

Maastricht House of Cards Collapses **European Disunity**

Since the dawn of the imperialist age at the end of the last century, capitalism on a world scale has been beset by a contradiction it cannot solve. It has created bonds of economic interdependence and a global division of labor that transcend national boundaries. Yet this highly integrated world economy—more closely interlinked than ever before—is divided politically into various competing nation-states and unstable imperialist blocs, whose mutual antagonisms undermine and threaten to tear apart the international economic bonds capitalism has brought into being.

Capitalist development contains a profound contradiction between the imperatives of international integration and the necessity for each bourgeoisie to find “national solutions” to the moves of its rivals, e.g., “dumping,” restrictions of the market and protectionism. This contradiction has already resulted in two world wars. Because of the need to maintain unity against the Soviet bloc in the post-World-War-II era, it was partly suppressed for the past forty-five years. But it was never far from the surface. Now that the Soviet Union is no more, and the once unquestioned economic supremacy of the United States is long gone, rivalries among the major capitalist powers are once again coming to dominate the world stage. Nowhere is this more evident than in the recent travails of the so-called European Community (EC—which changed its name as of November 1993 to the European Union).

Western European capitalism emerged from World War II in a very precarious condition. Industry and agriculture had all but collapsed, and in practically every country the rulers were discredited by their collaboration with fascism. Fearing an angry and resurgent working class, the capitalist rulers found it expedient to attempt to suppress national antagonisms in order to consolidate their rule. U.S. imperialism encouraged moves toward European cooperation, and benignly approved the EC project because it helped shore up a western European capitalist bulwark against the Soviet Union.

As American hegemony waned, the drive toward greater European unity gained momentum. This was fueled by a desire to achieve the efficiencies of operating within a larger economic field, and reflected the renewed ability of Europe’s ruling classes to pursue their own imperialist ambitions. The more farsighted capitalists recognized that the tremendous international expansion of production, trade and finance required extensive European economic integration in order to participate effectively in the global competition for markets and spheres of influence. Yet each of the imperialist bourgeoisies simultaneously saw unification as a means to advance their own particular (and often mutually contradictory) national interests.

Thus what began in 1952 as an agreement among

France, Germany Italy and the Benelux countries to eliminate all barriers to the export and import of coal and steel, became, with the signing of the Treaty of Rome in 1957, a blueprint for full-blown European economic and, ultimately, political integration. By 1968 the nine countries belonging to what was then called the Common Market had achieved a complete customs union, a common external tariff and the freer movement of labor and capital within the union. Britain entered the EEC in 1973, and the number of member countries subsequently expanded to the current twelve.

The road to European unity never ran smooth. Britain, clinging to memories of vanished imperial glory, and often valuing its “special relationship” with the U.S. above closer cooperation with its traditional continental foes, kept Europe at arm’s length for many years, and even today remains a reluctant partner. The unity drive almost came to a halt during the worldwide economic contractions of the mid-1970s and early 1980s, as EEC member states became preoccupied with managing their own internal crises, often at one another’s expense.

Yet, during the mid-1980s, the process of integration revived. The Single Market Act of 1986 and the Maastricht Treaty of 1992 were aimed at what the authors of the Treaty of Rome envisaged as the step following the creation of a customs union: full European economic integration. With these two agreements, the member states suspended important elements of national sovereignty. The Single Market Act resulted in an expanded role for the European Commission seated in Brussels: whereas any member state could previously veto its decisions, the Commission was now given broad powers to legislate by majority rule in many economic areas. All border controls were slated for elimination by 1993. The Maastricht Treaty laid out a plan for the creation of a single European currency (European Monetary Union, or EMU) by the end of the century. With these two treaties in place, Europe seemed on the high road to the third and final step projected by the Treaty of Rome’s architects: the merger of the member countries into a federated super-state, with a single foreign policy, parliament and army.

Today that vision lies in ruins. The insoluble conflicts between the national and international requirements of capital are dissipating the momentum toward European economic and political integration. The Yellow Brick Road has turned out to be paved with landmines, which have their origin in the very nature of capitalism.

