

The Geopolitics of the New Superpowers: Not the "New World Order" He Had in Mind

by Zoltán Grossman

"On the sixth day of Hate Week, after the processions, the speeches, the shouting, the singing, the banners, the posters, the waxworks, the rolling of drums and squealing of trumpets, the tramp of marching feet, the grinding of the caterpillars of tanks, the roar of massed planes, the booming of guns...at just this moment it had been announced that Oceania was not after all at war with Eurasia. Oceania was at war with Eastasia. Eurasia was an ally. There was, of course, no admission that any change had taken place. Merely it became known, with extreme suddenness and everywhere at once, that Eastasia and not Eurasia was the enemy."
—George Orwell, 1984

"The way things are going, we'll be shooting with them, not at them."
—A U.S. soldier speaking of the Soviets, 1990

Historically speaking, the break-up of the Soviet Union is not that big a deal. To us cartographers, the fall of empires and their replacement by new empires is old news. On a history textbook project, a cartographer usually compiles a new empire map each day—from the Romans and the Mongols to the Austrians and Ottomans. The disintegration of the old Russian Empire is just one part of a much larger picture—the musical chairs of empires, the shift of superpowers.

Since the Mercantile Revolution began 500 years ago, the world stage has generally been dominated by two superpowers at a time—by Spain and Portugal until the mid-1700s, by Britain and France until the early 1900s, by Germany and Japan until 1945, and by the US and USSR until today. In each instance, the pursuit of empire tallied up such high political and socio-economic costs that it not only ended, but dragged down the imperial power with it.

The current shift of superpowers is combined with a profound revolution in communication that is dismantling the very concept of the nation-state. The new superpowers are likely to be economically-based regional alliances, containing autonomous or even independent ethnic nations. New definitions of sovereignty, whether in the new Commonwealth of Independent States (formerly the Soviet Union), or in plans for European political unity, will make it harder to even make maps. The world is getting both smaller and larger at the same time—breaking up nation-states into ethnic enclaves, but then in turn uniting those ethnic enclaves in larger economic associations.

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The two best candidates for superpower status by the 21st century are a European alliance, with Germany at its hub, and an East Asian alliance, with Japan at the economic center. Having emphasized economic growth over military prowess, and integration of national economies over internal trade wars, Europe and East Asia are replacing the US and USSR as the two preeminent world powers. The process will be marked by inconsistencies, setbacks, and the periodic reassertion of the old order. But the overall trend is unmistakable.

While the US may maintain status as a third superpower for a short interim period, it is folly to think it immune from the forces that brought down the USSR—military over-spending, a crumbling civilian infrastructure, ethnic conflict, ecological destruction, a sense of popular powerlessness, and the loss of satellite states. When the current shift is completed, the US may end up looking like Britain after the loss of its empire—a strong but second-rate power, licking its domestic wounds.

The end of East-West competition has reduced the possibility of World War III, but is also introducing new problems. The industrialized nations sit under the umbrella of a single capitalist doctrine for the first time since World War I. I for one do not feel more comfortable or secure when the technocratic proponents of genetic engineering, nuclear power, male dominance, industrial robots, and racial superiority sit down together at a peace conference. As one American Indian observer at the United Nations, Russell Barsh, said of European unity, "the white people are realizing they like each other a lot more than they like the other peoples in the world."

The North-South conflict is rapidly taking center stage, with the working class of the former "Third World" coming under increased exploitation, minus even the small

safety valves that previously existed. The smartest elites in South Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America will again begin to compete for the attentions of the new superpowers, or begin their own processes of regional integration. But it is also from these regions—and from the neglected peripheries of the new superpowers—that the greatest hope is emerging for new models of working class power and social movements.

