

Marxism, Socialism and the New Millennium

"At a minimum, the tensions can provoke financial collapses and runs on currencies and stock markets; at worst, as we have witnessed over the last century, the consequences are war and mayhem."

Editorial, The Observer, 2/1/00

"The historical task of our epoch consists in replacing, in disciplining the forces of production, compelling them to

work together in harmony and obediently serve the needs of mankind. Only on this new social basis will man be able to stretch his weary limbs and - every man and every woman, not only a selected few - become a citizen with full power in the realm of thought.

"But this is not yet the end of the road.

No, it is only the beginning."

Leon Trotsky.

At the dawn of the New Millennium, the possibility of a new vista of human advancement or the most horrific of calamities lay before us. The potential for mankind, which the new technologies open up, could allow us to establish a classless society built on co-operation,

harmony and superabundance. We could have a true paradise on earth only dreamed about by previous generations. Given the possibilities inherent in the productive forces accumulated over the last 300 years, this is no Utopia as the sceptics imagine. However, the barrier to this outcome - the capitalist system based upon private ownership and the nation state - still stands in our way. If allowed to continue, it will mean economic depression, chaos and terrible "local" wars, as in former Yugoslavia.

Over the past century, the working class has repeatedly taken up the struggle to change society, especially after the valiant example of the Russian working

class in October 1917. Despite the heroism of the masses - which was sufficient to carry through the socialist reconstruction of society again and again - their efforts ended in failure. The fundamental reason for this was the failure of the leadership of the old organisations.

The programme, tactics, strategy and theory for the successful overthrow of capitalism exists in the treasure-trove of writings of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky. However, for the reformist and Stalinist leaders of the workers' organisations these ideas were - and remain - a sealed book. Consequently, the revolutionary events in Germany,

China, Spain and France following the Russian Revolution, as well of those of the post-war period, were sabotaged and betrayed by both the reformists and Stalinists.

At best, where capitalism was overthrown in Eastern Europe and China, although based upon nationalised property forms, the new regimes which emerged were created in the image of totalitarian Stalinist Russia. The lack of workers' democracy in these regimes - an essential prerequisite for the move towards socialism - was to end in a bureaucratic impasse and the move towards capitalist counter-revolution. As Trotsky brilliantly predicted, the

Stalinist bureaucracy would eventually seek to preserve its power and privileges through capitalist restoration.

Globalisation

At the beginning of a new century and a new Millennium, capitalism has been able to partially overcome its fundamental crisis explained by Marx. The system was able to do this by developing the world market - so-called globalisation - but at the cost of new and deeper contradictions. Globalisation has meant that the fate of all countries are bound together as never before. "Economies grow ever more interdependent as a result of the vast

new flows of trade and finance", states The Observer. (2/1/00) This is especially the case in the new industries of information technology, which has added to the crisis of overproduction that is now affecting a whole number of sectors of the economy. As predicted 150 years ago in the Communist Manifesto, capitalism has reached unheard of levels of concentration and centralisation of capital. "If you take the combined market capitalisation of just five stocks - Microsoft, Dell, Intel, Cisco and SBC Communications - you would end up with an entity that is valued more highly than the annual output of the UK", states the Guardian recently. "In other words, the equivalent

of the fifth-largest economy in the world. Microsoft alone would be the 11th largest economy in the world."

(20/12/99)

A crisis in one country will have a knock on effect throughout the world. This was sharply brought home by the Asian crisis that spread to Russia and then Latin America. Despite all the empty euphoria over a new paradigm, it is a crisis that is far from over.

The share values in hi-tech industries have hit the stratosphere, even where they have yet to make a penny in profits. Colt's were up 125% in three months, Logica's by 100%, Sema's by a mere

54%. This orgy of speculation has created a classic stock market bubble - which is set to burst in the coming period.

"Wall Street and the City appear to be in the best of health, with the Dow Jones and the Nasdaq indices scaling new heights", continues the Guardian. "But the amazing performance of the high-flyers has disguised the fact that a pretty ferocious bear market is already under way in New York and London. More than half the S&P 500 stocks are down this year.

"Some analysts have started to show concern at this trend. It is highly unusual

for stock markets indices to be rising as quickly as they are when more shares are going down than up. Even more unusual when the gap between a small number of highly capitalised stocks and a long tail of under-performers is as big as it is at the moment. Indeed, the recent trend bears striking similarities to the period running up to the great crash of 1929.... as we know from the Great Depression there is a real risk that the wild speculation and its inevitable aftermath can cause severe damage to the real economy."

