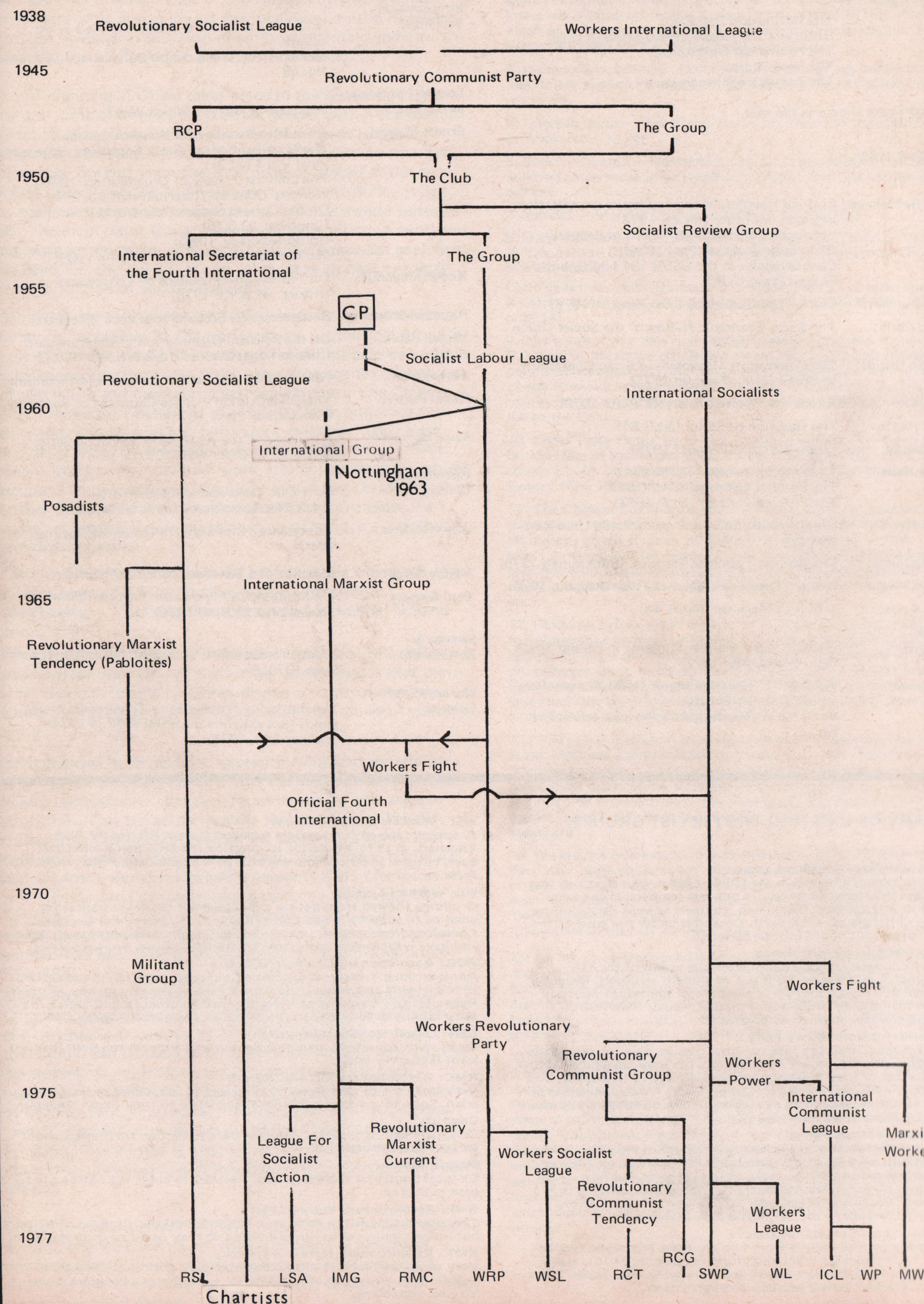


# TROTSKYISM IN BRITAIN



# THE REVOLUTION UNFINISHED?

## A CRITIQUE OF TROTSKYISM

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A BIG FLAME PAMPHLET

50p



## PREFACE

The politics of this pamphlet have grown largely from the theory and practice of the organisation Big Flame. For instance, at our 1976 conference we adopted a political position on the nature of Russia and China for the first time. Yet it opens up new areas not collectively discussed inside the organisation. It is for this reason that the pamphlet is signed individually. If there are inaccuracies or errors they are our responsibility. We have tried to avoid misinterpretation or distortion of Trotskyism or Trotskyist organisations. This pamphlet is a spirit of debate that we hope can lead to a long term process of unity. We would welcome comments and replies that could be published by Big Flame. Thanks to comrades Nick Davidson, Richard Lapper and others for help and work on this pamphlet of various kinds.

Paul Thompson and Guy Lewis  
April 1977

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## Introduction

The most important tendency on the revolutionary left in Britain today is Trotskyism (IMG, WRP etc) or 'semi-Trotskyism' (IS). They are important not primarily because of size, but because Trotskyist politics has for a long time defined the terms of debate among revolutionary socialists. Anarchism is irrelevant, Maoists largely absent and an independent Marxist tradition weak. So for those of us outside of or critical of the Trotskyist tradition, there has been a great need of an all-round critique [1] which did not suffer from political sectarianism and slander (the 'Solidarity' pamphlets [2], Mavrakis [3]).

That is the aim of this pamphlet, though in many ways our analysis is still inadequate and under-developed. We hope it will stimulate the kind of debate that helps towards the long-term process of unification of the revolutionary left that in some ways shares the historical experience and tradition of Marxism and Leninism.

We have had little to draw on and have had to come to terms with the fact that for many years the revolutionary left in Britain has been synonymous with Trotskyism, unlike many other European countries, notably Italy. The pamphlet does not concentrate on detailed criticisms of the theory and practice of various groupings. Where this is made, it is attempted to be integrated into a general analysis of the development of Trotskyist politics. We know there are differences between the various groups, and we try to explain some of them: but we also believe it is necessary to understand the general characteristics of Trotskyism. After all, even the IMG stated recently that the differences between the various groups was less than existed inside the Bolshevik Party.

If the Trotskyist organisations have weaknesses today they exist because of two factors. First, because of a failure to radically up-date Trotsky's analyses and theories; to understand the specificity of the development of those ideas in the

process and de-generation of the Russian revolution and how they were consolidated in the peculiar conditions of the 1930s with the creation of the Fourth International. The fact that we refer to 'up-dating' indicates that we are not totally hostile to the Trotskyist tradition. Trotsky was one of the world's greatest revolutionaries and many of his ideas played an important part in the unfolding of the revolutionary process. More importantly, Trotskyism during three long and difficult decades kept alive almost single-handedly and against tremendous odds many of the essential elements of revolutionary Marxism — concepts of proletarian internationalism, workers democracy and a struggle against bureaucracy in party and state — even if much of the politics became ossified in the political wilderness not of their own making.

Despite the strength and historical importance of Trotskyism, the second factor of weakness is more general and is located in Trotsky's methodological errors of political analysis. In his recent book Mavrakis points to three inter-connected methodological errors:—

1. "Principled dogmatism", a level of abstract generality of politics which seldom develops correctly because the concept of practice and political programmes does not allow for new understandings to filter back to theory.
2. Therefore a failure to analyse a conjuncture in its specificity.
3. An inability to distinguish between various levels of the contradictions between classes and social forces (economic, legal-political, ideological etc).

Lenin once criticised Trotsky by saying:—

"In all his theses he looks at the question from the angle of general principles." (Collected Works Vol 32)

The idea of 'from principles to reality' has a bad effect on the development of an understanding of new strategies and tactics; different phases and stages of struggle. It badly reduces the effectiveness of Trotsky's theories. For instance, Gramsci referred to the theory of permanent revolution as:— "Nothing but a generic forecast presented as a dogma and which demolishes itself by not coming true." (Prison Notebooks p. 241)

This static and unchanging concern to impose abstract principles on almost any situation has been both the strength and weakness of Trotskyism. Strength because it has meant consistency and continuity of analysis whose very certainty is attractive and which facilitates the kind of cadre-training that means that all over the world in innumerable meetings Trotskyist comrades will be getting up and giving the same line. Weakness because it has hampered the revolutionary left's ability to respond to new situations and because many arrogant 'interventions' in meetings have alienated thousands of people from the idea of revolutionary organisation of any type. It is this type of political method that generated one of the most bitter attacks on Trotskyism by Regis Debray. [4]

"One could say of Trotskyism, as of Abraham, that its separation from destiny is just what its highest destiny is. The worker-cum-peasant government and the proletariat are two abstract universals that can never change, which will inevitably dry up in the bitterness of accusation, because they can never link up with the actual fact of *this* socialist government, *this* proletariat, here and now.... Unfortunately a day will come when power is achieved, when the negative will come to mean something positive.... This content is a blot on the abstract and universal: it is a fact, a destiny, like the fact that a certain socialist state may not have enough natural resources of energy, may be thousands of miles away from its nearest friendly neighbour, may be involved by its past as a single-crop in foreign trade and so on.... By the fact that he (the Trotskyist) rejects every concrete embodiment of socialism from his theoretical circle of pure forms, he is actually expelling himself from the reality of history. The wheel always comes full circle: the Trotskyist is always right."

While there is a certain amount of exaggeration in the statement it is disturbing how little Trotskyism tends to learn, that actually changes the analysis. The International Marxist Group (IMG) in their pamphlet on 'Permanent Revolution' show the trap they are caught in:—

"We think that Trotskyism has much to learn from the Chinese, Cuban and Vietnamese revolutions just as it has from the unsuccessful revolutions of Spain 1936, France 1968, Bolivia 1971, etc. . . . The point, however, . . . is that it is the total theory that defines the parts. The contributions of Guevara and others are of great value *if re-defined in terms of Trotskyism*." (Our emphasis)

But what if these "contributions" actually change long-standing assumptions? Under the Trotskyist method they can only be re-defined to ignore unacceptable content. The most notable example of failure to learn something new was the reaction to the Cultural Revolution in China. For all its weaknesses, it was the first indication that the degeneration of revolutionary processes was not inevitable. Internationally, Trotskyism tended to dismiss these events as a "struggle within the bureaucracy". The ability to learn is hampered by the search for a politically linear history. The same IMG pamphlet says that the aim of Trotskyism is to:—

"... give an analysis of the inner-mechanism of entire process — from the causes of the Cuban, Chinese and Bolivian revolutions to the internal crises of the workers states, to the revolutionary events of May '68". [p.48]

Unfortunately, no single analysis is possible, precisely because there is no "inner-mechanism" that motivates such widely differing processes. Attempts to have an International dictating universal formulas to organisations in different countries has proved disastrous to the Trotskyist movement, reducing its effectiveness and adaptability in places like Portugal, where it has been marginalised.

The attempt to maintain doctrinal purity, rather than flexibly adapting to new conditions (always condemned as 'centrism' or 'populism') is at least partially responsible for the incredible history of faction-fighting that has dogged the Trotskyist movement. In Britain alone the number of new groups in the past couple of years has almost reached double figures. Unfortunately, for the left as a whole, this is more a product of the crisis of Trotskyism than the crisis of the capitalist system itself.

We now turn to an examination of the context and development of Trotsky's theories.

## NOTES

1. Independent critiques of Trotskyism are beginning to emerge. A recent example is Geoff Hodgson's "Trotsky and Fatalistic Marxism" (Spokesman pamphlet) but this concentrates on only a small, if important, area of Trotskyist politics.

2. There are numerous critiques of Trotskyism from the 'Libertarian' pens of the 'Solidarity' grouping. Aside from confusing Leninism with Trotskyism, the criticisms are too abstract and moralistic to be of any real use. They are also as sectarian as any 'Stalinist' hacks could produce.

3. The recent book "On Trotskyism" (RKP) by Kostas Mavrakis is a good example of an excellent, serious work marred by sectarianism and occasional slanders emanating at times from a semi-Stalinist position and tail-ending China.

4. From "Prison Writings" — Regis Debray (Penguin) — "An Ideological Digression on Trotskyism" . . . pages 138-141.

5. IMG Pamphlet — "Imperialism, Stalinism and Permanent Revolution." — John Robens.



# 2. Trotsky and the Degeneration of the Revolution

We begin this section by giving a brief account of Trotsky's role and attitudes during the degeneration of the revolution in the 1920's. It is impossible to explain Trotsky's theories without putting them into a developing historical context.

## THE BACKGROUND SITUATION

In 1921 the exhausting and destructive three year Civil War against the counter-revolution finally ended. But Bolshevik Russia was in a mess:—

"The material foundations of its existence were shattered. It will be enough to recall that by the end of the civil war Russia's national income amounted to only one third of her income in 1913, that industry produced one fifth of the goods produced before the war, that the coal mines turned out less than one tenth and the iron foundries one fortieth of their normal output, that the railways were destroyed, that all stocks and reserves on which any economy depends for its work were utterly exhausted, that the exchange of goods between town and country had come to a standstill, that Russia's cities and towns had become so depopulated that in 1921 Moscow had only one half and Petrograd one third of its former inhabitants, and that the people of the two capitals had for many months lived on a food ration of two ounces of bread and a few frozen potatoes and had heated their dwellings with the wood of their furniture — and we shall obtain some idea of the condition in which the nation found itself in the fourth year of revolution". (Deutscher — "The Prophet Armed".)

Famine and civil war had decimated the industrial working class, the vanguard of the revolution. The working class, its unions, clubs, co-operatives, the soviets were an empty shell. Even worse, the expected European revolution had not happened. After the wave of revolutionary struggles that swept Europe in the first couple of years after the war, the old regimes had stabilised to some extent. The failure of a pathetic attempt at a communist uprising in Germany set the seal on the isolation of the revolution in Russia for the time being. It was in these conditions that dreams of a vital working class democracy, outlined in Lenin's masterpiece *'State and Revolution'* was supposed to take root. Of course, there was no chance, instead everywhere the revolution was in retreat. The Bolsheviks had partially been thrust, and partially had assumed a position of absolute power. Their organic link with the proletarian vanguard was fast disappearing. In its place only the aspirations to preserve the revolution and act in the interests of a newly constructed working class, who would one day be in a position to resume the brief responsibility they once had in 1917-18 to direct the country's affairs through the soviets. But in these adverse conditions they felt forced to embark on what was a dangerous and ultimately self-defeating course.

They set up the CHEKA (Extraordinary Commission for Repression against counter-revolution, speculation and desertion) which acted on its own, controlled by bureaucrats not only against counter-revolutionaries but against genuine critical communist and Party cadres. Most of the other political parties had been suppressed; for good reason. The Mensheviks and Right Social Revolutionaries were openly

against the revolution and for a return of bourgeois power; the left Social Revolutionaries and anarchists (many of whose best activists had joined the Bolsheviks) didn't worry about stooping to terror and other tactics of utopian disorder. But the *necessary* repression of political opinion soon became the repression of *all* criticism; even within the party. As Deutscher said:—

"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."

The left opposition in the party had been represented earlier by leading Bolsheviks from Leningrad such as Bukharin and Radek, the Democratic Centralists and other people who were protesting about the extent of the retreat from the ideals of the revolution. Concessions to the rich peasants (Kulaks) and foreign capitalism, the arbitrary rule of the Politbureau, the over-centralistic methods of government were all targets for attack. The most important was the *'Workers' Opposition'*, composed mostly of disillusioned veteran Bolshevik workers and cadres. Their criticisms are worth noting because they were the first systematic critique and can be compared with the criticisms later developed by Trotsky.

## THE WORKERS' OPPOSITION

They acknowledged that the worsened material environment, the economic and political chaos was the main factor in forcing the retreat. But they said that the leadership had not learned where to stop. It was under pressure from the peasants, the petty-bourgeoisie, former capitalists, traders and petty officials. It had to contend with the growing influence of specialists, technicians and managers, who in their ideas and methods were tied to bourgeois ways of running the economy. Most importantly, the party was being subverted from within. It had to fill posts in government, industry and unions and wanted to control these people. But by admitting so many non-proletarian elements they were being swamped by people, many of whom were interested only in personal power and jumping on the bandwagon. Bolsheviks who had fought in the underground before the revolution formed only 2% of the membership in 1922 — during this time the membership had grown from 23,000 to 700,000.

Given this, the Workers' Opposition said the leadership had chosen the wrong road: relying on managers, cultivating a bureaucracy, over-centralising the political and economic apparatuses, stifling the soviets and factory committees and replacing collective with 'one-man' management. Even with a partially decimated working class it was necessary to involve it in economic management; to slowly develop its creative powers. The alternative was to alienate the workers, lose the impetus for productivity rises, risk increasing absenteeism and, most importantly, *slowly strangle the working class as a political force*. The debate came to a head around the role of the *trade unions*. The Workers' Opposition and others wanted to see the unions established as an independent force, enabling the workers to control the economy. On the other extreme, Trotsky saw no role

for the unions, they were to be an arm of the state, limited to 'education' of the workers, getting them to increase productivity and maintain labour discipline. Lenin took a middle position which eventually won out, that denied the unions a say in economic management, but maintained their semi-independence as a connecting link between the state and the needs and aspirations of the workers.

The Workers Opposition also called for the restoration of full democracy within the party, and the ending of appointments from above rather than elections from below, except in cases of unavoidable expediency. Unfortunately, some of their other suggestions were totally utopian in the circumstances, such as the expulsion from the party of all non-proletarian elements and their carefully vetted re-admission; every party worker to be required to live and work 3 months as a worker or peasant and the revision of wage policies to replace money wages gradually with rewards in kind.

## THE NEP AND KRONSTADT

Despite this, the Workers' Oppositions questions — *'What type of economic development and who directs it?' —* were crucial ones. Even more so in the context of the economic retreat forced on the Bolsheviks, contained in the *New Economic Policy (NEP)*. This gave tax and other concessions to the peasants, freedom of trade, freedom of production by craftsmen, concessions on attractive terms to foreign capital and partial freedom for private enterprise. It amounted to, as Lenin admitted, a partial restoration of capitalism in an attempt to get the economy moving again and to appeal to the peasants in their backward and isolated stage of development. We will return to this question later.

All the accumulated problems reached their explosion point at *Kronstadt* (an old revolutionary stronghold) where there was a popular rebellion of sailors, workers and peasants against the Bolshevik regime. Many of its demands were correct, *but it could not be allowed to succeed*. As Serge explains:—

"Soviet democracy lacked leadership, institutions and inspiration; at its back there were only masses of starving and desperate men. The popular counter-revolution translated the demand for freely elected soviets into one for 'soviets without communists'. If the Bolshevik dictatorship fell, it was only a short step to chaos, and through chaos to a peasant rising, the massacre of the Communists and the return of the emigres, and in the end, through the sheer force of events, another dictatorship; this time anti-proletarian." p.128 op.cit.

In this context the oppositionists within the party, including Serge, decided to fight the rebels, who were eventually crushed, on the ice outside Kronstadt.

## THE EARLY ROLE OF TROTSKY

During these early years Trotsky had built the Red Army from almost nothing to 500,000 men in two years and had brilliantly led them to victory against the White armies and their foreign allies. He had also shown brilliance as an organiser and administrator on the railways and other aspects of economic planning. His other great ability was as a political orator and mobiliser of the masses, an invaluable asset in this period. In foreign affairs he also played a major role in developing the *Communist International (CI)*.

But there was little hint of Trotsky's later role as an oppositionist. In fact he had been one of the most extreme disciplinarians. He indicted the Workers' Opposition on behalf of the Central Committee before the party and the CI. He was loud in his condemnation of criticism within the party and a major supporter of the suppression and banning of the Workers' Opposition at the 11th Congress (1921), which banned all factions. He was the most

extreme opponent of workers' control of the economy, advocating the fusion of unions and state: the biggest advocate of a layer of bureaucratic functionaries with material privileges. After the civil war he advocated the most authoritarian policies, continuing the unfortunate necessities of 'war communism'. The best known aspect of this was *'the militarisation of labour'*, through which the labour force was to be treated like an army — to be moved around and disciplined from above. So rigid and authoritarian were his attitudes that he was distrusted by many of the old Bolsheviks. This was compounded by the fact that he had only joined the party in 1917. Straight away he 'parachuted' to the summit of the Bolshevik organisation as leader of the Red Army and major figure on the Central Committee. To the masses and to revolutionaries outside Russia he was seen with Lenin as the leader of the revolution. But to the old guard he was, as Mikoyan put it, *'a man of the state, not of the party'*.

## TROTSKY IN DECLINE. 1922-3

This goes some way to explain Trotsky's rapid fall from power. He became increasingly isolated at the top of the party, distrusted by the oppositionists and the emergent bureaucracy in the old guard. The major determinant of his fall was Lenin's growing illness and paralysis. He was becoming increasingly unable to take part in the decision-making process and it was obvious that he would not last long. In that partial void the struggle for the political succession and therefore the direction of the revolution began. In this struggle Trotsky was a pre-determined loser, his inexperience of party life and practice and his lack of a firm power base (except perhaps in the army) were deciding factors. It is wrong to see Trotsky as a cynical fighter for political power, who having lost, then turned oppositionist. In fact he showed no real ability or willingness to indulge in political in-fighting at this stage.

Stalin, at the time supported by Lenin (who believed he was the best man to consolidate the party's hold on affairs and stifle criticism) became manager of the party machine as General Secretary. With Lenin out of the way the bureaucracy was consolidating its hold, led by the *Triumvirate of Stalin, Zinoviev and Kamenev*. They accelerated previous tendencies towards authoritarianism, over-centralisation, and constructed an apparatus *above the party*; using this apparatus to stifle all criticism and to trample on the rights of the smaller nations in the republic, in particular the Georgian Bolsheviks. They knew that to consolidate their power they needed to eliminate Trotsky as a power in the party. Trotsky was the most obvious successor to Lenin as leader of the party in many people's eyes — he was certainly the figure of greatest stature, as theoretician, organiser and orator, able to dominate meetings for hours on end.

Trotsky for his part began to be alarmed at his isolation amid the growing power of the triumvirate. He began to protest at the abuse of bureaucratic power, *although not against its existence*. But it was not just on the question of inner party democracy that he began to split with the Politbureau. Over a period of time he had been advocating greater economic planning and a strengthening of the state sector as against the private sector, the towns as against the countryside. With great foresight he envisaged the role long-term planning and the state could play, while the rest of the Politbureau was concerned only with the day to day running of the NEP. The advocacy of such policies created opposition, it challenged the existing policies and the tendency towards more and more concessions to private commerce, business and the peasantry. This section of the party, led by Rykov, charged Trotsky with hostility towards the peasantry, a charge that was to be used frequently in future.



Meanwhile, Lenin was beginning to be alarmed at the tendencies developing and the power of Stalin and the triumvirate. He violently opposed Stalin's suppression of the Georgian Bolsheviks. He wrote a letter to Stalin threatening to break off all personal relations and confided (so Krupskaya told Kamenev) *to crush Stalin politically*. He told Trotsky to oppose Stalin at the Central Committee and to accept no compromise, but again underestimating their power. Trotsky thought that Lenin's opposition would ensure their decline. Unfortunately Lenin had another relapse and the triumvirate went about consolidating their power. By the time Lenin finally died they were strong enough to suppress Lenin's last testament which called for the removal of Stalin as General Secretary and described Trotsky as 'the most able man in the present Central Committee'. (But it should be borne in mind that this 'will' is open to debate and has been misused by both sides). During this key period Trotsky remained largely isolated, incurring the wrath of the managers and administrators for his attacks on their inefficiency, the pro-peasant wing of the party and failing to support the Workers' Opposition. He remained impassive at the 12th Congress when the Workers' Opposition demanded the disbandment of the triumvirate and attacked the General Secretariat. He was on the defensive, still claiming absolute solidarity with the Central Committee. However, he was building up some support quietly as others flocked to Trotsky as a new and leading oppositionist.

### TROTSKY AS OPPOSITIONIST

The first signs of serious opposition came with the '*statement of the 46*', a document using Trotsky's terms of analysis, directed against the official leadership. These included Trotsky's political friends and allies — Preobrazhensky, Pyatkov, Sosnovsky, Antonov-Ovseenko and Smirnov; but they also included leading members of the Workers' Opposition and the Decemists like Sapronov, Bubnov, plus Ossinsky. Although still a loose grouping and coming together for different reasons, a united left opposition was being built.

Everyone of the 46 held, or had held, important positions in government and party, so they could not easily be suppressed. The 46 statement and two of Trotsky's documents — '*The New Course*' and '*Lessons of October*' gained a large degree of support in party cells, especially in the large factories, the army and the youth and student organisations. The triumvirate had to retreat and join in the critique of 'officialdom', a critique that was superficial enough to be recuperated by the bureaucracy. The accusations and attacks on the 1923 opposition grew to an unprecedented height and the triumvirate strengthened its position (as it was to do many times in the future) by taking and *distorting* elements of the opposition's proposals and putting them into practice. This came with the '*Lenin Levy*'. Trotsky had attacked the weakness of the proletarian cells' as the chief cause of 'bureaucratic deformation'. This in itself was a shallow and faulty analysis, reducing a political problem simply to one of class composition. What was more it was open to distortion. The triumvirate, between Lenin's death and February 1924 recruited 240,000 workers to the party. Presented as a 'homage to Lenin', in fact it was a means of smashing opposition by swamping the party with a mass of raw and easily manipulated new recruits.

### THE COMMUNIST INTERNATIONAL

The triumvirate had a tough job explaining the way Trotsky and the opposition were being treated to foreign communists. Trotsky was still seen outside Russia as the embodiment of the revolution.

So before the end of 1923 the Central Committees of the French and Polish Communist Parties protested about the treatment of Trotsky and the German CP had asked that

he lead the planned insurrection in Germany. But two factors destroyed the rumblings of discontent. Firstly, with a shallow and clumsy plan the German party failed in their insurrection, calling it off half-way through and leaving the Hamburg workers, who fought on hopelessly, isolated and then routed. Together with similar setbacks in Poland and Bulgaria the prospects for revolution in Europe receded for a number of years. This confirmed the opinions of the '*isolationists*' in the Bolsheviks who thought that Russia must stand alone, and weakened Trotsky's position as the advocate of *permanent revolution* and the necessity of European revolution to save the Russian revolution. The triumvirate also managed, amazingly, to pin some of the blame for the German setback on Trotsky and his associates. But the key factor in the case by which the Communist International was swung round behind the triumvirate had its roots in the past. Right from the start the Russians had acted as the unifying and dominating factor in the International — sometimes for good reasons. But they had a tendency to impose the *lessons of the Russian experience* on the diverse parties and conditions in other countries. With Trotsky often acting as chief agent they were used to browbeating and dictating to the rest, who dared not challenge the Russian formula. When the triumvirate asked for their approval for the action taken against Trotsky in 1924 the Communist International, used to unquestioning acceptance of the Bolshevik line, submitted, only Boris Souvaine, the French delegate, voting against.

A month later, at the Fifth Congress, the Russians, led by Zinoviev, 'Bolshevised' the submissive parties, suppressing all opposition before congress. Ignoring Lenin's last speech at the Fourth Congress, which warned against a mechanical and slavish imitation of Russian methods, they made sure that in future the Communist International would become a farce, a plaything for the needs of the Russian bureaucracy.

### THE OPPOSITION IS JOINED BY ZINOVIEV

There followed a relative lull in the battle for 18 months into the summer of 1926, in which Trotsky's position was further weakened by debates on literature and the history of the revolution. But there soon followed an event of momentous importance — the triumvirate was splitting. This was lucky because the opposition was getting very weak. Trotsky had again showed a lack of political tactics, for example in his refusal to challenge the triumvirate on the suppression of Lenin's will and being drawn into a phoney conciliation. Asked merely to 'maintain contacts and cadres of the 1923 opposition' the Trotskyists had dwindled into small groups, except in Moscow.

