

LRCI Splits Over Bosnia Betrayal

O, What a Tangled Web

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The League for a Revolutionary Communist International (LRCI), the international tendency led by the British Workers Power group (WP), have recently suffered two important splits. In early September, the founding leadership and half the members of the LRCI's New Zealand section walked out. A month later, at a public meeting in London, a leading Latin American cadre announced that the members of the LRCI's Peruvian and Bolivian sections had unanimously decided that they could no longer remain members of an organisation that refused to defend the Bosnian Serbs against NATO.

The splits appear to have been occasioned by the rightward movement of the LRCI's leadership over the past several years, particularly over the bloody communal war in Bosnia. This drift to the right is no surprise to us. Centrist—of which Workers Power is a chemically pure example—is inherently unstable. It was therefore only a matter of time before the LRCI began to fracture along right-left lines. But, although the dissidents seem to have split to the left, their break with the LRCI's centrist politics is incomplete.

LRCI Moves Right

The LRCI were burdened since birth with a glaring contradiction. On the one hand, their empirical observations were often trenchant and realistic, and appeared to support a Trotskyist political understanding; on the other hand, WP were unwilling to draw the proper political and theoretical conclusions from these observations for fear of offending left-liberal and social-democratic opinion. To pursue their thinking to its logical conclusions might isolate them on the left, and gain them a reputation for being “sectarians”—which to the centrist mind is a fate worse than death.

Following their 1980 renunciation of the “state capitalist” characterisation of the former Soviet bloc, which they had inherited from Tony Cliff's International Socialists, Workers Power often distinguished themselves from the mainstream of Britain's ostensible Trotskyists by their apparent leftism. In regard to Poland in 1981, for example, they published a lengthy analysis showing that *all* significant tendencies within Solidarnosc were going in the direction of capitalist restoration:

“The programme of the Solidarnosc leadership was one which, if implemented, would have strengthened the forces of capitalist restoration in Poland. We do not advocate that restorationists take political power from the Stalinists or that the working class should struggle to make this possible.”

—“Revolution and counterrevolution in Poland, 1980-81”, July 1982 (reprinted in *Trotskyist International* No. 4, Spring 1990)

Yet, when the Polish Stalinists suppressed Solidarnosc in December 1981, WP joined other pseudo-Trotskyist outfits in siding with Walesa against Jaruzelski, on the grounds that Solidarnosc's mass base in the working class prevented

it from being a counterrevolutionary organisation “per se”.

A similar contradiction was evident in the LRCI's stance during the collapse of the Stalinist regimes of Eastern Europe. While accurately characterising the new governments as restorationist, the LRCI insisted that the mass protest movements that brought them to power represented “political revolutions” that Marxists should support and attempt to deepen:

“Trotskyists must be prepared to support and participate in the ousting of the Stalinist dictatorships even where the majority of the working class has no other clear objective and even when pro-capitalist forces are involved.”

—*Trotskyist International* No. 4

As in the case of Solidarnosc, Workers Power were prepared to support mass movements in Eastern Europe that were hostile to the Stalinist regimes, regardless of who was leading them or what direction they were heading in. In recent years, as they moved to the right, Workers Power have attempted to reconcile the contradiction between their description of reality and their programmatic conclusions by adjusting the reality to fit their opportunist politics.

In the abortive 1991 Moscow coup, when the demoralised “hardline” element of the dissolving Soviet bureaucracy tried to preserve the status quo against the Yeltsinite counterrevolutionary juggernaut, Workers Power instinctively sided with Yeltsin. They nonetheless initially characterised the coup leaders as Stalinists, who “hoped by their actions on 19 August to defend their privileges on the basis of post capitalist property relations”. They described the Yeltsinites as:

“a faction of the bureaucracy that has abandoned the defence of its caste privileges and their source—a degenerate workers' state—in favour of becoming key members of a new bourgeois ruling class”.

—*Workers Power*, September 1991

This assessment was retracted, as it gradually dawned on the LRCI leadership that if indeed Yanayev & Co. were Stalinists seeking to defend the status quo, then siding with Yeltsin put them, as ostensible Soviet defencists, on the wrong side of the barricades. To “solve” this contradiction, the Stalinist coup makers were retrospectively declared to have been just as pro-capitalist as Yeltsin, but less democratic. Thus the bloc with Yeltsin and the counterrevolution could be justified on the grounds of defending “democracy”.

Yet the decision to support the counterrevolution in August 1991 was understood by the more politically conscious WP cadre as an important line change. This shift was reflected in the “Where We Stand” box, which appears in every issue of *Workers Power*. Prior to the 1991 showdown, *Workers Power* included a specific commitment to the defence of the workers' state against the forces of capitalist restoration:

“In the USSR and the other degenerate workers' states, Stalinist bureaucracies rule over the working class. Capitalism has ceased to exist but the workers do not hold political power. To open up the road to socialism, a political revolution to smash bureaucratic tyranny is needed. Nevertheless we unconditionally defend these states

against the attacks of imperialism and against internal capitalist restoration in order to defend the post-capitalist property relations.”