Despite all the so-called wonders of globalisation and the new technological revolution, they have not altered the

fundamental laws that govern capitalism - explained by Marx in Capital. It is true that capitalism since the war has experienced a new lease of life. This was due primarily to the expansion of world trade after 1945, and the unprecedented exploitation of the Third World countries. But this is reaching its limits, as can be seen by the desperate scramble for markets today. The ex-colonial world has been squeezed dry by the G7 powers - forcing them to lower their tariffs, open up their markets, denationalise their utilities, and follow the dictats of the IMF and World Bank.

The "Third World"

In Africa, despite all the talk of an "African Renaissance", the last two decades has seen a deepening crisis throughout the continent. Half of the region's 600 million people live below the poverty line. The economies have been squeezed by IMF-imposed cuts and the spiralling cost of debt servicing. Twice as much is spent on servicing debt as on primary education. Since 1980 outlays on education fell by one-third per pupil. In the Nineties, 13 African countries cut their education budgets under IMF programmes. In Mali, Zambia, Burkina, and Chad education spending has fallen to 1% or less of GDP. One effect has been the privatisation of education; consequently,

fewer and fewer children attend school. At the same time, such is the morality of capitalism, African states spend some \$7bn a year on arms to fight obscene proxy wars on behalf of the imperialist powers.

At the present time, the Third World is being ravaged from one end to the other. In the coming epoch, the ex-colonial world will experience one upheaval after another. In the past, the colonial revolution was derailed by the Stalinist "two stage" theory, which subordinated the struggle for socialism to the so-called "national democratic" revolution. This blind alley, resulting in a whole series of defeats and setbacks from Asia

to the Middle East, prepared the way for the emergence of monstrous Islamic fundamentalism. However, the collapse of Stalinism and the crisis of fundamentalism, as witnessed in Iran, will open the road once again for the genuine ideas of Lenin and Trotsky and the Permanent Revolution. Only the socialist revolution, led by the working class and in alliance with the poor peasants, can offer a way out for the ex-colonial world.

The creation of the world market, together with the centralisation and concentration of capital have created a world dominated by a handful of ruthless giant corporations. They have acquired

more power than a single state. Within countries capitalism has presided over a colossal polarisation of income and wealth not seen since the Depression of the 1930s. In the United States, Bill Gates has a wealth greater than that of 120 million North Americans combined. Globally, more than a billion people live in abject poverty, their collective income no more than 400 of the richest men and women on earth. Despite all the talk of "regeneration", the inner cities remain centres of crime, violence and drug abuse, and offer no future for the new generations. Here is "social exclusion" at the sharp end, to use the new vocabulary. We have a recent article in the Los Angeles Times entitled

"Cities Great Depression", where the US Deputy Treasurer Secretary, Lawrence Summers, a leading advocate of the US economic model, acknowledges "the ironies of the current economic boom". In an address to the distinguished corporate executives of Silicon Valley, he notes "a child born today in New York is less likely to live to the age of five than a child born in Shanghai." (29/4/98) And this, as we enter the new Millennium, in the most wealthy and most powerful country on the planet.

Stalinism

Stalinism in the USSR, as predicted by Trotsky, became so corrupted that it

ended in capitalist counter-revolution. The Stalinist bureaucracy betrayed the Revolution, and sought to transform themselves into capitalists. However, this introduction of the wonders of the market economy and the break-up of the planned economy has meant a regime of decline, resulting in the destruction of the productive forces, the impoverishment of the bulk of the population, mass unemployment and life expectancy plummeting. Even according to the World Bank, 50% of Russians live below the poverty line, up from 2% in 1989. Life expectancy has dropped dramatically from 72 to 59 years in less than a decade. Despite the totalitarian and corrupt nature of Stalinism, the

planned economy was able to provide everyone with a job, free medical services and a (cheap) roof over their head. The USSR was a second world super power. The Mafia-capitalist regime, staffed with ex-Stalinist bureaucrats, has now destroyed these achievements and plunged the mass of the population into a nightmare. Welcome to the wonders of capitalism in the 21st century!

Also in the metropolitan countries of the West there has been a tendency (especially in Britain) towards denationalisation, deregulation and an all-out assault against the working class. The "counter-revolution" in the

workplace has seen an intensification of labour, speed-ups, and the introduction of a ruthless regime of exploitation. This has not only affected the blue-collar workers, but also the white-collar sections of the proletariat. The so-called middle classes are becoming proletarianised in the new world of lean production. As Marx explained long ago, under capitalism, the introduction of machinery, far from reducing the working day, tends to lengthen it. The British worker - at the sharp end of the attacks - works longer hours, has shorter holidays and less pay than its European counterpart. This has resulted in a massive increase in stress and ill health across the working class and

amongst the "professionals". In Britain, a recent Labour Force Survey revealed that casual bar staff have more job security than senior university academics! We see a merciless pressure on workers generally to work longer hours for less pay in order to increase the amount of unpaid labour - surplus value - for the bosses. The top of the league for over-work is in the United States, the citadel of capitalism.