Despite a facade of social peace, the nation was still riddled with poverty and social tension. It was the *major social antagonism — that between town and country — that was to split the Bolshevik leadership*. It split into a *left*, a *right* and a *centre*. Some of the divisions reflected changes in the hierarchy of power. Those pushed out began to be more critical, those in office for several years less tolerant of criticism. But it was the question of *economic development* that was at the centre of the controversy. A new right wing emerged, led by the ex-left Communist, Bukharin. Saying that Russia was and would continue to be isolated from any chance of European revolution, he urged further concessions to the peasants. This was a policy that had not borne much fruit in the past. The peasants did not own the land, the Kulaks did. Bukharin advocated a continuation of

the NEP — building at a snail's pace 'dragged along by the peasant's handcart': ignoring the fact that the Kulaks got rich by squeezing the labourers, poor farmers and workers and generally slowed down accumulation in the state sector by striving to accumulate themselves.

The strongest reaction against this tendency was from the party organisation in the big cities like Leningrad. They found their voice in Zinoviev, who became the leader of the 'left'. The Bolshevik cadres and workers in such places had had enough of the retreat at the expense of the working class. Significantly Zinoviev came out with a critique of 'socialism in one country'. The Soviet Union might remain isolated for a long time but any chance of achieving full socialism was unreal without revolution abroad.

Stalin and his followers defined their position as 'centre'. This was a key development. The growth of the Stalinist monolith received great impetus. *By remaining at the centre, Stalin set himself the strategy of capturing and totally dominating the now fused party/state apparatus*. With power as strategy, Stalin could use and distort the politics of left and right, playing them off one against the other, and finally destroying them. This is precisely what Stalin proceeded to do, using the left to politically defeat the right, he then systematically removed the left from positions of power inside the apparatus.

In isolation, both groups suffered and the Leningrad opposition dwindled to a few hundred. At the Fourth Congress, removed from power, they were reduced to calling for a return to proletarian democracy. A proletariat they themselves had partly been responsible for dispersing, disintegrating and destroying its political vigour. However, after considerable delay and heartsearching on both sides, there was a fusion of the opposition.

### THE JOINT OPPOSITION ENTERS BATTLE

The joint opposition (JO) engaged with the Stalinists and with Bukharin for about 18 months. It was a *battle for the Bolshevik rank and file*, with the odds heavily stacked in Stalin's favour. As long as it was a battle between small groups he could win, backed by the party/state machine. The majority of people were unaware of the battle and anyway would favour Stalin insofar as he represented the myth of peace, stability and Russian self-sufficiency. The JO attempted to address factory and community cells; everywhere they went thugs followed to heckle and abuse them. The hacks and careerists dominated the meetings, repressing support. They were increasingly forced to act clandestinely, holding their meetings in workers' houses, tramping the streets as in the old days, agitating amongst small groups of proletarians. Their membership stood at between 5 and 8,000 at maximum. The battle took place on three fronts: *economic and agricultural policy, party democracy and foreign affairs*.

### ECONOMICS AND AGRICULTURE

A detailed counter policy in these areas was outlined in the *1926 Platform*, signed by 17 members of the Central Committee. Serge explains its basic outline:—

"The 100 pages of the platform attacked the anti-socialist forces that were growing under the NEP system, embodied in the Kulak, the trader and the bureaucrat. Increase in indirect taxation, bearing heavily on the masses, real wages held static at an excessively low level, barely that of 1913; 2 million unemployed, trade unions fast becoming organs of the employer state (we demanded the preservation of the right to strike); 30-40% of the peasantry poor and without horses or implements, and a rich 6% cornering 53% of the corn reserves; we advocated tax-exemption for poor peasants, the development of collective cultivation and a progressive tax system. We also advocated a powerful drive for technological renewal and the creation of new industries and mercilessly criticised what was the first, pitifully weak version of the five-year plan".

### FOREIGN AFFAIRS

The policy of socialism in one country was having a predictably disastrous effect on foreign policy. Giving up hope of revolution abroad and subordinating everything to Russian stability they imposed a reformist line of development

on foreign CP's. Believing that capitalism had stabilised itself they encouraged an accommodation with social democratic parties and reformist trade unions. In no way did such pacts and reformist united fronts further the class struggle. Nowhere was this clearer than in Britain. The British Communist Party was encouraged to form an alliance with left trade union leaders like Purcell and Hicks. When the General Strike came about the CP had not prepared the working class for the necessary break and independence of action from the reformist left. Hence during the struggle the CP was confused and impotent, the unions retreated and the strike was lost. Precisely these developments were predicted by Trotsky in his 1925 book '*Where is Britain Going?*'

This is just one example. There were other notable setbacks involving the Comintern, notably the temporary defeat of the Chinese revolution.

### PARTY DEMOCRACY AND THERMIDOR

The platform also called for a restored life for the soviets, revitalisation of the party and the trade unions and a restoration of inner party democracy and debate. In their position these proposals were doomed and it was precisely through the control of the party/state apparatus that the leadership was to humiliate and crush the JO. Their attempt to win over the party cells having predictably failed the JO were demoralised and on the retreat, still clinging to the idea that Russia was a 'workers' state', and that the Bolshevik monopoly power, now the Stalinist bureaucracy, must be defended. They yielded ground and accepted 'truce' terms little short of surrender. Stalin soon cynically broke the 'truce' by kicking Trotsky off the Central Committee and Zinoviev off the Executive Committee of the Comintern.

Trotsky began to accept that they were in for a period of isolation, bowing to 'the reactionary mood of the masses'. The question which now dominated the opposition in the relative calm of winter 1926-7 was the '*Soviet Thermidor*', (ie. counter-revolution generated by forces inside the party). The left of the JO, including some Trotskyists, believed that the Thermidor had long passed and that the party was ossified monolith speaking for the Kulaks, the 'NEP bourgeoisie' and the bureaucracy against the working class. But Trotsky maintained that the Thermidor had not yet happened. The forces interested in a Thermidorian counter-revolution he defined as the Kulaks, the NEP men and sections of the bureaucracy. He said the party would divide on these cleavages, the chief instigator or ally of a Thermidor being the Bukharinist right. The Stalinist centre had no programme and no social backing, it would lose in a counter-revolution, therefore it must be supported against the right. But as we said before, the fact that the Stalinist centre had no programme and no social backing was *precisely its strength*. To identify the counter-revolution with the increasingly ineffective Bukharinist right was a grave error which conditioned many of the future mistakes Trotsky made.

On the tenth anniversary of the revolution, the opposition made a belated 'appeal to the masses'. In the parades they shouted the slogans 'strike against the Kulak, the NEP man and the bureaucrat'. "Carry out Lenin's testament". 'Down with opportunism' and, paradoxically, 'Preserve Bolshevik unity'. Stalin's agents and the police smashed them on the streets before the largely uncomprehending masses. Not long after Trotsky and Zinoviev were expelled from the party for 'inciting counter-revolutionary demonstration and insurrection'. They appealed to the next congress but with not one opposition delegate it went unheeded. The JO disintegrated. Many of the Zinoviev wing capitulated as expulsions multiplied. Their leaders announced that they accepted all the decisions of the congress. Some remained true to their beliefs and along with the majority of the Trotskyists they were





Trotsky takes the salute of the Red Army just before his downfall.

## TROTSKY IN EXILE

The leaders of the vanquished opposition attempted to set up a clandestine organisation in the vain hope that events would prove them right and they would be strong enough to achieve rehabilitation, freedom of speech and propaganda. Trotsky worked hard to maintain contacts and act as link man for the scattered opposition.

Hopes were actually raised by the major event that characterised the brief period in exile. A new social crisis shook the country in the winter of that year. There was a grain shortage and widespread hunger. In this context the Stalinists and Bukharinists engaged battle. The latter wanted to give the peasants further concessions and were against forced collectivisation and 'premature' industrialisation, and as is usual for the defeated in a power battle, against the growing totalitarianism. To get out of the crisis Stalin adopted a supposedly 'left' course, borrowing from the opposition.

'From 1928-9 onwards the Politbureau turned to its own use the fundamental ideas of the newly expelled opposition (excepting of course that of working class democracy) and implemented them with ruthless violence. We had proposed a tax on the rich peasants — they were actually liquidated! We had proposed limitations and reforms of NEP — it was actually abolished! We had proposed industrialisation — it was done on a colossal scale which we 'super-industrialisers' as we were dubbed, had never dreamed of, which moreover inflicted immense suffering on the country. At the height of the world economic crisis food stuffs were exported at the lowest possible price to build up gold reserves, and the whole of Russia starved.' (Serge p.252 op.cit.)

Stalin's left course threw the fragmented opposition into disarray. After recovering from the shock, Trotsky said that they should critically support the left course. Following the wrong logic of previous analysis he still saw the Stalinist apparatus as a bulwark against the Kulak and the NEP man. He believed that this struggle would bring the party closer to the working class, rehabilitating them in the process as 'the party still needs us.' Indeed in some senses Stalin still did need some of the oppositionists — talented theorists, planners and experts to supplement his largely faceless men of the party machine.

*But he needed them on his terms.* So he encouraged those within the opposition who urged a conciliation with Stalin on the grounds that he was carrying out, albeit imperfectly, their policies. Trotsky was against a pact on the existing terms, but a substantial number eventually went over, led by Preobrazhensky, who claimed that they were merely carrying Trotsky's policies to their logical conclusion.

Most oppositionists, however, remained irreconciled to the regime. Younger ones, less attached to the party and more concerned with proletarian democracy than economic policy, were sympathetic to the extreme left of the opposition — the old Workers Opposition and Decemists, who judged correctly that the revolution and the Bolsheviks were unfortunately dead — even if their analysis of the nature of the Stalinist regime was way off course, (they denounced it as a 'bourgeois' or 'peasants' democracy, and accused Stalin of restoring capitalism when he was about to destroy the private farmer.)

The final tragedy was Trotsky's attempts in late 1928-9 at a pact with Bukharin and the right! Stalin had restarted his 'left' course with a vengeance and was preparing for the final crushing of Bukharin. In fear and desperation the Bukharinists decided to appeal to the left opposition before Stalin did. At first Trotsky kept to his original analysis, while becoming more critical of the left course. Then, to the amazement and indignation of the opposition, he said he was prepared to work with the right purely on the issue of restoring inner party democracy. Believing their only hope of salvation lay in a temporary alliance of all 'anti-Stalinist' Bolsheviks. However, the brief flirtation had no sequel, both sets of followers resisted it.

Despite these farces and the isolation of the opposition, it was gaining more adherents in the political and economic chaos. The GPU (political police) had to imprison or deport thousands more new oppositionists and there were plenty more where they came from if things got worse. The mystique and power of Trotsky was the magnetic force behind this revival, so Stalin prepared to bring him down with another blow against the opposition. Unable to physically eliminate him, Stalin, in January 1929 finally had Trotsky exiled to Constantinople. He spent the next five years on the island of Prinkipo, interpreting the events in Europe from a distance.

# Conclusion

This involves examining Trotsky's early ideas in the Russian and general historical context. A wider and more general examination of Trotsky's theories comes in the later section — 'The Political Basis of Modern Trotskyism'

## STALINISM, BUREAUCRACY AND THE NATURE OF THE REGIME

The struggle of the Left Opposition (LO) is primarily remembered for its assertion of proletarian democracy against the bureaucracy. Yet Trotsky, in particular, always had a remarkably shallow and blinkered analysis of bureaucracy and the question of democracy and its suppression. Right up to the end Trotsky always maintained that early restrictions of democracy, whether political (the other parties; within the Bolsheviks), or 'economic' (the factory committees; the soviets; the unions) — were the product of the backward and chaotic material environment, only becoming unnecessary with the growth of Stalinism.

We have already stated that the conditions *did* impose heavy limitations on the Bolsheviks: when every democratic debate threatened to exacerbate the tensions in society and threaten the collapse of the revolutionary process. Yet it is impossible to maintain that what was necessary before 1922, was unnecessary afterwards. As we have explained, this contradictory position was precisely used by Stalin against the Trotskyist opposition, when time and again their own words were used against them. It was one of the greatest defects of Trotsky and the Trotskyist tradition to have failed to face up to the contradictions within Leninism and the Bolsheviks; the tensions between proletarian democracy and authoritarianism. These tensions were not *just* a product of the material conditions, they were partially linked to certain aspects of Leninist theory and its context (which we examine later in Section 5b — 'Party, Class and Epoch').

While the revolution was going forward and the masses had independent organs of power themselves in the form of factory committees and soviets: the gap between party and class remained small, the living dialectic remained. And we must remember that the Bolsheviks were the only weapon the working class could possibly use to capture and maintain state power. But when the situation deteriorated, the gap widened, the elitist strand became stronger, precisely because *the material situation dictated the terms*. There was, however room for manoeuvre to close the gap. It was a small space, but it would determine the future of the revolution. Unfortunately, the Bolsheviks felt impelled to take the pessimistic road, limiting the powers of soviets and factory committees (as early as 1918), appointing functionaries from above, settling up the CHEKA, suppressing internal debate in the party. In general, taking an all-powerful role — political, administrative, social and economic, in the process swelling its ranks with administrators, managers and functionaries inherited from the bourgeois ranks of Czarist Russia.

All this happened with Trotsky's approval or acquiescence, whilst he was still holding the reigns of power. Yet he maintained that the de-generation was not a danger before 1922! It is little wonder that Trotsky consistently underestimated the degree to which the pre-1922 measures destroyed the working class as a political force, sealing it inside an apathetic and cynical passivity. Having aided the conditions for passivity and suppression of democracy inside and outside the party, it was futile to expect, as Trotsky did, that the proletariat would re-emerge as a social force in the struggle against the bureaucracy — or that inner-party democracy could be restored once the freedom of debate had been stifled and the banning of factions imposed during Lenin's lifetime. This merely gave the go-ahead for a powerful party apparatus to emerge and consolidate its power.

Trotsky's inability to see the links between pre- and post-1922 extends to the question of the Communist International. The way that Stalin 'Bolshevised' and used the Comintern to crush revolution and manipulate foreign Communist Parties in the interests of 'socialism in one country', could only have taken place in the context of the degree of control and 'Bolshevisation' carried out by Trotsky and Zinoviev. In the early years they imposed the Russian pattern of political strategy and structure on the humble and diverse foreign Communist Parties. But again the links go largely unacknowledged by Trotsky and modern Trotskyists.

What we have said does *not* mean that we share the reactionary belief common to ultra-left and bourgeois commentators alike that Stalinism was a direct product of Leninism. Let Victor Serge comment on this:—

"It is often said that the germ of all Stalinism was in Bolshevism at its beginning. Well I have no objection. Only, Bolshevism contained a mass of other germs — and those who lived through the first years of the first revolution ought not to forget it. To judge the living man by the death germs, which the autopsy reveals in a corpse — is this very sensible?" (From *Memoirs of a Revolutionary*)

## THE BUREAUCRACY

Trotsky's shallow analysis of relationships between party and class would not be so serious if they were not accompanied by an equally superficial understanding of the bureaucracy and the nature of the regime. Despite the ferocity of his struggle against it, Trotsky always *underestimated* and misrepresented the bureaucracy. He regarded it as a *parasitical layer on a healthy body*, a 'morbid outgrowth on the working class', as he once put it. That 'healthy body' was the 'workers' state' based on:—

"The nationalisation of the land, the means of industrial production, transport and exchange, together with the monopoly of foreign trade constitutes the basis of the Soviet social structure. Through these relations, established by the proletarian revolution, the nature of the Soviet Union as a proletarian state is for us basically defined." (Trotsky: 'The Revolution Betrayed'.)

Leaving aside for a moment the characterisation of the regime as a 'workers' state' — the error was that by viewing the bureaucracy as an unstable parasite, *the analysis separated it from its real role and functions*. As we indicated previously, Trotsky consistently underestimated the power and independence of the bureaucracy, claiming it had no programme or social backing. But its 'programme' was unmediated power and its social backing were the very forces it was creating itself. That is, the uncontrolled party/state apparatus, directing the organs of economic control and the means of terror and repression. The bureaucracy became an independent power in itself, it did not need direct social backing in other class forces, because its strength lay in the ability to keep those forces fragmented, powerless and terrorised.

The inability of Trotsky to recognise this, in fact was partially derived from a tradition of Marxism, which linked classes and class struggle to the existence of private property relations. Instead we have to examine how bureaucratic control over new economic forces and property relations creates the conditions for new class forces with their own interests and privileges to arise. While the bureaucracy had to (and still has to) balance the aspirations of other class forces, this was a strength, not a weakness as Trotsky saw it. This was because they had sufficient distance and control, through hierarchy and terror, to maintain that balancing process.

Trotsky preferred to see the inner-party and bureaucratic battles as solely ideological clashes, reflecting wider social trends; once saying:—

"Even episodic differences in views and nuances of opinion may express the remote presence of distinct social interests". ('The New Course' p.27)



His underestimation of the importance of the power battle between Zinoviev and Stalin and his characterisation of the Bukharinites as agents of the Thermidor (reaction) are only two examples of this mistaken political position in action. While it is true that such clashes do often represent underlying social trends — they have their own *specific political level*. Here is one of the most important roots of Trotsky's defective theories of bureaucracy, his failure to recognise the *autonomy of the political sphere*. He relapses into what Krasso calls 'sociologism', that is the reduction of political processes to the movements of social forces/classes. [1] Trotsky was always a genius for grasping the fluidity and movement of social classes and trends, as will be shown in other sections, but he tended to abstract and idealise them, making them the determinant of everything. Thus he failed to acknowledge that a political apparatus, through its control of the state and the economy, could have its own interests and logic of development, partially above other forces. It ceased to be a temporary and artificial creation "simply using the old label of Bolshevism, the better to fool the masses", as Trotsky said in one of his less enlightened moments. Trotsky's view that at one stage the bureaucratic deformations in the Party could be overcome by the re-proletarianisation of Party cells is another instance of 'sociologism'.

For us, in this period, the bureaucracy was a distinct and autonomous social layer, characterised by its total control of the political-economic apparatus, impossible to separate from the so-called 'healthy body' of the basic infrastructures of Russian society. In this sense, it meant that the new mode of production and all social relations had a 'bureaucratic' character. The control and nature of work, cultural life, the position of women in the family and political structures are only examples of spheres where either little was changed, progressive measures gradually eliminated or new hierarchical form and content emerged. For instance, industry did not simply lack workers' control or independent trade unions, it was dominated by capitalist work methods and management techniques, including Taylorism and 'one-man management'. Trotsky, while admitting that the working class did not in any way control the state, kept the myth of a workers state because of the existence of an economy he wrongly defined as 'healthy'. As long as the bureaucracy defended it against 'capitalist encroachment' it would remain a workers' state — again he made the mistake of seeing the forces of degeneration solely as external to the dynamic of the bureaucracy. To maintain that nationalised property etc. equals a workers' state is to *abstract property relations from the mode of production as a whole*, and to ignore the total social and political relationships involved in the whole of economy and society. It is responsible for the reduction by the Trotskyist tradition of the problem to "good base — bad super-structure".

## DEFEATING THE REGIME

This determines the weakness of the Trotskyist solution to the problem of bureaucracy in transitional societies — i.e. the need for a *political revolution*. A revolution that initially seeks to change the state personnel, but does not transform the supposedly 'healthy body' of the 'workers' state'. The degeneration of the state is seen at the political level only; when in fact any revolution must be social and material, as the bureaucratic character of production and society in general is in the traditional Marxist sense a 'fetter on the development of productive forces'. It suppresses working class creativity and involvement in all spheres of life. The character of the state machine is such that it cannot be reformed or restored. There is nothing to restore — the working class has no power, there are no soviets, the trade unions are paper institutions. The state is run by a class hostile to working class power, using 'Marxism-Leninism' as an ideology to hide the real situation.

We must be clear that while new class forces and hierarchical social relations were emerging, the bureaucracy was not yet a class. Classes are formed in an historical relationship with

other classes and social forces. The bureaucracy was a '*class-in-information*' throughout the 1920s and 30s because certain conditions had not been fulfilled, so that it could come to have a vital class characteristic — a consciousness of its own interests and unity. This required firstly, that all remains of opposition be suppressed, whether Trotskyist revolutionaries on the left, or old-guard bureaucrats on the right. It is remarkable and tragic that of the 24 people on the Bolshevik Central Committee of 1917, only Stalin remained in 1938. The rest had either died, been murdered by Stalin or had conveniently 'disappeared'. The second paradoxical condition was the death of Stalin. His personal dictatorship and terror apparatus had distorted the functioning of a new class system.

## PERMANENT REVOLUTION

One of the strongest points of Trotsky's theories was his critique of 'socialism in one country', and its effects on Russia's political and economic development and the progress of revolution abroad. Yet even here there are decisive weaknesses which add to his failure to grasp the dialectic of transition from capitalism to socialism.

Both Trotsky and Lenin provided the theoretical basis for the Bolsheviks to understand that the revolutionary process did not and could not go through separate stages. The bourgeoisie was too weak and subordinate to the old Czarist regime to carry through a 'democratic' revolution. The peasantry, while large sections were potential allies of the working class, was in Russia too distant from the unfolding process of struggle and in some aspects too fragmented to play a leading role. This meant that the urban working class was the central revolutionary force and the means of providing continuity between the democratic and socialist tasks of the revolutionary process. Trotsky understood this and stated it in his theory of 'permanent revolution'. It played an important role in successfully developing Bolshevik strategy. Yet it had weaknesses. In section 5d we will show how firstly it underestimated the necessity for distinct phases and tasks, despite the continuity, and secondly how it failed to understand how the working class built an alliance with the peasantry, instead regarding the relationship as one of subordination. This has passed on a legacy to Trotskyism which consistently underestimates the revolutionary potential of the peasantry and their achievements, in China and throughout the 'Third World'. Lenin's concept of the 'democratic dictatorship of workers and peasants' provided a better basis for understanding both these problems. (see Mavrakis, Chapter 2).

In this section we want to look at permanent revolution in relation to 'foreign policy'. There is no doubt that again the theory of permanent revolution played an important part in the Bolsheviks' understanding that Russia, in isolation and backwardness, could not develop into *complete* socialism without revolution in some of the advanced capitalist countries. This gave the Bolsheviks a firm basis for a revolutionary foreign policy. But in the early years neither Lenin nor Trotsky were foolish enough to pin all their hopes on such developments, especially after the German defeat and the necessity for the New Economic Policy (NEP) in Russia. Trotsky himself wrote:—

"Needless to say, under no circumstances are we striving for a narrow 'national' communism: the raising of the blockade and the European revolution all the more, would introduce the most radical alterations into our economic plan, cutting down the stages of development and bringing them together. But we do not know when these events will take place; and we must act in a way that we can hold out and become stronger under the most unfavourable circumstances — that is to say, in face of the slowest conceivable development of European and world revolution." (From 'Terrorism and Communism' — 1920)

Hence Trotsky held the essentially correct dialectical position, but unfortunately he was not to maintain it. After Lenin's death and Stalin's rise to power, the situation changed.

Stalin's strategy was based on the idea of 'socialism in one country'. Despairing of revolution abroad and surrounded by people lacking international political understanding and culture, Stalin embarked on what Colletti (The Question of Stalin — New Left Review No. 61) has called a policy of 'national restoration'. A policy that ignored and distorted previous Bolshevik theory and practice.

## SOCIALISM IN ONE COUNTRY?

There are two things wrong with socialism in one country as preached by and practised by the Stalinist bureaucracy. The first is that it often gave up the possibility of revolution abroad. This meant that the Comintern, once the vanguard of world revolution, became increasingly subordinate to the needs of the Russian party. This created a series of ultra-right and ultra-left zigzags, as the situation changed in Russia and the Stalinists attempted to rectify their previous political mistakes at home and abroad. What's worse, they ensured the defeat of the revolutionary forces in Germany, Britain and China — to name but three instances.



Secondly, it adversely affected the process of economic development. While industrialisation, capital accumulation and collectivisation of agriculture were necessary, the bureaucracy carried them out in an anti-socialist way. Not only were they accompanied by vicious repression, 'a revolution from above', as E.H. Carr called it, without attempts to bring changes in values from below; it failed to challenge concepts of economic development that had arisen in capitalist countries. This wasn't simply the already described adoption of capitalist work processes, but a failure to question the viability of total large-scale production and to integrate the organic development of town and countryside.

Trotsky and the Left Opposition's economic policies showed a much better grasp of many aspects, such as the role and detail of state planning. They were, however, flawed in that they too failed to question the nature of economic development. As we seek to show later, both Stalin and Trotsky's conceptions were 'economistic'. This was tragically shown when from 1928 onwards Stalin used the Opposition's economic policies to industrialise and collectivise — accompanied of course by the terror and lack of real planning in distinction to Trotsky's ideas. The reaction of many Opposition-

ists was understandably confused by Stalin's so-called 'Left Course', given the similarities. In the end, many capitulated, including Preobrazhensky, in the belief that Stalin was carrying out their policies.

In relation to foreign affairs Trotsky was using the theory of permanent revolution on many occasions to brilliantly predict and criticise the consequences of Stalin's foreign policies. But in this struggle he gradually abandoned his dialectical position and permanent revolution became an almost metaphysical internationalism and a vain hope for revolution abroad. A hope abstracted from the real circumstances and peculiarities of each country and their different ideological and political institutions. He later wrote, describing his analysis of the time:—

"The specific alignment of forces in the nation and international field can enable the proletariat to seize power first in a backward country such as Russia. But the same alignment of forces proves that without a more or less rapid victory of the proletariat in the advanced capitalist countries, the workers' government will not survive. Left to itself the Soviet regime must either fall or degenerate. More exactly will first de-generate and then fall. . . without a revolution in the West, Bolshevism will be liquidated either by internal counter-revolution or by external intervention, or by both." ('Stalinism and Bolshevism' — 1937)

In this context permanent revolution lost its precise meaning. A consequence was *fatalism* about political events in Russia, a fatalism that was to prove disastrous in the struggle against Stalin. Stalin was able to present Trotsky's views as idealistic and ignorant of the real situation. When combined with all the political contradictions of his own economic policy Trotsky's arguments about permanent revolution degenerated still further. Continuing to deny that a 'Thermidor' had occurred and that the bureaucracy was a strong and independent power, he asserted that 'socialism in one country' could not survive because:—

- a) It could not withstand the hostility of the capitalist world market and the economic blockade.
- b) The USSR was militarily indefensible.

Time proved him wrong on both points and his arguments undermined the opposition, as Trotsky was posing a version of historical fatalism that almost devalued political action. Such action was necessary on the question of the quality and political direction of the transition period, that is, it was not so much a question of total opposition to the policy of socialism in one country, but posing the question '*what kind of socialist transition, and who controls it?*' that was needed. To struggle on these ground would not have been easy, given the power and the control of the Stalinist apparatus: but as a perspective it could have broken through the confusion that had been created by what permanent revolution had come to represent — a *collapse into an undialectical opposite of a wrong policy*, simply a mirror image of Stalin's policies.

