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Much of DB110 is taken up with the revolutionary literature fallout generated by the terrorist network that acted on September 11. Within a few days the DB began receiving leaflets, editorials, and statements from the groups and journals of the revolutionary groups that use the DB as a forum. Of course there were far too many to publish in their entirety. Rather than try to select the “best” for publication, I decided to print the concluding portions of all that had arrived here—or that I had obtained—by mid October. Although there are minor differences in style and emphasis, the conclusions (to p. 10)

ABOUT THE DISCUSSION BULLETIN

The Discussion Bulletin is affiliated with the Industrial Union Caucus in Education (IUCE). It serves as the financially and politically independent forum of a relatively unknown sector of political thought that places the great divide in the “left,” not between anarchists and Marxists but between capitalism’s statist leftwing of vanguardists and social democrats and the real revolutionaries of our era: the non-market, anti-statist, libertarian socialists. They are organized in small groups of syndicalists, anarcho-communists, libertarian municipalists, world socialists, socialist industrial unionists, council communists, and left communists. The perspective of these groups with their rejection of capitalism’s wage, market, and money system as well as capitalist politics and capitalist unionism constitutes the only real alternative to capitalism in both its market and statist phases.

In the DB the often antagonistic groups that make up this sector can debate and discuss the issues that divide them and gain some understanding of their history and future possibilities. Among the latter might be movement toward at least limited co-operation.

The pages of the DB are open to anyone in this political sector, the only limitation being that submissions be typewritten, single-spaced, and copier ready. We do no editing here. As to content, we assume that submissions will be relevant to the purpose of the DB and will avoid personal attacks.

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STATEMENTS BY REVOLUTIONARY LIBERTARIAN SOCIALIST GROUPS AT THE START OF WORLD WAR III:

September 11 prompted statements by many of the groups and journals in our segment of the political spectrum, the revolutionary collectivists. In general the passages selected from the ten available in mid-October come from the concluding paragraphs where the authors make their point about the capitalist cause of what our rulers choose to call terrorist acts and about the revolutionary solution: the abolition of capitalism and the state.

(From internet website, no date)

The War Comes Home

...The US government and many Americans have made it clear that they believe that further war-making and "retaliation" are the way to prevent more bloodshed. But such actions will only result in the killing of more innocent civilians in other countries, increased hatred for the United States government and armed forces abroad, and, perhaps, other attacks on American civilians in this country and elsewhere. And it is likely that an increased concern for "security" will lead to restrictions on the freedom of Americans, by broadening the power of government to monitor our communications and transactions and control our activities and movements. It is disheartening that so many who are themselves grieving for victims of violence seem to envision more international slaughter and less domestic freedom as the only ways to respond. People need to realize that we will see an end to the ongoing terror only when the massive military establishment in this country is dismantled and those who rule the United States are no longer able to bully the rest of the world as well.

--The Bad Brigade <http://world.std.com/~bbrigade/>

(From Internationalist Perspective leaflet, no date)

The Reality of the "First War of the Twenty-First Century"

...The atrocity perpetrated on September 11, and the atrocities to come in this first war of the twenty-first century, are the product of the profit-system, of capitalism, and will only disappear when that system does too. This is a war that those who grasp the link between the carnage in New York and capitalism must resist, even as we recognize that the terrorists who unleashed it are themselves the barbaric embodiment of the same civilization that has produced the rage and desperation from which it sprang.

--INTERNATIONALIST PERSPECTIVE, Write to: AM, PO Box 40231, Staten Island, NY 10304

(From De Leonist Society of Canada leaflet, 1984)

Terrorism: Can It Be Ended?

There is a idea in this ongoing "battle of ideas" that has been struggling against great odds to make itself known, an idea that
must win out if mankind is to be saved from terrorism and much else that threatens to demoralize and destroy. It is the De Leonist Society's program of Socialist Industrial Unionism, a program of working class political and economic organization for a JUST social order--socialist industrial democracy. The biggest hope for tomorrow is that workers in North America will begin looking into this program today. The biggest blow against terrorism in the world would be the socialist reconstruction of society on this continent.

There is no time to lose!

The De Leonist Society of Canada, PO Box 944, Station F, Toronto, Ontario M4Y 2N9 Canada

(From Workers' Solidarity leaflet, no date)

AGAINST THE MADNESS

...Those who can end terror and war are those who are forced to die in it and produce it, the working class, both here in the U.S. and in the "enemy" countries. Even in the midst of the madness we hear some voices calling for a new peace movement. Building on the recent mobilizations against corporate control, activists serious about blocking further destruction must reach out to, and more importantly, listen to working people. Workers serious about fighting for a society without bosses must not fall prey to the current jingoism, and war drumming. The real war for us must be class war, not military conflict. As body bags begin to pile up, it is also time for workers and anti-militarists to talk with each other, work together in an effort to end the mad rush to possible world destruction.

As workers and peace activists, we must continue to build links across borders and cooperate with, not as some will advocate, agents of local elites and would-be States, but those fighting for liberation from fear, violence and oppression. Working cooperatively, resisting cooperatively, the working class can and will end the cycle of violence and oppression.

For Liberty, For Peace, For Revolution

Workers Solidarity Alliance, 339 Lafayette Street - Room 202 New York, NY 10012 e-mail: wsany@hotmail.com

(From International Bureau for a Revolutionary Party leaflet, September 2001)

U.S.A COALITION DECLARES WAR ON THE WORLD

...The decay of capitalist civilisation has been evident for the best part of a century. The unspeakable horrors of the First and Second World Wars, the organised brutality of concentration and other death camps, the bloody regional war fought with the highest technology at the expense of the working class has an unknown fate. Only the working class can change the system and guarantee it. Down with war! Down with capitalistic barbarism at the expense of the working class!
at the expense of the most impoverished workers, the fire bombing of Dresden, the carpet bombing of Cambodia and, of course, the use of the atomic bombs were all part of imperialist barbarism before these most recent abominations. It is a naive illusion to believe that such a system can bring peace and prosperity to the world.

Only the international working class, once aware of its own interests, is capable of changing the world. We have no interest in supporting either side in this "new war" - if the ruling class has its way our only role will be as victims and cannon-fodder. All the bourgeois factions whether US-led, national liberationist or Islamist are equally against the working class. Only by paralyzing these forces and politically defeating all the irrational ruling class ideologies will we be able to create a world without war, exploitation and terror. Socialism or Barbarism. There is no third road.

Down with Nationalism
Down With Terrorism
Down With Imperialism
For Working Class Struggle Against All Capitalist Wars

<http://space.tin.it/computer/maestefi/Inglese/doc/usa_coalition_declares_war.htm>

* * *

(From the New Unionist [New Union Party], October 2001)

U.S. Population Pays the Price for Rulers’ Actions Abroad

...The immediacy of the suffering of the Palestinian people and other oppressed nationalities will of course make them impatient and angry with the political backwardness of the workers of the U.S., Israel and other imperialist nations, and the temptation will be great to see them as part of the enemy camp. But the fact remains that an international working class movement is the only force capable of overcoming the injustices endemic to the international capitalist system.

Political organization and action, as necessary as they are to change society, are not enough: Alone they only result in exchanging one set of crooks for another. To enact a thorough-going change from the grassroots up, the workers must also organize economically, into an all-inclusive industrial union. It is this workplace-based organization that can give the people direct democratic control over their own labor and the product of their labor, becoming in the process the nation's new form of government.

Industrial organization also gives the people a power base to back up their political will, a power that succeeds where the force of armed violence and terrorism fails.

The hallmark of the workers' movement must be the rejection of violence and terror as weapons of liberation. It is political and industrial organization that will destroy the exploitation and oppression of capitalism. -
Terrorism versus Terrorism

...The solution to the ongoing insanity, we insist, remains the same. There is one world and we exist as one people in need of each other and with the same basic needs. There is far more that unites us than can ever divide us along cultural, nationalistic or religious lines. Together we can create a civilization worth living in, but before that happens we need the conscious cooperation of ordinary people across the world, united in one common cause - to create a world in which each person has free access to the benefits of civilization, a world without borders or frontiers, social classes or leaders and a world in which production is at last freed from the artificial constraints of profit and used for the good of humanity - socialism.

Socialist Standard, 52 Clapham High Street, London SW4 7UN, U.K.

World Capitalism Leads Humanity into a Future of Barbarism

...The workers of the world have no state or country to defend. Against the war cries of our exploiters, against their sordid attempt to distort the genuine drive towards human solidarity into the most despicable nationalist chauvinism, our only interest is to revive the class war against exploitation, and finally to put an end to this so-called "capitalist civilization" that is pushing humanity towards barbarism and the destruction of humanity.