Under the market economy it cannot be anything different. And yet, the key to a cultural revolution for the masses, with the opening up of culture, art and science, lies precisely in the generalised reduction in the hours of work. This is

the precondition for the involvement of the mass of people in the running of industry, society and the state. As Engels explained, so long as a privileged minority uses its position to secure a monopoly over culture, government and science, then it will abuse its position to maintain its class rule. "He who owns surplus-produce", explains Trotsky, "is the master of the situation - owns wealth, owns the state, has the key to the church, to the courts, to the sciences, and to the arts."

Exploitation of the labour of the working class is the driving force of capitalism. It is the source of inequality. As we enter the New Millennium, given the

intensification of labour, insecurity, anxiety and stress-related illness affects wide layers of the population. There has been a return to a more "normal" development of capitalism - its more ruthless side, more akin to the inter-war period and the laissez faire of the 19th century. As Marx explained, conditions determine consciousness. These new conditions of capitalism are preparing in the very bowels of society a new revolutionary movement.

Crisis of leadership

The upswing of capitalism following the Second World War, arising politically from the failure of the post-war

revolutionary wave, dialectically served to heal the scars of the 1930s. It saw the increased strength and cohesion of the working class on a global scale. The working class is immensely stronger, even in the Third World, than in Russia in 1917. The failure to carry through the socialist revolution in the past eighty years has nothing to do with the weakness of the working class. This responsibility lies squarely with the leadership of the movement, the subjective factor in Marxist terminology. This has been the key to the continuation of capitalism. As Trotsky wrote in 1938, "The crisis facing mankind, is a crisis of leadership."

The unfolding crisis of capitalism on a world scale will again provide opportunities for socialist revolution. However, the past failures of the leadership of reformism and Stalinism have created frustration and despondency. In Britain, the Blair government has carried out capitalist policies and stands as a second edition of the Tory party. This has led to widespread disillusionment, reflected in the election results of last May/June. A revolt of the working class against these pro-capitalist policies is inevitable in the next period. Similarly in western Europe and Japan, just as capitalism enters profound crisis, the social democrats have adopted pro-capitalist

policies, while the "Communist" Parties continue on the disastrous road of reformism. In Russia, it is the ex-Stalinists leaders of the CPRF who prop up the Yeltsin/Putin regime. Despite Yeltsin's sudden departure, which is a desperate gamble to make Putin the president in March, this will not save the regime in the long run. A new Russian revolution is inevitable, possibly ushered in by the coming world slump.

The new Millennium offers the working class a new perspective for change. Capitalism has entered an impasse. Unlike the period 1914-39, world war appears to be ruled out, given the continuing threat of nuclear annihilation

that hangs over the planet. Even so, there have only been 17 days of "peace" since 1945, with wars taking place in some part of the world or other. With the collapse of Stalinism, world relations have never been so unstable as at the present. A period of profound instability opens up in front of us. This has provoked a new arms race, where the EU has now agreed to establish a 60,000-strong rapid-reaction force, independent of NATO in preparation to intervene militarily against the colonial revolution. The cold-blooded cruelty of imperialism was graphically shown in the bombing and blockade of Iraq, where millions of children have died, alongside the bombing of Yugoslavia

with the wholesale destruction of its infrastructure. The Russian military is now simply following the West's example in brutally subjugating Chechnya. Despite the imperialist's hypocritical bleating, they are forced to keep subsidizing the Yeltsin/Putin clique with billions of dollars to prevent a new revolution, with all the revolutionary international implications that accompany it.

A new revolutionary epoch will develop in the west, the ex-colonial world and throughout the entire planet. The Russian Revolution in 1917 mainly ushered in a European revolution, although it had consequences in the under developed

world. Now we have entered decisively the epoch of world revolution. A new world slump, which could initially stun the working class for a period, can offer renewed activity on the part of the working class on the lines of the Spanish revolution of the 1930s. In this turbulent period, events will put to the test the reformist and Stalinist parties. The mass of workers who will be propelled into political activity will move first of all to their traditional mass organisations, transforming and re-transforming them. A process that our tendency explained many years ago but has been completely ignored by the sectarians. One revolutionary success in one important country would transform the world.

Overproduction

Capitalism has entered a blind alley, reflected in its inability to harness and fully use the enormous productive capacity in information technology and computers. It means the development of a crisis of overproduction, as Marx explained. Already overproduction ("over-capacity") is affecting a whole series of sectors: cars, steel, agriculture, computer chips, and others. This is particularly the case in S.E. Asia, where the two dominant economies of Japan and China are in serious deflationary difficulties. Japan has been in a slump for the last decade after its stock market crash in 1989. Repeated attempts to

revive the economy have failed, despite 124 trillion yen being spent over the last seven years. Japan's level of debt is rapidly heading towards 120% of GDP. China is experiencing an economic slow down with a fall in growth every year since 1992. Her growth has slowed dramatically in the past year and has only been propped up by massive government spending. A renewed slump will have a devastating impact on South Asia economically, socially and politically.