THE EUROPEAN SUPERPOWER

The unification of Germany, the break-up of Yugoslavia and the USSR, the resignation of Margaret Thatcher, the adoption of a single currency, the opening of the Channel tunnel, and the lowering of trade barriers—all fit into a larger picture: the elimination of obstacles to European unity. The integration of Europe is now an irreversible process, with NATO bound to go the way of the Warsaw Pact. Its replacement would be a core alliance of nations in Western and Central Europe, with cooperative economic, political and military structures. They will be coupled with a periphery in Eastern and Southeastern Europe

that will provide a ready labor pool. By the end of the decade, Europe will be seen as a single entity, as a superpower.

This trend was predicted by the late Trinidadian activist C.L.R. James, when he said in 1985:

"Already the whole of Western Europe is ready for one society, one army, one government...Marx and Engels foresaw that with the development of the economy, means of communications, regularity and similarity in ways of life, there will be an increasing community. And that's what's taking place...The objection to Europe forming a community is Moscow...There used to be the town, the town-cities. Later there were town-cities brought into the country and formed the country...The whole tendency of modern society in its basic structure is the unification of large areas."

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The Mapping Specialist

"Europe" has always been a political definition. Geographically, it exists only as a peninsula on the huge Eurasian land mass.

A united Europe would have four component parts: first, the nations of the European Community (EC), which are eliminating trade barriers on Jan. 1, 1993; second, the "neutral" nations of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) planning to join the EC; third, the former Communist nations of Central Europe; and fourth, the Eastern Orthodox and Muslim regions of Europe. At least in the short term, the nations in the first three groups would retain their sovereignty, but turn more and more power over to a united parliament, a central bank, and an integrated military structure. The future has already been prefigured in the recently formed Franco-German military force, the EC-EFTA formation of the new European Economic Area, and the Maastricht talks on currency and political union. The former Soviet republics may or may not choose to join this arrangement. "Europe" has always been a political definition. Geographically, it exists only as a peninsula on the huge Eurasian land mass. The 19th century geographers who delimited Europe generally used a racial definition, drawing what they saw as the borders of the white race and "Western civilization." Yet Europe includes peoples outside the mainstream of that civilization, whose technical and cultural level is not judged adequate by Western European elites.

Western Europe is showing increased acceptance of the Catholic and Protestant regions of Central Europe, which were once part of its economic and political domain, and is letting them into the new Europe. Poland, the Baltic states, and the states formerly under Austrian rule (Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Slovenia, and Croatia) are again fulfilling their traditional role as a halfway house between Western and Eastern Europe.

Southeastern Europe, where old ethno-religious conflicts have resurrected themselves, is another question entirely. The Eastern Orthodox elites of the Balkan heartland (Serbians, Montenegrins, Bulgarians, Romanians) are asserting their power against the more prosperous Catholic North (Slovenians, Croatians, Hungarians) and the less prosperous Muslim South (Albanians, Bosnians, Turks). Ruled until early this century by the Ottoman Empire, the Eastern Orthodox and Muslim regions got a later start in industrialization. Ethnic conflicts could turn into a major headache for a united Europe, or they could be partially solved by a continental parliamentary structure that gives some representation to separate ethnic groups.

The conflict in Yugoslavia was inevitable, since as a federation it straddled the core and periphery of the new Europe. The war

More "reliable" European immigrant workers will start doing the dirty work that non-Europeans have performed until now. Here Turkish workers lay a road in Berlin, a hazardous job.



Donna Binder / Impact Visuals

is not only splitting up the country, but opens the likelihood of land grabs by neighboring states "liberating" their minority populations. Turkey and Greece, once staunch NATO allies, are already being jettisoned by the West despite their loyalty during the Gulf War. Facing turmoil on its eastern borders, Turkey is desperately seeking to join Europe, realizing too late that it hasn't been invited to the party, and is turning east toward Muslims in the former USSR.