Despite all its power Trotsky's analysis has for generations mystified the ways in which there can be a *transition* to socialism, whether in conditions of backwardness or advancement. As C.J. Arthur points out in his critique of Trotskyism — 'The Revolution Betrayed?' [2] — some transitional society is inevitable in the ebb and flow of class struggle after the seizure of power. While any revolutionary process, class or party bears the risk of degeneration or defeat, permanent revolution has been responsible for an ultra-left short-circuit in its conception of transition to socialism. For while it is correct to say that the achievement of full socialism is impossible in a single country, it is the most mechanical fatalism to deny that a process of *building socialism* cannot begin in the real world of one space and time. (see Section 5d).

## NOTES.

1. Term coined by Krasso in his article 'Trotsky's Marxism' in 'New left Review No.44'
2. In 'Radical Philosophy' No. 6



# 3. Foundations of the 4th International

This period of Trotsky's life is dominated by three themes:—

- \***STALINISM**; much of Trotsky's writing during this period was taken up with analysing the changing phases of Stalinism.
- \***FASCISM**; Trotsky provided the only coherent Marxist analysis of that period of national Socialism and fascism.
- \***BUILDING AND FORMATION OF THE 4th INTERNATIONAL**; for the founding conference in 1938 Trotsky wrote

'The Death Agony of Capitalism and The Tasks of the F.I.: A Transitional Programme'. In a real sense this was Trotsky's will and testimony. The implications of the founding of the FI and its programme still hold an important influence over Trotskyist groups today.

In addition, and sometimes linked to these main preoccupations, he wrote a mass of material on Britain, Spain, Italy and Germany, dealing with everything from the trade union question to the contradictions facing the various ruling classes. He wrote on the tactics of the united front and on 'entrism'. And he wrote three major historical works which were to become Marxist classics: 'My Life', an autobiography written in the early 1930s; 'A History of the Russian Revolution'; and 'The Revolution Betrayed'.

## (i) THE POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS

A year after his expulsion from Russia, Trotsky helped to set up the *International Communist League*, which held its founding conference in 1930. Its programme was a direct response to second period Stalinism, characterised as it was by the programme of socialism in one country, and diplomatic alliances with bourgeois and social democratic forces in other countries.

The ICL was very small, but contained followers in countries which included the US, China, Germany, Spain and Britain. The ICL considered itself an expelled section of the Third International, fighting to regenerate it. At this time the Third International was still considered a revolutionary force and there was no talk of forming a new international.

But the programme of the ICL was already out of date when it was outlined. By 1928, Stalinism had begun to move into its Third Period. According to Stalinist theoreticians, the third period of capitalist consolidation was characterised by 'rapid development of the contradictions in the world economy' and a 'maximum sharpening of the general crisis of the world economy'. Third Period Stalinism represented a sharp even dramatic, break from the right wing policies of the Second Period. The Third Period saw in every working class struggle, in every ruling class problem, the imminent revolution. It was as ultra-left as the preceding period had been ultra-right. It was a crude response to the mounting contradictions of world capitalism in the 1930s — contradictions which included the Wall St. Crash of 1929, unheard-of inflation, and the growth of fascism in Germany and Italy.

So Trotsky's political work and writings in the 1930s were to be directed against the absurd zig-zags and turns in Comintern policy. These errors brought out much of the best of Trotsky's work, allowing his sharp sense of social movements and trends to come to the fore. His analysis of fascism was strongest in its strategic sense. He cut through the disast-

rous characterisation of social democracy as social fascism and developed the concept of the united front as a basis for working class and left wing unity. As an actual in-depth analysis of the roots of fascism, particularly the psycho-sociological basis it was less useful and therefore not necessarily transferable to other periods. It underestimated the grip of fascist ideas and as is recurrent in Trotsky's writing overestimated the power of revolutionary leadership. For example, he wrote:—

"Fascism would in reality fall to pieces if the Communist Party was able to unite the working class and by that alone transform it into a powerful revolutionary magnet for all the oppressed masses of the people". ('Fascism, Stalinism and the United Front' - International Socialism Journal Special p.13). But before long another Comintern zig-zag took place, taking policy to the right and Trotsky's attention was rightly diverted to attacking the opportunism of this new turn. The central Comintern concept was the 'People's Fronts' which would unite not just social democrats (i.e. the previous 'social fascists') but also 'entire nations' in the cause of peace and anti-fascism. In France and Spain the policies led to a failure to develop revolutionary situations and the communist parties played important roles in channelling the movements into safe reformist directions.

As Trotsky wrote about Spain:—

"Notwithstanding the fact that the Spanish proletariat stood in the final day of the revolution, not below but above the Russian proletariat of 1917 — by setting itself the task of rescuing the capitalist regime, the Popular Front doomed itself to military defeat".

## (ii) BUILDING THE 4th INTERNATIONAL

In 1938, against a background of impending world war, fascist and quasi-fascist regimes in control of large chunks of Europe, the defeat of the Spanish revolution, in Russia — purges at home and increasing accommodation to bourgeois governments and parties abroad, and the growing patriotic nationalist feelings in working class organisations in much of the rest of Europe, the Movement for the Fourth International became the Fourth International.

The founding conference, which lasted one day, was attended by 21 delegates from 11 organisations. The largest was the American SWP with around 1,500 members. Some of the groups were mere handfuls of people. The FI as a whole had no mass working class following or implantation.

The isolation of the 4th International was strongly conditioned by the campaign of slander by the Stalinist regime. Millions of left wing activists were successfully immunised against Trotsky by the Moscow show trials and the constant repetition of charges that Trotsky was a fascist agent etc. There can be little doubt that for survival purposes alone, Trotskyism had to organise its forces. The continuity of revolutionary Marxism or what they called 'Bolshevik-Leninism' was linked to that survival.

What is more doubtful, however, is the inflated claims of significance and leadership which distorted and continues to distort Trotskyism. The historic task that Trotsky gave the FI was determined by his analysis of the epoch and the specific conjuncture. Mankind was faced with the choice between

'socialism or barbarism'. The desperate gamble rested on the assumption that the objective conditions were not merely ripe, but over-fulfilled. In the Transitional Programme, the political basis of the FI, he wrote:—

"The orientation of the masses is determined firstly by the objective conditions of decaying capitalism, and second by



German CP leaders review Communist Militia in 1933.

the treacherous politics of the old workers' organisations. Of these factors, the first, of course, is the decisive one; the laws of history are stronger than the bureaucratic apparatus". p. 7

And:—

"In all countries the proletariat is racked by a deep disquiet. The multi-millioned masses again and again enter the road of revolution. But each time they are blocked by their own conservative machines". p.7

It follows, therefore, that:—

"The world political situation as a whole is chiefly characterised by a historical crisis of the leadership of the proletariat. The historical crisis of mankind is reduced to the crisis of the revolutionary leadership". p.6

On the one hand, capitalism was about to cease to exist. On the other, the working class was ready for revolution, and Trotsky confidently expected that mass working class uprisings would 'fill the sails' of the FI and rapidly turn it into a genuine workers' organisation.

The second major component of the Transitional Programme was an analysis of the nature of the communist parties.

"The Third International has taken the road of reformism at a time when the crisis of capitalism definitely placed the proletarian revolution on the agenda. . . the bureaucracy which became a reactionary force in the USSR, cannot play a revolutionary role in the world arena". p.37

More importantly, Trotsky firmly believed that the Russian CP and the whole of the Third International were on the verge of collapse. In 1939 he wrote:—

"Might we not place ourselves in a ludicrous position if we affixed to the Bonapartist oligarchy the nomenclature of a new ruling class, just a few years or even months prior to its inglorious collapse?" ('The USSR in War')

Unfortunately, neither aspect of the Transitional Programme was correct. The Russian CP was certainly far stronger than Trotsky gave it credit for, for reasons we explain in the next section. On the more important question of the stability of the system the projections were obviously factually incorrect. In a relatively short space of time, far from collapsing, capitalism was to enjoy its longest period of uninterrupted and sustained growth. Far from being 'socialism or barbarism', the reformist solution was once again open for the system. Nevertheless, this was after the war. Trotskyists will point out the special facts not only of war and inter-imperialist rivalry, but the treachery of Stalinism, technological and other 'booms' etc. It is true that the specific factual predictions are not the main thing. It is also true that it was very difficult for Marx-

ists to foresee stability in the 1930s. Socialism or barbarism, with the rise of fascism and the slump did appear to be the choice. In this sense the Transitional Programme was a genuine attempt to provide a solution to this final crisis. In it Trotsky writes:—

"It is necessary to help the masses in the process of daily

struggle to find the bridge between present demands and the socialist programme of the revolution. This bridge should include a system of *transitional demands*, stemming from today's conditions and today's consciousness of wide layers of the working class and unalterably leading to one final conclusion; the conquest of power by the proletariat". p.8

For a pre-revolutionary situation, allowing for certain exaggerations, the Transitional Programme was excellent. Transitional demands, sensitively handled could fulfil their intended function as bridging factors. The weakness, however, was not that it didn't predict the future, but that it did not adequately describe the existing period. Because even in the 1930s there were important changes maturing in the womb of the capitalist system, which were to act as a spring-board for the post-war boom and radically alter the content of class struggle. We get a hint of this failure to grasp the new dynamic of capitalist development when Trotsky writes in the Transitional Programme:—

"New Deal politics (in the USA). . . like Popular Front politics. . . opens no exit from the economic blind alley". p.6

And a year later he described Roosevelt's New Deal economics as 'reactionary and helpless quackery'. (Foreword to 'The Living Thought of Karl Marx') Unfortunately, it was precisely this 'quackery' which was to be the basis on which international capitalism re-stabilised itself.

We would not be overcritical of Trotsky for not grasping these admittedly new developments. But what is a strong criticism is that his whole methodology and conception of the epoch precluded him from seeing any elements of stability or revival genuinely re-asserting themselves. Trotsky turned the concept of the epoch, as an epoch "of war, crises and revolutions" into a vastly exaggerated and mechanical assertion of the collapse of capitalism. The perspective of the Transitional Programme stands oddly against one of his own criticisms as one of the phases of Stalinist politics:—

"We reject the apocalyptic presentation of the 'third period' as the final one; how many periods there will be before the victory of the proletariat is a question of the relation of forces and the changes in the situation. . . We reject the very essence of this strategic schematisation with its numbered periods; there is no absolute tactic established in advance for the 'second' or 'third' periods." ('The Turn in the Communist International and the German Situation' 1930)

This methodology and characterisation of the epoch is the basic flaw behind many of the aspects of modern Trotskyist politics as we will examine fully later. But before this we have to turn to examine the evolution of Trotskyism without Trotsky in the post-war period.



# 4 Trotskyism Without Trotsky : 1940 - 66

From the war until the mid-1960s Trotskyism, with the exception of some rare moments, remained an isolated revolutionary current internationally. In Britain the Trotskyist movement split, fused and expelled each other with monotonous regularity. The legacy of Trotsky's politics made re-adjustment to the new post-war conditions of capitalism very difficult.

## THE CAPITALIST REVIVAL AND THE ECONOMIC CRISIS

The Transitional Programme had said that capitalism had no future; productive forces had stagnated and reforms were impossible. After the war the FI continued the same analyses. Mandel, their leading economist wrote for the FI in 1946:—

"There is no reason whatever to assume that we are facing a new epoch of capitalist stabilisation and development. On the contrary, the war has acted only to aggravate the disproportion between the increased productivity of the capitalist economy and the capacity of the world market to absorb it."

This analysis was re-affirmed in 1948 and substantially accepted again in 1951. A majority of the newly formed revolutionary Communist Party (the only united Trotskyist grouping ever to exist in Britain) did not accept it fully, but had little by way of counter-analysis. The followers of Gerry Healey maintained the orthodox line in Britain. This line only came to be re-assessed in 1954/5, when the imminent world economic crisis was unlikely, and even the FI had to change its tune.

The FI's mode of analysis had failed to take into account the changes introduced by capitalist governments in the context of the new theories of Keynes. This affected key variables which altered the economic mechanisms of crisis — the use of wages and the role of the state. The capitalist crisis, as Marx had shown is in essence always the same problem; it is rooted in production and in attempts to stem the falling rate of profitability by increasing the organic composition of capital. But this is manifested in different forms in the actual economic market. Before the war it was manifested by a disjuncture between supply and demand. This was how Mandel saw it in the previous quote — a crisis of overproduction; too many goods with not enough demand to buy them.

After the war, guided by Keynesianism, governments attempted to solve this problem of 'effective demand'. They did this firstly by making the wage a political weapon of capitalism's development. Thus they could try to tie working class interests to the system through consumerism. Tied to this was an enlargement of the role of the state — in economic planning, direction of investment, creation and control of the welfare system, and also organisation of education and housing, tax and monetary policies, nationalisation. The aim of this was to make the state the 'collective brain of capital', with the ability (especially as it was to be the largest employer) to regulate demand, economic development and oversee the relationship between wages, productivity and investment.

None of the 'special factors' mentioned by Trotskyism (third technological revolution, arms spending etc.) can account for the massive growth rates and sustained nature of the boom. It was a new phase of capitalist development that even the new Trotskyist groups perform incredible somersaults to attempt to explain, to avoid the consequences of

Trotsky's conception of the epoch. Hence a classic from the RCG on FI policy:—

"There was no comprehension of the difference between the general features of the imperialist epoch (eg. stagnation and decay) and its specific expressions in the post-war period (boom, renewed strength of reformism)". (Revolutionary Communist no.2 p.30)

The political consequences of the boom were to recharge capitalism's batteries, a far cry from the death of reformism announced in the Transitional Programme. In fact, only social democracy could have ushered in the new regenerated system and cement working class identification with the state.

## THE STATE AND SOCIALISM

Trotskyism found it difficult to grasp the new role of the state. The whole left had been used to seeing the state as merely providing the legal and political framework for the dominance of the ruling class. State planning and nationalisation were seen as socialist and anti-capitalist measures. If Trotskyism had criticised state planning under capitalism, it was only on the basis that it was too little and in the wrong context:—

"The increasing practice of intervention in the economy by the state is an involuntary homage rendered to socialism by capitalism". (Mandel — 'Marxist Economic Theory' p.541)

These weaknesses flow directly from the Trotskyist analysis of Russia which identified a workers' state with nationalised property relations. By asserting that this was the economic basis for socialism, they implicitly reduced capitalism to private ownership. A critique of the limitations of the Russian economic model would have provided the basis for an understanding of the new forms of state control and intervention in the West.

## THE SPREAD OF STALINISM

If confusion about the nature of post-war capitalism was to create problems, it was nothing compared with the chaos that the debate over the 'Stalinist' countries was to cause in the world Trotskyist movement. In the Transitional Programme Trotsky still saw the Stalinist party/state machine as a Bonapartist group in an extremely precarious position. He saw the right wing of the bureaucracy as in the ascendant and predicted that unless the workers crushed the bureaucracy there would be a determined attempt to revise the 'socialist' character of the USSR and restore capitalism. He said that the dominant sections of the bureaucracy could only maintain their privileges by neglecting nationalised property, collectivism and the monopoly of foreign trade. Again, he failed to see that it was through this that they maintained those privileges. With the elimination of all opposition, the bureaucracy was consolidating its power and had no intention of 'restoring capitalism'. The USSR emerged from the war stronger than ever and expanded and imposed regimes on the Russian model in Eastern Europe and North Korea. There were more genuine revolutions led by local communist parties in Yugoslavia and Albania, and a little later the momentous revolutions in China and Vietnam.

At the FI conference in 1946 they had to face up to these problems. The Eastern European regimes had not even been created by the working class, so as Hallas points out:—

"If the Soviet bloc are workers' states then the FI and the Transitional Programme were wrong to say Stalinism cannot overthrow capitalism". (I.S. Journal 40)

They entered into long and semantic arguments to try and avoid the issue. The first formulation was amazingly that the 'Soviet bloc' were still capitalist countries ruled by an extreme form of Bonapartism. China was later to be labelled 'capitalist', Russia remained a 'degenerated workers' state'. This enabled them to maintain true to one side of the argument, but it was a ludicrous position given their analysis of Russia.

The new regimes were almost identical to the original model. Such idiocies were compounded by a series of amazing somersaults over the question of Yugoslavia. In 1948 it was expelled from the Cominform (successor to the 3rd International) as 'revisionist' and 'Trotskyist'. Anxious for allies against against the Kremlin, the FI declared that the Yugoslavian CP was a 'revolutionary party' — therefore condemning as rubbish all they had said before about its 'Stalinist' nature.

They could not carry on with such contradictions. In 1951 the FI conference, pushed by Michael Pablo, one of its main leaders, decided that the new regimes were 'deformed workers' states'. (Note the subtle difference between deformed' and 'degenerated')

"Totally deformed workers' states came into existence, ones which had extremely progressive property relationships, but were hampered by the Kremlin-imposed political apparatus". ('The Fourth International' — A 'Militant' group pamphlet)

So the Trotskyist movement adjusted and maintained its analytical separation between base and superstructure, abstracting property relations from social relations as a whole. These positions on Eastern Europe were at least a logical progression although opposition remained, including the 'Healeyites' in Britain.

## THE SPLITS IN THE TROTSKYIST MOVEMENT

From the early 1950s to the middle 1960s major developments were to take place in world Trotskyism as the movement tried to come to grips with its traditional conceptions. The splits which characterise the Trotskyist movement today largely derive from this period.

### (i) SEPARATION

Some sections of the movement ended up separating from it, though still defining themselves as part of the Trotskyist tradition. The most notable of these was the grouping that eventually became the International Socialist (and later the Socialist Workers Party) in Britain. In 1948 Tony Cliff, the later leader of I.S., was expelled for advocating the view that Russia was 'state capitalist'. Such tendencies, usually also advocating the view that the bureaucracy was a class, became a major division in Trotskyism. We deal with the question of state capitalism in the final section. The other distinguishing feature of this tendency was an analysis of the boom structured around the concept of the 'permanent arms economy'. Michael Kidron in 'Western Capitalism Since the War' claimed for I.S. that state expenditure on armaments acted as a built-in stabiliser for the economy. This is supposed to offset the tendency for the rate of profit to fall, postponing overproduction and slump by diverting resources from the productive sector. We haven't the space here to deal with detailed criticisms. We will make three short points.

1. This theory overemphasises arms spending in relation to total government expenditure. Increased state expenditure has played a significant role in maintaining social and economic stability by maintaining a level of demand and full em-

ployment. But any public expenditure can play a similar role to arms spending — including housing, education, health and the nationalised industries.

2. Its role as a stabiliser was from the beginning riddled with contradictions and cannot be the major explanation for the growth of inflationary crises in the late 1960s. Outside a period of expansion, the strictly 'unproductive' nature of such expenditure from the point of view of capitalism as a whole, creates pressure on private capital as it decreases the amount available for accumulation. I.S. concentrated on explaining the inflationary crisis as a function of the internal contradictions of the permanent arms economy, rather than stemming from its relation to overall state expenditure, to the private sector and its accumulation problems.

3. It took the crisis outside the sphere of working class action, making it purely a question of the internal functioning of the system. By not grasping this, it failed to fuse the crisis and class struggle. I.S. analyses of industrial struggle (eg. as put forward in 'The Employers' Offensive') are largely unconnected to their overall economic theory.

Despite these criticisms it must be said that the theory of the permanent arms economy was at least a genuine attempt to get to grips with a new problem. Even more importantly, because I.S. had a theory of the boom it could escape the economic lunacies of the FI.

### (ii) ORTHODOXY AGAINST REVISIONISM

The FI still believed that all the conditions existed to ensure the world victory of socialism, except international revolutionary leadership. Yet they had to acknowledge that, despite some experienced cadres, they couldn't provide it as organisations. In the context of coming to terms with the 'long boom' and the power and spread of Stalinism — they decided on a policy of *entrism*. That is, they recommended that Trotskyist groups should enter into the mass parties (some had already done so) to conduct long-term work in building up a working class base. Their public face was supposed to be kept through public meetings and a journal. These mass parties were conceived as either social democratic (Britain, Australia) or Communist (France, Italy). The FI agreed in 1951 that:—

"In countries where CPs were a majority of the working class, they can under exceptional circumstances and under pressure of very powerful uprisings of the masses, be led to project a revolutionary orientation and counter to the Kremlin directives."

(Pablo — 'The Rise and Decline of Stalinism')

In fact, to see the CPs as potentially revolutionary was wrong on two counts. Firstly, in the midst of the developing Cold War and East-West antagonism, the European CPs were becoming *more subservient* to Moscow (hence the total support for the suppression of the Hungarian Revolution). Secondly, the CPs had adapted to the re-formed capitalism, by means of the 'peaceful roads to socialism', in which they abdicated any revolutionary strategy and Leninist analysis of the state and parliament.

These changes proved too much for a minority of the FI (Healeyites in Britain, Lambertists in France) so they split from the official FI and formed their own alternative. The split became characterised as between 'orthodoxy' (the Healeyite minority) and 'revisionism' (the Pabloite majority). In Britain this split and the ensuing faction fighting lost Trotskyism the considerable periphery it had built up inside the Labour Party through the journal 'Socialist Outlook'. The majority of the Socialist Workers Party (the American section and the biggest and most important) also rejected the change.

The majority strategy of 'deep entrism' was inevitably coupled with renewed attempts to understand the low level of class struggle in the advanced capitalist countries, together



with the strengthening of reformism via the Labour Party and the unions. It appeared as though the European proletariat had been bought off. To see beyond this was difficult for the revolutionary movement given that it lacked the conceptual tools to re-analyse the situation.

What happened instead was that the FI majority *retreated from confronting the question* by concentrating its analysis and practice on the question of the colonial revolution:—

“This is the period when the conception of the revolution’s advance ‘from the periphery to the centre’, from colonial and semi-colonial countries towards the imperialist citadels of the advanced capitalist countries of the U.S. and Europe was worked out.”  
(International Marxist Review No.3)

This orientation was naturally boosted by the Chinese split with the Russians, and the Cuban and Algerian revolutions, (with Pablo playing an important part in the latter). ‘From periphery to centre’ remained the strategy of the FI majority and still remains an important part of FI politics. This helps to explain the politics of the IMG in Britain, which is the official FI group. They applied the ‘periphery to centre’ analysis of the advanced capitalist countries and logically reasoned that their main role was to build solidarity movements with the anti-imperialist struggle. In this way they believed that they could win the leadership amongst layers of the population least affected by labourist and chauvinist ideology — students, immigrants etc. It explains the important role that they have always given to solidarity work in relation to the Irish struggle. A consequence of this, of course, has been that all over Europe the FI is extremely weak in relation to the workers’ movement.

The policy changes, however, were too much for some groupings. In 1960 a tendency broke away under the leadership of Posadas, who was head of the FI’s Latin American section. They had some mass support in Latin America, notably in Bolivia amongst the tin miners. They took an ultra-left line that the Third World War was imminent and even necessary for socialism to rise from the ashes of the nuclear holocaust.

“The Bolshevik militant of this epoch is he who is prepared to face the last settlement of accounts between capitalism and the socialist revolution and the workers’ states, which will be settled within the nuclear war.”  
(‘Red Flag’)

As a consequence they set up their own ‘Posadist’ FI which was represented in Britain by a tiny sect — ‘The Revolutionary Workers’ Party’ — with a journal called ‘Red Flag’. The second and more important split involved Pablo himself and his supporters. Disagreements began in the early 1960 about interpretations of the colonial revolution, in particular the Cuban and Algerian situations. The ‘determining break’ came over the question of Pablo’s ‘critical support’ that the FI was giving the Chinese communists. The Pabloites maintained that China was definitely ‘Stalinist’. The split came in 1965 and they now call themselves the Revolutionary Marxist Tendency of the Fourth International. Their journal reveals that they have learned some important lessons, but their past remains like a dead weight on them, preventing them from learning more.

### (iii) THE MINORITY RETAINS ITS ORTHODOXY

The minority of the original FI represented by the Healeyites in Britain opposed most of the ‘revisionist’ developments, setting up their own FI. In Britain they had a field day. The revisionists like Pat Jordan and Ken Coates were buried so deep within the Labour Party that it was difficult to find them; they didn’t even have their own theoretical journal. Given this, and the colonial orientation, of the revisionists, the Healeyites could claim that such entrism was suicide and that they represented the fundamentals of Marxism and Trotskyism on the role of the working class (by which they mean

In reaction to the Stalinist suppression of the workers’ revolt against the bureaucracy in Hungary and the British CP’s support of the Russian invasion, hundreds of important militants left the Communist Party. The orthodox Trotskyists had a ready made analysis in Trotsky’s analysis of Stalinism; ideas for the future and a capacity and desire to organise. Many of the ex-CP members then joined. In 1957 they founded a twice weekly newspaper, the ‘Newsletter’, which in its early days was an excellent non-sectarian revolutionary paper. They also called a rank and file conference attended by 600 militants on an anti-bureaucratic platform, and produced a number of good agitational, industrial pamphlets. A sharp contrast again to its successor, the conferences of the stage-managed and manipulated farces of the ‘All Trades Union Alliance’. A theoretical journal, the ‘Labour Review’, was also published which contained some valuable articles on politics and history. Their theory now is a ritual incantation of sacred texts and abstract formulae derived from the past. As Hallas points out:—

“It started with a cadre of militants superior in numbers, talent and experience, to that of any previous revolutionary organisation since the formation of the Communist Party in 1920-21.” (I.S. Journal 40)

But despite gains in the Young Socialists (Labour Party) the Socialist Labour League (now the Workers’ Revolutionary Party) that they founded in 1959, soon faltered and lost much of its industrial base, and turned into a sectarian organisation that we know so well today. The reason is very simple — when combatting Stalinism and winning over CP members it was in a good position, able to draw on a wealth of experience. But when it came to a question of political strategy in modern class struggle it was bankrupt.

That bankruptcy was rooted in the limitations of orthodox Trotskyism. The major limitation was that they were still wedded to the idea that the economic crisis would be of the pre-war slump/catastrophe type. The date of the predicted collapse was simply put back year after year, rather like the Jehova’s Witnesses predictions of the end of the world. As the SLL became totally sectarian and engaged in no common activity with the rest of the left, it could have no feedback on its ideas, which became totally static. The SLL could never be wrong, so their pretentious ‘world leaderships’ and ‘world congresses’ of politically impotent groups could continue, although by now there was not much left of their section of the FI, having split from the French section.

Such decline and developments in the SLL were only countered by increasing activity, producing counter-productive political spectacles like those at Alexandra Palace, noted for their mass passivity and intense manipulation, ruthless bullying discipline, building the organisation around the selling of a substitutive newspaper and recruiting star names like Vanessa Redgrave. As they have such a high turnover in membership, most don’t remember the wrong predictions and bad politics that went before — which also leads to an increased sectarianism as their members must be ‘protected’ from other left wing groups who have longer memories.

Their necessary stress on the ‘central role of the working class’ has led to a blind and ultra-left position on the anti-imperialist struggles. For instance, after the Cuban Revolution that maintained that Cuba was still capitalist. This derives from the perverse logic that only a working class revolutionary party can make a revolution. Hence— no party in Cuba, no revolution! They failed to develop a perspective on the creative and important role of the peasantry and agricultural proletariat in anti-imperialist struggle. The WRP is a politically bankrupt organisation. We would be dishonest if we judged Trotskyism by their standards.

## 5. Modern Trotskyism Introduction

In the period we have examined the Trotskyist movement collapsed into undialectical extremes. ‘Orthodoxy’ remained trapped within an economic analysis only applicable to a past era and a view of class struggle so narrow that it could only impose old categories on every situation, learning nothing. ‘Revisionism’, in trying genuinely to adapt and understand new conditions, tended to retreat from an analysis of the advanced capitalist countries and the changed nature of the working class, choosing to locate its theories and practice primarily around colonial and neo-colonial questions.

