

The world economy, the left and the Afghan war

Document for Workers' Liberty conference, February 2002

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Introduction

The victory chariots of big capital are circling the stadium again. "Terrorism" defeated! Big technology vindicated! Time to press on with the new euro coinage and with the US government's plan for a Free Trade Area of the Americas!

As they enjoy the smugness reflected back to them by the vast, manipulative, capitalist media industries, the international leaders of capital feel able to shrug at the murmurs at the edges of the stadium. What about the civilians killed by the US tonnage-from-the-sky war in Afghanistan? A careful count, piecing together the fragments of information, gives a total of over 3,700 already - more, then, than the number of civilians killed on 11 September. What about the pauperisation and turmoil which Argentina has been thrown into by ten years as the prize pupil of the IMF and neo-liberal doctrine? No, the global bosses are confident that the market will carry all before it, smoothing out all wrinkles in due course - and where it does not prevail by sheer dull momentum, the US Air Force will do the job.

The major capitalist economies have been in recession in 2001 - with results including drastic job losses in manufacturing in Britain, and the biggest bankruptcy in US business history, Enron. However, a recession, unless either it becomes a catastrophic meltdown, destroying major structures that the bosses have come to rely on and cannot readily replace, or it sparks the working class into large actions, is something the capitalist classes can ride. The Financial Times, in January, could see no more than a "dead-cat bounce" in the year ahead, but summed up what the bourgeoisies' attitude is, and will continue to be unless the working class acts decisively: "Recessions end. This one will be no exception".

As we listen in the corners of the stadium, some of what we hear gives comfort to the complacency and self-congratulation in the arena. In their anger against today's modes of oppression and exploitation, many of the dissenters and rebels are making themselves ineffectual by looking for redress to the forces of yesterday's modes of oppression and exploitation - to the Taliban, to Hamas, to Saddam Hussein, to Milosevic, or to the Europhobes.

Rebellion always starts off "negative". As Lassalle put it, every great action starts with the statement of what is. Every revolt starts with the idea that what established power is doing is intolerable and should be resisted. The shaping of a positive alternative comes later.

We, as Marxists, have a positive alternative. If that fact leads us into a too-"knowing", too-"superior", stand-offish attitude to "negative" rebels who say frankly that they know that the USA's war in Afghanistan, or the IMF's work in Argentina, should be resisted, but don't know what the alternative is, then we make ourselves sterile. Unless the positive alternative is something that people can be brought towards "organically" on the basis of their instinctive "negative" rebellion against the established system, then it will never become reality.

On the left today, however, there is "negativism" of a different sort, "negativism" which has become a worked-out ideological scheme - the "negativism" of groups who consider themselves Marxist but interpret Marxism as a scheme which

shows them how, through the subtleties of history, obviously reactionary forces, just by coming into conflict with the big powers, can serve working-class advance.

Among the vocal rebels in the victory stadium of big capital, we find many who believe that support for such forces can somehow be the first step in an "anti-imperialist united front". That socialists can use the demagogues as a first battering-ram against imperialism, and then be able to vault over the ruins into the realm of workers' emancipation.

They are wrong. The battering ram of the demagogues will batter the socialists and the working class before it ever does any serious damage to imperialist power.

Under the victory stadium, however, another sort of rebellion is brewing. The working class is more numerous world-wide than ever before. Assaying the statistics is difficult, but probably the organised working-class movement in all its forms combined is also larger on a world scale than ever before.

The working class, by its basic economic position, is brought sooner or later into class struggle. France, Indonesia, South Korea and other countries have confirmed that truth in recent years. Behind the noisy flag-wavers in Argentina, there are a strong unemployed movement - organised round class demands - and important class-militant sectors in the trade-union movement which oppose the unions' corrupt Peronist mainstream leadership. Working-class struggle, once it has developed sufficient momentum, pushes workers towards organising for and in the cause of solidarity, and eventually towards generalising that principle of solidarity into politics. Indonesia and South Korea illustrate that trend, too, even if only tentatively. Today we see the government, and the capitalist press, in Britain, in considerable alarm at even small beginnings of the revival of working-class industrial militancy (rail, civil service, post).

Our conception of the struggle for socialism is the one that Karl Marx argued in 1850, as he sought to reorient the Communist League.

"We tell the workers: If you want to change conditions and make yourselves capable of government, you will have to undergo fifteen, twenty, fifty years of civil war" - accompanied by, so Marx took for granted and would himself undertake, fifteen, twenty, fifty years of ardent work of education and self-education by the revolutionary activists. "Now they are told: We must come to power immediately or we might as well go to sleep.

"The word 'proletariat' has been reduced to a mere phrase, like the word 'people' was by the democrats. To make this phrase a reality one would have to declare the entire petty bourgeoisie to be proletarians, i.e. de facto represent the petty bourgeoisie and not the proletariat. In place of actual revolutionary development one would have to adopt the revolutionary phrase".

"Actual revolutionary development" - working to develop, educate and organise the real subversive forces generated within capitalist development itself, rather than relying on "the revolutionary phrase" - and politics which represent the proletariat (working-class) independently, rather than some supposed common interest of "the people" in general - those are our guidelines.

Every attempt at a Marxist assessment involves three different angles of vision: the "evolutionary", the "structuralist", and the "voluntarist".

"Voluntarism" means seeing society as a product of human will, and therefore capable of being remade by human will.

It is part of the truth. "Men [and women] make their own history", wrote Marx. But Marx also explained why it is only part of the truth.

"Men [and women] make their own history, but not of their own free will; not under circumstances they themselves have chosen but under the given and inherited circumstances with which they are directly confronted. The tradition of the dead

generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living".

Human society is a product of human actions - but it is the composite result of a vast variety of human actions, pursuing different and often conflicting aims, over centuries and millennia past. For the individual or group in society today, that result exists as an objective "structure". Our productive forces (technology) today present themselves to us as material facts. We are involved in wage-labour, in the working class - and in the class struggle, one way or another - more or less willy-nilly.

Society is thus a structure. Marx emphasised this in another argument which seems at first sight to contradict the idea that men and women make our own history.

"In the social production of their existence, men [and women] inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of the material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of men [and women] that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness".

However, the structures are not fixed. There is contradiction, conflict, movement in them. They evolve. Thus, to continue the quote from Marx:

"At a certain stage of development, the material productive forces of society come into conflict with the existing relations of production... Then begins an era of social revolution".

Is the evolution of the structures, and their development towards revolutionary reversal, a "natural law", operating through large "objective" trends, with human consciousness merely a reflection of those trends? In some writings Marx, exaggerating his polemic against the socialists who saw socialism as an ideal to be made reality at any time, in any circumstances, just by an effort of socialist will, seemed to suggest that it was.

"My standpoint, from which the evolution of the economic formation of society is viewed as a process of natural history, can less than any other make the individual responsible for relations whose creature he socially remains, however much he may subjectively raise himself above them".

But Marx would not have forgotten what Engels wrote back in 1844:

"History does nothing, it... wages no battles. It is man [and woman], real living man, that does all that, that... fights; 'history' is not a person apart, using man as a means for its own particular aims; history is nothing but the activity of man pursuing his aims".

And Engels would repeat the point later:

"According to the materialist conception of history, the ultimately determining factor in history is the production and reproduction of real life. Neither Marx nor I have ever asserted more than this. Hence if somebody twists this into saying that the economic factor is the only determining one, he transforms that proposition into a meaningless, abstract, absurd phrase. The economic situation is the basis, but the various elements of the superstructure - political forms of the class struggle and its results... and especially the reflections of all these real struggles in the brains of the participants... - also exercise their influence upon the course of the historical struggles and in many cases determine their form in particular...

"One point... Marx and I always failed to stress enough in our writings... In the first instance we... laid, and were bound to lay, the main emphasis on the derivation of political, juridical and other ideological notions, and of actions arising

through the medium of these notions, from basic economic facts. But at the same time we have on account of the content neglected the formal side - the manner in which these notions etc. come about...

"Connected with this is the fatuous notion of the ideologists that because we deny an independent historical development to the various ideological spheres which play a part in history we also deny them any effect upon history... Once an historic element has been brought into the world by other, ultimately economic causes, it reacts... on its environment and even on the causes that have given rise to it".

Indeed, at certain points of conflict, elements of "consciousness" which have been determined by the material forces of production only indirectly and through a long chain of interactions can tip outcomes one way or another, changing the course of history in a very large way.

In a rounded Marxist view, the three angles of vision, "voluntarist", "structuralist", and "evolutionary" are integrated; but it is a recurrent pattern for actual attempts at Marxist analysis to flake off into one-sidedness.

Specifically, the common cod-Trotskyist view that capitalist development long ago reached the end of its tether leads to a "structuralist" one-sidedness. The idea that we reached, not the end of history, but the end of capitalist history at least, some time ago, leaves us frozen in "capitalism-at-the-end-of-its-tether" structures - "the crisis"; "imperialism" forbidding any substantial economic development in most of the world; the working class simmering in pent-up revolutionary rage, awaiting only a "new leadership" to explode.

This one-sidedness arises from the conversion into fixed dogma and flattening-out into a supposedly long-term stable assessment of Trotsky's provisional, stretched-to-its-limits world picture of the late 1930s - "degenerated workers' state" in the USSR in a paroxysm of imminent collapse one way or another; capitalism at a dead end; everything hinged round a "crisis of leadership" which would decide whether incipient mass working-class revolt would go one way or another.

