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In this issue:

Discussion on "Revolutionary Socialism: The Minimum Platform"; Back to Marx; The Russian Revolution; Reports & Announcements

Contents

Introduction (4)

ISF Meetings (4)

Discussion on "Revolutionary Socialism: The Minimum Platform" (5)

A Contribution to Discussion - Cliff Slaughter (5)

The Revolutionary Party - Don Cuckson (10)

The Law of Value in the Transition Period - Jim Smith (12)

Dual Power and Vanguard Parties - John Robinson (21)

Back to Marx (24)

Back to Marx - Ellen Meiksins Wood (24)

Karl Marx and the Trotskyist Tradition - Cyril Smith (27)

Wealth, Value and Nature - Cyril Smith (31)

The Russian Revolution (34)

Beyond Kronstadt - MK (34)

Dictatorship and Democracy - Simon Pirani (47)

Obituary: Geoff Pilling - Terry Brotherstone (54)

Reports and Announcements (55)

Conference Marks 80th Anniversary of Russian Revolution (55)

Revolutionary Publishing in Russia (56)

Critique 25th Anniversary Conference (58)

150 Years of the Communist Manifesto (58)

Introduction

We hope that this International Socialist Forum no. 2 will further develop the discussion begun in the first issue.

The document by a group of Iranian comrades, "Revolutionary Socialism: The Minimum Theoretical, Political and Organisational Platform", published in the first issue, raised a series of points about the development of the socialist programme for the 21st century. The first group of articles in this issue, by comrades who have participated in our discussion meetings in London, responds more or less directly to some of these points. Cliff Slaughter suggests some lessons from the history of Trotskyism. Don Cuckson questions common assumptions about the meaning of "the vanguard party" and "democratic centralism". Also on the question of the revolutionary party and dual power, John Robinson takes issue with Istvan Meszaros. Jim Smith raises questions about the transition to socialism, and how our view of it is affected by our understanding of the Soviet Union and its degeneration.

A second section concentrates on how Marx may be viewed from the end of the 20th century. We are espe-

cially pleased to include a contribution from outside our own immediate circle - by Ellen Meiksins Wood - as well as two articles by Cyril Smith, an active participant in the ISF.

A third section discusses how the Russian revolution and the early years of the Bolsheviks rule should be viewed by socialists today. We republish an article already published in pamphlet form, *Beyond Kronstadt* by MK; Simon Pirani's article was written in response.

We include an obituary to Geoff Pilling, whose writing and activity in the movement has been, and will no doubt continue to be, a powerful influence for many of those involved in the ISF.

May we thank all the comrades who have subscribed and/or sent financial contributions to ISF. We need more of these to go further - and we need your participation in our meetings and your correspondence and articles for future issues.

ISF Meetings

This journal was launched by comrades - socialists from Britain, Iran and other countries - who have participated in a series of discussion meetings in London throughout this year.

Our most recent meeting was held, jointly with the journal *Critique*, on the 80th anniversary of the Russian revolution in November. The discussion was opened by three speakers: an Iranian socialist, *Critique* editor Hillel Ticktin and Istvan Meszaros, author of *Beyond Capital*. The Iranian comrade said that in saluting, and appreciating, the Russian revolution, we had to ask: what do we mean by 'workers' state'; what is the 'transition to socialism'; and what is the relationship of democracy and socialism. This latter point, also dealt with in articles in this issue of ISF, became the focus of much of the discussion. It was also stressed that the relationship of party and class, for which the Russian revolution had often been taken as a model, had to be reviewed for today.

Our October meeting was a discussion on 'the law of value in the period of transition from capitalism to socialism'. The opening contribution by Jim Smith is the basis for an article included in this issue.

Subjects of earlier meetings included the Iranian revolution, the need to develop the theory of permanent revolution, and the nature of the period and the contemporary crisis.

In the immediate future, it is intended that meetings will continue to concentrate on the questions raised in the document **Revolutionary Socialism: The Minimum Theoretical, Political and Organisational Platform**, published in ISF No.1.

We welcome readers to participate in our meetings.

A Contribution to Discussion on 'Revolutionary Socialism: The Minimum Platform'

Cliff Slaughter

My comment is limited at this stage to the Platform's sentences:

The different organisations coming out of the Left Opposition, having played a major role in resisting this (Stalinist) degeneration and in safeguarding the revolutionary tradition, have proved eventually to be incapable of developing this theory in correspondence with the new changing situation. A thorough review of this experience, the fight to liberate revolutionary theory from decades of decline and a serious effort in developing it in accordance with present-day conditions must be in the forefront of the tasks of all socialist revolutionaries.

I think it wrong to not differentiate, in this matter of theoretical work, between different sections of the movement calling themselves Trotskyist (for example, there was a crucially important fight against the positions of Pablo and Mandel and in this way against the pressure of Stalinism, even if later some of those who participated in that fight, like the Workers Revolutionary Party and its International Committee, fell into similar opportunist positions in relation to the national bourgeoisie in colonial and ex-colonial countries). Nonetheless I agree wholeheartedly with this emphasis on the necessity of critically reviewing the movement's experience in the context of a fight to develop Marxist theory.

For many years comrades in Trotskyist organisations conducted a fight for what they understood as 'party-building'. Today, none of us will contest that Stalinism has disintegrated, with the Communist Parties having become 'social-democratic', but at a time when social-democracy itself, as a method of capitalist rule in the advanced capitalist countries depending on control of the working class through some reform concessions, is finished, because it is no longer in accord with the needs or the capabilities of capital in the period of accelerated articulation of its structural decline (see Meszaros, *Beyond Capital*). Thus the working class has been betrayed and failed by its 'traditional' parties.

The Fourth International was founded as 'the world party of socialist revolution' in order to defend proletarian internationalism against these betrayals as long ago as 1938. When the programme of the Fourth International was revised, especially as by Pablo and Mandel, there was a fight to defend it. But it is absolutely necessary to recognise also that the 'party-building' in which we engaged for so long **did not 'build parties'**, even if from time to time

one group or another had a certain temporary influence in particular sections of the working class or the youth.

There is of course no doubt that the power and pressure of the Stalinist bureaucracy, physical as well as ideological, on the working class and particularly on the Trotskyists, imposed grave and often impossible difficulties for the building of revolutionary parties. Today the physical pressure is no more and the ideological pressure residual. We are obliged to not only expose and oppose the open bankruptcy of Stalinism and Social-Democracy as manifestations of capital's structural crisis, nor only to review the ways in which these objective changes open up the class struggle in new ways, but to review **also our own conceptions and methods of 'party-building'**, the 'subjective' side of things, as it were.

Central to the thinking of all who have tried to continue the fight of Trotsky and the International Left Opposition has been the opening section of the 1938 'Transitional Programme': 'The world political situation as a whole is chiefly characterised by a historical crisis of the leadership of the proletariat'; and again, 'The historical crisis of mankind is reduced to the crisis of the revolutionary leadership.'

An essential fight was taken up in the Trotskyist movement against those (e.g. Michel Pablo) who effectively abandoned the fight for independent revolutionary leadership with ideas of the 'self-reform' of the Stalinist bureaucracy and of the ability of Stalinist and reformist leaderships to lead revolutions under 'mass pressure'. But was this enough? I have come round to the opinion that the 'crisis of revolutionary leadership' was until very recently understood in a dangerously wrong and narrow way. I mean to say that there was a tendency in our movement to assume that the crisis of leadership would be resolved by replacing one leadership by another (and that that other was us). This took the most extreme forms in the proclamations of more than one group that they were indeed 'the (reconstructed) Fourth International'. (Since the Fourth International was the name for a 'world party of social revolution', their claims were and are patently absurd).

Much of what went for 'party-building' was done with this conception that what was needed was to build an apparatus and train 'cadres' to **replace** the bureaucratic apparatuses of the existing parties. All those who have been working in the Trotskyist movement will recognise the outcome of this conception in the grotesque regimes which

developed under the leadership of Healy in Britain and Lambert in France and no doubt in other countries. (See especially the volume published on the occasion of the death of the French comrade Raoul).

Certainly history itself has shown that the actual results of the betrayals of Social-Democracy and Stalinism and their control of the working-class movement (not only the considerable fragmentation of the organisation and consciousness of the working class but the space and time given to capital for displacing its contradictions, achieving renewed expansion after World War Two, and prolonging its life) posed tasks which went far beyond merely replacing one leadership by another. Only in and through a wholesale necessary reconstruction and regeneration of the class movement of the proletariat, achieved in the course of the growth of a mass socialist movement, could a new revolutionary leadership be forged in the vanguard of the class.

I suggest that particularly after 1945 there was another underlying and insufficiently questioned (hardly explicit and hardly conscious) assumption, namely, that since the first act in the world socialist revolution (October 1917) the working class, except for short periods following defeats, is more or less in a state of latent readiness for revolution, requiring only our correct 'intervention' in the struggles inevitably forced upon it by capitalism in its last stage, imperialism. The extreme forms (which many of us must be criticised for having countenanced for far too long, even if we raised this or that criticism) were to be seen in the Healy WRP's insistence from the 1970's that we were in a 'revolutionary situation' and Lambert's Organisation (Parti) Communiste Internationaliste with his notion of 'the imminence of the revolution'. Here again is the fallacy that the working class, at boiling-point as it were because of the nature of the epoch since 1917, needs only to be 'supplied' with a new party. One can now see the dangers of one of Healy's standard arguments, namely that the post-World War Two working class was 'undefeated', in contrast to the working class suffering under the weight of defeats in the thirties. This was no less disarming to the movement than were the 'objectivism' and 'history is on our side' conceptions of some calling themselves Trotskyists that some of us criticised*.

Some of us in Britain had joined the Young Communist League and the Communist Party in the immediate post-war period, and broke with Stalinism in 1956 as a result of the 20th Congress and the Hungarian Revolution. In the Stalinist movement, we were of course convinced that

* Perhaps the most consistent thinker along this line of false conclusions from the 'crisis of leadership' was Nahuel Moreno, who discovered that in the epoch imperialist decay we can speak of the 'law of inversion of causality'! That is to say, the 'causal law' between economy and politics, between objective and subjective, is inverted. In this epoch, the objective conditions do not determine the subjective, but the reverse.

the future of mankind was ensured by the socialism being built in the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe and China, soon to be spread over the world, and that the Communist Parties were the defenders of the October Revolution. We lived in this enthusiastic state, even though some of us always rejected Pollitt's 'How to Win the Peace', 'parliamentary roads to socialism' and 'peaceful coexistence'. On reflection, I now find myself having to face up to the reality that when we then became Trotskyists and together with Healy's group formed the Socialist Labour League, we did not by any means make the necessary thoroughgoing review of our experience and of the outlook which had kept us in the Stalinist movement. The dangerously one-sided understanding of 'crisis of leadership' to which I have referred, I now think, disposed us to underestimate the real task of overcoming that crisis of leadership.

Thus, there were some very basic reasons, rooted in our whole historical outlook, why we did not have as much success as we could have had in 'party-building' or in preparing for the day (now!) when revolutionary parties could be built. I say this without of course forgetting, I repeat, that the physical and ideological weight of Stalinism constituted a massive objective obstacle to such building. But the persistence of the flawed historical outlook I have indicated was surely itself an unrecognised product of the pressure of Stalinist ideology.