The unfavourable conditions the revolutionary left had to operate in (long boom, cold war etc) intensified the difficulties Trotskyism had in adapting to changed conditions. But despite the weaknesses of implantation and analysis Trotskyism still managed to regenerate itself and become the dominant factor in a much-increased revolutionary left movement in some European countries. Of course, this was not a voluntaristic process. The setting was the increase in workers’ militancy (especially France ‘68 and Italy ‘69), the growth of the autonomous movements of women, students and immigrants and the anti-imperialist struggles in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

But why the regeneration in a context where traditional Trotskyism showed very little understanding of the new struggles? This was certainly the case. With some exceptions Trotskyism was either hostile or very slow to understand the workers’ movement and remains today sceptical and distant from any analysis of housework and community struggle. Student movements, especially as they lost their momentum were often used as fodder for ‘industrial work’. In industry the Trotskyist organisations had years of tradition of fertilising the trade unions and tended to miss vital moments of struggle outside the political and organisational framework of trade unionism. This was especially the case in Italy where the Trotskyist groups remain small and uninfluential, partly for this reason.

The regeneration was a product of a number of factors. Firstly, when these various struggles emerged, in most countries the Trotskyist organisations were the only ones prepared. Not prepared in any real political sense, but they had the organisations, the speakers, the political programmes. No matter how inappropriate any of their models were, in the absence of an alternative they were bound to make an impact on the growing number of mostly ex-student militants.

Secondly, the alternatives, where they existed, made serious errors which fuelled the growth of Trotskyism. In particular, both the anti-authoritarian movement in Germany and the so-called ‘Mao-Spontaneist’ currents in France had at first the political dominance and weight of numbers. But this ‘new left’ suffered from an over-emphasis on the critique of authority relationships, a lack of consistent organisational models and sometimes substituted eclectic political practice for a balanced, planned series of interventions with an industrial component.

Britain in the late sixties had only the ‘Solidarity’ group as an organised alternative, which despite producing a couple of useful pamphlets, was, and is, an ultra-left sect, totally hostile to Marxist concepts of organisation and politics. Other ‘libertarian’ groups were involved in useful local practice, mainly around ‘community’ issues, but were opposed to organisation and to industrial activity, basing their practice on the idea that the vanguard would emerge from the ‘fringes’ of the working class.

Big Flame emerged as a local group in Liverpool in 1970. Despite being industrially based and open to the idea of developing an organisation, it was slow to develop a viable model of general organisation and to rid its politics of remnants of ultra-leftism.

In contrast, Trotskyism, by its very rigidity, offered a political consistency and sense of serious organisation lacking elsewhere. This was definitely helped by its having a world presence, no matter how weak or at times mythical. Its commitment to a world revolutionary process and to backing anti-imperialist solidarity movements helped establish an implantation among students and ex-students and even some isolated working class militants. The revolutionary left, given its relative weakness, is susceptible to theories of instant revolution and an ultra-left distrust of any institutional or governmental power (China, Angola, Cuba etc), where the contradictions of class struggle also work themselves out.

Revolutionary organisations which are ‘nationally’ based in one country and which have a much longer-term perspective of building a new ‘International’ have difficulty in establishing their international commitments in the eyes of some militants. There is also the reminder of the opposite to the Trotskyist international mythology — in the Maoist groups who have subordinated their international perspectives to tail-ending the national interests of the Chinese state.

It is no accident that it is Italy where a ‘new’ left had done its theoretical homework, particularly in the theoretical analysis of the magazine ‘Quaderni Rossi’ and the practice of the Potere Operaio groupings (Workers’ Power), that the most serious serious organised alternative in Europe to Trotskyism emerged, and where three sizeable revolutionary organisations exist, none of which are Trotskyist (Lotta Continua, Avanguardia Operaia and PDUP). Neither is it an accident that the two largest European organisations with a Trotskyist background are precisely those which have challenged the Trotskyist tradition from within its general framework.

In Britain the International Socialists most successfully ‘rode the movement’s back’ in the late sixties, remaining flexible and open enough to attract many militants looking for an organised alternative. They had a different (if wrong!) analysis of the post-war boom (in the theory of the ‘permanent arms economy’), rejected the theory of permanent revolution (even if they had an even more ultra-left version derived from a ‘state capitalist’ position) and, most decisively, rejected the Transitional Programme (even if returning to a Second International split between maximum and minimum programmes).

IS have not advanced a revolutionary theory and practice based on new post-war conditions. Their model has often been the early years of the Comintern and the British Communist Party, the Minority Movements and so on. But by their flexibility and imagination they have been able to get closer to the working class movement, in particular to left-wing stewards, to whom I.S.’s lively, anti-bureaucratic but economic politics has a strong appeal. It is a tragedy that I.S.’s sectarianism and obsession with party building has reduced its impact on the left and in the working class: not to mention losing most of the old leading and middle cadre, especially in 1972-4 period.

In the following sections we hope to show how the traditional political analysis of Trotskyism still distorts its ability to understand the dynamic of class struggle internationally and domestically.



# b)i Party, Class and Epoch

A major part of any political theory is its view of the general relationship between party and class. It is linked to its analysis of the context of class struggle and specifically to the nature of the 'epoch'.

Modern Trotskyism holds a mechanical and a-historical conception of party and class relations, primarily because it has a partial and abstract understanding of Leninist theory. We will examine the context that gave birth to Leninism, and show how changes in the economic and political relations between capital, state and working class since then must lead to a resituating and reappraisal of that theory. The basic weaknesses of Trotskyism are a result of a failure to do this.

Trotskyism emerged as the defender of the revolutionary Marxist tradition against Stalinism and the degeneration of the Russian revolution. So its basic belief was the maintenance of the concept of the Leninist party, as the Russian and similar versions worldwide became bureaucratic and reformist. The Leninist conception provided the link to a revolutionary and democratic tradition of organisation. Now, as ever, Trotskyists want to build Leninist parties as the essential prerequisite for proletarian revolution. This view is *partially* mistaken: not because there are no elements of Lenin's idea that are relevant today, on the contrary there are plenty. But rather because Leninism was partly based on the particular Russian and European context, which has now changed. This is not accepted by Trotskyists. For them the needs of 1917 are the same as those of today. This leads to the repetitive, unimaginative and unchanging line on organisation that is manifested by Trotskyist groups today.

A couple of examples:—

'If only the workers in Paris had remembered the experiences of Paris 1936, of the Italian workers in 1920, if only they had had a revolutionary party, for such a party is the memory of the class.' (Tony Cliff of IS[SWP] writing in *Socialist Worker*)

Or if you prefer further back in history:—

'The remarkable thing about the audacity of the Paris workers is that the problems they took up in 1871 have not been solved to this day. We know the main reason for this. It does not lie in the immaturity of the objective conditions, nor in the lack of vigour of the mass struggles. It lies in the absence of an adequate revolutionary organisation.' (From *'On Bureaucracy'* by Ernest Mandel — IMG)

If only things were that simple! If revolutionary organisations are to be 'the memories of the class', they will have to start remembering that the function of a memory is to help *differentiate* between different periods, objective conditions and political tasks. Trotskyism suffers from a one-dimensional memory. In every situation, as each event in modern history unfolds — Chile — Portugal — 'if only there had been a party' the cry goes up. But it is not just a question of different conditions creating different organisational needs. Why is there no party uniting the real class vanguards? We may all want a party, but desiring it is not enough.

A certain level of consciousness and experience, the development of the struggle to the level where unification of the working class and its vanguards is taking place, a certain general ripeness of conditions — without these the necessity of the party cannot be turned into reality in most situations. Without some of these conditions the formation of a party tends to be the imposition of an *administrative machine* at the head of struggles and a working class that is not ready to recognise the legitimacy of the party as its own. Yet the problem is largely unseen by Trotskyism. Trotskyists believe it is necessary to build fully formed democratic centralist parties in any conditions, as the essential basis for further development. They may be small, but an embryo is better than nothing! For instance:—

'Even if we were still in the dark days of the 1930s, 40s or 50s in which the strength of the Trotskyist movement was miniscule, this would not in the slightest alter the necessity for a democratic centralist International.' (IMG)

The belief that the party or a party is not appropriate to and will not emerge in certain conditions, does not lead us to passivity. Organisational structures and tasks will be geared to specific circumstances. At some stages, organisation needs to be of a more preliminary character, looser and more open, with different relationships to the working class and the struggles that emerge. The role of the organisation would be to help develop the mass struggles and consciousness of the working class to the point at which a party becomes a direct necessity for the mass vanguards. However, it is not merely a question of the 'ripeness' of the situation and the level of struggle, it is also a question of what kind of struggle and what kind of working class. Surely the working classes and their struggles of Europe 1917 and Turin 1920 differ from those of Britain 1976 — or Chile 1976 — or Portugal now? Doesn't this pose the need for a very different *relationship*, political and organisational, between party and class. For Trotskyists the answer is essentially No! The consciousness and capacity for struggle of the working class has been given firm bounds in Trotskyist theory — its spontaneous, immediate, daily struggle cannot go beyond trade unionism, beyond seeking reforms under capitalism. The categories of Lenin's time — consciousness, spontaneity, organisation — remain fixed for all time, and transposed on to every future situation.

'Spontaneous struggles of the working class are limited to what is possible within bourgeois society, the revolutionary party leads the working class struggle for the overthrow of the system.' (Revolutionary Communist Group) (Revolutionary Communist No.1 p.12)

In other words, for Trotskyists, the party is still the sole provider of politics and consciousness to the working class — the distance between party and class remains wide. We will return to these questions of the nature of modern class struggle later in more detail. Suffice it to say, however, that the fixed analyses of Trotskyism creates a very structural/administrative concept of the need for the party.

'One of the central contradictions of the Bolshevik's revolutionary theory was their understanding of the significance of organisational questions to the formation of the revolutionary party.' (RCG) (Revolutionary Communist No.1 p.15)

They argue that out of the unevenness of consciousness, experience and struggle in the working class and the need for co-ordinated and directed attempts to seize power, which cannot arise spontaneously, arises the necessity for a given organisational structure — a structure of centralised leadership organised in the most democratic way possible. *This is absolutely correct.* It is also difficult to argue against most of the principles of democratic centralism, in conditions where they are possible and necessary.

- Full freedom of discussion
- Centralised direction of the political discussion in the organisation
- Centralisation of experience and national direction of activity
- Independent initiative and interpretation by the membership in implementation
- A controlled degree of specialisation and division of labour, checked by a certain level of rotation of tasks.
- Political training of members to create cadres.

But no matter how perfect the structures may be, *they don't tell us much about the content of the relationship between party and class in given periods and situations.* It is the nature of the working class and its relation to capital and state in different situations that is our starting point. In other words, even where it is possible, democratic centralism is a *secondary*

organisational question. *The key determinant is the conditions of struggle.* Unless the more general and 'timeless' aspects of Leninist theory of organisation are separated from and put into the context of the conditions of the struggle operating in that period, then our notions of party and class will be as empty.

## THE LENINIST THEORY OF PARTY AND CLASS — ITS LIMITS AND CONTRADICTIONS

The context that gave meaning to the Leninist relationship between party and class was *Europe* of the first part of the 20th century. It is a common mistake for critiques of the 'out-datedness' of Lenin to root its context solely in Russia and its special conditions of police state, large peasantry, the all-pervading state power etc. The thrust of the Leninist theory was aimed at breaking the predominance of the European schools of Marxism and substituting an alternative theory of revolution. It is true that it was the Russian conditions that pushed Lenin and the Bolsheviks into rejecting a Marxism which condemned them to wait for the development of capitalism before adopting the methods of socialist revolution. The dominant Marxist theory held that the revolution must go forward *by stages*, that in so-called underdeveloped countries like Russia, there must be a bourgeois revolution, led by the bourgeoisie, before revolutionaries could start fighting for socialism. Lenin's rejection had implications wider than for Russia. It was the weapon to break the reformist gradualism that had come to dominate Western Marxism. In the more advanced industrial countries the characteristic form of Marxism was in mass parties that were loose and open, yet bureaucratically run, and which fought for power primarily in parliament — combined with trade unions that carried out defensive economic struggle. Leninist theory had wider implications because Russia was not the 'backward' country that some maintained. It suffered from uneven development, rather than underdevelopment. For combined with the large agricultural sector were some of the most advanced factories and industries in the world, with high concentrations of skilled workers. In the rest of Europe these skilled workers were at the centre of struggle and the revolutionary process — for example, the common cycle of struggle that swept Europe in the early 1900s... the 1905 Russian revolution, Italy's first general strike in 1904, mass strikes of miners in the Ruhr etc.

So when Lenin proposed alternative strategies, the impact was felt eventually in other European countries. The dominant Marxist theory was not only no use to the Bolsheviks because it condemned them to a passive and subordinate role to the bourgeoisie: it also condemned them to *accept the spontaneous struggle of the workers.* Because we are concerned with the specific question of party and class, it is the latter which we have to examine. Why do we say 'condemned' to accept the spontaneous struggle? It is because they were in this time largely limited to *economistic trade unionism.* In European conditions (as well as in the specific Russian context, where it was constantly necessary to ensure proletarian rather than bourgeois control of the revolutionary process) only by separating and elevating the political struggle over the economic could the question of state power and its seizure be constantly posed. For Lenin this entailed a radical revision of relations between party and class. The *form* would be the tightly knit, highly centralised *vanguard party.* A cadre, combat organisation capable of intervening in and directing class struggle, not accepting its limitations as the mass bureaucratic parties in Europe did. The *content* was that this party of professional revolutionaries would bring political consciousness from outside to the daily industrial struggle, which was usually only spontaneously economic.

The specific features of the Leninist relationship between the party and the working class were dependent, then, on the level of development of relations between working class, capital and state. To explain the historical necessity for the Leninist party-class relationship we have to examine in more detail those other relationships.

Class relations tended to stop the daily struggle of the class at the point of production being spontaneously 'political'. With capitalism entering its imperialist phase, allowing new expansionary outlets — the trend towards monopoly was present. But companies were still relatively small and methods of production were mostly structured around the individual machine. This generated a class composition in the workforce which was based on the relationship of the skilled workers to these machines. The state's function was to provide a politico-legal framework for bourgeois power, generally keeping out of production in any direct sense. This meant that the worker confronted capitalism immediately in a *sectional* sense: the individual capitalist rather than collective capital and state power — and as a highly skilled *producer* divided on trade lines, with a tendency to see the problem of power more in terms of 'workers' control' rather than smashing the bourgeois state and installing the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Yet, revolutionary challenges to the system did arise from struggles connected with the factory. Crises were, in particular, provoked by attacks by capital on the skilled workers' degree of control in work. The struggles over 'dilution of labour' on the Clyde being a good example. In various parts of Europe workers councils, based on the power of skilled workers, played an important part in class confrontations. But the potential for real revolutionary challenge was held back by the type of class struggle likely to arise. The potential was dependent on an *outside political force* to focus the struggle on the objective of state power. The organisation of the skilled workers as *producers*, even its radical, workers' council form, tended to obscure the relation to state power, 'politics' and party organisation, based as it was on the particular class composition of the workforce in this period. Nowhere is this clearer than in Turin and Italian factory occupations organised by the workers' councils in 1920. Confident of their ability to run the factories without the capitalists — by staying *inside* the factories the movement failed to generalise its confrontations and prepare in a specific way at the general, state level to take power, *beyond the power to control production.*

The Leninist separation between the spheres of trade union and party activity, between economics and politics, flowed from this situation. *The party had to politically recompose the class and its vanguard outside the process of spontaneous daily struggle* and politically redirect that struggle against a consciously political object — the state.

The roots of the Trotskyist misuse of the Leninist theory of party and class can also be traced to the explanations that Lenin himself gave for the limits placed on the daily spontaneous struggle. Lenin outlined two interwoven but contradictory elements. One stressed the limitations imposed by the *conditions of struggle*, the relations between class composition, capital and state we have briefly outlined. The other was stress on a theory of the 'inevitable limitations' on working class *consciousness.* Compare two quotes from 'What is to be Done?':—

'The economic struggle is the collective struggle of the workers for better terms in the sale of their labour power, for better living conditions and working conditions. This struggle is necessarily a trade union struggle because working conditions vary from trade to trade and the struggle to improve them can only be conducted on the basis of trade organisations.'

and the more famous:—

'The history of all countries shows that the working class, exclusively by its own efforts, is able only to develop a trade union consciousness... The theory of socialism, however, grew out of theories... elaborated by intellectuals... the theoretical doctrine of social democracy arose altogether independently of the spontaneous growth of the working class movement.'



To pose political consciousness as arising not out of, but side by side with, class struggle, as the product of a marxist science developed by party intellectuals, is an idealist formulation. Consciousness cannot be deduced from consciousness, the potentiality for political struggle depends upon the particular conditions struggle arises in. While this view was not dominant in Lenin's time, it was wrong of him, and more especially later Marxists (especially Trotsky) to universalise these theories and conditions. Firstly, because its rigidity was not even appropriate to that period. Important spontaneous struggle did on occasions develop and had great significance. as Lenin later acknowledged, as in the case of the mass strikes and soviets in Russia in 1905. Secondly, its universalisation has led to consciousness being elevated above conditions of struggle as the determinant of party-class relationships. Hence, it is responsible for the extremely mechanical notions of this relationship which characterises modern Trotskyism. This reverses the real processes at work in struggle. It was the totality of the conditions of struggle that produced trade unionism as the dominant trend in class conflict and the *consequent* working class consciousness. This is not to deny the influence, even hegemony, of bourgeois ideology and its influence on trade unionism. Nor is it to pose some notion of spontaneously developing revolutionary consciousness in the working class. In some senses a socialist consciousness always comes 'from without' — that is outside any one sphere of experience, whether the factory, the home or the school — and usually only develops in interaction with revolutionary ideas and organisation. But some conditions of struggle encourage struggles to take on a political, ie. anti-capitalist, basis, which makes in turn for greater potentiality for the development of socialist consciousness. We would argue that these conditions are objectively present in modern relations between working class, capital and state — as experienced in peoples daily lives in the factory, community or college, but more of this later.

It is necessary to restore a materialist emphasis about the form and content of class struggle in line with Marx's formulation that — 'social being determines social consciousness'. Putting consciousness and ideology at the centre of analysis, as the determining factor in the level of struggle, fixes social being in such a rigid way and produces those endless abstract debates about consciousness and spontaneity that have limits for understanding of party-class relationships.

## THE CONSEQUENCES

The consequences of the Leninist position on party and class were always dangerous, and remain largely unacknowledged by Trotskyist and other groups today, who have a naive faith in the ability of democratic centralism to cure all ills.

'The Leninist party does not suffer from the tendency to bureaucratic control because it restricts its membership to those serious and disciplined enough to take political and theoretical issues as their starting point and to subordinate their activities to these.' (IS)

It is primarily the static and manipulative relationship with the working class which are the foundation for organisational degeneration in modern Leninist groups. Party structures on their own are no insurance against bureaucratisation.

In a wider context the idea of revolutionary consciousness as the product of party intellectuals, with the 'subjective factor' being solely located in the party *can* lead to a serious underestimation of the creative self-activity of the masses. This means a permanent danger of an elitist and authoritarian relationship between a Leninist party and the working class. It is important to stress that this is no automatic process, it depends on the precise relationship between party and masses in the struggles of the period. For the Bolsheviks, their ability to be inside the needs and struggles of the masses and translating that into revolutionary strategy and tactics kept the relationship a living dialectic, at least until the post-revolutionary conditions of material and political decay. The same cannot be said for Trotskyist sects mechanically modelled on the Bolshevik party, cut off from the conditions which made the Bol-

sheviks *the* revolutionary party of the Russian working class.

## THE RELEVANCE OF LENINISM

Despite outlining the limitations, the context and the contradictions of the Leninist model of party and class, there *are* universal lessons and truths contained in it, which are still applicable today. The first is the concept of the *vanguard organisation*. A vanguard organisation has the capacity to intervene collectively to develop class struggle, unlike either the 'mass' reformist parties (based on passive individual membership) or anarchist or libertarian 'organisations' (which are generally restricted to propaganda, because they see leadership and direction as contradictory to class autonomy). A vanguard organisation is based on grouping together conscious militants as *cadres* with the education and training to act as members of a *combat organisation*.

Lenin outlined the reasons that make an interventionist cadre organisation necessary. Essentially they are that the capitalist division of labour generates in any one section of the working class only a partial and fragmented experience of the system and the struggles against it. These differences are reinforced by the varying ideological experiences and cultural backgrounds in the working class. Also, the class struggle on a general and day to day basis lacks continuity, as the crisis expresses itself in an uneven and often isolated way. Therefore a political organisation operates to bring together militants from all sections to totalise experience and generate overall revolutionary perspectives. It links the experience and practice of struggle by bringing militants together, overcoming lack of confidence and isolation and provides consistent education. It should be rooted enough in the masses to enable it to be in the forefront of struggle and provide the necessary leadership.

The second application of Leninism is the role played by the party in arming and leading the proletariat to seize power. Some of the tasks necessary for seizing power under the conditions of modern capitalism have changed, most of which have gone unnoticed by Trotskyism. The state is a larger and more complex set of structures, with different types of political forces operative. In particular, the reformist forces (whether social democracy or the revisionist Communist Parties) are more strongly rooted, with a corresponding weakening of the revolutionary left, due to the experiences of the past half-century. It is problematical whether even in dual power situations, the revolutionary party will become an immediate 'majority' amongst the proletariat, on the Bolshevik model. Nevertheless, the period of dual power will be more protracted (albeit with insurrectionary moments) in which the party grows organically with the organs of popular power. All these tendencies reduce the insurrectionary aspects of the traditional revolutionary model of the seizure of power. But the degree of difference can also be exaggerated. It is still a case of re-situating the Leninist model.

There is a current of opinion which sees in the changed nature of society and state and in the existence of soviets and workers' councils, a lessened role for the party. But this is a bad mistake. We agree with Mandel, when he points out that the crisis does not merely grow from periphery to centre, but is a discontinuous process, that cannot be solved merely by the existence of autonomous working class organs of popular power. These do not homogenise and unify the class nor dissolve differences of ideology and interest overnight, solving all tactical and strategic problems. The centralisation of the revolutionary vanguard in the revolutionary party to 'seize the time' is still crucial. Recent events in Portugal emphasise that the process of power does reach crucial moments; turning points in which decisive action is needed — the kind of action (conditioned as it is by highly complex military, political and ideological considerations) which 'soviets' by their very nature cannot initiate or direct. It is also necessary to say that this role structures the task of the organisation, even in its embryonic and loose stages.

## TROTSKYIST CONCEPTIONS OF THE HISTORICAL EPOCH

Trotskyism has also failed to re-situate the Leninist theory of party-class relations because of its analysis of the historical epoch. In practice, this analysis appears as an over-emphasis on the problem of leadership, an exaggerated belief that the lack of correct leadership is the cause of underdevelopment of the class struggle and the failure to seize power. The Trotskyist conception of the epoch has remained static and leads to an undialectical separation of 'objective' and 'subjective' factors. Take this quote from the Revolutionary Communist Group:—

'In the Imperialist epoch capitalism suffers from a deep and prolonged crisis which can only be resolved if there exists a revolutionary party capable of winning the mass of the class to its programme. The maintenance of capitalism rests, not on its material foundations, for these are in decay — but on the immaturity and backwardness of the working class and its leadership. The various sharp political turns and alternations of periods of revolutionary advance with periods of reaction, spring not from changes in the economic base, but from impulses of a purely superstructural character. In this epoch the outcome of the crisis rests on the subjective factor: the understanding, organisation and determination of the revolutionary party.' ('Our Tasks and Methods' — Revolutionary Communist No.1 . . . page 5)

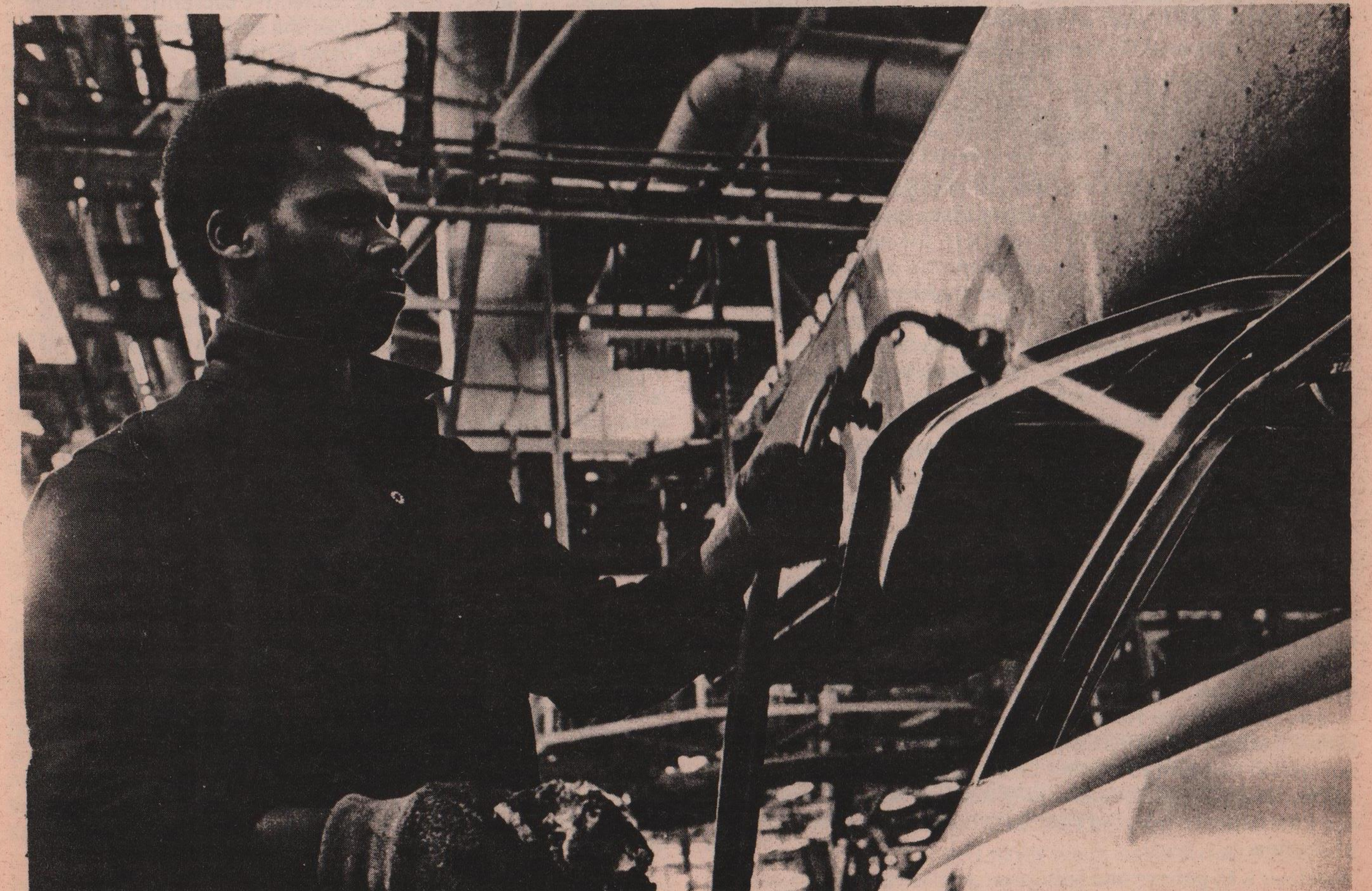
In this statement can be seen most of the weaknesses of Trotskyism. Firstly, it is absurd to see an undifferentiated period or 'epoch' which stretches from the first quarter of this century to today. To state, as the IMG does, that this 'Imperialist stage of capitalism is the epoch of wars, crises and revolutions' is both empirically inadequate and so general as to make it meaningless. If it is to show, as Lenin put it — 'the actuality of the revolution!— it saddles the revolutionary movement with a mechanical 'law' which, when it doesn't

operate, requires a substitute factor of explanation. In this 'epoch', when capitalism is supposedly finished and stagnant as a productive force, 'temporary' factors have to be used to cover the inadequacy of the analysis. These include, for various Trotskyist groups, all or one of, not simply backward leadership, but also a 'third technological revolution', arms spending, the role of the dollar and neo-colonial exploitation.