—*Workers Power*, August 1991 (emphasis added)

By February 1992 the box had been rewritten, and the explicit commitment to the defence of workers’ states against internal restorationist forces was removed, without any justification or explanation.

In an attempt to square their claim to be defencists of the “degenerate” workers’ states with their actual position of supporting the forces of the “democratic” counterrevolution, WP now flatly deny that anything fundamental has happened in the former Soviet bloc. They criticise the leading Latin American oppositionist for believing “that we are in a profound period of historic defeats and counterrevolution” and note that this is “a phenomenon he shares with the other recent defectors from the League in New Zealand and Austria”. The LRCI’s “optimistic” refusal to recognise reality can only be maintained by those willing to keep their eyes tightly shut. Except for East Germany, which was simply annexed by its imperialist other half, the whole of the former Soviet bloc, according to WP, remain workers’ states (albeit “moribund” ones).

On this question too they have been forced to rewrite their own earlier theoretical positions—once again with no word of explanation. In 1990 the LRCI offered the following criterion for the establishment of a bourgeois state in the Soviet Union:

“The establishment of a government, able and willing to separate the state power from the Stalinist bureaucracy and use its monopoly of armed force to defend private property, constitutes the bourgeois counterrevolution. From this point on the state is bourgeois. It must then proceed to dismantle the remaining proletarian property forms—the state monopoly of foreign trade and central planning. After this is accomplished, private property can be restored to a commanding position in economic life over a more or less prolonged period.”

—“The Crisis of the USSR and the degenerate workers’ states”, Resolution adopted by the International Executive Committee of the LRCI, 4 March 1990, printed in *Trotskyist International* No. 4 (emphasis added)

But after supporting Yeltsin, the LRCI backtracked, declaring that capitalism is not restored until the economy is fully regulated by the law of value. Thus, according to the LRCI, Yugoslavia, Albania and all of the former Soviet bloc states (except the former DDR) remain workers’ states. This has led to another difficulty. Marxists assert that the state is a *weapon* wielded by the dominant social class to defend its position against the rest of society. Yet it is obvious that the state machines in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union are not armed instruments for the defence of collectivised property.

To reconcile this contradiction, the LRCI have been pushed into reworking the Marxist theory of the state, seeing it as merely a reflection of the dominant form of social property. Since the majority of industry in the former Soviet bloc has not been privatised, WP conclude that these societies remain (moribund) workers’ states. Thus WP counterpose a norm of “pure” capitalism to the chaotic and unruly reality that marks the emergence of a capitalist social order from the wreckage of a bureaucratically planned economy, and claim that the latter is not capitalist because it does not conform to the norm. The counterposition of

norm to reality, and the view that the state must always reflect the norm, recalls the mechanical materialism of the pre-1914 Second International. It is of course true that the character of the state and the dominant form of property usually coincide. The exceptions occur precisely in periods of *revolution and counterrevolution*.

Part Way Back to Cliff?

The rightward evolution of WP, evident in their response to the August 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union, was no doubt accelerated by the passing of David Hughes, the original architect of WP’s leftward departure from the Third Camp fifteen years ago. Since Hughes’ death, the WP/LRCI leadership seems to have devolved on people who are much less interested in claiming the mantle of Trotskyist orthodoxy. The New Zealand oppositionists allege that the dominant current in Workers Power’s leadership today subscribe to the view that the former workers’ states of the Soviet bloc—Cuba, China, etc.—are purely and simply *bourgeois* institutions presiding over collective property relations, a position that had been rejected by a majority of WP in 1981. The New Zealand Proletarian Faction’s declaration states:

“The revisionist position on the state can be seen to be one mid-way between the Cliffite position of state capitalism and that of Trotsky. The LRCI formally broke with State Capitalism in 1981 and as such could not revert to that position. It could not openly revive the junked political economy of state capitalism. But because the League’s method separates society from the state, it could revise Marxism to allow workers property to coexist with a bourgeois state. This was the thrust of the 1981 minority position on the Stalinist state. If adopted, this position would allow the League to explain the relatively peaceful transformation of the state without ‘winding the film of reformism back’. If it was already a bourgeois state, it need change only in its personnel and not its class nature. While empirically very neat in accounting for the apparently peaceful transfer of power from bureaucrat to bourgeoisie in the collapsed Stalinist states, this revision went too far. It argued that the post-war overturns in which the bourgeoisie were expropriated [were] performed by a bourgeois state!”