Collapse of ERM—Blow to Maastricht

Plans for moving to a common currency (supposed to be a milestone on the road to European Union) were shattered by two monetary crises: in September 1992, and July 1993. To achieve monetary union, it was necessary to ensure that the currencies of all member states

serve as a reliable pan-European measure of value. This, in turn, required stable rates of exchange among the various national currencies. This was the aim of the Exchange Rate Mechanism (ERM), which prescribed a narrow range in which the values of EC currencies were permitted to fluctuate in relation to one another (for most countries this was 2.25 percent above or below a predetermined "central rate.") But the relative values of currencies fluctuate in accordance with the condition of the national economies that back them. These economies have different rates of growth and investment, different levels of development, and are consequently driven by different and often mutually conflicting imperatives. The rates of inflation, interest and levels of state indebtedness vary from country to country, yet the EC's Council of Ministers insisted that the ERM could only be maintained if all these factors were stabilized through strict fiscal controls.

The senior partner in the EC is Germany, whose economy is the powerhouse of Europe, and whose deutschmark is consequently the bedrock of the monetary union. But, swallowing the DDR (East Germany), proved far costlier than the West German rulers ever imagined. In its haste to gain immediate control over the DDR's economy, the West German state (BRD) decreed that, from 1 July 1990, all exports had to be paid for in deutschmarks, which resulted in a catastrophic decline for the ex-DDR's foreign trade. It was also announced that the debts of state-owned companies (which turned out to be a vast sum) were also payable in deutschmarks. Keeping social peace in eastern Germany, whose economy was gutted by the Western bourgeoisie, cost billions more in unemployment payouts. (According to the 26 January 1993 *Financial Times*, manufacturing jobs in the former DDR had declined 77 percent since unification.) The costs of sustaining the population, reconstructing the infrastructure and liquidating the majority of existing enterprises is estimated to have run up a total accumulated debt of 400 billion deutschmarks as of January 1993.

To prevent rampant inflation, the German government had to drain out at least some of the money it had pumped into the economy. Kohl knew that raising enough taxes to balance the budget would be political suicide, so instead he opted for a range of measures designed to put the major burden on the backs of the working class: raising direct and indirect taxes, cutting social services, arbitrarily cancelling union contracts for East German workers and imposing long-term substandard wages. Not to be outdone, the West German metal employers' association has unilaterally cancelled the wage and vacation provisions of the industry-wide contract, and massive layoffs have taken place in all branches of industry. In spite of the combativity shown in several big strikes and plant occupations, German workers' attempts to defend their standard of living have been undermined by the betrayals of the social-democratic trade-union bureaucrats.

One of the methods used by the German bourgeoisie to dampen inflation has been jacking up interest rates, through the agency of the Bundesbank, the German state's quasi-independent monetary arm. The interest

rate charged to commercial banks jumped 4.75 percent between 1989 and 1992 (*Financial Times* [London], 5 February 1993), and in September the international financial markets went into a frenzy, as speculators sold off other European currencies. To remain within ERM bands, other Community members had to spend vast amounts of their foreign cash reserves to prop up the value of their own currencies, and impose high interest rates to maintain the comparative value of their own currencies against the deutschmark. But higher interest rates spelled disaster for the weaker EC economies, most significantly Italy and Britain. Thus the monetary crisis of September 1992 resulted in the exit of Italy and Britain (temporarily, they said) from the Exchange Rate Mechanism and the devaluation of the Portuguese, Spanish and Irish currencies.

But if the September 1992 crisis left the European Community in a gravely weakened condition, the events of the following July struck at its very heart: the Franco-German alliance. During the Cold War, it was a cornerstone of imperialist policy to prevent a recurrence of hostilities between the continent's two traditional rivals. Conflict was avoided by allowing France to exercise a military and political influence out of proportion to its economic strength. With the downfall of Stalinism, the suspicion grew among the French bourgeoisie that a reunified Germany, in the absence of the Soviet "threat," and sensing its new-found power, might be more inclined to throw its weight around at the expense of its less powerful neighbor.

France's strategy was to use the EC to check German power. Paris has always been at pains to remind Bonn's rulers to act as the heads of a European Germany rather than in the role that many justifiably suspect they aspire to: the masters of a German Europe. In early 1993 France's new right-wing coalition government was under pressure to take some measures to stimulate the economy. But this would have meant a devaluation of the franc, and all the governing parties were pledged to maintain the *franc fort* (strong franc), i.e., the prevailing exchange rate with the deutschmark. Paris could not both jump-start the economy and maintain the exchange rate of the franc unless the Bundesbank could be persuaded to cut interest rates and devalue the mark. But German ruling circles showed little ambivalence when forced to choose between Euro-rhetoric and cold cash: despite constant pleas from Paris that it live up to its larger "continental responsibilities," the Bundesbank scoffed at the idea of letting the almighty deutschmark be dragged down with the franc. They responded to French entreaties with a few cosmetic gestures, but, at the end of July, flatly refused to lower one of the Bundesbank's key lending rates.