As its necessary counterpart, in order to stop it collapsing into frozen despair, this one-sided "structuralism" evokes an equally one-sided "voluntarism", the idea that "building a new leadership", by sheer act of will, outside all connection with the evolutionary processes in the broad labour movement, will flip us from "the crisis" into "revolution".

Against that, we fight to reinstate the rights of the long view and of the "evolutionary" angle of vision. For us, building a revolutionary party is as vital as it is for the cod-Trotskyists; but for us, it is integrated with, and the essential agency of, a broad strategy for transforming the whole labour movement, from bottom to top.

Our stance leads us to two chief guiding concepts: working-class political independence (or "the Third Camp"), and consistent democracy. These conclusions are, to borrow Marx's words, "in no way based on ideas or principles that have been invented, or discovered, by this or that would-be universal reformer. They merely express, in general terms, actual relations springing from an existing class struggle, from a historical movement going on under our very eyes". Yet to raise those concepts from implicit expression of the real subversive developments within capitalism to explicit guideline for a self-aware, transformed, working-class movement, requires relentless activity. That is our task.

It is a task discharged, in the first place and irreplaceably, by the simplest everyday agitation: unequivocal ardour and energy for the workers' cause in every actual class struggle, unequivocal preaching of class hatred against the bourgeoisie. Our Marxist critical sense becomes prissy pedantry if it displaces or obscures our necessary everyday denunciation of the horrors of capitalism and advocacy of a democratic, libertarian, cooperative, egalitarian, in short, socialist, alternative.

But our task is also discharged in more complex ways, by analysis, education, and more or less intricate organisation and tactics.

The path based on "actual revolutionary development" rather than "the revolutionary phrase" is not always the easiest. And when it is hard, there is pressure to slip back into "the revolutionary phrase", or away into a supercilious and sectarian attitude. Some episodes from the past may throw instructive light on problems we have faced with rallying ourselves for active engagement in the Afghanistan anti-war movement and in the "new anti-capitalist" movement.

Louis Althusser was the most prominent intellectual of the French Communist Party from the 1960s until he was incarcerated in a mental hospital after murdering his wife. A professor of philosophy, he was never really oppositional in the Communist Party, but he cultivated a stance of promoting a more "scientific" Marxism, free from the "humanism" and "empiricism" contaminating more everyday variants. He was hugely influential not only in the Communist Parties, but also among Maoists and even some Trotskyists. (Alex Callinicos of the SWP, for example, acknowledges Althusser as his mentor). Even today, the academic left is thick with Althusserians, neo-Althusserians and post-Althusserians.

One of the most important critiques of Althusser was written by the great historian E P Thompson, a former member of the British Communist Party who had left the CP in 1956 in rebellion against the USSR's suppression of the Hungarian revolution. Although he never worked through such questions as the Popular Front, Thompson tried seriously to find a new anti-Stalinist socialist politics. Althusser's theories, so Thompson asserted and tried to demonstrate, were high-sounding apparatuses for sustaining Stalinist thought-patterns in the era, after 1956, when simple faith in Stalin and the USSR no longer had sway.

Thompson was understandably repulsed by the rise of shrill Maoism, semi-Maoism, and cod-Trotskyism in the left after 1968, the sort of ideologies for which Althusser's "structuralism" could serve as philosophical apparatus. In his foreword to the book in which he published his critique of Althusser, he wrote of "a sense of isolation into which a number of us were thrust in those years [late 1960s and early 1970s]. However much the modes changed (and they changed very fast), reasoning was not one of them. It was a time for reason to sulk in its tent..."

"We remained identified with the Left... But at the same time much of this Left did not want our arguments and was developing ideas, attitudes and practices inimical to the rational, libertarian and egalitarian principles to which we were committed. If one offered to argue, one was answered, not with argument, but with labels ('moralism', 'empiricism', 'liberal' illusions)... which foreclosed further argument.

"It was a real sense of isolation and even of alienation from some part of that New Left and from much of that 'Marxism' which must explain the... tone... [and] the failure of some of us to maintain an active political presence correlative to our theoretical positions".

Understandable. But Thompson himself, when he returned to active politics, returned not as an advocate of the rounded politics he avowed in 1978 - "libertarian Communism, or... Socialism which is both democratic and revolutionary in its means" with "a continuing and unequivocal critique of every aspect of the Stalinist legacy" - but only as a single-issue campaigner (European Nuclear Disarmament).

There may have been something of the same with the "Shachtmanites" in the USA when they "sulked in their tent" out of "alienation from the New Left" - and camped their tent instead on the terrain of AFL-CIO and Democratic Party machine politics.

To be driven into "sulking" - alienated both from the capitalist triumphalists, and the rebels of "the revolutionary

phrase" - is easy but self-destructive. We should learn from the fate of Thompson and the "Shachtmanites". Positive, critical, and even patient engagement - even when confronted with "labels that foreclose argument" - is essential for revolutionary politics.

To help guide us in the process of renewing ourselves, so that we can help renew the labour movement, which in turn will renew the world, this document takes up various questions.

In the first section, it reviews the world economy today, trying to give us a realistic and up-to-date analysis of the actual developments in place of "frozen categories".

A second section surveys the left internationally in the light of the Afghanistan war. The third focuses on the tasks of Marxist renewal - that is, on how we transform our general stance into, not just a broad educative influence in the labour movement, but an active factor towards regrouping the fighters, rebels and revolutionaries as an effective force.

The fourth and fifth sections narrow the focus still further, reviewing our activity over the period since our last conference and laying down broad lines for our work in the coming period. Those broad indications must of course be read together with the other documents for conference which deal in detail with specific areas of activity.

The world economy

Since 1991 the world has been restructured. Many of the developments are continuations of long-standing trends, but their acceleration and combination is new.

The old European colonial empires were broken down between the 1940s and 1975 - 1989 if we include the Russian Stalinist empire - by a combination of emancipation struggles in the colonies and US pressure (quiet and diplomatic, but steady) for their breaking-down. The USA's prime concern then was to maintain its world sphere of influence - within which, on the whole, it was confident that US capital would prevail through market forces by superior economic clout - against the USSR's ultra-monopolistic imperium.

In pursuit of that strategy, the USA waged or sponsored many wars and coups to stop peoples "going communist" - Korea, Indochina, Indonesia, Chile, Nicaragua, etc. - bloodier than most of the military actions of the old European colonial imperialism. Until about the 1970s it maintained a semi-colonial hold over much of Central America.

Since 1991 an "imperialism of free trade", with the USA as the strongest economic and military centre within it, has expanded to embrace almost the whole world.

The change is not only political. We have a world made up almost entirely of capitalist states integrated into the world market in complex and multi-faceted ways. They include substantial sectors integrated into complex production networks stretching over several countries.

Until recent decades, many or most of the less-developed countries were feudalistic regimes, colonies, semi-colonies (sometimes, the colonial or semi-colonial rule imposed because the big power most interested could not secure a reliable pro-capitalist government otherwise), or, in the later 20th century, Stalinist states. The pattern of world trade was one of raw materials being exported from less capitalistically developed countries to the metropolis in Western Europe or the USA, most of manufacturing industry being based in the metropolis, and manufactured goods being exported back to the less capitalistically developed countries.

That pattern has pretty much broken down. All but the very poorest states have more bourgeois ruling-class substance behind them. They are integrated into the world market. Manufactured goods predominate in world trade, and in the exports of less capitalistically developed countries. The

biggest exporter of bulk raw materials is the USA, the most developed country.

There has been an enormous cheapening and speeding-up of transport and communications. Almost anything that can be traded, can be traded internationally. There are very few items for which the cost of transporting them internationally is prohibitive. This is also the era of mass international air travel, mass international telephone communication, and the Internet.

The wage-working class, defined as those who sell their labour-power to capital and are exploited by capital, together with the children and retired people of that class, is probably the majority of the world's population for the first time ever.

It is difficult to say precisely, because in many countries many people are 'semi-proletarians' who have bits of jobs or casual jobs and subsist partly on wage-labour and partly on begging or petty trade. Nevertheless, there has been a tremendous expansion of wage-labour. Indonesia, which is one of the world's less capitalistically-developed countries, a country where many people live not far from malnutrition or starvation, has probably a higher proportion of wage-labour than Germany did in 1918, when the Bolsheviks would cite it as the epitome of a highly-developed capitalist country.

The USA is the world's only superpower; but this is a world of politically independent capitalist states, and of international structures (UN, IMF, WTO, EU) gaining more clout than before. States, far from fading away, act vigorously to reshape and adapt economies, but with world markets in view rather than self-sufficient national plans. Money-capital flies round the world faster than ever, international investment and contracting-out increase, and many more countries have become significantly industrialised, but the world becomes more unequal, not more uniform. The working class is greatly enlarged, and there are probably more workers in independent trade unions than ever before in history, but the world has been reshaped by ruling classes militant against labour movements defeated or thrown into political disarray between the late 1970s and 1991 - with privatisations, welfare cuts, anti-union laws.

Under this "imperialism of free trade", world markets - not just markets in goods and services, but, as important, credit markets - create vast and increasing inequalities. They convey the choicest fruits of the world's labour to the billionaires in "highly concentrated command points in the organisation of the world economy... a new type of city... the global city... New York, London, Los Angeles, Tokyo... The more globalised the economy becomes, the higher the agglomeration of central functions in a relatively few sites, that is, the global cities" (Saskia Sassen). They are regulated by the IMF, the WTO, the World Bank - international institutions dominated by the ruling classes centred in those "global cities".