Without denying the role of these factors, our criticism of Trotskyism is that it will not recognise the profound transformations of capitalism initiated in the 1930s, 40s and 50s under the influence of Keynesianism etc. Let us make ourselves absolutely clear. We are not capitulating to some form of 'revisionism' which denies that capitalism any longer has internal economic contradictions, but we believe that the post-war reforms froze that process and now provide a very different set of problems as these changes collapse into a new crisis.

The changes in the relations between working class, capital and state have decisively altered the terrain of struggle. By using wages as a motor of capitalist development (encouraging consumption and rationalisation of plant etc), by involving the state directly in economic and social management, by attempting to institutionalise the class struggle through further incorporation of the trade unions: not to mention other processes like re-structuring capital through mergers and new financial and monetary relations between states — the system was given a new lease of life.

Trotskyism fails to recognise the totality and importance of these changes in the 'material foundations', or their effects on class consciousness. We have already documented how Trotsky and his later followers failed to recognise the importance of the New Deal or the post-war Keynesian reforms. They were prevented from doing this by the very nature of their analysis. The nature of Trotsky's characterisation of the epoch meant that any identification of capitalist *development* automatically ruled out proletarian revolution. Hence:—





'If the further development of productive forces was conceivable within the framework of bourgeois society, then revolution would be impossible. But since the further development of the productive forces . . . is inconceivable, the basic premise for revolution is given.'

(Trotsky — 'The First Five Years of the Communist International' Vol. 2 p. 4)

This was added to by statements that 'capitalism could no longer meet the 'immediate needs of the masses', and that 'systematic social reforms were impossible'. Given this, any changes in capitalism, while seen by Trotskyists as a *concession to reformism*, could not be seen as real reforms. That is, as measures which tried to integrate the immediate needs of the masses (for wages and consumption, health care and education etc) into the functioning of an expanding system with any hope of success. All over Europe working class people were won to accepting these changes, not permanently, but decisively enough to ensure many years of relative social peace.

No matter what imaginative and more serious attempts by the Trotskyist movement were made to analyse post-war developments, they are held within their own theoretical straitjacket. They can only see the development or expansion of capitalism (the 'booms') as due to temporary measures or to the weakness of the 'subjective factor' of leadership.

At the IMG's Fusion Conference in 1972 they related the ability of capitalism to regenerate itself as a product of Stalinism giving the breathing space for temporary measures to create a boom situation:—

'However, the political situation since 1945 has been dominated by the fact that this bureaucracy survived the war and was able to sabotage the revolutionary movement in Western Europe 1944-6. This gave to capitalism the chance to stabilise itself temporarily and to rebuild the shattered economies of Western Europe. A large upward shift occurred in the rate of exploitation, and this provided the initial conditions for the later aspects of technological innovation, armaments production etc. which were to sustain the boom.'

(Special Conference Supplement p.2)

It is even shown in the title of Mandel's recent book, '*Late Capitalism*', to which one observer acidly responded — a system is never late until it is dead.

Trotskyism had ceased to regard the bourgeoisie as able to develop the productive forces and therefore create systematic reforms. In fact, it was able to use both the needs and the desires of the masses and the collaboration of European social democracy and Stalinism to create a new period of stability and expansion. But this does not mean the bourgeoisie became a *politically* progressive force. It was the strength, actual and potential, of the working class which forced the bourgeoisie to make reforms to develop the system: attempting, for example through the use of wages, to institutionalise class needs and struggle rather than simply negate them as in the 1930s. This only confirms Marx's often ignored statement that 'the working class is the greatest productive force of all.'

In this light, the boom and stability of the system has to be seen in certain ways. The reforms were real, systematic and entailed changes in capital's material foundations. The crisis was due to the combination of two forces. Firstly, the struggle of the working class for its economic and social needs: for income divorced from productivity and a decent level of social services. This has reinforced the second factor; the competitive crisis that capitalism cannot escape. The crisis is not a question of over-production or demand management, it is a product of the law of value, profitability and the ability of the international working class to accelerate these conditions of decline.

But for Trotskyists their analysis of the epoch has meant, as Hodgson points out:—

\* A rigidly limited conception of capitalist development.

\* A determinist view of the economy, laws of development that see the super-structure reacting mechanically to the base.

Unlike Marx, Trotsky did not include social relations and ideas in the economic base, hence his inability to see the working class as a productive force — seeing only the supposedly 'neutral' technology, machines etc. However, it must be said some of these concepts were part of the tradition of the 2nd and 3rd Internationals.

This separation of base and superstructure has been exaggerated on a different basis within the Trotskyist tradition and has greatly distorted its ability to see new types of class struggles in new conditions. It is completely wrong to see the nature of class struggle as dependent on 'impulses of a purely superstructural character.' The changes in class struggle are, for the most part, a direct result of changes in capital's material foundations. To take a couple of examples.

Firstly, there have been immense changes in attitudes to work as a product of mechanisation, de-skilling and 'massification', involving both manual and white collar workers. This has made many traditional left attitudes to work out of date. Workers in many industries who spend much of their time fighting the capitalist nature and organisation of work are unresponsive to traditional notions of 'workers' control'. Even the 'right to work', when unconnected to the daily fight against line speeds, work discipline and gradings, can fail to motivate struggles. What is often more important to workers is guaranteed income and jobs, whether 'work' is available or not. Like the miner who was asked why he only worked a 4-day week, and replied 'because I can't live on three days' money'.

Secondly, the role of the state. The direct involvement of the state brings home far more clearly the political nature of struggles. It's ability to act as 'collective capitalist' and shape the direction of the crisis reduces the ability for unemployment etc. to be presented as 'natural disasters'. The role of the state in social management also means that it acts as a factor of cohesion between different sectors of struggle — the community, health, education etc. — thus totalising the impact of the crisis and making links between struggles in consciousness and practice more possible; as in present anti-cuts campaigns.

Because these factors go unacknowledged, the effect on Trotskyist theory is for *subjectivity to be separated from its objective basis*. Class consciousness is seen as separate from the changing structures of capitalism and the relationships it throws up which help determine that consciousness. In practical terms it is Trotskyists' constant battle cry that the conditions were ripe, but the consciousness was lacking. But this separation is undialectical. If working class consciousness is not mature enough then that is part of the objective situation! Because Trotskyism has not re-analysed the objective conditions, then it can only conclude that the missing factor is consciousness and leadership.

What this separation leads to is the belief that leadership can be transplanted on top of the struggle; whether or not the struggle itself has undergone sufficient transformation and maturation. For Trotskyism, the existence of the party is the condition for development of the subjective factor, the supposed only missing link. So we end up where we started, with the vulgarised and over-estimated notion of leadership. A concept of leadership that bears no relationship to whether or not Trotskyists have the actual capacity to lead the from inside the process of struggle itself.

## ii) Demands and Struggle

The failure of Trotskyism to see that certain aspects of Leninism were historically specific has meant that the relationship between the vanguard organisation and the working class is seen in static terms. The relationship continues to be seen as determined by an analysis of *consciousness*.

"The Leninist concept of the Party cannot be separated from a specific analysis of proletarian class consciousness." (Mandel — 'The Leninist Theory of Organisation')

For Mandel, Leninism is the 'Marxist science of the subjective factor'. So the party becomes based on a view of class consciousness as inherently limited. As we said earlier, the potential of consciousness, while not automatic or spontaneous, arises primarily from the conditions of struggle. Modern Trotskyism is notable for seldom analysing the changing conditions and arising content. In fact it is precluded from doing so seriously by its view of an unchanging epoch and an inherently limited consciousness. The above pamphlet by Mandel is abstract from start to finish. It never situates relations between party and class in changing conditions of struggle, but rather in absolutes of consciousness, spontaneity, the party and the like.

We have indicated through the pamphlet some of the changing conditions. But to briefly state some of them, brought about by different relations between working class, capital and state.

- i) With the interventionist role of the state, wage struggles, in particular fights to separate wages from productivity (eg via guaranteed lay-off pay demands) are directly political. This is not because they involve the state, but because they are more immediately anti-capitalist and less defensive.
- ii) The tendency towards a de-skilled and proletarianised composition of the working class makes unification of the proletariat both a different and potentially more possible process: particularly through struggles against gradings, work hierarchy and for parity etc.
- iii) Community, health, education and welfare services being drawn into a more direct relationship with capitalist production (via the state) has increased the anti-capitalist potential of struggles outside the factory and the strategic importance of organising with housewives, health workers students etc.

In general, we think that the daily (sometimes called 'immediate' or 'spontaneous') struggles of the class have a greater political potential (that is for being directly anti-capitalist) than in the period when the Leninist theory of the party was formulated. This is the product of the changing composition of the working class, the changed role of the state and the new structures of capitalism.

The rigid distinction between 'politics' and 'economics', or 'defensive' and 'offensive' struggle makes less sense now. This is not to collapse every sort of struggle into one another, nor to pose a spontaneously socialist consciousness. Merely to indicate that politics is less of an 'outside' factor that organisations have to bring into the struggle. Rather they have to discover, direct and generalise it from within the struggle, to overcome the continuing hold of sectionalism, reformism and bourgeois ideology in general. It should be noted that there are some exceptions to the above model. Some politics remains explicitly external and is raised as a principle by the vanguard organisation. An example being support for the liberation struggle in Ireland and similar situations.

Nevertheless, these attempts to re-analyse class struggle determine for us the nature of party-class relations. Because of

the largely static nature of their analyses, Trotskyists still pose the problem as one of the 'injection' of a political programme.

"The building of the revolutionary party is the process whereby the programme of the socialist revolution is fused with the experience of the majority of advanced workers' struggle". (Mandel 'Leninist Theory of Organisation' p.5)

Unfortunately, Trotskyists see this programme as being worked out *above* the changing process of struggle, in a supposed scientific process that Mandel calls 'theoretical production'.

"The gradual injection of these demands into mass struggles can only come about through the efforts of a broad-based layer of advanced workers, who are closely linked to the masses and who disseminate and publicise these demands which do not normally grow out of the day-to-day experience of the class". (Mandel p. 17 as above)

In other words, these 'advanced workers' are the passive carriers of a 'politics from the outside'. Perhaps this helps to explain why party leaderships (responsible for this 'theoretical production') can so often have bureaucratic and manipulative relationships with the rank and file members.

These positions affect the application of such programmes. From the position that the correct programmes can be worked out above the struggle there is a tendency for Trotskyist groups to believe that if they are big enough in a crisis situation, then the transplantation of such a set of demands can lead the working class to power. Talking of how there could have been a revolution in May '68 in France, Mandel says:—

"At that precise moment small nuclei of workers armed with the correct political programme. . . would have been enough of prevent the dispersal of the strikers, to inspire mass occupations and the democratic creation of strike committees in the principal factories of the country". (Mandel — 'Lessons of May '68')

Or a variation:—

"Events such as the French strike of May '68, to which the transitional programme provided a key set of demands, that had those who used them been strong enough, could have led the workers' movement step by step to the conquest of power." (Workers Fight)

This political approach in fact only creates self-appointed vanguards, who can teach but cannot learn. The ironic thing is that there have been hordes of Trotskyist sects or organisations with such programmes for decades, yet they have seldom played a key leadership role. They don't seem to question that the limited impact is not due to any lack of *size* (or to Stalinist or reformist betrayals) but to the lack of *relevance*. The Italian organisation Lotta Continua once correctly noted that the problem was not to *put yourself* at the head of the masses, but to *be* the head of the masses.

To be in this situation the vanguard organisation must be prepared to learn, particularly from the qualitatively higher periods of mass struggle. The Trotskyist approach precludes this as another quote from Mandel shows:—

"The proletarian army will never reach its historical objectives if the necessary education, schooling and testing of a proletarian vanguard in the working out and agitational application



of the revolutionary programme in struggle, has not taken place *before* (our emphasis) the outbreak of the broadest mass struggles". (from 'The Leninist Theory of Organisation') For us the vanguard organisation must sink itself into the changing process of struggle, to learn the effects of changes on consciousness so we can articulate working class needs and generalise them. Also to form organisations adequate to the tasks of the situation. The Trotskyist approach leads to programmes from without and organisations from above. Finally, a theory which recognises that class consciousness is multi-layered and is flexibly conditioned by changing conditions, enables a more balanced understanding of how the working class can become a revolutionary class. The Trotskyist theory lays such stress on working class domination by capitalism and bourgeois ideology that it is forced to reduce the transition from class-in-itself to class-for-itself as a sudden 'ignition' of consciousness in crisis/dual power situations. The effect is to create a too strong discontinuity between periods of 'normal' class struggle and a revolutionary crisis. We return to this theme later.

## TRANSITIONAL DEMANDS

We have dealt so far with the limitations of the Trotskyist concept of the *form* of relationship between party and class. We now turn to an examination of the *content* of those relations through a critical examination of transitional demands. In an earlier section we dealt with how the Transitional Programme had arisen in the 1930s. Its great strength was that by overcoming the traditional split between minimum and maximum demands it dually posed ways of taking the struggle forward to questions of seizing power. However, its actual context created its functional usefulness. In the late 1930s 'socialism or barbarism?' did appear to be a concrete choice, and the collapse of capitalism and a period of dual power were possibilities. Its weakness is twofold. Firstly, it underestimated the possibility of regeneration of the system, even in 1930s conditions. Secondly, it did not see the Transitional Programme as historically specific. This is shown by the fact that its outlines were formulated in the 1920s and early 1930s and yet it is still put forward as useful in whole or modified form by Trotskyists today.

The albatross of the Transitional Programme leaves Trotskyism to put forward (albeit half-heartedly) that capitalism is always in danger of imminent collapse. Statements that were half-true in the 1930s are universalised. Hence the IMG says:-

"The essential nature and necessity of such a programme is determined, at the most fundamental level, by the fact that capitalism cannot even solve the immediate problems of the masses." ('Building the Fourth International in Britain' - 1972)

As we have said before, once the stability and possibility of recuperation of working class needs are ignored, then the continued existence of the system can only be blamed on weak leadership or some other idealist formulation. To be fair, precisely because of the problems its use creates, few Trotskyist organisations actually use the full Transitional Programme. For those that try to (like the WRP) it is easy to criticise some of the ludicrous demands about workers' militias etc. In these situations it is simply a case of groups putting forward what they would like to happen (or what could happen in a dual power situation) with no link to the reality of the situation. The 'Militant' group's call for a workers' militia organised by the trade unions in Northern Ireland is a classic case, especially as those unions are pillars of the sectarian Orange order. Most Trotskyist groups are selective in their use of transitional demands, so we will examine a couple of the more widely used ones - 'workers' control and 'open the books'. We will try to show that transitional demands cannot effectively be used outside dual power situations and that if they are their uses degenerate into 'exposures' or abstract 'educating' perspectives.

## WORKERS' CONTROL

Trotskyist groups do not, as certain ultra-leftists suggest, put forward workers' control as a substitute for full workers power under socialism. On the contrary, it is seen as a transitional stage to workers' self-management. In the Transitional Programme, Trotsky wrote:-

"The working out of even the most elementary economic plan - from the point of view of the exploited and not the exploiters - is impossible without workers' control, that is without penetration of the workers' eyes into all open and concealed springs of the capitalist economy. Committees representing individual business enterprises should meet at conference and choose corresponding committees of trusts, whole branches of industry, economic regions and finally of national industry as a whole. Thus workers' control becomes a *school for planned economy*. (Trotsky's emphasis) On the basis of the experience of control, the proletariat will prepare itself for direct management of nationalised industry, when the hour for that eventuality strikes".

Trotsky wrote that when he believed that the collapse of the system was at hand. Lenin, writing in 1918, a situation of real elements of dual power, was even more explicit:-

"We have to expropriate them. That is not where the hitch lies. . . I told every workers' delegation. . . You would like to be confiscated? Very well, we have blank forms for a decree ready. They can be signed in a minute. But tell us, have you learned to take over production and have you calculated what you will produce? Do you know the connection between what you are producing and the international market? Whereupon it turns out they have not learned this yet".

Workers' control, then, is a 'school for a planned economy'. Therefore, as one Trotskyist group says:-

"Full workers' control, of course, can only be achieved in a pre-revolutionary situation and constitutes, under these conditions, dual power at factory, then at national level". ('The Battle for Trotskyism' - Workers Socialist League' p.15)

The problem arises when the demand is used outside of that context. It is our contention that it cannot be a 'school for a planned economy' in conditions of normalised capitalist production. Yet this is precisely how it is used by Trotskyists. In the last named document the WSL continue:-

"prior to this (dual power) the demand for workers' control, carefully used, educates the advanced layers and tests out the class itself". (p.15)

Modern Trotskyism is caught in an ambiguous position. While acknowledging that workers' control cannot exist outside of a pre-revolutionary situation, they continue to use it, largely propagandistically, because it is the centrepiece of the Transitional Programme. Why can't it be used in normalised capitalist production, even in a crisis situation? Firstly, because in the concrete material circumstances it arises in, the demand functions to impel workers to take responsibility for the running of the factory. This is not the aim of Trotskyists, but to talk of its use to 'educate the advanced layers' is an abstraction. In the real circumstances (workers' co-operatives etc.) the 'education' is imposed by capitalist competition. That is, the workers controlling, not simply their own exploitation, but speed-up, redundancies etc. The workers are not learning to plan the economy but to adapt to the capitalist system.

The more sophisticated Trotskyist groups (eg. IMG) recognise this problem. They say that while propagandising for workers' control, a position of 'no workers' responsibility for the running of firms under capitalism' would accompany it. Hence, they concretise that around demands for *veto*s, over mobility of labour, line-speeds etc.

While demands for particular vetoes are fine, the problem arises when they are linked with generalised demands for workers' control - i.e. the many demands for 'nationalisation under workers' control' that appear in Trotskyist programmes. A concrete demand for an extension of workers' power in particular and often temporary situations is confused with a propaganda slogan. As the IMG say in their recent '4th International Theses on Britain' - "generalised workers' control of the whole economy is now a 'propaganda task', relating to current and past revolutionary experiences. And as they say in 'What Is Workers' Control?' -

"The struggle for workers' control is only possible, therefore, if it is seen as part of a struggle for a workers' government which can challenge the power of the state on a nationwide basis." (J. Marshall - Red Mole 13.3.72)

Unfortunately, in Britain we are nowhere near that situation. In present circumstances the state and some employers are actually employing what they call workers' participation and control to help resolve the crisis, through incorporation of workers' representatives. To use the demand for workers' control in such circumstances where its meaning will inevitably be dictated by the existing power relations, destroys and indeed makes dangerous the educative value of the concept. The problem only arises because of the impossibility of using transitional demands properly outside the situation of dual power. The concept of workers' control should be used in a purely educational sense to explain a distinct future situation, while developing concrete forms of workers' power in the real conditions we operate in.

Similar problems arise in relation to one particular aspect of workers' control - the demand for employers to 'open the books'. While there are circumstances in which a demand for the release of commercial information can be very useful, as a generalised demand it is dangerous. Trotskyists advocate it to expose to workers that employers are lying about profits, bankruptcy etc. The problem maybe they aren't lying, especially in today's crisis situation. If that situation arises and they really are bankrupt then Trotskyists say that workers should refuse to take responsibility. Fine, but an undifferentiated use of the slogan 'open the books' can have undermined such attitudes. If workers have demanded to know the 'real' position, then find out it is adverse, then it defuses the situation more than if they'd taken a 'no responsibility' position in the first place. This is especially important where multi-national firms can manipulate the books and effectively disguise the fact.

## THE CONSEQUENCES OF A TRANSITIONAL APPROACH

The difficulties of implementing a Transitional Programme has led some Trotskyists to be increasingly selective and to recognise the propagandistic basis of such demands. A particular focus of this has been the questioning of 'calls to action' linked to transitional use of demands like that of a general strike. IMG have written:-

"Once the role of the party is defined as *presenting ideas* (our emphasis) to the working class then it is clear that it is perfectly possible to present a programme for the destruction of capitalism at any time. The task of the party must therefore not be defined as calling the masses to action, but rather as explaining a rounded conception of the situation." ('Building the 4th International in Britain')

The problem of dealing with the limitations of transitional demands in this way is that they 'solve' the lack of realism by expansion of their *'exposure'* function. The traditional demand located in this perspective is 'For a Labour Government with socialist policies', used particularly by the WRP. This is used in a cynical way, as its advocates know that it is impossible. The aim becomes that of involving the workers

in the struggle for the impossible, so that the lack of success will 'expose' the limitations of reformism. Unfortunately, it is far more likely that the inadequacies of the demand will be exposed and workers will realise the futility of any effort expended, thus exposing the revolutionaries instead.

This demand has been rejected by the more realistic Trotskyist organisations. The IMG has replaced it with calls for a 'workers' government'. While slightly more related to existing struggles of some sort (eg. for more democracy and accountability in the Labour Movement) it is still unrealistic and feeds illusions in reformism. In their election manifesto of 1974 IMG called for 'a government based on the organisations of the working class! For a Republic of Workers' Councils!' There are no concrete manifestations of trends inside the Labour Party or the working class that would make either of these demands remotely realisable within the foreseeable future. As this is the case and most militants know it, they appear as absurd.

The real educational value of raising issues of the tasks of a workers' government or the necessity and problems of building workers' councils (eg. via discussion of Chile or Portugal) are lost by their use in programmatic form, which mystifies the real task of the situation today. Given their use outside a realistic context, transitional demands can only be abstract. This includes the endless calls for general strikes and Councils of Action etc. that have littered the history of Trotskyism. They seldom show any realistic progress towards the intended goal.

It is worth noting that the concept of 'raising consciousness' implied in the transitional model is weak. It is built on a rationalist model where people's consciousness can be raised in a 'battle of ideas'. Trotskyists often explain that it is their aim to debate with the reformists and expose them in front of the masses by superior argument. Unfortunately there is more than ideology that binds reformism and the masses together. There is also the question of *power*. How many times have revolutionaries 'smashed' reformists in argument, yet still lost in real terms?

The Trotskyist approach to demands and struggling for them can seldom break these power relations because they so often confirm the 'powerlessness' of the working class and militants by setting unwinable targets plus abstract principles masquerading as political strategy. The weaknesses of their approach are reinforced by their attitude to working class consciousness. This is usually talked of in terms of 'backwardness' as if the ideas were somehow illusory or false, creating the illusion that they can be swept away by the correct ideas of the programme of the party. When this doesn't happen it is usually explained by the get-out clause of a 'time-lag' in consciousness.

A classic example is this statement from Tony Polan:-

"The accumulated momentum and authority of illusions enable them to maintain their power over the essentially conservative mind of man, long after the objective conditions - the economic base - for them have disappeared. In the May days in France, the reliable material forces of the capitalist state were little more than a few thousand CRS thugs. The fact that the working class remained subject to the ideology of Stalinist reformism *alone* ensured the survival of the French bourgeoisie". ('Why the SLL is not Marching')

As we have said before, the mistake lies in not recognising that ideology is part of the objective conditions. Ideology is lived relationships, reflecting the reproduction of everyday relationships in capitalist society and this includes the power of both the state and the French Communist Party in the above instance. Unless the depth and complexity of people's consciousness is given full credence, then failures can always be written off by 'betrayals' and 'bad leadership'.





Revolutionary demands need to mobilise class power.

Having made these criticisms, we are by no means suggesting that all or even most of the demands used by the better Trotskyist groups are bad. They do recognise the need for wide-ranging demands related to the actual dynamic of different situations.

But the left needs to work on demands that are part of strategies to actually advance working class power by relating to a realisable target connected to revolutionary ways of fighting everyday struggle. Big Flame has been weak in developing from the limitations of short-term demands, that do little more than articulate militancy, but do not significantly generate a higher level of struggle.

The Trotskyist use of transitional demands has always had the advantage of being able to bridge short and long term situations, albeit in a distorted way. To avoid these weaknesses we have been trying to develop the concept of 'medium-term' demands, that would act as a bridge between immediate agitation and wider propaganda for socialism. These are 'demands' which are general goals indicating autonomous working class needs. Their realism flows not so much from whether they can be achieved under capitalism but because concrete processes and immediate demands can be linked to them. In this way the masses can recognise their needs in them and how they are related to both a critique of

capitalism and the socialist alternative. Each general 'demand' or perspective would therefore be linked to immediate demands and also to ways of organising. Some examples would be:—

- (i) Guaranteed income for employed and unemployed (40 hours pay — work or no work; automatic cost of living indexes, minimum living income for unemployed and claimants)
- (ii) Independent income for housewives (Full unemployment rights and benefits for women, increased family allowances paid directly to women, payment to housewives for care of sick and elderly due to cut-backs etc.)
- (iii) The right to control our own bodies. (Abortion on demand, no discrimination against gays, full contraception and sex education facilities in schools etc.)

This approach also avoids the weaknesses of the other alternative to transitional demands — the minimum-maximum split. The SWP has made it one of the bases of their politics, wisely avoiding the mistakes of traditional Trotskyism. But as they have no bridging alternative their politics tends to be split into moralising about capitalist corruption versus the socialist utopia, or narrow economism. The latter manifests itself in the reduction of daily struggles to their lowest common denominator and not allowing 'political' demands to be raised in their rank and file movements.

## iii) Unification of the Class

### COMPOSITION OF THE CLASS, AUTONOMOUS ORGANISATION AND PARTY FORMATION

The unification of the working class, the growth of the revolutionary party and ultimately the seizure of power are all inseparable problems. Yet the revolutionary movement has tended to greatly oversimplify the process, particularly Trotskyism. An oft-repeated refrain is that — "The revolutionary party must make all progressive demands and movements of all oppressed social layers its own". This is used to justify the necessity for a general political organisation in a situation where many militants see their activity in autonomous movements as *opposed* to membership of revolutionary organisations. The problem is that while the statement is true in a long-term sense, the *formal* existence of a general party or organisation in no way guarantees its capacity to be that factor of unity. This applies even where such an organisation brings together militants from every sector *inside* its own for formation. Instead it must seek to prove in practice that it understands the particular dynamic of each sector of the class (women, blacks etc.) It must understand their respective independent needs, while it attempts to find points of unification as the struggle develops. At the moment the tendency is to submerge particular needs in such 'general' organisations and strategies, subordinating them to the models of organisation and politics of the stronger and more traditional sectors.

We have already seen that in the general sense and particular in the third world, Trotskyism tends to underestimate non-traditional sectors like the peasantry in the struggle for socialism. Similar errors are made in the advanced capitalist countries.

The working class is regarded as synonymous with industrial workers by many Trotskyists. They fail to recognise the real divisions on the basis of sex, race or other factors. The problem of unification of the working class is seen in terms of overcoming *ideological* divisions. In all the calls for blacks and whites, or men and women to 'unite and fight' it is seldom recognised that there are solid *material* reasons for division (differences in access to wages, position in the job hierarchy etc.) Out of these arise substantial differences in power which cannot be eliminated by calls for unity. They require autonomous organisation by each specifically oppressed sector.