A wall is descending across Europe, forming a new divide from Murmansk in the North, to Dubrovnik in the South, through Minsk, Lvov, and Belgrade. Rather than evoking an Iron Curtain moved farther East, this wall more closely resembles the barbed wire fence along the Rio Grande. Austria is literally building a fence and guard towers on its borders, to keep Romanian, Turkish, and Soviet economic refugees from entering in too great numbers. French Prime Minister Edith Cresson personifies the new European politician when she simultaneously slams the competing Japanese and expels African immigrant workers. Like in Israel, more "reliable" European immigrant workers will start doing the dirty work that non-Europeans have performed until now, and then only on Western Europe's terms. The new "guest workers" will come from Southeastern and Eastern Europe.

The main question, of course, is what will happen to the former republics of the Soviet

Union. Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia are being admitted to the European club. Ethnic Romanian Moldova (formerly Moldavia) now has no barriers to joining Romania. The three Transcaucasian republics—Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan (looking to join with Azeris in Iran)—also seem to have no future in a Commonwealth.

THE COMMONWEALTH OF INDEPENDENT STATES

The complete secession of these seven republics may not be as radical an idea as it sounds. It would be a virtual return to the borders of 1918, after Lenin's granting of independence to Poland, Finland, Moldova, and the Baltic and Transcaucasian republics. The more recent a republic's experience with independence, the sooner it is leaving the Union.

The problem comes with the remaining three Slavic republics (Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine) and the five Muslim Central Asian republics (Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan), parts of which have been under Russian rule longer than Northern Mexico has been under U.S. rule. (We may see the permanent independence of all the republics, and even the secession of the autonomous republics of the Russian Federation. But this process would be much more tortuous and violent than the independence of smaller republics.)

Stalin saw to it that none of these modern republics' boundaries corresponded too neatly to ethnic boundaries. For example, Russian President Boris Yeltsin has reminded his neighbors that eastern Ukraine and northern Kazakhstan are largely Russian.

Disputes between Russia, local nationalists, and Islamic fundamentalists have also rocked the Central Asian republics (or Turkestan). China takes a special interest in the status of Turkestan, both because it wants to expand its sphere of influence, and because it fears nationalism in Chinese Turkestan (Xinjiang). Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine may be kept together by a pan-Slavic nationalism which would resist their joining the European alliance. Victory for such an isolationist movement (personified in the Slavophile author Alexandr Solzhenitsyn) would be a setback for the modernist, European-aligned movement now personified in Mikhail Gorbachev, and the Russian nationalist movement personified in Yeltsin.

In the economic sphere, the Soviet bloc's revolutions are rapidly reaching an anticlimax. A comparable state of affairs can be found in South America where emerging industrial democracies such as Brazil and Argentina have found that throwing off military rule means little material improvement for the working class. The new regimes are al-

most gleefully advertising themselves to the West and Japan as reserves of cheap labor and resources, and are forcing austerity on their peoples to repay Western loans. President Bush's 1989 Budapest speech about the ready availability of cheap Hungarian workers could just as easily have been delivered in Sao Paulo.

Expecting to become another Scandinavia, Eastern Europeans would be bitterly disappointed that they have been consigned to the role of Latin America—a land of cheap labor, resources, debt repayment, and markets for Western Europe. According to Russian socialist Boris Kagarlitsky, the reintroduction of large-scale repression is inevitable. Despite rhetoric about supporting market reforms, the working classes may well end up confronting the reformers they once staunchly supported, as it becomes obvious (as in South America) that one set of elites has been traded for another.

Even so, the workers' program would not be based on a return to the Communist status quo, but perhaps on the plans for direct control over production that have been resurrected during each Eastern European uprising from the 1950's through the early 80's. Many workers opposed the Communist parties not because these parties supported egalitarianism, but because they weren't egalitarian.



Clark A. Dissmeyer



tarian. Now they are finding that the Yeltsins, Antalls, and Walesas aren't much better. Nationalism has intensified not simply because state communism is no longer there to hold it in check, but because the new leadership has intensified national chauvinism in order to hold on to economic and political power.

