war. The book contains some detailed information—about the Russian state, economy, and policy towards ex-Soviet lands—not covered in other works on the Chechen war, but it would be hard to get from it an overall picture of the course of events in the Chechen war. They do not appear in any sort of logical sequence in *Chechnya*, but simply as needed to illustrate some point or other. As to what the book is illustrating, this has been subject to conflicting interpretations.

From the title of the book, one might assume that Lieven didn't just oppose the Russian war on Chechnya, but was gloating with malicious glee as the last rites were being read for the Russian nation. Indeed, his book has been as taken as such. One reviewer cited some of Lieven's description of the wretched state of Russian economy and life in the 90s and wrote:

"Bursts of disgust notwithstanding, Mr. Lieven insists that he does not belong to what he calls 'the more Russophobe or paranoid Western school of thought concerning Russia'. . . . But with friends like Mr. Lieven, Russia has no need of more unthinking enemies. . . . Russia emerges from his analysis as a place so hideous that the only thing redeeming it is the completeness with which it has allowed itself to be defeated. Bringing about that defeat has been Chechnya's main claim to virtue."¹

But if Lieven had instead minimized the bleakness of Yeltsin's Russia for the mass of Russians, this would hardly have demonstrated love for the Russian people: it would simply be the policy of prettifying reality to make it seem as if free-market "shock therapy" had succeeded. Lieven however talks of the "debacle of liberal capitalism in Russia". So perhaps it's not

so surprising that book had a friendly, indeed enthusiastic, reception from the *New Left Review* last year, when Georgi Derluguian wrote that

"Most welcome is Anatol Lieven's move beyond the usual attacks on the neoliberal market orthodoxy by offering very plausible historical parallels . . . Lieven takes the route of arguing that the current situation of Russia is, alas, not historically abnormal [for capitalism]." He regards Lieven as one who "sympathizes with the Russians as a man steeped in Russian culture", if probably descended from "Russo-German aristocracy".²

Indeed, much of Lieven's approach sounds like the reformist analysis that is widely accepted as leftist these days. He is not concerned much with internal class relations in Russia, and instead sees things in terms of "elites", not classes. His emphasis is that the Russian elites are "compradors" and the Russian state is weak, both now and historically. Nor is he adverse to flirting with postmodernist terminology: his criticism of neo-liberal orthodoxy is not that there is an alternative to capitalism, but that there are many types of capitalism, with no "monolinear" path to capitalist development and no "monolithic" model to be followed. He holds that the situation of the poverty-stricken countries is not abnormal for modern-day capitalism, thus sounding leftist, but his only conclusion is that current Russia regime shouldn't be judged too harshly for its faults, which are typical of those of a large part of the present-day capitalist world.

Lieven is, in fact, not a leftist but a free-market advocate, albeit one who wants to strengthen the Russian state. His *Chechnya* sounds vaguely leftist mainly because opportunism has gripped so much of the left. The opportunist left looks not to the class struggle, but to the strengthening of this or that capitalist state. Some of such leftists look to the strengthening of just about any state, especially if it's a third world state. Others look towards countries which had a revolution in the last century, even if the revolution has been over for a long time: for example, they may look to Russia, because of the Bolshevik revolution of 1917, and embrace the present Russian state despite the diehard anti-working class nature of the present-day Russian regime. They overlook the struggle to ensure the independence of the proletarian movement against its exploiters, a movement which is opposed by all present-day governments, and instead find ways to side with this or that capitalist or state-capitalist state.

²"Che Guevaras in Turbans", *New left Review*, September/October 1999, in the section "Gramscian Horse-Sense", p. 22.

¹Robert Cottrell, "Chechnya: How Russia Lost", *New York Review of Books*, Sept. 24, 1998, p. 44, col. 3.

The question of imperialism

As for Lieven, his *Chechnya: Tombstone of Russian Power* isn't celebrating the decline of Russian power so much as regretting it. Thus Lieven is a free-market advocate who regards the present weakness of the Russian state as a tragedy, in large part responsible for the terrible economic problems in Russia. He argues that

"... Russia desperately needs a new spirit of patriotism as the base for any sense of public ethics and therefore any recovery of the state and the economy."³

His book is directed in large part against such anti-Russia diehards as "Richard Pipes, Zbigniew Brezezinski, Paul Goble and Ariel Cohen", who, he says, influenced him in the past.⁴ He now argues that present-day Russia isn't a threat anymore, and should be accepted as part of the Western capitalist camp. He tries to calm the fears of the Western bourgeoisie by arguing that Russia isn't a "great military and imperial power" anymore, and that Russia's "relatively unlikely" to see "radical change" any time soon.⁵

So Lieven attempts to show that capitalist Russia isn't imperialist. He writes that the Yeltsin administration's record "makes nonsense of the persistent Western myth that it is passionately committed to Russian imperialism."⁶ And this, in a book about Yeltsin's war on Chechnya! But Russia, a country in the midst of a fierce financial and economic squeeze, could only devote so much money to its war budget, and that, for Lieven, is one of the proofs that it isn't imperialist.

Indeed Lieven, as a capitalist ideologist, has a rather restrictive definition of imperialism. He doesn't see it as a system of domination by the great powers over the rest of the world. He doesn't connect it to the denial of the right to self-determination of nations in and of itself, or to economic and political domination over subordinate countries. No, it is simply especially savage atrocities against subject peoples, worse than the ordinary sort of bloody anti-colonial wars, not the subjection of these peoples itself. Moreover, Lieven's view is that Western capitalism is the standard of reasonableness, and so only "Stalinist regimes" and other exceptionally bad regimes should be labelled imperialist in this "post-imperial" age.

Thus Lieven's plea is that Russian capitalism today—and the infamous Tsarist regime too, for that matter—is no worse than other big capitalist powers. He compares Russia's struggle for

"hegemony" over the other nations of the late Soviet Union to British policy in Ireland in the later nineteenth century, and concludes that "Up to 1998, the Russian government has taken a more benign course."⁷ For him, the important point isn't whether there has been a struggle for hegemony, but exactly how it has been carried out. Even so, given such things as the Russo-Chechen war of the mid-90s, the Russian military intervention in Transdniestria, and the manipulation of bloody ethnic conflicts in the Transcaucasian republics, this comparison is hardly likely to exonerate Yeltsin's Russia. Meanwhile, as for the murderous Tsarist autocracy, Lieven gives it a retrospective seal of approval, arguing that

"As to the Russians, it is important not to read back into the behavior of nineteenth century Russia the exceptional totalitarian ferocity which characterised the Soviet, and especially Stalinist regimes in our own century. Regrettably, there was little that was unique to Russia about its methods of colonial 'pacification' in the nineteenth century: the French in Algeria and Senegal, the British in the suppression of the Indian Mutiny and the Matabele Revolt, and the Americans of the Western frontier were no gentler. Charles Callwell, Victorian soldier and author of the standard late nineteenth-century British study of anti-guerrilla operations, makes no distinction between the behavior of the various European colonial armies."⁸

Lieven's argument is based on his commitment to Western capitalism but, oddly enough, it reads just like the arguments made by various opportunist groups on the left who regard themselves as great opponents of the big Western powers. Such "leftists" justify the actions of their favorite tyrannical regime with the observation: "why, the big Western powers also do this or that", or "how hypocritical for the Western powers to condemn other regimes for what they themselves do". From the opportunist point of view, the workers of various oppressive regimes shouldn't stand up against them, but should tolerate these regimes as the price of some sort of "anti-imperialist" struggle. From the point of view of Lieven, there should be a mutual amnesty between the apologists for other big capitalist powers and those for Russia capitalism—let each forgive the imperialist sins of the others. But from the point of view of militant working class movement and proletarian anti-imperialism, the answer is to organize a class struggle against both the major Western bourgeoisies and the other oppressive regimes.