According to a recent article in the Financial Times, China has experienced "26 consecutive months of price deflation, a key economic ill that has led

to price wars, depressed the profit margins of already hard-pressed state enterprises and hit incomes among a rural population of some 900m. The waning fortunes of state enterprises have rendered them less able to service debts, applying further pressure on a state banking system already swamped by bad loans amounting to around 25% of total assets." (29/12/99) The article continued: "The other main cause of deflation - retail prices fell 2.8% in November - is over-capacity and oversupply. These bottlenecks will be difficult to rectify because of political resistance - especially at city and county level - to factory closures." The World Bank estimates that up to 35% of some

140m workers in the state sector are "surplus to requirement". With unemployment already at 100m in the rural areas and 18m in the cities, Beijing is clearly terrified at the social upheaval that is being prepared. Scattered strikes and workers' protests have already been reported in some industrial cities in recent months. Their desperate attempt to get into the WTO will backfire on them as they are forced to open up their markets to foreign competition. The crisis in South Asia is not over. It is only just beginning.

This new technology, which could completely transform the world and guarantee increased living standards for

all under a planned economy, add to the difficulties of world capitalism.

Globalisation does not mean a lessening of the problems, but on the contrary, an enormous intensification of the contradictions. The deregulation of world markets and the financial centre have introduced greater volatility and instability into the system. The bourgeoisie becomes increasingly parasitic as it invests less in industry and more in services and financial transactions. Gambling on the stock and money markets have become a major preoccupation, with an astronomical \$25 trillion of derivatives sloshing around the world economy. The ruling class has lost all sense of proportion as well as

their historic mission. They have become a mighty brake on society, just as the feudal aristocrats of the past.

The impasse of capitalism is reflected in a crisis of the ruling class itself, which is haunted by the malaise of their system. They talk of a new industrial revolution, but are faced with mass unemployment in all the main capitalist countries. This is not "cyclical" unemployment, but organic "structural" unemployment that is gnawing away at the very heart of society. Millions are forced to work longer and harder, while millions are forced to rot on the dole. The confidence of the upswing of 1948-74 has disappeared. Then, capitalism was able

temporarily to grant full employment and reforms under the pressure of the working class. All that is now at an end.

The more far-sighted strategists of capital are consumed with doubts and even alarm. Those, like Georg Soros, KJ Galbraith, and even Milton Friedman, have warned of growing crisis that can destroy the system unless something is done soon. They sense the general malaise of capitalism and look to the future with growing anxiety. They are aware that their system is in serious difficulties, but are powerless to avert an impending catastrophe. At the time of the Russian crisis in the autumn of 1998, Soros warned that capitalism "was

coming apart at the seams." They have temporarily escaped this scenario by the skin of their teeth. But only temporarily. As the leader in *The Observer* commented: "We only need to look back to the beginning of the century to realise how in very similar circumstances - an emerging global market, an era of immense technological innovation and the creation of a world financial system - that the resulting inequalities had consequences that proved ungovernable and were the underlying driver of war and depression." (2/1/00). There is a spectre haunting capitalism, the spectre of revolution.

Crisis of ideology

The drawn-out crisis of the system finds its reflection in a crisis of ideology, identified as a crisis within the political parties and structures, within the official churches, morality, the bourgeois family, and even science and philosophy. Official politics has become as corrupt as hell. The scandals surrounding the Clinton presidency, the British Tory Party, the Christian Democrats in Germany and Italy, as well as elsewhere, is all a reflection of the decayed nature of capitalism. This malaise percolates down from the top to the whole of society, where a general anxiety prevails about the future. "The cold economic rationality of capitalism", states The Observer, "in which every

institution is subordinated to the calculus of profit and loss, does not answer the question posed to every human being and every society - that there is more to life than the pursuit of economic efficiency. We are social as well as economic beings."

After twenty years of monetarist reaction fostered by the likes of Thatcher and Reagan, the decay of capitalism also reflects itself in a return to crude materialism in a dog-eat-dog society. Marx once explained in the opening pages of Capital, that the capitalist mode of production presented itself as "an immense accumulation of commodities". He explained that the system, based upon

the disguised exploitation of human labour, the real relation between men and women is translated into a relation between things. Workers are regarded simply as "commodities", to be dispensed with as other commodities by the owners of capital. What these commodities are, are of no concern to the capitalist, who is only interested in turning them into money as quickly as possible. "I am not interested in making cars", stated the car manufacturer Lord Stokes. "I am interested in making money."