I would add that, notwithstanding the starkly brief statements of the 1938 Programme, Trotsky himself did not have this mechanical understanding of 'crisis of leadership'. Thus, in 1935:

Without the slightest exaggeration it may be said: the whole world situation is determined by the crisis of the proletarian leadership. The field of the labour movement is today still encumbered with huge remnants of the old bankrupt organisations. After the countless sacrifices and disappointments, the bulk of the European proletariat, at least, has withdrawn into its shell. The decisive lesson which it has drawn, consciously or half-consciously, from the bitter experiences, reads: Great actions require a great leadership. For current affairs, the workers still give their votes to the old organisations. Their votes - but by no means their boundless confidence. On the other hand, after the miserable collapse of the Third (Communist) International, it is much harder to move them to bestow their confidence upon a new revolutionary organisation. That is just where the crisis of the proletarian leadership lies. To sing a monotonous song about indefinite future mass actions in this situation, in contrast to the purposeful selection of cadres for a new International, means to carry on a thoroughly reactionary work...

The crisis of revolutionary leadership cannot, of course, be overcome by means of an abstract formula. **It is a question of an extremely humdrum process. But not of a purely "historical" process, that is, of the ob-**

jective premises of conscious activity, but of an uninterrupted chain of ideological, political and organisational measures for the purpose of fusing together the best, most conscious elements of the world proletariat beneath a spotless banner, elements whose number and self-confidence must be constantly strengthened, whose connections with wider sections of the proletariat must be developed and deepened - in a word, of restoring to the proletariat, under new and highly difficult and onerous conditions, its historical leadership. [Writings of Leon Trotsky, 1935-36, pp. 31-2]

At the discussion meeting called by International Socialist Forum on 80 years of the Russian Revolution, Istvan Meszaros took as his theme what is surely the main question, namely: the **causes** of that great historical earthquake, the October Revolution, have not gone away; on the contrary they demand revolutionary work even more urgently; therefore let us address our responsibility to collaborate in comprehending these causes, overcoming past mistakes, elaborating revolutionary perspectives which can inform the work of combining and coordinating the many struggles forced upon the working class by capital in this period of its structural crisis, and engaging in joint work to take these perspectives forward.

The Iranian comrades, particularly in their resolution 'Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Iran' (published in International Socialist Forum, No.1), have made a most important beginning in this work. Their 'Revolutionary Socialism: The Minimum Platform...A Proposal for Discussion' (in the same issue) can be one of the most important bases for the renewal that is needed. The form of the initial alliance to work for this renewal, as the 'Platform' indicates, must be an open one, with the participants continuing to do their own work, publish their own journals if they so wish, and so on. In his way we will begin to learn how to develop the insight of Istvan Meszaros in the closing chapters of **Beyond Capital**, i.e., that the future mass socialist movement will be 'inherently pluralist', with its component parts developing through their growing and necessary ability to combine and coordinate their efforts (and **thus** to achieve class-consciousness), not to accept 'control' (and a 'revolutionary consciousness' already formed by professed Marxists from above). Thus the revolutionary party which is necessary *will play its part of striving to learn from and give direction to the mass movements of the working class through this self-combining and self-coordinating, from within the workers' movement and not from outside or above it, thinking to **control** it.* This is the path along which the 'crisis of leadership' will be resolved.

For this reason, i.e., because the first task is to find a form of work through which the renewal of Marxism in theory and practice can be addressed, some of us proposed on 8 November to the Executive Committee of Workers International that we accept the proposal of Iranian comrades to form an alliance on the basis of their 'Minimum Theo-

retical, Political and Organisational Platform'. This was accepted, and we look forward to meetings in the immediate future to discuss how to advance this work.

14 November 1997

Addendum

The above notes were based upon brief remarks made at the Forum's discussion meeting (on 80 years of the October revolution) on 2 November last. I should like to add the following extract. from notes which I had written earlier, in July of this year.

1. Marxists are obliged to strive to review their theoretical ideas and political perspectives in the light of the development of capitalism, of the class struggle and in particular the experience of the revolutionary movement and their own practice. This involves resisting, so to speak, the temptation to ignore the weight of objective changes.

Istvan Meszaros has recently drawn attention to a neglected remark of Marx (in his of 8 October 1859 letter to Engels):

The specific task of bourgeois society is the establishment of a world market, at least in outline, and of production based upon this world market. As the world is round, this seems to have been completed by the colonisation of California and Australia and the opening up of China and Japan. **The difficult question for us is this: on the Continent the revolution is imminent and will immediately assume a socialist character. Is it not bound to be crushed in this little corner, considering that in a far greater territory the movement of bourgeois society is still in the ascendant?** [my emphasis, CS]

Meszaros points to the implications of this remark for the question of what processes must take place before capital would reach its 'structural limits'. One could add another aspect.

Marx's expectations of 'imminent' revolution in Europe proved to be misplaced (which of course did not in any way lead him to question his conviction that capital's production relations would be unable to contain the productive forces developed under capitalism itself, and that in 'becoming conscious of these contradictions and fighting them out', the working class would make a socialist revolution). But it is interesting to see that Marx, on the basis of the objective facts of capital's international expansion, thought that a socialist revolution isolated in 'one corner of the world', even the most advanced one, Europe (let alone in backward Russia), might be 'bound to be crushed'.

Looking today at the implications for the socialist revolu-

tion of this world-wide spread of capitalism to which Marx referred, it is naturally not 'revisionist' to say that, in contrast to Marx's expectations in the middle of the eighteenth century of proletarian revolutions in Europe, the period after the early 1920's has seen the working class outside the imperialist countries more likely to be compelled to engage in revolutionary struggles than the better-off workers (at the former's expense) of Europe and North America. This does not at all mean that socialism can or will develop in the more backward countries, or that Marxists should 'concentrate' on those backward countries. After all, Lenin's 'weakest link' understanding of the Russian revolution and Trotsky's explanation of uneven and combined development and permanent revolution long ago anticipated the revolutionary answer to such ideas.

2. Lenin, in his last writings (the 'Testament') sees himself as guilty before all the workers of Russia for having underestimated the bureaucratism and reactionary elements which had already (1923-24) come to the top in party and state. He was, at the same time, convinced that the World War and October had opened the 'epoch of wars and revolutions' and, even after the defeats in Germany, Hungary and Italy, looked to the rallying of the best of the working class to the Communist International to ensure that even with further reverses the isolation of the Russian revolution would soon be overcome.

That was **three-quarters of a century ago**. There are no successful proletarian revolutions in the imperialist countries. The results of the revolutionary victory in Russia were, because of the counter-revolutionary usurpation of power by the bureaucracy, accommodated by imperialism for decades, as they were in Eastern Europe and China. The power of Stalinism in that period enabled capitalism to ride out revolutionary struggles in the rest of the world and to displace and defer the eruption of its historical contradiction. (If we understand the depth of these products of the counter-revolutionary nature of Stalinism, we will understand better the great intensification of the contradictions of capital unleashed by the collapse of Stalinism, the opposite of the appearance of expansion of capital manifested in the current restoration of capitalism in the ex-Stalinist countries.) In the scores of revolutionary struggles for liberation fought by workers and poor peasants in Latin America, Africa and Asia, it is the bourgeoisie (for years aided and abetted by the international Stalinist apparatus) into whose hands the power has fallen, and national bourgeois states turn bloody repression against the workers and peasants.

It could of course not be expected that Lenin or anyone else could have anticipated the 'world order' (imperialism, Stalinism, 'cold war', 'socialist camp', peaceful co-existence and peaceful competition, etc.) that was made possible by the betrayals after 1924, especially the victory of Nazism in Germany, the Spanish defeat, World War Two and the 'post-war settlement' in which the imperialists and the Stalinists successfully sealed off the

working class of Eastern Europe from its brothers in the West. Trotsky was surely right to insist that 'the laws of history are stronger than the bureaucratic apparatus', but 'laws of history' do not make revolutions, and nor are they immutable. They are another word for the **developing contradictions** of class society. And these contradictions result in great class struggles. And in these great struggles 'men become conscious of the contradictions and **fight them out**'.

The working class in the Stalinist and post-Stalinist period could not succeed in doing that. Another way of saying this is: under the enormous pressure of the defeats and their consequences - the essence of which was the relationship of forces between capital and a working class terrorised and ideologically dominated by Stalinism - the Marxists of the Left Opposition and the Fourth International were unable to find a strategy and organisation and a relationship with the struggles of the class which could rearm that class and enable it to resolve its 'crisis of leadership'. Under this heading come the many ways in which 'pressure of Stalinism' led to revisionism in the Fourth International (and not only Pablo's 'centuries of degenerated workers' states' or 'dual nature of Stalinism' or the eventual 'Spartacist' type of degeneration, but also the prostration before bourgeois nationalist forces).

3. So we have already arrived at Trotsky and Trotskyism. When Trotsky fell to the assassin in 1940 it was 'midnight in the century'. Trotsky proclaimed 'I am confident in the victory of the Fourth International. Go forward!' He did think that proletarian revolutions would follow the war as a result of the same contradictions which had caused the war. He thought that Stalinism would not be able to halt this revolutionary wave. As part of this perspective, he gave great weight to the contradictions within the Soviet bureaucracy itself, writing about the revolutionary positions of the 'Reiss faction'. Despite his profound understanding that Stalinism was 'counter-revolutionary through and through' he could not possibly have knowledge, at that point, of the depth of the repression which wiped out not only the Reiss faction but every single living expression of opposition, and not only in the Soviet Union.

Trotsky's central thesis of 'the crisis of working-class revolutionary leadership' proved to be a formulation on the basis of which Trotskyists in their concentration on 'the subjective factor' failed to give the necessary consideration to the historical analysis of the objective world (as if it was enough to say 'epoch of wars and revolutions', 'last stage of capitalism', 'all the objective prerequisites for socialism exist, only the crisis of leadership needs to be resolved', and so on). In this way it was virtually taken for granted that when we say, 'the working class is the only revolutionary class in society we mean it is, in capitalism's last stage, always ready for revolution provided only it is supplied with the right leadership.

This kind of thinking, I maintain, is by no means the least

of the sources of that conception of 'building the revolutionary party' which thinks of the party as a wellinformed apparatus which will replace the existing 'traditional' leaderships. There was a neglect of theory, in that 'Marxism was taken for granted and the main work done was in explaining and exposing Stalinism. The school of 'Revolutionary History' is useful but is no answer to this.(The Healy 'philosophy' is not worth referring to.)

Inevitably Trotsky's thinking was dominated by the revolutionary nature of the period opened up by October 1917, and he fought a bitter struggle against all those who saw something permanent or semi-permanent in the victories of fascism and the Stalinist, bureaucracy. It is **not enough** to say such things as that Trotsky's prognosis of new revolutions was 'negatively confirmed' in 1944-45, On the basis of Stalinism's counter-revolutionary repressions and betrayals and of its 'settlement' with the victorious imperialists, there were great objective changes: imperialism was able to enter a new phase of its development, an expansionary phase within its 'last stage', imperialism turning the destruction of the war and the military and economic demands of the 'Cold War' to its advantage, releasing the full might of the now established hegemony of U.S. capitalism on a global scale. Its historical contradictions were displaced' and their eruption to Q great extent deferred for a whole generation, only to appear from the 1970's onwards with even greater repressed force and on the world scale.