Internationalism, U.S. Section of the International Communist Current, Post Office Box 288, New York, NY 10018-0288

Socialists Condemn Terrorist Attacks

...The roots of terrorism in the modern world will not be found in the mountains of Afghanistan. They are embedded in the soil of a social system that bears terrorism as one of its fruits. Rooting out terrorism, whether perpetrated by a political state armed with sophisticated weapons or by some sect of self-anointed avengers, will take much more than a few bombs tossed in the wrong direction. The root of terrorism in the modern world is capitalism, a system that, "foments civilization, and yet... incites to barbarism," as Daniel De Leon once observed. There is no need to track down terrorism, but the need to root it out is urgent.
The People, PO Box 218, Mountain View, CA 94042

(From Internationalist Notes, 4th Quarter 2001)

World Trade Center Bombing:

Capitallists Prey, Workers Pay - Again

Workers should not be suckered into uniting with our bosses and exploiters either under the flag or religion! We should organize to wage the only struggles, the only war worth fighting, THE CLASS WAR! This is the war of wage workers against their capitalist exploiters. The world's workers should unite for the mass struggle and revolution to overthrow capitalism! We conclude with a good question to ponder: "What evokes greater horror: instantly snuffing out thousands of lives in this country to destroy centers of financial and military might, or slowly snuffing out millions of lives around the world to maintain centers of financial and military might?"

Internationalist Notes, PO Box 57483, Los Angeles, CA 90057

(From International Communist Current Leaflet October 8, 2001)

The Only Answer to Imperialist War: International Class Struggle!

... Humanity is not faced with the alternatives of war and peace. It is faced with the alternative between an insane spiral of imperialist wars and the development of the class war, between the descent into barbarism and the victory of the communist revolution. This was the alternative announced by Lenin and Luxemburg in 1914, and answered by the strikes, mutinies and revolutions which brought an end to the first imperialist world war. After almost a hundred years of capitalist decadence and self-destruction, that alternative stands before us with even sharper clarity today.

Against capitalism, which is responsible for the wars, the poverty, the famines and all the barbarism in the world today, the slogans which have always belonged to the workers' movement have never been more relevant:

WORKERS OF ALL COUNTRIES, UNITE!
THE EMANCIPATION OF THE WORKING CLASS IS THE TASK OF WORKERS THEMSELVES!

Write to: BM Box 869, London WC1N 3XX Website: www.internationalism.org
AGAINT CRUSADE AND JIHAD!
FOR CLASS STRUGGLE!

The suicide attacks on September 11 against the World Trade Center towers and the Pentagon have led to stupefaction, horror, reprobation, but also created, among some, a satisfaction mixed with joy before the spectacle of the first global power "finally paying in blood", for its imperialist policy, especially in the Middle East and in Central Asia.

An attack against workers and class struggle

"Not laughing, nor crying, but understanding": it is important not to give way to the effects of terror but to go on thinking far outside the nationalist and religious schemes which the two camps which are fighting have prepared for us.

First, let us remind all those who enjoyed the "American humiliation" a little bit too quickly that the authors of the attacks have objectively perpetrated a dramatic onslaught against the proletariat.

In fact, the World Trade Center towers were nothing other than giant vertical factories where not only thousands of white-collar employees were exploited but also thousands of cleaning, maintenance, and catering workers. In those two huge "rabbit warrens" there were also a large number of immigrants without ID cards of various nationalities (Albanians, Colombians, Bangladeshis, etc.) and religious, including many Muslims. Those legally not existing during their lives are today equally non-existent in their deaths.

A gift from heaven for Mr Bush and the American economy

The authors of the attack, by striking the civilian population in an indiscriminate way, far from weakening the American "Great Satan" have allowed an unprecedented National Unity to be created in the country, at the very moment where the new American administration faced a deep economic crisis and was preparing to impose a tremendous increase in military spending.

In the name of patriotism, National Unity has been able, up to now, to anaesthetise every class reaction from the American workers confronted with hundreds thousands of redundancies and to create the necessary basis for a national consensus for bigger military deployment in the Middle East and Central Asia.

Today, according to the polls, more than 80% of Americans are for war, even with American losses. National Unity also justifies the deployment of a budgetary diversion (up to $135 billion, i.e. 1.3% of GDP of the USA) to support the American economy, steeped in one of the most severe post-war cyclical crises of capital accumulation.

Western Hypocrisy

Of course, the calls for a crusade, to defend "the Free World, defender of human rights" are...
absolutely disgusting. Islamist groups, in this case those who might belong to the Bin Laden constellation, who today are depicted as mankind's enemies, have benefited for years from American largesse via Pakistan and Saudia Arabia when they fought against the USSR in Afghanistan.

Moreover, the alliance between the USA and political islam is a very old story whose origins go back to agreements reached between ultra-reactionary and racist wahhabite monarchy from Saudia Arabia and American oil companies. This alliance, very useful in the fight against pro-Soviet Arab regimes and for keeping a vigilant watch over the area's oil fields, has never been recinded and was sealed with blood during the war with Iraq in 1991 and the dreadful embargo which kills thousands of Iraqi people every day.

For all these years, good western souls have found nothing to say against that and the talibans of the Persian gulf and their oppressive regime were never denounced. The American state cannot then plead not guilty. The world's foremost military and economic power, it has played the part of the top sheriff only for its own interests and without paying any attention to the needs of local populations, mainly Palestinian and Kurdish, who have paid for many decades the price of a regional order which has to guarantee capital accumulation for ever on a world scale.

### Political Islam: an absolute dead end for oppressed people

This situation contributed to the radicalization of certain parts of the Middle East and Central Asian populations and took the form of a dissent more and more borrowing its weapons from Islamic ideology. The story is that this utterly backwards ideology - expression of the failure of the ruling classes of these areas to create the economic and social conditions for modern capitalism - far from supplying a well-fitted frame to the justified revolt of the oppressed people, traps them in an outdated fight, whose true goal is to subordinate the more and more oppressed "faithful" to the whole of the "muslim" ruling classes.

What is there in common between the young unemployed in Gaza or Algiers and the billionaires from the Gulf or ruling classes from the area's states, except religious belonging? Obviously nothing. Islam is used here only to create a fake community between "muslim" oppressors and oppressed which the area's proletariat never cease to pay for.

Political Islamism, as a substitute for the class struggle, has also been chosen by minority fractions of immigrant youth in Europe (France and Belgium particulary). Here, resentment has been fed by mass unemployment and racism and has been made use of by some religious groups.

The real revolt has then been trapped in the reactionary ghetto of Islam, of the umma (Faithfull community), which has contributed, along with the surrounding racism, to isolate these rebellious people from working class people of European extraction. In the end this plays the game of all those, from governments to bosses, who have an interest in dividing exploited people.

### During war, redundancies continue

Today then it is necessary to refuse recruitment wherever it comes from. Should it be done in the name of Democracy and supposed western supremacy or the community of the Faithfull.

Workers have absolutely nothing to gain from that. We must reject all calls for National Unity and economic patriotism at the same time as the bosses lay us off with all our might ; at the
same time as governments reinforce their repressive machine (Vigipirate in France, European Warrant for arrest). These devices put in place by governments, from the "pluralist left" in France to the extreme right in Italy, are nothing but tools of social control, threatening and repressing the proletariat as a whole and its immigrant and/or without papers fraction in particular.

Only the fight for the unity of proletarians, whatever their origins, can stop anti-proletarian terror, whether it is disguised as a crusade or as a jihad. Political Islam and Democracy are two banners which aim to recruit workers. We must reject them without any hesitation.

Some internationalist communists


For all contacts write without mentioning any name to: BP1666, Centre Monnaie, Bruxelles, Belgium

(from p. 2)

are remarkably consistent in the point they make: That the cause of the private terrorism of those responsible for bombing the World Trade Center and the Pentagon is the same as the state terrorism that is currently being visited on Afghanistan – the capitalist system.

The single exception to the decision to print only the conclusions is the statement of a group who sign themselves "Some Internationalist Communists." Published here in full, their leaflet, aimed at Islamic workers in Europe (France and Belgium), differs from the other messages, which were intended for Western workers. Much of it seeks to explain the relationship between Muslim ruling classes and those of the oil-thirsty West.

The two articles by Karl Carlyle present a thoughtful explanation of the economic aspects of the Muslim religion and the role they play in determining fundamentalist political strategy. *Left-Wing Communism and Infantile Disorder* was originally the title of Lenin's polemic against the revolutionary socialists who resisted the hegemony of the Bolsheviks in the new international that was in the process of being formed. Although this essay implies that the only targets of Lenin's ire were the Bordigists in the Italian socialist party and the German and Dutch critics of the official communist line, Lenin also took aim at the Socialist Labour Party of Great Britain and the American SLP and IWW. Russian policy at that time required the establishment of new mass communist parties that would have the numbers and thus political clout in their respective countries. The anti-reformism and anti-trades unionism of the Italians, Dutch, and German left communists as well as the British and American SLP and the IWW would have alienated the reformist wing of the old socialist parties which Lenin and the Bolshevik strategists counted on to furnish the numbers in the new communist parties. Herman Gorter's reply to Lenin, mentioned in the essay was translated by the DeLeonist wing of the IWW, the Workers International Industrial Union (WIU) and published in their newspaper, *The Industrial Union News* in 1921. This essay was sent to me (to p. 14)
September 22, 2001
From: "Karl Carlyle" <dagda@eircom.net>
Subject: Muslim Fundamentalism

Many Muslims have been declanag that all Muslims must obey the declaration of a holy war by the Taliban mullahs. This view that emanates from many Muslims flies in the face of the facts. Muslims have over the years violently attacked each other. In Afghanistan the Northern Alliance consists of Muslims. Yet they have been engaged in combat with the Muslim Taliban. The current Musharrif military dictatorship in Pakistan violently ousted a democratically elected leader of Pakistan. Saddam Hussein, leader of Iraq, has imprisoned and killed many a Muslim. The Iranian theocracy has been responsible for the deaths of many a Muslim. The last King of Jordan engaged in a massive attack on the Black September in Jordan. The Syrian regime have been responsible for similar killings. The degree to which Muslims internationally will obey the declaration of a holy war is questionable. Fundamentalism is not as strong as it is often portrayed. It can suit both sides to engage in hyperbole to promote the particular political interests that each respectively represent. The Taliban is a reactionary regime that is bitterly hostile to communism. The entire programme of the Taliban is the active hindering of the economic and political development of Afghanistan.