Trotsky once noted in relation to the United States - the citadel of world capitalism - that money relations had

sunk deep into the national consciousness that people were referred to as being "worth" so many dollars. Today, market relations and ideology permeate all spheres of life, from schools run as businesses, to hospitals and all manner of public utilities. Everything must be privatised and handed over to big business. You are no longer a "passenger" on our privatised rail network, but a "customer". That is, someone who has money to pay. Everything is reduced to a business transaction. Human relations are devalued and subordinated to the market economy. Human beings are regarded as things, while objects, especially money, are regarded with awe, possessing great

supernatural powers. This is the fetishism of commodities, described by Marx, inherent in a society based upon capitalist relations.

As we explained in the book, "[Reason in Revolt](#)", issued to commemorate the centenary of Frederick Engels' death, "In capitalist society, people are regarded as dispensable commodities. Goods which cannot be sold lie idle until they rot. Why should human beings be any different? Only it is not so simple with people. They cannot be allowed to starve to death in large numbers, for fear of the social consequences. So, in the ultimate contradiction of capitalism, the bourgeois is obliged to feed the

unemployed, instead of being fed by them. A truly insane situation, where men and women wish to work, to add to the wealth of society, and are prevented from doing so by the 'laws of the market.'

"This is an inhuman society, where people are subordinated to things. Is it any wonder that some of these people behave in an inhuman fashion? Every day the tabloid press is full of horror stories about the terrible abuses committed against the weakest, most defenceless sections of the community - women, children, and old people. This is an accurate barometer of the moral state of society. The law sometimes

punishes these offences, although in general crimes against (big) property are more energetically pursued by the police than crimes against the person. But in any case, the profound social roots of crime are outside the powers of courts and police. Unemployment breeds crimes of all sorts. But there are other, more subtle factors.

"The culture of egotism, greed and indifference to the sufferings of others has flourished, particularly in the last two decades, when it was given the stamp of approval by Thatcher and Reagan, has undoubtedly played a role, though it is not so easy to quantify. This is the real face of capitalism, more

accurately of monopoly and finance capital - ruthless, crude, grasping and cruel. This is capitalism in its period of senile decay, attempting to recover the vigour of its youth. It is parasitic capitalism, with a marked preference for the fleshpots of financial and monetary speculation, instead of the production of real wealth. It prefers 'services' to industry. It closes factories like matchboxes, ruthlessly destroying whole communities and industries, and recommends miners and steelworkers to find work in hamburger bars. It is the 20th century equivalent of 'Let them eat cake.'" (Woods & Grant, p. 409).

Now the reformist leaders, like Tony

Blair, are engaged in aping this moralising effluent. They too demand that workers prostrate themselves before Capital by adopting "flexible" working methods. They must become pliant tools of business in the name of "modernisation", "productivity", "globalisation", and "competition". In true Victorian style, they lecture the unemployed to find jobs - as if they are to blame for their plight. The Welfare State must be "modernised", that is, cut back to the bone, and supplemented by the "glorious" private sector, as in the 19th century. The rightwing reformists now worship at the shrine of the market economy, just as it approaches its demise. "We are the party of business",

announces Blair. While Stephen Byers, the trade secretary, urges the company bosses to award themselves "world class pay", while the workers should show "restraint". Just like inadequate upstarts, they have to prove their undying loyalty to the ruling class in the most crass terms. Like some Uriah Heap, with the Bible tucked under their arm, they fall over themselves to grovel to their new bourgeois masters. They remind you of the pigs in the last chapter of Animal Farm.

These reformists, who portray themselves as ever so "practical" people, preside over a growing class divide. The inner cities, like Glasgow,

are racked with poverty and despair. Along with poverty come ill health. A recent study from Bristol University showed the shocking - and widening - gap in life expectancy between rich and poor. The poorer you are, the greater your chances of dying before 65, suffering a long-term debilitating illness or having a baby that dies before it's one year old. Labour's national commission on social justice in the 1990s recorded an eight-year gap in life expectancy between the affluent outer wards of Sheffield and the much-deprived inner city. The most recent report notes a 9.5 years gap in life expectancy between professional men and their unskilled manual contemporaries.