Trotskyists explained many times that the post-war expansion was due not to some inherent potential of capital to overcome its contradictions and serve society's progress but rather a result of Stalinism's 8 betrayals. What they did not analyse, understand or explain was the social reality created by that expansion (and its relation to Stalinism). That neglect of theory came dangerously close to disarming the working class in face of the later eruption of capital's 8 contradictions with redoubled force as the structural crisis rapidly unfolds in every sphere of economy, society, politics and ideology. I repeat what I have said already several times to my own comrades: it was left to Istvan Meszaros ('Beyond Capital' and 'The Power of Ideology') to do the necessary work.

4. We all know that Marx and Engels, Lenin and Trotsky were no prophets but men who saw their theories as a **guide to action**. And so, more than once they saw the need to 'measure' their own ideas and achievements against the real development of what Marx called the 'class movement' of the proletariat and of the class struggle as a whole. Now, we lesser mortals who strive to fight in continuity with their fight have to do the same thing. The Fourth International after 1940 did not have any Marxists to compare in any way with Marx, Engels, Lenin or Trotsky (ask where are the 'works' of any Trotskyist since Trotsky's death). But I maintain that an **accounting** of where Trotskyism stands now is positively essential. Why? Much could be written (and will be) about this, but I am thinking of something as short as the Critique of the Gotha

Programme or even the few sentences in Lenin's 'Testament'.

I say '**positively essential**' because we we have the responsibility and real possibility to go forward with a resurgence (reconstruction, reconstitution, revival) of the essentially internationalist class movement of the proletariat, after the generations of reaction characterised above all by the domination of Stalinism and the consequent time and space given for capital's expansion.

What are these 'real possibilities' and responsibilities? The expansion achieved by capitalism after World War Two has reached its limits. This has been true for some time, but only with the collapse of its main pillar, Stalinism, has it become more and more apparent. That collapse was not an 'external factor' but part of and contributor to the articulation of the present phase of capital's structural historical crisis.

Stalinism is no more! The worst thing Trotskyists could do, after 1990, is to continue as if Trotskyism was a being whose alter ego is Stalinism (Trotskyism properly understood, as the continuation of Marxism, was never merely that). The working class now confronts the class enemy without the weight of Stalinism, despite the dangerous survivals of its ideological legacy. It confronts a class enemy whose room for manoeuvre is for that reason massively reduced; but the fact that capital is now battering against its structural limits also reduces that room for manoeuvre. The ruling class conducts, necessarily, a continuous offensive against the working class, provoking defensive struggles which are not yet, or in themselves, combined into the movement of the class as a class. The building of revolutionary leadership cannot be done except in and through this struggle, with all its new characteristics produced by the contradictions of capital at this new stage. **New theoretical tasks! New ways of working in the class movement of the workers! Confidence in the working class and in ourselves!**



The Revolutionary Party: a Contribution to the Discussion

Don Cuckson

I must congratulate the Iranian comrades for producing the document *The Minimum Platform of Revolutionary Socialism*, making it available in English and organising this discussion about it. It deserves a wide circulation and discussion in the labour movement.

I begin with some questions:

- 1) Can there be more than one revolutionary party?
- 2) Can there be more than one revolutionary programme?
- 3) Must the revolutionary party be a vanguard party?
- 4) Can there be more than one vanguard party?
- 5) If there are several organisations claiming this title, how do you pick the right one?
- 6) If the criterion is the 'correctness' of the programme, what criteria must be applied to judge 'correctness'?
- 7) Who chooses these criteria?
- 8) Finally, who decides which programme is 'correct'?

The document makes the distinction between the class vanguard and the vanguard party. The class vanguard is composed of all those, irrespective of party affiliation or social origin, who are at the sharp end in the struggle against capital. The composition of this class vanguard changes as battles are won and lost, as new issues arise, and as other sections of workers are drawn into struggle. There may be workers who are members of vanguard organisations, while really being involved in such struggles at the same time. These workers may be in the 'vanguard', but not by virtue of their membership of this or that organisation, only because of their position in the struggle against capital.

Now, some more questions:

- a) Do we (ie the class) need a vanguard party?
- b) Can such a party be a mass party, or must it remain a cadre party?
- c) Can such a party be 'pluralistic', ie can it accommodate politically the variety of opinions, trends and cross-currents, which a mass movement must inevitably

generate? (This is really a more specific form of question b).

d) Can a monolithic party rule (?) or 'create' a (pluralistic) socialist society?

Questions like these indicate the main questions: what is a vanguard party? What are its essential features, the features which distinguish it from organisations which are not of the vanguard type, in its own terms or in the opinion of anyone else?

The Vanguard Party, its Ideology and Structure

The ideology of the vanguard party is based upon statements like this:

Social development is governed by laws which are independent of human will and consciousness, and are therefore objective. These laws are similar to the laws of Physics and Chemistry, and, like these, can be known, understood and applied. The historic task of the vanguard party - (that's us) - is to apply the laws, formulate policies and a programme, and then tell the workers what to do, when to do it, and how. This is our REVOLUTIONARY MISSION!

So, according to this ideology, if there are several such groups, each of them can claim to have all the answers, as many answers as there are groups - and there are a lot of them! Each claims direct lineage from Marx and Lenin, with proprietary rights over the way the 'laws' should be applied. (Intellectual property is not such a new idea, after all!) Each of them interprets the past, forms policies for the present and writes programmes for the future. Each claims that it is 'correct' and that all the others are 'wrong', sometimes because they have capitulated to the enemy, or sometimes because they are just plain stupid. Each 'knows' that there is only one 'correct' answer to any question, and that it has got it.

This 'knowledge' gives each group the right, not just to call itself, but to be, the vanguard party. Each claims the right to intervene in, to manipulate, to control and ultimately to take over, all actions of the class, actually to substitute itself for the class. This includes trades unions at all levels, Trades Councils, Community Associations, tenants associations, not to mention Workers Coun-

cils, before, during and after workers take power.

Organisations like this are, of course, inherently sectarian. This has nothing to do with their size. What marks them out is their arrogant and patronising attitude to ordinary workers as well people in general. We can trace this attitude to quotations like the following: 'Class political consciousness can be brought to the workers only from without'. (Lenin, *What is to be Done?*)

Apart from anything else, this quotation is incomplete, and taken out of the social and historical context from which it was written in 1902. Dogmatically applied, such statements provide the main theoretical (?) basis for the existence of these elitist groups.

Democratic Centralism

Such a group needs an organisational form corresponding to its political outlook, and this is provided by the so-called 'Democratic Centralism'. This is democratic in appearance, in form, but bureaucratic in essence, in its fundamental nature. All committees may be elected periodically, but real power lies at the top, in a Political Bureau, or, as in the CPGB after 1943, a Political Committee.

The aim of the bureaucracy is CONTROL, (a) of the Party and (b) of the class by means of the Party. This is how it exercises its 'revolutionary leadership'. We can call this INSTRUMENTALISM. The Party is used as an 'instrument' to control the class in its spontaneous revolutionary action, and then to operate the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' in the name of the class. In the Soviet Union and in Eastern Europe before 1989, this was done by means of the system called NOMENKLATURA, the personnel which the Party placed in all the important positions in economic and social life.

Discussion was encouraged in the CPGB, of which I was a member for 35 years, but this was nearly always in areas where some adjustment in Party work was felt necessary by the leaders. The PC decided the boundaries of the discussion, what could be discussed, when to start and, especially, when to stop. Sometimes a distinction was drawn between 'constructive' and 'destructive' criticism. Of course, the PC decided which was which. Occasionally, views which had been acceptable last week, were unacceptable this week, for example, in 1948, when it was suddenly announced that Tito's Yugoslavia was guilty of 'anti-Soviet attitudes'. (The following year, we were informed that the country was led by 'fascist agents of imperialism'.)

In those countries where, it was alleged, 'the working class holds political power', the process of dissent and its outcome are well known. All 'criticism' led to 'persistent criticism', which was soon unmasked as 'an anti-Party attitude', then as 'counter-revolutionary ac-

tivity'. When the critic was found to be an 'enemy of the people', they could be assassinated, first politically, then physically.

The vanguard party is monolithic, not pluralistic, so it can never 'create' a pluralistic socialist society. It needs a dogmatic interpretation of what is euphemistically called 'Marxism' to sustain itself politically and organisationally. Thus it can never be a mass party. This is the insoluble contradiction faced by the vanguard party. Its ideology and form of organisation cut it off from the class which it aims to provide with 'leadership'. In order to increase its influence, it must recruit from the class. But, by this very process, it lays itself open to 'infection' by 'alien ideas'. If these are allowed to grow, it will, in its own terms, become opportunistic and reactionary, preventing it from fulfilling its own 'revolutionary' purpose.

I once formulated three Principles of Democratic Centralism:

- 1) Father knows best.
- 2) Ssh - not in front of the children!
- 3) Keep it in the family.

My partner later suggested a fourth principle, which I am happy to accept, called 'mushroom culture':

- 4) Keep 'em in the dark and feed 'em shit!

This is the diet fed to us by any Nomenklatura. This is how the Party exercises control over the whole of society, and that is what Stalinism means. It is a complete perversion of the ideas of Marx and Engels, who looked forward in the Communist Manifesto to 'an association in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all'.



The Law of Value in the Transition to Communism

Jim Smith

The article 'Revolutionary Socialism: The Minimum Theoretical, Political and Organisational Platform', translated from Farsi and published in *International Socialist Forum* Vol. 1, No. 1, states as follows:

...[T]here is a period of transition between capitalist and communist society identified by the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat based on all the oppressed and toiling masses. This state...[is] a necessary phase to allow the working class to establish its rule and start the transition period through the abolition of private property.

We can identify three distinct stages of this transition period. The first is the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat. This is established initially in individual nation states when the working class overthrows the bourgeoisie and smashes state machine. Each such revolution is part of the world revolution, a necessary condition for attaining even the lower stage of communist society, also known as 'socialism'. [1]

Marx in his *Critique of the Gotha Programme* asserted that the principle of distribution in the higher stage of communist society was 'from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs'. Communism was itself not to Marx the 'goal' but rather the precondition for the 'truly human society'.

The economics of the transitional society are inseparable from the dynamics of the world revolution. The initial stage of the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' in one or even several countries is necessarily one in which the struggle to overcome the laws of capitalism is in its infancy. The overthrow of the political power of the bourgeoisie is only the first step.

In this article, I attempt to look at some of the economic issues which arise during the period of transition from capitalism to communism. In particular, I make reference to the experience of the Russian Revolution and the Soviet Union.

The struggle against the law of value

I do not claim here to go into detail on Marx's concept of 'value', which has been the subject of detailed study. [2] The basis is that commodities, which must have a 'use value' as well as an exchange value will exchange – subject to variations in price caused by factors outlined below – according to the quantity of 'socially necessary la-

bour time' required for their production.