At every stage of market haggling - who gets contracts, where investment is sited and on what terms, which trade barriers remain (as they do, lower than in the past, but still there, including around the most ruthlessly "free-trading" states, like the USA), who gets loans on what terms, how debt will be repaid - economic, political, diplomatic and military might skews the scales.

Capitalist classes grab their loot, as Marx put it, through "the dull compulsion of economic relations" instead of the politico-personal dependence which underpins exploitation in feudal, tribute-paying, and slave systems. Yet they need much larger establishments of police, standing armies, and state bureaucrats than the previous exploiting classes. So also the imperialism of free trade is policed by larger military machines than the old imperialism of giant colonial empires (outside world war).

The core exploitative mechanisms are those embedded in free trade itself.

In his speech On The Question Of Free Trade, Marx explained: "What is free trade under the present condition of

society? It is freedom of capital... Gentlemen! Do not allow yourselves to be deluded by the abstract word freedom. Whose freedom? It is not the freedom of one individual in relation to another, but the freedom of capital to crush the worker...

"We have shown what sort of brotherhood free trade begets between the different classes of one and the same nation. The brotherhood which free trade would establish between the nations of the earth would hardly be more fraternal. To call cosmopolitan exploitation universal brotherhood is an idea that could only be engendered in the brain of the bourgeoisie. All the destructive phenomena which unlimited competition gives rise to within one country are reproduced in more gigantic proportions on the world market...

"We are told that free trade would create an international division of labour, and thereby give to each country the production which is most in harmony with its natural advantages.

"You believe perhaps, gentlemen, that the production of coffee and sugar is the natural destiny of the West Indies. Two centuries ago, nature, which does not trouble herself about commerce, had planted neither sugar-cane nor coffee trees there. And it may be that in less than half a century you will find there neither coffee nor sugar, for the East Indies, by means of cheaper production, have already successfully combated this alleged natural destiny of the West Indies...

"One other thing must never be forgotten, namely, that, just as everything has become a monopoly, there are also nowadays some branches of industry which dominate all the others, and secure to the nations which most largely cultivate them the command of the world market...

"If the free traders cannot understand how one nation can grow rich at the expense of another, we need not wonder, since these same gentlemen also refuse to understand how within one country one class can enrich itself at the expense of another".

Vast pauperisation, abrupt destruction of social safeguards, arrogant domination by a few billionaires - that is the imperialism of free trade, as destructive as the old colonial empires, and maybe in a more widespread and drastic way.

The path of battle for which it creates the basis, and which can effectively point beyond it to a better future, is workers' control, the political economy of the working class, the establishment of worldwide social standards and rights by international working-class action, and the struggle for worldwide socialist revolution.

Every right of national self-determination, every other broad democratic right, is an important stepping stone for that battle.

If, however, we misidentify the mechanisms of capitalist market exploitation as merely operations of privilege secured by political and military means; if we shut our eyes to, or misunderstand, what is new about the modern imperialism of free trade; if we interpret it as just a slightly different form of the old imperialism of colonial empires - then we will go wrong.

To rid a nation of colonial rule is a step forward. To withdraw a national economy from the world market is a step backwards.

Where countries are "almost entirely outside the circuits of global trade and capital flows", then, as the US Marxist writer Doug Henwood notes, the "exclusion contributes greatly to [their] extreme poverty and social disintegration. As the economist Joan Robinson once said, under capitalism, 'the misery of being exploited by capitalists is nothing compared to the misery of not being exploited at all.'" Marx himself, back in 1848, followed his critique of free trade with a warning. "Do not imagine, gentlemen, that in criticising freedom of trade we have the least intention of defending the system of protection". Where tariffs and trade restrictions

served rational capitalist purposes, explained Marx, they were only a means for a government to help local capitalists develop sufficient scale to enter the world market. Otherwise, they were conservative measures, in contrast to which free trade, by pushing forward the contradictions of capitalist production, would hasten the social revolution.

Economic isolationism is a step backwards as against the world market. To support it as anti-imperialist is to try to rally the working class behind bourgeois policies - only backward-looking, obsolete, failed bourgeois policies.

Another regressive policy can appear as anti-imperialist if we naively assimilate the modern imperialism of free trade to the older imperialism of colonial empires. We might call such attempts by smaller powers to offset their weak position on the larger canvass of the world economy by small-scale regional conquests "paleo-imperialism". (The prefix "paleo" signifies an earlier or previous form of something; thus "paleolithic" pertains to the earlier Stone Age, and "neolithic" to the later Stone Age).

Those conquests may be condoned or endorsed by the big powers: Indonesia in East Timor, Turkey in Cyprus, Morocco in the Western Sahara, Serbia in Kosova until 1999. Or they may bring the smaller power into conflict with bigger powers: Argentina against Britain over the Falklands, Libya against France over Chad, Iraq against the USA over Kuwait, Serbia against the USA in 1999 when Milosevic's reckless brutality threatened to destabilise the whole region, the jihadis of an imagined new totalitarian-Islamist empire against the USA today.

But paleo-imperialism does not cease to be reactionary when it comes into conflict with a bigger power, any more than a small capitalist exploiter is converted into a philanthropist by a competitive tussle with a big corporation.

The "venerable disguise and borrowed language" of previous anti-colonial struggles (the phrase is Marx's, from his criticism of the French radicals in 1848 who saw themselves as re-running the fight against entrenched feudalistic monarchy and aristocracy from 1793-5 when in fact they were contending with bourgeois society) - that "venerable disguise and borrowed language" cannot well guide our battles against the new imperialism of free trade. It will lead us not forward, but backwards - into supporting turn-back-the-clock economic isolationism, or endorsing the paleo-imperialism of Galtieri (military dictator of Argentina at the time of the Falklands war), Saddam, Milosevic, or Osama bin Laden. It will turn us away from independent working-class politics to rally us behind whatever enemy of our enemy seems strong and strident. Construed logically, it implies a policy of seeking to establish "anti-imperialist" ghettos on the margins of the world market.

Much of the recent discussion on imperialism among the Marxist-book-reading classes has revolved around Michael Hardt's and Toni Negri's book *Empire*. Negri was a leading writer of the so-called "workerist" ultra-left in Italy in the early 1970s, and is now in jail, framed up on charges of assisting the "Red Brigades" terrorists; Hardt is an American academic. There is a lot wrong with their book, but it also contains many truths, well stated: "Any proposition of a particular community in isolation, defined in racial, religious or regional terms, 'delinked' from Empire, shielded from its powers by fixed boundaries, is destined to end up as a kind of ghetto" - whereas nations could and did liberate themselves by "delinking" from the British or French empires and become not ghettos but more freely and flexibly linked to the rest of the world.

The "venerable disguise and borrowed language" would also lock us into a political ghetto. Doug Henwood sums it up in arguing against the loose thinking that equates "globalisation" and "imperialism", and then - since globalisation, broadly defined, covers more or less everything - can take almost every dispute as generated by or directed against globalisation/imperialism.

"What is the relationship between globalisation and terrorism (even loosely and imprecisely defined)? The buzz [at a US leftist conference] was that terrorism is the product of marginalisation and poverty, and marginalisation and poverty the products of globalisation. But are things really that simple? Latin America and East Asia, two of the regions most transformed by global economic forces over the last two decades, have produced no terrorists of note...

"Speakers frequently cited longstanding US geopolitical goals as lurking behind the war. This is undeniably true. Washington's war strategy is not motivated by tenderness for the people of Afghanistan. For all the professions of concern about the abuse of women under the Taliban, George W. Bush and his cronies haven't been born-again as feminists. But there was little serious acknowledgement that we were attacked, and that some US response was inevitable and even justified. Recognising that doesn't mean assent to Bush's version of a response, though lots of people in the peace movement seem to fear it does. But anyone who wants to speak to an audience beyond the small circle of believers has to consider these questions seriously".

Some Marxist writers perceive well what is new in the world economy, but then add a twist at the end of their argument which almost cancels out the perception. Ellen Wood writes (*Monthly Review*, July 1999): "Today, capitalism is all but universal. Capitalist laws of motion, the logic of capitalism, has penetrated ever deeper into the societies of advanced capitalism and spatially throughout the world..."

"But to say that capitalism is universal is not to say that all, or even most, capital is transnational... We still have national economies, national states, nationally based capital, even nationally based transnationals. It hardly needs to be added that international agencies of capital, like the IMF or the World Bank, are above all agents of specific national capitals, and derive whatever powers of enforcement they have from nation-states - both the imperial states that command them and the subordinate states that carry out their orders..."

"If anything, the universalisation of capitalism has also meant, or at least been accompanied by, the universalisation of the nation-state. Global capitalism is more than ever a global system of national states, and the universalisation of capitalism is presided over by nation-states, especially one hegemonic superpower".

Wood notes that "imperialism today is no longer a matter of direct colonial domination". The change is more than the same "colonial domination" being indirect instead of direct, or "semi-colonial" or "neo-colonial" relations, different in superficial form but not in real content, replacing the old colonial ones. The great struggles for colonial independence were not shams or wasted time! The big-power militarism of today "doesn't generally have territorial ambitions, and generally leaves nation-states in place. Its objective is not hegemony over specific colonies with identifiable geographic boundaries but boundless hegemony over the global economy".

But, in a peroration, Wood arrives at a definition of modern imperialist militarism as signifying something very like the creation of a new US colonial empire.

"So instead of absorbing or annexing territory, this imperialist militarism typically uses massive displays of violence to assert the dominance of global capital - which really means exercising the military power of specific nation-states to assert the dominance of capital based in a few nation-states, or one in particular, the United States, enforcing its freedom to navigate the global economy without hindrance".

