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THE NATURE OF SO-CALLED SOCIALIST SOCIETIES



A BIG FLAME INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE DISCUSSION BULLETIN

50p

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INTRODUCTION

The articles in this Discussion Bulletin are contributions to a discussion that has been going on in Big Flame's International Committee before and after the publication of *The Century of the Unexpected*. The first five contributions refer very specifically to issues raised by the pamphlet. The last two articles are contributions specially written for a week-end meeting of a co-ordination of European revolutionary groups that met in London in May 1980 to discuss the nature of soviet-type societies and its effect on revolutionary strategy in the first world. British participants in the co-ordination are the SWP and Big Flame.

There are two facets of this bulletin that may immediately surprise the reader: firstly, the diversity of views expressed, and secondly, the fact that we make the debate public.

The diversity of views expressed is a reflection of the political tradition that Big Flame represents. Our political allegiance is to revolutionary Marxism taken in the broadest sense — and not to one particular strand of it (e.g. Trotskyism or Maoism). And since it is the case that some of the comrades joining BF have been active in other political traditions (e.g. Trotskyist, Maoist), this is reflected in some of the contributions to the bulletin. Taken as a whole, it can be said that BF's political trajectory is away from its Maoism of the early 1970's. But how decisive the break will be is the subject of much debate in the organisation — as the contributions in this bulletin between Campbell and Thompson show.

The debate is out in the open because we do not accept the tradition in left-wing politics whereby you only go public once you 'have a line'. We want comrades outside BF to know of our internal debates and to feel free to contribute to them. We realise that the issues touched on in this bulletin are extremely complex and sensitive and we do not expect to develop an immediate consensus on them. However, we want to make it very clear that the contributions in this bulletin are personal statements and should not be taken as position pieces of BF. This should be made clear in quotations.

Anyone interested in participating in our debates and / or attending our meetings can contact us at:

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Big Flame contribution to the 3/4 May 1980 meeting of the European

Co-ordination

THE CLASS NATURE OF THE SOVIET UNION AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR MARXIST THEORY

The Russian Revolution of 1917 and its subsequent degeneration into the Soviet state that we know today is the single most important question for revolutionaries, as it has been for the past fifty years or more. For the vast majority of the masses of the world the nature of the USSR serves as an enormous block against seeing socialism as the solution to their problems. Many socialists in the post-war period took heart from the Chinese revolution and subsequent successful revolutions and anti-imperialist struggles in Cuba, Vietnam, Mozambique etc. However the closing years of the 1970s have seen events which force even strong supporters of such regimes to make a reassessment - the Chinese invasion of Vietnam, Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia etc. For these reasons it is timely that the organisations involved in the European Co-ordination should collectively discuss the nature of the regimes in what we call the second world.

There is another reason which makes this task urgent. It is that for forty years and more the international revolutionary movement has been split and split again on the question of the class nature of the Soviet Union and similar questions. But the main theses were for the most part defined in the thirties and forties when Stalin was still in power and before the spread of soviet-type regimes to Eastern Europe and similar events in N. Vietnam and N. Korea. Since then the problem has been to analyse the nature of regimes established by revolutions and anti-imperialist struggles in countries such as Cuba, Angola, Mozambique and most importantly China. Thus we now have the evidence of the whole post-war period to bring to support or disprove the respective theories.

In this document we shall concentrate on what we believe are the key issues involved in an assessment of the nature of the Soviet Union and other second world states, and what this implies for revolutionary theory. We can only in the time available outline our thinking. Fuller arguments can be found in two of our pamphlets which we are making available to members of the co-ordination. These are "The Revolution Unfinished? A critique of Trotskyism" and "The Century of the Unexpected - a new analysis of Soviet-type societies".

Since none of the groups in the co-ordination hold any variant of the orthodox trotskyist view that the Soviet Union is in some form a workers' state we shall only summarize our position which is not dissimilar to other critiques (eg Cliff in the early 50s). The degenerated workers' state position represented a total distortion of marxism. The term "workers' state" was used accurately to describe the situation in Russia immediately after the revolution and in the early twenties. The term described the fact that the working class had control of the state and was administering an economic system where the relations of production were predominantly capitalist (state capitalism proper). Orthodox trotskyism, starting with Trotsky himself in the mid-thirties, fundamentally reverses the correct usage of the concept of a workers' state. It claims that the Soviet Union is a workers' state because of the existence of nationalised property, a planned economy and the absence of generalised commodity production. Thus the definition is transferred from the political level to the socio-economic reality. For us the absence of private property and generalised commodity production for the market indicates that the mode of production is not capitalist, but this does not imply the existence of socialism or a workers' state. A planned economy and nationalisation can only work in the interests of the working class if political power is in the hands of the workers. Clearly this is not the case in the Soviet Union - a fact which even trotskyists acknowledge, which indicates their

the fully fledged ruling class now in existence to modify and consolidate its class structure. Having made these criticisms we should say that we agree precisely with Bettelheim, against economistic versions of marxism, that technology embodies social relations and social relations of production must themselves be revolutionised.

2. Class, surplus product and exploitation

Along with state capitalist supporters, but unlike degenerated workers' state theorists, we believe that exploitation takes place in the Soviet Union. But this is based not on the expropriation of surplus value but of the surplus product, over which the working class exerts absolutely no direct control. Such surplus product would be set aside in a genuine workers' state, and indeed in a socialist society, towards meeting social needs and the development of the productive forces. However in such societies the working class would have control over both the state and the surplus product. It is not necessary to posit the existence of capitalism and the operation of the law of value to explain why the setting aside of a social surplus takes place.

Following on from this the question of whether there is a ruling class is similarly crucial. We believe the overwhelming evidence demonstrates the existence of a ruling class in the Soviet Union. This class is based on bureaucratic control of the state apparatus, production process and social surplus. Since classes, according to marxist theory, exist in relation to each other, it follows that if, as is the case, there is an exploited working class (ie is not itself the ruling class) then there must be a ruling class. The precise definition of class is derived from the type of society one is discussing. A ruling class based on the state bureaucracy is quite appropriate for a state collectivist society. We believe there exists substantial evidence to show that the Soviet elite is indeed stable and can reproduce itself as a class, both informally through family connections and marriage and more formally through privileged access to higher education, party positions and activities etc.

3. Democracy

Neither socialism nor the transition to socialism is possible without the fullest and most direct form of democracy. Socialism, as Marx repeatedly tells us, is about the self-emancipation of the working class. Orthodox trotskyists contradict themselves in the degenerated workers' state thesis since it is precisely at the level of the so-called workers' state that, by admitting the need for a partial 'political' revolution to restore the transition to socialism, they recognise that the workers have no power. More pertinent to our discussion is the implication the need for the direct democracy of the producers has for analysis of societies which, in our opinion, have broken out of the cycle of capitalist underdevelopment. Whilst the Cliff theory of state capitalism does not regard such societies (eg China, Cuba, Vietnam) as more progressive than mainstream capitalism, most other groups in the Co-ordination, including ourselves, have in the past also made an important mistake in underplaying or choosing to ignore the fact that at the level of the state, most importantly in China, the masses have no direct or even indirect control. We believe failure to take account of the prerequisite of direct control of the state by the producers, through their sovereign organs, is the overriding weakness of the Bettelheimian analysis of China. This erroneous method underpins the recent idealistic and voluntaristic turns which Bettelheim has made following the fall of the Gang of Four. Unless workers democracy at the local and national level, as well as in the party, is maintained in the transitional period following a successful revolution then a transition to socialism is impossible and the society at most will become state collectivist, not socialist.

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C: The 'Laws' Governing State Collectivism

When we talk of 'laws' governing state collectivist societies such as the Soviet Union we are aware that we are talking in tentative terms. One reason is that very few marxists have put forward this analysis, and this comparatively recently. (We completely reject any equation of our analysis with that of Max Shachtman in 1941, from which we draw entirely different conclusions.) A second reason is that the societies of the second world (ie those outside the 'classical' capitalist world) which have made their revolutions have only done so since the second world war. There is therefore a lack of evidence. We should say in passing that we regard the countries in Eastern Europe which are directly under Soviet domination as state collectivist and subject to the same method of analysis as the Soviet Union. However, each country would, of course, have its own specific circumstances.

The following 'laws' can therefore be postulated as governing state collectivist societies such as the Soviet Union:

1. There is a new mode of production - neither capitalist nor socialist, nor in transition between the two. The ruling class is based on the state bureaucracy and its goal is production for production's sake. The ruling class control the means of production and the social surplus. The working class is exploited and denied democratic rights. There is a necessity for a total social and political revolution, establishing the dictatorship of the proletariat, to launch such a society on a socialist course.

2. State collectivist modes of production can have progressive phases when the productive forces of the country are developed extensively (eg Poland until 1960 - see Kuron and Modzelewski). This particularly applies, in principle, to underdeveloped third world societies which opt out of the domination by capital, along a path which could lead to state collectivism. Thus state collectivism potentially offers an historically progressive path for underdeveloped countries to escape their systematic subjugation to capitalist imperialism. By adopting this path they can possibly escape the trap of capitalist underdevelopment. Socialists should be prepared to give qualified support to such societies, not because they are socialist or on the path to socialism, but because in their own terms they are progressive.

3. In some countries with the right conditions a path towards socialism may be possible given certain circumstances, including direct democracy at the level of the state for the producers themselves. However, because state collectivist societies, after they have fulfilled their progressive stage, are fundamentally undemocratic, with no mass participation in the planning process, they cannot develop industry intensively onto a higher level because the producers are alienated from the plan and the surplus product. Thus these societies go into crisis and the internal contradictions of an exploitative society come to the fore. Such is the case now throughout the Soviet block. The degree and nature of the instability of such countries is of extreme importance to the struggle for socialism not only in the Soviet block but also in the capitalist world. One aspect of the state collectivist mode of production is that class struggle is inevitably directly political since the ruling class has to resort to naked repression to deal with it. If these societies are unstable the unfolding of a strong working class resistance within them would be an important point of reference for the working class under capitalism. This is one of the reasons why solidarity with working class actions in state collectivist countries is so important politically.

4. In the early phase of state collectivism, when a transition to socialism may be thought possible, the new regime may enjoy considerable popular support. The assessment of how progressive a particular second world state is should be made according to a variety of political criteria, which we regard as crucial for an understanding of what socialism is. These include: the extent of democracy, political rights and the existence of sovereign democratic organs of power at local and state level and within the party; the extent to which the state is attempting to transform the relations of production as well as property relations; the extent to which it is tackling sexual divisions, divisions between mental and manual labour; its relations to its national and ethnic minorities and so on. For example, by criteria such as these China and Cuba stand in a much more favourable light than the Soviet Union.

5. Internationally there is no symmetry between capitalist and state collectivist societies. Because it is a market system capitalism always seeks to expand itself and make new markets. Of its essence capitalism is an imperialist system. State collectivism has no such inner dynamic. The Soviet Union's foreign policy, contemptible though it is, should be seen as a response to capitalist imperialism and the military threat which the Soviet Union has always faced, and as fitting the geopolitical 'needs' of the Soviet state. Thus the political mentality of 'socialism in one country' and 'popular frontism' represents, in the long term, more the perceived needs of the state than the ideological remnants of 'classical' stalinism. For the East European countries of the Soviet Block and some other countries which are unfortunate enough to fall directly within the Soviet Union's geopolitical sphere of influence (now, it seems, including Afghanistan) the Soviet Union is the main oppressor. However on a world scale state collectivist countries by definition take themselves out of the world capitalist system, thus weakening capitalism internationally and helping the struggle in capitalist countries. Capitalist imperialism continues to be the main enemy of the working class on a world scale. On occasion state collectivist countries will be seen as allies of anti-imperialist forces, but such support is unreliable. Also, of course, state collectivist support for progressive forces should not be seen as inevitable, as China's counter-revolutionary foreign policy throughout virtually the entire post-revolution period indicates..

D: Implications for the Theory of Permanent Revolution

The debate in the opposition movement in the CPSU in the 1920s and subsequently throughout the whole of the international revolutionary movement centred on which of two paths the Soviet Union would follow. Either it would go on to establish socialism or it would regress to capitalism. Such a debate has a deep root in revolutionary politics starting with Marx. For more than a century marxism has seen all societies fitting somewhere on a linear progression which goes: primitive communism - patriarchy - slavery - feudalism - capitalism - socialism. We believe that the history of the twentieth century, and most clearly in the period since the second world war, has shown the need to alter this unilinear sequence. State collectivism does not exist as some half-way house between capitalism and socialism but as an alternative route which can be followed, and possible has to be followed by underdeveloped countries which break away from capitalism (though this is not established) in order to develop their productive forces. Nor is state collectivism a transitional society or some social formation which arises in a unique situation (eg Stalin's Russia). Rather state collectivism is a bona fide mode of production with its own laws of development which may have certain things in common with capitalism or socialism

but cannot be reduced to either. We call this development a bifurcation or branching-off from the unilinear sequence of classical marxist theory.

Our thesis has an important consequence for the theory of permanent revolution. We accept two aspects of Trotsky's theory: the permanent nature of the internal struggle to revolutionise all social relations after a revolution and the international character of the revolutionary process - that an isolated revolution will be defeated. The third aspect of Trotsky's theory needs modification. The great merit of the theory is that it rejected the vulgar marxist position on the necessity for a bourgeois democratic phase of capitalism before socialism becomes possible. Against this stagist theory Trotsky put forward the position that in backward countries the bourgeoisie could not be a progressive force and that the proletariat would have to undertake the tasks traditionally done by bourgeois democracy (eg development of industry) as part of the task of building socialism. This idea was obviously profoundly important to the very success of the Russian Revolution. We agree with Trotsky that the national bourgeoisies of underdeveloped countries have no progressive role to play. However history seems to us to show that a third option (other than capitalism or socialism) has occurred (ie state collectivism) and that this seems to present itself as a viable possible alternative.

We believe that this thesis to a great extent helps to resolve a central problem of marxist analysis which has bedevilled revolutionary politics, as well as being a source of enormous popular confusion, since the degeneration of the Russian revolutionary experience. The far left as a whole has yet to escape from the false dichotomy that only capitalism or socialism was possible in the Soviet Union, or some state transitional between the two, and the later false dichotomy of Trotsky that Stalin's Russia was either a temporary deformation or a social formation which would replace capitalism throughout the world. A failure to break with these earlier orthodoxies to a certain extent explains the political morass the members of the Fourth International (in all its various splits) experienced in the post-war period, from which they have yet to emerge today (eg the FI debate over Cambodia). Yet the various state capitalist theories, although marking a decided improvement on the degenerated workers' state position, suffers other weakness which we have already outlined. Nor do they avoid the capitalism/socialism dichotomy.