The Serbian option

No doubt Lieven regards the Milosevic regime in Serbia, which is in conflict with the Western powers, as one that is beyond the pale. So Lieven reassures the Western bourgeoisie that Russia is no Serbia, and devotes two chapters to discussing

³*Ibid.*, p. 382.

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 7, which he talks of "accounting with my own previous mistakes in analysing contemporary Russia. In the light of subsequent events, many readers of my previous book, *The Baltic Revolution*, written in 1992, have felt that I exaggerated the degree of threat to the Baltic States both from Russia and more importantly from their own Russian minorities. In the runup to the Chechen War, like every other observer I also greatly overestimated the strength of the Russian army—or rather underestimated its extreme decline."

⁵*Ibid.*, p. viii, 1.

⁶P. 296.

⁷*Ibid.*, p. 381.

⁸*Ibid.*, p. 307.

"the failure of the Serbian option". By this, he means the inability of the Russian government to mobilize major chauvinist movements among the ethnic Russians residing in other countries. This one of the major points in Lieven's denial of Russian imperialism, but it is an odd conclusion for him to reach. After all, he describes the attempts of various Russian political forces to incite the Russian masses. Moreover, if Yeltsin drew back from backing Russian separatist movements in certain other countries, it was not from any scruples, but because they were led by his political opponents or otherwise inexpedient. The Russian working masses may not have been enthusiastic about imperialism, but Russian imperialism made its attempts to mobilize them.

For example, Lieven discusses the separatist movement in the former Soviet Republic of Moldova, which is an independent country nestled between Ukraine and Romania. In the eastern part of Moldova, the Russians and Ukrainians combined form the majority of the population. When sentiment for joining Moldova with Romania seemed strong, a movement arose in the industrial area along the east bank of the river Dniester to separate from Moldova and establish a Transnistrian republic. It received weapons from the Soviet (later Russian) 14th Army stationed there from before independence. When fighting brought out between the Moldovan government and the Transnistrian separatists, Moldovan victory was prevented by the intervention of the 14th Army, then under a new commander, General Lebed. Afterwards, Russian troops continued to play the role of arbiter, although General Lebed stopped the 14th Army from further arming of Transnistria and denounced various Transnistrian officials as corrupt. Lieven points out that

"... Moscow as of 1997 appears determined to keep the 14th Army in Transnistria (which violates the Moldovan constitution), both as a bargaining chip against NATO expansion, and to prevent any conceivable future possibility of the region being incorporated into Romania. Indirectly, therefore, Russia went on supporting the Transnistrian state, and this will probably go on being true, whoever succeeds Yeltsin as President."⁹

Since then, although Russian troops remain, the crisis in Moldova has settled down, due partially to the more moderate Russian policy but mainly to the decline of pro-Romanian sentiment and to the willingness of the Moldovan republic to grant a certain autonomy to Transnistria.

So Yeltsin's Russia sought to maintain its influence in Moldova through arming factions, through stationing troops there as supposed peacekeepers, and through other of the traditional means whereby big powers seek to build spheres of influence. And it had no more high-minded purpose than using Moldova as a bargaining chip. Similar big-power bullying can be seen in Russian policy towards the independent republics of the Transcaucasus, where Russia strongly backed the overthrow of a couple of presidents of Georgia and Azerbaijan,

provided major support for the secessionist movement in Abkhazia (not from any special attachment to the Abkhazian cause but as part of a successful attempt to pressure Georgia into accepting the stationing of Russian troops on its territory), and so forth. (See pp. 49-50 of the chronology on Russo-Chechen relations in the last issue of *Communist Voice*.)

These examples show Russian building its sphere of influence. Yet Lieven believes that the example of Moldova shows the opposite. For one thing, he claims that the events in Moldova can't be duplicated elsewhere, although he has to admit that the current Russian political forces have indeed tried to manipulate the national question elsewhere. He admits, for example, that Russia manipulation was "undeniably" important in the case of Abkhazia, but he says that "even there, only on the basis of previously existing and deeply felt conflicting claims. In no case did Moscow or the Communists succeed in 'creating' or 'inventing' a dispute."¹⁰ But that's the way imperialism usually acts: it speculates on and manipulates previously existing conflicts in order to divide and weaken its opponents of the moment. This is not some special feature of the behavior of the Russian government or of the Russian old-line Stalinist forces that still falsely call themselves "communists", but a general feature of imperialism.

Lieven is also aware of various reasons that the Yeltsin government moderated its policy on Transnistria for purely pragmatic reasons. For one thing, the Transnistria leaders tended to be supporters of the Russian opposition, and some fighters from Transnistria went to defend the Russian parliament during the military struggle between Yeltsin and parliament in October 1993. For that matter, we might add, if Transnistria ever became independent and sought to unite with a nearby state, it would most likely join Ukraine, not Russia, due both to Moldova's location far from Russia, and to the fact that Russians rank behind Moldovans and Ukrainians as an ethnic group in Transnistria. These reasons for Russian restraint don't show that the Russian government isn't seeking hegemony in Moldova, but that it has to pursue a more subtle policy than straight-forwardly dismantling Moldova. Lieven himself shows that Russia has to tread softly in various parts of Central Asia, such as Kazakhstan, because anything else would be counter-productive. A pattern appears of the Russian government seeking domination, but for Lieven, since the Russian masses in various areas are noticeably reticent to be drawn into national strife, there is no imperialism. Lieven expects governments to seek domination (as, indeed, capitalist governments do), so, he reasons, what's wrong with the Russian government joining the game?

Basically Lieven emphasizes that the ethnic Russian minorities in various countries didn't show much national fanaticism. For example, he points to the fact that most of the Russians and Ukrainians living on the west bank of the Dniester in Moldova (and hence outside Transnistria, which is on the east bank) seem to be content. From his point of view, whereby imperialism must be a crime of the people, and not of the bourgeoisie,

⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 248-9, the parenthetical comment is Lieven's.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 252.

the reluctance of the people to respond to nationalist incitement means that the Russian government and various political forces can't be imperialist. (I would say, he denies the existence of the imperialism of the Russian bourgeoisie, but we shall see in a moment that Lieven denies the very existence of the Russian bourgeoisie.) One may well end up with an increased respect for the Russian working people after reading Lieven's account of their instinctive tendency to recoil from extreme chauvinism, but the history he narrates shows that they still have a major struggle in front of them against the chauvinism of the Russian bourgeoisie and of its various political parties, whether neo-liberal ones following Yeltsin and Putin or the Stalinist remnants such as Zyuganov's party.

World imperialism

A class-conscious workers' movement needs a different view of imperialism than Lieven's, a more scientific view. Judging whether the modern world still has imperialism is vital to getting a picture of 21st century conditions. The different forms of domination wielded by the larger or more powerful capitalist powers are major features of the current world situation. Overall, widespread proletarianization has made the class exploitation of the workers by capitalists more and more apparent throughout the world. But the exploitative nature of world capitalism also manifests itself in a series of other contradictions. This includes a growing gap between rich and poor countries, powerful and weak ones, those which have a voice and those which don't. Imperialism also manifests itself in the lack of respect for the right to self-determination of other nations by the dominant capitalist powers which achieved their right to self-determination long ago. Moreover, if there is far less direct colonialism these days (although some still exists), spheres of influence still exist and are fought over, and the financial and commercial domination of subordinate areas is not only alive and well, but growing. Imperialism manifests itself both in the overwhelming pressure of the old great powers to maintain their exploitation of the world, and in the attempts of new powers to enter the ranks of the big bullies. Thus millions upon millions of people suffer extra oppression, beyond the "normal" level of capitalist exploitation. To disregard these world contradictions would amount to pushing under the rug some of the most brazen crimes of world imperialism. Such blindness may be of value to the ruling classes who wish to maintain capitalist exploitation, but it can only hinder the socialist reorganization of the working class.

