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### Statement of Purpose

Taking stock of the universe of positions and goals that constitutes leftist politics today, we are left with the disquieting suspicion that a deep commonality underlies the apparent variety: What exists today is built upon the desiccated remains of what was once possible.

In order to make sense of the present, we find it necessary to disentangle the vast accumulation of positions on the Left and to evaluate their saliency for the possible reconstitution of emancipatory politics in the present. Doing this implies a reconsideration of what is meant by the Left.

Our task begins from what we see as the general disenchantment with the present state of progressive politics. We feel that this disenchantment cannot be cast off by sheer will, by simply "carrying on the fight," but must be addressed and itself made an object of critique. Thus we begin with what immediately confronts us.

The *Platypus Review* is motivated by its sense that the Left is disoriented. We seek to be a forum among a variety of tendencies and approaches on the Left—not out of a concern with inclusion for its own sake, but rather to provoke disagreement and to open shared goals as sites of contestation. In this way, the recriminations and accusations arising from political disputes of the past may be harnessed to the project of clarifying the object of leftist critique.

The *Platypus Review* hopes to create and sustain a space for interrogating and clarifying positions and orientations currently represented on the Left, a space in which questions may be raised and discussions pursued that would not otherwise take place. As long as submissions exhibit a genuine commitment to this project, all kinds of content will be considered for publication.

#### Submission guidelines

Articles will typically range in length from 750–4,500 words, but longer pieces will also be considered. Please send article submissions and inquiries about this project to: review\_editor@platypus1917.org. All submissions should conform to the Chicago Manual of Style.

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# The Platypus Review

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social system, there is going to be chaos and your living them honestly, "if you really challenge capitalism as a consciousness is when people know, and you can say to about what kind of economy we will have. To me class cratic planning—it raises a whole bunch of questions questions about production and consumption, and demowhat's valuable and what we think is valuable. You raise others. You begin to raise questions about who decides you anywhere automatically, but some allow more than tions about capitalism. I don't think any demands take it's just about militancy, so then you have to raise questively. But even if they fight collectively, they can't win if demands that can't be realized unless they fight collecbe used for." So in each sector you have people making different vision of what this productive capacity should auto manufacturing unless you say, "we have a whole This is also true in the private sector. You can't win in

**96**: Well, you certainly don't want to get trapped into arguing for a larger state but you do want to argue for a fight for a more democratic state and workplace. Right now, that kind of strategy, in itself, is only a strategy for giving unions a way to start a struggle rather than passively saying they can't do anything. It has some chance of building alliances and opening the door to begin thinking of issues in class terms, in terms of challenging who ing of issues in class terms, in terms of challenging who truns the workplace and questions about the priorities of the state. But, and this hasn't happened yet, the next step is to honestly and soberly say to people, if they want this they have to become more radical.

AM: To turn to the material base for class consciousness, there is a way in which organizing in the public sector, from the perspective of capital and its reproduction, limits its dynamism. As you pointed out, reducing public services were linked to regenerating the dynamic character of capital after the crisis of the 1970s. How can something that is increasingly unimportant to capital reproduction generate a progressive transformation from within it?

where they think through difficult things? party change the world without a newspaper or a journal workers. You look at the party and wonder, how does a doesn't have ambitions to be a radicalizing factor for short term will be of little help to the individual worker, to be radical. But even a party like the NDP, which in the pragmatically, especially if a party doesn't even pretend They look to a party in the same way, instrumentally and be merely instrumental in maintaining the world as is. you need, and without it, workers look to the union to and their links to others. That is the kind of organization workers is about understanding their position in society yond even the most radical union, whose interaction with dency. Class consciousness requires an organization beas a worker doesn't teach you that, it teaches you depenety. That doesn't happen spontaneously. Your experience class, a class built for the purposes of transforming soci-A major issue here is that you have to understand

complicated world. The rank and file need to be linked to a Left.

with one another within industries. But even in their best moments, unions are only a fragment of a much larger,  $\,$ 

**5G**: Unions can be involved in radical moments, but they certainly aren't able to revolutionize the world in the absence of a Left. Unions today are not in the place to offer spaces for people to listen to more radical ideas, to push political parties or to join them, but are busy just defending themselves, handling grievances, busy competing

AM: Could you expand more on the connection between unions and politics? It seems in the present, union activity increasingly greases the wheels of the electoral success of the New Democratic Party (NDP, social democrats) and Liberal Party in Canada, or the Democratic Party in the U.S. At points in this conversation it seems that what you have in mind for an organized form of politics almost appears to be unions in themselves, yet you also suggest there are limits to how far a union moveneral can independently generate its own politics. What ment can independently generate its own politics. What characterizes these limits?

organizations or unions, certainly contributes to this pescapable of expressing our frustrations, whether political to feel like it can be changed. Not having organizations ing of the world, but to understand the world you have talking to people, part of it is developing an understandhas been achieved so far. This can't be overcome by just lowering of expectations, for wanting to hang onto what be capitalist, it was devastating. Fatalism allows for the Union, but when you saw that even those guys wanted to else was possible. You didn't have to believe in the Soviet active, but its failure did evoke the belief that nothing really inspired people to another alternative when I was altogether. I don't know that the Soviet Union's existence tomatic of a fatalistic view towards changing the world not protest. It's a conservative orientation. This is sympand the promise is that you can keep most of it if you do countries is that workers have actually achieved a lot, think right now what reproduces capitalism in developed This might have been so once in capitalism's history. I fair and democratic or that it creates a beautiful world. in which capitalism is legitimated by people thinking it's I would characterize the moment right now not as one

break this cycle is hardly objective. the conditions that produce that organization. How you become "necessary" to reproduce an organization and be towards conserving their own existence. It can easily in history they might be ineffective, their response might they might develop confidence, and in another moment militant, they might inspire, they might raise standards, the revolutionary. At one historical moment they might be sectionalist organizations, and have no instinct towards form organizations for that resistance. But unions are resist, and then there is reason to believe that they might There is reason to think that they should collectively ing spontaneous about workers becoming revolutionary. socialism. Let me make it more radical. There is nothagainst the war in Vietnam, and raising the question of activism, but there is a difference between being active

shouldn't exaggerate how far left it was. There was left

So while the 1960s was a period of militancy, we

vival was tied to the fate of working class politics. strong working class rather than recognizing that its surlong-term. The Left took for granted the existence of a are, or what kind of political organizations we need in the about what unions are, what their inherent limitations for the Left to raise other questions, nobody was thinking capitalism. And while militancy creates a certain space working conditions and hours, they could not challenge the moment of capitalist growth to ask for changes in capitalism. While unions could have taken advantage of and anti-war protests do not fundamentally challenge Left ought not exaggerate its power: cultural revolution tion. The 1960s prove exemplary in regards to why the wasn't a politicization, much less the onset of a revolutheir power, and the next day, nothing happens? There if you have a general strike, everybody is intoxicated by strike in Canada. The question becomes, what happens becoming part of the defeat. In 1976 we had a general but in the absence of emancipatory politics, they end up 56: That's a good question. There are forms of resistance,

AM: You describe this period largely as a response by capital and capitalists. What about the politics of the Left through this period? Are they adequate? I mean, historically hasn't the Left been able to politicize the most dynamic edges of capital reproduction in a way in which it seemed unable to do between 1960 and the present?

restored, and labor and the Left leave feeble. from the 1980s and 1990s dynamically restructured and viduals rather than a class. Thus capitalism emerges tions, the reintegration of people in capitalism as indipolitics, about the complete breaking down of expectaproduct of a reconceptualization forced by the state of not just about the defeat of labor, but that defeat as the as an asset, getting more into debt. So the 1990s are ibly apparent. People began to borrow, using their home 1990s, the limits of such an approach became incredstruggles began to be solved by individuals. By the late the kids stay at home longer. What used to be collective maintain your lifestyle, you begin to work longer hours, way it was. But over time, they have begun to adjust. To militant about not wanting the world to continue the in the 1960s. Workers' expectations were once quite sideration even in the problematic ways it was espoused and fewer speak of leaving capitalism, a common con-China, and India emerges as a dominant power. Fewer By the 1990s, capital is integrating eastern Europe and the 1980s, as capitalism emerges at its most dynamic. So the 1980s and 1990s are much of the same story, the story of the weakening of the working class and the deepening of capitalism. Even as the United States pushes further towards being the dominant global power, it struggles through the deep recession well into

gains fought and won in the past can be lost. because you never know how far you can go, how many overnight. It continued throughout the 1980s and 1990s, working class must be broken, and it didn't just happen tion. So by the end of the 1970s, it became apparent the capitalist economy, encountered its limits, such as infla-Even the United States, the supposed core of the global state spent a decade trying to figure out how to respond. a threat to capitalism, so much so that capital and the class in Europe and North America continued to pose capital. Throughout the 1960s, the organized working in such a way that is not without relation to present-day made by the Left in the 1960s restructured production than as a crisis of international competition. Any gains from the initial strength of labor and its collapse rather ments of the 1960s. The crisis then is one stemming labor movement, itself connected to the militant moverecognized as the product of a generational defeat of the weaker than before and capital stronger. This should be opening for the radicalization of labor. Instead, labor is gitimizes capital and the financial system, creating an scale. One would think the current crisis resolutely delethis defeat—our present moment has really shown its ening of capital. At the time we didn't see the scope of result was its defeat, and, simultaneously, the strengthconstraints, and that wasn't on the agenda for labor. The have to develop the capacity to challenge structural by militancy. But militancy can only take you so far. You the public sector and also, an environment dominated Sam Gindin: In the 1960s, there was an explosion of

Andony Melathopoulos: Clearly these are not very good times for public sector unions, not only in Canada but worldwide. What characterizes the current situation? How does it differ from what unions have faced historically and how they could respond, not only in the 1990s, but during their formation in the 1960s?