Seeing blood in the water, the piranhas of the financial markets began dumping francs in anticipation of a possible French devaluation. But everyone knew that removing the franc or the deutschmark from the ERM would doom the Franco-German alliance, Maastricht, and the whole project of European union. Unstable exchange rates would alter existing European trade patterns in unpredictable ways, and tend to inhibit new capital investment. Too many dreams of renewed Euro-

pean imperial grandeur, too many political careers and promises, and too much business rode on Maastricht for the rulers of Bonn and Paris to sign its death certificate so hastily. Instead, they tried to put it on a respirator.

At the beginning of August, the finance ministers and leading bankers of the EC countries conferred in Brussels, and announced that the margins of currency fluctuation would be raised from 2.25 percent above or below the established central rate, to 15 percent—a margin so wide that this move was seen as a face-saving way to announce the end of the ERM. As an afterthought, the member states also announced their intention to bring their currencies back into the old ERM ranges as soon as possible. But it is precisely the possibility of the ERM, and a single European currency, that the July 1993 crisis called into question.

Economic Integration and 'Actually Existing Capitalism'

The European unity project was first of all an alliance driven by the economic interests of the major continental powers, and secondly an anti-Soviet expedient. Yet it was more than these things. It also reflected the real supra-national economic bonds that had multiplied over the past several decades, the ambitions of the ruling classes of Europe for a larger role in the world, and, for the bourgeoisie's "best and brightest," a hope for the continent-wide renovation and rationalization of the capitalist order. But the financial paroxysms of the past year sounded the death knell of these high hopes; they revealed the chasm between utopian/idealist bourgeois daydreaming and "actually existing capitalism."

Despite decades of growing economic interpenetration, the ruling classes of Europe are unable to transcend the limits of the nation-state, and bring the political organization of capitalist society into conformity with the requirements of its increasingly integrated economic foundations. Nothing short of the elimination of private property in the means of production, and the organization of the world economy on the basis of conscious planning, can resolve the contradiction between the global scale of contemporary productive forces and the narrow political limits within which they are confined—a contradiction that has already caused untold destruction in the twentieth century, and once again threatens the human race with catastrophe.

The attempt to construct a unitary Europe has produced serious differences within and among the continent's ruling classes. It created a rift in the leadership of Britain's ruling Conservative Party; more than any other single issue, this dissension was responsible for the replacement of the Euro-negative Margaret Thatcher by the more Euro-friendly John Major as party leader and prime minister. France's neo-Gaullist party, the Rally for the Republic (RPR), headed by Jacques Chirac, is known to be lukewarm in its support for Maastricht; two of its leading politicians, Philippe Séguin and Charles Pasqua, campaigned openly against the treaty. In the Socialist Party (PS), Mitterand's former defense minister, Jean-Pierre Chevènement, is an outspoken Maastricht opponent.

Even Jacques Delors, the French Euro-bureaucrat who personifies the EC, is losing hope in the possibility of realizing Maastricht. In Germany, where support for European unification has historically been strong, open dissent is growing. German ratification of the Maastricht Treaty was held up for months by challenges before Germany's highest court. Kohl's designated candidate for president, Steffen Heitmann, and Edmund Stoiber, Bavarian Ministerpresident of the Christian Social Union, have recently come out in open opposition to further European integration. Stoiber's opposition, which cuts across his party's national government partnership with the Christian Democrats and the Liberals, is obviously intended to undercut the appeal of the ultra-nationalist Republikaner campaign against Maastricht.

Differences over continental political and economic integration will continue to figure prominently in European politics for some time to come. The Maastricht Treaty was put to a popular vote in three countries in 1992. In Denmark, the treaty initially failed by a narrow margin (although this verdict was reversed in a subsequent referendum); in the Republic of Ireland it was endorsed by 70 percent; and in France, Maastricht gained approval by the slenderest of margins in September 1992. These referenda presented the left and workers' movement with an immediate practical question: how to vote on Maastricht, or whether to vote at all.