—“Declaration of the Proletarian Faction”

A characterisation of the degenerated/deformed workers’ states as essentially bourgeois, that is, completely antagonistic to the property relations upon which they rest, would buttress their argument, in the wake of the failed August coup, that the Stalinist “hardliners” were every bit as much in favour of restoration as Yeltsin. It would also fit their assertion that the social overturns carried out in Cuba, China, etc. were “predominantly counterrevolutionary” in character (see “Cuba, the LRCI and Marxist Theory”, 1917 No. 13). Characterising the deformed workers’ states as simply bourgeois perhaps qualifies as the most audacious “theoretical” gloss ever put upon the crass Stalinophobic position which remains fundamental to the politics of many a pseudo-Trotskyist: that Stalinism is “counterrevolutionary through and through to the core”.

While Stalinism was and (in so far as it still exists) is a mortal enemy of revolutionary socialism, a Stalinist ruling caste may sometimes be forced to defend collectivised property from the class enemy. In exceptional circumstances, it may even be pushed into extending workers’ property forms.

The refusal or inability to grasp the dual character of

Stalinism disoriented the Trotskyist movement of the post-war period in the face of Stalinist-led social revolutions in China, East Europe, etc., and led to pro-Stalinist deviations. In recent years a symmetrical Stalinophobic impulse led the LRCI, and others, to refuse to defend the gains of October from the “democratic” counterrevolution.

Matgamna’s Cure for Centrist Confusion

Workers Power like to present themselves as a “hard”, “principled” alternative to the run-of-the-mill reformists and right centrists of the British left. Many of WP’s members take this seriously, which is why the leadership is having trouble making the membership eat their betrayal on Bosnia. Workers Power today find themselves in a dilemma similar to that faced by Sean Matgamna’s *Socialist Organiser* in the late 1980s, as they struggled to shed the skin of ostensible Soviet defencism. According to *SO*:

“Our political attitude to the workers and bureaucracies in the Eastern Bloc has been quite different from that of other Trotskyists following the 1951 formula of the ‘degenerated and deformed workers states’. We should have been more explicit and outspoken about Vietnamese Stalinism—we did attack the illusions widespread on the left, but only, so to speak, in footnotes—but beyond that we have nothing to reproach ourselves with in practical politics. We did not—as did the Healyites—prattle about the danger of capitalist restoration in Czechoslovakia in 1968. We supported Solidarnosc’s call for a working-class boycott of Polish goods when martial law was imposed in 1981. We demanded the withdrawal of USSR troops from Afghanistan from day one.

“Over the last 30-odd years, many Trotskyists have made many efforts—often very intricate—to formulate better theories to underpin the 1951 codification. But aren’t all those efforts scholastic? Isn’t the shift of focus from the working class to the nebulous, classless ‘world revolution’ a logical product of the attempt to define Yugoslavia, China, etc., as somehow distorted socialist revolutions? (For sure the working class was not centre stage to make those revolutions socialist. So what was? The ‘world revolution’.) Isn’t the great instability of official Trotskyism, its constant wavering in its attitude to the Eastern Bloc states, an inescapable consequence of the *unviability* of the 1951 formulas?”

“Increasingly the formula ‘degenerated and deformed workers states’ plays no role at all in our substantive political arguments. Our conclusions are derived from factual assessment, and the formula sits uncomfortably on top of that factual assessment as a formula, no more. Isn’t it time to reassess?”

—*Socialist Organiser*, 15 September 1988, as reprinted in Workers Power: A tale of Kitsch Trotskyism, Alliance for Workers Liberty pamphlet, November 1993

Matgamna found his way out of his dilemma by renouncing Trotsky’s analysis of the USSR. This may not be so easy for the leadership of Workers Power who have staked their whole political reputation on their claim to have defended and developed orthodox Trotskyism on the workers’ states. This is why they feel compelled to insist that the workers’ states of the old Soviet bloc still exist. None of their positions can be substantially modified by the LRCI leaders without exposing *to their own membership* the fact that they have been wrong on virtually every aspect of the collapse of Stalinism. The knot of contradictions at the centre of the LRCI’s politics is inescapable, and seems likely

to lead to further ruptures in the future.

NATO, Bosnia & Marxist Theory

The immediate catalyst for the recent splits from the LRCI was the growing softness on the liberal and social democratic Bosnia ‘solidarity’ milieu, culminating in WP’s refusal to defend the Bosnian Serbs against NATO. The LRCI leadership’s insistence that the former Eastern European workers’ states (including Yugoslavia) are still workers’ states creates some particularly thorny problems in connection with the group’s Bosnian position. The October *Workers Power* states:

“Serbia’s wars have never been about defence of the workers’ state, but about the fulfilment of a reactionary nationalist project. The class character of its war aims, not just the class character of the state, have to be appraised and understood by Marxists. And the class character of Serbia’s war aims is not serving the working class, even in a ‘deformed’ or ‘degenerate’ fashion.

“All the pro-Serb ‘Trotskyists’ are guilty of an abstract method, whereby social categories like ‘workers state’, ‘imperialism’ and ‘semi-colony’ are utilised to produce a ‘kwik fit’ answer for whose side to take in the current war. “They retreat into their world of sterile formulae leaving the real world of the class struggle in Bosnia, with all its horror, behind.”