Last November Platypus organized a teach-in led by Sam Gindin of the Canadian Auto Workers, on "Public Sector Unionism, Austerity, and the Left," at York University in Toronto. What follows is an edited version of the interview Andony Melathopoulos of Platypus conducted with Gindin as a follow up to the teach-in.

Andony Melathopoulos

Unionism, austerity, and the Left An interview with Sam Gindin

The Platypus Review

# Marxism and Israel: Left perspectives on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict

Alan Goodman and Richard Rubin

Last November Platypus hosted a roundtable discussion between Alan Goodman from The Revolutionary Communist Party USA, and Richard Rubin from Platypus entitled "Marxism and Israel: Left Perspectives on the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict" at Hunter College in New York City. Panelists were asked to speak on the role the Left has played in the development of Israel, the Left's analysis of the role of American intervention in the Middle East, and what a critical Marxian approach to the conflict currently looks like, compared to what it might look like. What follows is an edited transcript of the event. Full audio of the event can be found at <a href="http://www.archive.org/details/MarxismAndIsraelLeftPerspectivesOnTheIsraeli-palestinianConflict">http://www.archive.org/details/MarxismAndIsraelLeftPerspectivesOnTheIsraeli-palestinianConflict</a>.

Alan Goodman: I'm a correspondent for *Revolution* newspaper, which is the voice of the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA. I will be speaking to the questions, but in some ways "what are the questions?" is part of the problem. A special issue of *Revolution* newspaper took an in-depth exploration of the nature and role of Israel in the world today by asking the question "Bastion of Enlightenment or enforcer for imperialism?" I Even people who have profound disagreements with us actually agree that these are the accurate terms of debate, and I think that as we begin to think about the genesis of the State of Israel, the question of legitimizing or delegitimizing Israel comes down to the fact that, objectively, this is a state that is not a legitimate state.

Let me start by sharing an experience I had at Columbia University: Someone who was selling this newspaper said "If you can tell me which state in the Middle East has nuclear weapons, I'll give you a free copy of this paper." My immediate reaction was alarm, wondering how we were going to pay for all the copies we would have to give away because Mordechai Vanunu (as well as Jimmy Carter) has exposed Israel to have about 120 nuclear weapons. It's the world's worst kept secret in a sense. Here's the bad part: many answered "Iran, I think." We explained to them that Iran's nuclear program is on the verge of developing weapons-grade nuclear material, while Israel has a sophisticated nuclear arsenal. And then the response was that many people felt a lot more comfortable knowing that Israel has 120 nuclear weapons than they were knowing that Iran might get one or two.

Our main article had a thorough argument that there wouldn't be a viable Zionist movement as we know it, and certainly not a State of Israel, were it not for the sponsorship of colonial and imperialist powers. Perhaps the biggest misconception that I find when I engage with the international community around the history and nature of Israel is the general narrative that, due to the atrocities done to the Jews in World War II, they should have a country of their own where that can never happen again. There is a coincidental convergence between the end of WWII, the coming to light of some of the crimes of the Holocaust, and the founding of the State of Israel. The fundamental driving force behind the Storrs, the first British military governor of Jerusalem, wrote that England's support for the Zionist enterprise was one "that blessed him that gave as well as him that took, by forming for England 'a little loyal Jewish Ulster' in a sea of potentially hostile Arabism." <sup>2</sup> This exemplifies how the world powers have looked at Israel, not being driven by a desire for justice.

Israel has carried out terrible crimes on behalf of U.S. Imperialism, but very little is known about these crimes. In the 1980s Israel was a vital force behind the genocidal killing of up to 200,000 Guatemalan peasants during a time when the U.S. was engaged with the Soviet Union over Soviet-backed resistance movements in Central America. Perhaps a better known, but still generally kept secret, is Israel's tight relationship with apartheid South Africa. One can't understand the nature of Israel without understanding the nature of its global imperialist sponsors, first Britain and then the U.S. Bob Avakian, the leader of the RCP has said that, "After the Holocaust, the worst thing that has happened to the Jewish people is the State of Israel." One of the things that is clearly underlying this is that the State of Israel is something which was done to the Jewish people. In the introduction to our special issue of Revolution we pose this challenge: "The State of Israel is projected to the world as an outpost of democracy and tolerance in a sea of intolerant Islam bent on its destruction. To be considered a credible mainstream voice in U.S. politics, academia or the media, one must present Israel as a frontline of defence against Jihad and a critical fortress defending our way of life. What is the essential nature of Israel? How does one understand the paradox of a country founded to make up for a great crime, but that itself commits great crimes? Answering these questions is not about "competing narratives"—the question here is, what is true, and what is just? To get into this, we will examine the history of Israel to understand the actual dynamics that led us to today's situation."

Responding specifically to the question of the history of the Left and its relation to Israel, it hasn't been one of our better moments. Bob Avakian has done a lot of work to excavate the experience of Russia and China when they were socialist countries, during the brief, sixty-year period when one or both were socialist, and during that time those countries mainly supported national liberation struggles around the world. It's recently been documented by the UN that the Soviet Union actually helped supply arms to Israel. As part of what we refer to as "Bob Avakian's New Synthesis," we put a lot of emphasis on the need for the next stage of the world communist revolution to take a radically different approach to the relationship between the interests of existing socialist countries and the world revolution. You'll find throughout this synthesis, in economics and every realm, putting the world revolution first.

I'm arguing two points. One, by objective standards of legitimacy, Israel was built on ethnic cleansing. The inhabitants of Palestine have been terrorized and

driven out of their country. They have a right to have their country back. Secondly, the essential nature of Israel is that it is an instrument of, and an enforcer for, imperialism. The stakes of this in the world are tremendously high; many people are very upset and outraged by Israel's crimes. We have to appreciate that around the world there's a whole different perception than in the U.S. We here in America have to break the vicious cycle of "McWorld vs. Jihad" by taking a clear stand against our own government and starting to think, not like Americans, but in the interests of humanity.

Richard Rubin: My esteemed teacher and friend, the late Eqbal Ahmad, who was himself a close friend of the late Edward Said, once remarked many years ago when speaking on the difficulty of addressing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, that the first thing one must bear in mind is that one is dealing with two communities of suffering. Furthermore, each is a symbolic representative victim of two great crimes. The Jews, although by no means the only victims of Fascism, are the archetypal victims of Fascism. The Palestinians, although by no means the only victims of colonialism, or even the worst victims, have also, like the Jews, with their particular fate, become the archetypal representative of a colonized people for many around the world. The intersection of these two communities of suffering leads to many pitfalls of discourse. I will not be addressing such issues here, however, and you must take my sympathy for all victims of oppression for granted. Rather I will address, as much as is honestly possible, the question of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and Marxism. This is by no means a self-evident perspective, and it is one that is generally avoided even by professed Marxists who, when they speak on the issue, usually say things that are identical to what many non- and anti-Marxists say. So is there, then, a Marxist perspective on the Israel-Palestine

To begin to address this question, I will draw your attention to two articles that both purport to offer such a perspective, although they come to radically different conclusions. One is an article entitled "Bastion of Enlightenment or enforcer for Imperialism?" that appeared recently in Revolution, the newspaper of the RCP USA, which we were just hearing about. The other is an article entitled "Israel and Communism" that appeared in the *Platypus Review* in issue 28, written by Initiative Sozialistisches Forum.<sup>3</sup> The latter, which is a translation from a German article that appeared in 2003, will strike most American readers as by far the more exotic and strange of the two. Indeed, to many it will seem not a document pertaining to the Left at all, but rather a manifestation of neo-conservatism. The deep origins of the Antideutsch current, from which the "Israel and Communism" article is written, are in German Maoism. The article is premised on an acceptance of Marxist categories and written in a Marxist language close to jargon. While superficially the "Antideutsch" article and the Revolution article appear to be polar opposites, I would like to claim that they actually stem from a similar methodology and misconception of the Left. To make this point more clearly, let me refer you to the following passage from the Revolution article:

"In the aftermath of World War II, the U.S. emerged at the top of the imperialist world order, in a position to dictate terms to both defeated rivals (like Germany and Japan), and allies (like Britain and France). Around the world, the U.S. moved to supplant old colonial powers and swallow up or encompass their spheres of influence. But other important forces also emerged out of World War II. For a short time, the Soviet Union and China formed a socialist camp that confronted the imperialist world. And another major factor on the post-war political stage was a powerful wave of national liberation struggles throughout especially Asia and Africa against the weakened colonial powers of Europe

Yet in 1948, as we just heard, the Soviet Union under Stalin's dictatorship supported the creation of Israel, and the socialist camp mentioned above provided significant, some would argue decisive, material aid to Israel. Furthermore, many articles appeared in the communist press at the time hailing the Israeli struggle as an anti-imperialist one. Arab communist parties, which were small, but which did exist in several countries—particularly Egypt and Iraq—loyally opposed the intervention of the Arab armies and supported partition. Additionally, the Israeli Communist Party took an extremely patriotic line during the war, at one point even criticizing Ben-Gurion in their newspaper, Kol HaAm (Voice of the People), for being an agent of British imperialism and not conquering even more Arab territory than he did. So in 1948 progressive and communist opinion was much closer to that of the Antideutsch article than to that of the RCP article. While nowadays anti-Zionist Jews are assumed to be on the Left (although in fact the largest group of anti-Zionist Jews are actually found among the ultra-Orthodox), this was not the case in the mid-century.

What has remained structurally constant however, despite this great shift in loyalties among progressive public opinion, is the insistence of stating the question in terms of which nationalist cause to support. That is, the essentially internationalist character of revolutionary Marxism has been subordinate to the logic of national liberation, even by those who claim to be revolutionary Marxists. This is true just as much of those who claim to be in an anti-Stalinist or Trotskyist tradition as it is of Maoists. I would argue that if there is any political lesson to be learned from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, it is that national liberation for oppressed peoples can be a delusion. After all, the deeply tragic character of Zionism stems from its Janus-like character. To the Palestinians it was and is a colonial settler movement, but to the Jews Zionism presented itself as a movement of national liberation for an oppressed people. It is customary to focus on one side of this (the colonial settler side) to delegitimize Zionism, and the other (the national liberation movement) to legitimize it. But I am emphasizing that both are integral to it.

Conversely, it will be argued that I am neglecting the distinction between the respective nationalisms of the oppressed and the oppressor. To this response one must simply pose the question of whether the nationalism of the oppressed can actually liberate the oppressed people. There is the sentimental notion that oppressed peoples, through their resistance to oppression, liberate themselves. Posed in this way, one has little need to think about the politics of resistance, only to support resistance. In fact, however, resistance, even heroic resistance, cannot end oppression unless the material and social forces to overcome it are present. It is questionable, for example, whether in the whole history of humanity there has been more than one successful slave revolt. It was neither John Brown nor Denmark Vesey who ended chattel slavery in the U.S. but the Union Army of the northern bourgeoisie. It was not the Warsaw Ghetto uprising or the heroic struggles of Jewish partisans that ended the Holocaust, but the material superiority of the Allied armed forces, particularly the Red Army. Israel is a successful advanced capitalist state with hundreds of advanced nuclear weapons and an immense economic and military superiority to the Palestinians. Only a politics that bridges the national divide and breaks the loyalty of masses of Israeli Jews to "their" state can in fact bring liberation to the Palestinians. To pose the need for such a politics will in the present moment seem utopian. It is counterposed to all the political forces on the ground in Israel-Palestine: the State of Israel, of course, but also the Palestinian Authority and Hamas. Nor, truthfully, does it resonate with any but a handful of Israelis or Palestinians. At present, all politics around the issue are formulated in terms of the acceptance of the bourgeois nation-state. This is true not only of the explicitly rightwing politics (in both Jewish and Arab versions) but also of the so-called "two-state" and "one-state" solutions. In a deep sense, 1948 is the last and deepest legacy of 1848.

#### Panelists' Responses

AG: I definitely want to respond to what Richard said, because I don't agree with it. We live in a country where we can discuss all kinds of things, but our standard of living is built on a system that ravages the rest of the world. Those cars outside are fuelled because regimes like the Saudis cut off the hands or the heads of people who protest. There's a tremendous amount of resentment around the world and it's not because they hate us for our freedoms, it's because every time Uncle Sam shows up you have Abu Ghraib, you have mass graves, you have torture chambers, and Israel plays a foundational role in propping up that world system, in particular on behalf of the United States. There are challenging questions in terms of understanding the nature of the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians, and there are different class forces among Palestinians. In Benny Morris's book 1948 he describes some Zionist atrocity and then he'll say "But a crowd of angry Arabs clubbed a Jew to death." You can't understand the world that way; that is relativism and there is both a methodological and a moral problem with that. Let me pose the moral question another way: You're living in Tony Soprano's house, and there's some screaming in the backyard because Tony's out there beating somebody. Now, do you say to yourself, "Maybe the guy Tony's beating is kind of a thug himself?" Or do you say, "This house is built on gangsterism that kills and tortures people?" So my point is that we have to confront the nature of the world we live in, and what responsibility that poses to us. These are basic questions of both epistemology and morality.

RR: I would argue, again, that the relationship between imperialism and Zionism is a complicated one, as seen in the case of British imperialism and Zionism, for example. Theodor Herzl originally imagined that he could "buy" Palestine from the Ottoman Empire, which was naïve of him, because he didn't really understand Ottoman politics. The support for British imperialism and an alliance with imperialism was of course crucial to the success of the Zionist enterprise. However, the relationship was somewhat fraught and there was a kind of mutual betrayal on both sides. When the British spoke of a "little loyal Jewish Ulster," they did not really foresee an independent Jewish state. So ultimately Zionism did in fact come into conflict with British imperialism. There were two rebellions against British imperialism: There was the Arab revolt, which you could call the first intifada in 1936-1939, in which the Zionists sided with the British in helping to suppress it. While that is a legitimate anti-imperialist revolt, one also has to realize that it had a very right-wing and problematic leadership. Then there was the Zionist revolt. After the Palestinian leadership had been largely crushed by the defeat of their revolt, there was a Zionist revolt against the British in the immediate aftermath, which led the British to turn Palestine over to the UNthe partition resolution.

The relationship between Zionism and imperialism is such that Zionism structurally needed an external ally because the alliance with Britain was always fraught. If you look at the Israeli attitude, for example, during the Suez crisis, there was still a lot of hostility between the Israelis and the British. It's worth bearing in mind that the commander of the Jordanian Army who was later fired was in fact a British officer. There was a direct connection there, and this was part of the way progressives justified to themselves that the Israelis were fighting against British imperialism. All of this shows how one needs to problematize these narratives of anti-imperialism and national self-determination. As a patron of Israel, the U.S. has been, clearly from the Israeli standpoint, the most beneficial because it is the one with which there is the least conflict. It is an alliance that especially deepened after 1967 and 1973. In other words, what I want to emphasize here is not the specifics of the narrative but the fact that, in a structural perspective, I think that U.S. support for Israel is, overall, rational. Having said that, it does not follow that the craziness that goes on in Hebron every day is simply a manifestation of imperialism. Not everything in the world that goes on is directly a manifestation of imperialism. For example I don't think the U.S. pushed

Israel into the 1967 war, just as I don't think the Soviet Union pushed the Arabs into that war. That war happened because of specific local circumstances, and it turned out to be a great success for Israel.

I don't think that the U.S. or Israeli lifestyles are actually built on the fact of imperialist oppression. That is, that the majority of the population in these countries materially benefit. It's not the case that the majority of Israeli Jews materially benefit from the oppression of Palestinians. There are a lot of Israeli Jews who are preoccupied with many other political questions than Palestine. So there is a similar class conflict to that which exists in other advanced capitalist countries. I don't think one can just say that the people living in Sderot are economically privileged, or that they're better off than people in Gaza. The total logic of capital doesn't explain, for example, what goes on in Hebron, nor does it explain the shift in Palestinian politics from secular nationalism to Islamism and the rise of Hamas. There are many ideological factors than can operate within the totality of capital, and I think Marxism poses that capitalism generates opposition to it. People are not totalitarian robots programmed into capitalist ways of thinking. So, this idea of totalitarian capital, I don't see how one could understand it this way.