David McNally, a dissident Canadian co-thinker of the SWP and an academic Marxist writer of some repute, does the business of recognising changes in the world only in order to conclude that all remains much the same in more short-cut way, typical of many other writers.

"After 1945, a new form of American-based imperialism emerged. This new imperialism was not founded on direct military and political control of other parts of the world. In fact, the US saw advantages in letting the countries of the colonial world de-colonise and declare political independence. For American capitalism was now intent on dominating the world economy through a new network of multinational corporations and global agencies, like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, designed to protect and support them".

The shortest answer to such presentations is to ask how the victory of Saddam Hussein or Milosevic or Osama bin Laden could in any way diminish or lighten the global domination of big capital over the working people. It could not.

Wood's and McNally's perorations are also analytically skewed. By what logic does McNally present multinational corporations as devoted not to profit but to patriotism, not pursuing the accumulation of capital but acting only as agencies of the disembodied domination-desiring force, "American capitalism"? Does Wood really mean that the rule of capital, world-wide, is so forcefully challenged that it can be maintained against a socialist threat only by direct military force? Or does she mean that US military action aims to secure free navigation to US-based capital, but exclude capital headquartered in other countries?

In fact capitalist states have been queuing up to join the IMF and the WTO.

The IMF needs no US Marines to enforce its plans. A government which refuses gets no more loans. That is enough. The WTO has never called on the US military to make China join up.

Marxists should be the last to underestimate the power of capitalist market forces to "batter down all Chinese walls", as Marx put it in the Communist Manifesto.

The rule of capital - and within that, the advantage of the biggest, wealthiest corporations, with the best bargaining positions - works through the "dull compulsion of economic relations". And in a world of "universalised" capitalism, the US government knows that trying to impose US military occupations or governor-generals is an expensive, risky and fragile method of providing the assistance it has to provide to US-based corporations in the world market. When there are capitalist states in every country, or at least in every economically important country, with a sufficient bourgeois class basis to ensure a minimum of regularity in functioning by capitalist criteria, then that assistance can be ensured much more cheaply and reliably by market forces and para-market forces (haggling over trade concessions and contracts, bargaining over credit, bribery - at the limit, economic sanctions).

Their routine US "globocop" use of war or military action since 1991 has essentially been to police the state fabric of the world - to maintain a smooth network of capitalist states covering the earth's surface, with gaps and "holes" only on the margins. The military philosophy has been to apply intense heat to weld shut any seams coming apart.

It is brutal. It is conservative. It is arrogant. It is cynical. But it is not colonialist. It is not creating a new "US empire" analogous to the old British Empire.

Our basic stance is the one enounced by Trotsky: "We are not a government party; we are the party of irreconcilable opposition... Our tasks... we realise not through the medium of bourgeois governments... but exclusively through the education of the masses through agitation, through explaining to the workers what they should defend and what they should overthrow..". Even if we can surmise that a particular US "globocop" action may - if all goes well, if there are no hidden hitches - bring some improvement, on balance, we give no credit in advance to big-capitalist power. We seek to educate and mobilise the working class as an independent - which necessarily means, oppositional - force.

That oppositional stance towards the USA is, however, different from positive support to the USA's current military adversary of the moment, the sort of positive support which would in fact be mandatory for socialists if the conflicts were really about the USA trying to build a new "US empire" and diverse nations trying to stay free from it.

The US-sponsored Dayton Accords for Bosnia, of 1995, gave the IMF the power to name the chief of that country's Central Bank. But even that was not essentially about making Bosnia a "semi-colony" of the USA. The successive UN High Representatives (effectively, governor-generals) there have been a Swede, a Spaniard, and an Austrian. Neither Sweden, nor Spain, nor Austria, nor the European Union as a whole, is simply an extension of the US State Department.

Because of the huge force applied to limited aims, the USA has won victories with very few casualties against Iraq, Serbia, and the Taliban.

Never before in world history has a state won wars - large wars, as measured by tons of firepower - with such small casualties on its own side, let alone three wars in quick succession.

Such victories breed arrogance and the continuation of the USA's bloated militarisation, initially a carry-over from its 40-odd-years confrontation with the USSR. They encourage the US military to keep on expanding its "globocop" role until it overreaches itself into a protracted war of high casualties on both sides and political objectives which grow far beyond seam-welding. It may be that the talked-about US attack on Iraq to follow its war in Afghanistan will mark that moment of overreaching.

There is no room for socialist complacency about, or credulousness towards the humanitarian claims of, post-1991 US international policy and world military doctrine. The huge US military machine is a standing threat to any large-scale revolutionary working-class movement. Despite Wood, the USA might well revert to direct-colonial "territorial ambitions" in the event of a serious threat to its oil supplies from Saudi Arabia.

But all the qualifications should not obscure the basic shift in world economics and politics.

Hardt and Negri's much-discussed book *Empire* contains much hyperbole, show-off eclecticism, wilful obscurity, and careless use of borrowed summary descriptions in place of properly-assayed empirical study.

It claims that the nation-state has been eclipsed, though Ellen Wood's assessment - that nation-states are essential agents in globalisation - corresponds much more to the facts. It hastily assumes that "intellectual, immaterial and communicative labour power", as against "mass factory work", has become central to capital, and concludes that the "industrial working class has all but disappeared from view". Its passages looking back on 20th century history lack critical understanding of Stalinism. It blandly celebrates any sort of dissent or opting-out by "the proletariat" or "the multitude" as revolutionary resistance - a thought which contradicts the book's own critique of localism and autarkism, and its recognition of the importance of the "new needs, desires and demands", the "new desire for liberation", generated by the movement of millions formerly peasants into modern capitalist production.

Its peculiar coinage - the term "Empire", not "an Empire" or "the Empire", for the modern world order - is unhelpful.

Nevertheless, it states some important truths with eloquence.

The old imperialism of colonial and semi-colonial empires was, as Hardt and Negri put it, "a machine of global striation, channelling, coding, and territorialising the flows of capital, blocking certain flows and encouraging others". In contrast, they define the present era as "the realisation of the world market and the real subsumption of global society under capital", which "requires a smooth space of uncoded and deterritorialised flows".

At least erratically, they recognise that the "smooth space" is very far from flat. "The decentralisation and global dispersal of productive processes and sites, which is characteristic of the postmodernisation or informatisation of the economy, provokes a corresponding centralisation of the control overproduction... The geographical dispersal of manufacturing has created a demand for increasingly centralised management and planning, and also for a new centralisation of specialised producer services, especially financial services. Financial and trade-related services in a few key cities (such as New York, London and Tokyo) manage and direct the global networks of production".

There are centres - but centres in a mobile, constantly-readjusted, hierarchy, not fixed headquarters of decree. "The coming Empire is not American and the United States is not its centre". "It might appear as if the United States were the new Rome, or a cluster of new Romes: Washington (the bomb), New York (money), and Los Angeles (ether). Any such territorial conception of imperial space, however, is continually destabilised by the fundamental flexibility [and] mobility... at the core of the imperial apparatus".

"Empire cannot be resisted by a project aimed at a limited, local autonomy. We cannot move back to any previous social form, nor move forward in isolation. Rather, we must push through Empire to come out the other side...The multitude, in its will to be-against and its desire for liberation, must push through Empire to come out the other side".

The world is not an American empire. In the first place, what of the other big capitalist powers? The European Union? Japan? We can well understand how they might support the US military machine to weld the seams and clamp shut the rips in the fabric of state authorities which the imperialism of free trade needs as walkways (and, of course, repay the USA with financial and diplomatic concessions elsewhere).

But why ever should the European Union and Japan help the USA to make the world the USA's rather than theirs? Why, for example, should the European Union support the USA actively in the Kosova war of 1999 if the real purpose of that war was - as the Marxist economist Guglielmo Carchedi improbably argues - to establish US hegemony against any EU threat and prevent the euro ousting the dollar as world money?

Is that there really is a single global big-capitalist class of which the US, EU and Japanese states are only duplicate representations? That the real differences between them are so small that they can delegate the USA to be their empire-making agency just as the US ruling class can delegate the Pentagon and the State Department for that job?

Repeated trade conflicts disprove that thesis. In any case, if there were a global big-capitalist class, it would have significant minority representation from countries outside the USA, Japan and the European Union. Of the 500 top firms outside the USA, listed by Forbes magazine for 2001, some 58 are headquartered in poorer countries, from South Korea, Brazil and Mexico through China and India to Singapore and Taiwan. And many smaller capitalist firms have their interests closely tied up with the bigger firms for whom they are contractors or suppliers.

If the US military is acting as imperialist agent for the global big-capitalist class, then the empire it is enforcing is that of big capital, not of the USA.

The thesis of the world being an American empire can only be upheld on the argument that not only the ex-colonies and the poorer countries are now semi-colonies of the USA, but the European Union and Japan too.

Politically, this argument would lead into crass nationalism in every country except the USA. Economically and empirically it is unsustainable.

Not so long ago, in the 1980s, US bourgeois opinion was all aflame at the supposedly near prospect of Japanese

capital "taking over" the USA and ousting US-headquartered capital from global leadership. Whatever the causes of Japanese capital's poor 1990s - over-adaptation for success in the previous era, and consequent difficulties of adjustment, form one explanation - they are certainly nothing that the USA has "done to" Japan, by way of war or otherwise. Giovanni Arrighi, a perceptive researcher into long trends of capitalist development, still reckons that US domination is declining.

The USA became a debtor nation in 1989 and the level of debt has grown in every subsequent year. At the end of 2000 it stood at \$2.2 trillion. Japan is the world's top creditor nation, with a net foreign asset position of more than US\$860 billion (late 2001).