As Pilling puts it, 'Marx showed that value is nothing else but the embodiment of human labour in the abstract the quantity of which is measured by socially necessary working time.' [3] Pilling shows that to describe Marx's position as a 'labour theory of value' 'is at best confusing and at worst quite wrong'. [4] In this, Marx differed from bourgeois economists such as David Ricardo and Adam Smith. Marx did not argue that it was possible to predetermine the 'value' of a commodity by the amount of labour which was involved in its production. Rather, value only arises when commodities are exchanged and the labour of the producers is realised in the value of the commodities. Value is 'the social relation of commodity to commodity'. [5] The basis on which commodities exchange leaves out of consideration the different use-values, and of the concrete forms of labour embodied in them. As a result, 'there is nothing left but what is common to them all; all are reduced to one and the same sort of labour, human labour in the abstract.' Values are 'the social substance' common to all commodities, 'a mere congelation of homogeneous human labour, of labour-power expended without regard to the mode of its expenditure'. [6]

Commodity production existed in all pre-capitalist societies except for 'primitive communism'. It is when wage-labour is the basis of commodity production that commodity production imposes itself on society as a whole. Unlike production by self-employed farmers and artisans, the capitalist mode of production 'rests on exploitation of the nominally free labour of others, *i.e.*, on wage-labour'. [7] Marx showed that while there is no such human being as an 'abstract labourer', it is alienated 'abstract labour' which is the common substance between commodities. The common substance between commodities is abstract social labour. Capitalism reduces the real 'concrete' labour of living human beings to 'human labour in the abstract'.

It was Marx's understanding of the nature of value as measured, not by 'labour time' but by 'socially necessary labour time' that allowed him to understand the nature of capitalist exploitation, the production by workers of 'surplus value'. The source of profit had remained a mystery to the bourgeois economists, or they had come up with solutions such as that profit was made from the eleventh hour of the 12-hour working day. What appeared as an equal exchange ('a fair day's wage for a fair day's work') was in fact unequal. The labourer has to be sepa-

rated from his [8] commodity, labour power. The worker sells his labour to the capitalist and receives wages in return. The value of the commodity labour-power is essentially the socially necessary labour-time taken for its maintenance and reproduction, i.e., the value of the commodities needed to feed, clothe and educate workers and their families.

The commodity labour power has a unique use value – that of creating new value. One portion of the living labour of the worker is ‘paid labour’, corresponding to the value of labour power and paid to the worker in the form of wages, and the other ‘unpaid labour’, or surplus-value, which goes to the capitalists. Surplus value is the source of profits, interest and rent.

Marx distinguished in the capitalist productive process between ‘living’ labour expended by the workers, and ‘dead’ labour, previously embodied in the means of production (machinery, materials, etc), used in the productive process but produced in the past. The payment made by the capitalist for living labour power, which creates value for the capitalist, as ‘variable’ capital. ‘Constant’ capital is invested in dead labour.

Marx argued that with the emancipation of the working class comes the abolition of abstract, alienated labour. This is a revolutionary process through which the working class, in accomplishing the revolutionary overthrow of capital, also revolutionises itself.

Marx distinguishes between ‘relative’ and ‘absolute’ surplus-value. Absolute surplus-value arises at the point at which the working day is prolonged beyond the point at which the worker would have produced the equivalent of a value for his labour power. Capitalists may try to increase absolute surplus-value by lengthening the working day, but there are clearly limits to this. The production of relative surplus-value presupposes the existence of absolute surplus value: relative surplus value is produced through shortening the necessary labour by methods whereby the equivalent for wages is produced in less time. This can be achieved through making workers work harder (increasing the ‘intensity’ of their labour) but also through the introduction of more productive machinery. The production of relative surplus-value, wrote Marx:

revolutionises out and out the technical processes of labour, and therefore the composition of society. It therefore pre-supposes a specific mode, the capitalist mode of production, a mode which, along with its methods, means and conditions, arises and develops itself spontaneously on the foundation afforded by the formal subjection of labour to capital. In the course of this development, the formal subjection is replaced by the real subjection of labour to capital. [9]

In order to increase the extraction of ‘relative’ surplus value, capitalists invest increasingly in constant relative to variable capital. For the individual capitalist, this means

investing in more technologically advanced machinery which enables more goods to be produced by fewer workers. It is easier for the capitalist to increase ‘relative’ surplus value through replacing workers by machinery than through increasing ‘absolute’ surplus value by forcing workers to work harder and longer. The relationship between constant and variable capital as viewed from the point of view of the relative value of means of production to living labour power is called by Marx the ‘value composition’ of capital. Viewed from the point of view of functions in the productive process (means of production and the mass of labour necessary for their employment) is the ‘technical’ composition of capital. Marx refers to the correlation between these two as the ‘organic composition of capital’. [10]

The trend in capital is for the organic composition to rise, for dead labour to dominate living and for the machine to dominate the worker. However, this process is a key element in the tendency of capitalism towards crisis.

In practice, commodities do not under developed capitalism actually exchange at value. This is not principally because of excess profits made through monopoly, superexploitation of colonies or semi-colonies, ‘unfair’ trading practices, etc, although all of these do take place. Rather, it is because of the laws of capitalist society towards equalisation of the rate of profit. Commodities then no longer exchange (as in less developed societies) at value, but at ‘prices of production’. [11] This arises from the disparities in organic composition of capital between different industries. Prices of production represent an intermediate stage in the tendency towards a general rate of profit. I should be noted, however, that while the surplus value extracted by an individual capitalist and his profit are not the same, total surplus value is equal to total profit, and total price is equal to total value. [12]

Although the investment in machinery to replace workers helps an individual capitalist to increase the mass of his profits in the short-term, the general effect of a rise in the organic composition of capital is to lead to a fall in the general rate of profit. This is because the increased investment in machinery relative to investment in living labour power, a decrease in variable capital relative to constant, means a decrease in the surplus value produced relative to the total capital invested. The increase in productivity cheapens commodities, as each product requires less labour time for its production, so that each commodity produced has less value. While this helps to increase the mass of profits through decreasing the value of labour power (except in those industries such as armaments and luxury products, which are not consumed by workers) the general effect, although relative surplus value increases, is a progressive fall in the general rate of profit. Marx shows that this tendency is an inevitable ‘expression peculiar to the capitalist mode of production of the ‘increasing social productivity of labour’. [13] This aspect of the crisis is not some incidental quirk, which can be overcome by reforms. It is rather a fundamental expression of

the 'general contradiction of capitalism', through which the worker becomes an appendage to the machine and unemployment exists when there is a need for goods and services. [14]

Many readers of *International Socialist Forum* will feel dissatisfied with the above outline. I hope, however it will form the basis for considering the forms in which the struggle to abolish value and 'abstract' labour in the transition to socialism take place, and also to consider the nature of social relations in the former Soviet Union.

Bourgeois right in the lower stage of communist society

An essential task for communists is to develop, in the words of Kan'ichi Kuroda, 'a "political economy of the transition period" which includes political-economic policies concerning how we would abolish the system of wage slavery on a world-wide scale.' [15]

Marx himself addressed this task in his *Critique of the Gotha Programme*. Marx here criticised the formulation of 'a fair distribution of the proceeds of labour' as, pointing out that the bourgeoisie asserted that 'the present-day distribution is "fair"', and suggested that weaknesses in the formulations in the Programme stemmed from a 'retrogression' to a bourgeois conception of wages as the value or price paid for labour performed, rather than as the value or price of labour power.

Marx stated that on this issue:

What we have to deal with here is a communist society, not as it has *developed* on its own foundations, but, on the contrary, just as it *emerges* from capitalist society, which is thus in every respect, economically, morally and intellectually, still stamped with the birthmarks of the society from whose womb it emerges. Accordingly, the individual producer receives back from society – after the deductions [for administration costs, services such as health and education, and for those unable to work] have been made – exactly what he gives to it.

Marx suggested that the worker would receive a certificate that he had contributed a given amount of labour to society, and that he would draw (after deductions) 'from the social stock of means of consumption as much as costs the same amount of labour'. Marx commented that: 'Here the same principle prevails as that which regulates the exchange of commodities, as far as this is exchange of equal values.' However, the 'content and form' are changed, as social ownership of the means of production has been achieved. This society is the lower phase of communist society, or 'socialism'. Hence, although 'equal right' which is 'bourgeois right' still applies, but 'principle and practice are no longer at loggerheads' as the law of value no longer holds sway. The equality 'consists in the measurement of an *equal standard*, labour' and is no

longer the illusion of equality which exists in capitalist society.

Wages and the law of value in the Soviet Union

The Bolsheviks who led the Russian Revolution were well aware of the issues of the transition from the lower to the higher phase of communism as raised by Marx in the *Critique of the Gotha Programme*. In *The State and Revolution*, written on the eve of the taking of state power, Lenin devoted part 3 of chapter V to this issue, quoting the *Critique of the Gotha Programme* at length. In 'the first phase of communist society (usually called socialism)', Lenin argued, bourgeois right was only abolished in part, 'only in proportion to the economic revolution so far achieved'. Lenin is clear in chapter V that this lower stage of communism ('socialism') is not the same as the initial post-revolutionary period, the 'revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat'.

The Eighth Party Congress, held in March 1919 shortly after the first congress of the Communist International, changed the party name to 'Communist Party' and also agreed a new party programme. Bukharin and Preobrazhensky then produced *The ABC of Communism* as an interpretation of this programme. There is a clear distinction in *The ABC of Communism* between the dictatorship of the proletariat – which is seen as 'transitory' – and 'socialism', seen as 'communism in the course of construction', or 'incomplete communism'. [16]

Bukharin and Preobrazhensky believed that money would begin to lose its significance 'from the very outset of the socialist revolution'. This conclusion was undoubtedly influenced by the conditions of 'War Communism', with the accompanying collapse of the rouble. Alec Nove comments that in this period, 'money lost its effective function within the state sector of the economy, and had precious little function at all'. [17] *The ABC of Communism* referred to the introduction of 'work-books' which would show how much a worker had produced and would entitle him to payment in kind, and also refers to the increasing depreciation of money as 'an expression of the annulment of monetary values'. Payment in kind was a measure forced on the state enterprises rather than planned. The Soviet Union had in fact not achieved even the beginnings of a socialist economy, and could not while the Revolution remained isolated.

Bukharin gave these views a theoretical development in the following year in his *Economics of the Transformation Period*. Using a term originally used by Vladimir Smirnov, Bukharin refers to 'primitive socialist accumulation', [18] a term which was also frequently used by Trotsky from 1922 up to and including the 12th Party Congress of 1923. [19] Lenin did not like this term, which he described as 'extremely unfortunate. A childish game in its imitation of terms, used by adults.' [20]. Lenin was also critical of Bukharin's phrase 'socialist dictatorship'. [21]

Bukharin in this work opposes the use of the law of value as a tool for the transformation to communism. His argument is that 'the law of value is no more than the law of equilibrium in the anarchic commodity system', and that therefore 'value as a category of the capitalist commodity system in its equilibrium is the least useful for the transition period where commodity production disappears and where equilibrium is absent.' Prices would thus take on an 'appearance-form', detached from value, and wages would become 'an illusory quantity which has no content'. Bukharin adds that:

As long as the working class are the ruling class, *wage labour* disappears. In socialised production there is *no* wage labour. And insofar as there is no wage labour, there are also *no wages* as the price of labour power sold to the *capitalists*. Only the outer shell remains of wages – the money form, which together with the money system approaches self-annihilation. *In the system of the proletarian dictatorship, the "worker" receives a social share, but no wages.*

Bukharin adds that 'the category of *profit* as well as the *category of surplus value*...disappears'. The above processes are seen as 'one of the basic tendencies of the transition period, the *rending aside of the veils of commodity fetishism*'. [22] While Bukharin's position here points the way towards overcoming the law of value and the abolition of abstract labour, he seems unclear about the tempo of this process. Chapter 11 of *The Economics of the Transition Period* relates this process to the process of world revolution, which he thinks will begin in the more backward countries. There seems to be a confusion between the stage of 'dictatorship of the proletariat' and 'socialism', expressed in the phrase 'socialist dictatorship'. A theoretical basis has arguably been laid for 'socialism in one country'. The reference to the working class as the ruling class shows a lack of commitment to the 'withering away' of the state. With the emancipation of the working class and the abolition of wage labour, there also comes the abolition of all classes. A note by Lenin suggests a disagreement over the issue of state power. [23]

From the adoption of the New Economic Policy (NEP) in 1921, Bukharin never again for argued for the imminent introduction of these proposals. From that time, he was in conflict with his previous collaborator, Preobrazhensky. Preobrazhensky in 1920 wrote a pamphlet (*Paper Money in the Age of Proletarian Dictatorship*) optimistically arguing, as Bukharin did in the same year, that the depreciation of the rouble was a step towards the total disappearance of money. The Tenth Party Congress of April 1921, which introduced the New Economic Policy, also removed Preobrazhensky from the Secretariat of the Central Committee and was not re-elected to the Central Committee.