#### Q & A

Since when does Marxism talk about morality? Richard gives a fair reply to Alan's problematic history of what is happening in Israel, and Alan responds by giving a loaded argument about how we're supposed to be anti-Zionist. I don't see how this perspective is Marxist in any way.

AG: Morality has always been part of Marxism, but it is a hallmark of what Bob Avakian and the RCP are bringing forward to put more emphasis on morality. Frankly, the experience of the Marxist movement up to now has been a bit expedient on questions of morality. And a lot of what Avakian has argued is that there has to be a struggle to objectively define a morality that corresponds to the interests of humanity, and then to hold ourselves to it when it appears to get in way of our objectives. By analogy, if one sees a woman getting raped, one doesn't ask, "How do I understand this without taking sides?" If you understand it, you will take sides. There's a distinction between the people who have suffered the most and the people who are oppressing and exploiting them. I think it's valuable to deconstruct it because through this process we can actually understand the nature of Israel as coming down to morality. It is a basic point of Marxism that the economic foundation of capitalist society defines societal morality. The society we live in perpetuates a dog-eat-dog dynamic, which is an expression of economic relations. When Marx and Engels talk about religion they describe it as the "soul" of a soulless world, and in a lot of their writings they talk about the reflection of economic relations in how people look at their relationships with others. I find it rather incredible that we don't seem to have some common perception that the reason we're walking around with iPhones has something to do with the wave of suicides in the plants that make them. Marx came about at a time when the peasants got driven off the land, and a class arose that represented, historically, the potential for humanity to transcend class society. Now, our critique is that Marx saw that too mechanically by equating proletarians with the historic mission of the proletariat as a class. But from that perspective, if it all boils down to the Maoist "right to rebel against reactionaries" then it's not counter-productive to try to understand the role that Israel plays in the world today. I think if we can't start from, "What is Marxism and how to apply it?," we have to start from what's real and what's true. If Marxism turns out not to be true, then so be it.

RR: I think that there is a moral dimension to Marxism. I've never been a Zionist, and as such am very much aware that the Palestinians are oppressed. I've been to Palestine and I've seen that Hebron is a hellish place. I'm also very much aware of the history of Jewish oppression. I know people personally who have undergone extreme suffering, both Palestinians and Jews, and removing oneself from a moral position is a way of trying to understand that. Opposition to imperialism is not a moral category, but a political and analytic category. Israel as an "apartheid" state is framed moralistically. So the question is not, "Is Israeli oppression of the Palestinians as bad as apartheid?" To me that's not the question. What is objectionable about that terminology is that it's very bad sociology, since the political and economic logic of apartheid and that of Zionism are radically different. Therefore talking about it loosely in terms of the "struggle" is confusing.

I think one of the things this has shown about specifically Marxist points of view on Israel-Palestine is how easily the discussion gets formulated in terms that really have nothing to do with Marxism. In terms of the question of morality, it's the question of how one conceives of political strategy. I'm not so interested in behaving morally—I'm interested in the possibilities for human liberation for Israelis and Palestinians, but also human beings in general, because you can't separate these 10 million people who are Jews and Palestinians from everyone else on the planet.

Concretely, the situation in Israel-Palestine is miserable and it's getting worse. If it's not heading towards an immediate catastrophe, it could, down the road, lead to regional nuclear war, or worse. There really isn't a revolutionary Marxist politics in Israel-Palestine aside from a handful of intellectuals, as is the case everywhere. Currently, the formulation of the politics is within a liberal context, but the liberal context and the way it's formulated around the one-state solution won't triumph. If, for example, a one-state solution were to be taken seriously, we would have to stop calling for an independent Palestinian state, and the Palestinians would have to say to the Israelis, "Annex us, give us full citizenship rights," and thereby try to transform the State of Israel into a bi-national state.

I would like Richard to expand on what he identified earlier as the bourgeois nation-state, in terms of the one-state or twostate solutions.

"Left perspectives" continues on page 4

#### Unionism, continued from page 1

standards are going to fall, but it will be an investment in the future." When workers accept that then they are class conscious. When you tell them that when you get rid of capitalism everything will be better, that's not class consciousness.

AM: There seem to be two issues for the Left to consider. The first are organizational problems in which the Left could, for example, create the means for workers to overcome the sectionalism of the union movement. The other is the issue of the Left being able to advance a utopian vision. But utopian impulses can misrecognize the potential of a given historical moment, and as you point out, organization can serve very instrumental ends. How would these two elements come together to make a reinvigorated Left?

**SG**: The question is, how do you build a movement that can begin to think in class terms to transform the conditions for unions, or in other words, how do you build a culture where socialists can influence rank and file workers without supposing that the line between political organizations and unions isn't real and necessary? I think we need to begin by appreciating the limits of unions, but also the potential. On the other hand, one needs a Left beyond unions, a Left that raises questions that wouldn't be addressed otherwise. The Greater Toronto Worker's Assembly (GTWA) is trying to think about how we create a new layer of politics beyond ineffectual coalitions, but we are really struggling because, while we do not want to begin from a point of immediate rigid consensus, we are beginning to recognize how crucial it is to develop a cadre of workers and activists who both embody intellectual understanding and are active. This is especially difficult if you want to be honest about the obstacles we face as a movement, but the role of the Left is to challenge things, to reflect on our failures, to resist repeating the notion that the working class are victims. The prime crisis for both labor and the Left today is the inability to rethink and reinvent our movements, our organizations. We end up reproducing archaic or inept modes of understanding and changing the world. So while I see some movements with good impulses, there aren't many that would be organizationally capable of producing a critical cadre, recruiting from the rank and file, developing socialists, promoting education.

AM: There is a way in which, for example, socialism, or Marxism, are subjective aspects of capitalism. They emerge from capitalism but are reflexive and, in their best examples, comprehend its emergence historically. Of course some types of socialism are romantic, and understand their task to mount a resistance to modernity, but some might consider it a transformative process, and not from the outside, but through capitalism. With this in mind I want to bring the conversation back to something you said earlier about patterns of consumption eroding working class capacities. I wonder how much of this is more a product of the degradation of left politics and its

growing inability to politicize the changing character of capital?

SG: Resistance does come from within capitalism, but for me, Marxism is the attempt to look at capitalism from a perspective that can imagine overcoming it altogether. When I watch comrades jumping from the socialist ship, when they seemed at one point to recognize that capitalism would produce nothing but catastrophe, I wonder what about the world convinced them otherwise. I think many have been disillusioned by the failure to fight for bigger things, a failure which has marked the labor movement for well over a quarter century now. This does seem to suggest that Marxists aren't immune to the cynical fatalism that there may be no going beyond capitalism. I wonder what caused this. Was it a degradation of the politics of the Left? Was it the increasing mindset that one is compensated through individual consumption, not through collective politics? I'm not exactly certain how things have gotten so bad, but it seems to me that without a Left that can keep alive some sort of utopian impulse, some refusal that things must be the way they are, and without organizations that can collectively raise these questions, only individual responses, however unsatisfactory, "make sense." Because for workers themselves it seems very hard to develop alternative perspectives. When it became evident that the working class would cease to experience increases in standards of living, reflecting social mobility from being on the street or on the picket line, the reaction was not social rebellion or political upheaval. Workers weren't radicalized—they responded to social problems by assuming the responsibility personally. Instead of understanding capitalism as systemically incapable of producing a world of equality or justice or extended freedom, a consciousness that would have to be politically contextualized and delivered, those demands were met by working longer hours, changing one's family structure and how it behaves, and debt, all of which only further the kind of dependency produced under capitalism. If you are so busy working you can't explore yourself intellectually or politically, the opportunities for a Left are slim.

AM: As you pointed out earlier one of the reasons why working class neighborhoods surrounding the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) vote conservative is that there is a certain freedom that capital is generating that they do not want to lose. Wouldn't a socialist politics have to engage that subjectivity and understand the ways in which it could advance politically? Without historical consciousness, how could you tell that the ways in which things are getting worse aren't completely natural?

**SG**: Without a historical perspective, you would have to make sense of regression in other less effective ways. When times are bad I think people begin to get nostalgic for an imagined past. You get rid of a specific set of politicians and replace them, and for a while, you might have new hopes. That can keep you going for quite a while. You might even get quite militant, but the militancy is about

returning to the past. The difficulty is to eventually convince people of the emptiness of a certain kind of life, without being patronizing. It's enormously difficult, because you are not actually presenting them with a tangible alternative. The role of the Left, then, is to be able to take advantage of a moment to politicize people.

AM: Would you agree that the questions arising from this process will not provide political clarification without a ruthless critique? I mean hasn't your experience been that many groups who already consider themselves anticapitalist or working class use these categories as a way to affirm their own practices, not to change them? Isn't it true, as Adolph Reed wrote, that "the opposition must investigate its own complicity"? Put another way, what does it say about the Left in the present if the only way to have a conversation about capitalism with activists is to put critique to the side?

