

REGROUPMENT, REALIGNMENT, AND THE REVOLUTIONARY LEFT

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It is clear that what in France is called the 'radical left' or 'the left of left' ? the forces to the left of social democracy and of what survives of Stalinism ? is undergoing a major process of renewal and of realignment. The mass mobilizations that have swept Europe and North America since Seattle, the development of a world-wide movement against global capitalism, the shift to the left of Rifondazione Comunista in Italy, the spectacular performance of the revolutionary candidates in the first round of the French presidential elections on 21 April 2002, the electoral challenge to New Labour mounted by a unifying far left in Britain ? all these are signs of a major political sea-change.

Two Political Earthquakes

This process has to be set in the context of the two earthquakes to have hit the left in the past fifteen years. The first was the revolutions in Central and Eastern Europe in 1989 and the collapse of the Stalinist regimes, culminating in the fall of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the disintegration of the USSR itself in 1991. The immediate political impact of this world-historical upheaval on the left was negative, even for those political currents that had opposed Stalinism from the social-democratic right or the revolutionary left. The disappearance of the only major geopolitical rival to the Western bloc ? and the catastrophic collapse of what purported to be a planned economy ? seemed to confirm the idea (most famously articulated by Francis Fukuyama) that there could no longer be any progressive alternative to liberal capitalism. At best, the more radical proponents of contemporary social democracy argued, we could choose which version of capitalism we were exploited by ? Rhenish stakeholder capitalism rather than Anglo-American *laissez faire*.

The deeply pessimistic reaction that this situation could induce even on sections of the revolutionary left critical of Stalinism is indicated by the opening of a resolution passed at the 14th World Congress of the Fourth International in 1995 (more extracts from this document are published elsewhere in this Bulletin):

Since our 13th World Congress in 1991, the balance of forces has continued to deteriorate for the toiling masses, in the framework of the general trends noted and analysed in the resolution on the world situation that we adopted at that congress. The international dialectic of struggles has had a negative effect, bringing about setbacks, defeats or isolation of many emancipation movements. Our own current has been affected and weakened by this negative dialectic, a result that could hardly be avoided in an organization unprotected by any sectarian shell to protect it from the contagion of the real course of social and political struggles ? More generally, all the social movements which are still developing at different rates in different countries ? against imperialist oppression, austerity, the harmful effects of the market economy, environmental dangers, women's oppression, militarism, etc ? are still very

fragmented. The project of a socialist society offering an alternative both to capitalism and to the disastrous experiences of bureaucratic 'socialism', lacks credibility: it is severely hampered by the balance sheet of Stalinism, of social democracy, and of populist nationalism in the 'third world', as well as by the weakness of those who put it forward today.

In a large number of dominated countries, broad vanguard forces are now sceptical about the chances of success of a revolutionary break with imperialism; and sceptical about the possibilities of taking power and keeping it, given the new world balance of power. Other forces, and not the least important, have broken openly with this perspective ?

Against this background, the prediction made, for example, in my *The Revenge of History* (1991), that, freed of the incubus of Stalinism, the authentic Marxist left could now take up again the unfinished business of confronting capitalism was undoubtedly excessively optimistic. Viewed, however, from the perspective of 2002, however, it does not seem positively wrong. Because the driving force in the disintegration of Stalinism was, above all in the Soviet Union itself, more its internal contradictions than mass revolt from below, the immediate short-term impact of its collapse was to strengthen Western capitalism in general and US imperialism in particular. But, in the longer term, the disappearance of Stalinism as a political force did liberate the left from having to dissociate itself from an obscene caricature of socialism. And, in part because of the very scale of market capitalism's short-term victory, which encouraged the world-wide imposition of neo-liberal policies, by the end of the 1990s a movement *did* emerge to challenge global capitalism.

This is, of course, the second major earthquake ? the rise of the anti-capitalist movement. There is no need to repeat here the extensive analysis of this development made by the SWP elsewhere (which has been thoroughly vindicated since its initial formulation in the aftermath of Seattle), but it may be helpful to resume the most recent developments. The combined effect of the radicalization produced by the Genoa protests and 11 September 2001 was to shift the centre of gravity of the movement from North America (where activists were thrown onto the defensive after 9-11) to Europe. The scale of the protests at the European Union summit in Barcelona in March 2002 and the gigantic demonstrations against Le Pen in France in April/May 2002 indicate that this process is continuing. But, at the same time, the second World Social Forum at Porto Alegre in January/February 2002, attended by between 60,000 and 80,000 people, mainly Brazilian, underlined that the movement cannot be seen as a purely First World phenomenon, while the major demonstrations in Washington and San Francisco on 20 April 2002 ? where opposition to neo-liberalism and solidarity with the Palestinian people fused in large, peaceful protests ? are the most important sign to date that anti-capitalist resistance is reviving in the United States itself.