At the level of propaganda a theory which implies that the 'state capitalist' societies are really little different from western capitalism is scarcely encouraging for the masses of the capitalist world. This is not, of course a reason for rejecting a theory if you believe it accurate, but we believe that the 'state collectivist' societies have weakened capitalism and have in certain cases served to inspire, with good reason, progressive forces throughout the world. A great merit of state collectivist method of analysis is that it enables revolutionaries to support, for marxist reasons, societies which are thought to be state collectivist or moving in that direction for what they represent to the people of that society in their own terms, without compromising our views on what socialism is. In an era in which most 'inspirational' events have occurred in the underdeveloped parts of the world, it has always appeared a major contradiction that the trotskyist left would support a party fighting an anti-imperialist struggle but when the struggle was successful would rapidly start to denounce the regime that was then established. On the other hand the Cambodian events, the invasion of Vietnam by China and many other developments show that many groups, including ourselves, who had been influenced by China, were often superficial in

our assessment of dubious and contradictory events. We believe that the theory of state collectivism redefines marxist analysis in a way completely consistent with marxist methodology and with contemporary and historical reality. Having said this we should state quite clearly that we realise this theory is extremely undeveloped, but we start from a firm belief that the currently predominant theories on the revolutionary left are certainly inadequate.

E: The Emergence of State Collectivism in the Soviet Union

We do not wish here to go into any detail on the precise reasons for the degeneration of the Russian Revolution. That will be discussed in a paper for the second bulletin on the party/class question. We will instead give a brief account of the emergence of state collectivism in the Soviet Union.

The initial seizure of power by the Bolsheviks in 1917 provided the political/legal conditions for the socialist transformation of society. The key failure was not to go further by transforming the social relations of production and society: the process stopped at nationalisation and a planned economy. Because of these limitations and the difficult material conditions the power of the workers and their organised expressions (soviets, factory committees etc.) was gradually eroded. After a considerable battle inside the Bolshevik Party a bureaucratic elite consolidated its power. Not only did this elite, focussed around Stalin, fail to advance the early gains of the revolution, but it started to erode them. It encouraged an increasing hierarchy of privileges with stress on wage differentials and material incentives. The party was no longer at the service of the masses but over their heads. In the fields of women's rights, education and many others the earlier revolutionary laws and practices were gradually rolled back.

The key aspect of this question is not to frantically search for the date of the degeneration, but to see it as a process inherent in the failure to go beyond the transformation of the ownership of property to all social relations. This is not to conjure up a linear development or political fatalism. By 1927 the crisis of the proletarian dictatorship had been resolved, but unfortunately in the wrong way. The proletariat was numerically weak and its vanguard decimated and the peasants distrustful of Bolshevism. The party, increasingly cut off from its roots, had a monopoly of political and economic power. The Left and Right Opposition had been crushed. Forced and rapid industrialisation (including collectivisation of agriculture) became the centrepiece of economic development under Stalin. The bureaucracy feared that without such rapidity it would lose out to the power of the Kulaks and the remaining entrepreneurs ('NEP-men') or be crushed by external capitalist forces.

Such a programme was directed in the context of a rigid centrally-controlled bureaucratic plan. The precondition for such a plan was the party/state monopoly of power and the exclusion of the masses from any aspects of decision-making at factory or social level. The powerlessness of the masses was a precondition for their mobilisation in total subordination to a plan not of their making. The state controlled movement of labour, shifting of population etc. This necessitated a reduction in effective legal rights at the same time as the state was producing a model constitution in 1936.

The collectivised state control enabled the economy to develop by excessive concentration on the primary (capital goods) sector. While concentration on the primary sector is characteristic of development, in the Soviet Union this reached dangerous proportions (eg in 1963 81% of all industrial resources) which entail a suppression of the needs of the masses. This is not the only crisis-producing

contradiction. Such a bureaucratically centralised plan cannot possibly realise its goals and co-ordinate all aspects of development. It simultaneously estranges both managers and workers through non-involvement in fundamental decision-making. The consequence is the high proportion of waste and low labour productivity with low quality products that many economists have noted. Such was the hierarchy of centralisation that the local representatives and beneficiaries of the bureaucracy were unable to influence the setting of absurd quotas, wage and price levels etc. The managers, therefore, contented themselves with pushing for more privileges for themselves and their enterprises (tax exemptions, investment credits, special subsidies etc) while accepting their lack of power. In such a situation, backed by bureaucratic terror, workers could only resist in the traditional passive way, by reducing work output. The trade unions had ceased to be anything but conveyor belts for exhortations to work harder. The position of the working class alone indicates the class character of the society.

The objective basis for a ruling class emerged and developed during Stalin's rule. It took the stabilisation after his death to allow the various strata to normalise their operations and coalesce into a ruling class, fully conscious of its interests. Before this a bureaucratic elite (as class-in-form) existed, based more on the party, who could not effectively combine with other strata because of the terror and the lack of solidity of ruling positions. This ruling class has grown generically in relation to the new class system. While the ruling class is not as durable and self-reproducing as capitalist equivalents, and probably never can be, it is growing in its power to perpetuate itself. However, there is an inbuilt tension and to some extent conflict of interests between various strata in the hierarchy. Managerial and technocratic layers, because of their position in implementing the central plan, want a loosening of bureaucratic control, normally residing in the hands of the Party and state functionaries. This tension existed under Stalin, but managerial and technocratic resistance was limited by Stalin's methods of administrative and physical elimination.

In the 1950s the managerial/technocratic strata tried to resolve this conflict between the plan and their power within individual enterprises by pushing for 'reforms' to give them rights in relation to implementation of the plan. These demands included some power over investment, pricing, labour mobility, distribution of the product and quota targets. Their scope, however, was limited by their effective exclusion from key aspects of central planning. Nevertheless, a series of economic reforms in the late 1950s and 60s indicated the growing power of these strata and their more effective integration into the ruling class. A chief spokesman for the managerial/technocratic layer, the economist Liberman, argued in 1962 for significant changes meaning a reduction in central planning and bureaucratic control. These included business autonomy, profit, self-financing, material incentives, price flexibility - all in the context of introducing competitive 'market' elements.

The reforms, including the so-called 'liberalisation' measures, have tended to reinforce state collectivism. While a collectivised economy exists under state control, managers can only exercise their power in its interests. The elements of controlled competition and enterprise autonomy are not, as Bettelheim and others claim, a return to capitalism. There are still none of the essential characteristics of generalised commodity production with a competitive market. Nevertheless, some movement towards reintroduction is clearly not impossible. This possibility is inherent in the conflict of

forces between plan and enterprise, central political bureaucracy and managerial strata, that characterises a state collectivist society. At the moment the managerial/technocratic elements are content to fight for reforms within the existing context.

Even within these strata there are differences between those who simply want a more efficient hierarchy within a highly centralised system and more liberal elements who favour political, economic and cultural decentralisation. Both, however, have learned the lessons of the 1960s reforms that fundamental institutional change is not on the cards. Instead they pursue practical changes and a further extension of economic and social privileges. These 'reforming' elements, although not challenging the state collectivist system, are still usually opposed by the central political bureaucracy (party-state functionaries, elements of the military etc.). Any reforms are interpreted by the latter sector (correctly) as a loosening in their power of control over planning and distribution. This explains the superficially greater 'anti-capitalist' stance of sections of this stratum in domestic and international issues. The military, of course, have a direct interest in the maintenance of 'ideological warfare' with the capitalist world. No sector of the ruling forces represents any socialist tendency. Despite resistance and surviving elements of socialist consciousness, the working class is too powerless and depoliticised to pose a real challenge. State collectivist societies are going to be with us for some time to come and it would help if the left could come to terms with the new type of class system.

Background to Big Flame's position

Unlike many other far left organisations Big Flame did not start by defining its central politics in relation to an assessment of the Soviet Union. It was not until 1976 that we adopted a formal position. This stated in essence that the Soviet Union and similar societies in Eastern Europe were state collectivist. A method was put forward for assessing a transition to socialism, which emphasised the transformation of social relations (eg between mental and manual labour, men and women). China we thought at the time was a transitional society which was building socialism. Since then we have changed our position. We no longer regard China as building socialism and we shall be having a debate this year which will probably centre on the question of whether China is already state collectivist, and if so, whether it is in a progressive phase or not, or whether it is still transitional. We have never adopted a formal position on such countries as Cuba, Vietnam or the recently liberated states of Africa. Though we have implicitly referred in this text to such countries as potentially or actually state collectivist, we have no formal position on this. Our discussion on China will be important in this regard.

We would be particularly keen to see discussion take place on two linked issues which seem particularly problematical and important to our tendency in regard to general theory of revolution both in underdeveloped countries and in advanced capitalism. First, the relationship of the working class and the peasantry in the Russian revolutionary experience, China and elsewhere. Second, the importance of the level of productive forces including the size and political weight of the industrial working class in the revolutionary process. The classical marxist position on this last question is explicit to the state collectivist thesis as put forward in our pamphlet (The Century of the Unexpected). However, we are not clear or agreed on its precise significance 'in the last instance' and how this might be articulated in concrete situations. In particular we regard as an example of vulgar marxism the SWP position which gives such overriding weight to the industrial working class in third world countries (and indeed everywhere).

In addition, and we may make a contribution on this later, the relation between party and class in Lenin's formulation was developed in a situation where the vanguard of the class in Russia and throughout Europe was the skilled worker. Today the class composition of the working class has changed drastically along with the labour process. Also reformism has a much more diffuse and therefore stronger material base within the working class. We would like to see greater awareness of the need to root present theory of party and class more in a materialist analysis of the present class composition as it actually is, rather than simply according to very different historical situations (though learning the lessons from those situations). Part of this would be a discussion of the correct relation between party, class and movement (eg women and blacks). This last area is presently being discussed in Big Flame.

Finally, if we are right about state collectivism in the USSR then this would mean that we would need to modify in certain ways our analysis of the reasons for the degeneration of the Russian Revolution. We shall hopefully deal with the lessons for today for both party/class theory and revolutionary strategy and programme in our next contribution.

Bill Campbell - Big Flame
January 1980

THE ORIGINS AND BASIS OF STATE COLLECTIVISM

Theories arguing that there is a 'third mode of production,' have become more prominent in recent years as Marxists have tried to come to grips with the enduring reality of Eastern European and other societies. Big Flame adopted a position that Eastern European societies were class societies of a new type at its Conference in 1976. In two further, though contrasting pamphlets, this new mode of production has been described as 'state collectivism,' to indicate that property was collectively owned, but by a new class, based on a fused, party-class apparatus, rather than the working class. Other descriptions differed in the variety of work within the third position, but what mattered was the underlying content of ideas.

The minimum basis of this position accepted the conceptual and empirical description of Soviet-type societies as new modes of production, breaking with the impasse of the degenerated workers' state and state capitalist positions. Of necessity, the theories also accepted the implications of recognising that a new mode of production was possible. Such 'bifurcations' constituting a major alternative method of economic/social and political development, rather than accidents or de-generations of a two-type model (capitalist or socialist). This is a break in the orthodox Marxist position (including that of Marx) which sees a linear development of modes of production.

However, this is where the agreement sometimes stops. For it still has to be worked out why new modes of production come into being. This is something Big Flame is still debating and the aim of this article is to look at the alternative conceptions of the origins and basis of the third mode, that we call state collectivism.

Two alternatives appear to be available. The first sees state collectivism (SC) as a theory of under development. (2) This is the position put forward in the Big Flame pamphlet "Century of the Unexpected." It is worth quoting at some length:

"A series of societies in the underdeveloped world have branched-off into a non-capitalist path, a path which runs not between capitalism and socialism, but parallel to capitalism, a path along which those societies can industrialise and to some extent catch up with the more advanced part of the world. This path of state collectivism is neither more nor less a transition to socialism than capitalism itself is." (p.4)

It is therefore only a theory of revolution in the sense that revolutions are normally required to break the grip of imperialism. Russia is presented as a "peculiar case" in that SC was preceded by a genuine proletarian revolution (ie one led by the working class). Other societies are described as having "populist or peasant revolutions, which merely masqueraded as socialist," (p.5).

The second alternative (to which I hold and was outlined in the BF pamphlet "The Unfinished revolution-A Critique of Trotskyism"), sees SC as a product of 'failed' revolution. This is not in the sense of the Trotskyist conception of de-generations of workers states, but of limits, both self

and externally imposed to the revolutionary process. Therefore SC is seen as a possible road of development in advanced capitalist countries as well as those in the third world.

WHY UNDERDEVELOPMENT IS NOT THE DETERMINING FORCE OF SC

The idea that SC could exist in advanced capitalist countries is explicitly denied in the first conception of SC. It is held that SC has "nothing to offer" advanced capitalism. In this it runs parallel to the general idea dominant in Marxism that "de-generated revolutions" like Russia are almost impossible in countries like Britain, because the level of development of the productive forces (ensuring abundance) and the cultural level of the working class (ensuring avoidance of bureaucracy). Hence the non-existence of socialism whether in de-generated workers' state, or some varieties of state capitalist and state collectivist theories is linked to basically external, economic factors, where scarcity and isolation are held responsible. The theories of state capitalism and SC that rest on the notion of underdevelopment, argue that nationalised property relations give emergent bureaucratic elites the means of breaking the grip of imperialism and industrialising in more favourable conditions. Though their isolation in relation to the capitalist world market then constrains what they can do. A transition to socialism being 'very difficult if not impossible' (3).

However, a new, exploitative mode of production does have something to "offer" in advanced capitalism. To see this, we have to break with the idea that "offer" only refers to dependent bourgeoisies, or other non working class forces. SC is, in fact, a general alternative way of managing an industrial or industrialising economy. It embodies forms of political control and economic management that are present in both capitalist development and working class movements. We will return to this in more detail later.

SC as a theory of underdevelopment suffers from economism. It is within the tradition of seeing the level of productive forces as the overwhelmingly dominant factor in enabling a transition to socialism. As stated previously, this shares with some interpretations of state capitalism the view that lack of productive forces leads to de-generation and new class forces:

"In an isolated and backward society, social relations are imposed and sustained by material scarcity, the ruthless division of labour demanded by the task of survival in conditions of backwardness. Scarcity impels the creation of a ruling class capable of maintaining the division of labour." (4)

Here economism and fatalism go hand in hand. The mechanical notion of base and superstructure gives too much weight to the problem of scarcity. Such economic conditions do not necessarily impel countries like China, Cuba or Angola to develop a new exploitative mode of production. There is the possibility that they force revolutionaries in those circumstances to develop alternative models of economic and social development. These concentrate on transforming the social

relations of production (relations between town and country, men and women, large and medium scale industry, the labour process etc). Scarcity does make these problems of a transition to socialism very much more difficult. But the uneven development of capitalism on a world scale will continue to ensure that revolutionary movements in the third world have the opportunities to challenge and defeat imperialism, in conditions of degrees of underdevelopment and isolation. It should be our task to try and indicate what are the conditions for a transition to socialism. Dependency on productive forces, not only leads to a fatalistic belief in almost automatic de-generation, it also fails to pinpoint other factors which are motive forces for the introduction of new class societies (forms of political power and social relations).