"Mortality variations between the richest and the poorest areas are now among the worst in Europe", states the Guardian. "The widening gap has pushed the UK even further down the developed nation's league table on life expectancy. The new research shows the 10 constituencies with the worst health records have a mortality rate twice as high as the 10 healthiest. Between the very top constituency (Wokingham) and the bottom (Glasgow Shettleston) there is a phenomenal fourfold variation in mortality rates. But it is not just death rates. Add in similar unequal distribution of sickness, disease, pain and discomfort charted by morbidity statistics... of the 100 constituencies

with the worst health, 97 are Labour; of the 100 best, 81 are Tory." (The Guardian, 3/12/99). The future offers no reprieve. "If we think inequality now is becoming unacceptable", states The Observer, "then what promises to unfold in the years ahead will take us into new realms." (2/1/00)

The past two decades of mild reaction have had wide-ranging consequences. The tread-mill of economic advance has forced workers to find a way out within the confines of capitalism, through overtime, couples working, and the like. This has served to militate against involvement in the labour movement. The lack of participation of the working

class in its traditional organisations has allowed the rightwing to impose their domination - at least for the moment. As in a stagnant pool, the scum rises to the top. Events however will shatter this present inertia. The domination of the rightwing is doomed. The crisis of capitalism will have a profound impact on the outlook of all classes, especially the working class. It will have no alternative but to seek a way out of the calamity that will engulf its life. The ruling class will find it cannot rule in the old way, and will look increasingly to more authoritarian methods to bolster up its rule. The traditional labour organisations will also be thrown into crisis, as the mass of workers move

towards the left. The rightwing will be spewed out, propelling the mass organisations further to the left, even in a centrist direction, betwixt reformism and Marxism. Opportunities will be given again and again to the working class to change society. The key to the situation, however, remains the subjective factor, the leadership of the working class.

The left reformists, while prepared to talk radical under the pressure of the workers, have no perspective or understanding of how to overthrow capitalism. Their Keynesian programme seeks to work within the framework of capitalism, at best, taking partial measures against the system. This serves

only to antagonise the capitalists, without resolving the problems of the working class. On the other hand, the Stalinists have long since abandoned any pretence of standing on the ideas of Lenin and Trotsky and the Russian Revolution. They have suffered a national and reformist degeneration. To resolve this historic problem requires a leadership that has learned the lessons of the epoch. It requires a Marxist tendency that has established deep roots in the working class and its organisations. Such a tendency cannot be created overnight, but has to be painstakingly built over a prolonged period on the basis of correct ideas, tactics and strategy. That today remains our

fundamental task.

"Capitalism can seriously damage your health"

The rule of the monopolies is a colossal brake on society, threatening to poison the planet in their rush to extend their power and wealth. The economy, the environment, the air we breathe, the water we drink, the food we eat - are all under threat. Global warming and the rise in water levels, which will have catastrophic consequences on the environment, threaten the planet. In Britain, where in the pursuit of profit, cattle were fed with animal carcasses, creating the scandal of BSE, and hushed

up by the Tory government. Recently, reports appear of accidents at nuclear processing plants, which are of grave danger to the public, but have again been kept secret. The latest accidents in Japan highlight the dangers of nuclear power where capitalist interests are involved. The runaway chain reaction at the JCO company's uranium-processing plant 70-miles outside of Tokyo bathed workers in radiation and sent levels outside the plant soaring 4,400-fold, causing residents to flee. If the workers had poured in 40kg of uranium oxide into the precipitation tank instead of the mistaken 16kg, then they would have produced not a "minor" chain reaction, but an atomic bomb that would have devastated the

capital, Tokyo.

Prior to this, a scandal had emerged at the British Nuclear Fuels where inspectors had bypassed procedures and falsified data on batches of uranium-plutonium oxide fuel destined for Japan. In their pursuit of profit, capitalism has chosen the cheapest and most dangerous form of nuclear power - nuclear fission. A much cleaner and safer form - nuclear fusion - was by-passed on grounds of cost. In the aftermath of these disasters, the Blair government still plans to privatise the remainder of the nuclear industry! All this to appease big business and the City of London, despite the overwhelming opposition of public

opinion. Again, the recent huge oil spillage from the Maltese tanker off the Brittany coastline has devastated the marine environment. The oil companies like the energy giant TotalFina that chartered the tanker are not interested in the environment. Cargoes could be carried in double-hulled ships, but these are too costly. Their prime concern is making money - at the expense of the environment and human health - which are expendable as far as capitalism is concerned.

The enormous advances in science and technology are increasingly turned into an almighty threat to humankind by big business. The development of genetics

holds tremendous possibilities for society. This will allow us to eradicate certain diseases and revolutionise our approach to medicine. Biomedical scientists believe there are 4,000 hereditary diseases caused by faults in single genes which could be rectified in time. The recent decoding of chromosome 22, through international co-operation, will lead scientists to once unimaginable cures and treatments for illnesses that are still barely understood. However, genetics in the hands of multinational corporations, in their race after monopoly profits, can and will lead to all kinds of man-made disasters.