In 1922 his work *From NEP to Socialism* was published. This book is set in the future, in 1970. It traces development back from 1970, when there is 'a socialist society

which is gradually being transformed into a communist one' and discusses how that socialist society was achieved. Preobrazhensky here still argues for the positive aspects of rouble devaluation, but relates this to relationships with foreign enterprises. [24] In 1926, Preobrazhensky's *The New Economics* appeared.

In both these works, Preobrazhensky sees the law of value as a useful tool in the development of a socialist economy. A starting point was the reality that Soviet industrial enterprises were less productive than those in western capitalist countries. *The New Economics* was directed against Bukharin's strategy of lowering the prices of industrial goods and allowing a strong market-based peasant sector to develop.

Behind this debate lay the 'scissors' crisis. The gap between agricultural and industrial prices in October 1923 had grown to the point where agricultural prices were at 89% of the level of 1913, and industrial prices at 276%. [25] Preobrazhensky argued that although productivity in the agricultural sector was also lower than in the West, the lower value of labour power in the Soviet Union would allow agricultural products to be exported at a low price, and the income so obtained used to develop state-owned industry. Agriculture could, Preobrazhensky argued, then be developed in turn with the help of modern industry. In other words, Preobrazhensky argued that for agricultural products the world value of labour power would apply, allowing them to be sold cheaply, while industrial products would sell at a price based on the value of labour power within the Soviet Union, with its much lower level of productivity.

Although Preobrazhensky talked of 'a struggle against the world law of value', the relationship between the law of value within the protected industries of the Soviet Union and the world law of value was an important aspect of his strategy. State monopoly of foreign trade was essential. Preobrazhensky summed up the strategy thus:

The current prices of our products are on average twice as high as the prices of the same goods abroad. We accumulate with these prices only because we struggle against the world law of value, by forcibly tying our internal market to our technically backward industry while selling the exported products of peasant economy at the prices prevailing on the world market, and by subordinating our import programme to the task of accumulating basic capital and replenishing stocks of circulating capital. [26]

The above quotation indicates a confidence that the Soviet Union could develop a socialist state sector prior to world revolution. We have to agree with Deutscher that 'Preobrazhensky, for all his references to international revolution, constructed his theorem in such a way as it implied that primitive socialist accumulation might be concluded by the Soviet Union alone or by the Soviet Union in association with other underdeveloped nations.'

[27] This position is similar to the one previously taken by Bukharin, noted above.

Preobrazhensky's apparent belief in that the Soviet Union could develop a socialist economy without world revolution allowed contradictory statements on this issue to appear in the 1927 *Platform of the Joint Opposition*, in which Trotsky collaborated with Preobrazhensky, Zinoviev and others. On the one hand, the *Platform* argued:

In the long struggle between two irreconcilably hostile systems – capitalism and socialism – the outcome will be determined, *in the last analysis* by the relative productivity of labour under each system. And this, under market conditions, will be measured by the relation between our domestic prices and world prices. [28]

This statement anticipated the arguments of Nikita Khrushchev, whose case for 'peaceful co-existence' was based on precisely the premise that the superior productivity of 'socialism' as practised in the Soviet Union would mean that the people of other countries would wish to adopt the same system. The *Platform* continues to reject 'an isolated development of socialism' and call for stronger trade links with world capitalism. This is argued to be the best way to ensure the strength of the Soviet economy and hence prevent its overthrow either through armed intervention by the capitalist powers or through penetration by cheap commodities. Later, however, the *Platform* argues that: 'A war of the imperialists against the Soviet Union is not only probable, but inevitable' [29] and asserts the need to 'explain now to the broadest masses of the peoples of the whole world that this will be a war of imperialists and slave-owners against the first proletarian state and dictatorship – a war of capitalism against socialism.' The *Platform* goes on to argue that the Soviet Union will be fighting 'for the international revolution and socialism'. [30]

Preobrazhensky in using the term 'primitive socialist accumulation' saw a clear analogy with 'the primitive accumulation of capital' described by Marx in vol. I of *Capital*. Marx describes this process as the 'expropriation of the immediate producers' which was 'accomplished with merciless Vandalism, and under the stimulus of passions the most infamous, the most sordid, the pettiest, the most meanly odious.' [31] Lenin's dislike of the term 'primitive socialist accumulation' is thus hardly surprising.

It is also not surprising that Trotsky should have assured the 1922 Fifth Congress of Youth that his conception of 'primitive socialist accumulation' would not involve the 'bloody and disgraceful' methods of primitive capitalist accumulation'. [32] At the Twelfth Party Congress in 1923 Trotsky vehemently rejected Krasin's suggestion that primitive socialist accumulation would involve plunder of the peasantry. [33] Preobrazhensky, however, was prepared to acknowledge that primitive socialist accumula-

tion would involve 'exploitation' of the peasantry, whereas Trotsky at the Twelfth Congress denied it. Deutscher argues that Trotsky differed with Preobrazhensky over both the pace of industrialisation and how far the peasantry would have to foot the bill of primitive accumulation. [34]

Preobrazhensky was quite explicit that in his view the development of a socialist state industrial sector would involve the use of 'capitalist forms' and that the state bank, Gosbank, would 'adapt capitalist relations to socialism', thereby 'betraying capitalism to socialism, like a *provocateur*, using capitalist methods', while at the same time avoiding 'the storms and stresses of market spontaneity'. [35]

By 1926, Preobrazhensky had developed the theory of the 'law of primitive socialist accumulation'. This 'law' would determine the 'distribution of means of production in the economy and the distribution of labour power and also the amount of the country's surplus product which is alienated for expanded socialist reproduction'. A system of 'non-equivalent exchange' between the private and state sector would allow the state sector to develop at the expense of the private. [36] Preobrazhensky's argument for in effect arbitrary pricing as a means to combat the law of value while at the same time making use of it and the claim to have found a new 'law' of socialist accumulation anticipated, as shown below, arguments by Stalin and his successors.

While it is clear that Preobrazhensky did not regard the law of value as having been abolished in the Soviet Union, his counterposing of a new 'law' ignored the only real force which can struggle against the law of value – the revolutionary working class. Walter Daum comments that:

The reason why Preobrazhensky's theory is wrong is that the proletarian consciousness which combats the law of value is not a blind law independent of the will of the workers. There is no law regulating conscious planning (other than the law of value itself – which holds it back, restricts it and subjects it to the economic scarcities of the existing society.) Preobrazhensky's own attempts to formulate this "law" present no objective developmental process. They merely acknowledge the effect of Soviet economic backwardness... [his position] had the effect of drawing a line between the state sector and the private sector, as if the law of value could penetrate the former only from outside. Adopted without acknowledgement by the Stalinists, it misguided generations of Oppositional communists. [37]

Interpretations of the Stalinist degeneration of the Soviet Union

There is no necessary connection between acknowledging the existence of the law of value in the period of the dictatorship of the proletariat and the conclusion Daum

comes to, that the workers' state was overthrown by a 'Stalinist counterrevolution' and capitalism or 'state capitalism' thereby established in the 1930s.

As noted above, in the transformation process as understood by Bukharin profit and surplus value 'disappeared'. They therefore existed in the early stages of the process, during the period of the dictatorship of the proletariat. State ownership, nationalisation, etc, cannot in themselves abolish value, although they may form the material basis for doing so. Daum argues that in a 'genuine workers' state', the proletarians working for the state 'still produce value and therefore surplus value. But they are not exploited, because there is no exploiting class, no bourgeoisie, to appropriate the surplus value'. [38]

If it were to be argued that the law of value or surplus value existed only in capitalist society, then if they could be shown to exist in a particular society then that society would have to be regarded as capitalist. It is therefore paradoxical to see Pilling, who holds that the Soviet Union is a workers' state, argue the following against the position cited above of Daum, who holds that from the late 1930s it became capitalist:

Firstly, it is not true that because a society produces values it "therefore" produces surplus value. But second, the creation of surplus value necessarily involves the existence of capital and a capitalist class. [39]

Pilling goes on in this review to argue that surplus value was also not produced in the Soviet Union under its Stalinist degeneration on the grounds that the bureaucracy does not own the means of production. To a great extent, this argument has similarities not only with Ernest Mandel, but also with the 'state capitalist' theorist Tony Cliff.

Writing on the Soviet Union under Stalinism, Cliff argues that 'the source of the law of value, as the motor and regulator of production' does not exist there. Instead, 'the laws prevailing in the relations between the enterprises and between the labourers and the employer-state would be *no different* if Russia were one big factory managed directly from one centre, and if all the labourers received the goods they consumed directly, *in kind*'. [40] This, according to Cliff, applies only when the Soviet Union is 'viewed in isolation from world capitalism'. The law of value, according to Cliff, is 'seen as the arbiter of the Russian economic structure as soon as it is seen in the concrete historical situation of today – the anarchic world market.' [41]

Another aspect of Cliff's work is that he confuses the 'lower' stage of communism ('socialism') as discussed above with the period of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Writing on 'the economy of a workers' state' [42] in the context of Soviet history, Cliff, while rejecting both Bukharin/Stalin's and Preobrazhensky's proposed solutions to the conflict between state industry and individu-

alist agriculture, posits a pure 'workers' state' in which, although there is still a division between manual and mental labour which is 'common to both a workers' state and capitalism', the distinguishing feature between the two is 'the existence or non-existence of workers' control over production'. Technicians in a workers' state 'are not subordinated to capital, but to the will of the workers' state, to the collective of producers'. In this workers' state, equivalents are exchanged on the basis of 'the equality of producers'. The law of value has, therefore, already been abolished. Cliff regards the restoration of capitalism (in the form of 'state capitalism') as taking place around 1928 with the First Five Year Plan, incorporating Stalin's forced industrialisation and collectivisation policy, with expropriation of the peasantry. The implication of the argument cited above, however, is that the Soviet Union never was a workers' state. Cliff does nonetheless accept the October Revolution, and by seeing 'workers' control' as the key issue, can claim there was a brief period of 'dictatorship of the proletariat' followed by 'dual power'. Cliff's theory of transition is lacking in realism.