As for Russia, it would be a disservice to the Russian workers to tell them that they don't have to worry about Russian imperialism and that chauvinism has a different character in Russia than in other lands. All the major bourgeois political forces in Russia—such as the nationalists, Zyuganov's Stalinist party, the liberals—are mired in Russian chauvinism. The attempts of some of these parties to inflame nationalist feeling in Russia is one of the chains used to bind the Russian masses to their miserable economic conditions. For the Russian workers, like those of other major countries, the recognition that their bourgeoisie—like the capitalist bourgeoisie of all the big powers

today—is imperialist, is an important part of combating chauvinism and conquering political independence from their exploiters.

The Russian bourgeoisie

Lieven however not only wishes to acquit Russian capitalism of the sins of imperialism, he wants to prevent the blame for any of the ills of present-day capitalism being attributed to the capitalist exploiters. He is willing to grant that the poverty-stricken state of Russian capitalism is not exceptional, but typical of capitalism in many parts of the world today, but he doesn't want the capitalists to be blamed for this. One of the ways he accomplishes this trick is as follows. If some capitalist ideologists imagine a capitalism without exploitation, Lieven imagines a Russian capitalism without a bourgeoisie, but only with an "elite". Thus he claims that:

"Certainly in Russia today, it is impossible to talk of a real bourgeoisie with a defined interest...It is, however, already possible to speak not just of economic 'clans' in the administration and political elite, but also of economic group interests which motivate in the same general direction political figures who appear on the surface to be opposed to each other."¹¹

Thus, in Lieven's view, there are Russian elites, and "economic group interests", but no class interests, and hence, presumably, no class exploitation. It may seem like quibbling over words to talk about "economic group interests" but not classes. But for Lieven and other capitalist ideologists, it is important to banish the specter of the class struggle against the bourgeoisie. In discussing why events take place, they have to refer to economic interests of this or that group. But they wish to avoid any implication that the twists and turns of economic interest add up to a great clash between opposing classes. And they want to be able to blame tragedies not on free-market or the bourgeoisie, but on the faults of this or that individual or grouping.

Lieven uses a similar trick to avoid having to judge the evolution of the classes in Chechnya in the 20th century. Here he holds that "there was never anything resembling a real Chechen 'bourgeoisie', as there was for example among the Volga Tatars, the Azeris, and so on" and hence "no question in Chechnya of a 'new middle-class intelligentsia of nationalism' "¹² Instead Lieven attributes recent events to the old traditions of the Chechen people. Chechen victories against Russia are supposed just a product of their old traditions of raiding their neighbors, and the collapse of the Chechen state is due to their old pre-state traditions.¹³

¹¹*Ibid.*, p. 395, col. 1.

¹²*Ibid.*, p. 334.

¹³For example, he writes that "Chechnya's history since the war suggests that the revolt of the 1990s has been against not just the Soviet and Russian states, but the modern state as such; . . . Chechen traditions cannot easily bear the yoke of any state—even their own . . ." It might (continued...)

But for that matter, Lieven prefers to eliminate the very term "bourgeois" altogether. He writes that

"'Liberal capitalist' as a description is much to be preferred to 'bourgeois', a word so chewed over as to have lost all flavour and meaning. As Alfred Cobban and others have convincingly argued, even when applied to the classic (in Marx's own analysis) 'bourgeois revolution' that of France, the term is highly questionable. Rather than argue about sterile definitions of class, it makes more sense to look at ideology, tactics and results."¹⁴

Classes, however, vanish, and with classes, of course, so does class struggle. What's left? Just different tactics and ideological differences among people, maybe even some "economic group differences", but no great confrontations of the exploited and the exploiters.

But at least when applied to Russia, this negation of class analysis brings Lieven closer to certain sections of the opportunist left. Lieven thinks in terms of elites, compradors, and nondescript groupings, but not in terms of exploiting classes. But a number of leftists, trailing behind the nationalism of the apologists of the old Stalinist system, such as Zyuganov's "Communist Party of the Russian Federation", also regard that the basic issue in free-market Russia is not a class struggle, but a fight against people who are sold-out to the foreigners (i.e. Lieven's "compradors"). Whatever their practical political disagreements with Lieven, their overall agitation shows a wholehearted agreement with at least one of Lieven's views, namely, that "Russia desperately needs a new spirit of patriotism as the base for any sense of public ethics and therefore any recovery of the state and the economy."

As well, Lieven not only doesn't believe that there is presently a real Russian bourgeoisie, he apparently doesn't think that there was a "Soviet bourgeoisie" either. While he hates the old Soviet system and socialism, which he identifies with Stalinism, his view of the economic function of the old Soviet elite seems to unite him with others who look nostalgically at the old Soviet Union. For example, consider Kotz and Weir's book *Revolution from Above: the Demise of the Soviet System*, which is quite popular in certain sections of the Western left. Kotz and

Weir regard the Stalinist system as socialism, if a repulsive variety of it. In order to defend their idea of socialism, they want to prove that the Soviet system did not suffer an economic collapse, but only a political collapse due to the greed of the Soviet elite. But if the old Soviet system had a bourgeois ruling class, how could it be socialism, even economically? So Kotz and Weir declare that, although the old Soviet elite ruled tyrannically in the Soviet Union and the working class had no voice, still, the elite was not a bourgeoisie. They write that "we do not consider the ruling party-state elite of the Soviet system to be a ruling class in the traditional sense."¹⁵

A mushrooming state bureaucracy during the "privatization of the state"

If Lieven doesn't care much about class relations, he is more concerned about the nature of the state. So he briefly discusses the bloating of the state apparatus that has occurred in Russia in the 1990s. This phenomenon was also noted in an article in the Dec. 1998 issue of *Communist Voice*. In the course of tracing the disastrous results of neo-liberal rule in Russia, it noted the tremendous increase in the size of the government bureaucracy. One might have thought that with the privatization of the economy, the government might shrink, as the notorious central ministries would have less to do. But just the opposite happened. For example, from 1989 to 1994, despite the financial crises, the size of the Russian bureaucracy dramatically increased from one million to 1.7 million.¹⁶

In fact, this growth of the state machine affected Chechnya as well. Russia is large; Chechnya is tiny. Yeltsin followed those who advised "shock therapy"; Chechen President Dudayev apparently followed an eclectic policy. Russia, despite its dramatic economic decline, still had large resources; the blockaded Chechen economy and state had few resources, and ordinary economic and governmental functions vanished. Yet the bureaucracy grew in Chechnya too. Lieven remarks that the

"picture of state collapse in Chechnya is by no means contradicted either by the mushrooming of Chechen ministries and bureaucrats or by the increase in the secret police. The first was simply a reflection of the privatisation of the state, as in Russia, and the buying off of individuals and

¹³(...continued)

be noted that the first thing the Chechen independence movement did when it declared independence from Russia was to establish its own state. And one might have thought that the blockade of Chechnya, the utter collapse of the Chechen economy, the arming and financing of outside factions by Russia, and the state of development of the various classes in Chechen society would have had more to do with the sorry condition of the Chechen state than has memory of the old Chechen style of life from over 150 years ago, but no, not for Lieven. He goes on to say that "The contrast between Chechnya in wartime and peacetime has been depressing; even if Russia accorded *de jure* independence to Chechnya it is unlikely that Chechens could profit from this." (p. 302) So it wouldn't matter if the blockade were lifted, the economy revived, and the Chechen authorities recognized by the outside world?