The significance of the anti-capitalist movement for the radical left is three-fold. First, it is bringing a new generation into political activity. The youth and militancy of, for example, the anti-Le Pen demonstrations in France have been widely recognized. Secondly, it is revitalizing many activists from the 1960s and 1970s generation who, having grown tired and pessimistic after experiencing the defeats of the past quarter

century, now see their hopes being renewed in these new mobilizations. Thirdly, and most fundamentally, after the apparent triumph of neo-liberalism in the 1990s, the continued viability of anti-capitalist politics has been demonstrated very concretely. The regularity with which, the *Financial Times*, for example, announces the decline of the anti-capitalist movement, only then to have to eat its words by reporting another massive protest or launching yet another defence of neo-liberalism is an indication of the way in which a critique of capitalism from the left has once again established itself as a pole in ideological and political debates in the West.

Class Polarization in Europe

Revolutionary socialists are today swimming in a much bigger stream. Moreover, they are swimming *with* the stream. A large-scale process of radicalization is drawing large numbers of people to the left. In Europe this radicalization has its origins in the process of class polarization that developed in the early 1990s. The impact of economic recession and of the neo-liberal policies demanded by European economic and monetary union (and still enforced by the European Central Bank and the EU Growth and Stability Pact) drove substantial numbers of people further to the right and to the left. This is what Tony Cliff called 'the 1930s in slow motion'. It was reflected in the gains made by the extreme right throughout Europe during the 1990s, but also in the rebellion against neo-liberalism expressed industrially in the French mass strikes of 1995 and electorally in the sweeping victories won by social-democratic parties in 1996-8.

The first round of the French presidential elections on 21 April 2002 demonstrated that this process of class polarization has reached a new phase. The social-democratic governments brought to office by a rebellion against neo-liberalism have pressed ahead with neo-liberal policies. Lionel Jospin is the most spectacular victim to date of the resulting revulsion. But Le Pen and the Nazi National Front are not the only beneficiaries. Over 10 per cent of those who voted in the first round backed revolutionary candidates. This is the most concrete evidence to date of the emergence of a 'radical left' that repudiates social democracy. The panic reaction of many on the liberal left to recent developments ? summed up by Martin Jacques, ex-editor of *Marxism Today*, when he wrote that '[n]ot since the 1930s has the threat of the irrational, of a turn towards barbarism, been so great in the West' ? completely ignores this side of the picture. Millions across Europe are participating in a learning process. Disappointed by the experience of social democracy and encouraged by the development of the anti-capitalist movement, they are ready to look further left.

Whence the Differences?

The development of the anti-capitalist movement represents a powerful challenge for existing left organizations: are they capable of relating positively and creatively to this new movement? It also poses the question of how important the theoretical and political differences that divided the left in the past still are. It is worth distinguishing between three kinds of difference. First, there are the historic divisions on the Trotskyist left. Between the two main international currents ? the Fourth International and the International Socialist Tendency ? these stem ultimately from different

interpretations of Stalinism, namely the orthodox Trotskyist analysis of Russia as a degenerated workers' state adhered to by the FI and the theory of bureaucratic state capitalism developed by Tony Cliff, founder of the IST. Secondly, there is the far more important division between Trotskyism and Stalinism. This is the political expression of a world-historic process ? the degeneration of the Russian Revolution of October 1917 and the rise of the Stalinist bureaucracy. Thirdly, there is the equally profound antagonism between revolutionary socialism and social democracy. Once again, this is a reflection of world-historic events ? in particular, the capitulation of the Second International to the First World War in August 1914 and the subsequent formation, in the aftermath of the Russian Revolution, of a new revolutionary Third International.

To pose the question of the contemporary pertinence of these differences is not to say that they don't matter any more. For example, orthodox Trotskyism identifies a workers' state with a state-controlled economy. Since a variety of social and political forces have carried through the statization of an economy ? Stalinist parties, Third World guerrilla movements, left-wing army officers ? the implication was that working-class self-activity was not required to create a workers' state. Cliff's theory of state capitalism permitted us to reaffirm Marx's fundamental idea that socialism is the self-emancipation of the working class. Even if Stalinism is moribund, what Trotsky called substitutionism ? the belief that forces other than the working class can overthrow capitalism ? is still alive and well. For that reason alone, the theory of state capitalism is an essential part of the intellectual heritage of revolutionary Marxism.