Of course, the question of the development of productive forces is linked to the "pre-condition" for socialism of a large working class. SC theories of underdevelopment are also Eurocentric in their rejection of any other force but the working class in conditions of advanced capitalism, as the sole force capable of providing a base for a transition to socialism. The Big Flame pamphlet "Century of the Unexpected" simply writes the peasantry out of the picture (p17). Yet imperialism has drawn the peasantry of the third world into the centre of struggle. It is absurd to carry on saying (as also do the Trotskyist movement) that the peasantry have no political weight (5). It just isn't as simple as asserting (6) that while peasants want to divide things up, workers can and do think and act collectively. Peasants have shown "collective tendencies" in China, Latin America and Southern Portugal to name a few examples. Like the working class, the peasantry is internally differentiated. There is an increasingly large sector that is not a landowning peasantry to any significant degree, but more of an agricultural proletariat. It is also the case that there is more movement from rural to urban centres, a more fluid social structure, in which the definition of a worker is not always clearcut. To say nothing about such situations or to mechanically call for revolutionary workers parties to be created, is once again to try and by-pass genuine problems.

Many of the problems, briefly mentioned centre round the conditions and process of a transition to socialism in a situation of "under-development." It seems to me that it is wrong and dangerous to jettison the concept of a transitional society or a transition to socialism in such conditions. There are three roads open to any society whose revolutionary forces have overthrown capitalism. They can:

1. Return to capitalism. Capitalist forms of property and relations of production are likely to exist, albeit controlled by the state (ie. state capitalism in Lenin's sense). Though this gets less likely the more these elements are eliminated from the economy, as there is not the class basis for a return.
2. Emergence of a new class society. Transformation stops at nationalised property relations. Control and effective, non-judicial ownership is appropriated by an emergent new ruling class based on a fused party-state apparatus.
3. A transition to socialism. This would build on the basic transformed property relations, revolutionary processes in two

spheres. That of social relations of production and society (eg relations between mental and manual labour, men and women etc) and relations of power. The latter needs to take up the necessity for proletarian direct democracy in the economy and state (7). Unless all three elements are transformed (property, social relations, power), their inter-relations will ensure that the conditions for the emergence of a new class system will emerge. However, we have to recognise that there may be disjunctures between the levels, depending on the particular circumstances.

Proletarian democracy is the ultimate key element, because without such power relations, the door is left open for the emergence of elites in party, state and economy, which can coalesce in a new ruling class.

While this applies to any post-revolutionary situation, such transformations have obviously added difficulties and specific problems in 3rd world countries, arising from degrees of under-development and isolation. Specific emphasis needs to be given to relations between town and country, size of productive unit and to alliances of workers with sections of the peasantry and other potentially progressive social forces. What therefore is likely, is that in the early stages of a transitional society, there may be contending modes of production. For instance remnants of capitalism (usually controlled by the state), emergent socialism and possibly state collectivism. The struggle between class forces and political tendencies, combined with the nature of the material circumstances will condition the possibility of such a situation resolving itself towards a transition to socialism. (8)

The concept of transitional society needs to be handled carefully. Its use by orthodox Trotskyism is often absurd. Societies can no longer be transitional (particularly when conceived of as between capitalism and socialism) when their social economic and political structures have hardened to the degree that a society like Russia has. But given that a transition to socialism is possible even in 3rd World countries, to describe a new mode of production (state collectivism) as 'progressive' is extremely dangerous. (9) It is only progressive if one refuses the possibility of a genuinely progressive alternative (ie a transition to socialism). If such an alternative is possible, then the emergence of a new class mode of production is regressive. It does not matter that such a regime could accumulate capital and develop productive forces in a way that capitalism could not. To use 'progressive' in this sense is to abuse the term in any Marxist way. (10) It can also lead to being 'soft' on the political regimes of such countries and fatalistic about bureaucracy, including Stalinism in some cases (11). What holds this notion of progressive together is however its economic fatalism. The position of various 'new mode of production as a response to under-development' theories is not too different from the more right-wing versions of Trotskyism which hold that because a transition to socialism is impossible in third world countries then a form of "proletarian Bonapartism" is inevitable and therefore progressive in such circumstances (12).

ALTERNATIVE CONCEPTIONS

In criticising the version of state collectivism as a theory of underdevelopment, the implication has been that an exception should not be made of the third or second world. So Binns and Haynes (of the SWP) are right to say that "exceptionalism" mistakenly "hives off" parts of the world to explain them. (13) In fact the SWP's own version of state capitalism has traditionally used such arguments (14). Their own use of a state capitalist model extends the analysis to a world level, where state capitalism is seen as the emergent form of an "aging" and crisis-ridden capitalism, East and West. The differences in nature and rhythm of development are covered over by utilising the over-used and vague notion of 'combined and uneven development.'

Yet such differences are crucial. The trends correctly identified in Western capitalism - ruling classes resorting to the state to aid the accumulation of capital - is distinct from second and third world situations. In the third world imperialism has determined that there is seldom any other agency except the state which can 'modernise' the economies (15). In the second world (of Eastern Europe etc) the direct power of capitalism has been eliminated, the state's role therefore is conditioned by the radically changed property/production relations. The SWP's view of course, is related to their definition of capitalism, an issue which has been dealt with elsewhere (16). The point being made here is simply that it makes no sense to collapse very different relations between the state and capital accumulation into one process. This "general theory" does not identify the specific dynamics of either 'private' capitalism, Soviet-type societies or any relation between the two in a useful way.

It remains the case however that no fully developed general theory that would explain the impetus for and dynamics of a new mode of production, yet exists. Even those that only attempt partial or "exceptionalist" explanations of particular circumstances like Russia often refer more to workers' general condition (eg alienation, exploitation etc) than to an adequate political economy. Those that try to look at the 'laws' of motion and crisis of new modes of production (Fantham and Machover, Ticktin) refer to "production for production's sake" and/or 'waste' as characteristic features. Yet this appears to be too descriptive to grasp any laws of motion.

But one of the problems may be that it is wrong to conceive of origins/laws of motion in terms parallel to the more strictly economic functioning of a mode of production like capitalism. It is a further example of economism to deny any relationship between movements to overthrow capitalism and the character of post-revolutionary societies. One does not have to go along with theories that Stalinism = Leninism = Marxism to identify important tendencies which have helped shape those societies. State collectivism is characterised by centralised economic and political power arising from the collective but non-proletarian ownership and control of the means of production. I would argue that such new modes of production emerge from specific combinations of tendencies in capitalism and oppositional, anti-capitalist movements.

There is a tendency for capitalist societies to attempt to survive and grow through the centralisation of capital and state (17). This centralisation helps to produce a division of labour which is increasingly hierarchical and specialised, creating new types of class composition (18).

While such measures cannot stop the emergence of capitalist crises, they do change the system that socialists are confronting. This is important, for part of of the socialist movement (particularly the Second International and its descendants) have always perceived socialism as built on and an extension of capitalism: socialism itself being achieved through the guidance of the working class by enlightened experts (19). The result is a thrust towards a state managed capitalism (given their non-revolutionary project), where "socialism" is identified with state planning and control (20). But what of revolutionary marxism? It must be said that there are important ambiguities in key areas. There is well-documented evidence that sections of the Third International tradition have seen productive forces as neutral and re-produced different examples of the socialism=state planning and ownership equation (21). This has become accentuated by the experience of Stalinism and the de-generation of the Russian revolution. It should also be added that the Third International Tradition also has a theory of political representation - working class interests embodied in one vanguard party - which can have dangerous implications in the sphere of political centralisation.

There is a real tension between this tendency and the emphasis in Marx, Lenin and other communist thinkers on direct proletarian democracy in state and economy. The consolidation of political and economic power in a fused party-state apparatus, characteristic of societies like Russia, is therefore a distortion of Marxism. But also a way of going beyond capitalism-but failing to break with relations of production and power which partially confirm the statist and bureaucratic trends in the socialist movement. This is why state collectivism is an alternative form of management of industrial societies, not merely a response to under-development or another type of capitalism. None of these factors make such post-revolutionary developments inevitable. As in the third world there is a choice of road, without some of the material problems of scarcity. (22)

But to take that road, certain tasks are incumbent on the revolutionary movement in Europe now. Briefly stated these include:

1. Theoretically and practically distinguishing the socialist tradition of proletarian democracy from the economism/statism of sections of the working class movement.
2. Giving more publicity and support to the dissident movement in Eastern Europe and elsewhere. Particularly giving emphasis to the left-wing alternatives ignored by the Western media.
3. Giving more critical support to liberation movements in the third world. Within a full anti-imperialist solidarity, we should recognise trends towards new, exploitative modes of production and support in what ways we can alternative conceptions (and forces) which can lay the basis for a transition to socialism. (23)

FOOTNOTES

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(1) This 'third position' is associated with Carlo, Rakovski, Bahro and in Britain, writers around 'Critique,' and Big Flame.

(2) This association of new mode of production with a reaction to underdevelopment is shared by writers like Carlo, Bahro and the Big Flame pamphlet written by Fantham and Machover "Century of the Unexpected."

(3) Whether such theories completely rule out the possibility of a transition towards socialism is not altogether clear. 'Difficult if not impossible' seems a reasonable summary of the Fantham/Machover position.

(4) Nigel Harris in IS Journal 89, page 19. This notion of scarcity impelling hierarchical economic and political forms is a common one among such theories whether they be state capitalist or new mode of production. Bahro for instance refers to backwardness in Russia 'levying an institutional tribute on the Bolsheviks.' See the commentary on Bahro by Militand in Socialist Register 1979.

(5) One example of such a position is the British IMG. They say, "The peasantry may supply a major part of, or even the main physical force in the revolutionary process, nevertheless as a political force its influence is relatively zero." (p54 'Imperialism, Stalinism and Permanent Revolution' John Robens).

(6) This refers explicitly to a statement from Ian Birchall in IS 89. He also says... "The peasantry... by its nature, does not pose collective solutions to the problems of society," (P.I2 "The Vietnamese Road to State Collectivism").

(7) Hence proletarian democracy is part of those social relations.

(8) We explicitly refer to a transition towards socialism. There is no possibility that in a backward country (or even an advanced one) socialism could actually be achieved in isolation. How far it can go will be determined by a combination of external and internal factors.

(9) See for example page 15 of "Century of the Unexpected" for their explanation of why the term progressive can be applied in particular stages. These arguments are repeated in even worse form in the first Big Flame submission to the Bulletin (eg page 7). The only progressive content in movements which end up producing state collectivist regimes, is their anti-imperialism.

(10) A parallel cannot be made with Marx's use of the word progressive to describe the impact of early capitalism. Centring progressiveness on development of the productive forces would make fascist regimes like Mussolini progressive, as Binns and Haynes point out in IS 7 (p32 "New Theories of Eastern European Class Societies").

(11) This is particularly the case with Bahro. See Binns and Haynes p30 etc.

(12) This is the position of the British "Militant Group", the largest Trotskyist entrists into the Labour Party. They describe countries like Syria and Burma as workers states!

(13) All theories which see underdevelopment as cause of state capitalism or collectivism have not got to grips with some of the Eastern European countries like East Germany. Clearly a state collectivist model is viable and 'offers' something to a developed industrial country. To say that it can be explained because such a model was forced on them by the Red Army is inadequate in relation to its actual functioning.

SANCTUARY OF THE DISENCHANTED: COMMENTS ON "CENTURY OF THE UNEXPECTED"

1. INTRODUCTION

What follows is a reply to the pamphlet "Century of the Unexpected" by Fantham and Machover. Fantham and Machover argue that we need to re-evaluate our theories of the nature of post-capitalist societies. They argue that in all such societies a new, classically unforeseen, mode of production exists, which they call "state collectivism". "State collectivism" has the following features: there is a new ruling class, the "bureaucracy"; the "bureaucracy", through its control of the state apparatus, imposes relations of exploitation on the working class; these exploitative relations do not rest on the generalized commodity production characteristic of capitalism; "state collectivism" exercises the historical mission of capitalism to develop the forces of production, in an epoch in which the dominance of imperialism blocks the road to independent capitalist development in the Third World.

The substance of my disagreement is theoretical rather than empirical. I am writing this in order to oppose the method of analysis used in "Century of the Unexpected" (CU from now on), rather than in order to disagree with the conclusions reached. I do not have an alternative analysis of the USSR to counterpose to that of CU. I do believe that there is scope for extensive re-analysis of the USSR. However, we must first be clear about the essentials of the Marxist method of analysis. My argument is that the method of analysis used in CU is not the Marxist method.

The introduction to CU, written by the International Committee of Big Flame, argues that the analysis in CU is rooted in "classical Marxism at its best". Let me then state at the outset what are the methodological tenets which I will consider to be characteristic of Marxism. These are threefold: (1) the method of historical materialism - the relations of production are the key to understanding the legal and political superstructure which rises upon these relations; (2) the method of class analysis - the motive force of history is the class struggle; (3) the method of dialectics - analysis must proceed through the discovery of the concrete contradictions which underly concrete situations.

I will frame my argument in four parts. Firstly, I will deal with the authors' positive definitions of "state collectivism". Secondly, I will deal with their conception of capitalism. Thirdly, I will deal with their conception of socialism. Fourthly, I will close with some theoretical conclusions.

2. "STATE COLLECTIVISM"

When Marx made the first scientific analysis of capitalism, he began with the commodity, the "unit cell" of capitalism. He then built up through the appearance of labour power as a commodity to the analysis of surplus value as

the form of existence of surplus labour. From these beginnings Marx was able to lay out the laws of motion of capitalism and to demonstrate the inevitable sharpening of the contradiction between social labour and private appropriation. If CU were to follow the Marxist method in establishing the existence of a new mode of production, we should expect a comparable project. We should expect an analysis of the relations of production and the consequent laws of motion of the new mode of production. No such method is employed in CU. Instead we get some vignettes of Soviet economic life, drawn from the researches of the "Critique" school, and some hints about the nature of the "bureaucracy". From the vignettes we receive a picture of the Soviet economy as characterised by a high degree of wastefulness and inefficiency, and some statements about constraints on the freedom of action of the managers. Mention is also made of the use of the repressive forces of the state against the workers. A "Tableau Economique" of the USSR is presented, detailing the skeletal elements of circulation and showing the central importance of the state in this circulation. The point at issue, however, is not the correctness or incorrectness of such facts but a theoretical analysis of what they mean.