¹⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 394-5, the parenthetical remark is Lieven's.

¹⁵See David M. Kotz with Fred Weir, *Revolution from above: The demise of the Soviet system*, p. 31, footnote 58. Also see "Closing their eyes to the obvious in their 'Revolution from Above': Kotz and Weir deny the economic collapse of Soviet state-capitalism" in *Communist Voice*, Jan. 20, 1998. See the section "An elite which is supposedly not a ruling class".

¹⁶Mark, Detroit, "The old state-capitalist 'socialism' was rotten while today market-capitalism ravages the Russian economy" in *Communist Voice*, Dec. 8, 1998. See footnote 6 in the section "Yeltsin's dictatorial rule". When I first saw this figure during the preparation of CV, I was surprised and asked the author to check the reference, which he did. It wasn't just that officials hung on to their jobs, as there was few other places for them to go, but that the bureaucracy grew like a cancerous tumor.

groups by giving them non-working state jobs; the second was to defend Dudayev."¹⁷

So Lieven's analysis is that the growing bureaucracy in Russia and Chechnya is explained by the "privatization of the state". This is a colorful and suggestive term, which seems to parallel the bloating of the state with the parallel process of the "privatization of the economy". Indeed, the two processes went on together.

However, Lieven, as a free-market advocate, is not going to attack private capitalism as responsible for the ills of present-day Russia. For him the privatization of the state only goes along with the question of the intrusion of crime into the state and economy, and with the empowerment of comprador officials and managers, rather than with the spread of normal capitalist relations. True, this contradicts his own emphasis, elsewhere in his book, that what is happening in Russia today is just as representative of capitalism as more prosperous examples. Nevertheless, his idea is that Russia had, not a real privatization of the *economy*, but only the privatization of the *state*. Criticizing Anatoly Chubais and other Russian figures who carried out the privatization of the Russian economy, he writes that:

"The distribution of what could be called the 'commanding heights' of the Russian economy, and the creation of a new class of great compradors, however took place largely separate from mass privatization." He goes on to favorably cite the views of Andrei Piontkovsky, who wrote that "Like many reformers, Chubais believes that it is not important how property is distributed, as long as property owners are created. After they have had their share of thievery, so the argument goes, they will start to turn their efforts to raising productivity. *But Russia has experienced not so much the privatisation of control over property as the privatisation of control over the state, over financial flows and budget resources.* The reformers have created a Frankenstein reform, and those who have got a taste of this fabulous means of enrichment are like addicts who will never get off the needle of budget money." (emphasis added)¹⁸

If the "privatization of the state" were really, as Lieven suggests, simply a matter of a mistaken way of privatizing, it might be of little theoretical interest. But it isn't simply a matter of wrong regulations and technical missteps. As we shall see, Lieven's own description of the evolution of the privatization of the state eventually contradicts his attempt to disassociate state privatization from the general privatization process.

Lieven defines the "privatization of the state" as "the way in which parts of the administration came in effect to represent private or semi-private economic interests. This is especially striking, of

course, in the case of Prime Minister Victor Chernomyrdin, who functioned for long periods in effect not as Premier of Russia, but as representative of Gazprom (and to some extent also the oil sector) in the Russian government. By helping Gazprom avoid taxation he cost the Russian state billions of dollars in lost revenue and contributed heavily to the fiscal crisis of 1996-7."¹⁹

Thus the privatization of the state is driven by the "private or semi-private economic interests", that is, by the privatization of the economy. It turns out to understand the privatization of the state, one has to study more carefully the development of private economic interests in the Russian economy. However much Chernomyrdin, and the oil and gas interests, have raped Russia, this isn't the whole story of the privatization of the state and of its connection to private interests. Taxation could be lifted from this or that group of capitalists, or subsidies made to them, without having to increase the already huge bureaucracy inherited from the old days. Moreover, the almost two million bureaucrats can hardly all be millionaires like Chernomyrdin, or owners of big firms, or even all particularly wealthy, although they can be retainers of the rich. But Lieven gives no real picture of what sections of the bureaucracy have grown, and of how this relates to the economic structure of Russia. And no wonder! To do this, one would have to examine how the Russian bourgeoisie is reorganizing itself as a private bourgeoisie, and Lieven doesn't like to talk about the existence of such a bourgeoisie or ruling class.

Lieven does, however, try to blame the privatization of the state on "communism", under which he groups both the revolutionary early years of the Soviet Union and the later Stalinist state-capitalist state. He makes an attempt to trace the privatization of the state as it developed over "several decades" prior to the collapse of the Soviet Union, and especially under Brezhnev. This, of course, contradicts the idea that the privatization of the state is simply a matter of a botched privatization of the economy by Yeltsin, but hey, consistency is not necessary for bourgeois ideologists. He takes a certain note of the increasing crisis of the Soviet bourgeoisie (which he does not call a bourgeoisie) under Brezhnev, writing that

"Real privatisation of the state by its own officials began under Brezhnev. It was helped by the inevitable tendency of the Communist Party and the state bureaucracy to clientelism, to the politics of leaders and their followings or cliques and the creation of bureaucratic/managerial clans (especially of course where, as in Central Asia and parts of the Caucasus, traditional clan loyalties in the strict sense also still persisted)."²⁰

Brezhnev did indeed allow centrifugal tendencies and corruption to build up, so long as formal loyalty was maintained to the overall system and its Brezhnevite leadership. But Lieven's account tends to make centrifugal tendencies simply

¹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 77.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 175-6.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 94-5.

²⁰*Ibid.*, p. 157.

into a matter of bad "communist" political arrangements. He doesn't investigate competing economic interests at all levels, from the enterprise level on up, that created the grounds for "bureaucratic/managerial clans" and, eventually, for the rampant corruption of the Brezhnev days. If Lieven investigated the economic side more closely, it would become clear that the bloating of the ministries and the Soviet-style "privatization of the state" were manifestations of the state-capitalist (not communist) nature of Soviet economy and politics since Stalinism came to the fore. The "privatization of the state" during Soviet days shows that the economy, although nationalized, was run according to the interests of competing private groupings among the state-capitalist ruling class. Thus the privatization of the state went parallel with economic privatization both in Soviet days as well as in free-enterprise Russia today. But it is precisely recognition of this parallel of economic and political privatization which Lieven wants to avoid. He instead wants to explain away the failures of capitalism in Russia as allegedly due to extraneous political or state factors, which is how he regards the "privatization of the state".²¹

Lieven does say something about the centrifugal tendencies in the Soviet bureaucracy as a whole, which had to be restrained by the Party leadership. But Lieven only looks superficially at these tendencies, and doesn't study the way they manifested themselves at the level of the various economic enterprises, and at the level of the "privatization of the economic ministries" (if I may call it that) that were supposedly directing the enterprises. He simply writes that

"the Soviet state was always characterised by a certain 'shapelessness', by bureaucratic cliques and factions, and by a tendency for orders and decisions to be made 'by telephone', that is to say personally and informally rather than by regular formal and legal means (something which was of critical importance in the run-up to the Chechen War). But the Politburo staff and Central Committee sections worked, however inefficiently, to pull all these informal groupings behind united and agreed strategies and decisions."²²

Thus Lieven restricts himself to some general remarks about the evils of informality, and ignores the clash of economic interests that developed under state-capitalism. Indeed, he ends up hinting that the problem is basically the lack of effective law and proper procedure. He ignores the relationship of the political and legal

superstructure in the Soviet Union to their economic base in class relations. He talks about how the different officials telephoned each other, but he ignores any discussion of whether their clashes and frictions had anything to do with separate and private economic interests among these officials, that is, he ignores any consideration of the actual economic organization of the state-capitalist bourgeoisie.