SG: The starting point for reinventing the Left is first, to appreciate the extent of our defeat, and second, to acknowledge that we were not in fact that strong and effective before that defeat, that our defeat was produced out of the limits of our analysis and structures. This means that a ruthless critique of ourselves is fundamental. But this can't mean a retreat from activism until we've fully clarified the "right" response. Critique and discussions must not occur just by talking among ourselves; self-examination must occur alongside engagement in struggles. Otherwise we're just talking to ourselves with no reality check.

The problem in bringing a wide range of people together in something like the GTWA is that the early focus is on developing working relationships and the fragility of those relationships means that any political discussions are very cautious and tentative—building bridges gets in the way of the critiques and discussions essential to building a new politics. I don't know a way out of this dilemma other than trying to ensure that such caution is transitional and that at some point the "risks" of the harder discussions must be put on the table. We haven't gotten to that point yet in the GTWA. Some of these discussions have been forced on us where we plan events and have to get to the roots of why we don't agree on certain specifics. But the difficult discussions have not really started. Some think it will be impossible to do so without fracturing the organization, that people are too embedded in their current activism, whether in the movements or unions, to seriously re-examine what we are doing. I think these pessimists are likely right, but the possibility that this may in fact work, or that we may learn something from the experience that leads to trying again in a more promising way, is good enough reason to work through the GTWA. I cannot think of an alternative way of working that is more hopeful. | P

Transcribed by Andony Melathopoulos

#### Trotsky, continued from page 2

was openly identifying with Stalin's heir Yuri Andropov (the butcher of the 1956 workers' political revolution in Hungary), refused to take sides in the final showdown between the Stalinist "hardline" remnants and Yeltsin's counterrevolutionary rabble. It could have been worse—most of the rest of the world's supposed "Trotskyists" openly supported the pro-imperialist Yeltsinites.

Trotsky's ideas remain a vitally important guide for action today because, as recent events from Egypt to Wisconsin clearly show, the future of humanity depends on finding an answer to the essential problem he addressed in the Transitional Program of 1938—the "crisis of proletarian leadership." Trotsky's devotion to the struggle for human liberation continues to inspire many of the young fighters around the world who recognize that the only way out of the endless horrors of global imperialism is through revolutionary organization. He had an immensely powerful intelligence and a brilliant facility for expression, but perhaps more importantly he was one of those exceptional individuals who, in the words of James P. Cannon, remained true to the revolutionary ideals of his youth.<sup>11</sup> His entire life was governed by Marx's injunction in the 11th thesis on Feuerbach: "The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to change it." | P

1. Leon Trotsky, *Trotsky's Diary in Exile—1935* (New York: Atheneum, 1963), 46–7. Quoted in Leon Trotsky, *The Transitional Program: The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International* (London: Bolshevik Publications, 1998), 5. Available online at <a href="http://www.bolshevik.org/tp/IBT\_TP\_0\_Preface.html">http://www.bolshevik.org/tp/IBT\_TP\_0\_Preface.html</a>. 2. The 1901 letter on centralization is quoted in Leon Trotsky, *Report of the Siberian Delegation* (London: New Park, 1980 [1903]), 39-42. Available online at <a href="http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1903/xx/siberian.htm">http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1903/xx/siberian.htm</a>. It is also discussed in Isaac Deutscher, *The Prophet Armed: Trotsky 1879-1921* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989 [1954]), 44-46.

3. Leon Trotsky *My Life* (New York: Pathfinder, 1970 [1930]), 162. Available online at <a href="http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1930/mylife/ch12.htm">http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1930/mylife/ch12.htm</a>

4. V.I. Lenin, "'Left-Wing' Communism: An Infantile Disorder," in *Collected Works*, Vol. 31 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1961 [1920]), 27. Available online at <a href="http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1920/lwc/ch03.htm">http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1920/lwc/ch03.htm</a>

5. Isaac Deutscher, *The Prophet Armed: Trotsky 1879-1921* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989 [1954]), 99-116.
6. Leon Trotsky, *1905* (New York: Random House, 1971 [1907]), vi–vii. Available online at <a href="http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1907/1905/index.htm">http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1907/1905/index.htm</a>.

7. Isaac Deutscher, *The Prophet Armed: Trotsky 1879-1921* [1954] (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), p 162. 8. Pierre Broué, "Trotsky: A Biographer's Problems" in *The Trotsky Reappraisal*, ed. Terry Brotherstone and Paul Dukes (Ed-

inburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1992), 17.
9. "The Lost Document," in Leon Trotsky, *The Stalin School of Falsification* (London: New Park, 1974), 82. Available online at <www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1937/ssf/sf08.htm>.
10. Leon Trotsky, "Balance Sheet of the Finnish Events," in *In Defense of Marxism* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1995 [1942]), 271. Available online at <a href="http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1940/04/finnish.htm">http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1940/04/finnish.htm</a>

11. James P. Cannon, "Sixtieth Birthday Speech," in *Notebook of an Agitator* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1973 [1958]), 180–1.

## Lenin, continued from page 2

achieve the socialist future. Workers of all countries will have to unite in a multi-faceted international movement to bring such a future into being

There is also the matter of organization, to which Lenin is rightly credited with giving intense attention, but in which (it seems to me) he followed Marx to a large extent. August Nimtz, in his recent book Marx and Engels: Their Contribution to the Democratic Breakthrough, did a nice job of demonstrating the seriousness with which Marx and Engels approached the question of organization. As they emphasized in the Communist Manifesto, Communists are the most advanced and resolute section of the working class movement seeking to push forward all the others because they are the most theoretically clear element within the working class, with a definite understanding of "the line of march, the conditions, and the ultimate general results of the proletarian movement." There is a need for democratic cohesive, effective organizations of working class activists to play this role. There are radical insights and militant upsurges that animate the working class in its struggles, but much serious work needs to be done to help draw together and deepen such insights into consistent class consciousness, and to sustain and broaden such upsurges into consistent class struggle that can lead to socialism.9

All that I have said is the orientation of Lenin as much as it is of Marx.

There isn't time here to explore what happened to Lenin's revolutionary project in the years after the 1917 Russian Revolution, particularly with the consolidation of the Stalin regime after Lenin's death. I can only cite the comments of a dissident Communist in Soviet Russia. Mikhail Riutin: "Stalin is killing Leninism, [killing] the proletarian revolution under the flag of the proletarian revolution, [killing] socialist construction under the flag of socialist construction." A former associate of Nikolai Bukharin and one-time leader of the Communist Party in Moscow, expelled in 1930 for opposing the forced collectivization of land, Riutin wrote that "the most evil enemy of the party and the proletarian dictatorship, the most evil counterrevolutionary and provocateur could not have carried out the work of destroying the party and socialist construction better than Stalin has done."10

As Marxist theory and revolutionary organizational perspectives became increasingly compromised and debased, some—including figures in the leaderships of certain Communist parties—were able to remain true to their original perspectives in the 1920s, serving as resources for Marxist renewal from the 1930s onward, along with the vital contributions of Rosa Luxemburg and Leon Trotsky, not to mention the example and ideas of Lenin himself, which amounted to a "saving remnant" of revolutionary Marxism.<sup>11</sup> With the multiplication and deepening of crises and insurgencies in our own time, it seems likely that such resources as these will attract the attention of thoughtful activists throughout the world, including right here. | P



Lenin's funeral, January 1924.

1. Richard B. Day and Daniel Gaido, eds., Witnesses to Permanent Revolution: The Documentary Record (Leiden: Brill, 2009); Lars Lih, Lenin Rediscovered: 'What Is to Be Done' in Context (Leiden: Brill, 2006), republished in paperback (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2008); August H. Nimtz, Jr., "A Return to Lenin – But Without Marx and Engels?," Science & Society (October 2009).

2. James P. Cannon, "Lenin and the Iskra Period," The Left Opposition in the U.S. 1928-31, ed. Fred Stanton (New York: Monad Press/ Pathfinder Press, 1981), 332. My own case for the correspondence of the thought of Marx with that of Lenin (as part of a broader revolutionary Marxist stream) can be found in From Marx to Gramsci: A Reader in Revolutionary Marxist Politics (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press. 1996). But this is hardly a unique perspective. It can be found (often with substantial documentation) in much of the existing literature, a sampling of which includes: David Riazanov, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (New York: Monthly Review Press. 1974); Sidney Hook, Towards the Understanding of Karl Marx, A Revolutionary Interpretation (New York: John Day Co., 1933); Edmund Wilson, To the Finland Station (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1972); Christopher Hill, Lenin and the Russian Revolution (New York: Viking/Penguin, 1978); Ernst Fischer and Franz Marek, *The* Essential Lenin (New York: Seabury, 1972): E. H. Carr, The Russian Revolution: From Lenin to Stalin (New York: The Free Press, 1979); Ernest Mandel, The Place of Marxism in History (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1994); Neil Harding, Leninism (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996); Lars Lih, Lenin (London: Reaktion

3. James P. Cannon, "Again: On 'Unity with the Shachtmanites," The Struggle for Socialism in the "American Century," ed. Les Evans (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1977), 139.