The strength of the autonomous movements, who often come into being ignored or opposed by the traditional left, has created a situation where all but the most backward Trotskyist groups now formally recognise the need for such organisation. Nevertheless, such support is still distorted by the fact that they are seen as *marginal* sectors. The schema is still the traditional one where peripheral sectors or the 'middle class' are won over by the vanguard organisation to the industrial working class and *its* programme. Take, for instance, this statement, part of the founding document from the fusion conference of IMG/Spartacus League in 1972:—

"In periods before 1945 the social unrest in these 'peripheral' groups would have found its natural leadership in the political struggles of the working class. However, due to the relative passivity of the working class, this has not occurred. Although the working class is the only class which is capable of resolving the contradictions of capitalism which affect these

other groups, nevertheless it does not automatically gain the leadership of all the oppressed sectors of society. It only gains this leadership when it can show in practice that only the proletariat has the physical power, social cohesion, political leadership etc. to destroy the particular oppressions suffered by these other groups. . . A clear example is the increasing struggle of women. These struggles are of extreme importance in that they continue by their efforts to disintegrate the hold of bourgeois ideology over society, enable other sections of these movements to be won directly to Marxism, and at least neutralise large sections of the petty bourgeoisie. It therefore is an elementary duty of revolutionaries to continue to support and attempt to lead such struggles by winning them to socialist positions" (Red Mole Special Supplement. p.2)

In this quote we can see why, despite formal recognition and principled positions on autonomy, activists in the various movements are suspicious of and hostile to the revolutionary left and vanguard organisation. The passage only recognises a one-way process of adaptation, that is, the integration of other groups into an already formed politics and way of organising. There is no concept of learning from their rich experience, still less of so-called peripheral movements redefining socialism to account of their needs. It is presented that it is still the industrial working class that 'solves the oppression' of 'other groups' because it has the muscle. The contradictions of sexual and racial oppression are reduced to their manifestations under capitalism and the ending of that system presumed to be the guarantee of the withering away of oppression.

In fact the IMG and the mainstream 4th International are probably the best current of Trotskyism on this question. At least their post-war concept of 'from periphery to centre' enabled them to locate and respond to non-traditional sectors and struggles. But the 'periphery to centre' concept (see Section 4) does not solve the question. It still puts forward a narrow definition of the working class in which a move to the 'centre' involves an underlying assumption that there is a rigid hierarchy of importance. The concept helps to explain why so many activists in autonomous movements experience interventions by Trotskyist groups as 'raiding parties' where they are taught where 'the real struggle' is.

IS/SWP are possibly the worst culprits, using united fronts and autonomous movements to cynically recruit, *when* they feel these forums have power and numbers. Their interventions in the National Abortion Campaign are a case in point, as is their work around racism. Excellent propaganda work was distorted by failing to recognise the legitimacy of autonomous black organisation. They consequently lost most of their key black cadre who left in disgust. Even in their work on unemployment, where they have discovered that it is actually the unemployed who are attracted to 'right to work' organisation, rigid views of power and class are maintained. As in other instances 'marginal' groups are used as entrances to the 'real' working class. One of the 'Rank and File' leaders, Carol Douras, opened a Right to Work Conference with the remark that:—

"Unemployed workers lose their rights and their power. Those of you with jobs have the power. You have to take up the fight". (I.S. Journal 94)



This also helps to explain the fetish of trade union delegation as the basis of campaigns, a theme we will return to in the next section. The narrow definition of power and class reflects yet again that much political theory was formed and has not been much altered since the early part of the century. A period when Leninist formulations were adequate as political strategy and when the industrial component of the working class was overwhelmingly dominant.

This is not the case today. The post-war changes in the structure of capitalism have created a very different composition of the working class. This includes:—

- \* The role of immigrant labour, creating important roles for the black and similar sections of the class.
- \* The proletarianisation of sectors of white collar work and professional workers, reflecting itself in the changing class character of higher education and students.
- \* The expansion of the state sector, creating a big layer of public service workers including many women.
- \* The bringing closer to production of many aspects of social life, connected to the family and community; increasing the role and importance of housewives.
- \* Changes in the actual composition of the industrial working class, with a movement from skilled to massified work.

The result is two-fold. Firstly, political strategy, including party formation and building towards taking power, must reflect the broadening of the working class. As Avanguardia Operaia said when criticising the traditional narrowness of their fraternal organisation, I.S. —

“The grouping of social forces that can carry out this autonomous organisation and task of a general national movement towards socialism is wider and qualitatively different from the straightforward working class of the industrial workers. (I.S. Journal 84 p.16)

Without this broadening a narrow workerism and economism will result, tending to tail after the lowest common denominator of struggles. We also have to recognise that there is a greater variability of struggles and demands that cannot be unflexibly reduced to ‘central-strategical’ projects, like a general strike to bring down the government (See ‘The Situation in Britain and the Tasks of the IMG’ — International Vol.2 No. 2)

Secondly, the question of class alliances is no longer characterised by a simple division into ‘centre’ and ‘periphery’. While the industrial working class remains a key, probably the key sector, because of its economic location, the primary question is that of politically unifying the broader working class. This means recognising the particular nature of the struggles of each sector and its need for autonomy as the spring board for unification. It means seeing that power is also political and social, reflecting the capacity to struggle, as well as narrowly economic. These things do not justify separatism, merely a recognition that the process of unification is more uneven than currently recognised in the Trotskyist schema.

### SOCIAL DEMOCRACY

Given that the goal of working class unification is the seizure of power, we have to give consideration to the role of social democracy. Social democracy and how to combat it has always been one of the key differences between Trotskyism and other revolutionary tendencies. In the last couple of years we’ve seen a strong move by Trotskyist organisations towards an entrism strategy. This has involved their organisations joining Trotskyist groups already in the Labour Party (Militant, Chartists etc.): the difference being that for IMG, ICL etc it is part of a dual strategy of having one foot in the Labour Party and one in extra-parliamentary struggles. We are totally opposed to entrism and regret this orientation by substantial parts of the revolutionary left. We think it derives from an analysis of reformism and social democracy that has static and institutionalised elements.

Entrism and the traditional Trotskyist orientation are based on the belief that the Labour Party is the mass party of the working class and that revolutionaries therefore have to be in or around it to break its hold. This derives from two inter-related positions:—

- (i) That the Labour Party was a party built by the unions to defend their interests. It remains a party that the unions, which millions of workers belong to, have direct links with.
- (ii) Because the majority of the working class votes Labour, it shows that they are loyal to it and believe in its policies and in parliamentarianism etc. These ‘illusions’ show that workers are loyal because the Labour Party represents the general political consciousness of the masses, that is reformism.

For these reasons, Trotskyist groups argue that Lenin’s advice holds — to enter or work around the Labour Party. They tend to see any attempt to challenge such a strategy as simply an echo of old debates of Leninist versus ultra-leftist.

“The discussion that echoed in radical circles around the 1970 election — and which is still with us today — was merely a belated repetition of that which had shaken the young Communist Party, or earlier still, the socialist movement around Hyndman in the 1900s”. (“The Labour Party—Which Way?” — League for Socialist Action. p.3)

The same pamphlet emphasises historical continuity to explain that the working class has always been ideologically subordinate and therefore loyal to the Labour Party. Hence:—

“Such a loyalty was not only able to overcome the disillusion of the Wilson experience but of every successive Labour government prior to that one”. (p.4)

Such an historically static analysis is institutionalised in that it makes permanent the elements involved; the nature of the Labour Party, the consciousness of the working class, what reformism is and so on. In our view the hold of reformism over the working class has to be looked at in a more dynamic and historical way. We acknowledge, of course, the grip of certain ideas like the neutrality of the state and the law, action through official channels/parliamentarianism and others. Yet this grip is neither static nor unchanging in its nature. At high points in class struggle like the General Strike, but also in many daily situations, either the ideas or the institutions are seen to crumble. Yet the situation remains in flux because the power of the reformist organisations and the weight of tradition always tends to limit the situation unless a clear alternative is built.

As we have said previously, such obstacles cannot be overcome solely through the battle of ideas. Reformism is not an external stranglehold on struggle linked to permanently limited consciousness, it is a living relationship that is inside the experience of the working class. It is this failure that leads Trotskyism to fail to grasp the changing historical relationships and bases of reformism and the class struggle. If we examine how reformism has changed since the war, it is obvious that the Labour Party and the trade union machines have been integrated into the running of the system.

The Labour Party was the overseer of the important post-1945 reforms aimed at extending the system and integrating class struggle. These, however, represented the historical turning point of reformism. After that, as a general strategy, it could go no further. Hence the growth and strength of ‘revisionism’ inside social democracy. This does not lead to an ultra-left position which sees all reforms as impossible or reactionary. Although they have not had a real reforming strategy, their counter-strategy, that of competing solely as better managers of capitalism permits particular reforms and directions that can still integrate the working class and its struggles.

The most important product is that the new position of Labour and union leaders as co-managers of the system necessarily alters the basis of reformism inside the working class. The process of integration has been clearly visible and felt materially by the working class which has had to rely more on its own struggles. Even during the 1950s, when a period of economic expansion gave little space for struggles, a new ‘home-made’ reformism largely replaced working through official union channels. This new reformism was less rooted in adherence to reformist institutions or the traditional ideological basis of illusions in parliament and the Labour Party. It was more interior to everyday struggle and therefore more volatile and changeable. It was particularly rooted in the type of struggle characteristic of the period: based on *sectionalism and delegation*.

Sectionalism is the belief and mode of struggle that depends on seeing each sector of the working class having separate interests, for instance in ‘special case’ wage claims. Trotskyism makes the mistake of seeing the struggle of *one sector itself* as reformist: revolutionary struggles being connected only to overtly ‘political’ objects, connected to state power and united working class action. But the struggles of one sector can open up the way for the rest of the class, by passing generalisable demands, eg. for across the board increases. Most struggles in themselves can be either revolutionary or reformist depending on the content, context and form. For instance, women fighting on an estate for nurseries is not reformist if it increases the anti-capitalist consciousness, organisation and unity of the women involved. Sectionalism in the first sense has been dominant in post-war class struggle and has held back opposition to wage controls, cuts and many other things. It extended its hold precisely because the working class had to rely on its own struggles in a period when sectional struggles could win. Delegating the battle to representatives also consolidated itself as part of the same process and has become a real handicap when the unions and shop stewards increasingly abdicate from the fight-back. In fact, we have to see the present retreat as a product of the class’s struggles and consciousness being trapped inside those of the period of expansion. This ‘interior’ reformism ensures that social democracy can remain powerful even when the actual material possibility of reforms has diminished. This hold is consolidated by its *power* relative to the *powerlessness* of the working class movement trapped inside inadequate ways of fighting and thinking.

These changes tend to be underestimated by Trotskyism:—

“Workers vote Labour in their millions, not because of this or that leader or policy, nor because Labour is the only electoral alternative to the Tories, but because they see Labour in class terms as *their party*”. (“What We Stand For” — I.S. Trotskyist Opposition 1973 p. p.48)

The relationship between the working class and reformism is still seen in traditional terms. Entrism is defended by reference to who built the Labour Party and what it meant in the period of its growth. We recognise that what the Labour Party represented in the minds of the masses was a positive thing. Reformism had not been seen in experience of parliamentary government. But things are different now. There can be no doubt that the working class struggle and the Labour Party have grown more distinct in most areas in political and organisational terms. Pointing to voting figures that continue despite the ‘betrayals’ is a misleading exercise. It confuses two separate political processes — parliamentary and extra-parliamentary struggle. In a bourgeois democracy, where ‘politics’ is presented in parliamentary terms and where such institutions continue to have a relationship to ongoing social forces, then of course working class people will vote, usually for the party which is closest to them. But few working class people today vote Labour because they have illusions that it will advance socialism or even their daily interests. They do so because the basic class instinct makes them choose the lesser evil. An unconditional ‘vote Labour’ position can act-

ually reinforce residual illusions. Large numbers of Labour voters have and will abstain or vote for a socialist alternative.

Voting Labour is a *tactical* question dependent on the particular balance of forces. Meanwhile, we must build a political and organisational alternative to Labour as a reference for vanguard sectors.

As for the equation of membership of the unions with identification with Labour, this leads to the illusion that when entering into debate with reformist leaders, you are addressing the whole of the working class. Many industrial workers cannot be reached within the union structures or even the ‘Labour Movement’. This applies even more to non-industrial sectors like housewives. Concentration on the Labour Movement, an inevitable aspect of the entrism orientation, so often leads to ‘revolutionary socialism’ divorced from the mass of the working class.

The growth of entrism has happened in the wake of working class retreat. It is not even a genuine combination of activity. In general it tends to push struggles to go inside the Labour Party and Movement, thus running the risk of reducing their energy and effectiveness gained from having a *mass* orientation, usually by-passing the traditional institutions and channels. This underestimates the potential of independent working class action. IMG says:—

“For the majority of the most militant workers who are already and will be engaged in struggles, what is posed as yet is not the question of whether they should or should not politically break with the Labour Party, but what policy, programmes and leadership shall be fought for inside the Labour Party and Labour Movement.”

(‘4th International Theses on Britain’)

This institutionalised concept of the working class is extended even more dangerous by an IMG split-off, the L.S.A.—

“It means pioneering the struggles outside the party — those of the women’s liberation movement, the black community or the unions — inside the party and ensuring it is not headed off by ‘right’ or ‘left’ wings.” (‘Which Way for Labour?’ p.26)

Such an orientation not only diverts struggles but also mystifies the real potential for change and usefulness inside the Labour institutions. The history of the working class movement is littered with ‘paper’bodies, based on so-called delegates, which actually substitute building organisations based on activists prepared to fight. None of this means we are against work in the Labour Movement or ‘delegated bodies’. On the contrary, we are for a genuine combination of mass work and more ‘institutional’ activity. But we want to clearly prioritise building mass independent working class activity. The danger of entrism is that whatever the intentions it prioritises the opposite. This is also true of our attitude to events inside the Labour Party. While we are not entrists we would support, tactically, activities of the left inside it, if it helped the mass movement outside. This helps an orientation to the comrades who work in the Labour Party for essentially local reasons. Even here, however, we should recognise that entrism is often seen as conspiratorial. It can involve a lot of distant manoeuvring that can put power in the hands of ‘left-wingers’ who are as frightened of the power of working class people as the people they replaced. In the end we think that by pushing people back towards an identification with Labour, the entrism-exposure strategy increases the dependence of the working class on those politics which constitute the power of Labour over the class. In today’s conditions it is increasingly *power* and not simply *ideology* that constitute the hold of reformism. It is a difficult task to build an alternative working class and popular power. Entrism is safer, but the road in the end will be longer because of it.



# c) Bureaucracy

## ANTI-BUREAUCRACY — A SUPERFICIAL METHODOLOGY

We have dealt in some detail with the inadequacies of Trotsky's analysis of the Soviet regime and the role of the bureaucracy within it. The mistake lies mainly in characterising the bureaucracy as a 'parasite on a healthy body', i.e. the workers' state. This implies a mechanical separation of the base and superstructure, leading to a shallow concept of change that transforms political structures, but not the basic socio-economic features of society.

What this section of the pamphlet is interested in is the effect of the analysis of the Stalinist bureaucracy on the rest of Trotskyist politics. For if there is one thing that uniquely characterises modern Trotskyism it is an obsession with bureaucracy. We believe that the inadequacies of Trotsky's analysis have transferred themselves to create a superficial methodology of analysing the problems of institutions, particularly political organisations and trade unions.

There has been an over-concentration on bureaucracy in many areas. Great stress has been laid on replacing the 'bureaucratic leaderships' (of countries, parties, unions etc.) by revolutionary ones. The error lies in thinking that the existence of a bureaucracy is separate from the nature of the institution. So the creation of a revolutionary leadership is abstracted from the transformation or replacement of the institutions themselves. As in Russia, the transformation is seen as a purely superstructural problem. This has had the unfortunate effect of drastically simplifying the nature of the revolutionary process and underestimating the changes in working class life and institutions that are necessary to challenge capitalism. It feeds the naive view that 'if only we had the right leaders' the problems of the struggle would be solved.

As Bettleheim notes, for Trotskyism the concept of bureaucracy is a substitute for not only a deeper, but a *class* analysis. It helps mask:—

"... the political and ideological relations of which the bureaucratic phenomena were only the manifestation." (Quoted in Miliband New Left Review 91)

In a general sense, flowing from the analysis of Russia, Trotskyism ties bureaucracy to abstract sociological roots. Mandel says that bureaucracy:—

"... is not a class rooted in the productive process but a social layer growing out of the proletariat". ('On Bureaucracy')

The concentration on bureaucracies as parasitical layers creates a situation where the necessity for a division of labour is seen as allowing a basis for bureaucracy. A particular problem is identified with full-time officials, usually of petty-bourgeois origin. The working class is seen as weak, given its 'scientific and cultural underdevelopment', to stop the bureaucratic process.

"A working class organisation whose members are only usual workers engaged full-time in the productive process is far more easily conquered by bureaucratic politics and ideology than an organisation which makes a conscious effort to educate and select the most conscious workers and form them into professional revolutionaries". (Mandel— 'On Bureaucracy')

The full-time official becomes trapped within a restricted world of bureaucratic privileges, with consequent social and psychological factors reinforcing the desire to be separate

from the proletarian institution. In this sense, then, bureaucratisation is seen as an inherent problem of organisation at society/state or institutional level. There is no doubt that is a degree of truth in the analysis. The Trotskyist movement has performed a vital role in identifying process of degeneration at the level of workers' democracy. Yet at the same time, Trotskyism generalises the analysis so broadly that it loses its specific usefulness, which is as part of a theory of organisation. Instead it becomes a substitute theory of general institutional processes. The bureaucracy 'becomes the location for all problems', as Debray noted. For Trotskyism:—

"... the bureaucracy is a ten-thousand-headed monster, and it is all the bureaucracy's evil doing". ('Prison Writings' p.139)

There *are* problems inherent in the division between leaders and led. But even in terms of organisational questions it is wrong to reduce it to the division of labour and the sociological split between officials and rank and file. After all, Trotskyists monotonously leave their own organisations accusing budding bureaucracies of 'Stalinism', then set up new ones which reproduce similar problems. These cannot be solved sociologically by the composition of organisations or structurally by rights of faction or perfect constitutions. The bureaucratisation of organisations, in so far as it can be solved, can only be checked by transformation in political practice and class struggle.

But the problems of state or union institutions are wider than these. We have to examine the fundamental dynamics behind Russia or the trade unions to understand why they are inadequate and how the existence of a bureaucracy fits into this. The trouble with the Trotskyist use of the concept of bureaucracy is that it induces a sense of fatalism that things will always degenerate short of the world revolution. Mandel refers to the 'dialectic of partial conquests' being at the root of bureaucratic conservatism.

Any leaps forward are seen as a danger to existing gains. But there will be 'partial conquests' for a long time and we have to examine how to change things in specific situations. The Chinese concept of revisionism is more concrete. It takes the critique of bureaucracy further. While recognising that bureaucratic elites arose out of discrepancies of power and the means to exercise it, they link it to wider questions of social relations, i.e. the problem is linked to the inadequacies of social relations and institutions in the whole society, as we explain in the next section. The Cultural Revolution was aimed at reversing the process which bureaucratisation was a part of, but Trotskyism failed to acknowledge it as an anti-bureaucratic revolution. They point to the existence of bureaucratic and undemocratic features at party and state levels. This is undoubtedly true, despite the Cultural Revolution, but it should reaffirm our basic point that the problem of transforming institutions and social relations is separable from the existence or non-existence of bureaucracies.

## BUREAUCRACY AND TRADE UNIONS

These issues can be concretised by an examination of the role of trade unions. Revolutionary Marxism has taken Lenin's analysis that there are insurmountable limitations to trade union action in a capitalist society as a necessary starting point. The institutional role the unions have is as mediators in the sale of labour power. This acceptance of the 'bargain' with capital is why Lenin called trade unionism the 'bourgeois politics of the working class'. This did not stop him wanting revolutionaries to work inside the unions, but with a clear sense of the limitations.

This has been largely lost by Trotskyism whose routinised practice in the unions seldom challenges its fundamental limitations. While the separation between political/economic and party/union spheres is maintained at a theoretical level, in the day to day sense the limitations connected to trade unions that are posed is the existence of a bureaucracy. Trotsky himself tended to present things in these terms. In 1929 he said:—

"If there were not the bureaucracy of the trade unions then the police, the army, the courts, the Lords, the monarchy would appear before the masses as nothing but pitiful and ridiculous playthings. The bureaucracy of the trade unions is the backbone of British Imperialism". ('Marxism and Trade Unionism' — pp.58-9)

No-one doubts the treacherous role played by trade union leaders, for instance during the General Strike. But the weaknesses of the General Strike were precisely the weaknesses of trade unionism. That is, once beyond bargaining over the terms of the sale of labour power and faced with classwide confrontations involving the bourgeois state trade unionism has gone beyond its political limits. The trade union leaders are merely the summit of this weakness and its most obvious manifestation. Failure to recognise the structural basis of trade unionism leads to illusions that trade unions can be something they are not. In 1933 Trotsky wrote in an article on unions in Britain:—

"Capitalism can only continue to maintain itself by lowering the standard of living of the working class. Under these conditions trade unions can either transform themselves into revolutionary organisations or become lieutenants of capital in the intensified exploitation of the workers". ('The Unions in Britain')

While it is necessary for Marxists to resist trade union incorporation and fight for independence from the capitalist state, we do so to provide tactical space for workers' struggles not because:—

"Only on the basis of such a strategy can the trade unions be turned into instruments serving the interests of the socialist revolution". ('What We Stand For' — Trotskyist Opposition in I.S. 1973)

This utopian naivety can only mystify the essential nature of trade unionism and exaggerate the possibilities of change of the trade union structure itself. What is created is a political framework where 'sell-out' and 'betrayal' are the explanations for the behaviour of trade unions and their leaders. Workers need to realise the structural limits of trade union activity and the degree to which union leaders can be forced to act in their members' interests.

So where does this leave the Trotskyist concept of bureaucracy? There is no doubt, as we emphasised earlier, that there are important truths in the analysis. The 'sociological' aspect of bureaucracies becoming distanced from the rank and file through the division of labour involved in being full-time officials, does create both a world of privilege and one of desire to avoid conflict. The unfortunate effect of overstressing it, however, is to put forward simplistic concepts of change, particularly those which emphasise 'corruption' of officials. As Hyman points out:—

"... nor is the main reason the fact that on elevation out of the workplace, the full-time official becomes socially and therefore ideologically isolated from those he represents. . . By and large the average trade union official (lay or full-time) tends to be more progressive in his outlook than those he represents. The basic problem is one of function". (In 'Marxism and The Sociology of Trade Unionism')

It is the bargaining function, *not* the existence of trade union bureaucrats as a separate group in the division of labour with their own distinct interests, that creates the conditions for

social privileges. These accrue as a consequence of the necessity for there to be 'rules of the game', institutionalised bargaining involving the separation of the specialist from the mass of the workers.

Similarly, the ideology that may accompany the bureaucrat is a secondary question. There are many sincere officials who don't believe that capitalism is permanent, but who are forced by the logic of their function to accept the normality of its operation and who may adapt their beliefs to the situation they act in. Of course, they don't all act the same; ideology, political/economic context and other factors create variability. But there are broad patterns of behaviour implied by the trade union function that become increasingly likely the greater the pressure, as now in a capitalist crisis.

Paradoxically, the 'bash the bureaucracy' approach actually glorifies the rank and file. In fact, both groups may have political limitations by seeing the struggle merely in trade unionist terms. The difference is that whereas the objective situation pushes the official to stick to the rules of the game, it exerts pressure on the rank and file to overturn industrial legality and the norms of capitalist production. When they do so they often go beyond trade unionism and it is for us to transform these processes in a consciously anti-capitalist direction. This is our objection to the strategy of 'rank and fileism', particularly pushed by the SWP. This sees the problem as a contradiction between trade union leaders and rank and file members, rather than between the limitations of trade union politics and the needs of mass, anti-capitalist struggle. Hence it leads to strategies based on routinised union activity, minimising politics and eventually a gradual run-down of genuine activity amongst the rank and file.

The critique of the inherent limitations of trade unionism fell by the wayside because it did not fit the needs of practice inside the unions. When time after time the unions failed to meet the needs of the struggle it was difficult for the left to say they were failing *because* they were unions. Much of the left was trapped by accepting that trade unionism was the limit of everyday working class struggle and consciousness, despite the growing trend to go beyond such limits. In such circumstances Trotskyist analysis became increasingly derivative of the analysis of the bureaucracy in Russia.

Traditional Trotskyists advance the strategy of replacing the leaders', substituting revolutionaries for existing bureaucrats of right or left. This is essentially the same as the concept of the political revolution in Russia, which leaves the basic structure intact. Mandel indicates this when he says:—

"A political revolution, on the other hand, leaves the mode of production fundamentally unchanged and power passes from one layer of a class to another layer of the same class". ('On Bureaucracy' p.32.)

Rank and fileism and a greater stress on democratic control by the membership, derives, for the SWP, from the notion of the Russian bureaucracy as a privileged caste who cannot simply be replaced at the top, but must be replaced from below. Our position is that we are not against 'democratisation of the unions', or the election of left leaders. We tactically support both if they increase the power of the rank and file, just as we work inside the union structures to develop a political alternative to trade unionism. The 'replace the leaders' strategy, rank and fileism or building left caucuses in the unions without posing such alternatives, mystify the nature of the unions and underestimates the capacity of the masses to struggle autonomously. The Trotskyist concept of bureaucracy has some analytical value but its overall effect is to work as a substitute analysis and strategy to the real processes being examined. Its effect on the mass of the people is to create the impression that the revolutionary left is always negative and superficial in its politics: which unfortunately is so often true.



# 5d) Permanent Revolution and the Transition to Socialism

One of the main features of Trotskyism is the theory of permanent revolution. The analysis of classes in society, the question of stages of development, the nature of the epoch — all these areas have considerable implications for international analysis and the characterisation of post-revolutionary societies. We will initially deal with the theory itself and then go on to discuss its implications, with particular reference to the Soviet Union and China.

## PERMANENT REVOLUTION

"Insofar as capitalism has created a world market, a world division of labour and world productive forces, it has also prepared the world economy as a whole for socialist transformation. . .

The way out of these contradictions which will befall the proletarian dictatorship will be found in the arena of world revolution." [Trotsky — 'The Permanent Revolution']

Trotsky saw the world as a unified capitalist market. It follows that the only way the development of the forces necessary for the socialist revolution can flourish is on a world scale. Revolution is total or it is nothing. Only two possibilities face the world — socialism or barbarism. The theory fails to recognise the contradictions, at both an international and national level, on which revolutionary struggle grows. As Mavrakakis has said: 'By presenting the world as already unified into a single economic organisation, Trotsky was led to neglect national peculiarities, the specific concrete conditions (determined by history and cultural heritage) of the class struggle and the necessity to isolate the peculiar laws of the revolution in each country. In particular he exaggerated the role of exterior influences without seeing that these can only act through forces within each of these partial totalities.' [On Trotskyism — page 179]

Whilst capitalism dominates the world economy as a whole, inter-capitalist rivalry creates contradictions which aid the struggle for socialism. The growth of revolutionary struggle in Southern Europe is precisely the product of the tendency of capital to develop and underdevelop different economies at the same time. Capitalist development in France, Germany and Scandinavia is accompanied by underdevelopment in Italy, Spain and Ireland. At an international level the 'First World' has only developed at the expense of the Third World. The revolutionary movement, taking advantage of these developments, has succeeded in overcoming capitalism within various nation states, thereby increasing the opportunities for the creation of a socialist 'market' alongside the capitalist market.