Clearly, what is going to be central to deciding this question of meaning is the understanding of the nature of the ruling power - the "bureaucracy". I have managed to find 7 components of a definition of the "bureaucracy". Some of these fail to distinguish between the "bureaucracy" and any ruling class whatsoever; some fail to distinguish between the "bureaucracy", the bourgeoisie and the proletariat; and some fail to distinguish between the "bureaucracy" and the bourgeoisie. The most extensive statement about the "bureaucracy" is found on page 18 of CU: the "bureaucracy" bases itself on "the control of the state apparatus and its ability to control the process of production and the social surplus". This statement contains three elements:

- (a) control of the state apparatus: this is a feature of every ruling class, including the proletariat.
- (b) ability to control the process of production: this is a little more specific. Not all ruling classes control the process of production. For example, under feudalism this control is in the hands of the producers. However, it is characteristic of both capitalism and socialism that the ruling class controls the process of production.
- (c) control of the social surplus: this phrase (which is imprecise) presumably refers to appropriation of the surplus product. This again is characteristic of every ruling class. It is what defines a ruling class in the economic sphere, just as control of the state apparatus is the defining feature in the political sphere.

There are four further definitions. Two of these, (f) and (g), I will discuss in the next two sections. These are negative definitions. They attempt to demonstrate that neither capitalism nor socialism exists in the USSR. They state that exploitation in non-value terms exists in the USSR (f); and that "literal and direct power" of the working class does not exist (g). The remaining two definitions are as follows:

- (d) "the principle means of control is not through private property but through formally collective property controlled from above through the state and by the ruling bureaucracy" (p 12): since we have already

examined the definition of "bureaucracy", the last phrase adds nothing new. What is added by this definition is the importance of state property. Again we encounter difficulty. State property is characteristic of the class rule of the proletariat. I will also argue below that it is compatible with the class rule of the bourgeoisie.

- (e) On page 16 there are a number of statements about the class goals of the "bureaucracy". The "bureaucracy", we are told, is interested in production for the sake of further production. The reason for this is that the accumulation fund is held by the state, and the state is the locus of the "bureaucracy". Increased accumulation strengthens the state and therefore strengthens the position of the "bureaucracy". Now, all of this may or may not be true about the collective "psychology" of the "bureaucracy". They may indeed be "motivated" by a desire to maintain and strengthen their position. But to argue in this way is to abandon the standpoint of Marxism. Marxism understands the actions of a ruling class, not in terms of its subjective desires, self-conceptions and "goals", but in terms of the relations of production through which the position of the ruling class is reproduced. The "goal" of production for production's sake does not describe a set of production relations. Indeed, this formulation of the problem totally obscures the social basis on which production occurs, by making of production an ahistorical and technical term. We may, however, note that history has provided us with one ruling class whose "goal" can be described as production for production's sake: the bourgeoisie whose drive for capital accumulation results in the subordination of human need to production.

The five positive definitions of the "bureaucracy" have, therefore, not advanced us a step further. Definitions (a) and (c) are general definitions of any ruling class; definition (b) fails to eliminate either the proletariat or the bourgeoisie; definition (d) fails to eliminate the proletariat, and, as I will show in the next section, also fails to eliminate the bourgeoisie; definition (e) really tells us nothing at all, but is suggestive of the class rule of the bourgeoisie. The "bureaucracy" would seem to have no characteristics which demarcate it from historically and theoretically better known ruling classes. Nothing so far discussed has provided the key to the new relations of production and the new laws of motion of CU's new mode of production. We should not be blinded by the deceptive familiarity of CU's vignettes of Soviet life into thinking that we have understood anything new.

It still remains possible, though, that the existence of a new mode of production could be established "negatively". To do this Fantham and Machover would have to demonstrate rigorously that some given social formation was neither capitalist nor socialist. I move on now to an examination of their conceptions of capitalism and socialism. I will try to demonstrate that here too they fail to proceed from an analysis of the essential social relations of capitalism and socialism.

3. CAPITALISM

Pages 9 and 10, which outline the "Tableau Economique" of the USSR, also outline the essentials of Fantham and Machover's conception of capitalism. This is the core of their argument that a non-commodity based system of

exploitation has been established in the USSR. They consider a variety of economic transactions in the USSR and conclude that they are not commodity transactions because they do not occur on a free market. The defining characteristic of capitalism, for Fantham and Machover, is the market. We have already encountered an aspect of this argument in definition (d) above, where private property is contrasted with state property.

But this is not how Marx conceived of the inner nature of capitalism. In "Capital", for instance, he wrote:

"Free competition brings out the inherent laws of capitalist production in the shape of external coercive laws having power over every individual capitalist" (Capital I, p270; International Publishers N.Y.)

Thus, the inherent laws are not those of the free market; the operation of the market simply "brings out" those laws. What Marx was able to demonstrate theoretically has become empirically clear with the development of monopoly capitalism. As is well known, monopoly capitalism results in distortions of the free market, the occurrence of various forms of economic planning by the multinationals and a politicization of the economy through increasing state intervention. This state intervention runs as far as the nationalization of some of the means of production as the collective class property of the whole bourgeoisie. Marx was able to understand theoretically the earliest phases of monopoly development which were occurring in his lifetime. He wrote of the joint stock companies:

"It is the abolition of capital as private property within the framework of capitalist production itself." (Capital III, p436)

What, then, did Marx to be the inherent laws of capitalism? In "Capital", he begins with the analysis of the commodity. More specifically, he begins with a consideration of the social preconditions for the existence of the products of labour in the form of commodities. He concludes that the condition for commodity production is the existence of independent production being carried on by producers who are materially interdependent. Because the producers are interdependent, they must exchange their products. Because they are independent, they cannot regulate by conscious agreement this exchange (or rather the prior distribution of social labour). The result of this contradiction is the commodity. The commodity which is at once a use value and an exchange value represents the existence of labour which is at once social and private. For commodity production to give rise to capitalism it is necessary that a class should exist which has no access to the means of production: a class which is compelled to sell its own labour power. So, to the separation of the producers from each other, is added the separation of the producers (the proletariat) from their means of production. From this double separation arise surplus value, the self-valorization of capital, economic crises and all the other features of capitalism.

Returning now to Fantham and Machover's analysis, how do things stand? They themselves note the appearance of labour power as a commodity in the USSR. They write (p 10) "The worker ... is legally compelled to sell his or her labour power" and yet they deny that labour power is a commodity. They note the existence of money and prices but deny that these are symptomatic of commodity relations. They argue this because, as we have seen, they confuse a phase of the circulation of capital (the free market, which furthermore exists

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in a pure form only during the liberal competitive stage of capitalism) with the productive relations of capitalism. The market does not cause the existence of commodity relations: it is the expression of these relations.

And if, within the state sector of economies such as the USSR, the means of production continue to have prices and money continues to mediate transactions, this is precisely because commodity relations cannot be abolished by abolishing the free market. Commodity relations can only be abolished by the ending of the double separation. On what basis do Fantham and Machover imagine prices are calculated within the USSR save the law of value? Almost all post-revolutionary societies display in their history episodes during which ultra-"left" illusions existed that commodity relations could be abolished by administrative decree (e.g. the illusions of "War Communism" in 1919-1921 in Russia). Without exception, economic chaos and the growth of a black market have given the lie to these illusions. To suggest that wages, prices, money and other commodity categories are empty forms which can be filled with new content is to depart from the method of Marxism. For Marx showed that these forms are nothing but the representation of determinate social relations.

We can now see that the assertion that exploitation in non-value categories exists in the USSR results from an incorrect understanding of the basis for the existence of value forms. If, as Fantham and Machover accept, labour power is being sold in the USSR, then labour power is a commodity and we are dealing with bourgeois production relations. We are now in a position also to re-evaluate definition (d) above, which contrasts private property with state property. This definition assumes that private (i.e. individual) property is the basis of capitalism. But property relations are juridical categories and belong to the superstructure, not to the base. Property relations are the product of productive relations, not vice versa. The production relations on which capitalism rests derive from the double separation. Providing that this separation is maintained, the existence of bourgeois production relations is maintained. In the liberal competitive era, bourgeois production relations took the legal form of individual property. In the era of monopoly, collective and class property exists alongside individual property. If all the means of production were the class property of the bourgeoisie, then we would be dealing with a state bourgeoisie. State property is, therefore, not the antithesis of bourgeois production relations, but can, in fact, be the expression of a very highly developed form of these relations.

The assertion that there is a new mode of exploitation in the USSR rests on false premises and does not stand up to scrutiny. It remains an open possibility that some or all of the post-revolutionary societies have restored capitalism.

4. SOCIALISM

I will begin here by trying to establish the elements of a theory of socialism which are a common heritage from Marx, Engels and Lenin, without venturing to draw on the experience of those societies whose nature is at issue here.

As is well known, Marx analysed capitalism as developing through an

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increasingly sharp contradiction between the social nature of production and the private nature of appropriation. He demonstrated scientifically that this contradiction could only be resolved by a revolutionary reconstitution of the mode of appropriation as social appropriation i.e. communism. He stressed that between capitalism and communism there must be a phase of transition, which he called the "lower stage of communism" and which we today call socialism. The political essence of this transition period to the classless society is the accession of the working class to state power i.e. the dictatorship of the proletariat. Classes continue to exist under socialism. Therefore class struggle continues to exist. Without this class struggle, the foundations of bourgeois existence at the economic, political and ideological levels cannot be eliminated.

Socialism is not, as Fantham and Machover assume, a mode of production. It is a phase of transition between the capitalist and the communist modes of production. It is therefore a contradictory hybrid of elements of both modes of production. In its initial stages at least, the relations of production are largely untransformed bourgeois relations, which tend to reproduce at the economic level the double separation which engenders the law of value. At the political level, however, proletarian relations exist and dominate (albeit imperfectly) the bourgeois economic relations. Socialism is characterized by a complicated non-correspondence between the economic and the political. An entire epoch of class struggles is necessary for the proletariat to capture successive positions of control and eliminate the non-correspondence, through a revolutionization of the relations of production. This revolutionization cannot be brought about by decree. Socialism cannot be understood as a mode of production with its own distinctive relations of production and laws of motion (as on the standard "socialism = state property + planning + democracy" type of formula). We can only understand socialism as a movement, determined by the real contradictions which relate real class forces. We can only judge its success in terms of progress towards genuine social appropriation.

This is not, however, how the question of socialism is presented in CU. Fantham and Machover's notion of socialism is two-fold: firstly, it is only possible with a given degree of development of the productive forces (p 12); secondly, it is only possible under certain institutional conditions - working class power "in the literal and direct sense" (p 7). The first condition, when applied to individual countries, makes of Marxism a form of evolutionism, an innovation pioneered by the German Social Democrats under Kautsky. The second condition would be unexceptionable if it merely talked of working class power - that, after all, is what the dictatorship of the proletariat means. But "literal and direct" power must mean something over and above workers' power in general. It must refer to a particular form of government. Now, we do not insist on "literal and direct" power of the bourgeoisie as a criterion for the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie. For the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie describes a set of class relations not a form of government. Similarly, dictatorship of the proletariat indicates a set of class relations not a form of government. To talk of "literal and direct" power draws our attention away from the sphere of class relations and into the

sphere of legal or constitutional issues. In a similar way, the first condition draws our attention away from the relations of production and the class struggle and towards the forces of production. We thus end up with the substitution of a technical-constitutional definition of socialism for a class definition. In fact, the definition is so framed as to contain its conclusion. It necessarily excludes all the post-revolutionary societies. What we are left with is the standard ethno-centric view that only our own imperialist countries are capable of undergoing socialist revolutions. I pass now to a more detailed critique of Fantham and Machover's conditions.

(a) "full development of the forces of production"

When Marx examined the basis for socialism, he did not adopt the method of setting up a model of socialism and then asking which societies could achieve it. Instead, he analysed the real contradictions within the capitalism of his day that were pressing forward a revolutionary solution. When Fantham and Machover reproduce Marx's analyses of 1867 this is not proof of their classicism, but of their abandonment of the method of analysing concrete contradictions. We no longer live in Marx's epoch of competitive capitalism. We live in the epoch of imperialism. In our epoch the proletarian revolution does not break out where there is fullest development of the productive forces, but where the international development of capitalism creates the sharpest class contradictions. Lenin showed that the imperialist chain snapped at its weakest link by analysing all the contradictions of imperialism (capital/labour; capital/capital; capital/national liberation). It may be a "tiresome" complication that imperialism results in a separation between the most advanced development of class contradictions and the most advanced development of the productive forces. But we cannot deal with this complication by simply repeating Marx's analyses of 1867.

It may be objected, as Fantham and Machover do, that Lenin still based his analysis on the prospect of the European revolution. This is true, but it omits the fact that Lenin later rectified his analysis and demonstrated that Russia had not only the necessary conditions but also the sufficient conditions for the building of socialism (see his 1922 article "On Cooperation"). If we want to argue that the USSR failed to develop along these lines, well and good. But we must argue this in terms of the outcome of the class struggle and not fatalistically in terms of the productive forces (which can never be historical agents) and appeals to the "invisible hand" of historical missions and social evolution.

(b) "literal and direct" workers' power

The concept of "literal and direct" power is somewhat clarified by the statement (p 14) that there must be "independent working class institutions outside the direct control of the proletarian party". What is being contrasted here is "literal and direct" state power of the class as a whole, to proletarian state power mediated through the instrument of a vanguard Party. What Fantham and Machover must demonstrate then (in order to establish this as an essential aspect of socialism, rather than a description of a particular form of government) is: firstly, that "literal and direct" power is always and everywhere compatible with the dictatorship of the proletariat; secondly, that "mediated" power is never compatible with the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Consider, in this respect, the example of the factory committee movement in Russia between 1917 and 1918. Immediately before and after the October Revolution, the factories were in the hands of these committees of rank and file workers. This "literal and direct" control at the level of the factory proved incompatible with proletarian management of the economy. The workers in each factory approached their situation from the standpoint of anarcho-syndicalist, small proprietor consciousness. They tended to regard each factory as the collective private property of its factory committee. Independently of each other, the committees made decisions about hours, wages, productivity, quality etc. This apparent collapsing of the separation between producers and their means of production intensified the separation between the individual factories. Thus the realm of operation of the law of value (and often simply plain anarchy) was extended not contracted. Since the means of production are social in nature, this apparent local control over them was, in fact, illusory. Proletarian economic management requires that the economy as a whole is brought under the conscious and collective control of the producers. It was therefore inevitable that the factory committee movement would end in failure, not because of the malevolence of the Bolsheviks, but because of the real balance of class forces. A movement which appeared highly progressive and revolutionary when looked at only from the "constitutional" point of view was revealed to be objectively bourgeois looked at from the class point of view. This example should make it clear that "literal and direct" control is not a priori compatible with the dictatorship of the proletariat (i.e. the class interests of the proletariat). The example should also make clear the difference between adopting a constitutional and a class standpoint. It is not the institutional form which creates a balance of class forces favourable to the proletariat. Rather it is a favourable balance of class forces which provides the conditions for the development of corresponding institutional forms.