4. James P. Cannon, "The Revolutionary Party and Its Role in the Struggle for Socialism," *Fighting for Socialism in the 'American Century,'* ed. David Holmes (Sydney, Australia: Resistance Books, 2000), 11.

5. C. L. R. James, "Lenin and the Vanguard Party," *The C. L. R. James Reader*, ed. Anna Grimshaw (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1992), 327.

6. This responds to an accusation regarding my views in "Symposium on Lars Lih's Lenin Rediscovered," with contributions by Paul Blackledge, Ronald Grigor Suny, Robert Mayer, Chris Harman, Alan Shandro, Paul Le Blanc, and Lars T. Lih, Historical Materialism 18.3 (2010), 25–174. Specifically Lars Lih, "Lenin Disputed," 131. 7. For a survey collection of Lenin's writings consistent with this

argument, see V. I. Lenin, *Revolution, Democracy, Socialism: Selected Writings*, ed. Paul Le Blanc (London: Pluto Press, 2008).

8. See Paul Le Blanc, *Lenin and the Revolutionary Party* (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 1993). The material in the following several paragraphs is taken from Michael Yates, "Interview with Paul Le Blanc," *MRZine* (28/08/06), http://mrzine.monthlyreview.org/2006/yates280806.html.

9. See August H. Nimtz, Jr., *Marx and Engels: Their Contribution to the Democratic Breakthrough* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press. 2000).

10. Paul Le Blanc, *Marx, Lenin, and the Revolutionary Experience: Studies of Communism and Radicalism in the Age of Globalization* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 133–134. In addition to extensive discussion in this volume, see Paul Le Blanc, "Lenin and Revolutionary Democracy," *Critique: Journal of Socialist Theory*, Volume

38. Issue 4, 01 December 2010, 617-630 11. See Perry Anderson, Considerations on Western Marxism (London: Verso, 1979). Gramsci's political writings and prison notebooks up to the 1930s stand together with four works stretching from 1923 to 1929 by Lukács as outstanding additions to an authentic Leninism. For Gramsci, see Selections from Political Writings 1910-1920 (New York: International Publishers, 1977), Selections from Political Writings 1921-1926 (New York: International Publishers, 1978), and Selections from the Prison Notebooks (New York: International Publishers, 1971): for Lukács, see History and Class Consciousness, Studies in Marxist Dialectics (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1971), Lenin, A Study in the Unity of His Thought (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1971), A Defence of "History and Class Consciousness"—Tailism and the Dialectic (London Verso, 2000), and "Blum Theses, 1928-1929," in Tactics and Ethics: Political Essays, 1919-1929 [New York: Harner and Row, 1973). On Luxemburg, see Paul Frölich, Rosa Luxemburg (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2010), Rosa Luxemburg, Socialism or Barbarism: Selected Writings, ed. Paul Le Blanc and Helen C. Scott (London: Pluto Press, 2010), and Georg Adler, Peter Hudis and Annelies Laschitza, eds., The Letters of Rosa Luxemburg (London: Verso, 2011). On Trotsky, see Kunal Chattopadhyay, The Marxism of Leon Trotsky (Kolkata, India: Progressive Publishers, 2006), Bill Dunn and Hugo Radice, eds. 100 Years of Permanent Revolution Results and Prospects (London: Pluto Press, 2006)

and Leon Trotsky, Writings from Exile, ed. Paul Le Blanc and

Kunal Chattopadhyay (London: Pluto Press, 2011 forthcoming).

## Left perspectives, continued from page 3

RR: In terms of the one-state solution, a lot of one-state politics are just fraudulent: people talking about a onestate solution who don't even really believe in it. But to the extent that you take it seriously, the advocates are talking in terms of the bourgeois nation-state. People like Ali Abunimah are anti-Marxists. I'm not saving that pejoratively—Edward Said was an anti-Marxist, and that's the proper analytical description of their liberal political positions. The only context in which a one-state program might succeed would be in the context of a radical transformation of social relations, in other words, if it were framed in a Marxist context. But the guestion of one-state vs. two-state is really not the issue, because if you have a bi-national political movement committed to Arab-Jewish socialist co-existence and the abolition of existing social relations, then whether you end up with a federation or two socialist states or one bi-national state is a secondary consideration.

I wouldn't say it's the question of taking one side or another. It's erroneous to understand it as just Israelis vs. Palestinians. The problem is with formulating a radical response, but even Palestinians and Israelis who believe in genuine equality and co-existence formulate their positions not in a radical context, but an essentially liberal context. One can say that's very understandable given the circumstances in which they operate. Part of the problem, however, is that I'm trying to formulate a politics that really can't exist, because there aren't the people on the ground to formulate such a politics. I'm not arguing about which is the oppressor nation, and which is the oppressed. The question is how you understand that fact of an oppressed nation and an oppressing nation politically, which I think is what the real difference is. If we are really talking about the way the world is set up, then there is the specific history of capitalism in its organization of the nation-state, and the fact is that some nation-states have played an unequal role in terms of the development of capitalism. It has not developed equally across the planet. But if you're talking about a revolution in the United States or western Europe, then that would abolish the world capitalist system, and one consequence would be the abolition of the nation-state. The same does not apply to the possibility for socialist revolution in a third-world country. I think we have a false opposition: the totality of capitalism vs. the theory of imperialism; that is, Alan's claim that our standard of living in the U.S. is directly dependent on the exploitation of third-world countries. | P

Transcribed by Ryan Hardy

1. See "Bastion of Enlightenment... or Enforcer for Imperialism: The Case of Israel," *Revolution* 213, October 10, 2010. Available online at <a href="http://www.revcom.us/a/213/israel-en.html">http://www.revcom.us/a/213/israel-en.html</a>.
2. Tony Cliff, "The Jews, Israel and the Holocaust," *Socialist Review* 219, 1998. Available online at <a href="http://www.marxists.org/archive/cliff/works/1998/05/israel.htm">http://www.marxists.org/archive/cliff/works/1998/05/israel.htm</a>.

3. Initiative Sozialistisches Forum, "Communism and Israel," *Platypus Review* 28 (October 2010). Available online at < http://www.platypus1917.org/2010/10/08/communism-and-israel/>. 4. "Bastion of Enlightenment... or Enforcer for Imperialism."

# Lenin's Marxism

Paul Le Blanc

At the 2011 Left Forum, held at Pace University in NYC March 18-21, Platypus hosted a conversation on "Lenin's Marxism." Panelists Chris Cutrone of Platypus, Paul Le Blanc of the International Socialist Organization, and Lars T. Lih, the author of Lenin Reconsidered: "What is to be Done?" in Context were asked to address, "What was distinctive about Vladimir Lenin's Marxism? What was its relationship to the other forms of Marxism and Marxists of his era? Was Lenin orthodox or heterodox? Was there a 'unity' to Lenin's political thought, as Georg Lukács argued, or do his major works—What is to Be Done? (1902), Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism (1916), The State and Revolution (1917), "Left-Wing" Communism: An Infantile Disorder? (1920)—express distinctive and even contradictory phases in Lenin's political development? How did Lenin's Marxism overcome—or not—other competing forms of Marxism? How should we understand Lenin's historical contribution to Marxism, today?" The following are Paul Le Blanc's opening remarks.

THE MARXISM OF VLADIMIR ILYICH LENIN represents as my friend Lars Lih emphasizes—the best that one can find in the Marxism of the Second International. This "best of Second International Marxism" embraces the rich contributions of Karl Kautsky up to 1910, as well as those of Rosa Luxemburg, Franz Mehring, David Riazanov, and of course Leon Trotsky. The qualities of these theorists shine through in a remarkable new collection, Witnesses to Permanent Revolution: The Documentary Record, edited by Richard Day and Daniel Gaido. Yet it is a collection that leaves out Lenin, except for relatively negative references, especially in the generally quite good scholarly introduction, unfortunately reflecting the flawed "textbook" interpretation that Lars has done so much to demolish: that Lenin's outlook of the early 1900s was both authoritarian and mistrustful of working class spontaneity. At the same time, I think Lenin's representing the "best of Second International Marxism" actually adds up to a close correspondence between Lenin's thought and that of Karl Marx.1

Lars has often argued that Trotsky-influenced activists (like me), despite our undoubted virtues, have adhered to a leftist version of the "textbook" critique of the early Lenin. Actually, back in 1931, when reviewing an English-language collection of Lenin's writings from that early period, James P. Cannon (a founder both of U.S. Communism and U.S. Trotskyism) commented, "Lenin was an orthodox Marxist. This fact leaps out from every page of his writings." Consistent with

Lars' massive study, Lenin Rediscovered, Cannon finds
Lenin's Marxism of the early 1900s to be superior to
that of sharp critics who would later evolve into close
comrades: Luxemburg and Trotsky. As Cannon put it,
"Lenin's policy was vindicated in life. Lenin built a party,
something that Luxemburg was not able to do with all
her great abilities and talents; something that Trotsky
was not able to do because of his wrong estimation
of the Mensheviks." Genuine Marxism is dynamic,
open, critical-minded—and the term "orthodox" often
has the opposite connotation. But regardless of such a
terminological quibble, Cannon and Lars seem to have
the same position here, and I think they're basically right.