In any anti imperialist war movement we cannot take either the side of the US led imperialist coalition nor the Muslim organisations or states that may be subject to attack from this reactionary coalition. We must mount a popular attack on this prospective imperialist war on the basis of an attack on the capitalist state. Such a movement must challenge the very existence of capitalism and the forces that support it such as the Taliban, the Iranian state and, above all, the imperialist states. Indeed Muslim fundamentalism is capitalism's saviour. Its ideological and political function is designed to prevent the masses from turning towards communism. In Iran where a revolutionary situation emerged the Muslim movement led by Khomeini was the form assumed by the counter revolution. It prevented the Iranian working class from deepening the revolutionary process and thereby challenging capitalism. The Afghanistin mujahideen was sustained by imperialism through the CIA and the Pakistani state in the struggle to preserve and develop the class interests of imperialist capital.

Islamic fundamentalism is not as strong as it has been presented even by its apparent enemies. There has been much hyperbole in this regard. If it posed a threat to the stability and development of capitalism it would not be compelled to resort to terrorism. The current condition of the Palestinians is irrefutable evidence as to the weakness of Islamic fundamentalism. Islamic fundamentalism in the Middle East has shown its complete political bankruptcy. Instead of the situation improving as a result of its growing influence the situation has been deteriorating. This is because its strategy is incapable of solving the problems of the Palestinian masses. Its sectarianism has generated division and further polarised Jew from Arab. The problems of the Palestinian masses can be only solved when Jewish and Arab worker joint hands against Middle East capitalism and its states—the Israeli, Jordanian, Syrian and Egyptian states. There is no essential difference between the Israeli and Jordanian state. All such states ultimately exist to perpetuate the class interests of imperialist capital. All must be abolished. An
attack on the Middle East capitalist states is an attack on imperialist capitalism.

Muslim fundamentalism, and Islam in general, is a sectarian religious ideology and even political philosophy and practice. It essentially promotes the class interests of imperialism. Muslim and Christian fundamentalism are particularly sectarian. Muslim fundamentalism has been effectively promoting polarization between Eastern and Western workers at a time when the globalisation of the working class into a unified political reality is an urgent necessity. While attacking racism it sustains racism a multiplicity of ways because it is inherently racist.

The conflict now developing between US state and Islam fundamentalism has its source in the needs of US imperialism. US imperialism to survive must relentlessly extend and deepen its influence economically, politically and ideologically. The developing global economic crisis is testimony to this. Consequently it must engage in specific geopolitical actions in pursuance of this aim. It cannot tolerate relatively autonomous, albeit contradictory, forces that hinder it in its desperate effort to extend and deepen its influence. Muslim fundamentalism is, largely speaking, one such force. Its destabilising character in the current situation outweighs its benefits for imperialism. It is a destabilising force in Asia and the Middle East. Regimes that American imperialism has needed are threatened with destabilisation and even collapse by Muslim fundamentalism. Iran is a classic example where Muslim fundamentalism led to the collapse of an actively pro-imperialist regime that was the lynchpin of US geo-political regional strategy.

However imperialism is a contradictory force which means that it engages in policies and actions that lead to its own undermining. Although the function of Muslim fundamentalism, as a counter revolutionary force, is the prevention of the development of the working class into a communist working class it is these unique characteristics that, in the immediate sense, obstruct imperialist expansion. Consequently imperialism's relationship to fundamentalism has a contradictory character. It uses it in pursuance of its class interests while simultaneously undermining it. In the same way Muslim fundamentalism is contradictory. While actively sustained by imperialism it at the same time attacks imperialism its very source of nourishment. Bin Laden personifies this contradictory relation. While sustained by the CIA in his struggle in Afghanistan he turns his guns on it.

In many ways Muslim fundamentalism is similar to Stalinism. Stalinism is a counter revolutionary force that prevents the existence of communism. Consequently it serves imperialism's interests. Yet to maintain its unique role as a counter revolutionary form it has acted, at the same time, in a way that obstructs imperialism. This generates conflict between the two forces. The Cold War was just such a conflict.

Muslim fundamentalism is a religious and political ideology and practice that is petty bourgeois. It serves the class interests of small capital. It is this that makes it reactionary. However the very fact that it serves the interests of small capital in the context of increasing capitalist globalisation is what lends it its acutely anachronistic image in the eyes of the Western working class. However it is its specific class character that gives it its appeal to the masses that exist outside of western capitalist society. Its representation of the interests of small capital means that it expresses a hostility to big capital. And what bigger capital than US imperialist capital—the Great Satan.

It is this hostility by small capital against big capital that gives its anti-imperialist appearance. It is this anti-imperialist appearance that lends its anti-oppressive appearance. Consequently the Muslim masses identify with it. Despite its anti-imperialist appearance it ultimately serves imperialism class interests—essentially it cannot exist independently of global capitalism. Muslim fundamentalism is a politics of the image. This is why it presents itself as quixotic pageantry—religious rhetoric, images, long beards etc. This form of politics assumes a religious form because it is a politics of appearance. And what more suitable a form for such a contradictory politics than its disguising itself in religious—the class image system.
Given the political character of Muslim fundamentalism there is no possibility that it can successfully resist the enormous power of capitalist imperialism bearing down on it in the form of this Washington led coalition of "Infinite Justice". Only the modern working class can effectively challenge the might of the imperialist bourgeoisie.

Note: Forgive the unpolished character of this posting since it was written in a hasty manner because of the pressure of time and the fast pace of developments.

Regards
Karl Carlile(Global Communist Group)

Subject: Islamic capitalism

Communism List:
http://homepage.eircom.net/~kampf/

Islamic fundamentalism's reactionary character does not necessarily mean that it is a force with a programme that makes no sense. It may be that Islamic fundamentalism as much as imperialism sees the strategic and economic global importance of Central Asia and the Middle East. This may be partly why these two regions are central to its actions. As with imperialism it too is seeking to maximise its influence and even control of these regions. Control of these regions will place Islamic fundamentalism in a vastly greater strategic position in its struggle with imperialism. Its commercial power will correspondingly increase because of its being the source of rich oil reserves. Its colonisation of these strategic regions means that it is well positioned to further deepen and broaden its ideological and geopolitical influence.

To artificially collapse Islamic fundamentalism into a naive extremist medieval politics that can never really get anywhere is a little naive. Islamic fundamentalism may be perceived by the Western masses as extremist and even insane. To limit perception to the level of appearances is to miss the real point. It is to ignore the fact that Islamic fundamentalism is anti-imperialist. It is anti-imperialist in the sense that it struggles to establish an economic and political space in which Islamic indigenous capital can develop—a pan Islamic state from the Caucasus to Arabia. Because of the strength of contemporary imperialism it is no longer possible to achieve an independent capitalist class within national boundaries Islamic fundamentalism struggle to promote a capitalist class that exists independently of imperialism from a regional platform as opposed to the context of the nation state. Islamic fundamentalism is not anti-capitalist. But it is anti-imperialist. It represents the class interests of non-imperialist capitalism. Islamic capitalism exists in an atrophied form. Being capital it strives to enlarge itself and break free from the stranglehold of imperialist capital. Given that US imperialism is the leading imperialist power it concentrates its fire on it. Its strategy is designed to split the other imperialist powers from US imperialisms as a means of weakening imperialism and thereby defeating it. The Islamic bourgeoisie struggles to emancipate itself from imperialism by setting up the regional political conditions that facilitates its efforts to establish its independence. Because imperialism is so globally powerful and Islamic capitalism so relatively powerless it must resort to the most radical means to establish conditions that facilitate its independent economic development vis a vis imperialist capitalism. Because of the relative strength of the Islamic working class it is forced to cloak its bourgeois aims in the form of religion. This is the basis for the emergence of Islamic fundamentalism as a prominent force in Asia.