Thus while Lieven refers to the bloating of the state bureaucracy and connects it to the privatization of the state, he doesn't really study this process. He makes no attempt to verify his suppositions about how this developed by, say, tracing the size of the bureaucracy and seeing when it grew, and what parts of it grew. All he wants to do is keep the blame for bureaucratic ills away from market capitalism. And yet, in another part of book he talks, for example, of how "rampant bureaucracy" is one of the features of certain widespread capitalist systems, for example, the "systems of the cacique type" where power is in the hands of "corrupt political chieftains (*Cacique* comes from the Caribbean Indian word for a chief), who distributed patronage and government contracts, . . . and occasionally bumped off inconvenient political opponents, critical journalists, trade unions and so forth."²³) Forgetting all about this, he ends up simply blaming everything on "communism" and its violation of "human nature". This is not only easier than actually investigating the role of the bureaucracy, but it absolves capitalism of the blame for the ills of privatization. And that is a conjuring feat worthy of the illusionist David Copperfield.

The "martial races"

Lieven is similarly superficial with respect to latter twentieth century Chechen society. He doesn't relate the current situation of Chechen society and politics, and the resistance to Russia, to developments during the last period of time, since the Chechen exile. Instead he mainly talks about the old Chechen society that still existed at time of the decades-long Caucasian war against Russian annexation in the mid-19th century. He explains Chechen victory in the first Russo-Chechen war of 1994-6 by saying that they are "one of the great martial peoples of modern history". The Chechens are presented, essentially, as the noble savages, who "had rejected modernisation in general", were impressive at sacrifice and fighting, but were pretty much incapable of establishing "the institutions of a modern, let alone a democratic state".²⁴

The first Chechen war of 1994-6, with its struggle of a

²¹Tracing the "privatization of the state" under Stalinist state-capitalism would bring up the economic contradictions that exist inside the ruling Soviet bourgeoisie. It is notable that many Trotskyists and Stalinists alike deny that there was a Soviet bourgeoisie, on the grounds that there weren't private and competing economic interests among this bourgeoisie. The Soviet-style privatization of the state showed otherwise. Interestingly enough, Lieven seems to deny the existence of a present-day Russian bourgeoisie on the exactly opposite grounds: there supposedly isn't enough of a common "defined interest" binding them together, so they can't be called a class.

²²*Ibid.*, p. 95.

²³*Ibid.*, p. 151, the parenthetical remark is Lieven's..

²⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 22, 324. Lieven, of course, believes he avoids the mistake of other writers who regard the Chechens as "noble savages" because he recognizes some of the limitations of the old Chechen society. He also preaches against others for thinking that Chechen society is timeless and unchanging. And he has a few scattered comments on newly-risen Chechen social relations, mostly in refutation of the views of this or that other author. Yet, when all is said and done, he himself repeatedly falls back on presenting modern-day Chechens as simply the Chechens of old.

people hardly a million strong against the Russian army, is undoubtedly one of the more impressive stories of national resistance. No doubt, it has its own particular features. Yet the outbreak of a struggle for independence hardly requires explanation by some unique characteristics of the Chechen people. It is one of the many national rebellions of the last two hundred years. By instead presenting their national revolt as something altogether peculiar to the Chechens, Lieven removes it from the principles which one might apply to similar struggles. The situation in Chechnya becomes something unique to itself, where a people is fighting for an independence which supposedly it can hardly handle.

Moreover, the Chechnya which fought the Chechen war of 1994-6 was hardly the Chechnya of the Caucasian war of the mid-19th century. Chechen society then consisted of economically self-sufficient families in an agricultural, patriarchal society with no state and, hence, no state bureaucracy. Chechnya today is a capitalist society, if one with a collapsed state and economy. In the Chechnya of the past, the overwhelming majority of Chechens were illiterate and with limited knowledge of anything beyond their locality. In the Chechnya of today even the proletarianized majority has extensive contact with other peoples throughout a large part of the former Soviet Union. A number of traditions may remain, but the basic structure of Chechen society has changed forever. By failing to study these changes, Lieven does no favors for the Chechen people, and is forced to fall back on lame explanations about the Chechens being a "martial people" and one incapable of running a modern state.

Before the state existed

But if the history of the old Chechnya cannot replace a study of the subsequent class evolution of Chechen society, it still has its importance. It shows that the struggle of the Chechens against annexation is not the invention of some foreign agents seeking to destabilize Russia, but has its own historic roots. Moreover, the Chechen example says something about how human society has evolved. There was a time when human society existed without either class divisions or a state. Chechnya, as late as the early 19th century, was an example of a society without a state and without at least modern class divisions. As such, it illustrates something of the strengths and weaknesses of such societies. Engels, in *The Origin of Family, Private Property and the State*, discussed a number of examples of clan or tribal societies which didn't have states and were free of class divisions. He traced how patriarchy, class divisions, and eventually the state, arose in them. This showed that class divisions and the state are not the result of "human nature", for human society existed without them for far longer than it has existed with them. Engels showed that such early societies lacked a number of the evils of modern, class-divided "civilization". Nevertheless, his idea was not that a future revolution would return to the original pre-class type of society. He showed that these societies had dissolved and been supplanted, not by accident, not by some arbitrary misfortune, but because of the contradictions that developed within them as

economic life advanced. Neither was life ideal in these old societies, with their low level of productive ability and scientific knowledge and with the development of patriarchy and slavery in these societies as their wealth developed, nor can these societies be called back into existence. The Marxist theory was that the economic prerequisite for abolishing all classes, and eventually the state, is the common ownership and management of an economy based on large-scale production. By way of contrast, the old societies had common ownership and cultivation of land (and then later had common ownership but individual cultivation of land), but were based on small-scale production.

It's been over a century since Engels wrote about tribal societies. There has been a lot more historical research on various of them. But the general approach set forward by Engels remains of value, and a look at Chechen society prior to the Russian conquest brings to mind a number of the issues that Engels raised. The courage, sense of honor, skill at horsemanship and fighting, and sense of independence of the free male Chechen was noted by many foreign observers. But these qualities didn't stem from Chechens being genetically some sort of "martial people", but reflect qualities common to various societies before class division and exploitation has reached a certain point. They were not special racial or ethnic characteristics of Chechens, but characteristic of the Chechen social conditions of those times.

Lieven presents the old Chechen society as "egalitarian". In fact, Chechen society didn't have a state or government. It did not have the feudalistic features that had taken root in much of neighboring Dagestan, such as landowning nobles, khans, princes, etc. It was based on self-sufficient agricultural small-scale production, both farming and raising livestock. There was common ownership by the local village of land (but probably not common cultivation). These features place the old Chechen villages among the tribal societies, at various stages of development, discussed by Engels.

Lieven says that the old Chechen society was "economically undifferentiated" and "egalitarian" (except for the slaves), implying that they were classless (but as a bourgeois, he can't use such "Marxist" designations). This might be basically true (for the free population), but he doesn't present enough economic description to really judge. Since Lieven doesn't think there is a real bourgeoisie even in today's Russia, one can hardly have much confidence about his judgement about the possibility of more subtle class relations in early 19th century Chechnya. For example, the history of communal agriculture all over the world show that it is possible for farming villages to have collective land ownership, and yet have class division between rich and poor. But this would be outside Lieven's idea of class, since all he looks for is hereditary political privilege.