Choice of Poisons: Rampant Nationalism or Inter-Imperialist Integration

The controversy over Maastricht is exclusively a dispute over how European capitalism should be organized. The duty of Marxist revolutionaries is to represent the long-term, historic interests of the working class, which has no stake in either model of capitalism. Yet most of the left failed to adopt a position of "a plague on both your houses." Even self-styled revolutionary and Trotskyist groups joined left-reformist currents in advocating a "no" vote, arguing that a win for the "no" side would have represented some kind of victory for the working class.

This position seems to derive in some measure from the current reactionary political climate. Fifty years ago, few workers' parties would publicly deny that the ultimate goal was the elimination of private property in the means of production and its replacement by socialism. The debate within the workers' movement centered on how best to attain that goal: by reform or revolution, through the popular front or the political independence of the working class, through "socialism in one country" or the spread of revolution internationally.

Today, the grounds of the argument have shifted entirely. The social democracy for the most part officially abandoned the socialist goal many years ago. Since the collapse of the USSR and the Eastern European regimes, the remnants of the Stalinist parties have recast themselves as left social democrats, and have also renounced socialism in word as well as in deed. Nearly all mass workers' organizations and parties now openly proclaim that the working class can set itself no higher goal than to preserve and expand the limited social gains

wrested from the capitalists in the past. The permanence of capitalist society is taken for granted; the only relevant question concerns what kind of capitalism we should have. Contemporary public debate, in short, takes place almost entirely within the framework of bourgeois ideology. It is therefore easy to see how many ostensibly Trotskyist groups instinctively feel that to reject the bourgeois framework is to abstain from mass electoral politics altogether and, rather than be marginalized, strain to discover, some kind of leftist, working-class pole in the Maastricht controversy.

Such a pole never emerged. It is true that the majority of the bourgeoisie and their political representatives were pro-Maastricht. But the main articulate opposition came not from those who rejected Maastricht because they opposed a capitalist future, but rather from a right-wing nationalist bourgeois minority. Thatcher and Séguin were against the treaty because they feared that their own bourgeoisies might have to sacrifice some of their traditional prerogatives to what they perceived as a German-dominated Council of Ministers in Brussels. And behind these “mainstream conservatives” stood Enoch Powell and Jean-Marie Le Pen, who have based their entire political careers on stirring up chauvinist hatred against immigrants.

In the French referendum, the Communist Party (PCF) and a minority of the Socialists (PS) were also in the “no” camp, and warned from time to time that Maastricht would mean greater unemployment and austerity. But this is the same PCF that has been capitulating for years to growing anti-immigrant sentiment in the working-class suburbs of Paris and other cities, where it has been losing votes to Le Pen’s National Front, and the same PS minority that has been imposing austerity on the French working class for the last ten years. It is also true that the September vote was roughly divided along class lines, with affluent districts voting heavily in favor of Maastricht, and the majority of workers and small farmers voting against. Working France’s repudiation of Maastricht reflects profound discontent with a worsening economy and the politicians perceived as responsible for it. But, beyond that, the political implications of this “no” vote remain unclear. The working class and the small farmers have also been prey to growing chauvinism and xenophobia. Their discontent never rose above the level of a vague and inchoate protest against prevailing conditions. The implicit choice—from beginning to end—was between greater European unity and the status quo. Revolutionaries refuse to choose between these bourgeois poisons, and call for opposition to both capitalist “options” for intensifying exploitation.

The USec Votes ‘No’

Ernest Mandel’s United Secretariat of the Fourth International (USec) advocated a “no” to Maastricht in the French referendum. The 12 October 1992 issue of *International Viewpoint* (IV) asserted that:

“The underlying question in this referendum was: ‘do you wish to rationalize the means of capitalist restructuring and to further the coherence of austerity policies throughout Europe’ and the obvious socialist answer to this was of course ‘no.’”

And, indeed, Maastricht represented the European bourgeoisie’s preferred method of conducting the current global offensive against the working class. But the problem with the USec’s approach is that it implies that a capitalist class standing apart from the EC would somehow be immune to the imperatives of international competition and rationalization, and need not resort to austerity and strikebreaking. This is a point we took up in 1988, during the “Free Trade Election” in Canada:

“Whether ‘free trade’ or Canadian protectionism triumphs, the capitalists will attempt to ensure that the workers pay the price of intensified international competition. If Mulroney’s deal falls through, and the Canadian capitalists end up ‘independent’ of all the major international trading blocs, the *first* thing they will do is try to further slash labor costs (i.e., working-class standards of living) on the grounds that they are locked into a small domestic market.