Because of the strength of imperialism and the weakness of Islamic capitalism it is prepared to engage in
extreme actions such as suicide bombings of one sort or another culminating in the attack on the World Trade Centre. Because of the potential strength of the Asian working class and the relative weakness of the Islamic bourgeoisie it cannot seriously mobilise the working class without the danger of its own property interests being challenged. Consequently it is prepared to engage in extreme terror to promote its class interests while the working class is reduced to the role of passive audience that watches the stage show unfolding. Islamic capitalism ideologically assumes the form of Islamic fundamentalism. Islamic capitalism constitutes a brand of Islam so restrictive as to ensure that the threat from imperialist capital and the organised working class is ideologically precluded while its very fundamentalist nature is so strong as to ensure that the cohesive unity of its supporters is maintained in the face of overwhelming odds. It is also a religious ideology that transcends, by its nature, the bounds of the colonialist artificially imposed nation states to proclaim a pan-Islamic state. Islamic fundamentalism's anti-imperialism is not congenitally anti-imperialist. Only the working class can display an authentic anti-imperialism. Consequently Islamic fundamentalism while ostensibly anti-imperialist is ultimately pro-imperialist. This is its problem – its contradiction.

Regards Karl Carlile (Communist Global Group)
Be free to join our communism mailing list
at homepage.eircom.net/~kampl/

from p. 10)
so long ago that I am not sure of the source. The names Melmoth/Hayes don’t ring a bell with me. But I suspect from the typeface of the xerox copies I have that it is from an early issue of the International Review, the International Communist Current’s English language theoretical journal.

Council Communism is the name taken by the movement that developed from the Dutch-German wing of the “left-wing communism” that Lenin fulminated against in the pamphlet described above. Like all the rest of the left-wing revolutionary groups that opposed the Russian-dominated Communist parties, it exists in much reduced circumstances, both here and in Europe. The essay apparently was written around 1995, and I suspect I got it from the internet, although I’m not sure.

Arnold Petersen, the author of the letter to Lenin, was national secretary of the Socialist Labor Party from January 1914, a few months before De Leon’s death, until 1969—a 55-year tenure. Written a year after the revolution, it demonstrates the problems revolutionary socialists had in obtaining information about the Bolsheviks and vice versa. This copy of the letter came from the July 1984 issue of the De Leonist Society Bulletin. Included in that issue was a detailed comment on it by Alan Sanderson. Readers interested in Sanderson’s essay can obtain a copy from me for the asking.

Both of the next two letters relate to our perennial debate on labor time vouchers. Alan Kerr raises another argument that seems to support some method of rationing in a post revolutionary society—that of capitalist sabotage of production. The De Leonist Society of Canada re-examines The Gotha Program and finds what seems to me to be an argument for the dictatorship of the proletariat. And I comment on both letters.

Next Martin Glaberman protests my treatment of him in DBs 108 and 109, the result of what he sees as my ignorance of Trotskyism, my lack of interest in the thinking of CLR James, and my habit of basing conclusions on insufficient evidence. I comment on his letter. As usual we end with some notes, announcements, and short reviews.

(to p. 19)
LEFT-WING COMMUNISM
AN INFANTILE DISORDER

Sixty years ago in May 1920, delegates attending the second congress of the Third International were each presented with a copy of a pamphlet written by Lenin entitled "Left-Wing" Communism An Infantile Disorder. In this pamphlet Lenin subjected those organisations labeled "left communists" to a series of withering criticisms and arguments, which are today common currency for the leftists who consider Lenin's text a classic expose of Marxist 'tactics' and 'dialectics.'

Who were they, these left communists, these "ultra-lefts", so heavily censured by Lenin?

THE LEFT COMMUNIST MOVEMENT

Sixty years ago the left communist current of the marxist revolutionary movement represented the highest expression of the great wave of class struggle which shook the world at the end of the war. Against Lenin's original distortions and the outright lies of today's leftists, we have to point out:

- that the left communists were a marxist, not anarcho-syndicalist tendency;
- that they were not new, immature workers just entering the communist movement but a strong tendency which had developed within the mass social democratic parties before the war, to oppose their degeneration and defend revolutionary principles;
- that they categorically rejected socialchauvinism with the outbreak of war in 1914 and were the closest to Lenin's positions at the conferences of Zimmerwald and Kienthal, and took up revolutionary defeatism;
- that they were among the first to rally to the new international in 1919 and took up the practical defense of the Russian revolution by calling for revolutions in Western Europe and elsewhere.

It was precisely because the left communists defended the original principles of Bolshevism and of the Third International that they were led to take the course of opposition to their compromise and betrayal after 1920. Lenin's pamphlet itself was a sign of this early degeneration.

And because the left communists were marxists, they were able to appreciate the implications of the new epoch of capitalist decadence ushered in by the war, and in particular the historic importance of the soviets or workers' councils which played such a central role in the October revolution.

The strongest grouping of the left communist current at this time (and the recipient of most of Lenin's gall) was the KAPD (the Communist Workers' Party of Germany). The KAPD had been formed in early 1920 by the majority expelled from the KPD in 1919 for refusing to carry out parliamentary activity. The German left communists understood correctly that there could be no further useful function for such bourgeois institutions, which had become the main rallying point for the counter-revolutionary forces and could only act to destroy the workers' own organs of power, the workers' councils. In this way, the left communists defended the real spirit of the Third International itself which had proclaimed the entry of capitalism into "an era of wars and revolution", and had denounced bourgeois democracy as completely obsolete. Working class fighters like the KAPD understood the need to work for the formation of workers' councils as the historically-discovered form of the dictatorship of the proletariat, against all lies and mystifications about the parliamentary 'road' or 'tribune.'
In Italy, left communism was represented by the Abstentionist Communist Fraction of the Italian Socialist Party, around Amadeo Bordiga, which defended an intransigent marxist line against the confusionist and social democratic swamp of the PSI. It was the left-wing 'Bordigist' grouping which formed the original nucleus and leadership of the Italian Communist Party (PCI) in 1921.

In Britain it was the Workers’ Dreadnought group of Sylvia Pankhurst which fought for communist clarity, most particularly on the vital question of parliamentarism and the attitude of communists to the reactionary, bourgeois Labour Party. Also mentioned, and to some extent lumped together with the left communists, in Lenin’s pamphlet, were the shop stewards around people like William Gallacher on the Clyde. The first shop steward movement in Britain was an attempt to move the working class away from reformism and the trade unions through ‘rank and file’ unionism tinged with pre-war syndicalism. Alas, because of the inability of the stewards’ movement to become political, especially on the vital questions of breaking with the union machine and the role of a working class party, it was doomed to incoherence, eventual impotence and integration into the official union apparatus through the British CP. Individuals like Gallacher did take up left-wing, anti-parliamentary positions but tended to be inconsistent owing to their syndicalist hang-ups. Gallacher himself was soon ‘converted’ by Lenin and later became Westminster’s pet ‘Communist’ MP, combining parliamentary careerism with hackwork in the Stalinist CP.

In his pamphlet, Lenin liberally applies the ‘leftist’ tarbrush to all and sundry, from the British stewards to the American IWW, thus establishing the confusion that the left communists were syndicalists or anarchists.

THE SECOND CONGRESS OF THE THIRD INTERNATIONAL

The left communists were not, as the leftists like to think, struck dumb by Lenin’s pamphlet, later to crawl away under the spell of his rhetoric and logic. They defended their positions at the second and third congresses of the Comintern before they were finally expelled. At the time of its publication, Anton Pannekoek, one of Lenin’s favourite targets in his polemic, wrote that:

“Its significance lies not in its content, but in the person of the author, for the arguments are scarcely original and have for the most part already been used by others. What is new is that it is Lenin who is now taking them up.” (Afterword to ‘World Revolution and Communist Tactics’, in Pannekoek and Gorter’s Marxism, Pluto Press, p.143)

It was no accident that Lenin’s polemic against the left communists was made at the time of the second congress of the Comintern. For three years the Russian revolution had remained isolated. With Russia convulsed by civil war and beset by the dire economic difficulties of the ‘war communist’ period. In an effort to alleviate these difficulties, the Bolshevik state had been forced to seek compromise with the outside world, in particular through the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. The enormous pressures of running a state economy began to make inroads into the previous clarity of the Bolshevik party, and brought old confusions to the surface. Caught up in the apparatus of the ‘workers state’, the Bolsheviks more and more began to compromise their role as ‘guiding light’ of the world revolution. Bolshevik predominance in the Comintern became a negative influence as they became entangled in the bolstering of the Russian bastion. This was the process analysed and attacked by the left communists in the interests of the world revolution.
After the fiasco of the 'March Action' in Germany in 1921 the Bolshevik state (and the world revolutionary movement as a whole) started to resign itself to a period of isolation. This isolation can be seen as the underlying influence in the Comintern's reversal of attitude towards the left flank of social democracy, i.e. to the German 'Independents' - the USPD - and the centrists of the PSI led by Serrati with the right-wing of the PSI led by Turati lurking in the wings. This reversal was already clear by the second Congress. The application of the PSI for membership in the Comintern and their ready acceptance of the famous 'twenty one conditions' was attacked by the left communists because they understood, that you can't teach an old dog new tricks; and these social democratic dog bit very fiercely at the first opportune moment! The lefts pointed to the dangers of courting the deceptively alluring "mass parties" like the PSI and denounced this policy of the Comintern leadership as a betrayal of its original opposition to social democracy. The German, Dutch and other left communists considered that the best 'practical' way forward would be to develop to the utmost the revolutionary consciousness of the proletarian, in particular with regard to parliament and the unions. This rejection of a compromise with social democracy was to lead eventually to the exclusion of the left communists from the International, while the right-wing became more and more the dominant force.