Fantham and Machover underestimate the extent and the complexity of the struggles that the proletariat must pass through in the constitution of its unity and in the realization of its class interest. They deny the process through which the proletariat educates itself and conquers successive positions of control over its own circumstances. These processes are not spontaneously present, and they are certainly not created by the simple expedient of "literal and direct" control. Fantham and Machover underestimate the conditions which make the existence of the vanguard necessary. For a whole epoch of struggles the proletariat remains disunited and requires to surmount contradictions between itself and other revolutionary classes in order to exercise its leadership of society. For this it needs a vanguard organization of its most advanced class-conscious members. Of course the vanguard cannot (cannot, not must not) substitute itself for the rest of the class. But neither, historically, has the class as a whole been able to substitute itself for the vanguard. And Fantham and Machover are totally wrong when they see the guarantee of proletarian supremacy in the separation between the vanguard and the class. The guarantee of proletarian supremacy lies in the deepest and most organic contact between the vanguard and the class - the embedding of the vanguard in the life of the class. Only if the vanguard bases itself on the self-activity of the masses can it lead the revolutionary transformation. Only if the proletariat is led by a trusted vanguard can it correctly resolve the contradictions that face it, in the

direction of the revolutionization of social relations. Of course, the existence of a vanguard carries the danger that the vanguard (in its origin only the most advanced stratum of the class) may become separated from the class. But to say that this is a possibility is not to demonstrate that it is a certainty. On the other hand, the absence of a vanguard would consign the proletariat to handle contradictions according to its own spontaneous ideology (which, however class-centred, is still the "spontaneously" imposed ideology of the bourgeoisie). For class consciousness is not created by the intervention of "literal and direct" power, but through struggle. The stress on the very advanced institutional form of "literal and direct" power rests on a confusion of socialism with its goal, communism. It distracts the attention of the proletariat from the struggles it must undergo to reach that goal.

In conclusion, Fantham and Machover base themselves on a notion of socialism as the triumph of democracy, rather than, as Marx expressed it:

"... a rational medium in which the class struggle can run through its different phases in the most rational and humane way" ("First Draft of the Civil War in France: Political Writings III p 253; Vintage N.Y.)

They have proved as unable to develop a conception of socialism adequate to their task, as they were to develop a conception of capitalism. CU therefore fails to exclude the possibility that some or all of the post-revolutionary societies are socialist.

5. THEORETICAL CONCLUSIONS

It is because appearance and reality do not coincide that there is a need for science. Marx criticized the bourgeois economists of his day, not so much because what they said was wrong, as because they simply redescribed appearances. This criticism also applies to CU. It moves entirely on the surface of things. Its method is the method of empiricism. The fact that it "makes sense" tends to blind us to the lack of any explanation. The very familiarity we feel with the terms of reference ("bureaucracy", "state property", "market", "democracy") inhibits the development of a scientific understanding.

I do not rule out a priori the possibility of a "third mode of production", but I do insist such a possibility be established theoretically. For, such a possibility is not only unforeseen, there is no space for its existence in current Marxist theory. I want to close by sketching in why this is so. It is important to do this because of the nature of the challenge thrown down by CU. CU challenges us, not just to re-evaluate our analysis of the USSR, but to reconsider what we mean by Marxist method. In this respect, it is both the product and the talisman of today's profound crisis of Marxism.

A new ruling class cannot simply be invented out of mid-air and domiciled in the Olympian heights of the state apparatus. But it is instructive to enquire why such a project does not immediately strike us as foolish. The reason for this is the particular role which the state plays in the post-revolutionary societies. Immense control over economic life does reside in the state apparatus. This can create (and historically has created) illusions among state functionaries that the economy can be ruled by decree. The

existence of state property can render opaque the real nature of economic relations between the units of this property. If decrees are issued without a scientific understanding of the real relations, they will have effects, but not the effects intended. If the basis for ideology in pre-revolutionary societies is the fetishization of commodities, we can describe a corresponding basis in post-revolutionary societies as a fetishization of the state. However much power the state apparatus may possess, it is still only power consonant with determinate economic laws. It is through these laws that the decrees of the state have their effect. Since the laws are only the product of a determinate class formation, the power of the state rests on this class formation. Thus we can only speak of a class holding state power if the conditions for the reproduction of that class are given in the relations of production. (We are not talking here of the momentary usurpation of political power by some clique or other, but a system of reproduction of class relations in the context of the extended reproduction of a given social formation).

On the morrow of the revolution, the class formation is determined by the antagonism between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. (I am not forgetting here the petty bourgeoisie, the peasants and other feudal elements: I am discussing the class formation which emerges dominant in the course of extended reproduction). Whatever its self-conception, the cadre of state functionaries must base itself on this class formation. It can no more constitute itself a new ruling class by virtue of its position in the state apparatus, than the "bureaucracy" in Britain can abolish the law of value by virtue of its position. If the revolutionary government and state abandons its links with the masses, it will become increasingly dependent for reproduction of the political order on the functioning of the bourgeois social relations, newly released from proletarian dominance. It is not necessary that the government should be aware of its class nature as an embryonic state bourgeoisie. It may continue to believe that it is building socialism (or "state collectivism" for that matter). But our task, as analysts, is to sort out the essential class relations, whatever the novelty of their legal or ideological garb. And in the present state of knowledge, I can see no way that the fight between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie can suddenly become three-cornered. The novelty is only superficial. As Lenin noted:

"Classes have remained, but in the era of the dictatorship of the proletariat every class has undergone a change and the relations between classes have also changed. The class struggle does not disappear under the dictatorship of the proletariat; it merely assumes different forms." (Selected Works, One Volume p 503; International N.Y.)

To distinguish what is essential from what is contingent in this altered terrain of class struggle; that is the first step in Marxist analysis. Then, to explain what is contingent in terms of the essential; that is the second step. Not, as in CU, to attempt to deduce the essential from the contingent.

Gavin MacLean

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The most striking methodological characteristic of the "degenerated workers' state" theory is that it creates a dualism between an imputedly progressive essence to Soviet society and the way that society actually behaves. Hegel, of course, had attacked just this dualism in Kant, who

SOME NOTES ON BIG FLAME'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE DISCUSSION OF SOVIET-TYPE SOCIETIES
by V. Graham

What follows are a series of discussion notes in which I try to take up what I consider some of the more serious weaknesses of Bill Campbell's document, "The Class Nature of the Soviet Union and Its Implications for Marxist Theory", and the pamphlet, Century of the Unexpected, on which it is based. I hope to develop these notes into a short critical piece for either publication in our journal or insertion in the discussion bulletin. It should be noted that not all of my criticisms of Campbell's document apply to the pamphlet on state collectivism, since in some ways Campbell has provided an inadequate summary of the pamphlet's argument.

1. Some Minor Points of Disagreement

I should first like to get out of the way some of the least important aspects of the state collectivism argument, so as to clarify what I think the argument is and is not about.

First, I am not going to dwell on whether or not we should call what exists in the Soviet Union a mode of production, or whether the Soviet elite is a ruling class. I think that the arguments put forward in the pamphlet are not entirely convincing, but these quibbles are not really germane to what I think that pamphlet's real weaknesses are. To some extent my differences with the authors of Century of the Unexpected and problems in their theory will come out in the course of these notes.

Secondly, the same applies to the question of whether cdes. Machover, Fantham, and Campbell are correct in saying that state collectivism represents an alternative path to capitalism. I believe that these regimes are quite specifically post-capitalist, i.e., they arise out of the response by their societies to the way that imperialism, with its combined and uneven development, has affected them. This does not, however, seem to me to be the main problem here. I shall make more detailed comments on the difficulties I think the "alternative-to-capitalism" thesis gets us into later on.

2. The Driving Forces of Soviet Type Societies

The great strength of the state collectivism thesis as put forward by cdes. Machover and Fantham, is that it provides an analytical framework through which revolutionaries can identify the potentially progressive content of anti-imperialist movements without distorting our assessment of these movements' ability to construct socialism. A second, and related contribution is that they correctly identify the basic source of contradiction in these societies as the working class's position within these societies' system of production relations. They correctly challenge the notion that state property and "planning" are in and of themselves "good" or "proletarian", and allow us, in fact, to reject the very notion that planning as socialists understand it even exists in Soviet and related societies.

My main disagreement with these comrades is that, having correctly criticised both "workers' state" and state capitalist theories of the USSR for divorcing the observed behaviour of these societies from what they identify as their driving forces, they themselves fail to present a cogent argument as to what these driving forces really are.

A. General Method

The most striking methodological characteristic of the "degenerated workers' state" theory is that it creates a dualism between an imputedly progressive essence to Soviet society and the way that society actually behaves. Hegel, of course, had attacked just this dualism in Kant, who

had argued the existence of unknowable inherent laws (noumena, the thing in itself) which constituted a separate entity from the observable "reality" they were to explain. For Hegel a phenomenon is the phenomenon of its essence, that is, what appear to us as phenomena have the form they do precisely because of the intrinsic forces that produce them. Change the latter and the phenomena become something different.

If the workers' state theorists were to argue that they had no such dualism, they would have to be able to explain how it is that this progressive essence, state property, "planning", etc., produces the abomination of Soviet society. Of course, it is possible to imagine a hypothetical society in which the working class is responsible for its own exploitation, but even workers' state theorists would not engage in such sophistry. It remains for them to explain the mechanism by which this progressive essence gives rise to its opposite, and this they cannot do, except by going outside an analysis of production relations and dwelling on the inessentials of distributive relations.

State capitalism creates the same kind of dualism, this time introducing fundamental distortions into the classical concepts of capitalism, value, and the market. This does not a priori prove that what they ascribe as the essence of Soviet society does not exist, but it is a fact that they have never made a concrete attempt to detail the inner workings of Soviet production relations.

If we are to develop a genuinely revolutionary theory of Soviet society we must abandon the traditional dualism that has plagued marxist theory since the mid-1930's and attempt to discover the inner workings of Soviet production relations and the way in which these essential characteristics of the system manifest themselves.

B. Production For Production

At precisely the point where cdes. Machover, Fantham, and Campbell must set about to make this kind of analysis they shy away from a detailed discussion of Soviet production relations and resort instead to a Weberian imputation of an external goal to the system - production for production's sake - which provides the system with its rationale and its drive. To explain this goal, the state collectivism pamphlet (p. 16) resorts to the subjective apprehension by the elite of what it must do to stay in power. The pamphlet lists a number of the clinical failings of the system, and correctly locates these failures in the position of the working class, as the implementer of bureaucratic instructions, within this bureaucratic system. However, it does not actually study the contradictions themselves.

At an empirical level it is dubious that the elite in the USSR or related societies actually desires the perpetual hypertrophy of heavy industry. Except for the third five-year plan just prior to World War II and the immediate post-war period, the plans have consistently aimed at redressing the imbalance between producer and consumer goods; and just as consistently they have failed (as the quote from Kuron and Modzelewski on p. 16 points out). This fact has been pointed out to cdes. Machover and Fantham on several occasions, yet it has not caused them to nuance their argument in the slightest.

If production within heavy industry has predominated it is because of the fundamental contradictions within production, which make it impossible to redress the imbalance or even to make the outcome of the centre's instructions approximate to the instructions themselves. In defence of the state collectivism pamphlet and cde. Campbell, marxists have only just begun to address this problem of identifying these contradictions, primarily through the journal Critique. This analysis is only in its embryonic stages, and I would not venture to give a detailed exposition of it here. But I shall try to sketch the analysis in its outlines.

As Ticktin has argued, we must start by looking at the nature of the product, where the primary contradiction is not between use value and exchange value (as under capitalism) but within use value itself. The Soviet worker, politically and socially atomised, deprived either of participation in the system or of collective means of combatting it and yet at the same time relatively free of the coercion to work well imposed by the capitalist labour market, turns out a product that is defective. Its quality is bad, production is slow and irregular, deliveries are unreliable. All this the state collectivism pamphlet acknowledges. The effect of this system, however, is that it requires enormous inputs of human and physical resources to achieve even limited growth.

A machine produced badly breaks down frequently, has to leave production, requires vast quantities of spare parts, and itself turns out defective products. Repair is subject to the same social relations of production, and so it, too, is done badly and consumes vast inputs of labour and materials. Spare parts are produced defectively and are not standardized. Thus in agriculture two allegedly identical tractors turned out by two different factories will not be able to use the same spare parts. What is more, their life span is a fraction of that of a Western tractor.

In all of these societies the infrastructure is weak: roads are poor, transport is inefficient, warehousing is chaotic. As a result huge quantities of physical product simply get lost. Both in industry and in services and agriculture labour is under-mechanized, with large numbers of jobs involving unskilled manual operations (often employing relatively highly-trained youth, whose morale then falls). Similarly, managers are themselves reluctant to allow the introduction of new technology, since this introduces uncertainty into their patterns of plan fulfilment and may lead to higher targets being set in future.

Therefore the pattern of extensive growth referred to in the state collectivism has two sources: the inability of the regime to introduce new technology and raise labour productivity in existing plants (to this is related the inability of the regime successfully to develop means of giving them free mobility of labour); and the excessive waste and squandering within the system. The effects of these are not always the same. The inability to introduce new technology has meant that whenever new techniques and innovations appear the only way the regime can establish them is to build an entirely new factory or set of factories completely from scratch. This partly explains the cycle of Soviet construction, where huge numbers of new projects get initiated, fall behind schedule, thereby creating a backlog of unfinished projects, and the regime imposes a moratorium on new construction. The excessive waste requires a vast industrial apparatus because finished output requires vastly greater inputs than in modern capitalist industry. The regime is effectively a prisoner to this reality.