So it is probably not too surprising that Lieven and others treat the issue of slavery in Chechen society rather cavalierly. Chechen society had at least one class division aside from patriarchy, that between the free population and the slaves. Lieven dismisses it as a minor issue; he simply shrugs it off in a footnote as an institution "since time immemorial". Apparently, the Chechens mainly enslaved people captured or abducted

during raids on the villages of their Caucasian neighbors, the slaves either being ransomed, set to agricultural or other work, or "especially young female ones", sold "to the Ottoman markets of the Black Sea".²⁵ The growth of slavery is one of the ways in which the tribal societies are undermined from within—although if slavery remains economically peripheral, it can coexist with tribal institutions for a long time. Lieven makes no attempt to examine how significant a factor slavery was for Chechen society, and how it was developing over time. He similarly brushes aside the patriarchalism of the old Chechen society: he doesn't stop for a moment to consider why this existed, whether it had always existed, and what factors would either exacerbate it or lead out of it.²⁶

Actually, the old Chechen society seems to have gone through a complex development, including a number of zigzags. Lieven, while occasionally providing a few details that hint at such a history, always ignores it in his general statements and conclusions about this society. Thus Lieven writes, as do many other authors, that the Chechens "never had rulers or a native aristocracy of any kind", while elsewhere remarking in passing that the Chechens had indeed had such rulers at one time, and "from the sixteenth century expelled their native and non-Chechen overlords". Indeed, "Chechen folklore . . . retains memories of the struggle against lords, in the form of stories about the fortified towers belonging to them, the ruins of which are still to be seen in Chechnya. Thus the tower Tsoi-Pkheda is associated with the story of a Prince Sepa, who tried to enforce *droit de seigneur* [right of the first night—JG] on the girls of his village, and was killed by one of their brothers."²⁷ The Chechen society that fought against Russian annexation in the 18th and 19th centuries wasn't simply the old society that had existed for thousands of years in the Caucasus, but had already gone through major changes.

Thus it shouldn't be assumed that the institutions of the Chechen society of the early 19th century had simply existed "since time immemorial". Moreover, besides the more idyllic features of the old Chechen society, there were a number of more somber features. Chechens had a high sense of honor, but raiding neighboring villages and abducting people as slaves

ranked highly in this code of honor. Blood feuds were so extensive that they impaired resistance to Russian annexation. As we have seen, patriarchy and slavery existed. There was no written language, and knowledge was restricted to a handful (Chechen society readily absorbed from outsiders the need to use muskets, and all Chechen free males were quite proficient in them, but the need for literacy and wide knowledge was foreign to it). And so forth. Some of these features may have come down from ancient Chechen society, while others may only have arisen, or become exaggerated, at a certain point of development, but they were all there in the 19th century. Moreover, the lack of a state and of its laws did not mean the lack of any social control over the individual Chechen: social conventions could be all the more binding for being based on custom and tradition, rather than law. (In a society subject to government, it is usually considered honorable by this or that stratum of the population to evade certain laws, while it would be harder to find situations where a member of a tribal society would consider it honorable to evade social conventions.)

One of the problems facing the old Chechen society was its difficulty in uniting the various independent villages and communities. Resisting the huge Tsarist armies that encroached upon the Caucasus required united resistance, not just the effort of individual villages. These efforts couldn't be directed simply by the decisions or leaders endorsed by a council of elders or a meeting of all free males of a village. As a result, Chechens turned to institutions that contradicted the old tribal or clan traditions.

One of these institutions was Islam, which was not the original Chechen religion. In Chechnya, prior to the resistance to annexation, Islam was fairly idiosyncratic and coexisted with survivals of an older, indigenous, Chechen religion. But various of the major leaders of resistance to Russian annexation utilized Islamic religious movements as a way to unite Chechens across the divisions of Chechen society (and to unite Chechens with Dagestanis and other Caucasian peoples). In the course of this, Chechen society was changed. Islamic law contradicted the traditional Chechen code of behavior (the "Adat") that was still strong in the 19th century; and Islamic forms of organization cut across the old tribal forms. A process of adjustment took place.

Also, in the heroic resistance during the Caucasian war, the legendary leader Imam Shamil didn't just use religion and oppose a number of Chechen traditional practices, but introduced a rudimentary state administration into Chechnya. It's probably no accident that the leaders who united the Chechens against the tsarist troops in the 19th century were themselves mainly Avars (one of the peoples of Dagestan). This included not just Imam Shamil himself, but Qazi Moullah, Hadji Murat (whose life was the basis for Tolstoy's novel by that name, which described Chechen and Dagestani resistance to Russian conquest), and others. As Avars, they were acquainted with the institutions of a more class-divided society, including the state and a stricter form of patriarchal Islam.

The bottom line

But Lieven doesn't deal with the evolution of Chechen

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 419, column 2, footnote 6.

²⁶ Actually, he doesn't discuss it much at all. But, for one thing, the general village assemblies were gatherings of the (free) male population, and presumably when there was talk of the village elders, this meant male elders. On the other hand, Chechen women didn't wear the veil and were notably freer in their conduct than the women in neighboring Dagestan. It is also notable that the mother's elder brother traditionally played "a strong role, sanctioned by tradition, in the upbringing of male children" (p. 341). This would appear to be a remnant of "mother-right" surviving into patriarchy and "father-right". This would suggest that women probably had a much higher status in earlier days in the northern Caucasus. It would go along with Engels' view that women had a much higher status in the ancient societies, and lost that status as these societies evolved towards class society.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 309, 339. And note that Lieven refers to "native", i.e. Chechen, "overlords" as well as foreign ones.

society. Whether he is considering the old Chechen society or modern Russian society, the questions asked by Lieven are limited by his free-market ideology. That is why, even though his book is the most detailed of the books on the Chechen wars here reviewed, the account is disjointed. Individual facts about Russia and Chechnya appear in isolation, in no particular order.

Moreover, in his "Conclusion" at the end of his *Chechnya*, he has no mention of any prospect for the Chechens whatsoever. He may want to "honour the courage and tenacity of the Chechen people", but ultimately he finds them irrelevant.²⁸ His concern is with Western policy towards Russia; he doesn't want the Western powers to create a backlash in Russia by refusing it entry to the big power club. Thus there is nothing at all about Russia's failure to recognize the right to self-determination having created the bloodbath in Chechnya; and even less than nothing about what stand the workers of Russia should have towards the policies of their exploiters. Lieven's concern is simply to regulate the relations among the big powers, and Chechnya is not a big power. He opposes those unregenerate Cold Warriors who want to continue the struggle against Russia into the present, but his standpoint is simply that Russian imperialism is as legitimate as Western imperialism. As for the Russian bourgeoisie (not his term, of course), which he repeatedly denounces as "compradors", he simply wants them to become patriotic. He writes that

"The danger then is that if Russia were in fact forced to abandon her present very weak and qualified 'imperial' identity, it might swing to something very much worse. This would be especially true if Russia were to be simultaneously excluded from Western institutions and

surrounded by a ring of Western-backed states with strong and strongly anti-Russian official national identities and programmes—which is in effect Henry Kissinger's programme. It would also be the case if ethnic Russians beyond Russia's border came under physical attack on a large scale. The fact that this has not happened so far has been of critical importance in limiting the growth of a radical and ethnicist Russian nationalism. We must hope that it says that way, but also recognize that Russia desperately needs a new spirit of patriotism . . ."²⁹

What Russia needs is that its working masses develop a class struggle for its interests against the local exploiters, who have changed from a state-capitalist bourgeoisie to a free-market bourgeoisie. To do this, they will have to denounce the "imperial" identity and chauvinism of the Russian bourgeoisie, an imperialism which keeps Russian workers separate from their Chechen comrades and workers of other nationalities. This requires not only defending the right to self-determination of Chechnya, but building fraternal bonds with the Chechens masses, who face a complicated struggle against outside oppression and also to establish a proletarian trend in Chechen politics. Western workers, if we too are to stand up in class struggle, will have to denounce Henry Kissinger and other ultra-imperialists, but not from Lieven's standpoint. Our standpoint here in the West has to be to oppose the imperialist club altogether—not to champion a union of Russian and Western imperialists against the workers of all countries, but to encourage the struggle against all imperialisms in internationalist alliance with the workers of all countries. □

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 382.