THE EAST ASIAN SUPERPOWER

While most world attention has centered on European integration, a similar process is taking place in East Asia. Though less defined than the process in Europe, it is potentially more dramatic in its global implications. Japan's emergence as an economic superpower—much like Germany's—cannot be viewed in isolation from its growing interrelationship with neighboring nations. Just as European integration led to the reunification of Germany, East Asian integration will almost certainly lead to the reunification of Korea, and possibly the reunification of China and Taiwan. It could also lead to tensions along the current Sino-Soviet frontier, where the two new superpowers would meet head-to-head, and in the Middle East, the main supplier of oil to both Europe and Japan.

Japan, like Germany, launched World War II to achieve dominance over surrounding resources, markets, and labor supplies. The Japanese put forth their "Co-Prosperty Sphere" as a mutually beneficial system for East Asians, but it turned out to be another exploitative imperial system with Japan at the center. As a militaristic formula, it failed to win substantial support among the conquered peoples, and came into fatal conflict with U.S. and British interests in the region. The current trends in East Asia point toward a new "Co-Prosperty Sphere," but based on economics and politics instead of

Japanese military power. In other words, though Japan would play the pivotal role, this alliance would be more genuinely "co-prospertous." The two centerpieces would remain Japan and China.

While both Japan and China openly aspire to be superpowers, neither is capable of going it alone. China has what Japan needs, and Japan has what China needs. Japan has the capital reserves, high technology, and refined technical and managerial skills—precisely the formula that modernizing China is looking for. China has a gargantuan, cheap labor supply, a huge standing army, and natural resources—precisely what energy-poor and partly demilitarized Japan lacks. The developing Sino-Japanese partnership, based more on trade than investment at this point,

could blossom to joint superpower status. Japan is already the largest aid donor to China, a status cemented by Prime Minister Kaifu's 1991 visit to Beijing.

The incorporation of the other East Asian industrial economies in the formula could further strengthen a regional alliance. Hong Kong is already due to become part of China in 1997. Regional integration would speed up the

reincorporation of Taiwan, since it would no longer be forced to mold itself into a Chinese province, but into an integral part of a larger region. Similarly, bringing both Koreas into a regional alliance would render their political division moot. Largely ethnic Chinese Singapore would also lend technical expertise. The formation of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) prefigures the future of the region, though for the moment it includes the United States. Malaysia has advocated an Asian alliance that excludes Washington, but this may be slow in coming. By 2000, projections show that the level of U.S. trade across the Pacific will be twice that of U.S. trade across the Atlantic. The East Asian regional alliance would be divided

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into three sections. The first would be the capitalist industrial economies—Japan, southern Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, and certain Chinese provinces such as Guangdong and Fujian. The second would contain the state-controlled labor and military pool in the other Chinese provinces, northern Korea and perhaps Indochina. The third would be the presently Western-aligned nations such as the Philippines and Indonesia, which would continue to provide resources and labor to the industrial centers.

The resistance to such a Sino-Japanese-centered East Asian system would be much more difficult to overcome than a German-centered Europe. Korean and Philippine mistrust of Japan runs far deeper than Polish or French mistrust of Germany. Similarly, Indonesia or Vietnam would never define themselves as allied to China. The emerging solution is to deal most closely with the most comfortable dominant partner. For example, Vietnam is developing close ties to Japan, whereas South Korean economic cooperation is growing with China.

An even stronger nationalist resistance may come within China itself, and has already reared its head in the student movement. The modern Chinese student movement began in full force in 1986, in rallies held symbolically on the anniversary of major 1919 patriotic student rallies, which opposed Japanese economic expansion into China. The 1986 rallies likewise criticized increasing economic cooperation between the Deng Xiaoping regime and Japan. The movement grew to encompass demands against corruption and for democracy.

Deng's massacre of the students in June 1989 didn't make much sense in terms of winning Western support for his modernization program. But the massacre made perfect sense in that Deng correctly saw the students as an obstacle to joint superpower status with Japan. The Japanese reaction to the massacre—particularly in the business community—as the weakest among any of the capitalist nations. By December, 1989, Japan promised to resume a \$5.6 billion loan aid package, and welcomed the Chinese removal of limits on foreign ownership in joint ventures. The massacre facilitated, rather

than hindered, a Sino-Japanese alliance.