Against all this opportunism, Gorter and the KAPD affirmed that social democracy everywhere was exclusively bourgeois: "Instead of applying the same tested tactic in all countries, thereby making the Third International internally strong, we are now once again turning to opportunism just an Social Democracy once did. Now everything must be included: the trade unions, [German] Independents, the French centre, parts of the [British] Labour Party. In order to preserve Marxist appearances conditions must be set which must be signed (!!) and Kautsky, Hilferding, Thomau, etc., are excluded. The masses, the middle-class masses, are however, included and pulled in by every means. "The best revolutionaries such as the KAPD are excluded!" (quoted from Herman Gorter's 'Reply to Lenin', extract published in International Communist In-the Era of Lenin. (Doubleday/Anchor. p.219)

This critique of the Comintern's policy was based on the left communists' experience with social democracy in Western Europe, and in particular with parliamentary activity and the trade unions.

THE POSITIONS OF THE LEFT COMMUNISTS

In his Reply to Comrade Lenin, Herman Gorter demonstrated that Lenin and the Bolshevik Party had not fully appreciated the class-nature of social democracy and the trade unions. This was especially true for the unions which the KAPD, confronted with some of the strongest in the world, was well placed to understand. It was not as Bolshevik practice implied, just a matter of bad leaders:

"By their nature the unions are not good weapons for the revolution in Western Europe, even if they had not become instruments of capitalism, even if they were not in the hands of traitors, and even if they were in the hands of any leaders you might care to use; who were not, not, by their nature, bound to turn their members into slaves and passive instruments, the unions would still be just an useless."

Here Gorter had discerned something which in entirely missing in Lenin's analysis. For Lenin, and later the Comintern, it was really a matter of providing the correct revolutionary leadership to workers inside the existing trade unions. For the German Left, the unions could not be turned into instruments for the overthrow of capitalism since they had been integrated into the machinery of the state, alongside the social democratic parties. The unions, like the social democratic parties, had to be destroyed.
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This point Garter and the KAPD constantly stressed. Lenin—and the Comintern leadership, in the right-turn towards 'mass' parties and 'mass' trade unions which would give maximum but passive support to the Russian state never understood the significance of the anti-union movement in the working class, which was strong in Germany and led to the emergence of large workers' organizations explicitly anti-union and for the dictatorship of the proletariat. The existence of such organisations and the AAUD (General Workers' Union of Germany) was a strong refutation of Lenin's sophistry on this question.

In attempting to relate to the lessons of the class struggle, Gorter and the KAPD follow in the tradition of Rosa Luxemburg who in her Mass Strike pamphlet could discern the growing historical changes within the movement: the mass character of the workers' struggles, their growing political significance, and the inadequacy of the old kinds of organisation. The KAPD took up this analysis in the new conditions of capitalist decadence, after social democracy had definitively betrayed the working class. Inevitably their work is pitted with weaknesses, but they had grasped the basic truths. They did not throw out the role of the party, as Lenin maintained. In fact they were for the tightest discipline and centralism within the party. The role of the party however is seen in a new light with the change in period and especially with the emergence of the soviet which for the KAPD performed the revolutionary function of destroying the capitalist state and exercising proletarian power, providing the direction for the mass of humanity towards communism. Against accusations of anarcho-syndicalism, Gorter replied: "When you say that there should be an iron discipline and absolute military centralisation in the Communist Party, this is not only wrong because we also want iron discipline and strong centralisation, but because this issue means to us something different from what it means to you." (Reply to Lenin)

The role of the party, as the KAPD stated in 19121, was to group together the "most conscious and prepared proletarian fighters": "The communist party must have a thoroughly worked out programmatic basis and must be organized and disciplined in its entirety from below, as a unified will. It must be the head and weapon of the revolution... The main task of the communist party...is...to be the one clear and unflinching compass towards communism. (It) must show the masses the way in all situations, not only in words, but also in deeds. In all the issues of the political struggle before the seizure of power, it must bring out in the clearest way, the difference between reforms and revolution, must brand every deviation to reformism as a betrayal of the revolution..." (Theses on the Party)

For the KAPD, the Comintern's drift towards compromise with social democracy at the second congress, was precisely such a "deviation to reformism" and a "betrayal of the revolution". For the Bolsheviks and the Comintern leadership the admittance of the left social democrats, the Kautskyites and all the rest of them, was merely another tactic, a move to establish an influence in those mass organisations which still retained a presence in the working class. This was a capitulation to ambiguity—the idea that, because of their membership, the social democratic parties and the old trade unions were still working class. For the Comintern, it all became a matter of having the right leaders to make them revolutionary again. The official tactics of 'revolutionary' parliamentarism and trade union work reflected more and more this ambiguity, hardening into an objectively counter-revolutionary practice, a veritable Frankenstein's monster providing a base of strength for Stalinism later on.

In the last fifty years the working class has paid dearly for these ambiguities and early compromises of the Third International. The price has been years of compounded illusions in the working class nature of the trade unions and the social democratic parties. Lenin's original polemic against the left communists is now used by the leftists - the Trotskyists, Maoists, etc - to justify their own deeply-
entrenched interests in the defence of such reactionary bodies, and to attack revolutionaries who support and strengthen the workers' own growing understanding of the need to struggle against the left-wing of capital.

The positions of the left communists, for all their confusions and half-finished character, have today become vital foundations in the defence of class positions. For us, those 'infantile' organisations have provided a programmatic point of departure for the next revolutionary wave. It is in no accident that their work has been buried or deliberately distorted. But today, their fight is our fight. Their lessons our lessons, only doubly enriched today. The left communists may have disappeared in the bourgeois counterrevolution, but their work is not forgotten, and will be taken up by new generations of workers who will raise the battle-cry of the KAPD: "The revolution is proletarian or it is nothing!"

Melmoth/Hayes

(from p. 14)

Finances

I don't think I'm up to relating the financial health of the Discussion Bulletin to international terrorism. Suffice it to say that we did not hold our own financially during September and October. One more thing in this connection. Until further notice, please do not mail non-U.S. currency to the DB. The local bank has been swallowed up by a mega-bank headquartered in Cleveland and now charges $20 for each transaction involving foreign currency.

Contributions: Tony Laffan $5; Joe Tupper $20 (for the abolition of capitalism); Anthony $5; Jack Rosenquist $1; Mighty Slow Walkin' $3; T. Gelsthorpe $10; Adam Buick $9.01; Chris Fanta $2; Harry Slitten $12; Tony Wong $14; Fred Whisler $9. Total $90.01. Thank you, comrades.

BALANCE August 26, 2001 $211.25

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BALANCE October 25, 2001 $153.50

Fraternally submitted,
Frank Girard
Reprinted from RECONSTRUCTION #4 (Australia)

Asked to characterise the significance of the October Revolution, John Maynard Keynes - always one of capital's most astute thinkers - once suggested that 1917 heralded the victory of "the Party of Catastrophe." For many of the revolutionaries who helped to establish the international communist movement, however, the simple, unambiguous demand for 'All Power to the Soviets' had seemed to encapsulate a new class politics finally able to surpass the disasters of war and betrayal. One of them, the poet Hermann Gorter, greeted Lenin at the time as 'the foremost vanguard fighter of the international proletarian', and the soviets themselves in the following terms:

"The working class of the world has found in these Workers' Councils its organisation and its centralisation, its form and its expression, for the revolution and for the Socialist society (Quoted in Shipway 1987: 105).

For most people on the far left, Gorter and his colleague Anton Pannekoek are remembered - if they are known at all - as two of the lefts castigated in Lenin's "Left-Wing" Communism, An Infantile Disorder. In 1917, however, both were prominent figures within the international revolutionary movement. To their mind, the participation of the social democratic parties and unions in the First World War demonstrated not only the moral turpitude of the Second International's leadership, but the very bankruptcy of forms of organisation which shifted 'the center of gravity... from the masses to the leaders!' (Gorter). Against the craft unions of old, they counterposed factory committees and soviets; against the party-form of social democracy, they championed a 'new type' of political vanguard dedicated exclusively to the development of workers' self-organisation.

Within much of Western Europe - and Germany above all - such perspectives found a wide resonance between 1917 and 1923. Expelled in late 1919 from the Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands (Spartakusz) for their rejection of parliamentarianism and the old trade unions, the German 'left' communists formed a new party, the KAPD, which briefly overshadowed its 'official' rival in militancy and influence. Through their network of affiliated workplace organisations, the AAUD, the 'Lefts!' for a time acquired an important presence within the German working class, particularly in the strategic regions of the Ruhr and Bremen. During the attempted rightist Kapp Putsch of early 1920, their activists played a leading role in the Red Armies which briefly dominated the Ruhr.