Correspondence

Should state-capitalist and liberal forces be declared 'socialist', although one knows them to be 'corrupt'?

Below ZN replies to the previously published exchanges between ZN and the *Communist Voice*. In the last issue this exchange dealt with whether public education, nationalized health care, social security, and even the "nationalizing of collapsed banks, as in Japan", are socialist institutions within capitalist countries, as ZN claimed. ZN advocated, essentially, that every reform was socialist, and that failure to call a reform "socialist" amounted to opposing that reform. Moreover, he claimed, activists should strive to push European social-democracy to the left, even though its current leaders were "conservatives disguised as social-democrats". Mark spoke against prettifying social-democracy and state-capitalism, discussed the stand of Marx and Engels on reforms and the state sector in capitalist countries (ZN had referred to the *Communist Manifesto*), discussed the role of the state in the transition to socialism, and the need to build up an independent class trend, distinct from all bourgeois trends.

In this letter, ZN continues his defense of the idea of supporting, and calling "socialist", regimes and political forces which he admits are "corrupt". This leads him to express support for Zyuganov's Stalinist "Communist" Party of the Russian Federation. He even applauds Zyuganov's dirty alliance with the present free-market president of Russia, Vladimir Putin, and he expresses support for Putin's brutal war against Chechnya.

February 2000

Dear *Communist Voice* —

It seems to me that CV & myself agree very closely in theory. We both see Marxism-Leninism as the necessary political theory of the age, which must be put into practice in a practical way. We agree that Stalinism & Maoism were & are flawed. We agree that we as leftist propagandists must both present & promote Marxist-Leninist theory, & also suggest practical applications of theory. Where we disagree is on definitions, interpretations, & applications. I discussed certain measures in the *Manifesto* program as being inherently socialist, & I described how they were used both in capitalist countries & in Stalinist countries. You argue against defining the measures as being socialist, & then say I am somehow wrong in my attitude simply because the John Birch Society, like GB Shaw & others, agrees that such *Manifesto* measures are in fact socialist. There is nothing wrong with the entire political spectrum agreeing on how terms are defined. You seem to think it would be better if each group had a different vocabulary — a political tower of Babel. This is in fact a common bourgeois ploy — constantly changing definitions. My attitude is the opposite. I, for example, object that the Shining Path Maoists, yourselves, & other leftists

have gone along with the bourgeois re-definition of Reaganite-type conservatism as "neo-liberalism." It only confuses issues, making communication even more difficult.

I don't understand how you can say that I have not expressed my dissatisfaction with Stalinism. I tend to stress its brutality — its fascist-like tyranny — even more than its corruption. When I speak of the mediocrity of Cuban communism, what do you think I am referring to but precisely its corruption, & the resulting inefficiency which has made Cuban socialist society so unenviable, so uninspiring? When I talk about encouraging FARC to be more politically correct than Cuba, what do you think I'm talking about? But I support Cuba because Castro has been the least brutal of all Stalinists, & because the corruption of the Cuban government is as nothing compared to that of the CIA-infested US police state. And so I support a moderately corrupt Cuban socialism vs. a corrupt-beyond anything-before-seen-on-earth US capitalism, & you as Marxists can't understand my point of view?

I have not commented on the corruption of Chinese communism? My whole explanation of how the "line of the right" got into Mao's ChCP, & now has the upper hand — what do you think I am talking about but the corruption of the ChCP? And of course Stalin himself was regressive both economically, & also socially. Not only did he restore power to the bourgeois, he also reversed things like Lenin's socially LIBERAL divorce laws — one of the reasons I object to re-defining "conservative" as "neo-liberal." Stalin was a social conservative with no respect for women's rights or human rights — thus the brutality of most Stalinism. Reform of Leninism must begin with the idea that communist leaders must respect the people they lead. This may perhaps have some relation to your own expressed attitude.

As for your criticism of non-purist opponents of the WTO, here again we are dealing with the two different roles of the Marxist propagandist. On the one hand we must try to spread Leninism among those disgruntled with the current capitalist imperialism represented by the WTO — especially labor unions & workers in general, environmentalists, & indigenous peoples. On the other hand we must create ammunition that even the non-radical masses may use against the WTO. One should not condemn politically incorrect anarchists when they help turn WTO meetings into a disaster — this is perhaps one of the few places where anarchists can actually be useful. And one should not condemn moderate rationales for condemning the WTO — for example that the WTO must not take one more step "forward" so long as they don't enforce the human rights laws, labor laws, & environmental laws that they write for places like Mexico in NAFTA. It will be many blue moons before those hypocrites begin to practice what they preach, as they condemn the ChCP for its human rights record, & so long as we propagandists

hammer this idea home to the middle-income US mainstream, they will not react negatively to beautiful fiascos like that at Seattle, & the left can continue to propagandize & gain momentum.

Similarly, you seem to think that it's bad to promote mild socialist measures like a Canadian-type universal health insurance for the US — something the Democrats, unlike Canadian & European social democrats, can never accept. The US would need a third party to the left of the Democrats to promote any such PRACTICAL universal health care — rather than — impractically expensive private/public plans proposed by Mrs. Clinton a while back, & Bradley now. A purely government-run insurance like Canada's once again shows the cost efficiency of even mild socialist measures — yes, even in a capitalist setting — but here it is indeed the people, rather than the corporations, who would benefit, which is why the Democrats would never support it, & why the CIA tries to prevent, so far successfully, the formation of a social democratic party which would bring US health care up to the relatively humanistic level of Canada & Western Europe. Remember Lenin's "Infantile Disorder" essay. It IS necessary to promote mild socialism in countries not ready for revolutionary socialism. This is infinitely more true in the sole superpower US, because it would undermine US support of anti-revolutionary military & paramilitary activities in Third World countries like Colombia, besides shifting the US & world Zeitgeist to the left. This is a part of the strategy I propagandize, & it IS Leninist.

As for Chechnya, speaking of corruption, the Chechen rebels acted like gangsters the first time around, so I did not support either them or the Russians. The Chechens won that round. Then they started to spread their gangsterism into Dagestan. So I tend to support Russia now. As with the Serbs & Austrians, I tolerate fascists & gangsters only if they don't try to spread their poison beyond their own borders, whether to Kosovo or the EU or Dagestan. But I do find your defense of only-slightly-less-gangsterized Russia as being the natural outcome of working-class evolution quite strange. As I say, Stalinist socialism should have been reformed, not destroyed. And so I advocate the reform of Chinese & Cuban socialism, rather than that they should follow the "natural evolution" into Russian-style gangsterism. Fortunately, the RCP is making a comeback in alliance with Putin. They are already less brutal than in the Stalinist era. They are already less corrupt than the Yeltsinites. Let us hope that they continue to "evolve." Again, nothing revolutionary, but these are not rosy times.