THE UNITED STATES

With such momentous changes around the world, it is laughable that the leadership of the United States assumes that it will remain unscathed, that the U.S. is an island of calm in the middle of the storm. The "euphoria" of a military victory over Iraq and a political victory over the USSR can only be short-lived. The crushing debt load from years of military deficit spending, the two-tiered educational system leading to a two-class society, the spontaneous but sustained uprisings in Washington, Brooklyn, and other cities, are only a few of the early warning signs of what lies ahead. As Kagarlitsky has said, "If one superpower collapsed, why not try to change things in the other hemisphere?"

For the past four decades, the projection of U.S. power around the world has depended on the Soviet bogeyman, the alter ego to the land of democracy. Now, simultaneously, not only is the "evil empire" not there to kick around anymore, but U.S. paramouncy is threatened by competition from the new European and East Asian superpowers. Washington is trying to stave off the inevitable by mimicking their regional integration plans, negotiating free-trade pacts with Canada, Mexico, and other nations in the hemisphere. But the effort is crippled by the lack of powerful partners, and inadequate resources in technical research and development. You heard it here first: no Americans will be shouting "We're Number One!" at the 2000 Olympic Games.

Former CIA officer John Stockwell has detailed the use of U.S. foreign policy as a method of controlling the population of the U.S. itself. He asserts that the federal government not only opportunistically uses foreign crises to distract attention from domestic problems, but actually searches for and in some cases creates new enemies in order to reinforce its legitimacy. A long string of demonized scapegoats—Khomeini, Qaddafi, Noriega, Saddam—attests to this strategy. But in the absence of a looming threat from a major power, can such a "search for ene-

mies" pacify enough U.S. citizens? The new rallying cries against Middle Eastern dictators and Latin American drug lords are hardly enough to sustain a superpower through times like these.

The decline of the U.S. is already proving more violent for the rest of the world—from Panama to Iraq—than the decline of the USSR. War abroad also provides the perfect framework for the militarization of domestic life. The police-state conditions in neighborhoods of Los Angeles and other cities, increased FBI political harassment, the use of 4,500 Canadian troops against the Mohawks, and U.S. contingency plans for martial law—all are extreme versions of an overall trend.

Unlike Russia, the United States did not manage to annex most of its sphere of influence in the 19th and 20th centuries. It did annex many Indian nations and northern Mexico to establish a territorial base. It made colonies out of Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, Hawaii, the Philippines, and five other Pacific island groups. It also hoisted protectorate status on Panama, Nicaragua, Honduras, Cuba, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, and Liberia, guaranteeing those countries a special instability that persists to the present day. Its economic sphere of influence was also extended over nearly all of the Americas and parts of Asia, including South Korea and Israel.

Also unlike Russia, the U.S. is not about to withdraw its investments and troops without a fight. Quite the contrary: Washington is returning in force to its former colonies and protectorates. Since 1988, it has directly used military force in Nicaragua, Honduras, Panama, the Virgin Islands, the Philippines, and Liberia. It has virtually extended protectorate status over six oil-rich Persian Gulf states, especially Kuwait.

Who's next? Cuba is an ideal target, left vulnerable by Moscow and situated just off the ready-made air base called Florida. The

secession of Quebec may also leave parts of English Canada, such as the Maritimes, ripe for a more peaceful plucking. But they are both too close to home.

Just as Hiroshima was intended more as a message to the Soviets than to the Japanese, any new U.S. intervention is carefully calculated to impress Washington's emerging competitors. Former conservative French Premier Jacques Chirac correctly viewed the U.S. role in the Gulf War as securing control over the energy supply of Western Europe and Japan. Placing U.S. troops in the middle of Kurdish uprisings in Iraq and Turkey guarantees a U.S. role in the carving of new borders in the entire oil-rich Transcaucasian region. A foray into South America, such as Peru or Colombia, would assert the Monroe Doctrine against new economic competition. And a second Korean War would project

U.S. power right between Japan, China, and Russia, just at the time it's most needed. George Bush doesn't launch a war just for any old reason.