For all that, it would be mad now, when the Stalinist states have largely been swept into the dustbin of history and the surviving Communist regimes are (with the exception of North Korea) busily seeking to integrate themselves into the world economy, to insist on dividing revolutionary socialists on the basis of their different interpretations of Stalinism. This would not have been true as recently as the early 1990s. The intellectual clarity provided by the theory of state capitalism was critical in allowing the IS Tendency to resist the wave of pessimism that swept the left internationally after 1989 ? including most orthodox Trotskyist currents, as the passage cited above from the FI Congress in 1995 shows. It was indeed critical to the formation of some groups ? for example, the International Socialists of South Korea emerged thanks to its success in winning activists from the predominantly pro-Stalinist left in the aftermath of the August 1991 coup in Moscow on the basis of the ability of Cliff's theory to explain the disintegration of 'existing socialism'.

But ? with the revival of the left that began with the mass strikes in France in November-December 1995 ? a new page has been turned. The position that a particular organization took on the question of Stalinism is not a reliable guide to its orientation towards the new movement. On the one hand, the International Socialist Organization in the United States, historically one of the leading affiliates of the IST, reacted to the Seattle and the subsequent international radicalization with a sectarian dogmatism reminiscent of the worst aberrations of orthodox Trotskyism. On the other hand, FI activists have played a prominent role in the development of ATTAC in France and in the World Social Forums at Porto Alegre. Political tendencies must be

judged, not primarily on their theory or their past, but on their response to the challenges of the present.

To repeat, this does not mean the differences listed above no longer matter. As we shall see, the question of reform or revolution retains all its force today. But, rather than simply reiterate old arguments, we need to judge, in the light of the demands of a new period, what differences, old or new, really matter today.

Processes of Realignment

This assessment is merely one version of a judgement being made much more broadly on the left internationally. There is an extraordinary strong desire for unity among activists of all backgrounds and generations. This finds expression in a variety of different ways. To begin with the far left, in Britain we have seen the formation of the Socialist Alliance in England and Wales and of the Scottish Socialist Party, which have between them united most of the sane elements to the left of the Labour Party under the same roof. On a larger, primarily European canvass, there is the developing dialogue between the FI and the IST, which has found concrete expression in leadership discussions and some practical collaboration between the two currents' flagship organizations, the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire in France and the Socialist Workers Party in Britain. Overlapping with these two processes are the now regular Conferences of the European Anti-Capitalist Left, which bring together some major formations from Trotskyist, left-reformist, and Stalinist backgrounds.

Somewhat analogous processes are at work elsewhere in the world. For example, in the Asia-Pacific region a number of organizations from a Stalinist (usually Maoist) background are engaged in a process of re-examining aspects of their politics and drawing together organizationally. For example, various groups that broke with the Communist Party of the Philippines are currently in a process of regroupment. Often with such formations (including the PRD in Indonesia), the most obvious way in which Stalinist ideas continue to exert a residual influence is in the acceptance of a stages theory of revolution that separates democratic and socialist revolutions as distinct phases of the struggle in Third World countries. This helps to explain the role that the Australian Democratic Socialist Party (DSP) is playing as a facilitator in the realignment of the far left in parts of Asia. The DSP, an orthodox Trotskyist grouping in origin, broke with the FI in 1985 in large part because it came to reject Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution and accept a stages approach instead.

It would, however, be a major mistake to reduce the processes of left realignment currently underway to these shifting relationships among currents on the far left. Much larger forces are in play. Two developments in Europe illustrate this. The first is the shift to the left by the Partito della Rifondazione Comunista (PRC) in Italy. This began in 1998 when (at the price of a split) the PRC withdrew its support for the centre-left Olive Tree coalition government then headed by Romano Prodi. But the decisive stage in this process came when the PRC identified itself with the protests at Genoa in July 2001 and with the movement that subsequently developed in Italy against the war in Afghanistan and in solidarity with the Palestinian people.

Secondly, and closely connected, is the development of a Europe-wide anti-capitalist network. Organizationally the key forces in this network are the Italian Social Forums movement that emerged from the post-Genoa radicalization and ATTAC, which has now spread beyond France to over 40 countries, mainly in Europe, but it embraces many others ? Globalise Resistance in Britain and Ireland, the Movement for Global Resistance in the Spanish state, the Genoa 2001 Campaign in Greece, and so on. The network developed from the necessity of Europe-wide collaboration in the various summit mobilizations, starting with Prague in September 2000, and from the leading role played by French and Italian activists at Porto Alegre I and II. Preparations for the European Social Forum due to be held in Italy on 7-10 November 2002 are extending this network, but also putting it to a critical test.