“Alternatively, if free trade goes through, it becomes an excuse to cut living standards and social services in order to stay competitive with the U.S.

“In either case the capitalists are going to want concessions on wages and working conditions while further reducing government services and social benefits. Whether or not they get away with it will depend on the response of the unions. The limited gains won in the past—like unemployment insurance, old age pensions and medicare—were won by hard class struggle. And it is class struggle—not a renegotiation of capitalist tariffs—which will determine what happens to working-class living standards in the future.”

If, for example, Britain were to withdraw from the EC, should we expect capitalist pressure on the working class to ease? Would the unions gain leverage? There is no reason to think so. A successful campaign to leave the EC would be followed by an advertising blitz with “There Will Always Be an England” as its theme song. The Thatcherites would urge the population to “buy British,” tighten their belts and increase productivity to preserve the priceless traditions of their free island nation.

IV regretted that both the PCF and PS waged “no” campaigns based on chauvinist, nationalist appeals:

“One of the main points around which opposition crystallized was that of the nation. At first this... manifested itself in denunciations of the ‘European Unity’ process for its threat to ‘French identity’. This was the keynote of the National Front as well as of the RPR’s Pasqua; *nor was this theme entirely absent in the speeches of Chevènement and the Communist Party.*” (Ibid., emphasis added)

The LCR (French USec section) apparently had considerable difficulty differentiating its “progressive no” from the plain old regular “no” of the chauvinists and protectionists. This is not simply a product of tactical ineptness. The USec’s practised opportunism dictates that it discover a “progressive side” to just about everything that occurs, from the victory of Islamic fundamentalism in Iran, to the restoration of capitalism in Poland and the former Soviet Union.

Class Politics and the ‘No’ Campaign

Joining the USec in the “no” camp is the International Communist League (ICL), dominated by the Spartacist League (U.S.). The Robertsonites’ propaganda on Maas-

tricht has a somewhat tentative tone, which reflects the difficulties of presenting a hard left case for a “no” vote. Still, their major article on Maastricht in the wake of the French referendum (*Workers Vanguard*, 2 October 1992), presents several arguments worth taking up.

First, *Workers Vanguard* asserts that the majority of the French working class voted “no” out of solid class instinct:

“Maastricht became a symbol of the arrogant European ruling elites—the jet-setting bankers and corporate executives, the high government officials with their bodyguards and limos, staying in posh hotels as they made the rounds of endless EC conferences.”

“While there was certainly nationalistic sentiment motivating the ‘no’ vote, this was combined with an instinctive recognition that the European Community is an agency of the Paris *bourse* and Frankfurt bankers.”

“The Maastricht referendum gave unemployed steel workers and dockers a small opportunity to defy the masters of Europe.”

“The most striking thing about the referendum was the clear and overwhelming class division between ‘yes’ and ‘no,’ with the working class voting 60 percent against.”

It is of course a good thing when the working class acts instinctively in its own interest. We have no right to assume, however, that genuine class interest informs every instinctive reflex of the working class. What “class instinct” impels the American workers to support the Democrats/Republicans or Russian miners to follow Yeltsin?

There was undoubtedly an undertone of class resentment in the French workers’ rejection of Maastricht. They were angry with the Brussels bureaucrats, the financiers and corporate executives as well as the “beautiful people”—movie stars, artists and litterateurs—paraded before the media to drum up support for a “yes” vote. Yet whatever implicit class resentment may have informed the French workers’ “no,” in the existing political configuration it could only be subordinated to the dominant nationalist “no.”

It is possible, especially in periods of heightened class struggle, for questions that would ordinarily be seen as intra-bourgeois disputes to acquire a class significance. For example, in January 1919, the removal of the left social-democratic chief of police in Berlin, as part of a bid to restore capitalist hegemony, sparked an abortive revolt by the most militant sections of the working class. In such a situation it would indeed be both obtuse and sectarian for Marxists simply to tell the workers not to take a side.