Kuroda [43] has pointed out that Trotsky exhibits a similar confusion concerning distribution between the dictatorship of the proletariat and socialism in Chapter 3 of *The Revolution Betrayed*. Here, Trotsky argues that in a workers' state distribution is carried out 'with a capitalistic measure of value' [44] and this is equated with the "lowest stage of communism" as defined by Marx and defined by Trotsky as a society where, 'in order to increase the productive forces, it is necessary to resort to the customary norms of wage payment – that is, to the distribution of life's goods in proportion to the quantity and quality of individual labour.' [45] Kuroda argues that by including the 'quality of labour' Trotsky misses Marx's point in the *Critique of the Gotha Programme*. This is because 'quality of labour' includes a quantity of past ('dead') labour objectified in living labour-power and is the basis of differences in the value of labour-power in capitalist society. In socialist distribution, the 'quality of labour' is absent from the calculation, even though exchange remains unequal, since although exchange is for equal amounts of labour, workers' capacity to labour differs, as do their needs. Hence, exchange in socialist society, although still according to bourgeois right, is not according to 'a capitalistic measure of value', as Trotsky (who is followed in this by Tony Cliff) asserts. Trotsky is therefore disarmed theoretically in his criticism of the Stalinist distribution system, which uses this false conception of distribution under socialism as justification of the piece-rate wage system. Trotsky nonetheless quite rightly saw an essential task of the transition period as the abolition of piecework payments as 'a relic of barbarism'. [46]

Kuroda also discusses the character of wages in the transition from the dictatorship of the proletariat to socialism. Here, the economic task is 'the process of the abolition, or the sublation, of the law of value'. In this instance, 'quality of labour' is still taken into account, regarded as past

labour objectified into labour power. However, in the transition process this 'quality of labour' is no longer given a value definition. Wages then become the 'illusory quantity which has no content' referred to by Bukharin or, in Kuroda's words, 'pseudo-wages'.

Kuroda also accuses Trotsky of making 'a fetish of the property of the workers' state', of having a 'static' view of the Soviet Union. [47] However, he rejects [48] 'state capitalism' on the grounds that the nationalised means of production do not function as 'self-expanding value' - Marx's definition of 'capital' [49] - and that prices in the Soviet Union are unrelated to market prices or the law of average rate of profit, but rather subject to a 'confused and incoherent' bureaucratic policy. To Kuroda (writing in 1961), the USSR 'is a newly appeared historical existence' although he stresses that this does not mean 'a new category which is neither capitalism nor socialism (for instance, the theory of bureaucratic collectivism in Max Shachtman's formulation)' but rather as a 'form alienated by the Stalinist bureaucracy of the transition period society towards world socialism'. [50]

The arbitrariness of prices and wages in the Soviet Union, which continued until the last few years of its existence, is an aspect which serious analysis cannot ignore. Trotsky pointed out in 1933 that money, like the state, would wither away with socialism but could not be abolished by decree. Trotsky added: 'The Soviet economy today is neither a monetary nor a planned one. It is an almost entirely bureaucratic economy. Exaggerated and disproportionate industrialisation undermined the foundations of agricultural economy... Industry, freed from control by the producer, took on a supersocial, that is, a bureaucratic character.' [51]

Stalinist ideology

Hence, the law of value was in a sense bypassed by the Stalinist bureaucracy, but not abolished. As Kuroda warns us, the arbitrariness of this system does not lead us to infer that some new system, such as 'bureaucratic collectivism'. It is significant that from 1943 Stalin and those around him themselves began to argue that the 'law of value' operated - or should operate - in a socialist economy. This view was first put forward in the article 'Some Questions of Teaching of Political Economy'. [52] Nove suggests that this unsigned article may have been written by Stalin himself [53]. It certainly pointed towards a new way of thinking on the part of the bureaucracy, contradicting previous positions. Dunayevskaya shows that A. Leontiev, one of the editors of *Pod Znamenem Marxizma (Under the Banner of Marxism)* the journal which published the article, had written in 1935: 'The Marxian doctrine of surplus value is based, as we have seen, on his teaching of value. That is why it is important to keep the teaching of value free from all distortions because the theory of exploitation is built on it.' [54] A new interpretation of Marxism was needed to support the bureaucracy's new image of the society over which it ruled.

Stalin elaborated these arguments in his *Economic Problems of Socialism in the USSR* (1952). Here, Stalin states that it was necessary 'to discard certain concepts taken from Marx's *Capital*' when considering 'our socialist relations'. Among the items to be discarded are not only 'surplus value' but "'necessary" and "surplus" labour, "necessary" and "surplus" product, "necessary" and "surplus" time'. However, Stalin is in no doubt about one concept:

It is sometimes asked whether the law of value exists and operates in our country, under the socialist system. Yes, it does exist and it does operate. Wherever commodities and commodity production exist, there the law of value must also exist.

So according to Stalin not only is there value and commodity production without surplus value, but without surplus labour either. Stalin goes on to argue that the law of value operates in the sphere commodity circulation, where it performed 'the function of a regulator'. The law of value also, Stalin insists, extends to production. Although 'the law of value has no regulating function in our socialist production', says Stalin, 'it nevertheless influences production, and this fact cannot be ignored when directing production'. This is because 'consumer goods, which are needed to compensate the labour power expended in the process of production, are produced and realised in our country as commodities coming under the operation of the law of value'. Therefore, argues Stalin: 'In this connection, such things as cost accounting and profitability, production costs, prices, etc., are of actual importance in our enterprises. Consequently, our enterprises cannot, and must not, function without taking the law of value into account.'

'Is this a good thing?' asks Stalin. He then answers: 'It is not a bad thing. Under present conditions, it really is not a bad thing as it trains our business executives to conduct production on rational lines and disciplines them.'

We see here proof of Daum's argument, quoted above, that Preobrazhensky's position of 1926, while he was a member of the Left Opposition, provided arguments which Stalin was later to use, in particular as regards the belief that the law of value could operate in one sphere of the Soviet economy and be excluded from another. Stalin goes on to claim that because of the limitations on the operation of the law of value, which mean that 'the law of value cannot under our system function as the regulator of production', the Soviet Union remains free from 'the periodical crises of overproduction' which afflict capitalism.

It is clear from 'Economic Problems of Socialism in the USSR' that Stalin had abandoned any pretence of struggle against the law of value. Instead, there is the grotesque caricature of Marxism, with the categories which Marx developed to analyse capitalism being used in an attempt to introduce capitalistic methods into the USSR, under

the banner of 'socialism'.

Conclusions for Marxists from the Soviet experience

The October 1917 Revolution remains a vital development in history. It showed the revolutionary nature of this epoch and the readiness of the working class to take power and transform society. The Revolution brought in the period of transition to world proletarian revolution, and thus formed the basis for the abolition of the law of value.

Much of the debate among those of the Trotskyist tradition on the 'class nature of the Soviet Union' has perhaps missed the main issues. In my discussion on the meaning of the Marxist concept of value at the beginning of this article, I consciously cited two works which emphasise the philosophical method of *Capital*, Geoff Pilling's *Marx's 'Capital'* and Raya Dunayevskaya's *Marxism and Freedom*. Yet these take opposed positions on the class nature of the USSR, Pilling saying it is a 'workers' state' and Dunayevskaya saying it is 'state capitalist'. On the issue of whether surplus value may be produced in a workers' state, Pilling seems to agree with the 'state capitalist' Tony Cliff against other 'state capitalists' Dunayevskaya and Walter Daum.

The key issue is rather an understanding of the epoch in which we live as the revolutionary epoch. In 1962, Kan'ichi Kuroda put the issue thus:

[I]n order to approach the question of the Stalinist alienation, or transformation, of the USSR, one must first of all grasp the *nodal significance* of the Russian Revolution as the prelude to the world revolution, and grasp the Soviet Union as an *alienated form of the transition period society* (towards the realisation of world socialism, the material foundation of which is the proletarian world revolution). At the same time, it is necessary first of all to hold firmly to the perspective of the world revolution – that is, asking the question: "How is this alienation to be transcended by revolutionising *praxis*?" If this is not done, the definition of the historical character of today's USSR will either become arbitrary, or will fall into a pro-Stalinist orientation. [55]

There are those of the 'state capitalist' viewpoint who deny that the epoch from 1917 has been the revolutionary epoch. The International Socialism Group (IS), forerunner of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) in Britain, is an example. This Group's outlook was that 'state capitalism' was a variant of the trend towards stabilisation through the 'permanent arms economy'. Lenin's theory of imperialism, and the founding principles of the Fourth International, were held to have been proved false by events. [56]

On the other hand, the Pabloite/Mandelite position that Stalinist parties could accomplish revolution under mass

pressure, etc, equally represents an abandonment of the revolutionary nature of the working class. [57] We may note that the designation of the states of Eastern Europe, China, etc, as 'deformed workers' states' came from this tendency. In particular, the non-Marxist method of argument by analogy for which the 'state capitalist' outlook is criticised by Pilling [58] and – in the specific case of Tony Cliff – by Kuroda [59] is also that used by those who argue that a 'workers' state' exists when a given number of attributes apply, such as a proportion of industry being nationalised and a state monopoly of foreign trade. Tom Kemp argued against this method, in the context of the proposal that Cuba be considered a workers' state: 'But if Cuba is accepted as a workers' state, on the lines laid down in the SWP documents, it will only be a matter of time before the necessary attributes of this state can be assembled for Algeria, and if Algeria, why not go off to some other parts of the world?... There is Egypt. There is Burma.' [60]

This is the epoch of world proletarian revolution. Despite the betrayals of leaders from Stalin to Gorbachev which led to the collapse of the Soviet Union, the October Revolution was the start of the process of world revolution, the transition to communism. This transition, which can only be achieved through the revolutionary action of the proletariat, involves a struggle against the law of value. We should learn from the mistakes of the past, as well as building on the gains of the First International, the October Revolution, the early years of the Communist International, and of the Fourth International. We must develop Marxism as the theoretical weapon of the revolutionary proletariat. This is essential for the building of a revolutionary international which 'assimilates and bases itself on all of humanity's progressive social experiences' [61] and which will be the leadership of a working class which emancipates itself through 'revolutionary practice', bringing about the end of human pre-history and enabling true human history – the history of free human beings – to begin.

Notes

[1] As Lenin pointed out in *The State and Revolution*, chapter V, 3, although the lower stage of communism was 'usually called socialism', it was called 'the first phase of communism' by Marx. Stalin's 'theory' of 'socialism in one country' distorts the relationship between the three stages of transition.