Some on the Marxist left tend to be dismissive of these coalitions because many of the activists in them do not describe themselves as socialists (this is even more true of the North American networks). This apparent contradictory state of affairs ? activists fighting global capitalism but denying that socialism is the alternative ? is a consequence of the fact that resistance to the system revived in an ideological climate in which not merely revolutionary Marxism but other socialist traditions had been marginalized. To exclude this layer of activists ? numerically probably the largest grouping on an international scale ? from the broader anti-capitalist left would be a disastrous sectarian error.

What Sort of Party?

This process of left realignment therefore takes place against a very different background from that assumed by the Fourth International when it discussed regroupment in 1995. Then the FI envisaged (in the resolution extracts of which are published elsewhere in this Bulletin) the possibility of different currents drawing together in a context that it saw as dominated by capitalist offensive and disarray and retreat on the left. Today, however, it is impossible to ignore the signs of revival. All the same, the growth of the far right underlines the scale of the challenge now facing the anti-capitalist left in Europe. Whether members of political organizations or working in looser activist coalitions they have collectively to offer an attractive and effective alternative to those radicalized by the experiences of the past years. To take the obvious example, what ongoing framework can be offered to the nearly three million people who voted for revolutionary candidates in France? This takes us to the question of political organization itself.

A significant section of the anti-capitalist movement have a more or less hostile attitude towards political parties. This reflects a variety of factors ? for example, the appalling record of the 'official left' (social democrats, Communists, and Greens) in office, negative experiences with far left organizations, and the influence of autonomism. The result is a movementism that, for example, has led to the formal exclusion of political parties from the World Social Forum and attempts to extend this ban to the European Social Forum. This position is very hard to sustain intellectually. Despite the ban on parties at the WSF, the Brazilian Workers Party (PT) was an informing presence (the concluding ceremony at Porto Alegre II felt at moments like a PT election rally). More seriously, there are systematic political differences within the

movement ? notably with the emergence of a strongly reformist pole around ATTAC that is challenged in particular by the Italian autonomists (the *disobbedienti*) on the basis of politics that chiefly emphasizes the self-activity of already committed activists. These divergent currents operate like parties, organizing on the basis of what amount to distinct political programmes, even if they spurn the name 'party'. The real question, then, is not so much for or against the party as a political form, but rather what kind of party we should be building?

Here Murray Smith, a member of the LCR, but also till recently editor of *Frontline*, the magazine of the leading current within the Scottish Socialist Party (the International Socialist Movement, or ISM), makes an interesting contribution elsewhere in this Bulletin. He makes essentially two points, first, that the LCR should take the initiative in seeking to bring together a wide spectrum of activists from different political traditions and social movements in a new anti-capitalist party in France. Secondly, he argues against taking as the model of this party that provided by what he calls 'traditional revolutionary organizations' such as the LCR and the SWP, that basis themselves on a clearly defined revolutionary Marxist programme. A new party in France should, like the SSP, be 'strategically non-delimited', leaving open the question of reform and revolution. To call such a party 'centrist' would be to remain trapped in 'a period when the workers' movement was characterized by a sharp polarization between reformist and revolutionary currents'. The rightward shift of social democracy (Smith calls them the 'post-reformist left') has, however, made such an approach obsolete:

In building a party with a class-struggle practice (and an intervention by revolutionary Marxists) we create a framework that is unfavourable for the development of reformist currents. Besides, it is difficult to see how we could build a party on any other basis. Even to defend existing reforms and win new ones we have to employ the methods of class and mass struggle, in relation to which action in the parliamentary institutions would only play a supporting role. To fight for reforms has never meant you were a reformist, even still less so today when the so-called reformists don't introduce reforms any more. A party built on these bases, especially with a conscious intervention by revolutionary Marxists, doesn't constitute a favourable terrain for the development of reformist currents.