It is unclear who WP means by “pro-Serb” Trotskyists. We do not regard Serbia, or any part of what was Yugoslavia, as a workers’ state. We have never taken a side in the territorial battles being fought among the component nationalities of the Balkans. When, however, the Serbs, or any other indigenous people in a semi-colonial or dependent capitalist country is hammered by an imperialist coalition, is it not self-evident that Marxists must defend imperialism’s victims? Apparently not to WP. One is reminded here of Burnham and Shachtman during the 1940 fight in the American SWP. Arguing for the abandonment of Soviet defencism after the Stalin-Hitler pact, they urged that the party be guided not by “sterile formulae” (e.g., the class character of the Soviet state), but rather by the “concrete course of events” in the unfolding war. Trotsky called such a method “impressionism”.

Moreover, WP’s neutrality between imperialism and the Serbs is particularly reprehensible given their own premises. Workers Power maintains that Yugoslavia is *still* a workers’ state. Not only, therefore, does it refuse to defend a semi-colony against imperialism, it refuses to defend what it considers a workers’ state from NATO bombs!

For Marxists, theory is a guide to action; for opportunists of the Burnham/Shachtman/WP type, the opposite is true. If a particular position, taken for the convenience of the moment, contradicts one’s theoretical position, there is nothing to be upset about; theory can be adjusted to practice soon enough.

In a leaflet distributed in September, we commented on WP’s claim that Serb defencism was not posed by NATO’s blitz bombing, but would be in the event of a full-fledged ground invasion:

“This sophistry is transparent. For the WP leadership the question of Serbian defencism is posed, but not *now*. It is obvious to those who read the press or watch television that the Bosnian Serbs are under massive imperialist attack today. The question of whether or not there will be a complementary intervention by NATO ground troops is merely a tactical one. So far the imperialist chieftains have opted for a low-risk strategy of pummelling the Bosnian

Serb army from the air, leaving the Croats and Muslims to sort things out on the ground at some future point.”

—*Bolshevik leaflet* No. 1

LRCI's Zig-Zags on Yugoslavia: Too Much to Swallow

The recent opposition was a reaction to the LRCI's rightward drift in recent years. The Latin American oppositionists pointed to a 1994 resolution of the LRCI International Secretariat on a US invasion of Haiti as “very symptomatic” of the leadership's tendency to value “democracy” above opposition to imperialism:

“In these circumstances revolutionaries can give no support of any kind to the military or to any guerrilla struggle which might be launched by elements of the army and the attachés against the Aristide government and the US forces in the coming period.”

—quoted in “Bosnia: From a Revolutionary Line to an Eclectic Line”, José Villa, June 1995

It is evident from Villa's document that the LRCI position regarding the Bosnian Serbs was the immediate catalyst for the split. The opposition took a line on Bosnia clearly to the left of the LRCI leadership:

“A key demand in the Balkans and Bosnia is to call for all the Muslim, Croat, Serb and other peoples to stop its reactionary war and to unite to expel the 40,000 imperialist troops, the warlords and the oligarchies. This is the same policy that Lenin and Trotsky advocated for the Balkan wars and the great European wars of this century. Instead of that, the LRCI is calling on the imperialists to arm the US allies in the region: the Bosnian government. “The LRCI always call for UN troops out. But we never call for its military expulsion by the workers of Bosnia. The LRCI don't support the imperialist bombs but don't give too much importance to them. The leaders of WP like to say they are not so strong and significant. Sometimes they didn't even condemn these attacks.

“On 11 November 1994 50 NATO warplanes attacked Serbian Croatia. It was ‘the biggest air strike in the history of the Western Alliance’ (*Guardian*, 12 November 1994). For a revolutionary group based in Britain the most elementary task was to condemn the attack of its own imperialism and call for its defeat.

“The next issue of *WP* (December 1994) didn't condemn at all the ‘biggest air strike in the history of NATO’.”

Villa's document also comments:

“In Bosnia we should be in favour of arms to...*the workers!* Like in the two Balkan wars and in the two world wars, Marxists have to fight for the creation of separate multinational workers' militias in opposition to *all* nationalist ethno-religious bourgeois forces. These multi-ethnic workers militias could make concrete military actions with this or that other force in the defence of a particular community that is under a pogromist attack.”

This was the LRCI position until their sudden flip-flop in late 1992 under the pressure of the “Workers Aid” cabal of B-52 “socialists”. As the LRCI oppositionists point out, the betrayal over the imperialist blitz in August–September 1995 was prepared by the revision of their line over several years, “based on adaptation toward bourgeois democracy, the imperialist media, and centrist currents like the USec and LIT”. (For our analysis of WP's drift rightward over Bosnia, see “Balkan Barbarism”, 1917 No. 15.)