[2] Apart from *Capital* itself, relevant works include Geoff Pilling, *Marx's 'Capital': Philosophy and Political Economy* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980); I. I. Rubin, *Essays on Marx's Theory of Value* (Montreal: Black Rose, 1973); Roman Rosdolsky, *The Making of Marx's 'Capital'* trans. Pete Burgess (London: Pluto Press, 1977)

[3] G Pilling, *Marx's "Capital"*, p 106

- [4] *Ibid.*, p 41
- [5] *Capital*, vol. I (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1974), p 54.
- [6] *Ibid.*, p 46
- [7] *Ibid.*, p 714
- [8] The worker may, of course, be a woman. I use the male form merely for convenience.
- [9] *Capital*, vol. I, pp 477-478. Walter Daum in *The Life and Death of Stalinism* (New York: Socialist Voice Publishing Co., 1990), p 40, argues that increasing the intensity of labour represents an increase in absolute surplus value. This is not Marx's view
- [10] *Capital*, vol. I, p 574
- [11] *Capital*, vol. III (London: Lawrence & Wishart 1972), p 177)
- [12] For a discussion of this see David Yaffe, 'Value and Price in Marx's Capital', *Revolutionary Communist* No 1 (January 1975)
- [13] *Capital*, vol. III, pp 212-213
- [14] See Raya Dunayevskaya, *Marxism and Freedom* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1964), p 143
- [15] Kan'ichi Kuroda, *Stalinist Socialism: A Japanese Marxist's Perspective* (Tokyo: Kobusho Shobo [undated English translation]), p 44. In quoting this book, I have made slight amendments to the translation
- [16] N. Bukharin and E. A. Preobrazhensky, *The ABC of Communism* (Penguin Books, 1969, p 390)
- [17] Alec Nove, *An Economic History of the USSR* (Pelican Books, 1989) p 55
- [18] N. Bukharin, *The Economics of the Transformation Period* [with Lenin's critical remarks] (New York: Bergman, 1971) p 10
- [19] See Isaac Deutscher, *The Prophet Unarmed* (Oxford University Press, 1970) pp 41-46 and p101,n
- [20] *The Economics of the Transformation Period*, p 223, note L198. See also note 85, p 217
- [21] *Ibid.*, p 198, note L94
- [22] *Ibid.*, pp 145-147
- [23] *Ibid.*, p 221, note L179
- [24] E A Preobrazhensky, *From NEP to Socialism* (London: New Park, 1973) pp 22-23
- [25] Nove, *op. cit.*, p 85
- [26] E A Preobrazhensky, *The New Economics* (Oxford University Press, 1965) p 38
- [27] Deutscher, *op. cit.*, pp 237-238
- [28] *The Platform of the Joint Opposition (1927)* (London: New Park, 1973), p 40
- [29] *Ibid.*, p 78
- [30] *Ibid.* p 81
- [31] *Capital*, vol. I, p 714
- [32] Deutscher, *op. cit.*, pp 43-44
- [33] *Ibid.*, pp 101-103. Deutscher also points out that in later years Trotsky seldom used the term 'primitive socialist accumulation'.
- [34] *Ibid.*, pp 237-238n
- [35] *From NEP to Socialism*, pp 49-50
- [36] *The New Economics* pp 84-85
- [37] Daum, *op. cit.*, pp 148-149
- [38] *Ibid.* p 131
- [39] G Pilling, "'State Capitalism", *Marxism and the Soviet Union*, *The International*, No 6, May 1991. Pilling's position has little claim to 'orthodoxy'. *The Platform of the Joint Opposition* explicitly refers to 'surplus value created by our state industry' (p 13). Trotsky also refers to the bureaucracy as appropriating surplus value in his 1934 pamphlet *The Class Nature of the Soviet State* (London: New Park, 1968), p 20
- [40] T Cliff, *Russia: A Marxist Analysis* (2nd Edition, London: International Socialism, 1964), p 159. All italics in the original
- [41] *Ibid.* p 161
- [42] *Ibid.* pp 87-98
- [43] Kuroda, *op. cit.*, pp 23-25
- [44] L Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed* (tr Max Eastman, London: New Park, 1973) p 54
- [45] *Ibid.* p 46
- [46] *Ibid.* p 83
- [47] Kuroda, *op. cit.*, p 27
- [48] *Ibid.* pp 28-45
- [49] *Capital*, vol. I, p 531
- [50] *Ibid.* pp 18-19
- [51] Trotsky, "The Degeneration of Theory and the Theory of Degeneration" (April 1933), *Writings 1932-33* (New York: Pathfinder 1972) pp 222-224
- [52] First published in the Soviet journal *Pod Znamenem Marxizma (Under the Banner of Marxism)* in 1943, and translated by Raya Dunayevskaya and published under the title 'Teaching of Economics in the Soviet Union' together with Dunayevskaya's critique in *American Economic Review* Vol. 34:3, September 1944
- [53] Alec Nove, *The Soviet Economy* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1965), p 283.
- [54] Raya Dunayevskaya, 'A New Revision of Marxian Economics', in *The Marxist-Humanist Theory of State-Capitalism* (Chicago: News and Letters, 1992) p 85. This is Dunayevskaya's critique of the article, reprinted from *American Economic Review*
- [55] Kuroda, *op. cit.*, p 15
- [56] See Michael Kidron, 'Imperialism, Highest Stage But One', *International Socialism* No. 61, June 1973 and *Western Capitalism Since the War* (Pelican books, 1970); Duncan Hallas, 'Building the Leadership', *International Socialism* No. 40, Oct/Nov 1969, which attacks the basis of the Fourth International. For a critique of Hallas, see Cliff Slaughter, *The class nature of the 'International Socialism' Group* (Workers Press pamphlet, 1970). Slaughter mistakenly refers to the title of Hallas' article as 'Building the Revolutionary Party'.
- [57] As with the SWP/USA. For an explicit statement of this viewpoint, see Robert Chester, *Workers and Farmers Governments Since the Second World War* (New York: Pathfinder, 1978)
- [58] G Pilling, *Marx's 'Capital'*, p 27
- [59] Kuroda, *op. cit.*, pp 42-43
- [60] Tom Kemp, 'Revisionism – the Discussion' *Labour Review*, summer 1963
- [61] Statute III of 'Statutes of the Fourth International', *The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International* [the Transitional Programme] (London, Workers Revolutionary Party, 1975), p 60

Dual Power and Vanguard Parties

John Robinson

The year 1995 saw the publication of *Beyond Capital* by Istvan Meszaros. This book of nearly one thousand pages undoubtedly contains much interesting and useful information and ideas. One of its positive aspects is that it shows that capitalism has entered into what Meszaros terms a 'structural crisis'. This implies that capitalism has entered a phase in which, economically, it has no room for manoeuvre. We are left with chronic unemployment, immense armaments budgets and severe damage to the environment. Further, in capitalism's 'structural crisis' the only way out for the working class is to turn defensive struggles into offensive ones in order to overthrow the world capitalist system.

Istvan Meszaros is not a Trotskyist (he himself can of course hardly be blamed for this). This finds its reflection in several ways. For example, he fails to comment on Trotsky's attempt to build the Fourth International. He clearly does not agree with the basic Trotskyist thesis that the crisis of humanity is reduced to a crisis of proletarian leadership. He does not understand the significance of the dual power situations which have been and are inherent in twentieth century capitalism.

Cde C.Slaughter has written a review of *Beyond Capital* in *Workers International Press* (June 1997). This is mainly centred on the important Chapter 18, 'The Historical Actuality of the Socialist Offensive'. It is in the context of cde Slaughter's review that this article has been written.

In relation to revolution the position of Meszaros is clear. He maintains that a socialist revolution can take place only if a state of 'mass communist consciousness' is reached in society. Thus cde Slaughter writes: 'How ... is it possible ... to combine effective resistance [to attacks made on the working class] with that of "mass communist consciousness" (Meszaros p.695, quoting Marx) which is necessary if the bankrupt system of capital's rule is to be ended?' (WIP June 1997 p.9. Slaughter's note on Meszaros and Marx). Further: 'Meszaros shows that Marx's project of fighting for the necessary socialist (communist) consciousness takes the only feasible form of self-developing common action' (p.9). It is clear from the context that the phrase 'self-developing common action' does not refer to the revolutionary seizure of power. It is important to realise that Marx's term 'mass communist consciousness' is used by Marx in a sense completely different to that of Meszaros. In *The German Ideology* Marx and Engels wrote that a revolution was necessary if the working class were to become fit to rule. Thus:

Both for the production on a mass scale of ... commu-

nist consciousness; and for the success of the cause itself, the alteration of men on a mass scale is necessary, an alteration which can only take place in a practical movement, a revolution; the revolution is necessary, therefore, not only because the ruling class cannot be overthrown in any other way, but also because the class overthrowing it can only in a revolution succeed in ridding itself of all the muck of ages and become fitted to found society anew (MECW, Vol 5, pp52-3).

This makes it quite clear that, for Marx and Engels, only by going through a revolution could the working class rid itself of 'all the muck of ages' and thus bring about a 'mass communist consciousness'. In this day and age, of course, such a revolution must of necessity be a world revolution.

The contrast is striking. For Marx and Engels, mass communist consciousness arises as a result of revolution. For Meszaros mass communist consciousness is a pre-condition for revolution. Meszaros is therefore quite mistaken in asserting that he has taken over and is using a basic idea of Marx and Engels.

It is necessary to spell out one of the basic lessons learned by world Trotskyism and embodied in its theoretical arsenal. This is that, in the period of capitalism's death agony, the working class, time after time and in country after country, has risen up and has created dual power situations. This of course happened in 1917, when the dual power situation was resolved in favour of the working class by the leadership given by the vanguard party led by Lenin. However, on all other occasions the working class has been unable to take state power due to the absence of such a party.

It would be appropriate to consider some examples of past dual power situations. The most recent example is that afforded by the massive general strike in South Korea in 1997. Perhaps the best-known was that of France in 1968, when the greatest general strike in history, involving ten million workers, took place. In the absence of a vanguard party the Stalinists were able to stifle the revolution on behalf of the ruling class. In Iran in 1979, for a four-month period preceding the overthrow of the Shah, four and a half million workers not only went on strike but occupied and ran the factories. However, there was no vanguard party capable of rallying the workers against the takeover by the clergy. In 1985 there was a general strike in Denmark. No less than one million workers were involved. This was out of a total population of five million. In other

words one in five of the whole population was involved. Here again the threat to capitalist rule fizzled out due to the lack of a revolutionary vanguard. The final example given here is that of Bolivia in early 1996. In *Workers Press* (20/7/96) it was reported that a general strike and uprising took place, with students in one city disbanding the police and setting up a new, revolutionary police. But instead of mobilising the working class and its allies to take power the leaders of the COB (the Bolivian TUC) ordered two hundred leading trade unionists to go on hunger strike. Here once again a vanguard party was lacking.

With such dual power situations (and many more have occurred) in mind it is easy to see the correctness of Trotsky's statement that: 'All talk to the effect that historical conditions have not yet ripened for socialism is the product of ignorance or conscious deception. The objective prerequisites for the proletarian revolution have not only ripened; they have begun to get somewhat rotten ... The historical crisis of mankind is reduced to the crisis of the revolutionary leadership' (*Transitional Programme*).

It is now possible to say that, generally speaking, the general rule of revolution (exceptions to the rule are of course a possibility) at the present time is that the working class will, through its own self-movement, rise up and thereby create a dual power situation. But, as in 1917, the dictatorship of the proletariat can only ensue if a vanguard party is on hand to resolve the crisis of leadership and thus to lead the working class to power.