Have wars like those in the Gulf, Kosova, and Afghanistan been fought for "US domination"? Yes and no.

All wars are fought for domination, even if sometimes only for the domination of a nation over its own territory. If the US is fighting for domination in a particular war, it can very well also be true that its adversary - Iraq, Serbia, the Taliban and Al Qaeda - is also fighting for domination, and not just for domination in the sense of national self-determination.

The USA obviously reckons on coming out of wars with its military and diplomatic authority enhanced. But working-class internationalism does not mean supporting our weaker enemies against our stronger enemies. The socialist commitment to equality does not mean that we feel an obligation to boost our weaker enemies and bring them closer to equality with our stronger enemies!

As Hardt and Negri put it: "Globalisation must be met with a counter-globalisation, Empire with a counter-Empire".

And the elements of that counter-Empire are constantly created by "Empire" itself.

The working-class movement is battered by the setbacks and disappointments of the 1970s and 1980s, by drastic industrial restructuring rammed through in their wake which has destroyed old bastions of organisation, and by political perplexity following the pro-capitalist collapse of what most socialists had taken to be the living, though deformed and unsatisfactory, exemplification of the possibility of an alternative to capitalism, the Stalinist states. However, in the longer term, the collapse of Stalinism is a tremendous positive contribution, by way of path-clearing, to the possibilities of socialist renewal.

That is the basic perspective for working-class socialist revival, and for the principle that it cannot come except through a self-enlargement, self-transformation, and self-redevelopment of the mass labour movement.

We cannot foresee the tempos and details, but even the basic perspective gives us some indicators for activity: an orientation to transforming the labour movement, based on the logic of actual working-class concerns and struggles rather than on any doctrinairism; a vigorous effort of self-education and self-renewal.

Immediately, the emergence of a widespread if diffuse "anti-capitalist" mood among youth is encouraging. It may mark the end of the politically numbing effect on the left of the collapse of Stalinism. The development of that mood by way of looking forward from one blockade/demonstration at a WTO, IMF or G8 meeting to another, hoped to be bigger and better but of the same sort, at the next such meeting, has to reach the end of its rope some time. It may even be that it has done so already. But that does not mean that street action will cease to happen, or to have importance; still less does it mean that the mood will fade away. It can be given expression in a dozen other ways, some of them more promising.

Effective activity in this milieu must be measured essentially by success in drawing groups and individuals into a fruitful contribution to the self-redevelopment of the labour movement.

That success, in turn, depends somewhat on the strength of the positive impulses to self-assertion from the rank and file of the movement. The dissent over public services, privatisation and the political funds at the trade union conferences in 2001, and the good response to the "Unions Fightback" statement and conference we initiated, are hopeful signs, though it is too early to hail any "upturn".

In any case, such things as the very rapid growth of a movement against the US war in Afghanistan - whatever the political failings of the leadership of that movement - show that there are more than enough radical stirrings to give us room for expanded activity. Before addressing practical priorities of orientation, we should get an overview of the tasks of Marxist renewal and of our own position.

The left in the light of the Afghanistan war

We argued for an internationalist working-class and democratic stance, which meant opposition to both the US-led war (designed to secure revenge and to forestall a larger threat by jihadi-fundamentalism to the security of world oil supplies) and to the ultra-reactionaries of the Taliban and Al-Qaeda. We said candidly, after the fall of Kabul, that the outcome of the US-led war in Afghanistan was better than the old state of affairs, with Taliban rule. But that calculation after the event did not lead us to think that we should have been "optimistic" on behalf of the US-led war in advance, or given it credit as a way acceptable to us for achieving the desirable outcome of overthrowing the Taliban.

Our Ukrainian comrades write: "We are clearly standing on the positions that it's necessary to oppose the international political movement of Islamic fundamentalism as well as the US/British war. The huge majority of the left organisations here, recognising that Taliban is terrible, support it in different forms, in particular 'military support' or 'military united front'. Nevertheless, we participated in a lot of anti-war protests and distributed the materials with our positions. It's necessary to note that the largest anti-war rallies included about ten to fifteen thousands of protesters, so we had quite wide field for our propaganda".

Our Australian comrades also argued the same views as the AWL in Britain, and our comrade Hal in the USA provoked a debate within the Solidarity by circulating some of our written material from Britain.

In Britain our main opponent within the left has been the SWP. They see the world as comprising two camps - the USA (aka imperialism), with its insatiable drive to global domination, and the resistance. They see their job as championing the resistance.

The argument is complicated by the SWP's preoccupation with immediate gate receipts, their approach of "the united front without politics", and their characteristic mealy-mouthedness. Thus, their self-image and self-presentation was often that of "best builders" of a broad anti-war movement, unconcerned about any political detail; they would strive to demur as little as possible from pure-and-simple pacifists or supporters of the United Nations. Although refusing to condemn the 11 September attacks was a point of honour for them, they gushed freely about how "horrible" the attacks were, and never publicly argued against condemnation. In fact, eventually, at the Stop the War Coalition conference, they quietly conceded "condemnation". They did not positively spell out any slogans along the lines of "victory to the Taliban!"; instead, they offered weaselling apologetics for the jihadi-fundamentalists (not the best tactics, but they have been "driven to it" by "rage and despair" at the horrors of US policy; not the best on women's rights, but in forcing women into the burqa and seclusion, the Taliban leaders were just trying to protect them from the lusts of their young soldiers...)

The mealy-mouthedness and apologetics were the SWP's speciality. Three political impulses have been, however, common ground between the SWP, all the British would-be Marxist left bar us and the CPGB, and a large swathe of the would-be Marxist left internationally.

1. Not to try to analyse jihadi-fundamentalism as something new and distinctive, but to assimilate it to the 20th-century common run of militant middle-class movements in the Third World - unusually right-wing, maybe, but anti-imperialist in an anti-colonial, liberatory sense.

2. Not to try to analyse what is new and distinctive in the patterns of world economy and politics, but to assimilate them to the old imperialism of colonial empires.

Scarcely any Marxist, if pushed, denies that the winning of independence by the colonies happened, and was significant; but many take the fact of continuing and increasing world inequality (which is actually evidence for the world being capitalist, not for it being colonial-imperialist) as proving that the changes are only superficial.

3. To seek an "anti-imperialist" camp to support in the way that most of the left used to side with the Stalinist bloc against the USA.

A straightforward version of the SWP's basic viewpoint was argued by the "Morenist" International Workers' League (LIT), a would-be Trotskyist current based mainly in Latin America. They did not dispute that the Taliban were "semi-fascist" or "barbarian"; but, polemicising against the Labour Party of Pakistan, they wrote:

"You regard the Taliban as representing barbarism while from our point of view, in this confrontation, the 'barbarian' Taliban represent progress precisely because they challenge the imperialist barbarism. If imperialism wins this war, they will feel free to colonise the world, that is to say, to attack other nations in all the fields and so we will find ourselves closer to barbarism". Which made some sense - if... if the war could be taken as exemplifying a world geared around a drive by the richer countries to build colonial or semi-colonial empires, and a drive by the poorer countries to escape.

The Labour Party of Pakistan, a group formerly connected to the Militant/Socialist Party and now linked with the Democratic Socialist Party in Australia and the Scottish Socialist Party, took a position much more like ours than the Morenists' or the SWP.

The LPP - confronting the fundamentalists at first hand - know that a victory for the jihadi-fundamentalists could not be a victory for any sort of liberation. They know that the jihadi-fundamentalist attack on the USA, and the USA's war of retaliation, constituted something different from a colonial liberation struggle even under extreme right-wing or feudalistic leadership (as such liberation struggles sometimes have been).

"If the Taliban are victorious, it will strengthen the masses in their fight against imperialism, LIT argue. They forgot just one word in this sentence, it will not be the 'masses' but 'religious fundamentalists'. We are told by the religious fundamentalists every day that they defeated the Soviets. And now they can tell that they have defeated US imperialism? What effect that will have on the masses in the Muslim countries especially, LIT comrades have no clue.

"But what sort of victory for the Taliban are the LIT comrades telling us about? I can assume that they mean that US imperialism is unable to arrest Osama, dead or alive, or the Taliban remain in power for some more time. Is that they mean by a victory for the Taliban? Or do they mean another successful terrorist attack on one of the imperialist country where thousands more will die? Is that a victory for the Taliban?

"The so-called victory of the Taliban will only promote religious fanatics and not the revolutionary ideas...

"The Taliban regime and its supporters in Pakistan are committed to obliterating the left and the organisations of the working class. It is our duty not to help them in this process.

Marxist principles never dictate political suicide! This makes united front actions against the war with these forces problematic to say the least. In any case, there is no Marxist 'principle' that says the enemy of my enemy is my friend or that dictates seeking an alliance with reactionary opponents of imperialism".

The LPP calls the jihadi-fundamentalists "the new fascists", and has helped organise an independent anti-war movement in Pakistan, opposed to both US militarism and the jihadi-fundamentalists.

"It is a war of revenge of prestige, of ego. It is about displaying the military power of America and the West", explains LPP general secretary Farooq Tariq. But "we also have to make it clear that the Taliban and al Qaeda are reactionary movements which will annihilate socialist parties of the left, trade unions and any progressive social forces." The way the issue panned out in Pakistani politics, according to the LPP, was this: "Some of the smaller alliances of the radical and Stalinist parties are openly supporting the standpoint of the military regime. 'The United States must be supported to root out terrorism,' is the cry from these ex-left parties justifying their support for the regime. These 'left parties' include the National Workers Party and Communist Mazdoor Kissan Party (Communist Workers Peasant Party). They have now abandoned their anti-US sloganeering.