The effect is to create a pattern of growth that is at the same time non-growth. Here the notion of waste that appears in the state collectivism pamphlet is inadequate, since it concentrates on the physical losses due to squandering or loss of resources, idle capacity, etc. A broader concept is needed. The Soviet Union can be compared to an organism that burns up more calories consuming its nutritional inputs than those inputs actually provide. Every attempt to solve one set of problems creates a train of further problems that tax the system even further. Figures for growth in Hungary and the USSR show this very well. To achieve relatively modest percentages of growth the system consumes far greater increases in industrial inputs. Whilst Britain, for example, needed an approximately 2.9-fold increase in investment to obtain a 2.1-fold increase in national income between 1950 and 1978, Hungary needed a 7.3-fold increase in investment to achieve a 4.7-fold increase in income. In Hungarian agriculture, whose growth has been a lynch-pin of Hungarian export plans, growth has required such large

increases in industrial inputs as to throw doubt on whether this rise in agricultural output was worth it. Soviet agriculture faces the same dilemma: the system requires a 2.5-fold increase in fixed assets to achieve a meagre 30% rise in agricultural output. The system requires a greater and greater investment just to keep agricultural output from falling!

I would argue that it is this pattern that explains the regime's inability to redress the imbalance between heavy industry and consumer goods, rather than an imputed "goal of production". The quote from Kuron and Modzelewski on p. 16 of the state collectivism pamphlet, which attributes the distortions in plan instructions to the conflict between the "class goal of the ruling bureaucracy" and "the interests of the basic groups who achieve production (maximum consumption)" is simply wrong. This conflict exists, to be sure, but it is not because the producers or even managers are aware of their interests in consumption. Every Soviet worker would like to see greater output of consumer goods; yet the Soviet worker is at the same time an object of exploitation within a system of atomized production relations, and in this capacity she or he simply is not willing to perform labour of the quality and intensity that would be required to improve the supply of consumer goods. Hence the problem arises from the contradictory position of the worker who seeks to minimise her or his exploitation but at the same time is dependent on the collective labour of the working class to satisfy the collective needs of society.

3. The Progressive Content of State Collectivist Regimes

In initial discussions within Big Flame about the state collectivism thesis I was prepared to accept the argument that such societies - whether they represented a mode of production or not - contained certain historically progressive elements compared to their subjugation to imperialism. In particular they lay down a certain basis of modernization and give rise to an industrial proletariat which can overthrow them. However, I now am inclined to think that this division between a progressive stage and a retrogressive stage is an altogether dubious proposition, especially as summarized by Campbell in his document.

It seems to me that the only progressive content in the movements that tend to set up so-called collectivist regimes is their anti-imperialism. After the achievement of this goal, the removal of their societies from the imperialist network, it is questionable that we should view these regimes as "progressive".

First, because they do not strictly operate as an alternative to capitalism in bringing about development. Every one of these regimes, for instance, has totally failed to solve the agrarian question; agriculture remains backward and a major bottleneck for future growth.

Secondly, because, as I have already outlined, the type of growth they bring about is highly distorted and contains the seeds of the breakup of these systems. This is not something that attacks these regimes in their old age; it is inherent in the very methods of industrialization adopted from their birth. It is impossible to argue that the problems confronting the Soviet regime today are in any way different from those that faced it in the 1930's. All of the difficulties of waste, poor work and slow work by the workers, managerial distortions of instructions, chaotic supplies, etc., existed then and in fact were the natural result of the Soviet system of production relations. It is true that the regime built factories where none existed before, but it did so at such cost that only the constant use of terror and a police state has kept the regime from being overthrown.

In Campbell's formulation (the section on Permanent Revolution), which is far more static and politically ambiguous than the pamphlet, the argument that these regimes are a "third option" which is a "viable possible alternative" is politically unsound. It implies that in their "progressive" stage

we support state collectivist regimes. In fact we do not support them, except insofar as we oppose interference in their affairs by imperialism, but call - and actively work - for their overthrow by the popular masses.

It is also wrong to ignore the origins of the social group that exercises state power in these countries. In the Soviet Union the elite emerged as a bureaucratic stratum that came to power by crushing both the private sector (the peasantry) and the working class. It could only establish itself by eliminating both capitalism and socialism as possible systems. In doing so it deprived itself of the inherent rationality (relatively speaking) that either of these systems could have provided. In short, it had to suppress both plan and market.

This has not been true just of the Stalinist elite. Although in Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and other such regimes the ruling elite may initially have enjoyed popular support (largely based on popular illusions in what the Communist Parties would do once in power), they rapidly set about crushing the working class as a political force (while claiming to defend it against the consumer interests of the intelligentsia; this is one aspect that distinguishes the East European regimes from the USSR). This was an essential condition of their coming to power and staying there. Are we to call this progressive? Are we to support these regimes during this phase of their history (witness Angola, where the MPLA crushed the left soon after arriving power; I do not, by the way, consider Angola a "state collectivist" regime, but I believe supporters of that theory do)? Obviously not. We can understand the dynamic that has made this situation the universal outcome of every post-capitalist revolution without accepting it as historically preferable or even inevitable (what role, for instance, does the fact that Stalinist parties generally lead anti-imperialist movements have in causing them to evolve in a similar direction?).

The state collectivism pamphlet is more forthright on this point. We defend the working class as the only class that can initiate a genuine transition to socialism, which means we defend the working class against a state collectivist regime at any phase of that regime's history! This section of Campbell's document should be redrafted if we are to submit this as our contribution to the Coordination meeting.

A final point on this issue: If a condition of the establishment of state collectivist regimes has been their need to suppress both plan and market, and if this in turn has been a source of their enormous instability (as the state collectivism pamphlet itself says on p. 15), is it correct to view these regimes as a mode of production? The pamphlet seems to me to raise this very point when it says that after the end of the progressive stage of state collectivism "there are only two mechanisms flexible enough for running the system; either a capitalist market or a workers' democracy in which the mass of the direct producers are intimately involved in all aspects of the plan". If these are the only alternatives, where does that leave state collectivism?

4. What Political Conclusions Do We Draw From This Theory?

The above quotation seems to me to raise another, more fundamental point about the state collectivism theory as presented by the pamphlet and cde. Campbell. Namely, what are the fundamental contradictions of this system and how can they be overcome? Comrades Machover and Fantham accept that state collectivism is a highly contradictory system, without really identifying the nature of these contradictions. However, because they correctly root the source of these regimes' instability in the working class's role within production, it is more or less clear in their exposition that such systems - like capitalism - pose society with the need to define radical needs that the systems themselves cannot satisfy. Here, too, there must emerge

a class capable of acting as the universal class, that is, a class which in the course of its struggles comes to pose radical solutions on behalf of society at large. In Soviet-type societies, as under capitalism, that class (at least at this point in history) can only be the proletariat.

We cannot present a theory of Soviet-type societies without defining what political stance we take towards them. The point of having such a theory is, after all, so that we can understand how to overthrow them. In the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, China, and similar societies this is a pressing question. At least in the USSR and Eastern Europe these regimes are at a point of severe crisis where discontent is virtually universal, and the regimes are incapable of satisfying the grievances of any sector. This explains the new hardening-up within the Soviet Union since last summer (see below).

The hallmark of these regimes is that both the intelligentsia and the working class find themselves in opposition and fighting for certain limited common objectives: e.g., freedom of speech, freedom to organize and assemble. Until now the working class has generally failed to distinguish itself from the liberal intelligentsia except negatively, i.e., by distrusting them and showing contempt for their struggles. To the extent that the working class has become more political, however, it has failed to distinguish itself positively from the intelligentsia and to define the tasks that it has to accomplish in order to achieve socialism. The result has been a political confusion, where sections of the left, both in Eastern Europe and in the West (most notably the Fourth International) have failed to identify the fundamental antagonism that exists between the aspirations and necessary actions of the working class and the interests of the intelligentsia, Communist Party reformers, etc.

In presenting any document to the public we must state what we think the means of struggling against these regimes are; specifically we need to be clear (a) about the antagonistic roles of the working class and the intelligentsia, and (b) that we do not see the struggle against these regimes as in any way limited to a fight for "human rights". I suspect the syndicalism of some of the other formations in the Coordination may produce political agreement between us on this point. I doubt any of them have the two-stage theory of the Fourth International, namely that first there is a struggle for democratic rights (in which we defend all opponents of these regimes) and then follows the struggle for socialism. Critique actually has a worked-out position on this question which I think should be Big Flame's position as well. There should be a separate discussion with documentation. Comrade McKenzie was correct at the last conference that we need to have a worked-out position on the struggle within Eastern Europe, and we should set the International Commission the task of producing a position for discussion and voting at the NC.

5. Some Factual Errors in Comrade Campbell's Document

Finally, on page 9 of cde. Campbell's document, in his discussion of the formation of the Soviet ruling class, there are some important errors of fact.

First, he is wrong to separate the "ruling class" (what I would call the elite) from the managers and technical intelligentsia. Despite the fluidity of the personnel in these groups during the thirties, they nevertheless provided the social base for the regime. More important, the distinction between them and the Party leadership probably no longer exists: most of the leadership are engineers, ex-factory managers, etc. The conflict that often arises between managers and the centre is real, but arises out of the structural constraints placed on each. A manager who circumvents the plan, seeks greater freedom of manoeuvre in his factory, etc., can take quite an opposite view if and when he progresses through the ranks of the Party.

Second, the reforms of the 1960's were very limited. All major criteria, e.g., prices, wages, supply, and output, continued to be designated by the centre.

Third, the reforms failed and have now been decisively abandoned in favor of a return to more rigid control from the centre. Managers ostensibly will no longer have a choice of their product mix (they used to be able to concentrate on the goods that were most "profitable" or easiest to over-fulfil), but will have specified for them their inputs and outputs. At the same time a decree of early January has attempted to crack down on what the regime considers poor labour discipline, by tying certain financial and pension benefits to a worker's length of service at the enterprise and his or her good conduct while at work. There has not been a decree like this since 1938.

It cannot, therefore, be argued that the reforms "have tended to reinforce state collectivism". They did not change that much; if they did, it was in the direction of reinforcing the instability and contradictions within the economy. However, the attempt to return to hyper-centralization will fail just as miserably. The alternative remains either plan or market. To the extent that the regime has decided to retrench against both, we can expect the system to become even more unstable.

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Postscript

Following a discussion of these Notes at the International Commission I should like to make one addition and one clarification.

The addition concerns the state collectivism pamphlet's argument against the various state capitalist theories of the Soviet Union. Although their case is correct, insofar as they show that commodity production does not exist in the USSR except in the most peripheral areas of production, they need to take the analysis back one further step, to the nature of labour and the difference between abstract and concrete labour.

Commodity production presupposes a market and the existence of exchange value. Value is the social abstraction which equates the concrete labours of different, independent producers, whose products in their use form are otherwise unequatable. If exchange is to take place, their concrete labours must be reduced to some common element. This common element is value, which is totally indifferent to the concrete nature of the labour performed. To show that commodity production or even a market exist in the Soviet Union, it is therefore necessary to show that abstract labour exists. This cannot be done. In the USSR, one has only concrete labour. Everyone works at her or his own pace, at her or his own quality, turning out different quantities of product in the same time. This is true of individual workers, as it is true of individual shops within enterprises and of individual enterprises with respect to one another. The result is that all calculation and predictability is impossible. No one can know what the "average" worker or the "average" enterprise will produce because of the chaotic nature of interconnections between elements of the system and because of the extreme individualization of the work process. The introduction of conditions of production that would permit the evolution of abstract labour would require a radical change in the Soviet elite's relationship to the working class; i.e., it would have to achieve complete mobility of labour, something it has heretofore been unable to do for political reasons.

The clarification concerns my discussion on page 5 of these Notes, where I say that it is possible to support national liberation and anti-imperialist movements while they are struggling against imperialism and at the same time

lend our efforts and support to the overthrow of the regimes these movements set up after coming to power.

First, I see no contradiction in accepting that left-wing nationalists such as the Mugabe movement in Zimbabwe, can inflict a defeat on imperialism (which makes the terms of struggle easier for the left on a world scale) and yet at the same time will not create the conditions for socialism once in power. To the contrary, it seems to me that a precondition of any "state collectivist" regime is that it crushes the working class and the left who will challenge it precisely over the issue of moving towards socialism. This does not happen in stages; it is a conflict that exists before these movement even come to power. In this conflict we have no choice but to support the left.

Secondly, we have to treat the issue in its international dimension. After the overthrow of capitalism the transition to socialism must be a self-conscious act. Especially in societies still plagued by scarcity (such as post-revolutionary Russia, China, and virtually everywhere else that capitalism has fallen), it is impossible to expect that those managing the society and its economic and political development will willingly take steps to eradicate the source of their privileges. In other words, they will not allow for proletarian democracy, they will not try to undermine the division of labour, they will not make really genuine culture and education the mass property of all, because this would mean giving up their power to the working class as that class became able to manage society on its own. This will be a problem even after revolutions in advanced countries, but at least there we have reason to expect the working class to be powerful enough to defend itself and the needs of society from usurpation.

One can only argue that backward, post-capitalist countries lack the pre-conditions for socialism in a conditional sense. They are "doomed" only if their revolutions remain isolated. Hence the importance of taking an unequivocal stand on the issue of socialism in one country. Unless the Western proletariat comes to the aid of the left and the working class in "state collectivist" (or developing "state collectivist") societies there will almost certainly develop a privileged bureaucracy which will crush the left and suppress the workers. Such has been the history of post-capitalist revolutions up to now, and I see no reason to call this in any way "progressive".

THE FAILURE OF SO-CALLED SOCIALISM - and THE IMPLICATIONS FOR OUR THEORY & PRACTICE

It is essential that we realise that today for the vast majority of working class people in capitalist countries, socialism is not an inspiring vision. Most of us on the revolutionary left are able to explain away for ourselves the problems of so-called socialist regimes and retain the belief in a socialist and ultimately communist vision as laid down in the writings of the founders of the communist movement. Not surprisingly, we are in a hurry to dismiss the threat so-called socialist societies pose to our ideas by making the (correct) point that these societies are not socialist - not even moving towards socialism. But, even if it is true that the bourgeois media make what happens in so-called socialist societies seem even worse than it in fact is, we cannot get away with arguing that calling these regimes socialist is purely a dirty trick of the West. After all, these regimes call themselves socialist and adopt 'Marxism-Leninism' as their official ideology. And events like the 'Boat People' and the war between Vietnam and Cambodia affect popular consciousness. So, Western ideologues of anti-communism like the 'new philosophers' in France are able to give a certain plausibility to their claim of a historical continuity existing between Marxism, totalitarianism (the Gulag) and so-called socialist societies.