Even the United Secretariat (USec), previously among the most craven tailists of Bosnian nationalism, began to

adjust their position after the massive NATO bombing campaign. In the October issue of *International Viewpoint*, Livio Maitan, a longtime USec leader, writes:

“In this sense, and despite all the obvious distinctions, the intervention follows the same logic as the Gulf War. What is more, it creates an extremely serious precedent....

“None of the governments in place respects even the most elementary political rights. They all make use of authoritarian methods. They have changed, or tried to change, the map of the region through war. They are inspired by reactionary nationalist ideology, favouring the ethnic purification which they have all practised, though to different degrees....

“All this applied to the Bosnian army and government too. They now follow the same dynamic as the Serbian and Croatian forces....

“*THE WAR MUST STOP*. All military operations should cease immediately. This is the condition sine qua non for reversing the perverse dynamic of nationalist and racist hysteria, destruction and massacre, to make possible the re-emergence of the most basic forms of civil society, and to sketch out political solutions which respect the interests and aspirations of the peoples concerned.

“In the face of a typical imperialist project, it is impossible to shuffle in silence. We must say ‘Stop the bombing!’ ‘Stop the NATO intervention!’”

—*International Viewpoint*, October 1995

This represents a significant shift by the USec—from Bosnian defencism to a social pacifist “Stop the War” position, with a pronounced tilt against NATO. There is a certain irony in the fact that the LRCI dropped their original position of defeatism on all sides in order not to miss out on the USec-influenced Bosnian “solidarity” milieu. With the stench of NATO intervention growing thick, the USec has begun to back away in embarrassment, leaving the LRCI alone to explain its neutrality between imperialism and the Bosnian Serbs.

LRCI Dissidents & Yeltsin's Counterrevolution

The Latin American oppositionists connect the LRCI's betrayal in Bosnia with a wider critique of the group's Stalinophobic deviations:

“For many years we have been fighting against [the LRCI's] progressive right-turn degeneration. In August 1991 we opposed the line for a united front with and behind Yeltsin and the capitalist parties against the stalinist coup d'état in Moscow. We argued that we had to be against a coup d'état that would repress the workers but that we couldn't unite with the capitalist social counter-revolution. Inside a Workers' State we couldn't make a common block with the world bourgeois counter-revolution against an authoritarian faction of the bureaucracy, because this class is worse than the stalinist caste. The victory of Yeltsin and of the bourgeois parties meant the imposition of an openly capitalist regime and the destruction of the USSR, with that was produced a defeat of incredible proportions world-wide.”

—“Resolution From All the Latin American Members of the LRCI”, September 1995

This clearly stakes out a left position within the LRCI, but it stops short of drawing the necessary conclusions. If the bourgeoisie “is worse than the Stalinist caste”, which it is, and if the destruction of the Soviet Union as a workers' state was “a defeat of incredible proportions world-wide”, which it was, then it follows that Trotskyists had the politi-

cal duty to bloc militarily with any apparatchiks, no matter how venal and treacherous, who sought to resist the counterrevolution. Despite their incompetence, their attempts to placate imperialism and their reactionary Russian nationalism, the Emergency Committee of August 1991 were trying to arrest the inroads of the market “reformers” who threatened to destroy the planned economy. Of course, in the event of their victory the Stalinists would attempt to repress the workers (which revolutionaries would naturally oppose), but this is no reason to refuse a bloc with them against capitalist counterrevolution.

The LRCI’s Latin American oppositionists may fail to draw the logical conclusion of their observations about the Yeltsinists’ victory. However, the position of the New Zealand oppositionists of the Proletarian Faction on this critical question is much worse:

“It was necessary for revolutionaries to expose Yeltsin as the enemy of the political revolution. The correct position was to mobilise workers independently of Yeltsin, an open restorationist. If Yeltsin was serious in opposing the coup we could offer a military bloc with him, but only if he ‘broke with the bourgeoisie’. Revolutionaries would have demanded that Yeltsin not only called for and supported a general strike, but called on the army to defect and arm the workers. Against Yeltsin calling off the strike we would have called on the miners to break from Yeltsin. This would have helped Yeltsin to expose himself to those layers of workers who saw the need to build an independent, armed workers movement.”

Despite the “left” nuances and criticism of WP’s bloc with Yeltsin, the PF is prepared to block militarily with the forces of counterrevolution. Calling for Yeltsin, the leading restorationist figure, to “break with the bourgeoisie” is like urging a wolf to become a consistent defender of sheep. Yeltsin had a consistent counterrevolutionary programme whose fundamentals are beyond conditions. Unlike the Stalinists, Yeltsin was—and is—“counterrevolutionary through and through and to the core”. Any bloc with him against the Stalinist coup places one on the wrong side of the barricades.