Factional divisions, ongoing polemics with the majority of the Bolshevik leadership, and renewed competition at home from a communist party now fused with the left social democrats, all combined to weaken the 'Lefts' standing in the class after 1921. Perhaps the most serious of the KAPD's internal differences concerned the nature of the party. One wing, around Otto Ruhle, held that since the Revolution is not a Party Matter' - the party-form being inherently bourgeois - the KAPD should dissolve itself into the new workplace organisations, which would instead be the proper vehicles of proletarian dictatorship. Against them, the majority expounded a theory of the offensive, wherein the cadre party ('hard as steel, clear as glass') sought to lead the proletariat by example - with less than happy results, as the disastrous March Action of early 1921 made clear.

By the early twenties, when it became clear that the Soviets were such in name only, and the Comintern
subordinate to Russian foreign policy, the left communists finally broke with the Bolsheviks. Within Europe, the relative stabilisation of class conflict after 1923 brought with it the loss of the tendency's remaining audience. Turned in upon themselves, the remaining left communists began slowly to reassess their political perspectives. Developing one of the first theories of state capitalism, they came to see the Bolshevik regime as the product of 'the great bourgeois revolutions of Europe'. Like Ruhle, many also began to question the appropriateness of the party-form for communist politics, arguing instead that, while groups of revolutionaries should do all they could 'to foster self-initiative and self-action' in the class, spontaneous actions of dissatisfied masses will, in the process of their rebellion, create their own organisations, and that these organisations, arising out of the social conditions, alone can end the present social arrangement (Mattick 1978: 85, 84).

During the thirties, a number of small but lively journals provided a forum for debate and discussion amongst the 'council' communists, as such 'Lefts' now called themselves. Perhaps the best-known of these was Paul Mattick's International Council Correspondence (later Living Marxism), to which Ruhle, Pannekoek and Karl Korsch all contributed. While the theoretical work and political analysis advanced in these journals was often of a high standard, the council communists' isolation continued into the following decade; if anything, the climate of the Cold War would be even more inhospitable for those who saw the rival blocs as simply different forms of capitalist imperialism.

Like many other tendencies of the old communist movement, council communism would be 'rediscovered' by the radical politics of the sixties and seventies. Whilst never attracting the sorts of numbers who flocked to the Leninist groups, the current nonetheless exerted a significant influence upon the outlook of the post-1968 libertarian left. Even here, however, its reach was largely indirect, via other groupings and thinkers — the situationists, Socialisme ou Barbarie, the Johnson-Forest Tendency — whose earlier break with Leninism had brought them into contact with the surviving council communists during the fifties. In some cases the accidents of family history also played their part: Noam Chomsky, for example, would have his first encounter with radical politics courtesy of a council communist uncle in New York.

In many cases, this libertarian reinterpretation of council communism has taken the form of 'councilism', an ideology which celebrates the direct democracy of the councils whilst reducing the struggle for a classless society to the project of workers' self-management of production (see, for example, many of the arguments propounded in the British journal Solidarity during the seventies). Against this, a new generation of ultra-left thinkers has argued that "Socialism is not the management, however 'democratic' it may be, of capital, but its complete destruction!" (Barrot and Martin 1974: 105).

Of course, there is also much to criticise about the politics of the original council communists themselves, and considerable debate to be had as to the degree to which such views are of relevance today. Certainly one of the damaging (if unintended) consequences of their efforts to defend a vision of working class autonomy from both capital and all self-proclaimed saviours has been an understanding of class composition that remains frozen in time. This deficiency has left some of their modern day descendants poorly equipped to deal with new working class demands and behaviours, and the questions of race and gender with which these are often entwined — although on this score, at least, they are hardly alone on the left. At the same time, given the parlous state of the labour movement, the council communists' insistence upon workers' self-organisation as the heart of class politics has lost none of its pertinence. Meanwhile, revolutionary workers' councils have continued to appear in many moments of intense social conflict over the past seventy years: from Hungary to Chile, from Poland to Iran. The most
recent instance was just four years ago, during the 1991 rebellion in Kurdistan; it will not be the last.

Further Reading:

(most of these references can probably still be found in university or public libraries)


An aggressive attempt to rethink the left communist tradition. In the process, council communism is criticised for seeing capitalism less as a social relation and more as a management system.


A sometimes difficult but nevertheless comprehensive account of the council communists' debates over crisis theory, the nature of restructuring, and state capitalism during the thirties.


A wide-ranging collection of (often condensed) pieces from Pannekoek's pen, wrapped in an almost hagiographical chronicle of his life.


This biography is a critical yet not unsympathetic account of Pannekoek's politics, tracing the path from his prominent role in pre-1914 social democracy and the Zimmerwald movement to his activities as a left and council communist.


Amongst other things, this book emphasises the links developed in the crucial years from 1917 and 1923 between left communist practice and some distinctly 'western' brands of marxist theory.


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A collection of twelve essays written between the thirties and sixties. Apart from discussions of Korsch and Ruffile, there is a particularly fine chapter weighing up the respective merits (and otherwise) of Luxemburg and Lenin.

The book that made Mattick famous amongst a new generation of marxist economists, with its comprehensive critique of both Keynesianism in the West and state capitalism in the East.


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Perhaps the best short introduction to council communist politics, by a member of the British group Wildcat.


Four key texts written between 1912 and 1921, dealing with nationalism, the tactics of the Comintern, and the role of party organisation in the process of workers' self-emancipation.


An account of the Melbourne-based Southern Advocate for Workers Councils and its editor Jim Dawson, charting his forty year path from De Leon and the IWW (via the old Socialist Party) to Pannekoek and council communism after the Second World War.

Steve Wright now works in the Centre for European Studies, Monash University. He is still a member of
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An account of the Melbourne-based Southern Advocate for Workers Councils and its editor Jim Dawson, charting his forty year path from De Leon and the IWW (via the old Socialist Party) to Pannekoek and council communism after the Second World War.

Steve Wright now works in the Centre for European Studies, Monash University. He is still a member of
LETTER TO LENIN

New York, December 20, 1918.

Nicolai Lenin
Moscow, Russia

Dear Comrade:

Peculiar circumstances at present prevailing in this country make it necessary, or at least advisable, to leave this letter without signature. For interpretation of its contents, we would refer you to comrade Boris Reinstein, as he will be able to shed light where light may be needed.

Knowing full well that any attempt on our part to get in touch with you direct, via ordinary channels, will be worse than useless, we have endeavored to find channels that are not ordinary. Through these, as many of them as we can find -- copies of this letter will be sent. If one reaches you, good and well; if more than one should make the journey safely, you will know the reason of the duplication.

Barring the receipt of a few copies of the publication "RUSSIAN NEWS" from Berne Switzerland we are without authentic information as to what is going on in Russia now. The "RUSSIAN NEWS" bulletins we received on three different occasions, two or three numbers each time, and we translated all of it. Part thereof has been widely published and created quite a sensation; the other part, including your own letter (the one you say you wrote at the request of a Russian revolutionist who, after the revolution of 1905, had spent several years in this country) has been put into English but has not as yet been published due to circumstances beyond our control. It will be published as soon as an opportunity presents itself,

But no longer do we receive these bulletins from Berne, at least none have reached us for quite some time. We assume that what we did receive came to us only because the censor had perhaps fallen asleep at the time they slipped through. Very rarely a letter from comrade Reinstein has come to hand. Presumably, he has written many but most of them have been held up by the censor. We did, however, receive the message you sent us regarding the De Leon literature. That literature was delivered by us to a Russian who said he had ways and means to get it into your possession. We did not hear, definitely, whether it has reached you, but a rumor has been afloat in New York that you had made appropriations for the translation and dissemination in Russia of the literature in question. If those rumors have any basis in fact, then we can deduce that the matter has safely reached you.
At our end we are face to face with a situation that is full of possibilities in one direction or another. It is transitional in a sense and it is hard to tell just what the post-war changes may bring about. The repressive and reactionary measures imposed during the war, are still in full force. Newspapers and magazines have been harassed and suppressed, ferocious prison sentences of 10, 20 and even 30 years have been imposed for mere utterances. Demonstrations of dissent from dominant currents of opinion have either been directly forbidden by local authorities or have been invaded by riotous crowds of soldiers and sailors, in short, a veritable reign of terror, official and unofficial, has been instituted.