But this process is denied by most Trotskyists. For the I.S.: "In most cases the new regime will very rapidly start coming to terms with one or another of the Western imperialist powers. The objective reason exists because if you attempt to take power in your own country, around your own project to overcome the heart of imperialism in one country, whereas imperialism operates on a world scale, inevitably you are forced to exploit your own working class, lower the working conditions of the peasants in order to try and survive in relation to the massive economic powers at the disposal of the metropolitan countries." [I.S. Journal No. 89 — page 1.]

According to this view, revolutions are foregone defeats, only to be rescued by world revolution!

But imperialism is not a uniform phenomenon — it is weak or strong according to the level of class struggle at a national level, and inter-imperialist rivalry at an international level. American imperialism was too weak to win in Vietnam, yet strong enough to win in Latin America. To deny the Vietnamese revolution is to pave the way for Latin Americas. Socialism will grow by attacking capitalism at its weak points, and each successive revolution will increase the chances of further revolutions as the balance of forces tilts in favour of socialism. The theory of permanent revolution fails to recognise this long-term struggle and with its rigid view of the world — seeing socialism or barbarism as the only two choices, with no intermediate phase — is a recipe for fatalism.

In the pamphlet 'Imperialism, Stalinism and Permanent Revolution', the IMG defend this view by recourse to Marxist methodology: essentially by asserting that in a 'holistic' method, the whole determines the parts, so that the world capitalist economy determines any country's development, even after abolishing capitalism. This is vulgarisation of Marxist method. In developing an analysis Marxism uses the concept of a 'structured totality', giving relative autonomy to the 'parts', or, more precisely, to the superstructure; and admits the possibility of various parts determining the base. The Trotskyist notion is yet one more example of imposing mechanical and fatalistic laws.

## 'PERMANENT REVOLUTION' AND 'SOCIALISM IN ONE COUNTRY'

After the defeats of the European working class in the early 1920s, the Soviet leadership became increasingly, and realistically, despondent of the possibility of further revolutions, at least in the short-term. Isolation and economic backwardness necessitated drastic solutions. Stalin, under the banner of 'socialism in one country', embarked upon a policy of collectivisation combined with extreme authoritarianism and the use of terror. In 1939 he maintained that the class struggle in Russia was over and that it was now possible to move towards establishing communism in one country, having 'built' socialism. Trotsky fought a lonely battle against Stalinism but his struggle was too often impaired by the abstraction of his political ideas. The theory of Permanent Revolution offered little in the way of concrete ideas to resolve the Soviet predicament. In 1926 Trotsky wrote: "It was clear to us that the victory of the proletarian revolution is impossible without the world revolution." What hope then for Russia? Not surprisingly, Trotsky was ousted from power and Stalin was able to characterise Trotsky's theory as 'permanent hopelessness'. "There is but one prospect left for our revolution: to vegetate in its own contradictions and rot away while waiting for the world revolution" was now Stalin put it

Trotsky in 1928 described the 5 Year Plan as 'reactionary, utopian national socialism. . . To aim at building a nationally isolated socialist society means to pull the productive forces

backward, even as compared with capitalism.' Ironically, Trotsky had advocated collectivisation of the peasantry throughout the early 1920s. By the late 1920s the opposition in the USSR had no effective counter to Stalin's policies.

Stalin's version of 'primitive socialist accumulation' based on an extremely economistic view of what constituted the 'productive forces' decimated the proletariat. Until the Chinese revolution saw the re-recognition that the working class was the greatest productive force, this model of development remained unchallenged. Internationally, 'Socialism in One Country' required the alliance of Western Communist Parties with the parties of the bourgeoisie. The Popular Front advocated by Stalin (via the Comintern) reduced the CPs to ineffectual reformism (and decimation in the case of Germany), and set back the revolutionary movement in Europe by many years.

Caught between the contrasting utopianisms of Permanent Revolution and Socialism in One Country, a new concept of the transition to socialism was needed.

The Trotskyist view is that while the dictatorship of the proletariat can be achieved in one country 'it cannot proceed to a higher stage of socialism. [ 'Imperialism, Stalinism and Permanent Revolution' — IMG — page 24] As we have seen this can only lead to the fatalistic view that the development of productive forces will be retarded, leading to a bureaucratisation that cannot be solved internally.

Particularly disturbing is the position that is therefore allocated to third world countries that have defeated imperialism. The possibilities of socialism are made dependent on spreading the revolution. In a review of a recent work by Bettelheim the IS Journal had this to say:—

"The priorities of a victorious regime in a backward country must be. . . to break out of its shells, to foster workers' revolutions in an advanced country as a condition of its survival." [IS Journal No. 89]

What useful advice to the people of Mozambique and Angola! The revolutionary governments have a difficult enough job feeding the people and fighting puppet armies of imperialism without having to foster revolution in Britain, the US etc. even if those unlikely events were possible. This lack of realism is a product of the profound pessimism of an economistic analysis. The same IS article states:—

"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."

Here economism and fatalism go hand in hand, ignoring the human factor, conscious action and political leadership. This mechanical notion of base and superstructure gives too much weight to the problems of 'scarcity'. Scarcity does not necessarily lead to internal degeneration. It can and does 'impel' countries like China, Mozambique and Angola to develop alternative models of economic development. They are adapting to their adverse conditions by developing self-sufficiency, building new relations between agriculture and industry and developing alternative technology and work processes.

Of course, they have to live and trade with the capitalist world market and that no doubt makes them do things they have no wish to do, for example Mozambique's migrant workers in South Africa. But trade doesn't inevitably lead to bad politics. China's wrong international policies are not a product of contact with the world market, but a wrong strategy, based on a wrong analysis of the balance of world forces. De-emphasising the problems of economic backwardness can of course lead to idealism, as it has done in the writings of some Maoists who see everything in terms of political leadership. But it is a tightrope that has to be walked, otherwise the concrete problems of building socialism in today's conditions are dismissed in advance, and the revolutionary left

in Europe will have failed to learn important lessons from our comrades in the Third World.

## CLASS ALLIANCES

The theory of Permanent Revolution also embodied a narrow view of revolutionary vanguards and alliances between various class forces.

## THE PEASANTRY

"Within the capitalist system it is inconceivable that the industrial working class remains anything but the decisive revolutionary force. The number, concentration, organisations of the industrial proletariat make it on a world scale, the revolutionary class, par excellence."

"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." [Quotes from the IMG pamphlet on Permanent Revolution — pages 48 and 54]

It is clear from Trotsky's writings that the notion of class alliances derived from the theory of Permanent Revolution are not actual alliances, but the peasantry 'subjugating itself' to the leadership of the industrial workers. This has led to a serious under-estimation of the strength of the peasantry, both as a force for socialism and as a sector whose needs have to be carefully catered for. As a perspective, Permanent Revolution is inferior to Lenin's initial concept of the 'democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry.' This gave a much better recognition to the necessity for a genuine class alliance with the peasantry.

Trotsky's lack of understanding of the peasantry is indicated by his view of collectivisation in the USSR, which in its emphasis on rapid and forced collectivisation, differed little from Stalin's. Trotsky's view on this again shows the economism involved in his theory. This economism sees power resting *only* with industrial workers, despite the fact that they are a politically ineffective force in many important situations.

At the same time imperialism has drawn the peasantry of the third world right into the centre of the struggle. Monopoly capitalism has in general created new layers of the working masses, who are just as oppressed and often more combative politically, although they do not wield the same economic power as the industrial working class. The revolutions of the post-war period — China, Cuba, Vietnam, Angola, etc. — have all been based on peasant movements. To continue to deny their role shows incredible blindness to historical fact. Isaac Deutscher could only suggest that the Chinese revolution was an extraordinary 'coincidence'. But perhaps more disturbing is the automatic labelling of any peasant based revolution as 'degenerated'. The IMG's view of China is indicative:— 'With a correct policy from the Comintern the proletariat could have seized power in China in 1927. . . Instead, however, not until 22 years later did the Chinese Communist Party, profoundly bureaucratised through being based on rural and not urban class struggle, come to power.' [

[IMG — 'Permanent Revolution' page 49]

This quotation illustrates a recurrent weakness of Trotskyism — sociologism. Political phenomena (degeneration, bureaucracy) are explained entirely in terms of being based on particular social forces, in this case on the peasantry. It is an absurd notion which implies that if the Chinese Communist Party had been based on industrial workers things would have automatically been different. It also is deficient in that the problem of bureaucratisation was not particularly important at this time, given the close links with the masses built during the guerilla and normalised war situations.



The denigration of the peasantry is based on the assertion that it is incapable of posing collective solutions to the agrarian crisis. The I.S. in an article entitled 'The Vietnamese Road to State Capitalism' wrote:— "In most backward countries since the Second World War, the potential revolutionary role of the working class has not been realised, for a variety of reasons, notably the political leadership of the communist parties. The peasantry cannot substitute for it because by its nature it does not pose collective solutions to the problems of society. Crudely, peasants on an estate see their salvation as dividing the land up among themselves; workers on an assembly line can't divide it up, they can only collectively appropriate it." [IS Journal No. 89]

But peasants have in many cases proved their collective tendencies. Although the immediate programme of the Chinese peasantry after liberation was the seizure of the landlord holdings and the division of the land, it soon became evident that only collectivisation of farm tools, then of the land, could solve the agrarian crisis. The process is described by a Chinese peasant:— "The typical thing in our area is that the heavy soil here requires three horses to pull one plough. But no family that benefitted from land reform got three horses — the average was one per household. So there was a spontaneous tendency right from the start for three or four households to get together, pool their horses and plough each others' land in turn. . . . Those who tried to work individually the first season saw the results and sought out work partners for the following season. . . . The pooling of several work-teams paved the way for a new development in 1952, when there was a 'land-pooling' campaign in which 30 to 50 households pooled their land, implements and cattle, forming agricultural co-operatives, and planning production according to an overall state plan. . . ." [Quoted in 'China: The Quality of Life', by Wilfred Burchett — page 18] The gradual process of collectivisation continued until the establishment of the Peoples Communes in 1958, with the complete absence of the violence and enforcement associated with the Russian campaign.

It is not just in China where peasants have shown this collectivist consciousness. Peru, Chile and many other parts of Latin America, and the South of Portugal are only some of many notable examples..

For many of the countries of the world the industrial working class is a tiny minority of the population, and revolutions must be built primarily on the peasantry. For revolutionaries, the task is to draw into the struggle those strata of society 'that think and feel as the working class'. It is more a question of proletarian consciousness, not whether he or she is a 'worker' in the strict sense. It is also a question of material position in many third world situations. There is an increasingly large sector that is not a landowning peasantry to any significant degree. Many are landless labourers and many switch jobs from the land to industry depending on conditions and availability of work.

For I.S., however, revolutions like that in Mozambique, are largely an irrelevance:— "The importance of Mozambique is that its liberation prepared the way for the creation of revolutionary workers' parties in Rhodesia and South Africa — And, although we support the liberation movements we recognise that now, not in the future, there needs to be the creation of workers' parties in the third world" Debate with Avanguardia Operaia — I.S. Journal No. 84] According to this view the revolutions in Guine-Bissau, Mozambique and Angola had no importance in their own right, but only inasmuch as they destabilised Portugal. It is hardly surprising that the Trotskyist movement has few representatives outside Europe while these ideas prevail.

A final aspect of the above point of view is that the weaknesses of the industrial working class in third world countries is not seen in materialist terms, ie. as due to their

relative lack of weight in the class structure. Instead, failures of the industrial working class to establish itself as the main political reference point is seen by Trotskyism in the idealist terms of 'lack of revolutionary leadership'. It is as if the industrial working class plus Trotskyist leadership is the sole condition for revolution.

## SEIZURE OF POWER

The other important weakness of Permanent Revolution in this general context is on the process of seizing power. Briefly, it tends to see the process as too linear and 'uninterrupted', ignoring the problem of phases and stages. In a speech in 1937 ('Let us strive to draw the broad masses into the anti-Japanese united front') Mao Tse Tung wrote:—

"We advocate the theory of the transition of the revolution, not the Trotskyite theory of permanent revolution. We stand for going through all the necessary stages of a democratic republic in order to arrive at socialism. We are opposed to tailism, but also to adventurism and precipitation. We cannot agree with the Trotskyist approach which rejects the bourgeoisie and stigmatises the alliance in the semi-colonial countries simply because of the transitory nature of the bourgeoisie's participation in the revolution."

The Maoist theory goes too far in mechanically separating 'stages', but it does point to two factors which Trotskyism ignores. Firstly, there may be intermediary and distinct stages, which we would call phases, which pose different tasks. An emphasis solely on the uninterrupted continuity of the process tends to telescope the tasks and lead to adventurist short-cuts. Secondly, one stage may still include alliances with the bourgeoisie and petty-bourgeoisie. The Chinese and other experiences show that they are not always weak and may have a temporary progressive role to play, although this is increasingly unlikely in modern imperialism and its neo-colonialist context. Basically, both Permanent Revolution and the concept of 'necessary stages' pose the process of seizing power in too rigid and universal a way. We must allow for the concrete analysis of particular conditions to see what kind of phases and alliances are necessary.

Trotsky also differed with Lenin over this question. He criticised Lenin's slogan of the 1905 Revolution — 'the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry'. For Trotsky, this slogan implied the submission of the proletariat to the bourgeoisie. But for Lenin the slogan flowed from an analysis of the concrete possibilities of the time. The workers' movement was inexperienced and barely organised and the peasant movement was equally backward. The demand for immediate socialism would have been adventurist and utopian. Yet 'democratic' demands had the possibility of winning certain sections of the bourgeoisie and thereby aiding the downfall of the aristocracy. The 1905 revolution gave the workers' movement vital space in which to develop. By 1917 that movement had created its own organisations (the soviets) and the seizure of power had become a reality. This new set of conditions required new programmes. Lenin's slogan, dropping the 'democratic' tag, became the 'dictatorship of the proletariat'. Trotsky then maintained that Lenin had learnt his lesson! Not so. For Lenin, correct demands arose from an analysis of the balance of forces at the particular historical conjuncture. For Trotsky, the formula became ahistorical dogma — abstracted from the realities of the situation.

The mistakes of Trotsky on these questions are often repeated by modern Trotskyists. A recent article by Mandel ('On the Current Stage of the World Revolution' — Imprecor, 10th June 1976) had this to say:—

"From a programmatic standpoint, the slogan of the Socialist United States of Europe has now been superseded by the need to fight for the Socialist United States of the World."



Otelo's campaign helped build working class power.

This unfortunately continues the weaker strand in Permanent Revolution of metaphysical internationalism, ignoring national peculiarities in the process of seizing power. One example is that Trotskyists characterise the demand for *national independence* as ultra-leftism and a betrayal of the international revolution. Thus Otelo de Cavarhlo's campaign in the elections of summer 1976 in Portugal was attacked for not putting forward 'principled' socialist positions and, in particular, for raising the slogan of 'national' independence. Of course, aspects of Otelo's programme must be criticised, particularly the 'non-partyism', but this is secondary to the point. The importance of his campaign was its ability to mobilise a substantial mass of the Portuguese proletariat around a left programme, to revitalise the movement and give it confidence and space to develop in a period of right-wing offensive. The fact that more than 20% voted for the left platform certainly restricted the plans of the bourgeoisie. A vote of 5% for a so-called 'principled' platform would surely have been a defeat. That is why all the revolutionary groups in Portugal (UDP, MES, PRP etc) with the exception of the LCI (4th International) supported Otelo. It is worth recalling Marx's advice to the European communist movement in the Critique of the Gotha Programme — 'one step of real movement is worth a dozen programmes'. The role of revolutionaries is to analyse the balance of forces between proletariat and bourgeoisie and to raise slogans and demands which meet the needs of the situation.

The point about such 'principled programmes' is that they

are often abstractly imposed on the situation. Even if people did fight for them it would tend to result in confusion and demoralisation.

For us, national independence can be an element in the strategy for socialism under particular conditions. Revolutionary movements and governments are faced with real political and economic survival problems. National independence in such circumstances is aimed at finding the space for the proletariat of that country to move against the vestiges of the bourgeoisie and to avoid dependence on international imperialism by fostering links with progressive countries. Trotskyism tends to deny this phase of internal strengthening and consolidation. Permanent Revolution only recognises the two extremes of world capitalism and world socialism. It has little to say about the long period of transition between the two and specifically rejects the possibility of a socialist 'bloc' existing alongside a capitalist one, before finally overcoming it: as this quote reveals:—

"The opportunist concept that capitalism can be overthrown gradually, first on one sixth, then one third, then one half of the world's surface. . . and so on. . . is nothing more than an updated extension of the Stalinist concept of 'socialism in one country'."

(Mandel— "On the Current Stage of World Revolution")

We are left with nothing but the cataclysmic vision and exhortations to build the world revolutionary party that the theory of Permanent Revolution has become.



# Problems of Transition

The Chinese have constantly stressed that the class struggle continues in post-revolutionary societies, and that it may continue for many generations. Vestiges of the bourgeois and petty bourgeois classes still remain; new class forces may develop. Without recognition of this and constant vigilance and struggle against it, the dictatorship of the proletariat will inevitably weaken. The revolution, involving the initial transfer of power to the proletariat, provides the precondition for socialism but not the guarantee. Capitalism and communism are separated by a whole historical epoch. The dictatorship strives to establish socialism and thereby pave the way for communism, which is only possible on a world scale. This section will focus on stage of transition to socialism in its full sense which must involve the total transformation of social relations. This will mean:—

1. The abolition of the private ownership of the means of production.
2. Elimination of competition and production for exchange value and its replacement by democratic planning and production for use.
3. Workers' and people's management of the economy and society.
4. The institutionalisation of mass forms of democracy, freedom of association and criticism for all progressive classes. A genuine proletarian state not party substitutionism.
5. Elimination of the power of the old classes and struggle against the growth of new elites in party and state structures.
6. Progressive elimination of differences between manual and mental labour, town and country, men and women and between different races.
7. Movement towards egalitarian distribution of rewards and knowledge.

If these tendencies are successful, communism will then be based on:—

1. The abolition of wage labour.
2. The elimination of classes.
3. The disappearance of the state.
4. Full socialist development of the productive forces in the context of world communism.
5. From each according to their ability, to each according to their needs.

## CLASS AND THE TRANSITION

The above points are intended to be a methodology for judging experiences in different countries. Characterisations of Russia, China and the other post-revolutionary societies can vary enormously, from socialist, state capitalist, to new class societies. All these descriptions involve a particular understanding of the Marxist concept of class.

Lenin defined classes as 'large groups of people differing from each other by the place they occupy in a historically determined system of social production, by their role in the social organisation of labour, and, consequently, by the dimension of social wealth which they dispose of and the mode of acquiring it.' The means by which a ruling class holds power, exploits and dominates the subordinate classes varies from society to society, according to the mode of production (feudalism, capitalism, Asiatic mode etc.)

So class society is not specific to capitalism, nor does the abolition of private property necessarily imply the abolition of class society. Too often the left has fallen into the trap of associating the abolition of private ownership and its replacement by a nationalised economy as the key process in

establishing socialism. Certainly this step is an absolutely necessary prerequisite of socialism but it is not the final act. The abolition of private ownership only guarantees the abolition of the *capitalist* social system and the *capitalist* ruling class. It does not guarantee the abolition of classes per se. The overthrow of capitalism can therefore result in three options:

1. The transition to socialism.
2. The re-introduction of capitalist methods of production.
3. The development of a new type of class society.

It is the contention of this pamphlet that the Soviet Union has developed into a new form of class society. The new ruling class controls, not through the ownership of property, but rather by virtue of its control over the state apparatus and its ability to determine the production and distribution of the social surplus. This position will be expanded at a later stage.

## PRODUCTIVE FORCES

There are a number of reasons why the analyses of the transition to socialism and the nature of Russia etc. are inadequate. One of the most important is an economic perspective that sees the 'productive forces' as neutral. In the 'Permanent Revolution' Trotsky wrote: 'Soviet forms of property on a basis of the most modern achievement of American technique transplanted into all forms of economic life — that indeed would be the first stage of socialism.' Both Stalin and Trotsky stressed the necessity to develop 'industrial plant' in the belief that a higher level of productive forces provided the material basis for socialism. For Trotsky, the revolution could only be sustained in societies based on a high level of productive forces. Faced with the defeat of the European revolution and isolation from the more advanced countries the problems became how to extract enough surplus out of the countryside to build industry. This strategy has been traditionally called 'primitive socialist accumulation'. It is based not simply on the idea of neutral productive forces, but on a mechanical subordination of the countryside to towns and a fetishisation of large scale production. This model of accumulation is most seriously flawed for its failure to recognise that capital is not a thing but a relationship between persons'. (Marx. Capital Vol1). Socialist society can only be built on the transformation of *social relations* of production. Viewing the productive forces as neutral is to deny the role of the working class itself which Marx identified as 'the greatest productive force of all'. As Mavrikis pointed out, 'they (Trotsky and Stalin) did not see that after the abolition of the individual ownership of the means of production the essentials remained to be done: the revolutionising of the relations of production and social relations connected to them'. [page 53] As a result the increasing exclusion of the workers and the peasants from the decision making process could be justified only in terms of the need to build 'industrial capital'. But productive forces are not neutral. The working class, as the primary productive force, will determine the productive capacity of society. Machines, technology, raw materials, are all *factors* in the struggle for production — but not *determinants*. Technology is no more the base for socialism than the planned economy. Much of the revolutionary left today remains dogged by their elevation of 'capital' (ie. machines, technology etc) to the status of a primary productive force. For the Socialist Workers Party (I.S.) the lack of 'capital' led inevitably to the degeneration of the Russian revolution — 'It is precisely because the Soviet Union was backward and isolated from the goods and skills available in the more advanced countries that the government was compelled, as the condition of its survival to re-create, or to tolerate the re-creation of a hierarchy of privileges'. This vulgar materialism leads to

a totally fatalistic view of revolutions in backward societies. We do not try to deny the extreme difficulties facing post-revolutionary societies with a weak industrial base, but rather suggest that there is an alternative model of development. The Chinese have gone a long way towards challenging the traditional notion of primitive socialist accumulation. By re-asserting the creativity of the masses and attempting to revolutionise the social relations of production under the slogan, 'Make the revolution, promote production', they have achieved a considerable increase in GNP from an even lower industrial base than the Russia of the 1920s. Bettelheim writes:— 'What has happened in China demonstrates in effect that the 'low state of development of the productive forces' is not an obstacle to the socialist transformation of social relations and does not have the necessary result, arising from the process of primitive accumulation, of aggravating social inequalities'. (Class struggle in the USSR 1917-23. Page 40) The Chinese have put particular stress on encouraging medium and small scale production and an organic link between town and country.

## THE NATURE OF SOVIET SOCIETY

As we indicated in the earlier part of this pamphlet, 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 stopping at nationalisation and a planned economy. Because of these limitations and in 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: 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. By the 1930s Stalin had come to characterise the ideal of equality as 'reactionary, petty-bourgeois absurdity, worthy of a primitive set of ascetics but not a socialist society organised on Marxist lines'. 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 this 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. In fact, the creation of new class hierarchies needs a specific type of bureaucratic political formation, characterised by Stalinism, that fuses power in the state-party machinery. While Trotsky and the Left Opposition fought and correctly criticised many of the ways Stalinism was shaping Russia, they were limited by a key factor dealt with earlier — the fact that Trotsky saw the basis for socialism as the abolition of private ownership rather than wider changes in social relations. Hence, any degeneration was seen as super-structural in character. This lies at the root of the failure of Trotskyism to break with definitions of Russia as a 'workers' state' (albeit degenerated). These definitions are not sufficiently distanced from those held by the Communist Parties that Russia is 'socialist'. In a recent Communist Party pamphlet [1] David Purdy asserted that despite many difficulties Russia was socialist because 'the mode of production dominant within it is socialist'. (p.22) This only stands if (i) the mode of production is identified solely with nationalised property relations and not wider relations of production and political power. (ii) the party, state and trade unions are collapsed by an institutionalised analysis into an automatic identification with the working class. So Purdy says:—

"What is at stake is how decisions about investment are taken: by whom, with what criteria, for what purposes and with what social and economic consequences." (p.29)

Quite right, but he then concludes that as decisions are taken centrally (and not by separate competing enterprises as in 'capitalism') then it is socialist. It is different from capitalism, he says, because the worker under capitalism "lacks direct power and control over the process of production". (p.25) Trotskyism has been able to show that this is simply not the case and that workers' power is at best a legal fiction. This criticism is part of the excellent super-structural critique that has characterised the Trotskyists' analysis of Russia and Stalinism. But they too are stuck in condemning the 'inadequacies', rather than a critique of the 'economic' base. In effect, the CP and Trotskyist definitions of the basis for a 'workers' state' are quite similar. For instance, Trotsky said that a workers' state "stands or falls with the planned economy". ('Class Nature of the Soviet State' p.122)

The argument becomes whether or not there has been a political degeneration (including economic decision-making) — as the Trotskyists say — or a few mistakes — as the Western C.P.s say — or perfect socialism — as the old-style Stalinists say.

## STATE CAPITALISM?

It is the limitations of such analyses that provided the impulse for theories that Russia was 'state capitalist'. There are many versions of this from the traditional line of the semi-Trotskyist SWP (IS) to the newer Maoist versions of Bettelheim etc. [3] While we recognise that the theories enabled important breaks to be made with traditional analyses and provided a fresh critique, they are fundamentally mistaken.

Firstly, the theory of state capitalism maintains that the external operation of the predominantly capitalist world economy forces the 'law of value' to operate inside Soviet society. This is a complete misunderstanding of the relationship between internal and external factors. External factors may be the condition of change, but internal factors are the basis. To be more precise, the fact that the Russian economy as a *whole* competes on the world market in no way forces generalised competition, exchange value or any other feature of capitalism to operate internally in Russia. The characteristic features are absent as we will argue in more detail later.

Secondly, Marx defined capitalism as a mode of production based on *generalised commodity production*. All products and elements in the labour process are commodities. Goods and services are produced for exchange on the market, rather than for their use by the population. The result is that capitalist production is production for *surplus value* (commodities in relation to exchange value represent more value than that advanced for their production in the form of commodities and money).

Generalised commodity production and surplus values can only exist when regulated by a market economy and competition between capitalist enterprises. As Marx put it:—

"By definition competition is the internal nature of capital. Its essential characteristic is to appear as the reciprocal action of all capital: it is an internal tendency appearing as imposed from outside. Capitalism does not and cannot exist except divided into innumerable capitals: for this it is conditioned by the action and reaction of one upon the others." (Marx — 'Grundrisse' p.414)

The fact that modern monopoly capitalism necessitates state intervention, planning (and even nationalisation) to survive and function efficiently is not in itself enough to change the system. For such planning is done precisely to ensure the survival of capitalism *within* a competitive market structure. [4]



In Russia the elimination of private ownership of the means of production have ended a competitive market economy and exchange value based on generalised commodity production. Advocates of a theory of state capitalism are therefore destroying any consistent Marxist definition of capitalism. There can be state capitalist societies or sectors, but only in the sense specifically identified by Lenin and Trotsky. Lenin pointed out that in the early 1920s (via the NEP etc) Russia had a partially state capitalist economy because the state needed the existence of an element of private capital and petty bourgeois commodity production to develop the economy. But the precise definition rests on a *workers' state* and *dictatorship of the proletariat* subjecting elements of capitalist enterprise to their control. The theory of state capitalism, therefore, put forward by the SWP etc does not enable us to differentiate between different forms of society. Another example of a genuine form of state capitalism is given by some Third World countries which have state control of capital but have not destroyed the bourgeoisie and installed a dictatorship of the proletariat.