Though the experience of the SSP is often cited in this context, the conception of a broad anti-capitalist party defended by Smith is shared by many who do not support the ISM ? for example in the Fourth International. In order to identify what is wrong with this conception it is essential to start with the points of agreement. First of all, the history of the workers' movement shows very clearly that mass revolutionary parties do not develop through a linear process in which a small Marxist group gradually grows bigger and bigger by recruiting more and more members. Like history more generally, the development of revolutionary parties involves qualitative leaps and sharp breaks. A classic case is the emergence of the French Communist Party from a split in the Socialist Party at its Tours Congress in 1920. There may well be cases where the way forward is to regroup a relatively broad spectrum of anti-capitalist forces in a party whose programme falls short of revolutionary Marxism. Moreover,

this may indeed be what the LCR should be seeking in France. Certainly to make a larger realignment conditional on agreement with the deep-dyed sectarians of Lutte Ouvrière would be to ensure that the entire project is stillborn. The idea that has been floated in the LCR of convening a broad Estates General of the Anti-Capitalist Left as a step towards a new party makes a lot of sense.

But it does not follow from the fact that sometimes regroupment on the basis of a broad anti-capitalist programme is the right step to take that the *aim* of the process should be a party that fudges the question of reform or revolution. Smith is able to take a relaxed attitude to this because he seems to believe that classical reformism is dead. But this is a big mistake, for at least two reasons. First of all this belief involves a grave underestimation of contemporary social democracy. Of course, what Tony Cliff called 'reformism without reforms' is a feature of the present period: a crisis-ridden capitalist globalization presses social-democratic governments to dismantle the reforms they had previously introduced. But this does not mean that the base of these parties in the organized working class has simply vanished. More to the point, there is no reason to believe that at least some social-democratic parties will not, when driven into opposition by the present electoral revival of the European bourgeois right, to rebuild support by promising reforms. The French Socialist Party has already moved left in response to Jospin's defeat. Jospin himself rebuilt the PS's base after the debacle of the later Mitterrand years. Only a fool would confidently assert that this cannot happen again.

Secondly, the capacity for social democrats to recover from their failure to deliver reforms has an objective basis in the relative lack of self-confidence of workers ? greatly reinforced, of course, by the trade-union bureaucracy, which encourages them to look to others to improve their condition. This lack of self-confidence can only be overcome by the experience of mass struggle, and even then workers do not immediately or automatically shake off the influence of reformist ideas. All the great workers' movements, from the Russian and German Revolutions to *Solidarnosc* in Poland, have involved an intense battle of ideas over different strategies for taking the struggle forward. Though we are not in a revolutionary situation today, we see precisely the same process of differentiation at work in the contemporary anti-capitalist movement. The most powerful single force within the movement in Europe is a coalition of reformist forces, embracing significant elements within both ATTAC and the Italian Social Forums movement, who see either a revived nation-state or a reformed European Union (or some combination of the two) as a counterweight to global capitalism (which they often identify with the US). This is a much more militant reformism than that represented by contemporary social democracy, because it has emerged from a mass movement and has an activist orientation, but reformism it still is. The role that this current has played in resisting mass mobilizations and in particular blocking anti-war activity in different parts of Europe is documented elsewhere in this Bulletin.

The most prominent challenge to this wing of the anti-capitalist movement from the left comes from the autonomists. But this response is vague and diffuse in the extreme. Consider, for example, Michael Hardt on the polarization between the so-

called *souverainistes* ? defenders of national sovereignty ? and the supporters of more radical positions at Porto Alegre II:

It is certainly important, on the one hand, to recognize the differences that divide the activists and politicians gathered at Porto Alegre. It would be a mistake, on the other hand, to try to read the division according to the traditional model of ideological conflict between opposing sides. Political struggle in the age of network movements no longer works in that way. Despite the apparent strength of those who occupied centre stage and dominated the representations of the Forum, they may ultimately prove to have lost the struggle ? The leaders can certainly craft resolutions affirming national sovereignty around a conference table, but they can never grasp the democratic power of the movements. Eventually they too will be swept up in the multitude, which is capable of transforming all fixed and centralized elements into so many more nodes in its indefinitely expansive network.

Hardt's reliance on the automatic development of the 'multitude' is likely to be no more successful than earlier versions of the idea that spontaneity is enough to defeat capitalism. Like its predecessors, it represents a denial of politics, the refusal to recognize that the struggle against capitalism requires for its success the articulation of ideologies, the development of political strategies, and organized efforts to win support for them. Challenging the influence of reformism within the anti-capitalist movement cannot be left to the objective logic of 'network movements'. It requires the development of a coherent, organized revolutionary pole within the movement. But what is true internationally also holds on the national scale as well. An anti-capitalist party will be unable to negotiate the twists and turns of the class struggle ? a class struggle from which reformism cannot be magically banished ? without a clearly articulated revolutionary Marxist analysis that informs its tactical initiatives and practical activities. Organizing on the basis of a broader and more ambiguous programmatic basis may sometimes be a necessary phase in the process of building a mass revolutionary party but a looser party is no substitute for the real thing.