The war being over, our bourgeoisie is gripped by the fear of what is now apt to come. This fear expresses itself in open threats as to what is going to happen if the working class does not willingly adapt itself to the changed conditions that the end of the war must bring. The bourgeois press is full of demands that wages must now be brought down to a new level, -- that there must be "readjustments". The transformation of industry from the war basis to a peace basis is already in full swing and, as it proceeds and gives rise to serious disturbances of our industrial fabric the fears of the bourgeoisie may be fully realized. Attempts to force down wages are already being made in the face of a still rising cost of subsistence especially the cost of food. Resistance on the part of the workers is manifesting itself in strikes of which there may be many before long. Even today, the number of strikes is likely to be considerable, but it is next to impossible to obtain accurate information as to what is going on in view of the systematic suppression of news and in the absence of a class-conscious organization of the workers on the industrial field of sufficient power to overcome this conspiracy of silence on the part of the capitalist press, one can only surmise what events may be taking place.

The sins of omission and commission of the Socialist Party of this country which has for so many years and in fact throughout its entire existence resisted and helped to frustrate every attempt to build up such an organization on industrial lines and has given its support overtly and covertly to the Gompers type of craft union -- these sins have, during the last few years, come home with a vengeance. The Gompers organization, always hand in glove with capitalist interests, worked openly on the side of the bourgeoisie during the war, surrendering every point that the workers had ever gained for themselves. -It dominates the field. Thus, at a time when great conflicts between capital and Labor loom up. In the distance, the Socialist movement is without an organization of the workers on the economic field which, in point of numbers and the weight that numbers give, would be able to rally and marshall the working class.

That part of the army which was still in this country at the time the armistice was signed, numbering in all about 1 3/4 millions, Is being rapidly discharged and is helping to fill up the Labor market
These men, when they flow back into civil life and begin to seek work, will be confronted with large numbers of women who, during the war, have been trained to fill countless posts in industry, in commerce, in agriculture and even in the transportation service. Parts of the army in France numbering in all somewhat over 2 1/4 millions, are being returned for demobilization and these too will help to swell the labor supply.

Had we, under such conditions, at our disposal an economic organization with forces large enough to take in hand all this human material and weld it into such an organization, we would soon be in a position to contribute our share towards the efforts the European working class is now or soon will be making to throw off the yoke of capitalism. But, as things are, your very correct observation in that letter of yours already referred to, is found to be true, namely, that it will take yet some time before succor may be expected by Russia from the American contingent of the revolutionary proletarian forces.

Indeed so important is a clear perception of the lay of the land and so imperative the discarding of all illusions that it is necessary to state, definitely that it would be a mistake to assume that the American working class is at present held down by Government oppression and persecution only. The situation is far worse for that working class is held down, principally, by its own backwardness so its own conservatism, aye its own reactionary leanings. Oppression and persecution is, after all, the lot of the comparatively few, and the mass of the workers is to-day in a state of mind where, given the opportunity they will rise and help rend these few in aid of the very Government that oppresses them.

But now to the point of establishing, if possible, direct connection that will enable us to remain in touch for the exchange of information. If this reaches you safely, will you please see to it that such important documents as you may issue are sent to whatever address in a neutral country you may get from us together with this letter? Such documents, if so sent, may then reach us through the same channel that this letter has travelled. We shall then try to find ways and means to publish such information in a manner that will reach large numbers. If possible, we would prefer such documents in German as that will facilitate translation without having to go outside of a narrow circle. In this way we shall be able to counteract, in a measure at least, the floods of false and slanderous reports that are dished up, day after day, in the capitalist press of what is said to be going on in Russia. THE PEOPLE ARE HUNGRY FOR INFORMATION AND GREAT MASSES KNOW FAIRLY WELL THAT THEY ARE BEING LIED TO.

In regard to happenings in Germany and Austria we are also kept in the dark. We know, of course the general facts. We know that in Germany the social patriots are at the helm and that the revolutionists are now struggling to win the workers and the returning army. But we know we are being lied to as to the happenings of the
day. As to Austria we have hardly any information worth having. All we hear of is famine and chaos. And we are also cut off from information as to what is really going on in England, in France and in Italy, except that we get glimpses of information now and then which would indicate that the masses in these countries are awakening and are restive.

With best wishes for the success of the Russian revolution and wishing also that health and strength may be given you in the future for all the important work that destiny has placed upon you to perform, we remain

Fraternally yours,

“SOLIDARITY”

Dear Frank,

In Discussion Bulletin 109 page 17 you comment that Labour Time Vouchers are nonsense. Still, no one should see your comment as inflexible (“Holy Writ”) as you also say they (LTVs), “would have to be used,” if only in the 19th century conditions. Your reason is straightforward. You feel LTVs, would have to be used to help overcome scarcity. You expect no problem of scarcity. No need for LTVs.

Let’s see if I understand you.

Let the capitalist class pour enough resources down the drain, and you’d say the working class taking control, would need LTVs? LTVs, or something like them, would have to be used, to insure against hunger-scarcity? In this struggle—class war—to regain control of production, and of our own products, you wouldn’t tie our hands against using any means, political or industrial, just so long as it becomes necessary, would you Frank? I hope not.

One last point: We could look at administration difficulties, dangers and how to avoid them. Each improvement in computing will help but. Of course one thing is clear. You cannot do without admin[istration]. Society will have to know what it needs and in what proportions. Will have to apportion its labour time accurately, between different kinds of work. Will need to know what labour time definite amounts of the various produce costs.

Only through organised production, at last, is exploitation ended, the worker in control of production. That sure control is the big advantage over production for sale. That’s why LTVs i.e. “Labour Money” is not money, cannot turn into money.

Alan Kerr For The Anti-Exploitation Society 13 Huntings Farm Green Lane, Ilford England IG1 1YE
EXPLORING THE GOTHAS PROGRAM

Commenting on our submission, LABOR TIME VOUCHERS OR CHAOS (DR109), you state: "It strikes me that unless we regard Marx's writings as Holy Writ, Dr. Who is right." On the other hand what strikes us is your readiness to abandon Marx in favor of an academe who, while avowedly unacquainted with Marx's Critique of the Gotha Program, nevertheless dismisses it lock, stock, and barrel to the tune of "So what!" What indeed? We think that far more useful than Who's knee-jerk reaction to the question of The Gotha Program's relevance today would be a glimpse or two at the document itself! For instance let's look at the following two passages as they relate to each other and as they may mirror modern conditions:

(1) "What we are dealing with here is a Communist [i.e. a Socialist] society, not as it has developed on its own basis, but, on the contrary, as it is just issuing out of capitalist society; hence a society that still retains in every respect, economic, moral and intellectual, the birthmarks of the old society from whose womb it is issuing."

(2) "In the higher phase of Communist [i.e. Socialist] society, after the enslaving subordination of the individual under the division of labor has disappeared, and therewith also the opposition between mental and manual labor; after labor has become not only a means of life, but also the highest want in life; when, with the development of all the faculties of the individual, the productive forces have correspondingly increased, and all the springs of social wealth flow more abundantly--only then may the limited horizon of capitalist right be left behind entirely, and society inscribe on its banners: 'From everyone according to his faculties, to everyone according to his needs.'"

"So what?" cries Dr. Who. So (quite apart from what appear to be serious depletions of some of the earth's food stocks, as well as looming shortages of traditional energy sources and fresh water—nor to mention the problems inherent in global warming), what if modern productive capability appears to have solved the problem of scarcity? Does this capability alone warrant shelving The Gotha Program? Does it warrant your verdict: "LTVs were an idea for an equitable system of rationing. It made sense in 1875, but it makes no sense in 2001." We direct your attention to Marx's observation that as it issues out of capitalist society, Socialism will "still retain, in every respect, economic, moral and intellectual, the birthmarks of the old society from whose womb it is issuing." The point is that while you concur with Dr. Who's apparent dismissal of the "economic" birthmark as being no longer relevant, neither of you acknowledges the existence of those other birthmarks which Marx characterized as "moral and intellectual." Dr. Who can perhaps plead ignorance but you are apparently well acquainted with the text. Moreover in our various submissions to the DISCUSSION BULLETIN we have repeatedly emphasized the moral depravity of the capitalist class and its lackeys as con-
stituting a prime reason for the imposition of Labor Time Vouchers during Socialism's first phase. Why the silence upon this vital aspect of revolutionary preparedness? We look for your explanation.

Nor, in our opinion, can your concluding comment pass muster as a reasoned argument against adoption of an LTV system. Your suggestion that an "undermining [of] working class control [read social control] of the system...would evolve naturally as time passed" beggars belief! A little thought should help you realize that you are putting the cart in front of the horse! In other words the need for Labor Time Vouchers will obviously be greatest, not least, on Day One of a socialist mandate and the evolution to follow, as projected by Marx, will not be a gradual undermining of social control, as time passes, but a gradual humanizing of the "beast" that will be a carry-over from Capitalism.