As R.P. Lester wrote in his book *Genghis Khan*, "When a man has achieved great power, what is there left for him to achieve but more

power? When he has overcome all his enemies, what does he find but more enemies?"

THE FORMER 'THIRD WORLD'

The collapse of the USSR has led some Western leftists to believe that the former "Third World" nations have been abandoned, or left high and dry. As a countering force to the West, the USSR did safeguard the independence of certain countries such as Cuba, Iraq, and Angola. Yet in the vast majority of cases, Moscow not only didn't support Third World liberation movements, but impeded or actively opposed them. Historical Soviet cooperation with right-wing regimes from Iran to Argentina is well documented.

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The "abandonment" view implies that Africans, Asians and Latin Americans somehow need a Great White Father to help them win their liberation. Independent liberation movements in countries as varied as Namibia, Nepal, South Africa, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Western Sahara, Brazil, Haiti, and the Philippines are now doing quite well without Moscow, thank you. Even Cuba is seeking economic and moral protection from fellow Latin American states.

In fact, the Soviet withdrawal from the "Third World" does not automatically forfeit the field to Washington. To the contrary, greater political self-reliance of nations can give substance to non-alignment. No longer does a nation have to define itself as within one of two blocs, or delicately strike a balance between two undesirable systems. Independent liberation movements can begin to define what former Iranian President Abolhassan Bani-Sadr called "negative equilibrium"—or the avoidance of membership in any bloc.

In the current interim period, U.S. capital and military power are preventing the emergence of new challenges from the South. For a

time, the traditional neocolonial relationships will remain intact—Europe in Africa, the U.S. in Latin America, Japan in Southeast Asia, with South Asia and the Islamic Belt not as clearly defined. Yet this state of affairs is not etched in stone. With the emergence of the new superpowers, the smartest "Third World" elites can begin again to play potential suitors against each other.

Already, Latin American governments are wooing European and Japanese capital like never before. Nicaragua is talking with the Japanese about possible construction of a new transisthmian canal, while Peru has elected an ethnic Japanese president partly to secure new overseas investment. European and East Asian superpowers may put the Monroe Doctrine to a profound test. Some Islamic nations are building relations

with East Asian powers, as evidenced by Chinese arms sales to Iran, Korean labor in the Gulf nations, and Japanese technical assistance to Saudi Arabia.

Latin American nationalism has been growing due to an increased debt burden, "free-trade" exploitation, and U.S. military repression. In some of the countries, discontent can now be more openly expressed in the space provided by democratic reforms. An explosion of this discontent, similar to that which occurred in Eastern Europe, isn't out of the question. It may be difficult to foresee crowds filling the streets of Caracas, Santo Domingo, or Panama City—in the same way crowds filled Prague, Leipzig, and Moscow—with U.S. influence toppling in one country after another. The only certainty is that the U.S. would react far more violently than the USSR did in response to the loss of its satellites.

Third World elites can also adapt to the new geopolitics by carrying out their own processes of regional integration. Latin American unity, African unity, Arab or Islamic unity, and South Asian unity have always been elusive and ideologically-based, but may become

more practical and necessary in order to compete in a realigned world. Regional integration can also provide a voice to ethnic groups not adequately represented by the nation-states in which they live, and in the process lessen the level of ethnic warfare.

The greatest hope in the coming period resides with those left out of superpower politics entirely—the working classes in the former "Third World." Industrial automation, middle-class ideology, and runaway shops have largely disempowered labor in North America, Western Europe, and Japan. The homeland of the traditional "proletariat" is shifting to the industrializing fringes of the superpowers, to countries such as Mexico, China, Brazil, South Africa, and the Philippines. Marxist categories of exploitation and class struggle still hold a

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Zoltan Grossman

strong resonance in these countries, fostering the growth of working-class movements. It's important to remember that movements of the poor can also be manipulated toward the right, as shown by the Algerian fundamentalists, Argentine Peronists and Russian fascists.