LRCI Dissidents on the National Question

While the LRCI’s former Latin American comrades take a correct position on Bosnia, their treatment of the national question as a whole still bears distinct birthmarks of their centrist origins. Villa’s document compares the squalid communal wars in Bosnia and Rwanda with other situations of mixed populations, where there is systematic oppression of one people by the other:

“The LRCI made a terrible mistake when the IS [International Secretariat] supported the RPF [Rwandan Patriotic Front, the communal militia that won the Rwanda civil war]. The IS made that error because it has the same wrong methodology as over Bosnia. They take sides according to who is now the main victim. But in a communal war the situation could change completely. That is why in an inter-ethnic war like that between Pakistan and India the Trotskyists do not take sides. Only when we are dealing with the battle of an historic oppressed nation/community against an historic oppressive nation/community (like between Israel and the Palestinians, or Northern Ireland) could we take sides.”

The above is more than a little murky. There is, of course, a distinction to be made between, on the one hand, a general land grab by nationalities on a more or less equal military

footing, as in post-Stalinist Yugoslavia and post-independence India, and, on the other hand, a situation of systematic, institutionalised oppression of one people by another, as in Palestine and Northern Ireland. In the first kind of situation, Marxists clearly take no side. But, although we do indeed defend IRA attacks on British troops, just as we support Palestinians throwing stones at occupying Israeli soldiers, this does not amount simply to “taking sides”. We do not, for instance, offer one ounce of support to the IRA when it bombs Protestant pubs, or to Hamas when it attacks unarmed Israeli civilians. In these national questions, as in all others, we are guided by single strategic goal: to unite the working class in opposition to the capitalist class and its state. National, ethnic or religious groups oppressed by the state have a right to resist that oppression, arms in hand if they deem it necessary. But to support this right is by no means to support the *nationalist ideology and politics* that usually accompanies such resistance.

One pernicious feature of nationalist ideology is that it usually tends to regard the entire dominant nationality or group as complicit in its oppression, and therefore often considers *all* members of such a group to be fair game. Many nationalists also see nothing wrong with attaining the oppressed group’s aims at the expense of the dominant group, i.e., reversing the terms of oppression. Marxists, on the other hand, are always guided by the objective of breaking the workers of the dominant group from the influence of “their” bourgeoisie, and uniting them with workers of oppressed groups. We cannot accomplish these tasks without being the most resolute opponents of every form of national exclusivism and by rejecting all-class national alliances of the oppressed. The whole matter, in short, is far more complicated than simply “taking sides”.

In national conflicts which involve geographically mixed (or interpenetrated) populations, Marxists seek to formulate a programme that recognises the rights of *all* the peoples involved, in order to undercut reactionary national/communal hatreds and unite the masses in a struggle against capitalism. And this is just as true in Northern Ireland as in Bosnia.

The Falklands/Malvinas War Revisited

The Latin American comrades contrast the LRCI’s refusal to defend the Bosnian Serbs against NATO with WP’s Argentine defencist posture during the 1982 Malvinas/Falklands conflict. Their split resolution comments:

“The actual LRCI doesn’t have anything to do with the organization that we founded. WP, that in 1981 had the courage to agitate for the victory of Argentina in the war that was fought by its ‘own’ British imperialism, now is calling for the defeat of the people who are being bombed by the British planes and is asking its own imperialism to arm and train their allies in Bosnia.”

It undoubtedly took courage for British leftists to defend Argentina in 1982—but that does not prove that the policy was correct. Unlike the recent NATO attacks on the Bosnian Serbs, the war over the Falklands/Malvinas did *not* involve an assault by imperialist forces on the indigenous population of a semi-colony. The Malvinas war was fought for a remote group of islands that had been possessed by Argentina for a dozen years early in the nineteenth century, but never had an indigenous Argentine population. For 150 years there had been no Argentine presence on those islands, and the few thousand shepherders who lived there in 1982 were of British origin and wanted nothing to do with

Argentina.

In a recent theoretical piece on the national question, the LRCI criticise ideologies which call for “claiming and forcibly recovering ‘lost’ national territory, inhabited by another people, ‘lost’ centuries or millennia ago; e.g. Serbian claims to Kosovo, Zionist claims to Arab lands considered part of *Eretz Israel*” (*Trotskyist Bulletin* No. 6). It is only adaptation to Third Worldist sentiment that causes them to be so resolutely “anti-imperialist” over the Malvinas/Falklands.

Argentine self-determination was *not* at stake in the war over the Malvinas and there was, consequently, no reason to shed workers’ blood in the conflict. The entire episode was initiated by the Argentine military regime in order to derail a growing wave of proletarian struggle. It was just such situations that Lenin had in mind in “A Caricature of Marxism and Imperialist Economism” when he remarked:

“We shall not ‘support’ a republican farce in, say, the principality of Monaco, or the ‘republican’ adventure of ‘generals’ in the small states of South America or some Pacific island.”