More immediately, what Smith calls 'traditional revolutionary organization', whether large or small, has definite practical advantages. The relative ideological homogeneity of a revolutionary Marxist party gives it a greater capacity for rapid and decisive action than looser, more programmatically ambiguous formations. Consider, for example, the speed and determination with which the British SWP reacted to 11 September 2001 by starting, within less than 24 hours of the attacks on New York and Washington, a series of initiatives that led to the formation of the Stop the War Coalition and the emergence of one of the most dynamic anti-war movements in Europe. This was possible because the SWP, and the IS Tendency, had, over more than a decade, developed both theoretical analyses and a body of practical experience concerning contemporary imperialist wars and radical Islam that allowed us very rapidly to identify the key issues that were likely to emerge in the wake of 9-11.

It is important to understand that the relative homogeneity of programme and analysis possessed by a revolutionary socialist party is not something arrived at by the mechanical repetition of sacred texts or the bureaucratic imposition of uniformity.

Revolutionary Marxism can only continue as a living tradition by showing its capacity to respond creatively to historically novel developments. This means that an authentically Leninist organization has to be able thoroughly to discuss these developments. Inevitably such discussion often involves major disagreements and vigorous polemics ? particularly when the party has to deal with a sharp turn in the objective situation. The consensus that now exists within the IS Tendency over both contemporary imperialist wars and radical Islam emerged over sometimes strongly polarized debates in the late 1980s and the mid-1990s respectively.

Open discussion is therefore essential to a properly functioning revolutionary party. It is not, however, an end in itself, but is rather a means of clarification and therefore of enabling the party to act more effectively. Understanding this is the key to grasping the nature of democratic centralism. Daniel Bensaïd of the LCR makes the point very well:

What is often attacked in the notion of the Leninist party, or in 'democratic centralism', is plainly the verticalist centralism for a long time illustrated by the bureaucratic centralism of the Communist Parties. We then run the risk of forgetting that a certain form and a certain degree of centralism are also democratic imperatives. Parties which are simple spaces of discussion, without decisions taken in common bringing together the activists as a whole, will be reduced to clubs where gossip and opinions are exchanged without any common engagement for action. They will then be playthings for the surrounding market mechanisms and for the cooptation of the leaders by the media (as often already happens).

In an authentic democratic centralist party, then, open discussion is encouraged, but as a means of allowing the party to intervene more effectively. Discussion therefore terminates in a democratically arrived at decision, after which all members, whatever their views on the issue, work together to implement the policy that has been agreed on. What this means organizationally is a matter of some controversy. The practice of the Fourth International is normally to permit the permanent existence of organized tendencies within their sections. Munyaradzi Gwisai of the International Socialist Organization (Zimbabwe) also defends a conception of the Leninist party as a multi-tendency organization in his contribution to this Bulletin. The problem with permanent tendencies is that they institutionalize internal disagreements within the party. This often has the effect of turning the organization in on itself and creating an introverted atmosphere in which the latest internal bulletin is a bigger event than developments in the class struggle. Even where this does not happen, the existence of permanent tendencies is likely to encourage a situation in which specific issues are viewed through the lens of the internal differences. Decisions emerge, less through the weight of the strongest argument, but as a result of the balance of forces between the different factions, a situation that can encourage coalition-building and unprincipled deals. Bensaïd describes such a situation at the 10th Congress of the FI, which met in 1974, deeply split between two international factions: 'the logic of factionalism set the boundaries and the Congress resembled a diplomatic meeting of delegations rather than a collective discussion. The important questions were settled separately and in private.'

Gwisai invokes the example of the Bolsheviks to support his approach, but the history of Lenin and his party offers a very different picture, one in which open and vigorous debates often took place but in which the alignments of the leading Bolsheviks constantly shifted on specific issues. Within the space of a few months, for example, Lenin and Trotsky moved from being close allies over the necessity of taking power in September-October 1917 to antagonists over the Brest-Litovsk treaty in January-February 1918, while Zinoviev and Kamenev, bitterly opposed to Lenin in October, became his strong supporters over Brest-Litovsk. A revolutionary party should seek to promote this kind of fluid, open debate rather than institutionalize factional differences.