Industrialists are rapidly muscling in on

genetic research, such as the US corporation Celera Genomics, which has already applied for patents on 6,500 lengths of DNA. Researchers for the corporation are concentrating on the more "profitable" genes, whose data can be made available to paying subscribers. This is in complete contrast to the data from the US-British Human Genome Project, funded by charities and taxpayers, which publishes data as soon as it is available free of charge. Inevitably, drug companies and biotechnology companies, to secure their stranglehold over the market, will ultimately apply for patents on the uses of the new information. These monopolies, in search of big financial

returns, are desperate to hold the rest of society to ransom.

Again, the development of genetically modified food may have great possibilities for the future development of foodstuffs. However, in the hands of multinationals, eager for profit and power, there are terrible dangers. The BSC scandal is such a horrendous warning. Over-intensified methods of farming, using hormones and antibiotics have polluted the food chain. The huge biotechnology firm, Monsanto, manufactures rbst, a genetically modified version of bovine growth hormone, which is injected into about 30% of US dairy cattle. Although given

official health approval, big objections are still raised by consumer groups, and even governments. According to research by veterinary experts, animals treated with the hormone suffered from side effects, including lameness and fertility problems. Antibiotics, which find their way into milk and therefore to humans, give rise to allergic reactions and antibiotic resistance.

The consequences for releasing GM hormones and crops into the food chain, with the minimum of research, is an absolute scandal. Social consequences are so much small change to the monopolies. The effects on human health are unknown, and yet, GM produce has

been pumped onto the world market in ever-greater quantities by the agro-corporations.

Monsanto produced a so-called "terminator" gene that directly affects the fertility of a plant. Although the plants are considered "healthy", the modified gene means the seed it produces is sterile. With such a weapon, Monsanto hoped to sell the seed to farmers in the under developed world, who would then become totally dependent upon these companies for their crop each year.

After public outcry, Monsanto promised not to commercialise the project.

However, other companies, like Zeneca, are still pursuing similar research in

maize. Such technologies certainly have tremendous potential for future agriculture, but only on condition that it is taken out of the hands of private profiteers.

Socialism or barbarism

Marx and Engels warned that the choice facing society was between socialism or barbarism. The reformist politicians dismissed these ideas as fanciful. They are incapable of understanding or even recognising the class mechanics under capitalism. They regard the fascist barbarism of Hitler, Mussolini and Franco, not as representative of capitalism in the epoch of decay, but as

accidental features of the past. Yet capitalism over the last century brought with it the nightmare of world slump and Depression, Fascist barbarism, mass unemployment and two world wars, which came close to extinguishing the human race. Even in the post-war period, where capitalism was able to partially overcome its problems, there was hardly a single day of peace. Mankind witnessed an arms race that built up an arsenal of nuclear and conventional weapons that could destroy the planet over and over again. Man had developed sufficient knowledge to destroy its species through the medium of Mutually Assured Destruction. Despite the collapse of the USSR, these

murderous arsenals continue today to cast a dark shadow over the planet.

Even the bourgeois strategists are not unaware of the dangers. An editorial in The Observer newspaper, which analysed the future pessimistic perspectives for the capitalist system, was forced to mention the possibility of a "new barbarism" in the future, where Chechnya and Kosovo are a salutary reminder. "It is just as plausible to argue that we stand on the verge of a new barbarism, in which the economic and social gains we enjoy disappear in a welter of nationalism, local wars, financial crises and trade protection, as it is to argue that the decades ahead will

build and extend the progress we have experienced over the last 55 years...

"More than that, the contemporary global capitalist system is built on sand. International finance has ruptured national boundaries and has gone global with a capacity to speculate feverishly on a scale never witnessed before. Currencies of the world's largest economies - the US and Japan - can swing violently over months; for small economies, the movements are even more vicious. The warnings that Wall Street is a bubble stock market, with hugely inflated prices and prone to excessive speculation, may have become routine but they are no less serious; the

contagion, via the speculation in loss-making Internet companies, is spreading to London. It will only take one overstretched bank or one unexpected economic calamity to knock the whole house of cards sideways and, given the international linkages, for the entire financial system to be sent reeling."
(2/1/00)

Despite the thin veneer of cultured appearance of western civilisation, capitalist reaction can flourish rapidly in the soil of economic, political and social crisis. After all, before the rise of Hitler Germany was the most cultured country in Europe. The German labour movement was the strongest in the

world. At the time, the German Blairs and Monks' dismissed the threat of fascist reaction - right up until 1933. "It could never happen here", they said, attempting to lull the working class to sleep.