Russia does not fit this picture as the state monopoly progressively eliminated private ownership and competition. Even those residues of private ownership, small units of agricultural production and small artisan production operate within determined limits of the central plan. As Carlo [5] points out: such are the power relations that the kolkhoz must give to the state what it orders it to produce. The prerequisites of even mercantile exchange (passage of property between independent producers) are completely lacking.

Other factors pointed to by state capitalist theorists like the privileges of the ruling 'bureaucracy, exploitation, alienating work etc. may be enough to differentiate Russian-type societies from socialism, but not enough to identify it with capitalism. Such factors can exist within different class societies. As we have said that we consider Russia to be a new type of class society, we must now turn to looking more closely at its inner mechanisms.

## ECONOMY AND CLASS

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 politico-economic power. The Left and Right Oppositions 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 pre-condition for such a plan was the party/state monopoly of power and economic control and the exclusion of the masses from any aspects of decision making at factory or social level. The powerlessness of the masses was a pre-condition for their mobilisation in total subordination to a plan not of their making. The state could and did control 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. Hierarchies of skill, specialisation and authority and income were encouraged as part of this economic development. For instance, income differentials gradually widened so that even on official estimates they had reached 1 to 10 and by unofficial estimates much more. [6] While complete income equality is impossible under socialism the Russian situation compares unfavourably with the 1 to 5/6 spread in China noted by Bettelheim, Blumer and others. This is particularly the case as there is every indication of them widening further. Russian econ-

omists (Lieberman etc) have admitted that the 1965 reforms widened differentials.

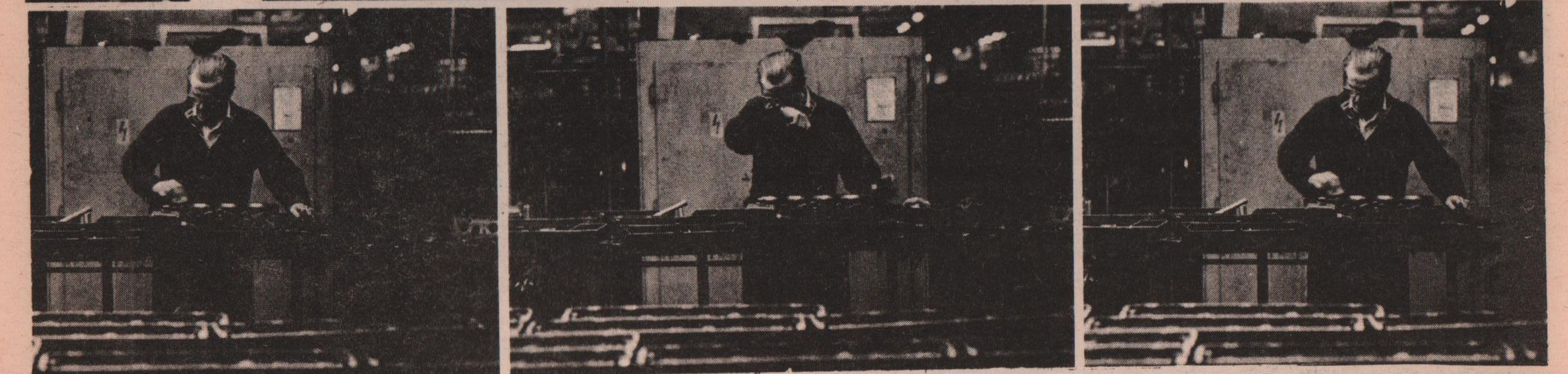
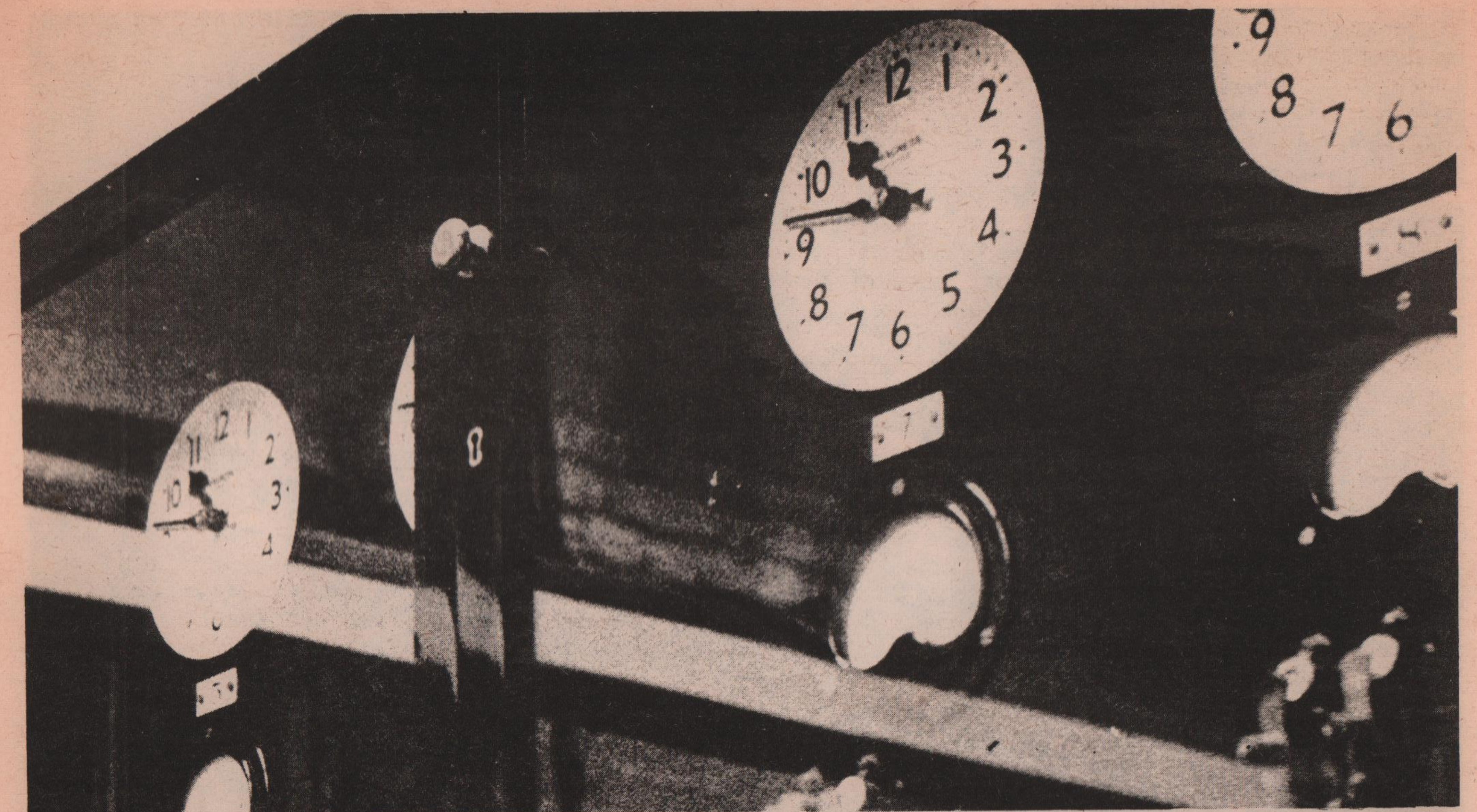
The collectivised state control enabled the economy to develop by excessive concentration on the primary (capital goods goods) sector. While concentration on the primary sector is characteristic of development, in Russia this reached dangerous proportions (eg. in 1963, 81% of all industrial resources), 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 depressing work output. The trade unions had ceased to be anything but conveyor belts for exhortations to work harder. This position of the working class alone indicates the character of the Russian class society. As Carlo observes:—

"The free, conscious and integrated participation of the masses in the productive process is the productive force absolutely indispensable for building socialism. The high labour productivity and the good quality of the Chinese products (relative to the level of the economy) is as well known as the poor quality of the Russian products. In a typically politicised and participatory Chinese factory, it would be rather difficult for a manager to produce oversized or undersized parts, enormous tractors, glaring light bulbs etc." (p.61 op cit)

The point is that the waste, inefficiency and low productivity are neither 'abuses' nor deformations as apologists for Russia claim, nor a conflict between a non-capitalist mode of production and a bourgeois mode of distribution, as the Trotskyist Mandel claims. [7] The latter maintains the fiction of a 'socialist' economic base in a context where Russia is still claimed to be a society in transition between capitalism and socialism. In fact, as Rakovski shows [8] such factors are generic to a new class system and mode of production. It is clear that under Stalin Russia had evolved to such a system that was neither capitalist nor socialist, nor in a state of transition. Instead it is, as Carlo describes:—

"A new antagonistic system with its own specific dynamic in which elements similar to other systems acquire a new function". (p.44 op cit) [9]

The dynamics and crises of this new mode of production are conditioned by the state monopoly of ownership and decision making. A new ruling class (based on top party, state and managerial strata) dominates and exploits the workers and peasants. Factors characteristic to class societies in general are present in a different form. Workers are both exploited and alienated in the process of production. Exploitation does not necessarily depend on the capitalist wage-relation and the extraction of surplus value. In Russia it emerges in the form of a dominant class appropriating the surplus labour of subordinate classes. The working class has no say in the production and distribution of the surplus. Neither, as we have indicated, does it have any say in production in general. There has been a diminishing struggle to abolish wage labour — the social relation in which workers' labour power is purely a commodity exchanged for a wage. The following extract from a description of the work process in a Hungarian factory [10] echoes Marx's classic description of alienation under capitalism.



Alienation, East and West.

"Ultimately the only thing that helps is if I turn into a machine myself. The best workers excel at this. Their eyes are veiled whatever the work, as if they wore impenetrable masks on their faces, yet they never miss a thing. Their movements don't seem to require any effort. They follow the unfailing trajectories of magnetically controlled emotionless bodies. They average the fastest possible pace over the day as a whole, as they do not rush at things when they are still fresh and do not slow down when they are tired. Truly, just like machines."

The Russian work process in no way embodies socialist social relations. All the familiar facets that workers face fragmentation, hierarchy, boredom, de-skilling and repetition. One sad instance is the worship of 'American technique' (Taylorism and Fordism) indicated in the building of so-called 'modern' plants in Russia like FIAT, with their mass, line method of production.

Under Stalin, this new class system was accompanied by terror and extreme authoritarianism. While this had a certain functional usefulness to the system, it was not inherent in it. In fact, the true functioning of the system was distorted by the fear and waste it produced. Russian society only 'normalised' after Stalin's death. To say such things and to point to a kind of 'worsening' of things after Stalin has been sufficient to bring down the rage of Trotskyists and accusations of pro-Stalinist apologetics. [11] It is, however, nothing of the sort. Rather it is a sober assessment of the necessary evolution of the new class system. As Rakovski says of Stalin's rule:—

"When the witch hunt becomes so general and the danger signals so vague, no social group can feel safe, then it only needs a momentary weakness in the system for the fraction in power itself to put an end to the use of mass terror. The death of Stalin led precisely to this situation. Once under way, the ebbing of the terror had just the same cumulative dynamic as its growth. To secure its own safety, the fraction in power had to permit a certain de-centralisation and demobilisation of the whole society." (p.97 op cit.)

Before we examine whether any of these modern 'reforms' have essentially altered the nature of the system, we must turn to our analysis of classes in Russia to back up our characterisations of the society.

## FROM BUREAUCRATIC ELITE TO CLASS

Trotsky and modern Trotskyists (with the exception of state capitalist theorists) have always denied the existence of a new ruling class, preferring the concept of a parasitic bureaucracy. Firstly, let us deal with whether a ruling class is possible in general. The Trotskyist, Isaac Deutscher wrote in 'The Unfinished Revolution' that:—

"What this so-called new class lacks is property. They own neither the means of production nor land. ... they are not able to turn any part of their income into capital, they cannot save, invest or accumulate wealth in the durable and expensive form of industrial stock or large financial assets. They cannot bequeath wealth to their descendants, they cannot, that is, perpetuate themselves as a class." (p.55)

This confuses classes under capitalism with classes in general. Ownership of the means of production should not be seen in such narrow legal terms. The Russian ruling class, through





Czechoslovak youth give their verdict on the Russian system.

their control of the political-economic apparatus, effectively perform an 'ownership' function, determining the production and allocation of the social surplus. Through their monopoly of power they also acquire a disproportionate share of social wealth and means of disposing of it (special privileges — cars, shops, second homes etc.). While these class privileges are not in the capitalist form of stocks and shares, they are nevertheless materially real and can be used as a means of reproduction and perpetuation of themselves as a class.

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. It is worth quoting Rakovski in some detail:—

"There are basically three channels for selecting members of the dominant class: the distribution of opportunities for higher education, activities in the organisations... (party etc. [our addition]) and the system of informal relations within the dominant class. In Soviet societies the chances of acquiring a higher qualification are determined by a more or less formal system of privileges. In the Stalinist period, these privileges were extended to some layers of the working class. But with steadier industrial development the dominant class has been able to fill management positions by internal reproduction, and this has changed the relations between the three selection mechanisms. Whereas in the Stalinist period it was often sufficient to pass through one of the channels, in the post-Stalinist period, it is generally necessary to pass through all three at once. As a result, mobility between the two classes has been sharply reduced. (p. 101 op.cit.) [12]

Other commentators have also noted a decline in the rate of social mobility and the use by the ruling class of its wealth and status to re-produce itself eg. by buying extra tuition

for their children in the fiercely competitive education system.

So 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.

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 Party and state functionaries [13]. This tension existed under Stalin, but managerial/technocratic resistance was limited by Stalin's methods of administrative or 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, of course, quota targets. Their scope, however, was limited by their effective exclusion from key aspects of central planning.

"Their behaviour (managers') is conditioned by the fact that they do not own the productive apparatus and are therefore forced to pursue their aims by exploiting whatever cracks appear in the bureaucratic plan." (Carlo op.cit. p.60)

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/technocrats, 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.

Reforms in 1965 certainly moved in this direction. There was administrative decentralisation, with managers given considerable power concerning the number of employees, work norms and internal distribution of wages within the total basic wage fund set by the state. Also enterprises have the right to refuse useless and excessive supplies of goods, by giving a ten-day notice to the supplying enterprise. The reforms also allow them to sell products not distributed within the planning framework.

The reforms in Russia and Eastern Europe are not aiding the working class. They are giving more power to managers, corresponding to a decline in certain aspects of bureaucratic control. As Bettelheim indicates: economic planning is:—

"Characterised by the growing role of enterprise associations and a diminishing number of planned indices. In current Soviet decentralisation power is shifting to the managers rather than the workers". ("Cultural Revolution and Industrial Organisation in China" p.50)

So, what are the conclusions of these tendencies for the character of the system and the classes within it?

## CONCLUSION

The reforms made, including the so-called 'liberalisation' measures, have tended to reinforce the existing class structure system that we call *state collectivism*. [14] As Carlo says:—"The reform does not challenge the economically dominant position of the plan." (p.43 op. cit.) 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 that have been introduced 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. Rakovski shows this when he says:—

"The market can only regulate enterprise behaviour if the enterprises are not prevented in advance by the form of organisation of the economy from seeking to exploit their market possibilities to an optimal extent. Clearly this condition cannot be met in Soviet economies". (p. 90 op.cit.)

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, as Rakovski indicates, 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 sect-

or (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 genuine communist 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 [15] and it would help if the left could come to terms with the new type of class system.

## THE NATURE OF CHINESE SOCIETY

By placing the transformation of the social relations of production at the core of their strategy the Chinese embarked on a very different path of development. In 1966 Mao wrote:—"In China, although in the main socialist transformation has been completed with respect to the systems of ownership and although the large-scale and turbulent class struggles of the masses, characteristic of the previous revolutionary periods, have in the main come to an end, there are still remnants of the overthrown landlord and comprador class, there is still a bourgeoisie and the remoulding of the petty bourgeoisie has only just started. The class struggle is by no means over... the proletariat seeks to transform the world according to its own world outlook and so does the bourgeoisie. In this respect, the question of which will win out, socialism or capitalism, is still not really settled."

The continual struggle against the emergence and re-emergence of class formations new and old has been an ever-present feature of Chinese society. The recognition of the necessity to keep alive the relationship of 'masses to party to masses' has ensured a much higher degree of mass participation in decision making than in Russia. The radical shake-up through all levels of the party structure during the Cultural Revolution, through the factory committees and through the commune structure, re-asserted the power of the masses against the stagnating bureaucracy, at least temporarily.

These are some of the reasons why we regard China as in the process of building socialism. However, we stress, as they do, that it is not a linear process. The class struggle will continue for a long time and determine whether a full transformation to socialism happens. The likelihood of a truly socialist society is held back by a number of contradictions that still exist in China.

The current conflicts following the death of Mao indicate a continuing battle over which direction the country should go. While there are substantial forces in the Party, state and society who want a Russian-type model, with more hierarchy and differentials, the problems in China cannot be reduced, as they and some of their apologists do, to 'capitalist roaders versus revolutionaries'. There are structural defects in Chinese society.

These arise primarily from a failure to institutionalise mass democracy and decision making at all levels. Because the Party is automatically identified as the means by which proletarian interests are expressed, it retains a monopoly of power and initiative. Although this is far more true at the national level than the local ones. We can see some of these contradictions at work in the economic field. They have embarked on a policy of decentralisation at a local level. Workers are involved in planning and decision making through 'workers management teams'. However, real power appears to rest with the 'Revolutionary Committees' which are clearly Party-led. The best then that can be said is that they are accessible to and interact on a real day to day basis with the workers. [16]



Despite contradictions, tremendous achievements have taken place which pose a positive alternative not only to the Russian model, but also to traditional definitions of socialist development. The decentralisation of management of state enterprises to a local level is an important change in power relations which involve the masses in planning. It is also done without the disadvantages of the Russian attempts to give managers more autonomy at the local level, as the Russian version involves a reduction in national planning and a further exclusion of workers from decision making.

Local planning in China takes place in the context of tight central control of prices and other factors within the overall national plan. Distribution of consumer goods is also controlled by state agencies of commerce, with no 'market' elements. Surplus from the enterprises is placed at the service of overall economic development. But the policy is not to make a profit on essential goods, which are state subsidised. The main point is that planning and production are based on workers' initiative with profit not the dominant goal. Social need, i.e. the pursuit of use value, presupposes a radical transformation of social relations.

Some aspects of this include 1) The replacement of material by moral incentives 2) Enterprises being responsible for anti-pollution measures 3) The ending of divisions between administrative and performance tasks, struggling against the power of specialists and mental/manual separateness. The Chinese didn't make the mistake of the Bolsheviks in admiring and thinking of as neutral, capitalist work methods. They have laid great stress on revolutionising the mode of work. This means integrating individual work into collective tasks, going against fragmentation of labour by modifying conditions to enable workers to master wider production processes. Part of this process is the de-mystification of science as neutral and unchangeable.

"Machines are no longer viewed as immutable objects, but as subject to modification by the workers themselves". (Bettleheim — "Cultural Revolution and Industrial Organisation" p.81)

We have already mentioned the encouragement of smaller-scale production. One of the further advantages is that it enables workers to exert a higher degree of control over the labour process and a better integration into the local community.

Such changes in China have necessitated important alterations in the education system. The less hierarchical and specialised occupational structure requires similar processes in education. Two particular aspects include, firstly, the discouragement of 'intellectualism' by requiring a compulsory two-years work before university and, once there, particular periods spent working alongside peasants and in factories — with workers and peasants taking on some teaching tasks. Secondly, the allocation of higher education places on a quota (per commune, factory etc.) basis, instead of through competitive selection; again designed to avoid formation of new elites.

Many people reading this will say — yes, but what about Chinese foreign policy? It is true that it's largely mistaken and on occasions counter-revolutionary, as in Angola etc. But this should not be used to shut our eyes to the many fruitful developments, with all their contradictions, that have happened inside China, as many comrades do. The mistakes of Chinese foreign policy are not a product of the internal social relations, nor even primarily of China's comparative isolation, though this is a factor. It is based on a wrong notion of the world being divided into equally dangerous imperialisms.

China is neither perfect in itself, nor a model for our type of society, but we have dealt with it because it illustrates not only the problems of a transition to socialism, but a challenge to the mechanical and fatalistic concepts that Trotskyism has been part of.

NOTES

1. David Purdy — 'Soviet Union—Socialist or State Capitalist?'
2. Mandel's pamphlet 'The Inconsistencies of State Capitalism' effectively demolishes this argument.
3. The Chinese Communist Party characterise Russia now as a capitalist system. Bettleheim, as one of their most sophisticated interpreters attempts to give a more polished gloss to this. While much of his empirical material is useful, he nowhere establishes the theoretical basis for the existence of capitalism.
4. It does show, however, that capitalism cannot any longer be identified solely as anarchic and anti-planning as some of the left continues to do.
5. Antonio Carlo — 'The Socio-economic Nature of the USSR' in Telos Nov. 1974)
6. Carlo — ibid p.5 — He mentions that Soviet ministers can earn a hundred times more (plus routine privileges) than the average manual worker.
7. Mandel — 'Marxist Economic Theory' Vol.2 p.593
8. Marc Ravovski — 'Marxism and the Analysis of Soviet Societies' In 'Capital and Class' No.1. . . Rakovski is a leading Eastern European Marxist dissident. Carlo calls this system 'Bureaucratic collectivism'. The basic analysis is similar to our own, although we prefer 'state collectivism'. (See note 14)
9. The concept of a new non-transitional society is also supported by Rakovski in the above article. He argues that such a party/state monopoly produces a society that is uniquely characterised by the absence of any formally autonomous institutions. The unity of the single all-embracing hierarchy is maintained through its own dependent relation to the Party.
10. From 'Piece Rates' by Miklos Haraski — New Left Review 91. He is a Marxist sociologist jailed by the Hungarian regime for publishing a book on alienation based on his experiences of work in a factory from which the above quote was taken.
11. The Chinese Communist Party officially date the 'revisionist degeneration' from this point. In fact, their critique of Stalin and the limitations of the Russian Revolution go deeper, (eg. in some of Mao's writings) but for historical and political reasons linked to the relations with Russia before and after the split, they officially maintain the fiction that 1956 was the key date (with Khrushchev's speech etc.)
12. Rakovski believes that classes do not exist in the historical sense (development of conscious interests and means of fighting for them) because of the lack of autonomous institutions. Conflicts of interest do, however, exist, so he maintains they exist in a sociological sense. Our point is that despite a relative lack of solidity, Russian-type societies increasingly provide the structural basis for ruling classes to become more permanent and conscious.
13. This group is called 'the central political bureaucracy' by the Polish Marxists Kuron and Modzelewsky. See their 'Revolutionary Socialist Manifesto'. Other studies examining the nature of a new ruling class (particularly stressing the growing power of managers/technocrats) include Djilas' 'The New Class' and Burnham's 'The Managerial Revolution'. Both books suffer from defects well criticised elsewhere.
14. We are not interested in fetishising one term, or finding a new one. We prefer 'state collectivism' because it seems to us that the character of such societies resides in the collective 'ownership' and control of economic resources through a fused party/state apparatus. The term 'bureaucratic collectivism' does not lay enough emphasis on a new ruling class formed by its monopoly control of state/party power.
15. We have not mentioned other Eastern European societies in any detail. Some of them (Hungary etc.) have taken the 'reforms' even further than the Russian changes. Yugoslavia has to be treated as a slightly separate case: Their open use of market elements has laid the basis for a return to capitalism, despite their more interesting political structures (elements of 'workers' control' etc.)
16. Bettleheim reports that an investigation into Shanghai factories showed that 70% of party committee members are also members of revolutionary committees, and that 49% of revolutionary committee members are party members. Bettleheim's analysis (along with some other pro-Chinese writers) is dangerously blind to the dangers of party power. They attach a great deal of importance to good members of the party with correct ideas being the basis of the struggle against revisionism and new elites. Bettleheim's statement that 'The dominant apparatus of proletarian state power therefore is the Marxist-Leninist party and not the state apparatus' (from 'Cultural Revolution and Industrial Organisation in China') is glib and dangerously substitutionist.

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GLOSSARY OF EXISTING TROTSKYIST GROUPS

**RSL: Revolutionary Socialist League**  
Deep entrust group, emerged in the 1950s. Leader, Ted Grant. It was the official 4th International Group but was removed in the early 1960s. Most influential entrust group, controls Labour Party Young Socialists. Officially does not exist. Organises under the label of the 'Militant' paper. Journal: 4th International.

**IMG: International Marxist Group**  
Emerged from deep entrists. Became official group of the 4th International in mid-sixties. Built out of student struggles. Recently it partly entered the Labour Party again. Most important political current of mainstream Trotskyism, though smaller than WRP. Paper: Red Weekly. Journal: International.

**WRP: Workers Revolutionary Party**  
Main split from official 4th International. Has its own version of the International, but it's not very international as they have successfully split from most of their allies. Claims membership in thousands, but exists mostly on paper. Took over Labour Party Young Socialists in early 1960s, was expelled and now controls Young Socialists as junior junior WRP. Paper: Newline (daily).

**SWP: Socialist Workers Party**  
Previously the International Socialists. Small group in 1950s, became semi-Trotskyist because of its 'state capitalist' position on Russia. Became largest group through more open approach, but now more sectarian and bureaucratic. Move to the SWP seen as building the party. Paper: Socialist Worker. Journal: International Socialism. Controlling influence in the 'Rank and File Movement'.

**ICL: International Communist League**  
Smaller group formed mainly from two expelled Trotskyist tendencies from I.S. — Workers Fight and Workers Power in 1970s. Has since split, with the Workers Power faction leaving. ICL paper: Workers Action. Workers Power journal: Workers Power.

**WSL: Workers Socialist League.**  
Grouping formed from people expelled from WRP, led by Alan Thornett, in 1975 for daring to question the line. Some industrial base, but still bears the imprint of WRP's dogmatism. Paper: Socialist Press.

**WL: Workers League**  
Grouping formed from people expelled from IS, for instance, for wanting to support Broad Left candidates in some union elections. Contains some ex-leaders of I.S. Small, mainly Midlands based, open and have criticisms of orthodox Trotskyism. Paper: Workers News.

**RCG: Revolutionary Communist Group**  
Another small Trotskyist opposition expelled from I.S. in the early 1970s. Highly theoretical, they don't even have a newspaper. Journal: Revolutionary Communist. Recently had an obscure split with a minority leaving to form the Revolutionary Communist Tendency.

**LSA: League For Socialist Action**  
Small split from IMG, including people who support the SWP (American) faction in IMG.

**RMC: Revolutionary Marxist Current**  
Very small group split from IMG in early 1970s. Open and non-sectarian. Soon to produce a journal as successor to their paper 'Spectre'.

**Chartists**  
Originally split from RSL. Another deep entrust group in the Labour Party. Paper: Chartist.

**Marxist Worker**  
Ex-local branch of Workers Fight. Refused to enter ICL. Strong local base in Bolton.

**RWP: Revolutionary Workers Party**  
Tiny group supporting Posadas in 4th International disputes. Entrists, but no-one knows where they entered, so they could have disappeared.

**RMT: Revolutionary Marxist Tendency**  
Very small, semi-entrust group, but open and critical of Trotskyist tradition. Followers of Michael Pablo, ex-leader of 4th International. May be disbanding.