Out of the shantytowns of Manila and Mexico City are emerging fascinating democratic groups that combine working-class militancy with new social movements. Rather than repeating tired old debates of private ownership versus state ownership, these movements are opening up new possibilities of social ownership of farms, factories, and neighborhoods. Not at all like the North American stereotype of passive victims wallowing in poverty, these movements have a lot to teach activists here about grassroots organizing, and fusing class, ethnicity, ecology, religion, and feminism. The new women's movements in Latin America, India, the Philippines and elsewhere especially have new models to offer. As working-class women from exploited nations, they have no one below them to sell out, and have little to lose in building new societies.

CHALLENGES TO ORGANIZING

What do geopolitical realignments mean for activist work in North America? Events elsewhere in the world sometimes seem so

overwhelming and confusing that it's hard to see how they can affect us. But, as the Filipino activist priest Edicio de la Torre once said, “If you're not a little confused, then you're not thinking clearly.” Again, there are some general trends that we can be looking for.

The collapse of the Soviet bloc enables us to disassociate our ideas of socialism from the dictatorial “model.” But it also means we have reverted to the global situation that existed prior to World War I, when national elites competed with each other, but all governments agreed on the need for elite rule. The socialist movements in that era failed to put their international class interests ahead of their national interests (as detailed in the writings of Rosa Luxemburg), resulting in their acquiescence in the war. We face a similar challenge today, with the “national question” again taking center stage, as if it had ever really gone away.

The possible isolation of the U.S. could open up both dangers and opportunities for the Left. Like most empires, the U.S. could turn into an isolated “Fortress America” in its dying days, lashing out at enemies without and within. As the center of economic power moves abroad, fingers will point the blame at home. But the country could also turn inward, concentrating on domestic problems. The Left could reemerge as a force that is looking to a post-imperial fu-

ture, with a positive message of healing divisions.

The dangers are already painfully evident. In any domestic unrest over declining social standards, the most potent and organized opposition may well emerge from the populist Right. The U.S. Right intends to encompass both the establishment and the alternative to the establishment. Pat Buchanan's "America First" movement and David Duke's "Whites First" movement have picked up on the key themes. They offer a message that points out many of the same economic problems that the Left recognizes, but offer a racial or nationalist analysis rather than a class analysis. Duke represents not an extreme racist version of Bush, but a revolutionary movement that would eventually turn against the Republicans. In other words, we have to get our act together or, like the Left in many European countries (past and present), angry white workers will be increasingly channeled into the radical Right.

The opportunities are only now emerging for the U.S. Left. The so-called "economic downturn" (a full-blown depression in some regions) is quickly discrediting the 1980s "free-market reforms." Simultaneously, African American activism has taken a more visibly radical turn, Latino communities are asserting their power in urban areas, and Native Americans are reaching unprecedented levels of unity in preparation for the Columbus Quincentennial. Unmistakable threats are galvanizing progressive activists—elimination of abortion rights among feminists, AIDS in the gay community, and ecological disasters among greens.

North Americans seem not to be mobilized by details of high-level government scandals or foreign policy conspiracies, but increasingly by domestic issues that directly touch their lives. This could be a healthy

trend as the U.S. declines, because it points the way to a United States that tends to its own problems, that is not (as on many maps) at the center of the world. Yet these "domestic" concerns need to be connected to a global framework, both to differentiate the Left from the isolationist Right, and to promote solutions that benefit human beings regardless of their country.