What was Lenin's distinctive contribution to Marxism? According to Cannon, "The greatest contribution to the arsenal of Marxism since the death of Engels in 1895 was Lenin's conception of the vanguard party as the organizer and director of the proletarian revolution." 4 Yet this seems to be contradicted by the findings of *Lenin Rediscovered*. Its argument could be summarized in the following way:

The theory and practice of the vanguard party, of the one-party state, is not (repeat not) the central doctrine of Leninism. It is not the central doctrine, it is not even a special doctrine.... Bolshevism, Leninism, did have central doctrines. One was theoretical, the inevitable collapse of capitalism into barbarism. Another was social, that on account of its place in society, its training and its numbers, only the working class could prevent this degradation and reconstruct society. Political action consisted in organizing a party to carry out these aims. These were the central principles of Bolshevism. The rigidity of its political organization came not from the dictatorial brain of Lenin but from a less distinguished source—the Tsarist police state. Until the revolution actually began in March 1917, the future that Lenin foresaw and worked for was the establishment of parliamentary democracy in Russia on the British and German models.... Bolshevism looked forward to a regime of parliamentary democracy because this was the doctrine of classical Marxism: that it was through parliamentary democracy that the working class and the whole population... was educated and trained for the transition to socialism.5

In fact, this summary was put forward in 1963, but not by Lars, who would have been on the verge of adolescence back then. These are the words of C. L. R. James, whose blend of Afro-Caribbean, British and U.S. experience and reflection (with some strong traces of Trotskyism) constitutes a distinctive and creative contribution to Marxism.

Yet Lenin and the Bolsheviks—unlike their Menshevik comrades and ultimately unlike Kautsky—were prepared to follow the implications of the revolutionary Marxist orientation through to the end. It is not the case that Kautsky or the Mensheviks somehow "forgot" the Marxist ideas that Lenin and his comrades "remembered," but they became compromised.<sup>6</sup> The Mensheviks adhered to the dogma that Russia could now only go through a democratic-capitalist transformation, that a working class, socialist revolution would not be on the agenda until many years later. They consequently became committed to a workercapitalist alliance, which naturally created pressures that forced them to compromise the class-struggle elements of Marxism. For Kautsky, by 1910, it became clear that he would become marginalized within the increasingly bureaucratic-conservative German Social Democratic movement unless he subtly but increasingly diluted his seemingly unequivocal and eloquent commitment to revolutionary Marxism. By 1914, when the German Social Democracy supported the imperialist war policies of the Kaiser's government, and in 1917 in the face of the Bolshevik Revolution, Kautsky became utterly compromised. What is distinctive about Lenin's Bolsheviks is that they did not compromise, they doggedly followed through to the end the implications of the revolutionary Marxist orientation as expressed in What Is To Be Done?, The State and Revolution, "Left-Wing" Communism, and elsewhere in

This suggests that there was something to Cannon's assertion after all—that there was a decisive element of difference between the kind of party that Kautsky was part of in Germany and the kind of party that Lenin and his comrades were actually building in Russia. At the same time, Lenin's thought can most fruitfully be understood not as a break from, but in continuity with that of Marx.8

One of the key insights offered by Marx and Lenin is that the very nature of capitalism makes revolutionary change both possible and necessary. This is so in several ways. The advance of technology and productivity, thanks to the dynamics of capitalist development, has drawn the different regions of our planet together and created a sufficient degree of social wealth, or economic surplus, to make possible a decent, creative, free existence and meaningful self-development for each and every person. Yet the dynamics of capitalist development (the accumulation process) are so destructive of human freedom and dignity that it is necessary to move to a different form of economic life.

The natural trend of capitalist development has been creating a working class majority in more and more sectors of the world, and the nature of the working class makes a socialist future both possible and necessary: possible because a majority class, essential to the functioning of capitalism, has the potential power to lay hold of the technology and resources of the economy to bring about a socialist future, and necessary because the economic democracy of socialism is required to ensure the dignity, the freedom, and the survival of the working class majority.

For both Marx and Lenin, then, we also see that socialism and democracy are inseparable. The very definition of socialism, for both of these revolutionaries, involves social ownership and democratic control over the technology and resources on which human life depends. Marx says in the *Communist Manifesto* that the working class must win the battle for democracy in order to take control of the economy. Lenin asserts in various writings leading up to 1917 that the working class can make itself capable of bringing about socialism only by becoming the most consistent fighter for all forms of genuine democracy and democratic rights

Both of these comrades believe it will be possible to win a working class majority to this perspective if revolutionaries develop a clear understanding of capitalist reality (which creates the possibility and necessity for socialism) and help others—especially among the growing working class—to understand this reality. But both of them also insist that an essential part of this process of creating a socialist majority among the working class will involve helping to organize the workers themselves around serious struggles to improve the condition of the working class (a better economic situation, an expansion of democratic rights, etc.). Not only will this result in life-giving improvements for the workers, but it will also give them a sense of their power and their ability to bring about change. An accumulation of organizational and class-struggle experience will enable them to struggle more effectively in the future. This will be necessary because the natural dynamics of capitalism will work ultimately to erode any gains the workers are able to win. Such erosion can be blocked, ultimately, only by moving beyond capitalism to the economic democracy of socialism. In the struggles of today, it is necessary to educate about the requirements of the future. In multiple ways, the struggle for reforms in the here and now must be linked to the struggle for revolutionary

In order to advance its interests, then, the working class must organize itself not only as an economic movement but also as a political movement, and it must be politically independent from the capitalists and other upper-class elements organized in various liberal, conservative, and hybrid political parties. The workers must utilize their trade unions, reform organizations, and political party in the struggle for political power. When they are able to win political power (which will have to be organized in more radically democratic structures than those developed by the capitalist politicians), this will constitute a working class revolution, and they should use this revolutionary power to begin the transition from a capitalist to a socialist economy. In this entire process, the workers must ally themselves with all laboring people (especially farmers, peasants, etc.), and with all of the oppressed, whose liberation must be part of the working class political program.

Because capitalism is a global system, the struggle of the working class for a better life and for socialism must be global, and the development of socialism can only be accomplished on a global scale. Lenin played a major role in grounding revolutionary strategy in a clear understanding of imperialism, but the global and exploitative expansiveness inherent in capitalism is laid out clearly in the *Communist Manifesto*. Marx and Lenin shared a most thoroughgoing revolutionary internationalism, rejecting the notion that a single country could somehow, on its own,

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# Trotsky's Marxism: "The point, however, is to change it"

Jason Wright

At the 2011 Left Forum, held at Pace University in NYC March 18-21, Platypus hosted a conversation on "Trotsky's Marxism." Panelists Ian Morrison (Platypus), Susan Williams (Freedom Socialist Party), and Jason Wright (International Bolshevik Tendency) were asked to address, "What was Trotsky's contribution to revolutionary Marxism? At one level, the answer is clear Above even his significance as organizer of the October insurrection and leader of the Red Army during the Russian Civil War, what makes Trotsky a major figure in the history of Marxism is his status as the leader of the Left Opposition and, later, his founding of the Fourth International. But this panel asks whether stating this fact is sufficient for understanding Trotsky's Marxism, or whether this might not in fact merely beg the question. The issue remains—what was it in Trotsky's evolution from the period of 1905 through the Russian Revolution of 1917, that allowed him to become the leader of the Left Opposition and the great Marxist critic of Stalinism in the 1920s and 1930s? What of Trotsky, rather than 'Trotsky-ism'?" The following are Jason Wright's opening remarks.

**LEON TROTSKY WAS A BRILLIANT WRITER**, thinker, military strategist, and revolutionary organizer, whose life was defined by the struggle to preserve and develop the legacy of Bolshevism and the lessons of the October Revolution of 1917, the single most important historical event of the last 200 years. In an entry in his diary on March 25th, 1935 he wrote:

[I] think that the work in which I am engaged now, despite its extremely insufficient and fragmentary nature, is the most important work of my life—more important than 1917, more important than the period of the Civil War or any other.