"The Muslim League of ex-Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif is trailing behind the religious fundamentalists, half-heartedly supporting the Taliban and opposing the military regime's support for Bush...

"The Labour Party Pakistan position is very close to the position of 'No to War; No to terrorism'... The LPP has to oppose religious fundamentalism and the powers that were harbouring it, mainly the military regime of Pakistan in general and the ISI (Inter Services Intelligence) in particular. Unlike other trends it did not support the 'lesser evil' philosophy..." The LPP's has been an honourable and decent position. Its chief defect is its failure to answer the Morenists' (LIT) arguments head-on.

"By opposing the imperialist war on Afghanistan", wrote the LPP, it had "taken the correct side in a struggle between oppressor and oppressed nations". The LPP favoured "a revolutionary defeatist position in the countries that are waging war against Afghanistan", but that this "defeat" could be achieved only by an anti-war movement in the USA and its allies, not by the military action of the Taliban.

Only? Why not by the military action of the Taliban in addition to an anti-war movement? The LPP's answer, effectively, was that any positive support for the Taliban would make building a sizeable working-class anti-war movement impossible. True enough, and decisive if the Marxist task is to establish working-class independence from US militarism rather specifically to ensure its defeat. But if "defeat" must be our prime concern, then why doesn't the military action of the Taliban weigh heavier in the political scales than fewer or larger numbers of workers on demonstrations in New York, or London, or Lahore?

If the issue were really one of "imperialism" and an "oppressed nation", then taking "the correct side" could not just mean negatively opposing the USA, but also positively siding with the Taliban (however critically).

Wouldn't socialists who said they wanted the defeat of the imperialist side, but only by the polite method of socialist anti-war demonstrations, deserve to be branded as evasive and platonic?

The answer to these objections - an answer not drawn out by the LPP - is that the LPP's detailed arguments on the fundamentalists demonstrate that the Taliban/Al Qaeda war, from 11 September onwards, was not actually about vindicating the rights of an oppressed nation, and the US war was not about trying to build a new colonial empire (starting in Afghanistan, of all places).

Other socialist groups from countries where the jihadi-fundamentalists are strong took positions similar to the LPP's. The Worker-communist Party of Iran and the Worker-communist Party of Iraq took their stand on the idea that US militarism on the one hand, and the Taliban and political Islam on the other, were the "two poles of terrorism" in the conflict, and both must be opposed.

Their substantive conclusions were correct, despite some sectarianism of tactics towards the anti-war movement. Their form of argument begged the questions raised by the LIT and sidestepped by the LPP. An authentic national liberation movement may well be "terrorist" in its methods, according to the conventional mass-media usage of the word "terrorism" or even according to the Marxist usage. Should we then refuse to support that national liberation movement against an imperialist oppressor?

The WCPI/I declare themselves in favour of the right of nations to self-determination. In one comment they described the issue as the "modern reaction" of US militarism against the "Stone Age reaction" of the Taliban - a description hardly considered and precise but possibly a tad nearer to a class social/political assessment than "terrorism vs terrorism". They did not offer any clear class analysis of "political Islam", limiting themselves to the proposition that "political Islam" is terrorist and reactionary and the assertion, a quarter-truth at best, that it was "created by the West" as a counterweight to the Left in the Muslim world but has now spiralled out of control.

The WCPI/I generally made their denunciations of "US militarism" rather than "imperialism". When, occasionally, they used the word "imperialism", they gave it no special weight that would not attach to, say, "militarism".

After the fall of Kabul their calls for a democratic and secular Afghanistan could only be distinguished from calls on the US and its allies to impose democracy and secularism by the assumption - which they did not make explicitly, and which in any case is sadly improbable - that there is a potent mass movement of the Afghan peoples for a democratic and secular outcome.

They expressed disdain for "the familiar 1970s religious-nationalist and Third World-ist 'anti-imperialism'," and "the inverted colonialist mentality of the Western marginal left, which in all its life has been nothing but a pressure group without any distinctive perspective. On one side we have the Western left intellectuals who feel guilty about the past colonial history of the West and are apologetic to the 'third world' as such. The issue in their system of thought is not the plight of the people living in this 'world', but a preoccupation with self-serving concepts about people in the West and the rest of the world. To them, the rest of the world, the 'third world', is a given entity".

Workers' Left Unity Iran, less active on the war, have nevertheless given more attention to understanding the nature of Islamic fundamentalism and the changes in world economy and politics. They analysed jihadi-fundamentalism in the same sort of terms as we did. An interview on their website with Moshe Machover takes up the proposition that "old-style imperialism doesn't exist anymore".

"Q. But what about the American control of the Middle Eastern oil, the fact that the United States is the biggest military power on earth and so on?

"A: Undoubtedly, undoubtedly. But what I'm saying is not that there is no domination of the big capitalist powers over the whole world. This is growing in fact. But it has taken completely different forms.

"If you read Lenin's Imperialism, from there you will not have any idea that there is going to be a process of what we call de-colonisation, although he speaks about some variant forms... The typical form of control was direct political and military presence of the big capitalist metropolitan powers in the colonies. This is no longer the case.

"This imperialism that existed until some time after the Second World War, no longer exists. This old imperialism was really not, as Lenin thought, the highest stage of capitalism..."

"Capitalism has other ways of domination : by means of impersonal blind market forces. This is the fantastic thing about capitalism, fantastic. I'm saying fantastic in the double meaning. Amazing thing about capitalism that both within each economy and also on the global scale, it manages to control and exploit economically individual human beings and whole nations sometimes without, usually without direct use of 'physical' force. That is done through market-forces.

"This is now how it is done. It is true that United States-based companies exploit and dominate the oil in many parts of the world. But they don't do it as Britain did in the old days in Iraq, by having a physical presence.

Iraq was really only semi-independent even after the Portsmouth treaty of 1936. It was controlled by Britain.

"Now... everything is done through the 'free' play of market-forces, through the 'freedom' of the capitalist market. It works in a more efficient way. Occasionally when the need arises, when things begin to destabilise, the bigger powers intervene directly as we have seen in various parts of the world..."

"It is mistaken to think, for example, that the intervention in Yugoslavia was in order to make Yugoslavia or part of Yugoslavia a colony in the old sense. This is nonsense. It was to prevent destabilisation of the world order in which, when it is functioning normally, as it were, the metropolitan countries manage to exploit vast territories by objective forces that do not require the use of actual physical force or political presence".

The WCPI/I's disdainful comments on "the inverted colonialist mentality of the Western marginal left" were all too apt, however.

If the SWP was the most crass exponent of the politics of rallying to the "anti-imperialist" (=anti-USA) camp come what may, and the Morenist LIT was the most forthright and clearest about it, nevertheless, in Britain and internationally, most groupings gravitated to those politics with one degree or another of qualification and demur.

The Democratic Socialist Party and the Scottish Socialist Party were pulled towards a better position by their links with the LPP, though the LPP stance left them still in the grip of the idea that their "main task" had to be to oppose the USA and other comment was secondary.

The best exceptions were Solidarity in the USA, the LCR in France, and "News and Letters".

Solidarity responded to the 11 September attacks thus: "The September 11 attacks are a world-class crime against humanity. We condemn without reservation these acts and those who perpetrated them, whoever they may turn out to be. The thousands of working people incinerated in the World Trade Centre are innocent of the crimes of imperialism, just as were the hundreds of African civilians killed in the streets of Tanzania and Kenya in the 1998 bombings of the US embassies there.

"As well as a slaughter of innocent people, these attacks are a severe blow against struggles for social justice from the Palestinian struggle for self-determination to the mobilisations against the institutions of global capitalism.

"We must also condemn acts of terror when these are perpetrated by our own government".

In their magazine *Against The Current*, David Finkel further spelled out the case for a stance based on independent working-class politics, rather than rallying to the anti-US "camp":

"We confront two questions: not only how we oppose the imperialist military operation, but also the question on the minds of the US population, 'how can we fight terrorism?'

"The latter question must be addressed, not only because it is on the minds of ordinary people who must be won over to

an antiwar perspective, but also because it is a very real question!

"The struggle against totalitarian-religious fanaticism and the high-tech smart-bomb free-market-über-alles terrorism of imperialism are, in real life, the very same struggle".

News and Letters is a strange group - a descendant of the state-capitalist faction in the Workers' Party in the 1940s, much of its energy is given to pious exaltation of the oracular insight and Hegelian profundity of its now-deceased founder, Raya Dunayevskaya. Yet what it wrote about Afghanistan was good:

"To try to rationalise the Sept. 11 attacks as an 'understandable' reaction to US foreign policy skips over the fact that some forces opposed to the US are just as regressive, if not even more so, than US imperialism itself..."

"Narrow opposition to US imperialism has for far too long disoriented would-be revolutionaries. It has led them into opportunism and realpolitik, distancing them from the aspirations of the masses of human beings for genuine liberation. In recent years, such attitudes have caused a section of the Left to betray the Bosnian and Kosovar people, and tacitly to give support to Milosevic's genocide.

"The lesser-evilism which underlay much of the Left's silence on Bosnia, and its refusal to support the movement for national self-determination in Kosova, has only succeeded in strengthening the power of US imperialism..."

"This moment can prove to be an opening for revolutionaries if we can transcend the kind of narrow either/or that has been offered by Bush and bin Laden. The outpouring of solidarity with Afghan women seen in the recent tour of the US by RAWA representatives was a beginning. This will have to continue and become much more profound..."