This conception of the Leninist party has important implications for how revolutionaries operate within the broader movement. The kind of sectarianism displayed by LO or the American ISO when they counterpose their organization to the movement is utterly bankrupt. Participation in a broad range of united fronts is an essential feature of the present period. But these united fronts ? which include movements such as the Socialist Alliance, ATTAC, and Globalise Resistance, which have a broad programmatic basis ? are not ends in themselves. While working constructively with a diversity of different currents, revolutionary Marxists have to be contributing to a process of ideological clarification that focuses on the question of strategy ? of how to take these movements forward. Sometimes this may involve polemics with the reformists and the autonomists. Provided that these arguments are conducted in a comradely fashion, and pursued in a context where it is clear that the aim is to strengthen the movement, they need not have a divisive effect. Nevertheless the development of a strong Marxist pole within the movement depends on the willingness of revolutionaries to engage in ideological struggle.

First Steps

The most obvious way in which such a pole could be constructed on an international level would be for the two main Trotskyist currents ? the FI and the IST ? somehow to draw more closely together. It may therefore be helpful to consider some of the obstacles that such a process faces. Two in particular stand out:

(1) *Theoretical disagreements*: Of these the most important is not the historic debate over the class nature of the Soviet Union. More current questions are also in dispute. For example, the conference of the European Anti-Capitalist Left in Brussels in December 2001 saw a debate between the LCR and the SWP over the movement against the war in Afghanistan. The LCR comrades argued the relative weakness of the movement in France reflected objective factors ? in particular, the legacy of French imperialism. The SWP delegates criticized what we saw as the subjective weaknesses of the French left, which led them even-handedly to condemn US imperialism and Islamic fundamentalism. Behind this lies a larger disagreement over assessments of radical Islamism: the SWP tends to emphasize the potential of this (very heterogeneous) ideological and political phenomenon to express opposition to imperialism, while the LCR stresses its reactionary features. This is not simply a theoretical disagreement: the Stop the War Coalition in

England (in which the SWP plays a leading role) has been able to involve leading Muslim organizations and activists in a united front against the war on terrorism.

(2) *Differences in political culture*: The two tendencies also have different political styles that, while not necessarily implying principled disagreements, sometimes present difficulties in working together. These differences reflect the divergent responses by the FI and the IST to the downturn in class struggle and the crisis of the revolutionary left that developed in the late 1970s. The FI was itself a major victim of this crisis, suffering the collapse, disintegration, or decline of many of its leading sections. Those that survived – including the most important in Europe, the LCR – did so as coalitions of activists involved in specific movements. By contrast, the IST was a far weaker international current when the crisis of the far left developed. It expanded both geographically and numerically during the downturn of the 1980s on the basis of a perspective central to which was general Marxist propaganda. The more activist orientation that the IST developed in response to the class polarization that began to develop in Europe after 1989 still laid much greater stress on the development of Marxist theoretical understanding than did the FI groups.

These divergent survival strategies mean that FI and IST groups tend to have quite different age profiles: the former dominated by middle-aged activists rooted in unions or other social movements, the latter much younger but (with some important exceptions – for example, the Irish SWP and SEK in Greece) much weaker connections with the organized working class. (The British SWP, because of its longevity as an organization and the bursts of growth it has enjoyed since the mid-1980s, spans both sides of this divide.) FI comrades' involvement in activist networks means that they have been well placed to contribute to the anti-capitalist movement: LCR members played a leading role in ATTAC from the start, and their counterparts elsewhere have often been prominent in the movement's international extension. The IST, by contrast, has sought a much higher political profile starting with the large contingent it had at the Prague protests in September 2000. Its affiliates played an important role in initiating anti-capitalist united fronts – for example, Globalise Resistance in Britain and Ireland and the Genoa 2001 Campaign in Greece – but they have also openly intervened and projected themselves as revolutionary Marxist organizations in the movement. Meanwhile the LCR in particular sometimes gives the impression that its activists in specific movements operate fairly autonomously while the Ligue itself till recently took a low profile outside elections.

These different methods of working have sometimes been a source of misunderstanding between the two currents; ways of addressing them would have to be found if the IST and the FI were to work together more closely. The decision of the LCR leadership after the French presidential elections of April/May 2002 to break with the long-standing FI tradition of making membership conditional of the attainment of a relatively high 'political level' and to adopt a policy of open recruitment – something that has been, in different forms, part of the SWP's practice since the early 1970s – is therefore an important step towards reducing the gap between the practice of the two currents.