Internal and External Factors

Faced with this situation, revolutionaries in the West have stressed that so-called socialist societies bear no relation to real socialism. And we argue that countries like the Soviet Union were diverted from the building of socialism because of external constraints - for instance, the Civil War from 1917-21, the failure of the revolution in Western Europe. Indeed, these external factors are important, but there also existed internal factors that determined the failure to build socialism in the USSR (or at the very least move towards it). And, we must analyse these internal factors and develop a critique of them if we are to rebuild confidence in the desirability of socialism. In the 1920's and the 1930's, many working class vanguards in the West identified with the Soviet Union. In the 1960s and 1970s, it was with China. Today, they are just as aware of the pervasive rottenness of capitalism but no longer see the possibility of an alternative. So, to provide them with such an alternative is a matter of great urgency.

The Dictatorship of the Proletariat

A fundamental internal factor lies in the contradictory nature of the period after the revolution - the period that has been described by Marx onwards as the dictatorship of the proletariat. The key problem is that whereas the dictatorship of the proletariat is seen as a transitional state that 'wither away' - the steps taken during it (to strengthen working class rule) make this process of 'withering away' more and more unlikely.

At a political level, the centralisation of power into one party that is both ruling party and state apparatus works against a destruction of the state that is seen by Marxists as an essential characteristic of communism. And the turbulent nature of the relationship between the state/party and the organs of popular power (e.g. the Soviets in the USSR, Poder Popular in Angola etc) reflects a conflict between state priorities at a national level and the autonomy of local decision making.

At the economic level, the centralisation of economic decision making in the state plan works against the economic decentralisation that is essential for effective workers' control. This fundamental contradiction was clear in the 1920-1 debate on the trade unions in the USSR in which the main protagonists were Lenin, Trotsky and the Workers Opposition. The Workers Opposition argued for workers' control of production at plant level. Against this, Lenin counterposed the need for a perspective which started from the interests of the class/nation as a whole - which managers of industry appointed by the state to carry out the economic plan were said

to represent.* Though Lenin (unlike Trotsky who argued the most extreme position of the 'militarisation of labour') did concede that in the prevailing situation in the Soviet Union, the interests of the state did not totally coincide with the interests of individual groups of workers and that therefore trade unions were still necessary to workers as defensive bodies.

The Banning of Dissent

There can be no once and for all correct solution to these extremely difficult problems. They can only be resolved where political debate and discussion flourishes - and this is not the case in a one-party state. In fact, after 1917, the Bolsheviks began by allowing other political parties (and factions inside their party) but they were quick to use the Civil War as a pretext for the silencing of political opposition and debate. At his speech to the Tenth party congress in March 1921, Lenin told the Workers Opposition;

'You have come to the Party Congress with Comrade Kollontai's pamphlet which is entitled The Workers Opposition. When you sent in the final proofs, you knew about the Kronstadt events and the rising petty-bourgeois counter-revolution. You don't seem to realise the responsibility you are undertaking, and the way you are disrupting our unity.' At that congress, the Bolsheviks banned the Workers Opposition and all future factions. And this decision was to have severe consequences for political debate and opposition in the Soviet Union and in all societies that took it for a model. Obviously, you can't separate banning factions and banning other parties. As Deutscher puts it in the Prophet Armed; 'They did not realise that they could not ban all controversies outside their ranks and keep it alive within their ranks; they could not abolish democratic rights for society at large and preserve those rights for themselves alone.'**

Withering Away of the State

Underlying this under-estimation of the necessity for political discussion and debate in the transition to socialism is the notion held by Marx, Lenin, Engels etc of the 'withering away of the state'. For according to the theory, as the state 'wither away' so does the need and rationale for political differences (that are articulated by political parties). A contemporary version of this argument is put forward by Bertell Ollman in an article in Critique (issue 8) - he writes; 'We should not be surprised to learn that in these conditions (of communism) there is no place for a state. Simply put, the state withers away because there is nothing further for it to do. The main work of the dictatorship of the proletariat was to destroy all remnants of capitalism and to construct the foundations for full communism. Laws, organisation, discipline, coercion etc, were all necessary to accomplish these ends. But now communism is the reality, and capitalism is history. Marx says, "When, in the course of development, class distinctions have disappeared, and all production has been concentrated in the hands of associated individuals, the public power will lose its political character. Political power, properly so called, is merely the organised power of one class for oppressing another.".....The people of communism are agreed on all subjects which could possibly come before a parliament. When interests merge and decisions are unanimous, it is no necessary to go through the

*It is quite clear that the relationship between local and national interests continues to be a key problem for so-called socialist societies. For instance, in China, there is the problem of the different yields of the different agricultural communes. Should the communes with the richer earth be allowed to keep all their produce and distribute it to their members (who would then have a higher standard of living than workers in poorer communes) or should the state take some of their produce and redistribute it to those communes whose land is less fertile?

** See also section 2 of the Big Flame pamphlet The Revolution Unfinished

formality of counting hands. Furthermore all really major decisions, those bearing on the structure of communism itself, have already been taken by this time, People have what they want, that is communism, and there is nothing for a legislature, whose main function is to make changes, to change.....'

For some totally unexplained reason, it seems that in the transition to communism, everybody is agreed on all major issues! Myths must be very strong to enable someone to write so glibly - given the events in so-called socialist countries over the last 60 years. That Ollman (and others) can be so absurdly optimistic comes from the Marxist belief that politics is essentially about classes and since under communism there are not classes, it follows that there is no politics. But even if we accept that under communism everyone is of the same class, why should that imply the disappearance of fundamental political differences? For example, differences about how to best use scarce resources, of how to punish wrong-doers, of what policies to have in trade with other countries etc. Under capitalism, the bourgeoisie is represented by a plurality - why should not this be the case for the working class under communism? Historically, this idea that the proletariat can have only one voice has been used systematically to stifle any political opposition to the dominant party in so-called socialist societies. Maybe, in time, the miracle will happen and all political differences will under communism disappear but this is not something that can be forced. On the contrary, political discussion and debate should be encouraged and the structures that promote it institutionalised.

After the overthrow of capitalism, the state does not wither away. For even if the long-term aim of the revolutionary leadership is to run down the state apparatus, what happens in the short term is that the state/party expands into all aspects of everyday life at the expense of civil society. Since many of the problems discussed above are associated with the concept of the 'dictatorship of the proletariat', in the next section, I want to look briefly at the arguments of those Marxists who are critical of the term and would prefer to do without the ideas that lie behind it.

NO CHINESE WALL

Within Marxism, there is a tradition (that of Second Internationalism from Kautsky onwards) which is very antagonistic to the dictatorship of the proletariat - their solution has been to argue that proletarian democracy is simply a quantitative extension of bourgeois democracy - a transition that need not include the smashing of the bourgeois state. Today, this position is argued for by Euro-Communists, left social-democrats and 'third-roaders' like Geoff Hodgson. Hodgson's interesting book Socialism and Parliamentary Democracy is an argument in favour of 13 propositions - four of which are;

- Socialists should not aim at a destruction of parliament nor at a smashing of parliamentary institutions.
- A national congress of delegates from soviet-type bodies should not be the supreme decision-making body in a socialist regime in Britain, even if soviets and a congress of soviet representatives are desirable. (By a soviet, Hodgson means, of course, a council of worker representatives elected from workplaces in a particular district).
- The supreme decision-making body in a socialist regime in Britain should be some sort of parliament, based, essentially, on universal adult suffrage.
- All socialists, Marxist or otherwise, do not aid the cause of socialism in Britain by continuing to use the term 'dictatorship of the proletariat' whatever the users of that term may take it to mean.*

*It's not at all clear whether it is the term that Hodgson is objecting to or the concept behind it - from my reading of the book, I suspect that it's the latter. True to Second Internationalism, Hodgson also believes that there may be a special 'British' way to socialism. He quotes Marx's remark that to smash the bureaucratic-military machine 'is the pre-condition for every real people's revolution on the Continent' to suggest that Marx did not mean this generalisation to apply to Britain!

Hodgson's argument that 'there is no Chinese wall between bourgeois and proletarian democracy' rests on a fundamental misunderstanding about the nature of rights in a bourgeois democracy. Hodgson begins his argument with the correct perception that rights in a bourgeois democracy (e.g. freedom of speech, freedom to organise collectively, the right to hold meetings etc) are an important gain for the working class and certainly not something to be abandoned in a post-revolutionary situation. At the same time, we must not forget the limited nature of these freedoms. There is freedom of the press but you need to have a lot of capital to make use of it. In Britain, most publications of the revolutionary (and reformist) left have a hard time getting distribution. And if one of our papers began to have a mass sales - you can be sure that obstacles would be put in its way (e.g. the law of libel). In a situation of social unrest, when the left and the far left can expect to find an ever-increasing hearing: there is little doubt that ways will be found (e.g. the declaration of a state of emergency) of making inoperative the freedom of the press and the other freedoms of bourgeois democracy. A current example of this process of restriction can be seen in the North of Ireland where the right of a trial by jury has been suspended and replaced by the notorious Diplock courts which make a mockery of any notion of bourgeois justice. To argue that freedoms and rights are limited within bourgeois democracy is not the same as to say (as the ultra-left does) that they are a sham and not worth defending. On the contrary, they are worth defending because they are intrinsically worthwhile and also because they provide the socialist movement with space to be active in. But in defending these freedoms, we must not forget (as Euro-communists and left social-democrats do) that ruling class rule in a bourgeois democracy is a mixture of consent and coercion; in an attempt to distance themselves from the revolutionary left, they seem to only be aware of the consent side of the mixture.*

SOCIALISM AS STATE PLANNING

For writers like Hodgson, the transition to socialism centers around political and economic centralisation. At an economic level, left social democracy and euro-communism argue that the transition to socialism involves more and more state intervention in the economy. In Socialism and Parliamentary Democracy, Hodgson writes;

'It is in recent years that the beginnings of this 'unlocking' (of the power structure) strategy have emerged within the Labour Party, with the proposals of Planning Agreements and a National Enterprise Board'. ** Behind Hodgson's analysis is that what we have in 'advanced' capitalist countries today is a social formation containing elements from both the capitalist and the socialist mode of production. The socialist elements are things like state intervention in the economy, the nationalised industries and institutions like the National Health Service (NHS). And their strategy for the transition to socialism is to fight for more state planning and more democracy in these institutions until the capitalist elements in the mode of production are in such a minority as to be insignificant. Such a strategy is gradual and explains why they see proletarian democracy as a quantitative extension of bourgeois

*It can be pointed out that the freedom of the press in a post-revolutionary situation will be a qualitative extension. It will mean newspapers and television to which everyone has access. With the development of systems like ~~television~~ cable television - the potential for mass involvement is there.

**Not that the Labour government ever did anything to unlock the power structure.

democracy.

This 'socialism as state planning' perspective is incorrect in that;

- firstly, it misunderstands the role of the state sector in a 'mixed' capitalist economy. Whilst it may be true that institutions like the NHS are in some ways a working class victory, they are not a political threat to ruling class hegemony. And when capital decides (as in the current recession) that expenses on the NHS must be cut back, this gets done - even if it is the 'party of the working class' (Labour) that controls the government. It is quite true that under monopoly capitalism there is an ever increasing state sector of the economy but this must be seen as a collective charge on capital and not as some autonomous force for socialism. Nor is it the case that there are the seeds of socialism within the state sector of the economy. For example, in the National Coal Board (NCB), relations between workers and management are on traditional capitalist lines and the NCB is run with all the features you would expect of a capitalist enterprise (e.g. redundancies, speed-ups, increased productivity etc.) In the health service, nationalisation has not affected the hierarchical relations that exist between doctors, domestics, nurses and patients - nor has it led to a greater emphasis on preventative as opposed to curative medicine. And there remain very great differences between the health services of non-capitalist countries like Cuba and China* and those of countries like Britain which remain dominated by the capitalist concept of health.

- secondly, left social-democracy and Euro-communism have at their very centres a conception of socialism as government by the state for the people which is very far from the vision of Marx in his libertarian writings (e.g. on the Paris Commune) and of Lenin in State and Revolution - though it is fair comment to say that post-revolutionary USSR did not realise this vision in practice. The left social-democratic model of socialism as state planning has its roots in Fabian paternalism and allows no place in the building of socialism on the self-activity of working people - which is central to our idea of the transition. And, at the economic level, it bears a not accidental resemblance to the centrally planned economies of state collectivist societies.

The Crisis of Socialism

As I argued at the beginning, there is no longer a widespread belief amongst militants that socialism is the solution to our problems. Events over the last 60 years, have made it the case the desirability of socialism is something that has to be argued for - it cannot be taken for granted. So, we can no longer hold a stageist model of revolution whereby first there is the seizure of power and it is only after this seizure that we can begin to talk about what life will be like under socialism, what social relations will be like etc. To respond to the ideological crisis of socialism, we must begin to discuss in considerable detail what socialist society will be like and in what ways it will be different from life under capitalism. This is already being done at a sectoral level (i.e. in discussions on what a socialist health service would be like) and it must be extended to cover all the institutions of society.

We can begin the discussion by remembering that;

- in the 'advanced' capitalist countries that we live in, the forces of production are much more developed than in those societies where

*See the article by Sheila Hillier in Revolutionary Socialism(4)

capitalism has already been overthrown. Even if it is not impossible to introduce socialism in a general situation of scarcity - it is much more difficult. Today in capitalist countries, there is little doubt that the relations of production are holding back the forces of production. For example, there is the need to build thousands of new houses, there are thousands of unemployed building workers ready to do the job - but because production is regulated by the market (and not need), the houses are not built.

- socialism was seen by early Marxists as a transitional stage on the way to communism. The problem is that socialism is a contradictory stage - in that the more measures that have to be taken to protect socialism, the more difficult is the transition to communism.

- It is also the case that much that is central to our struggle against capitalism will still be very necessary after the revolution - for instance, the self-activity of the masses and the autonomy of the social movements. We do not support the self-activity of the masses because we see it as a useful tactic against the capitalist regime. We support it because it is fundamental to our conception of communism - a society where people exercise total control over all aspects of their lives. We are not making the revolution for power to be handed from one elite to another. For people to exercise control, a society's, political, economic, cultural and social organisation must be both decentralised and linked at a national level. And institutions that exercise this control must be developed at local, regional and national/state level. For instance, in China the failure to extend mass democracy beyond the local level of the commune led to a failure to institutionalise democracy in the post 1948 period. As a consequence it was impossible to make permanent the gains of the cultural revolution and prevent the triumph of revisionism in the period after the death of Mao. The same goes for the autonomy of social movements. Our support for women to organise autonomously is not tactical, it is absolute. And this means that we recognise that women will want to organise autonomously after the seizure of power - and the same goes for the other social movements. We recognise the right of social movements to organise autonomously for as long as they think fit.