Unlike voting for a candidate in an election, voting “no” in a referendum could also be a purely negative act. But a “no” vote in the Maastricht referenda had a political meaning determined by the larger context in which they took place. Small propaganda groups cannot alter that context or that implied meaning. The Maastricht referenda were essentially attempts by majority bourgeois factions to enlist popular support to overcome the resistance of the bourgeois oppositions to the deal. There was no reason why the attitude of the working class should have been any different in this case: workers should support neither the policy of the majority nor of

the minority of the exploiters.

Reasoning like the USec, *Workers Vanguard* argued that Maastricht represented a consciously anti-working class strategy:

“...class-conscious workers recognized that the proposed currency union was intended to hold down and slash wages and social benefits.”

“...the men who run the European Community are not scapegoats; they really and truly exploit and degrade the working people of France and the rest of Europe. They are responsible for the unemployed steel workers of Lorraine and dockers of Marseilles.”

Quite true, but it is equally true that the bourgeois opposition to the treaty was led by individuals no less hostile to the workers. *WV* admitted as much when it noted that the leftist social democrat Chevènement (to whom the Pabloist LCR was orienting) had a “program of economic autarky and inflationary finance [that] will not reduce unemployment one whit....”

The most militant-sounding argument advanced by the Robertsonites was that a defeat for Maastricht would deal a blow to the current rulers and could ignite working-class struggles. The September 1992 issue of their French journal, *Le Bolchévik*, proclaimed:

“We call for a no vote...knowing that a victory of the ‘no,’ by weakening a little more this anti-working class, anti-immigrant and anti-Soviet regime, would open a breach which the working class could take advantage of.”

The idea that revolutionaries should automatically vote no hoping to “weaken” the existing capitalist government and “open a breach” is foreign to Marxism. Revolutionaries have no interest in destabilization per se. The question is, who would stand to gain from such a development? In a situation where the working class is in a combative mood, and the capitalists are on the defensive, “opening a breach” could be an important step toward challenging the bourgeoisie for state power. But in France at the moment the main beneficiary of such a “breach” would more likely be Le Pen’s National Front.

Between Imperialists There Can Be No ‘Lesser Evil’

The Maastricht referenda took place against the larger background of the breakup of the Soviet Union—a major historic defeat for the working class. The vast majority of workers, who equated socialism with Stalinism, concluded from Stalinism’s downfall that socialism has failed. A corollary to this—churned out ad nauseam by capitalism’s propaganda mills—is that workers have no historic interests or goals independent from those of their rulers. It is of paramount importance in this period to inoculate the most class-conscious elements of the proletariat against such paralyzing assumptions. This was the principal danger confronting the working class in the Maastricht votes—a danger that made it doubly imperative to take a hard stance of revolutionary opposition to *all* sections of the ruling class.

Unlike reformists, we do not undertake to provide positive proposals for our rulers about how the “national interest” can be advanced. We champion the in-

terests of the downtrodden, and seek to organize opposition to any capitalist measures that will adversely affect the oppressed and exploited. Revolutionaries oppose every attempt to poison the working class with nationalism and protectionism because such sentiments undercut class consciousness, which can only be internationalist. Yet we do not advocate “free trade,” or take positions on how the capitalists should arrange their balance of payments, terms of trade or handle currency fluctuations. We neither advocate a strong dollar/pound/mark/yen nor a weak one, a return to the gold standard or floating exchange rates. These are all intra-bourgeois disputes, and we should follow the advice of Hilferding as quoted by Lenin in *Imperialism, The Highest Stage of Capitalism*: “The reply of the proletariat to the economic policy of finance capital, to imperialism, cannot be free trade [or protectionism] but Socialism.”

Workers Vanguard makes the observation that:

“In the short run, the collapse of the Maastricht project will tend to politically favor America, which can more easily play off the European bourgeoisies against each other. But even if German imperialism emerges...more able to impose its will economically (and militarily), this would point not to an era of harmony and prosperity but to interimperialist war.”

A point well taken, but one which hardly squares with advocating a “no” vote (or a “yes”)! If Maastricht collapses, the U.S. gains; if it proceeds apace, German capital will benefit; so which should workers favor, German or American imperialism?

The treaty is an attempt to better equip European capital to compete with North America and Japan. Marxists denounce inter-imperialist economic rivalry as a precursor to open military hostilities. But the defeat of Maastricht, or even the disappearance of the EC, would not terminate such rivalries, it would merely shift the ground for the sharpest conflicts to an *intra*-European level. One or another power would sooner or later forge an alliance with the U.S. or Japan, forcing its regional competitors to seek protection in some other bloc. We oppose imperialism, and we oppose every manifestation of its socially reactionary character, but this does not mean we wish to see the working class drawn into discussions about the pros and cons of one ruling class alliance or another. In a historical sense we favor global economic integration, but recognize that it cannot be achieved in a progressive fashion under imperialism.