For the sake of clarity I would put it this way. Had I not been present in 1917 in Petersburg, the October Revolution would still have taken place....

Thus I can not speak of the "indispensability" of my work, even about the period from 1917 to 1921. But now my work is "indispensable" in the full sense of the word ... There is now no one except me to carry out the mission of arming a new generation with the revolutionary method over the heads of the leaders of the Second and Third International[s].

Trotsky was murdered by a Stalinist assassin a little more than five years later, but he lived long enough to launch the Fourth International and write the *Transitional Program*—a document in which he codified the essential lessons of the October Revolution, thus, in his words, "ensuring the succession" of Bolshevism.

Trotsky was a relative latecomer to Leninism. Before joining the Bolshevik Party in 1917 he was one of its most vociferous, and prominent, opponents. Yet as early

as 1901, before the publication of Lenin's justly celebrated *What Is To Be Done?*, Trotsky had flirted with the idea that the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (RS-DLP) needed a more centralized apparatus than it then possessed.<sup>2</sup> And when he escaped from Siberian exile in 1902 he joined Lenin in London. The next year, in 1903, he attended the Second Congress of the RSDLP, where Lenin sought to reorganize the party on a centralist basis. However, Trotsky rejected Lenin's notion of a hard combat party, and instead favored the Menshevik model of a broad organization that would include sympathizers, fellow travelers, and well-wishers.

In hindsight it is clear that the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 would have been impossible without the prior split with the Menshevik "softs." But it took many sharp political struggles between 1903 and 1917 before the significance of the differences between Bolshevism and Menshevism came into focus for many of the participants. Looking back, Trotsky was harshly critical of his own role in 1903, writing:

My break with Lenin occurred on what might be considered "moral" or even personal grounds. But this was merely on the surface. At bottom, the separation was of a political nature and merely expressed itself in the realm of organization methods. I thought of myself as a centralist. But there is no doubt that at that time I did not fully realize what an intense and imperious centralism the revolutionary party would need to lead millions of people in a war against the old order.<sup>3</sup>

Trotsky had been wrong on the most essential issue, but he was not wrong about everything. In terms of the historical possibilities for the Russian Revolution, his vision was more acute than Lenin's—particularly in the aftermath of the failed 1905 Revolution, which Lenin later referred to as a "dress rehearsal" for 1917.4 Lenin's thinking in 1905 remained essentially confined within the then prevailing Social Democratic orthodoxy that Russia must first pass through a bourgeois revolutionary stage. Trotsky, who had begun to take note of the combined and uneven character of Russia's development and of the limitations of the nation state, recognized as early as 1904 that a successful revolution would require the working class to lead Russia far beyond the demands of the liberal bourgeoisie.<sup>5</sup>

The spark that set off the 1905 revolution was the "Bloody Sunday" massacre of workers peacefully marching to the Winter Palace to petition the Tzar in January of that year. There are many parallels between Russia in 1905 and the current wave of popular revolt sweeping the Arab world, but in some very important ways the Russian workers' movement was more advanced than what we have seen recently. The tumult of 1905, which produced

the first true mass organizations of working class power, the soviets, temporarily suppressed the cleavage between Mensheviks and Bolsheviks. Trotsky, who returned from exile when the revolution erupted, quickly emerged as a leading figure in the Petrograd Soviet, and in that capacity collaborated closely with the Bolsheviks.

When the revolution was defeated, Trotsky was jailed. While in prison he began to refine his theory of permanent revolution, which he elaborated in 1906 in *Results and Prospects*. He subsequently summarized his conception as follows:

[T]he Russian revolution, although directly concerned with bourgeois aims, could not stop short at those aims; the revolution could not solve its immediate, bourgeois tasks except by putting the proletariat into power. And the proletariat, once having power in its hands, would not be able to remain confined within the bourgeois framework of the revolution...

The contradictions between a workers' government and an overwhelming majority of peasants in a backward country could be resolved only on an international scale, in the arena of a world proletarian revolution. Having, by virtue of historical necessity, burst the narrow bourgeois-democratic confines of the Russian revolution, the victorious proletariat would be compelled also to burst its national and state confines, that is to say, it would have to strive consciously for the Russian revolution to become the prologue to a world revolution.

As his biographer, Isaac Deutscher, observed,

[T]his powerful insight shaped much of Trotsky's future activity. In this brochure of eighty pages was the sum and substance of the man. For the rest of his days, as leader of the revolution, as founder and head of an army, as protagonist of a new International and then as hunted exile he would defend and elaborate the ideas he had put in a nutshell in 1906. Similarly, Karl Marx spent his whole life developing and drawing conclusions from the ideas he had advanced in the *Communist Manifesto...*<sup>7</sup>

Yet despite his important insights on the shape of the Russian Revolution, Trotsky acted as an impediment to the development of an effective revolutionary party in Russia. From 1903 until the outbreak of World War I, he was perhaps the foremost advocate of a reunification between Bolsheviks and Mensheviks. As the French historian Pierre Broué has noted,

[T]he more striking feature of this period is his constant striving at any price for conciliation and for the unity of the Russian Party. For Trotsky at that time, Lenin was sectarian and even secessionist, fully responsible for the Party split. The outcome of this line was the constitution of the 1912 August Bloc, in practice the regroupment of every current of the Party against Lenin and several so-called Party Mensheviks."8

The revolutionary events of 1917 forced Trotsky to belatedly recognize that he had been wrong and Lenin right on the necessity of a hard break with Menshevism. In a symmetrical development, Lenin's April Theses were denounced by many old Bolsheviks as an expression of Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution. Still, the essence of the partnership was that Trotsky came over to Lenin. The Russian Revolution was possible because Lenin had built a party whose cadres fought every form of revisionism and class-collaborationism. Once Trotsky made the leap to Leninism, he never went back, and from the day he joined

there was, in Lenin's words, "no better Bolshevik."

During the 1920s and 30s Trotsky extended and deepened Bolshevism "according to its own logical laws of development," and upheld its internationalist core against the reactionary and autarchic nationalism of Stalin's "socialism in one country." Against the Comintern's ultra-sectarian Third Period attacks on social democrats as "social fascists," the Left Opposition advocated the creation of a united front between Communists and social democrats to

During the Spanish Civil War, Trotsky told the bitter truth about the betrayal of Andrés Nin and the POUM in supporting the cross-class "Popular Front" government. Trotsky asserted that the first step to defeating Franco and the forces of reaction was to break with *all* wings of the capitalists, including the "progressive" bourgeois forces aligned with the Popular Front. This was, of course, exactly what Lenin had proposed in his April Theses.

Today we have a somewhat analogous situation with Hugo Chavez, the left-talking Bonapartist that heads the Venezuelan capitalist state. He must of course be defended against attacks by the CIA or rightist coups, as the Trotskyists sided with the Spanish republicans against Franco and the Bolsheviks blocked with Kerensky against Kornilov in 1917. But, like both the Spanish Popular Front and Kerensky, Chavez deserves no political support from revolutionaries.

Trotsky's contributions—including his incisive critique of the degeneration of the Soviet Union and the Communist International—are largely ignored by contemporary dilettantish left academics, who generally prefer parsing the opaque prose of Antonio Gramsci or C.L.R. James, or engaging in other even less rewarding pursuits.

Trotsky's policy was always to "put program first." Today most of those who claim his legacy take exactly the opposite approach. In France, the former Revolutionary Communist League (LCR—which falsely claimed the mantle of the Fourth International) has rechristened itself the New Anti-Capitalist Party (NPA) and abandoned any pretense of Leninism in an attempt to find a niche in a popular front government. This has been coming for a long time: 30 years ago the LCR (and most of the rest of the world's "Trotskyists") were enthusing over the Ayatollah Khomeini's reactionary mass movement in Iran, the CIA-supported Afghan Mujahedin, and Lech Walesa's counterrevolutionary Solidarnosc in Poland.

In his last major political fight, Trotsky locked horns with a section of American followers that renounced the defense of the degenerated Soviet workers' state. In that struggle, Trotsky observed that "[i]t is the duty of revolutionists to defend every conquest of the working class even though it may he distorted by the pressure of hostile forces. Those who cannot defend old positions will never conquer new ones." This is not just a historical question—it remains on the agenda today for the deformed

workers' states in Cuba, China, Vietnam and North Korea. In the August 1991 showdown in the Soviet Union, we of the International Bolshevik Tendency were virtually alone in militarily siding with Stalinist remnants against Boris Yeltsin's forces—a necessary position from the standpoint of defense of the Soviet degenerated workers' state. By 1991, the Spartacist League, which only eight years earlier

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