- We must recognise the tremendous limitations of the one-party/state model. It represents the limitation of political debate and disagreement which can only be an obstacle to the building of socialism. We should see the existence of a plurality of parties after the revolution as a precondition for the nurturing of political life. At the same time, it is vital to decentralise as much as possible political and economic decision-making and to build from the base up a net-work of local, regional and national councils (soviets) that are the building blocks of proletarian democracy.

There is a part of the Marxist tradition that thinks that we should be silent about what will happen in a post-revolutionary situation. This silence has allowed right-wing forces to monopolise the debate about what socialism is. The argument in this paper is that unless we challenge the right-wing and provide our own detailed and concrete model of socialism, our chances of mobilising mass involvement in the struggle for socialism will be slight.

- Pete Anderson (Birmingham BF)

THE ATTITUDE OF WESTERN REVOLUTIONARIES TOWARDS SOLIDARITY WORK ON EASTERN EUROPE - by V. Graham

The Basic Issues

The main argument I wish to make is that revolutionaries should avoid basing solidarity work around any campaigns for so-called human or democratic rights. Instead, they should clearly define their work in terms of tasks and goals: The basic goal in Eastern Europe is the creation of socialism, which poses socialists the world over with certain tasks they need to accomplish in order to make socialism a reality. This is the only way for the left to avoid alliances with liberals and anti-socialists over the fight for human rights in which the left sacrifices its independent goals for the sake of unity.

This is not to underplay the importance of winning democratic freedoms in Eastern Europe. Our side, the working class, will never challenge either the regimes in these countries or the intelligentsia for power unless it wins them. Nor am I arguing that the left and the working class should never form alliances with people from other social groups over the fight for such freedoms. I am arguing that when doing so the left must organize independently, with its own programmatic objectives.

It follows from this that socialists in the West should defend, or carry out solidarity work in defense of, Soviet and East European workers and socialists, and not of non-socialists except in very specific cases: namely, where non-socialists are clearly fighting alongside working class and socialist forces over specific issues.

Finally, a basic goal of solidarity work around Eastern Europe must be to combat anti-communism among the Western working class. This can only be done if we actively challenge the pretensions of the Soviet Union, the East European countries, China, etc., to be "socialist". We have to show that they are the very antithesis of socialism. Pointing to genuine working class and socialist oppositions to these regimes will make this task that much easier. We must also identify socialism with democracy: genuine democracy is only possible under socialism, a lesson the human rights movement has yet to learn.

The Nature of Class Conflict in Eastern Europe

In the USSR and Eastern Europe the history of brutal repression has alienated virtually the whole of their populations from the regimes. Because this has taken place in the absence of any genuinely independent workers' movement, the complexity of class conflicts in these societies tends to be obscured.

In Eastern Europe, as under capitalism, the working class is the only class capable of putting an end to "non-socialist" society and establishing socialism as a system that can satisfy the needs of the mass of the population. As such it is the only class that will, historically speaking, set the creation of socialism as its ultimate goal.

In this sense the working class has fairly little in common with other social groups that also form part of the opposition movement. In the case of the intelligentsia - both the academic intelligentsia and the technical intelligentsia - their political ideas are greatly influenced by Western liberalism and market philosophies. Their immediate personal interests are very close to the interests of the ruling elite; they just want a more efficient, more humane, and more predictable system of allocating privileges. In short, they want an end to bureaucracy, increased production of consumer goods, a meritocracy-based system of personal advancement, and relative freedom to advance their views. They do not want socialism. They are contemptuous of the working class and conceive of reform as a vehicle for rationalizing the inefficiency of these societies and for assuring themselves a privileged position as the managers of production and distribution.

This does not apply, of course, to all members of the intelligentsia. I am speaking of the intelligentsia as a group. Individuals will, of course, lie to the left and will take an active part in the fight for socialism.

The same applies to various reform groupings inside the different Communist Parties, such as those who initiated the Hungarian resistance in 1956 or the Dubcek movement in Czechoslovakia in 1968. Although many of them call themselves socialists, we should be clear that what they most often mean by socialism has little in common with a vision of socialism that sees the working class organizing society as an autonomous social force. The reformist socialists of Eastern Europe rarely, if ever, question the dominant position of the Communist Parties, nor their own dominant position as the potential heads of these parties should their reforms ever be successful. Reform for them means a more humane distribution of power and means of consumption with greater "rights" for the workers. But the reformers still see themselves as a body of "rational", knowledge-bearing technicians at the top of the system. Their socialism does not include workers' self-management of production and society.

The position of the working class is no less complex. Because it has been deprived of access to genuinely marxist and revolutionary ideas, because it has tended to associate "Marxism" with the official ideology of the East European regimes, and because of the very real repression and atomisation that makes organization risky and difficult, the working class finds itself in a situation where it has not yet defined itself as a distinct class, with distinct historical goals different from those of the intelligentsia or other liberal reformers. Thus the most progressive ideas will often coexist with beliefs more appropriate to the political aims of other classes. For example, leftists in Eastern Europe often still believe in the efficacy of appeals to Western bourgeois politicians. In countries like Poland and Hungary the workers will continue to show strong nationalist sentiments, many of which are by no means progressive (and often anti-semitic).

In short, the class struggle in Eastern Europe is just now in a process of crystallization. The left, including small numbers of workers, find themselves working alongside members of other social groups around the issues of basic freedoms. They have not yet seen the need to go beyond this standpoint and to define further goals that would show up the basic antagonism between themselves and the non-socialists. On the other hand, the situation is volatile and subject to rapid changes. There soon grew up a left wing inside the Charter 77 movement in Czechoslovakia, which wanted to go beyond a basic fight for human rights. The workers' explosions in Poland in 1956, 1970, and 1976, and the workers' uprising in Hungary in 1956 have shown that the working class is capable of its own independent action with a high degree of spontaneous organization. Even in the USSR there is a left, which we rarely hear about because it is so swiftly repressed. However, with the deepening economic crisis in the West, sections of the Soviet intelligentsia that used to be openly hostile or indifferent towards marxism are now having a second look.

With the class struggle at such a fluid and embryonic stage, socialists in the West should be doing what they can to bring an end to these confusions and to stimulate the emergence of an independent, class conscious working class movement. We are part of an international movement: what we say and do here in the West has an effect on those struggling in Eastern Europe. If we fail to declare our unambiguous support for the working class and for the left in Eastern Europe, and if we fail to point out that there is a basic antagonism between the goals of the left and the goals of the non-socialist forces, we will only help perpetuate this state of political confusion.

As I shall explain below, the results could be disastrous.

Proletarian vs Democratic Rights

Among Western socialists, especially among the Fourth International, there has been a tendency to see the struggle in Eastern Europe in terms of stages: first we fight for basic democratic rights and then we fight for socialism. The

accomplish for socialism to succeed.

In the short term we recognize that the working class and other social groups will share certain limited, temporary objectives: freedom of speech, the right to organize, freedom of the press, freedom of assembly, freedom of personal conviction, and the like. To achieve these common objectives they will fight alongside one another. However, throughout this process the working class needs still to be conscious of its own independent objectives and of the fact that its alliance with non-socialist forces will be short-lived.

Socialists in the West organizing solidarity work solidarize with those forces who support the working class in its objectives. That is, we defend those non-socialists - such as the left-Catholics and intellectuals in Poland who helped form the Workers' Defence Committee following the arrest of striking workers in 1976 - who support the working class's aims and help the working class to achieve them. We defend them so long as they continue to fight alongside our own forces. However, that defence is conditional. Because it is based on the tasks we must accomplish to win socialism, as soon as non-socialist forces break with the working class, as soon as they cease supporting the workers' demands say, for example, for the right to strike or the right to organize independent workers' organizations, or as soon as they start to organize in opposition to the working class, we no longer defend them.

We of course point out to our own population that we do not recognize the right of the Stalinist regimes to repress anybody. We explain why they have to resort to repression in order to stay in power. And most important, we explain that this has nothing to do with socialism, and that in fact these regimes are repressing the real socialists. But we can do this without coming to the active defence of people who would slit our throats if they ever came to power.

This approach is fairly clear-cut when dealing with the human rights movement or the various nationalist movements inside the USSR and Eastern Europe. A more difficult problem, it seems to me, is where groups which cut across class lines, such as women, begin to organize around issues which the working class ought to be taking up but has not yet understood the need to. In Hungary, for instance, in 1973 a group of women from the intelligentsia organized a petition campaign to try and block attempts to restrict the right to abortion. Obviously, Western socialists should defend such campaigns (which in the Hungarian case was made easier by the fact that the women were not right wing and framed their campaign in terms of the needs of working class and peasant women, not those in the intelligentsia).

I am not at all convinced that revolutionaries should take the same attitude towards the collective of women in Leningrad whose existence has just come to light. Although these women have taken a positive step in organizing around the problems that they face in Soviet society because they are women, their politics appear very much to reflect the antagonism that Soviet intelligentsia feels towards the working class. The dominant current seems to be right-wing or apolitical (many have a long history in the religious movement), and many of the articles are openly contemptuous of working class women. I think that Western revolutionaries should take a cautious attitude towards such groups. They should defend their right to organize, but at the same time point out the potential conflict between these women and women of the working class. Fifty per cent of the Soviet working class is female; working class women are subject to extreme exploitation and social discrimination, both through their position within production and their domestic situation. It is clear that any moves towards getting these women to organize around their grievances and needs would be an enormous step. But I doubt that the Leningrad group - or any group based on similar politics - can assist this process, and it is the duty of Western socialists to point this fact out.

Organizing East European Solidarity

At present in Britain, the approach I have outlined here might make it more difficult to organize an East European solidarity movement. However, the IMG has tried to organize such a movement on the opposite basis and has failed. Its East European Solidarity Campaign is just a shell, which has certain contacts to Labour Party big wigs and a few trade union officials, but has singularly failed to organize a single impressive event. I believe this is largely due to its equivocation over democratic rights and its failure to give unambiguous support to the left and the working class.

First, there are many left-liberals who would lend their name to appeals and campaigns which defended the workers and the left. They might wish we had a broader basis to our campaign, but they would not sanction the repression of workers and socialists in Eastern Europe. We need not water down our politics to attract them. We will lose some of these people, but we will gain many as well.

Second, there is no getting around the need to confront the Communist Party over the issue of the "socialism" of the USSR and Eastern Europe. Many Eurocommunists and others in the CP have attacked the limitations on human rights in these societies, but often selectively. For instance, they defend the Charter 77 in Czechoslovakia, but call the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 a "counter-revolution". This is not true of all of them, to be fair. But we must force them to take a stand. How can they, as Communist Party members, oppose the oppression of the workers in Poland, Czechoslovakia, the USSR, etc., and still call these countries socialist? Conversely, how can they claim to defend socialism, and sanction the repression of workers and socialists in Eastern Europe (as many did over Poland in 1976)?

Third, we must take an unequivocal stand in favour of socialism. No other way can we use East European solidarity work to undermine anti-Communism, both in the West and in the USSR and similar countries. This means challenging the claims of these regimes to be socialist - which we can do only by defending those oppositionists, no matter how few in number, who really are socialists of one shade or another (we must remember that the whole issue of socialism is very confused in the USSR and Eastern Europe; we need to be flexible, using the kind of approach outlined in the previous section). This also means that in our propaganda we have to insist on the identity between socialism and democracy: real democracy is only possible under socialism. The pretensions of Western bourgeois politicians to defend human rights are hypocritical, just as hypocritical as the pretensions of the East European and similar regimes to being socialist.

I do not know if in Britain at the moment it would be possible to launch a viable solidarity movement based on the principles outlined here. I would doubt that we could in the absence of some major upsurge, such as the Polish strikes of 1976. At that time, Critique, Big Flame, and certain others tried to launch discussions among the left to form such a campaign, but these were pre-empted by the IMG's more liberally-oriented effort which effectively excluded people with a more militant line.

It is important to understand the differences between the two approaches, because the left cannot afford to squander another opportunity the way it squandered the opportunity provided by Poland. The IMG believed that by basing its campaign on broad civil rights it could build a "mass" trade union campaign to defend civic liberties. This was an illusion. Critique argued that any solidarity movement would necessarily be small, and so it was essential that it concentrate on priority political tasks: (1) combatting anti-communism through an educational bulletin that explained the anti-socialist nature of these regimes, and (2) directing the attention of our own working class towards the existence of working class and left-wing oppositions in Eastern Europe and explaining the need for our working class to defend them.

Until another opportunity comes to re-raise the issue of a solidarity

campaign we need to do the following in our work around Eastern Europe:

(1) We can and must strengthen the propaganda in our own publications about Eastern Europe.

(2) We should be prepared to give ad hoc support to various efforts around Eastern Europe, no matter who organizes them. This should be on a one-off basis. When the IMG's East European Campaign organizes certain rallies, demonstrations, or other efforts, we should lend at least limited support, even if the significance of these events and our own limited resources do not warrant making them priority mobilizations. We should send representatives to rallies and offer to provide speakers, where appropriate.

(3) Our members should begin to familiarize themselves better with events in the USSR and Eastern Europe. We can use the journal and the paper for this. Members should also attend conferences whenever they appear, especially the Critique conferences, which tend to be places where people can meet comrades of different interests and from different countries, and where we can both learn something and make valuable contacts. In terms of publications, members should take a regular look at the IMG's Labour Focus on Eastern Europe. This is not a good bulletin, because it has little political analysis of these regimes (the IMG is afraid this would scare off the CP and sections of the Labour Party) and because it is written in a very factual, stuffy style. But it does have documents and information on what is happening in Eastern Europe, much of which is not available elsewhere. From the point of view of gathering a deeper empirical knowledge, as well as theoretical insight into the nature of Soviet and East European society, there is no substitute for the journal Critique, which carries articles on the history of the USSR, the political economy of the Soviet Union and the East European countries, and surveys of events.

V. Graham
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March 1980

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Many of the ideas in this document grew out of collective discussions with comrades from the journal Critique. It would be fair to say that the position of that journal on the issue of East European solidarity work is very close to many of the positions I have put here. However, because these still represent my own opinions, and because Critique is only just now preparing a detailed statement on East European solidarity work for publication, Critique should not be held responsible for the ideas in this document. This is especially true of those sections which criticize the political practices of other organizations and of the section on the Leningrad women's group; these are my personal views, and not those of either Critique or Big Flame.