The internationalization of capital gave birth to the multinational corporation. It now needs to give birth to the multinational movement. Workers employed by the same parent company in different nations now have the communication tools with which to take common action. In Mindanao, I witnessed Filipino strikes at a Pillsbury plant

tape a heartfelt message to their fellow workers in Minnesota. Union organizing is taking place among the maquiladora workers in the U.S.-Mexican border industrial zone. Contacts between U.S. and Japanese labor activists could take the edge off national union propaganda in both countries. The feminist, gay & lesbian, and green movements have made great strides toward building international ties,

given the universality of the problems they address. Yet all movements need to build bridges to activists in the former Communist states, to support their efforts at grassroots democracy, and to educate them about some of the drawbacks and pitfalls of capitalism.

Some specific regions also may need special attention, such as the periphery of the emerging European superpower, in Eastern and Southeastern Europe, as well as the East Asian superpower's sweatshops in China and Southeast Asia. The history of the Middle East and Central Asia need to be better understood since they are likely to be zones of continuing conflict. Struggles for social and economic change in the industrializing states

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of South Asia, Africa, and Latin America also need solidarity, beyond expressions of support for human rights.

Perhaps the most important lesson from the uprisings in the nations of the former Soviet bloc and Third World is the centrality of civic life, which can also be called social power. For the most part, recent changes have not come about through political parties or groups, but through social and cultural changes at the grassroots. Activists who understood that they were not leading the changes were those who became the leaders. People are mobilized by issues and ideas that give them a sense of their collective power. That is the real "democratic revolution."

In This Issue...

one, in the Quincentennial controversy about what Columbus actually did in the so-called "New World," and in the right-wing accusations leveled against supposed "PC" goon squads bred in Black and women's studies programs, we can see the deepening divisions among the U.S. people, divisions which reflect the degree to which racism and male supremacy are a structural part of this country's social fabric. In this issue are a number of pieces which signal the vitality of contemporary challenges to a eurocentric and male supremacist cultural vision: the poems of Kalamu Ya Salaam, the "speak bitterness" pieces on the Thomas confirmation by Rhonda Williams and Ayofemi Stowe, a new "locomotion" column on the music of Kid Creole, and two book reviews covering Barbara Neely's new mystery novel featuring an African American woman sleuth and Filipino cultural critic E. San Juan's recent work on the politics of Third World culture.

But here, just as the collapse of the Soviet empire demands hard thinking about the future, this cultural controversy swirling around us at home demands hard thinking

As C.L.R. James said in 1985,

"The means of communication in the modern world every succeeding year becomes more rapid, more comprehensive...So that at both ends you have the tendency toward rule by common people, everybody. That is the historical logic...You see, the trouble is so far that people have tended to believe that democracy was parliamentary democracy. That is not so. Democracy means government by the people. The people will find out ways and means of expressing themselves..."

Or as Patti Smith sang on her 1988 album *Dream of Life*:

"Vengeful aspects became suspect/and bending low as if to hear/and the armies ceased advancing/because the people had their ear/and the shepherds and the soldiers/lay beneath the stars/exchanging visions/and laying arms to waste/ in the dust...The power to dream/to rule/to wrestle the world from fools/its decreed the people rule...I believe everything we dream/can come to pass through our union/we can turn the world around/we can turn the earth's revolution/we have the power/people have the power." ■

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about the past. What is at stake is a great deal of the "truth" with which we in the U.S. have been inculcated all our lives. To do battle with the dominant white, eurocentric view of history, we will have to question not only the degree to which the history taught in our schools disguises the true roots in slavery and genocide of the U.S. empire, but also the whole way we understand the passage of civilizations throughout human history.

The article on eurocentrism by Juliet Ucelli and Dennis O'Neil introduces us to a range of Marxist analysis dedicated to uncovering and countering the hidden assumptions of the eurocentric world view. Not surprisingly, much of this pathbreaking theoretical work is being developed by Marxists such as Samir Amin who have based their theory on the struggles and resistance of the "South," or what we used to call the third world. For those of us interested in what sort of Marxism will revive itself in the future and on what basis, this admittedly difficult foray into complex theoretical terrain is well worth the effort. ■