There is a methodological connection between WP’s knee-jerk “anti-imperialism” over the Falklands, their support to Green nationalism in Northern Ireland, Palestinian nationalism in the Middle East and their capitulation to the imperialist hue-and-cry over Bosnia today. They are rooted in liberal moralism on the national question, the belief that “oppressed peoples” (whoever they are) can do no wrong. In the Malvinas, the Middle East and Ireland, the LRCI, by tailing the nationalism of the oppressed, pose as the most intransigent opponents of imperialism. In Bosnia this same tailist impulse has led to the shameful refusal to defend the Serbs against imperialist terror.

NZ Dissidents Reject Regroupment

The NZ oppositionists (who now call themselves the Communist Workers Group) appear to have drawn pessimistic conclusions from their time in the LRCI:

“Our experience is that small, isolated, petty-bourgeois dominated tendencies, geographically located in a major imperialist power, have yet to find a way to overcome these problems. They will not rise above national narrowness until they recognise that the ‘solution’ is part of the problem. The LRCI instead of recognising the need to fight to overcome these dangers, makes a virtue of necessity. Of necessity revolutionaries have to start with FPG’s [Fighting Propaganda Groups] that are small, overwhelmingly petty bourgeois in composition, and which do not represent the major forces of struggle around the world. This was the situation faced by the FI in the early 1930s. But this does not mean that we make a virtue of the propaganda stage of party building, minimising or even fetishising the fact of our narrow petty bourgeois composition and national narrowness.

“A symptom of fetishising the early stage of party building is the tactic of splits and fusions among the fragments of trotskyst centrism with the aim of ‘rebuilding’, ‘reforging’ etc. the FI. We reject this tactic as the main orientation of any FPG because the FI is dead and cannot be revived. Such a project wears the history of the postwar FI like a stinking corpse around its neck. None of these fragments seeking to breathe life into the corpse have survived the current crisis of Trotskyism. This is what we would expect. None of the trotskyst left currents was theoretically armed to cope with the crisis of ‘trotskyst centrism’ posed by the world crisis of capitalism and the collapse of the Stalinist states. The permanent crisis of

leadership was already acute by the 1940s. In the 1990s there is as yet no recognisable embryo of a revolutionary vanguard. To solve the crisis of revolutionary leadership we must turn our backs on the bankrupt method, theory and practice of post-war fake trotskysm.”

—“Declaration of the Proletarian Faction”

The PF depicts the LRCI as an international tendency dominated by European centrists who tend to capitulate to social democracy over questions like Russia and Bosnia, and who seek to dragoon their international comrades into endorsing their betrayals. But the cure the PF advocates is at least as bad as the disease. To “turn our backs” on political struggle amounts to a refusal to combat revisionism on an international scale. This was the great mistake of the pioneer American Trotskyist, James P. Cannon, in his early struggle against Pabloism. Now the PF wants to repeat it! The only way an internationalist cadre committed to the programme of Marxism can be forged is through political struggle—through “splits and fusions”. Rejection of this points to a retreat into “practical” work in one’s own national (or even local) terrain, which must inexorably lead to a slide into exactly the “national narrowness” that the PF denounces.

Some Unresolved Questions

Faced with a sharp turn to the right, the LRCI threw up a real, if heterogeneous, leftist opposition. The LRCI leadership is making much of the fact that the oppositionists split before exhausting their opportunities for internal discussion. The Latin American oppositionists counter with allegations that they were bureaucratically denied their factional rights.

There do seem to be a few irregularities in the LRCI leadership’s handling of its internal opponents. While anticipating that the former oppositionists will “gossip” about how badly they were treated, the LRCI’s own documents admit that a leading Latin American oppositionist was suspended from membership for being “involved in discussions with comrades organising an undeclared, *secret* faction that eventually led to a walkout without a political fight by eight members of the New Zealand section”. The same document admits that a leading NZ oppositionist was suspended from membership, not for any breach of discipline, but for expressing “disloyal” views in an intra-tendency document that inadvertently found its way into the hands of the WP leadership. The leadership admits further that:

“All these manoeuvres led the IEC to take the unusual step of delaying recognition of [i.e., attempting to suppress?] a tendency the Bolivian section and [a leading Latin American oppositionist] proclaimed on Bosnia and Rwanda just before the [June] IEC.”

As is often the case in factional situations, an “unusual step” by one side was matched by the other. The result was a complaint by the LRCI that the suspended Latin American oppositionists carried out a “precipitate and unprincipled split”. The Latin Americans explained their action as follows: “Because we were obstructed in our right to be a tendency inside the LRCI we declare ourselves as a tendency of the international workers movement.”

It is clear that the LRCI have suffered a serious setback—particularly in the departure of their Latin American membership. Workers Power are currently circulating a sheet predicting that Villa, one of their former leading cadres:

“will frequent the pubs of London with any hopeless

sectarians, like the Spartacists and the International Bolshevik Tendency, who can use him, because they are enemies of the LRCI, conveniently forgetting that these pro-Serb 'anti-imperialists' always scabbed on the Irish national struggle and refused to side with Argentina during the Malvinas war. He will fuel his own, and their fantasies, about further 'splits' in the LRCI. He and they will be sorely disappointed."