"Unlike 1979, when the Iranian women's struggle was sacrificed to Khomeini's counter-revolutionary anti-imperialism, serious revolutionaries in the West need to take this opportunity to build new ties with those Third World revolutionaries who are face to face with the fundamentalist threat".

The LCR's central committee resolution after 11 September declared that: "The LCR unreservedly condemns the attacks of 11 September, which were deliberately aimed to claim the greatest possible number of victims in a civilian population. In this context it denounces the international networks who fomented these monstrous acts, networks whose actions and plans for society run counter to the struggle for the emancipation of humanity.

"At the same time it denounces the policy of the American administration and the other imperialist powers, a policy comprised of aggressions, of globalisation of injustice, and of widening the inequalities between North and South. It fights against their drive to put in place a 'Holy Alliance against terrorism' which will use state terrorism against the peoples..." Francois Ollivier, in Rouge, was clear about the jihadi-fundamentalists.

"Internationalism remains our compass! Internationalism, and solidarity with the American people facing the horror, with its thousands of New Yorkers, black, white, Asian, Chicano, massacred by blind terror. This terror is not a distorted form of anti-imperialism. It in no way represents the interests of the dispossessed masses whose name it cynically claims".

Following these lines, the LCR's paper Rouge had front pages along the lines of "No to war, no to fundamentalist terrorism".

Inside the LCR, however, there were many who argued for a more conventional "anti-imperialist camp" policy. Vocal among them, sadly, were the comrades from VdT whom we have discussed and worked with over the last four years or so. As is the norm in the LCR, the debate was expressed publicly in the LCR press.

Laurent Carasso and Marc Dormoy wrote a discussion article entitled "New world order, new colonial order", arguing that the main significance of the war was that it had "allowed

the USA to launch a general offensive with the aim of reaching a new stage in the consolidation, commenced through the Gulf and Kosova wars, of their leadership on the world scale".

Galia Trépère, an ex-VdT comrade, wrote that: "With 11 September, the world has indeed lurched into a new phase of its history". New? Her argument seemed rather to be that things are as they were in the old era of colonial empires - only more so.

"After adorning itself with ideas of democracy and liberty against the USSR and, today, against terrorism, imperialism" - the same nebulous megalomaniac as ever, a spirit which exists over and above particular classes, states, and historical periods, but expresses itself through them - "adopts the face of an aggressive militarism".

"The current intervention in Afghanistan follows in the continuity of the policy of the imperialist powers, determined by the drive to ensure their control over the energy resources of the planet". Why then the USA did not go to war against the worldwide nationalisations of local oil resources, and enforced raising of oil prices, in the 1960s and 1970s, but instead launches war now, in a period when the oil producers' global competitive position is much weaker and in a country with no oil at all, Galia does not explain. She continues:

"It is in order to control the immense oil and gas resources of the Caspian Sea that, under cover of humanitarianism, that there is being prepared, under the aegis of American imperialism, via that of the UN, the armed occupation of Afghanistan and the installation of military bases in Central Asia... It is unthinkable for American imperialism to leave free scope to Russia, China or Europe in this region of the world..." Look at a map, and you will see that the Caspian Sea is almost 1000 miles distant from Kabul (but only about 250 miles from the USA's longstanding ally Turkey).

The theory that the war has been all about oil and gas pipelines is contrived "economic determinism" in place of Marxism. According to Ahmed Rashid, author of the best study of the Taliban and the manoeuvres during the 1990s over oil, gas and pipelines in the region, it is more likely (though not certain) that one of the USA's concessions to Russia in order to get its support in the war has been a final renunciation of any pipeline plans conflicting with Russian wishes. In any case, why would Russia and the European Union support the US war in Afghanistan if it is primarily directed against themselves? How would an "armed occupation" of Afghanistan led by European troops keep the area an American preserve to exclude Europe?

Lutte Ouvriere is a tendency with much to its credit. Nevertheless, its rigid insistence on seeing the world through exactly the same categories as 1940 Trotskyism, and rejecting all intellectual innovation as "petty bourgeois dilettantism", has been costly.

Its first headline after 11 September effectively told "the USA" collectively that the attacks were its "fault": "You cannot sustain wars all over the world without them catching up with you one day".

It followed up by writing about: "The twisted manoeuvres of imperialism to consolidate its hold on the planet".

The method of attributing events to the designs of a superhuman force, "imperialism" - of which the US government, the British government, the French government, various multinationals and banks, now and at other times in history, are only so many profane manifestations - recalls a polemic by Marx and Engels against idealism.

"The ordinary man", wrote Marx and Engels, "does not think he is saying anything extraordinary when he states that there are apples and pears. But if the philosopher expresses those existences in the speculative way he says something extraordinary. He works a wonder by producing the real natural being, the apple, the pear, etc., out of the unreal being of reason 'Fruit'... He declare[s] apples, pears,

almonds, etc., to be mere forms of existence, modi, of 'Fruit'..."

Lutte Ouvriere continues: "The state terrorism of imperialism and, behind it, the avidity of the big corporations, bring catastrophes one after another. By continuing in its period of decay, imperialism generates intolerable and ever more dangerous dramas for the future of humanity".

Such dissolution of specifics into great generalities spanning decades disables concrete political response.

The Lutte Ouvriere minority faction - again, a tendency deserving great respect on many questions - did no better.

"It goes without saying that the [US-led] military expedition aims neither to impose a somewhat less dictatorial and reactionary regime in Afghanistan, nor even to eradicate terrorism. The American intervention has the aim of showing the whole planet, peoples, governments, and ruling classes, who is master". (Here we find an echo of the idea that the US war was really directed not against the Taliban, or Al Qaeda, or the peoples of Afghanistan - but against the world's other more powerful ruling classes, in Europe, Japan or Russia. In which case, why should we be concerned to boost, uphold, or defend the second-rank big powers against the superpower?).

"After the snub it suffered in the eyes of the whole world with the attacks of 11 September, it was necessary to remind the world that no-one can hurt the United States, above all at home, without someone paying for it much more dearly, whether they be guilty or innocent, in the Americas or on the other side of the world". This might be just an overdone reminder of the motive of revenge in the war - except for the concluding sentence coming straight after. "The best that we can thus hope for in the interest of the oppressed people of the whole world would be a defeat of imperialism". In other words, side with the Taliban because "imperialism" (aka the USA) is the "main" enemy.

Marxist renewal

The left is still blighted by Stalinism. A vision of politics in terms of world power blocs or "camps" in place of an independent working-class axis; the "structuralist" methodological freeze; the "Apparatus Marxist" concept that the best "line" is whatever can be derived by manipulation of the given supposedly-Marxist categories and seems most organisationally advantageous; the sect regimes and mentalities which go with it - all these derive from Stalinism.

Potentially, the collapse of 1989-91 widens the openings for ending the Stalinist blight. So far, however, groups and individuals have mostly responded either by collapsing towards bourgeois liberalism or by shelving Stalinism as an obsolete question.

Our tradition, the Trotskyist tradition, shipped a lot of Stalinistic water in its passage through rough seas. The stretched-to-the-limit tensions in Trotsky's last perspectives; their provisional nature, the fact that any conversion of them into stable assessments for a radically longer time-scale destroyed their logic; the way that "Trotsky" was passed on to later generations, before the main body of his writings became available in the 1970s, in a version doctored, notably by Isaac Deutscher, to fit the sensibilities of the more liberal and critical segment of official "Communism" - all had an effect.

So did sheer volume. On any significant issue an ostensibly "Marxist" view or range of views would be in circulation from the Stalinist movements and their fringes, and could often claim academic repute. The small Trotskyist groups, poor in resources, had scarcely any option but to take much of this "Marxism" on trust, "correcting" it only when obvious.

The intellectual, theoretical and polemical renewal of Marxism is essential also for a renewal in the relations

between organised Marxists and the broad labour movement. Without renewal, Marxists filter their communications with the labour movement around them through a private jargon ("anti-imperialism", "defeatism", etc.) Outside the jargon, and the emotional charge attached to its terminology (often by association rather than by logic - take the example of the term "defeatism", discussed by Hal Draper in WL 2/1), their arguments can make no sense except as an emotional reaction.

With a concept of Marxism as a revelation supplied by a private jargon of fixed categories of thought, the groups cannot develop in their members the habits of dialogue and open debate which they need in order to deal with the labour movement around them.

External sectarianism goes hand in hand with internal dogmatism - especially with the sort of low-grade dogmatism widespread today. Some "dogmatism" towards the core ideas which we can learn from the writings of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Luxemburg, Trotsky, and so on is in order for anyone with a realistic view of their own limits; "dogmatism" towards a garbled pastiche of ideas from those sources is another matter.

The small trade union turnout for the big anti-war demonstrations in October and November gives an example. The reason, on all evidence, was not that pro-war fever had gripped the trade union ranks. It was that most of the left had given no priority to the task of convincing trade unionists, and scarcely had the intellectual means to try.

At first sight the SWP, with its longstanding repudiation of the Stalinist USSR as state-capitalist, should be an exception to the rule of extensive Stalinist storm-damage in the Trotskyist movement. It is not. In fact, today it is one of the most crass exponents of the world-power-bloc, "camp" approach, originated by Stalinism, in place of independent working-class politics. The reasons for this paradox are two.