As this example indicates, the differences between the IST and the FI are not set in stone. Of course, the LCR comrades did not decide to practise open recruitment *in order* to reduce these divergences. Their decision was dictated by the practical necessities of relating to the wave of radicalization since 21 April (thus, see Murray Smith's comments on the question of membership). But that is precisely the point: the development of the struggle on an international scale is forcing established revolutionary organizations to re-examine past assumptions and practices. This is the context that has put regroupment and realignment onto the agenda. This does not mean that these will simply take place spontaneously, as Michael Hardt suggests when he argues that reformism will simply dissolve into the 'multitude'. The obstacles described above – let alone the much greater ones that separate the Trotskyist left from currents emerging from one wing or other of the Communist movement – are real ones that cannot simply be wished away. They will need to be addressed if they are to be overcome. Concretely this means three things:

1. the different socialist tendencies being drawn together in the new movements against capitalism and war need to engage in positive and constructive united front work that involves not merely them but also the broader anti-capitalist left that does not regard itself as Marxist or even socialist;
2. where possible, revolutionary currents – in particular, the FI and the IST – need to achieve a higher level of practical collaboration: steps already have been taken in this direction – for example, the far left rallies during the protests at Nice (December 2000), Genoa (July 2001), and Brussels (December 2001) – but thought should be given about how to build further on these initiatives;
3. discussion of the political differences that exist on the far left and in the broader movement needs to be pursued in an open and comradely way: nothing is to be gained by pretending they do not exist or trying to brush them under the carpet.

Since Seattle the revolutionary left has been embarking – along with many others, fortunately – on a new voyage. There is no map to guide us – no set of rules or obvious historical reference point to dictate what we should do. The potential rewards are enormous. History will not forgive us if we miss this chance.

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W. Hutton, *The State We're In* (London, 1995).

See especially C. Harman, 'Anti-Capitalism: Theory and Practice', *International Socialism*, (2) 88 (2000), A. Callinicos, *The Anti-Capitalist Movement and The*

Revolutionary Left (London, 2001) and id., *An Anti-Capitalist Manifesto* (Cambridge, forthcoming).

See A. Callinicos, 'Crisis and Class Struggle in Europe Today', *International Socialism*, (2) 63 (1994), and 'Reformism and Class Polarization in Europe', *ibid.*, (2) 85 (1999).

M. Jacques, 'The New Barbarism', *Guardian*, 9 May 2002.

See T. Cliff, *Trotskyism after Trotsky* (London, 1999), A. Callinicos, *Trotskyism* (Milton Keynes, 1990), and D. Bensaïd, *Les Trotskysmes* (Paris, 2002). For the most recent round in the debate between defenders of these rival interpretations of Stalinism, see the exchanges between Chris Harman, Ernest Mandel, and myself in *International Socialism*, (2) 47, 49, 56, 57 (1990, 1992).

For a case study of the political acrobatics this logic produced comparatively recently among supporters of the FI, see A. Callinicos, 'Their Trotskyism and Ours', *International Socialism*, (2) 22 (1984).

T. Cliff, [1960] 'Trotsky on Substitutionism', in id., *Selected Writings*, I (London, 2001).

See Callinicos, *Anti-Capitalist Movement and the Revolutionary Left*.

See D. Lorimer, *Trotsky's Theory of Permanent Revolution: A Leninist Critique* (Sydney, 1998) and J. Percy and D. Lorimer, *The Democratic Socialist Party and the Fourth International* (Sydney, 2001). For a critique of this kind of thinking, see J. Rees, 'The Socialist Revolution and the Democratic Revolution', *International Socialism*, (2) 83 (1999). Not all groups involved in the regroupment process promoted by the DSP accept a stages theory ? for example, the Labour Party of Pakistan, which broke away from the Committee for a Workers' International dominated by the Socialist Party of England and Wales.

For much further analysis, see Callinicos, *Anti-Capitalist Manifesto*, esp. ch. 2.

M. Hardt, 'Today's Bandung?', *New Left Review*, (II) 14 (2002), pp. 117-18.

'Entretien avec Daniel Bensaïd', *Le Passant ordinaire*, May 2002: circulated by e-mail.

Bensaïd, *Les Trotskysmes*, p. 105.

See J. Rees, 'Anti-Capitalism, Reformism, and Socialism', *International Socialism*, (2) 90 (2001), and A. Callinicos, 'Unity in Diversity', *Socialist Review*, April 2002.

Compare, for example, G. Achcar, 'Le Choc des barbaries', *ContreTemps*, 3 (2002), and C. Harman, *The Prophet and the Proletariat* (new edn., London, 2002).

See C. Harman, *The Fire Last Time* (London, 1988), ch. 16.

See, on the history of the IST, T. Cliff, *A World to Win* (London, 2000), pp. 201-19.