While, it is true the bourgeois would not want to risk again handing power over to the fascist maniacs, where their power is at risk, they could easily hand things over to a military-police regime, as in Chile in 1973. It is interesting to note that prior to Pinochet, Chile was regarded as the "Britain of Latin America". The officer caste is much more reliable than the fascist upstarts. Their outlook, personal ties, education,

and so on, make them a more preferable alternative. And as General Pinochet demonstrated, the military can adopt the most ruthless measures when needed. It is true that the bourgeoisie prefers to rule through "democracy" at present, as the democratic representatives are more pliant than the generals, especially in the case of Noriega in Panama and Zia in Pakistan. However, in periods of social crisis, such Bonapartist regimes are more appropriate means of bourgeois rule - at least for a time. But given the strength of the working class in American and Europe, such a regime, as in Greece in the late 1960s, would not necessarily be long lasting, and would lead to further revolutionary

convulsions. That is why the ruling class would think repeatedly before embarking upon such a risky venture.

Today, elements of barbarism are present in the genocide in Rwanda, Uganda and Somalia - in many parts of the globe. But this is no problem of the "backward" countries. On the "civilised" European continent, the horror of ethnic cleansing is taking place today in the Balkans - under the very noses of NATO troops. The cold cruelty of the imperialist powers can be seen in the bombing of Yugoslavia and Iraq. In Russia, the bourgeois regime is waging a bloody war against the Chechen people. These developments are a warning to the

labour movement. The working class does not have indefinite time to overthrow capitalism. If there is no other way out, the capitalists will inevitably turn to Bonapartism to hold on to their power.

The strength of the working class

The stakes are extremely high. But the position of the working class is not a hopeless one. On the contrary, in terms of numbers and cohesion, the working class has never been stronger. There is a very favourable balance of class forces for the proletariat internationally. In the past, there has been no shortage of revolutionary opportunities. And that

will be the case in the future. The recent overthrow of the hated Suharto dictatorship in Indonesia, which ruled for thirty-five years and murdered over a million communists and trade unionists, shows the determination of the masses. Unfortunately, the weakness of leadership has meant that the revolution is far from complete, and given this weakness, will unfold over a number of years. It nevertheless demonstrates one thing: nothing can break the will of the working class to change society. The proletariat is like the Greek god Anteus; when each time he was thrown to the ground, he got renewed strength from his mother, the earth.

The mole of revolution, to use Marx's expression, is burrowing deep in the foundations of capitalist society. Those organisations that attempt to hold the workers back will be broken by the crisis within their ranks. Dialectically, events will shake society to its foundations, and with it the working class and its organisations. Out of this struggle of living forces, the most conscious layers of the proletariat will find the road to Marxism. All the great Marxist teachers had enormous confidence in the ability of the working class to change society. "Scientific socialist is the conscious expression of the unconscious historical process; namely, the instinctive and elemental

drive of the proletariat to reconstruct society on communist beginnings", stated Trotsky. "These organic tendencies in the psychology of workers spring to life with utmost rapidity today in the epoch of crises and wars."

Events, events, events will transform the whole situation. The working class will learn from the painful experiences of life that capitalism offers no way forward. In the words of Lenin, "an ounce of experience is worth a ton of theory." Socialist and Marxist ideas will gain a mass audience as the left recaptures the workers' organisations. The Marxist tendency must base itself upon the capacity of the working class to struggle.

On their shoulders rests the fate of society and the future of humankind. The working class will be propelled on the road of socialist revolution in one country after another. Armed with correct tactics and strategy, the coming to power of the proletariat in one important country will transform the entire world situation. It would set the world alight, resulting in the establishment of the Socialist United States of Europe as a stepping stone to the World Federation of Socialist States.

This would open the road to the unlimited development of society, science, technique and culture. It would literally open the road to the stars. For

the first time, human beings would begin to master nature. Ninety five percent of scientists who have ever lived are alive today. There is much talk about the Internet revolution, which has amazing possibilities for the future planned economy, but today, three-quarters of the earth's population do not possess a phone let alone have access to the World Wide Web. This field of science is still in its infancy. The possibilities are infinite. But only on the basis of world planning, world co-operation and a world government. Such a system can only be based upon world socialism, and the dissolution of the state, violence and all forms of oppression.

"Man will make it his purpose to master his own feelings, to raise his instincts to the heights of consciousness, to make them transparent, to extend the wires of his will into hidden recesses, and thereby to raise himself to a new plane, to create a higher social biologic type, or, if you please, a superman.

"It is difficult to predict the extent of self-government which the man of the future may reach or the heights to which he may carry his technique. Social construction and psycho-physical self education will become two aspects of one and the same process. All the arts - literature, drama, painting, music and architecture will lend this process a

beautiful form. More correctly, the shell in which the cultural construction and self-education of Communist man will be enclosed, will develop all the vital elements of contemporary art to the highest point. Man will become immeasurably stronger, wiser and subtler; his body will become more harmonised, his movements more rhythmic, his voice more musical. The forms of life will become dynamically dramatic. The average human type will rise to the heights of an Aristotle, a Goethe, or a Marx. And above the new ridge new peaks will rise." (Leon Trotsky, Literature and Revolution)

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3rd January, 2000

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