Sincerely,
ZN □

Mark replies:

What Lenin actually said in 'Left-Wing' Communism, an Infantile Disorder

Dear ZN,

There are some things we agree on. We too, would consider various reforms, such as national health insurance, an advance for the workers. We too are encouraged by the mass movements,

such as the demonstrations against the WTO. And we agree with your outrage at things like Milosevic's war on Kosovo and the U.S. intervention against the rebel forces in Colombia. As well, I think our discussion has had some value, particularly because many of the views you express reflect commonly held beliefs in the left today, albeit with your own individual variations.

But our discussion also shows that we have diametrically opposed pictures and evaluations of the basic political features of the world. You have called your views "realpolitics." From what I can see, the gist of this realpolitics is this: 1) the only realistic course against the capitalist status-quo is to find something to support among the political forces that are already strong, no matter how corrupt; and 2) since we generally don't encounter ready-made powerful revolutionary trends today, activists should, for now, ignore the tasks necessary to establish a new revolutionary working-class trend.

Your support for the Russian war in Chechnya

These basic premises not only have led you to support as "socialist" just about any measure, regime or trend that is not pure market capitalism, including bailouts of the Japanese bankers. But your quest to find something powerful to support, no matter how repulsed you claim to be by it, has now led you to reconcile with the criminal *private* capitalist gangsters running Russia in their shameful extermination of Chechnya. So driven are you to support one or another dominant force, that even though you consider both the Russian government and the Chechen leadership gangsters, you must concoct some tortured reasoning to pick between them. In this case, we learn that the Chechen leaders are worse because they force themselves on others. Such alleged "realism" has blinded you to the simplest fact: that if it is wrong for some Chechen leaders to force themselves on the population of Dagestan, the Russian rulers are guilty of this same sin on a much grander scale when they subjugate the Chechen people by force.

Praising state-capitalism as "socialism"

This same outlook manifests itself in your stand on the regimes in Cuba, China, or the former Soviet Union or the state sectors in countries like the U.S., Europe or Japan. You are critical of them, you say. But no matter how disappointed you are with China, Cuba, etc., this doesn't prevent you from supporting them. It is not just a matter of you calling a regime "socialist" and we using some other term. You call them "socialist" so as to prettify them and ignore the need for building of a class trend opposed to them. The Cuban and Chinese leaders may be corrupt and Stalinism may be fascist-like, but it's all socialism. It may not be revolutionary socialism or even particularly good socialism. But socialism is everywhere nevertheless. If the Japanese capitalist government bails out a bank, that's "capitalist socialism." National health care is an example of "mild socialism." If a regime you like has contradictions with the U.S., that is all that is needed to qualify as presumably "anti-imperialist socialism." The corrupt regimes evidently represent "corrupt" or "tyrannical" socialism. If by

your previous critique of what happened in China, the CIA-backed right-wing forces have run things for decades, that doesn't mean China isn't socialist. I guess it would be "CIA socialism." No matter how dreadful your "socialism," it is basically OK and merely in need of some reform.

This type of "criticism" of what you consider the socialist trends does not help inspire the workers with a perspective of genuine socialism. It does not clarify that the concept of socialism fought for by Marx, Engels and Lenin is not tyranny and corruption over the masses. It does not explain that the capitalist state sector or social programs are a far cry from socialism. Rather, the concept of socialism is reduced to anything that isn't pure market capitalism. It can't even inspire you. Yet this degradation of the concept of socialism is all your "realistic" criticism offers. Indeed you openly declare for promoting reformist "moderate socialism" as opposed to revolutionary socialism, at least in the U.S.

Nor can your support for the rulers in China or Cuba or the state sector here be compatible with support for the workers' movement. What happens when workers try to organize independently of the corrupt bureaucrats in the phony communist countries? These state-capitalist regimes try to crush them. Public sector workers in your alleged socialist institutions in the openly capitalist countries are mistreated by their "socialist" managers who do not hesitate to call in the professional strikebreaking apparatus, otherwise known as the courts and the cops, when their workers rebel. Workers need to get organized against your fake socialists. Nothing in your letter shows any recognition of the need to encourage a workers' trend against this oppression or to support and agitate in defence of workers in these struggles.

Should differences in the movement be kept quiet?

Indeed a big theme of yours is that even if you know a trend is corrupt, it should remain private knowledge and not discussed among the masses. Look how you deal with our articles on the anti-WTO protests in Seattle. Activists everywhere are summing up their experience with different political trends there. But you consider it wrong for us to put forward a critical perspective on any of the political trends involved. You complain that because our agitation goes beyond "moderate rationales for condemning the WTO" we alienate the "middle-income U.S. mainstream." In other words, don't go beyond the mild politics of the mainstream trends like the trade union bureaucrats and liberal reformers who fear a powerful class movement and worked to confine the militancy of the activists in Seattle. Nor should we have any public criticism of the stand of the Black Bloc anarchists in the anti-WTO protests. You think it suffices that you know there is something wrong with anarchism. But here too, you prefer to remain silent about it in front of the mass of the activists.

Your wishes aside, the genie cannot be put back in the bottle. Activists everywhere have been vigorously debating the issues you want to evade. Such attempts to sort out political trends by activists in the course of struggle are inevitable, and it's critical

if the movement is to advance. Without it, the dead-end trends that are now dominant will always remain so. If we in the CVO and other revolutionary-minded activists had followed your advice to just say what the mainstream is already saying, it would not have meant that the differences in the movement would all go away. It would simply mean that the reformist critique of anarchism and the anarchist critique of reformism would dominate, while only revolutionary criticism of both would be silenced.

Lenin's approach in "Left-wing' communism

You say your approach is real Leninism, in line with Lenin's famous work, *"Left-wing' communism — an infantile disorder"*. But Lenin's approach here is at odds with yours. For one thing, Lenin emphasizes the immense importance of the creation of new revolutionary trends in the proletariat even though they were often initially, at least, much smaller than the established opportunist "socialist" trends. In particular, Lenin emphasized the need for these new groups and parties to denounce in front of the masses the opportunist "socialists" such as the leaders of the social-democratic parties or the Labor Party in Britain. You ignore this issue and tout the big opportunist trends. (Incidentally, in this work, Lenin mocks the use of the word "socialist" to describe the social-democrats and the British Labor Party leaders and denounces them as servants of the bourgeoisie.)

No doubt Lenin saw the need for the proletarian party to form, under certain conditions, temporary alliances or agreements with other parties. His famous recommendation to the British communists groups at the time to provide electoral support to the Labor Party candidates is an example. But Lenin did not do so to create any illusions in the "socialist" character of the opportunists, but to further expose them in front of the masses and rally the masses around the revolutionary communists. Hence, Lenin emphasized that should such an electoral agreement be entered into, the revolutionary proletarian forces must "retain *complete freedom* of agitation, propaganda and political activity" so as to "get complete freedom to expose the Hendersons and the Snowdens in the same way as (for *fifteen years* — 1903-17) the Russian Bolsheviks demanded and got it in respect of the Russian Hendersons and Snowdens, i.e., the Mensheviks." (Section IX, "Left-wing' communism in Britain") Lenin said without this condition, any agreement would be "treachery." You, on the other hand, fault our agitation for being different than the mainstream opportunists. And you recommend hiding from the masses the double-dealing and service to the bourgeoisie of the "mild socialists."

Here I am not dealing with whether this or that agreement is appropriate today. But the advisability of a particular agreement is not what you raise. Rather, you present a general approach of reconciling the masses to the dominant opportunism and hiding its corrupt nature. This is why I say that despite our agreement on certain things, we have dramatically different political approaches.

Sincerely,
Mark, for *Communist Voice* □

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