LRCI’s “European Constituent Assembly”

The League for a Revolutionary Communist International (LRCI—led by the British Workers Power group) published a statement on Maastricht in their *Trotskyist Bulletin* No. 2, November 1992, which projected that “Within a decade” the movement represented by Maastricht “could mean the creation of a federal European imperialist superstate.” In light of what has happened since these words were written, the authors probably wish they had been a trifle more cautious. But, unlike the USec or the Robertsonites, the LRCI at least got the bottom line right with their call for a vote against *both* bourgeois camps.

The LRCI position on Maastricht is marred by the

introduction of the following demand:

“For the election of a sovereign European Constituent Assembly for all those countries in the EC or who seek to join it, convened and protected by the fighting organisations of the working class.”

The demand for a “sovereign European Constituent Assembly” might suit little-England “socialists” like Tony Benn, who could use it for some internationalist cover. But why would supposed revolutionaries promote such a slogan? Marxists raise the call for a constituent assembly to focus popular resistance to bonapartist dictatorships, and mobilize the masses in an attempt to turn a struggle for bourgeois democracy in a revolutionary direction. But there is no connection between the convocation of a European constituent assembly and the creation of a European workers’ government.

Only opportunists can pretend that current sentiment for a single Europe is an empty shell that can be filled with whatever social and class content may please them. However it is approached, the call for a constituent assembly in Europe boils down to a call for the creation of an institution “convened and protected by the fighting organisations of the working class” to promote a *capitalist* United States of Europe. The project of a united capitalist Europe belongs exclusively to the bourgeoisie, just as much as the defense of the prerogatives of the imperialist nation-states. The various international alignments of the imperialist powers are reactionary to the core, and no amount of centrist double-talk can extract a “revolutionary” content from a tactic based on illusions in the peaceful harmonization of inter-imperialist competition. The LRCI’s demand is therefore not merely utopian, it is *reactionary* utopianism, inasmuch as it promotes the reactionary illusion that European unification on capitalist terms can have a progressive content.

Be Realistic: Fight for Socialism!

The questions posed by Maastricht are critically important to defining politics in the post-Soviet era. The Russian Question as we have known it will be less a touchstone of revolutionary politics, and more and more take its place at the head of the list of historical experiences of the proletariat, along with the Paris Commune, the German Revolution of 1918 and the Spanish Civil War. It will remain the decisive historical example—the highest point yet reached by the international workers’ movement—and one which retains incomparable lessons for revolutionaries. But it will not directly intrude into the calculation of every question of global politics, as in the past. Questions posed by relations between one’s “own” imperialist rulers and their rivals are therefore now more clearly central to revolutionary politics than before. The race between proletarian consciousness and the next round of inter-imperialist hostilities will determine humanity’s future.

Proletarian consciousness may seem to be losing the race. The essential elements of the current situation—economic slowdown, the explosion of ethnic and nationalist hatreds, increasing rivalry among capitalist nations and imperialist blocs—are broadly familiar from the

situations preceding the two world wars. One ingredient is, however, missing: a militant, socialist proletariat. Yet, despite the deindustrialization in North America and Britain, and the growth of the “service” sector, the organized working class retains the social weight and economic power to lead all the oppressed in a successful assault on the existing social order. The spread of industrial development into former colonies and neo-colonies has vastly increased the size and social weight of the working class internationally.

The composition of the proletariat in the imperialist heartlands is changing, and its consciousness and political will have been eroded by the countless betrayals of the Stalinists and social democrats, as well as the illu-

sions created by the relative prosperity of post-war decades. But it is precisely that post-war standard of living that is under attack in all imperialist countries today. To fight back, the working class requires the most advanced theory and political practice that the history of the class struggle can supply. That most advanced theory and practice is still Marxism, regardless of its temporary unpopularity due to a false equation with Stalinism. The working class will discover Marxism once again, but only if its most basic premises—first among them the political independence of the working class—are jealously guarded against the unrelenting pressure of bourgeois reaction in an epoch of capitalist decline. ■