The De Leonist Society of Canada
P.O. Box 944, Station F
Toronto, Ontario M4Y 2H9

Sincerely,

THE DE LEONIST SOCIETY OF CANADA

Comment:

Alan Kerr raises a specter that hadn't occurred to me. It is possible, I suppose, that some members of a dying capitalist class, seeing their advantages and wealth slipping away, might decide in a suicidal frenzy to pull the whole edifice down, sabotaging resources including those devoted to the production of goods and services. That eventuality seems unlikely to me. For one thing our masters are so divorced from useful production they wouldn't know how to sabotage it if they wanted to. And also production is where our class has its greatest strength. We are the producers and can control it from top to bottom. True they might be able to pull the stock market down around their heads or the banking system. I think, though, that Alan is right in suggesting that any kind of eventuality that created a shortage of necessities would require some kind of rationing. The question would be whether LTVs would be the best method. There are other possible shortages that will almost certainly occur that I haven't seen discussed in the journals of the World Socialist Movement. For example, will a socialist world try to provide a car for everyone? As for the need for administration, I think, as Alan suggested, that computers will take care of that—computers and the organization provided by the socialist industrial unions.

It seems to me that the De Leonist Society of Canada’s criticism of Dr. Who’s and my willingness to scrap some of Dr. Marx’s Gotha Program raises more questions than it answers. What the DLSC seems to be saying is that humanity has been so corrupted by capitalism that it will not be able to function in a socialist society. The question then becomes who or what will educate us to the point where we can live under socialism. Who or what will determine the rules of proper socialist behavior and enforce them? Who or what will run the re-education institutions, not to mention the old pre-revolutionary prisons. We know the Leninists’ answer. The history of the past century—had he been able to see it—might have changed Marx’s thinking. What is the DLSC’s solution to the problem? As DeLeonists I thought our hope for the future was the education of the working class before the revolution.

—Frank Girard
Dear Discussion Bulletin,

I was intrigued by the discussion of my views and experience in Nos. 108 and 109 of DB. I have no problem with people disagreeing with me. It happens all the time. I do have a problem, however, with people misunderstanding and distorting my views and the facts.

Frank Girard says that I never found a group that I could support wholeheartedly. What is that supposed to mean? I joined the Young Peoples Socialist League when I was 13 years old because it was the only organization in my neighborhood. Girard thinks that made me a social democrat. I think, as little as I knew, that it didn't make my any particular kind of socialist. As a teenager I studied Marx and listened to debates and discussions in the movement. The result was that I moved consistently to the left. I joined the Trotskyists when they joined the Socialist Party. In 1940 or 1941 I made contact with C.L.R. James and was convinced of the correctness of his analysis of Marxism. I supported that Tendency to this day, something like 60 years. The name of his organization changed because of splits and other vicissitudes. I was the last chairperson of his group (when it was called Facing Reality). When the group dissolved in 1970 I formed Bewick Editions in order to keep as much of the works of James in print as I could. If that is not supporting any group wholeheartedly, I plead guilty.

Girard says that the Johnson-Forest Tendency was Trotskyist when he read Correspondence occasionally in the mid-fifties. This was after we broke with Trotskyism. We rejected Trotsky's theory of the vanguard party; we rejected his theory of permanent revolution; we rejected his analysis of the Soviet State, among other things. What in the world does Girard think Trotskyism is?

He also writes about my supposed "continued support for the UAW version of capitalist unionism." That is pure invention. I would appreciate it if he let me know where he found quotes that indicated that.

Finally, Girard writes about "our class." What is that supposed to mean? The category social class is flexible and changes with time. But it is an objective category based on how you make your living. It is not an ideological category based on what you think. I am a middle class intellectual who happens to be a revolutionary. What class does Girard belong to?

It seems that Frank Girard never had any great interest in or paid much attention to the James Tendency. That is fine with me. But then he should have avoided writing about it. Instead he produces what is essentially superficial and misinformed gossip.

Comradely,
Martin Glaberman

Comment:

Martin Glaberman's letter is the sort of thing I would rather not comment on. For one thing his experience in the socialist movement is so different from mine that I have difficulty understanding his actions and thinking as he relates them in Revolutionary Optimist, the interview published by Black and Red and reviewed in DB108. One example is what seems to me to be the ease with which he moved from one group to another. I joined the SLP at age 20 because I agreed with and wanted to support its program. And I remained an active member for 34 years until the party management kicked me out 20 years ago. I supported the SLP "wholeheartedly" as opposed to Glaberman's account of joining the
Socialist Party's youth group because it was close to home. His "leftward" ideological drift means to me only that he embraced increasingly radical reformism in the evolving primordial Trotskyist soup of the 40s and 50s. What do I think Trotskyism is? Well, I assumed it was a Leninist variant that began as an alternative management group for the USSR Incorporated and developed to compete internationally with the official communist parties.

I apologize for what is apparently an error on my part. I was certain that I remembered Correspondence advocating a "workers' state." At my age depending on memory is usually a mistake. I'll try to remember that in the future. Glaberman also regards my assertion that he continued to "support the UAW version of capitalist unionism" as a "pure invention" and challenges me to find evidence. I go to page 14 of Revolutionary Optimist where he speaks of attempts to organize a small shop whose workers, mostly women, voted against joining a union, an act he describes as "formally, that's a reactionary position." He then goes on to point out the circumstances that made such a vote acceptable, saying that, "The union is an unqualified plus, right? In ordinary situations I would say yes, but you have to understand the contradictions and so forth." I submit that this together with what I gather was many years of working as a radical, boring from within UAW locals would suggest to anyone that he supported capitalist unionism.

What do I mean by "our class"? I had in mind the working class, the non-owners of the means of production who must sell their lives to live. I see myself, Martin Glaberman, and most readers of the DB as members of this class, whether or not they are intellectuals or socialists or Methodists, or even pickpockets. Finally, I'll admit to not knowing much about CLR James and his Tendency, but this a condition that I can easily remedy.

-Frank Girard

NOTES, ANNOUNCEMENTS, AND SHORT REVIEWS

Communist Left is the "Review of the International Communist Party." Number 14 (undated) includes articles on Algeria, "The Explosive Potential of the Indonesian Working Class," "The Italian Left and the International (Part 6), The Communist Party and Parliamentarism," "Biodiversity and Capitalism," and others. For those of us unfamiliar with the various groups that evolved from the Italian left communist opposition to the Third International, this 36-page issue sheds some light on the program and purpose of one strand, the International Communist Party. Consider the following statement: "What Distinguishes Our Party is the assertion of the line which stems from the Communist Manifest, to the Russian Revolution and the foundation of the Communist International; - the struggle against the degeneration of Moscow, rejection of Popular fronts and of coalition of Resistance Groups; - the difficult task of restoring the revolutionary doctrine and organisation in conjunction with the working class in opposition to personal and parliamentarist politics." From my recent reading of a book on the Italian Communist Left I gather that this group is a part of the Bordiga wing. Most interesting to me was Part 6 of their series on the "Italian Left and the International [i.e. the 3rd International]" which details the actions of the Commission on the Parliamentary Question that accepted the report written by Bukharin and Lenin. This report committed the International to policies that allowed the inclusion of reformist groups in the Communist Parties and led to the reformism that has always characterized CPs worldwide. Included in this 36-page issue is a list of publications in various languages. The cover price is given as L1 / $2.50; the annual subscription is L2.00 including postage, $5 for the USA - from ICP Editions, P.O. Box 52, Liverpool L69 7AL, U.K. Also received from ICP editions was Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Russia, the 1991 edition of a collection of texts on Russia taken from ICP journals and published originally in 1976. The preface states "Our main intention in presenting this work is to accelerate the
dismantling of the widespread myth of Russian socialism.” All but one article in the 49-page pamphlet was written before 1976. The nine-part article “Why Russia Isn’t Socialist” includes sections on the nature of Russian capitalism, the Russian proletariat, Stalinism, and Russian agriculture. It seeks to show the essential capitalist nature of all aspects of the Russian economy. L 2.00 / $5.00 [?] from the Liverpool address given above.

World Socialist Review is the “Journal of the World Socialist movement in the United States.” With number 16, Summer 2001, it resumes publication after a hiatus of at least two years; number 14 was published in December 1998. This 16-page issue features articles on two of the WSM’s major fixations: religion and the idea of a moneyless economy. I have trouble with importance the WSM gives to religion. Despite the formal acceptance of religion here in the U.S., with polls suggesting that believers number over 90 percent of the population—nearly 100 percent in prisons—I think its importance in determining people’s political beliefs and other activity is vastly overrated. People seem to be able to reconcile almost any behavior with their religion, and I can’t imagine that it will inhibit our ability to choose the socialist solution when the time comes. The WSR bases its opposition on the same history of religion’s barbarism, its psychological effects and the philosophical reasons that made me—and I would assume most readers—rid ourselves of it when we grew up. I would guess that the real strength of Christianity is about on a par with that of paganism in, say, 300 A.D. In other words the WSM is fighting a battle that is already won. “There Is Never Enough Money” combines an excellent critique of reformist solutions to social problems with a brief, thoroughgoing examination of the role of money in a capitalist society. “Is There Turnover Under Production for Use” raises the question, “If society becomes the owner of the means of production, then what happens to surplus labor and the production of surplus value?” The author paints an attractive picture of labor in a socialist society. From other remarks one can infer the need for an administrative organization—a socialist industrial union??—through which society would plan production and distribution of goods and services in a moneyless economy. $2 from WSP (US), P.O. Box 440247, Boston, MA 02144.