One: Cliff, like Healy and Lambert, emerged prominent from the late-1940s crisis of the Trotskyist movement not essentially as a theoretician but as an "operator" - someone who would stand out in a period of general perplexity because he could and would improvise and push practical schemes and tactics without theoretical qualms while others were stuck in self-interrogation. Improvisation - the primacy of which Cliff himself self-indulgently, in his 1970s multi-volume biography of Lenin, claims to be the hallmark of "Leninist" politics - has always been the guiding principle.

Cliff's group always had - and still vestigially has - a thicker decorative coating of academic or quasi-academic writers. But decorative was all it was.

Cliff's "state-capitalist" theory of the USSR was never developed, or subjected to any process of drawing out implications. It was popularised, adapted, and blanded-down, but that is all. The Cliff group never had a hard-edged "Third Camp" line.

Two: Cliff's state-capitalist thesis saved him from the flat collapse of the other theorists of the 1940s British Trotskyist movement, notably Ted Grant, into axiomatic equation of all nationalised economies with workers' states, and thus from the view that some autonomous movement of the productive forces was pushing history willy-nilly towards the creation of more and more workers' states, highly "deformed" but nonetheless the lawful next stage of progress. It might seem obvious that it would also give him much more critical distance from the USSR than any of the "orthodox" Trotskyists had. But it did not.

The picture which Cliff's 1948 book paints of the USSR - a system at the very highest point of capitalism's evolution, free of systematic tendencies to crisis of overproduction, and with a much faster development of the forces of production than the West - is, despite the "state capitalist" label, more "appreciative" of the USSR than were the mainstream "orthodox" Trotskyists of the time, who regarded Grant's views with contempt and saw the USSR as a system where

the bureaucracy had smothered and cancelled out very nearly all the progress due to the nationalised property.

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In the mid 1960s, Perry Anderson and others around New Left Review - a magazine still influential now, and very influential in the late 1960s and early 1970s, when some of its editors were linked to the IMG, forerunner of the ISG/Socialist Outlook - famously announced themselves as setting out to bring Marxist theory at last to Britain. They would bring light into the country's "dense web of archaic superstructure" and thick fog of "empiricism"! E P Thompson commented sardonically: "We hold our breath in suspense as the first Marxist landfall is made upon this uncharted Northland... Pulling their snowcaps over their ears, they disembark and struggle onwards to bring the intense rational consciousness of their cutting instruments to the 'traditional intelligentsia once buried entirely in the tribal rites of Oxford or literary London'. There is a sense of rising suspense as they - the First White Marxists - approach the astonished aborigines".

In fact Anderson and his comrades did not pretend that the new Marxism they brought was all the creation of their own minds, starting from no other source than their own superior readings of the classic Marxist texts. They saw themselves as bringing a better Marxist culture to Britain from other countries, notably France (Althusser and others) and Italy.

There are and have been, however, projects of "renewing Marxism" even more pretentious than Anderson's. There are and have been those who promise to renew Marxist theory from scratch - starting from a clean slate - bringing us a higher culture from no more remote continent than their own heads.

They present themselves as rising above the "sectarian squabbling" involved in attempts such as ours to renew Marxism by starting from within, in polemic with, and in development from a definite tradition, in our case the Trotskyist tradition. They claim to be more positive, more forward-looking.

The two recent examples on the British left are the original Revolutionary Communist Group, in 1975, and the CPGB today. Maybe the Worker-communist Party of Iran is in the same mould.

The RCG originated in a "Right Opposition"- expelled from the SWP in 1973 - its politics indefinite, but closer to the old Militant Tendency (pre-Socialist-Party) than anything else. For two years they operated only as a discussion circle. Then they decided to launch a public and active organisation. They presented themselves as very "theoretical" - the first issue of their journal proclaimed itself with a picture of a pile of volumes of Marx's writings on the cover - and out to create a new Marxism by heavy studies which would skip all the crap in between and tell us about capitalism today through studies based directly on Marx's original thought.

That appeal, however farcical it seems in hindsight, won them a fair number of talented people. The RCG's day-to-day politics, however, developed very "untheoretically", by rationalisation and generalisation of gambits proposed by some of their members who were less concerned about the theory but had an eye for practical schemes.

The entire evolution has too many twists and turns to go into. Enough to say that within ten years the original RCG had transmuted into two groups, one (the present RCG) flatly Castroite-Stalinist, the other (RCP) so sectarian that its politics might have been deliberately designed in order to discredit Marxism within the left.

The CPGB does avow a tradition, that of the Communist Parties from 1919 to 1991. Or rather it seems to. Actually it does not deny that from the early 1930s, at latest, the British Communist Party's politics were utterly corrupt. Its is a tradition only in a Buddhist cycle-of-reincarnation sense: the

CPGB dies in its earthly form around 1930, and then its physical body rots, while its spirit goes through other spheres in order to be reincarnated sixty years later in the CPGB of today. And, lacking a hierarchy of monks to certify authenticity, we only have the CPGB's word for it that it is in fact the real Dalai Lama.

As with the RCG, the actual politics accumulated by the CPGB are what they have picked up from their surroundings - fortunately, a good deal of it from us. (The "anti-economism" and monarchy-fetishism, apparently, from the RDG).

As John Maynard Keynes aptly put it: "Practical men, who believe themselves to be quite exempt from any intellectual influences, are usually the slaves of some defunct economist. Madmen in authority, who hear voices in the air, are still distilling their frenzy from some academic scribbler of a few years past".

That cannot be our approach. We must be polemicists. Virtually all the major writings of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Luxemburg and Trotsky instructive to us today were polemics, or (like the Communist Manifesto, Capital and Revolution Betrayed) positive expositions based on a large volume of previous polemic. If they had to proceed that way, by step-by-step critical elucidation within and out of a previous tradition, why should we think that we can do it all much more easily and directly?

In almost all fields of intellectual effort this rule of development-by-criticism holds. In philosophy, for example - the writings of the great German philosopher Hegel, which formed one of the intellectual jumping-off points for Marx and Engels, took the form of a prolonged critical-polemical tussle with earlier philosophers, notably Kant. "In this work", wrote Hegel in his Science of Logic, "I frequently refer to the Kantian philosophy (which to many may seem superfluous) because whatever may be said... about the precise character of this philosophy... it constitutes the base and the starting-point of recent German philosophy..."

A later notable philosopher offers a perhaps unique exception to the rule. Ludwig Wittgenstein, the major influence on modern academic philosophy in the English-speaking world, wrote his decisive works without any reference to earlier philosophers. If we have a social-scientific Wittgenstein in our ranks, we should certainly give them room to develop their work. But Wittgensteins are not too common.

Development-by-criticism does not mean, of course, that we should allow our intellectual concerns and focus to be determined exclusively and negatively by those we polemicise against in the activist left. There are issues vital to the renewal of the Marxist left which the activist left neglects. The analysis of Stalinism is one of them, the analysis of contemporary world capitalism another! On those and others we must engage polemically also with the academic Marxist left.

But polemic remains, as James P Cannon put it, "the mark of a revolutionary party". Even if we could develop all our political ideas more directly and easily, without the trouble of critical engagement with our tradition and milieu, we would still have to explain those ideas to the people around us who are influenced by that tradition and milieu, and we could not do that without polemic.

What about those uninfluenced by that tradition and milieu? In the first place they are less numerous than they seem. In the labour movement, as in the world of bourgeois politics which Keynes was writing about, the "practical men and women, who believe themselves to be quite exempt from all intellectual influences" are very often still the ideological "slaves" of whatever grouping first introduced them to socialist politics (or sometimes slaves-in-rebellion, forming their ideas by reflex negation of that grouping, as with the many who reject a "party" because to them "party" means what in their first fresh days the SWP or the WRP told them it was).

In the second place, even when we come across young people new to it all, we have to equip them to deal with the left and the labour movement as they are. And that includes educating them in polemic - polemic which is as well-written (or spoken) and accessible as possible, as thorough as necessary.

We should not ignore the academic Marxist left. For example, we want to talk to students interested in demonstrations about fees or in NUS elections, and to students interested in protests against Nike - but also to students who are interested in studying Capital, or reading modern Marxist writers, and who maybe are not sure what they want to do in practical politics yet, outside attending occasional demonstrations.

The dislocations and setbacks of the last twenty years have produced not only an unprecedented pulling-apart of the activist left into mutually-uncommunicative islands (with a few welcome but low-traffic bridges now built by the Socialist Alliance), but also an unprecedented width of seaway between the "intellectual" or academic Marxist left and the activist left (and, arguably, also, more blue water than ever before between the activist Marxist left and militant trade-unionist milieus).

Strategically, we aim to overcome this fragmentation by building a multi-faceted, intellectually-alive, open and democratic revolutionary party. Our starting point, morally and practically, is definitely within the activist-left archipelago rather than the others.

And we have things to learn from those academic Marxists. Amid a vast volume of dross there is much of value. As Marx put it, ignorance never did anybody any good. The foremost leader of the Italian Communist Party in its revolutionary days put it even more sharply: "I think it is better if a peasant joins the socialist movement than if a university professor does. But only if the peasant tries to acquire the university professor's experience and breadth of outlook, so that his [or her] choice - and the sacrifices it entails - will not be sterile".

The change in format of the magazine (smaller page size and square-bound) in order to make it less ephemeral and more suited to longer articles is not a turn inwards. It is an adaptation to gear us better to the task of seeking out serious readers and providing them with solid food to chew on.

That is not our only task, by a long way. Without the sort of work which is organised around workplace bulletins, occasional leaflets, a regular newspaper suitable for selling on the streets and door-to-door, and so on, our political lifeblood would fade into a pale, watery trickle. But the theoretical-polemical task is a vital part of the whole.