—“Statement on the expulsion of J. Villa and the suspension of Poder Obrero (Bolivia) from the LRCI”, 13 October 1995

The LRCI leadership is quite right that their former left oppositionists must come to terms with a number of questions that are clearly unresolved in their minds. They must attain clarity on the failed Soviet coup of 1991, and, more generally, on the question of with whom to make and not to make military blocs. They should re-evaluate LRCI positions on the national question, especially as it pertains to interpenetrated peoples. They should also seriously reas-

sess the significance for the working class of Galtieri's 1982 Malvinas adventure. How they answer these questions will play a large part in determining whether they continue to develop toward genuine Trotskyism or slide back into some approximation of the classical centrism of Workers Power circa 1981.

We note that the LRCI statement predicts that anyone expecting “further ‘splits’ in the LRCI” will be “sorely disappointed”. That may be, but we are not entirely surprised to learn that the WP leadership has forbidden WP members from engaging in informal political discussion with comrades of the IBT. This prohibition suggests that the LRCI leadership is already thinking about where those who leave to the left may go. Naturally we regret this unprecedented policy by the LRCI leadership. At the same time we are flattered by the attention, and promise to do everything possible to be worthy of this expression of confidence in the power of our programme. ■

Defeat NATO/UN Attack on Bosnian Serbs! **Imperialist Hands off the Balkans!**

Reprinted below is the IBT's 5 September 1995 statement on the NATO bombing of Serb targets in Bosnia:

The recent air strikes by British, French and American aircraft, and the bombardment of Bosnian Serb positions by UN heavy artillery, represent a qualitative escalation of imperialist intervention in former Yugoslavia. The current blitz is an act of all-out war, reminiscent of the murderous assault on Iraq in 1991. The open-ended attacks on the Bosnian Serbs, which go far beyond the previous “pin-prick” air strikes, are intended to humiliate the Serbs and force them to accept the diktat of the Great Powers. The 31 August London *Times* reported:

“As the allies continued their bombardment, the UN delivered its ultimatum to the Bosnian Serbs, setting out the conditions under which the raids would be halted. They included the withdrawal of all heavy weapons within 12 miles of Sarajevo and the signing of an agreement on the cessation of hostilities.”

NATO's military intervention in the Bosnian communal war was prefigured by the massive covert arming of the ultra-nationalist Croatian regime of Ustasha-apologist Franjo Tudjman by the imperialists. This resulted in the re-annexation of the largely Serbian-inhabited Krajina region and the expulsion of some 250,000 Serbs. The imperialists, who have routinely fulminated against Bosnian Serb “ethnic cleansing” of Muslims, could barely hide their glee at the Croats' military success and the resulting change in the balance of forces. The NATO air bombardment followed directly.

The position of Marxists in the current conflict is clear: we are for the defeat of the NATO/UN imperialist forces and the military defense of Bosnian Serb forces resisting them. We advocate political strikes and solidarity actions by British, French, American and other workers against the imperialist blitz. Insofar as Bosnian government or Croatian forces act in concert with, or under the command of, the imperialist forces in attacking the Bosnian

Serbs, we are for their defeat. While defending the Serbs against imperialist attack, our position on the communalist conflict remains unchanged—we do not support the territorial claims of any of the combatants to land inhabited by other peoples. Marxists must defend all communities (Serb, Croat and Muslim) from “ethnic cleansing”, whether in Krajina or Sarajevo.

Many reformists and centrists, bending to the pro-imperialist sentiments prevalent in the social democratic and rad-lib milieux (“B-52 liberalism”), have sided militarily with the Bosnian Muslim government. To give this a leftist coloration they have suggested that the NATO powers really support the Serbs. But in reality the imperialists would like to stabilize the Balkan powder keg and turn *all* the fragments of the deceased Yugoslavian deformed workers state into compliant semi-colonies. Any illusions about the imperialists having some special affinity for the Serbs have been blown to pieces by the recent NATO bombardment.

The barbaric communal slaughter in Bosnia is a product of the break-up of Yugoslavia, the multi-national deformed workers state, and the victory of capitalist counterrevolution. To expect the U.S. or European imperialists to solve the resulting catastrophic mess would be to appeal to Satan for salvation from the fires of hell! A defeat for the imperialists in the Balkans would be a victory for working people in the region as well as internationally. Revolutionaries seek an end to the communalist bloodletting and the development of a class axis of struggle against the imperialist godfathers and their local allies: Milosevic, Tudjman and Izetbegovic.

Imperialism out of the Balkans!

For a multi-ethnic workers militia to stop communal terror!

For a Socialist Federation of the Balkans!