The question of dual power needs to be considered more closely. The first point to be made is that movements that develop into dual power situations are not usually started by those who intend to create such situations. Indeed, such ideas are often very far from the minds of those who start off the process. The opposite can be the case. For example, a section of workers can agree, in principle, with the operation of a government-inspired wage freeze. However, since they themselves find it difficult to live on their existing wages, they consider themselves to be exceptions to the general rule and go on strike. Their example may be followed by other sections of the class and the whole process may snowball. Eventually, independently of the intentions of the workers, a position may be reached at which a movement develops which objectively poses the question of power. Since all thought reflects material reality, such a large movement finds its reflection in the minds of workers in such a way that they feel, often for the first time, the basic strength of the working class as a class. In such a situation workers become prone to consider the policies of a vanguard Marxist party and to accept its leadership. A proletarian revolution can then follow.

It needs to be stressed that the working class, however militant its struggles may be, can never spontaneously see the necessity of smashing the capitalist state machine, replacing it with the dictatorship of the proletariat and with a workers' government pledged to Lenin's strategy of

world revolution. Such knowledge can only be supplied by a Marxist vanguard party.

To look at the matter in another way, it is a general Marxist principle that the working class acts first and then, afterwards, thinks about what it has done. In contrast to this, a vanguard Marxist party, which can consist only of a minority of workers and others, can anticipate dual power situations and prepare for them accordingly. Trotsky remarks somewhere that Marxism is a science of perspectives. A genuine Marxist party must therefore have a perspective of its intervention in objectively-developing dual power situations. Here it would be opportune to quote Trotsky's definition of scientific socialism (Marxism):

Scientific socialism is the conscious expression of the unconscious historical process; namely, the instinctive and elemental drive of the proletariat to reconstruct society on communist beginnings (*In Defence of Marxism*, New Park p.129).

The above definition is worth considering. Clearly one aspect of the class struggle which Trotsky must have had in mind when he wrote these lines was that of dual power situations. For it is 'the unconscious historical process' involving 'the instinctive and elemental drive of the proletariat' that shows its strength during dual power situations, whilst it is the 'conscious expression of unconscious processes' that forms the content of the policies of the vanguard party as it strives to resolve the crisis of leadership.

It is indeed unfortunate that the crucial question of dual power receives little attention either in the one thousand page book of Meszaros or indeed in cde Slaughter's review of it. The same is true of the latter's pamphlet, *A New Party for Socialism*.

The failure of Meszaros to emphasise the vital importance of dual power situations is further reflected in cde Slaughter's review. Thus he writes: "self-developing common action" ... will ripen and bear fruit in socialist revolution only insofar as the mass of people learn in their own experience ... that they themselves must take on the task of reconstructing society on new foundations' (WIP June 1997 p.9). Here it needs to be re-emphasised that the working class itself, however militant it may be, will never spontaneously acquire the knowledge that it is necessary to smash the capitalist state, replace it with the dictatorship of the proletariat and follow a strategy of world revolution. This is surely shown by the lessons of past dual power situations. In France in 1968 the workers who objectively posed the question of power certainly had not learned 'in their own experience ... that they themselves must take on the task of reconstructing society on new foundations'. Indeed, after they had been betrayed, a large proportion of workers still continued in their belief in a parliamentary transition to socialism and in socialism in single countries. In Denmark, the period following the dual power situation in 1985 showed no sign that the workers had learned 'in their experience' that they 'must take on the

task of reconstructing society'. The same can no doubt be said of the periods following the revolutionary situations in Bolivia in 1996 and South Korea in 1997. Also in the periods following the many other dual power situations that have arisen since 1917 and which have ended in failure.

Here it needs to be remarked that if the 'mass of people' can learn 'in their own experience' that a socialist revolution is necessary, and if indeed it is possible for the working class to achieve a 'mass communist consciousness' before a revolution, then the question of providing a Marxist leadership for the working class does not arise, or is at least relegated to a question of secondary importance.

The above-quoted view of Meszaros, namely that 'the mass of people [will] learn in their own experience that they themselves must take on the task of reconstructing society' clearly contradicts the decades-long Trotskyist position that the contradictions of capitalism frequently give rise to dual power situations which, due to the absence of vanguard parties, fail to lead to revolution. It is therefore both surprising and perplexing that cde Slaughter fails to subject the position of Meszaros to critical comment.

A further aspect of the position of Meszaros needs to be considered. This is his insistence that the allegedly necessary 'mass communist consciousness' can be obtained only through 'an inherently pluralist movement' (p.9). It has to be stated that the lessons of the twentieth century is that dual power situations have failed to result in working class power, not because there was a lack of 'inherently pluralist' movements but because of a lack of vanguard parties. It is hard to see, for example, how the French dual power situation of 1968 could have resulted in socialist revolution if there had been an 'inherently pluralist movement' rather than a vanguard party.

Of course it is perfectly permissible for Trotskyists to call for and work for a pluralist movement, such as the MFS in Britain. But such a movement can, by itself, be no substitute for a vanguard party. Indeed, the real importance of pluralist movements is that they can provide a recruiting ground for the vanguard party. Thus it is essential for organisations like the MFS to contain within it a Trotskyist nucleus which can develop into a vanguard party. The Trotskyist nucleus of course has to face many tasks. Not least of these is that of developing itself theoretically through a consistent fight against those other parties and groups whose policies would lead the working class to disaster. Examples of these include the SWP (Britain), the SWP (USA), the Lambertists and the French organisation Lutte Ouvriere (which received 1.6 million votes in 1965). It may be concluded that for Trotskyists the only true criterion for the establishment of pluralist movements is that of whether or not it leads to the building of a vanguard party.

Brief mention should be made of the collapse of the Stalinist bureaucracy and the effect this has on dual power

situations. The first point to be made is that the betrayals of the working class in dual power situations by Stalinists is now, to say the least, much more difficult. Indeed, it makes the task of vanguard parties easier. However, the Stalinist collapse does not in any way mean that workers in struggle will spontaneously understand the need to smash the capitalist state machine, establish a proletarian dictatorship and so on. In dual power situations all sorts of revisionist elements and trade union bureaucrats will come forward in an attempt to hold the working class back from revolution and these will have to be combatted by the vanguard party.

A brief contrast between the Meszaros approach and the Trotskyist approach is now possible. The Meszaros approach: First, the building of an 'inherently pluralist movement' then, through this, a 'mass communist consciousness'. Then this will lead to revolution. The Trotskyist approach: The building of vanguard parties. Intervention of vanguard parties in dual power situations leading to revolution.

To summarise some of the main points made above:

- 1) Contemporary history is characterised by a series of dual power situations.
- 2) In dual power situations the working class will objectively pose the question of power.
- 3) The intervention of a vanguard party is necessary to transform a dual power situation into a revolution.
- 4) Pluralist movements cannot in themselves resolve the crisis of leadership. However, they may be used as a recruiting ground for the vanguard party.
- 5) 'Mass communist consciousness' arises as a result of the working class going through a revolution. It cannot be regarded as a pre-condition for proletarian revolution.
- 6) The 'mass of people' may learn 'in their own experience' that change is needed. This will of course make them receptive to Marxist leadership. But they will never spontaneously learn what has to be done. It is the task of the vanguard party to win at least advanced sections of the working class to Trotskyist positions.
- 7) The collapse of the Stalinist bureaucracy makes the building of vanguard parties easier than formerly. It also lessens the Stalinists' ability to betray. However the Stalinist collapse does not imply that, in dual power situations, the working class will spontaneously know what to do.

It is to be hoped that cde Meszaros will re-examine his position. In conclusion, it is necessary to prepare for the many dual power situations that will arise in various parts of the world in the next few years. In this preparation, it is necessary to start from the premise that the crisis of humanity is reduced to a crisis of proletarian leadership.

Back To Marx

Ellen Meiksins Wood

[Ellen Meiksins Wood is co-editor of *Monthly Review*. The above article was originally presented at the 1997 Socialist Scholars Conference and is reprinted here from the *Monthly Review* of June 1997 with the kind permission of the Author and the Editor]

Let me start with a provocative claim, which is contrary to all the conventional wisdom. The claim I want to make is that this historical moment, the one we're living in now, is the best not the worst, the most not the least appropriate moment to bring back Marx. I'll even claim that this is the moment when Marx should and can come fully into his own *for the first time* — not excluding the historical moment when he actually lived. I'm making this claim for one simple reason: we're living in a moment when, for the first time, capitalism has become a truly universal system. It's universal not only in the sense that it's global, not only in the sense that just about every economic actor in the world today is operating according to the logic of capitalism, and even those on the outermost periphery of the capitalist economy are, in one way or another, subject to that logic. Capitalism is universal also in the sense that its logic — the logic of accumulation, commodification, profit-maximization, competition — has penetrated just about every aspect of human life and nature itself, in ways that weren't even true of so-called advanced capitalist countries as recently as two or three decades ago. So Marx is more relevant than ever, because he, more effectively than any other human being then or now, devoted his life to explaining the systemic logic of capitalism.

In the *Communist Manifesto*, there is a striking and prophetic image of capitalism spreading throughout the world, battering down all Chinese walls, as Marx and Engels put it. But when Marx wrote *Capital*, he — rightly — emphasized the *specificity* of capitalism, as a very particular and, for the moment, local phenomenon. He didn't mean, of course, that capitalism didn't already have global effects, through the international market, colonialism, and so on. But the system itself was very far from being universal. It would inevitably spread, but for the moment it was very localized — not just confined to Europe or North America but, at least in its mature industrial form, to one place in particular, England. He even felt compelled to explain to the Germans that some day they too would follow in the footsteps of England: *de te fabula narratur*, he warned them. You may think this is a story only about England, but whether you know it or not, this story is also about you.

So Marx's *Capital* derives its distinctive character from this simple fact: that it is about one capitalist system, as if

it were a self-enclosed system, and about the internal logic of that system. Now I'll come back to this in a minute, and to why, paradoxically, the localized quality of Marx's analysis makes it more, not less, relevant to our current condition, even though, or precisely because, capitalism is so universal. But first, I want to say some things about the development of Marxism after Marx, and also about the new forms of left anti-Marxism that have followed.

My main point is this: nearly every major development of Marxism in the 20th century has been less about capitalism than about what is *not* capitalist. (I'll explain what I mean in a second.) This is especially true of the first half of the 20th century, but I would argue that the tendency I'm talking about here has affected Marxism ever since. What I mean is that the major Marxist theories, like Marx, proceeded on the premise that capitalism was far from universal; but where Marx started with the most mature example and abstracted from it the systemic logic of capitalism, his major successors started, so to speak, from the other end. They were mainly interested — for very concrete historical and political reasons — with conditions that, on the whole, *were not* capitalist. And there was an even more basic difference: whatever Marx may have thought about the global expansion of capitalism, or the possible limits on its expansion, that wasn't his primary concern. He was mainly interested in the internal logic of the system and its specific capacity to totalize itself, to permeate every aspect of life wherever it did implant itself. Later Marxists, besides being concerned with less mature capitalisms, generally started from the premise that capitalism would dissolve before it matured, or certainly before it became universal and total; and their main concern was how to navigate within a largely non-capitalist world.

Just think about the major milestones in 20th century Marxist theory. For instance, the major theories of revolution were constructed in situations where capitalism scarcely existed or remained undeveloped and where there was no well developed proletariat, where the revolution had to depend on alliances between a minority of workers and, in particular, a mass of pre-capitalist peasants. Even more striking are the classic Marxist theories of imperialism. In fact, it's striking that the theory of imperialism in the early 20th century almost replaces or *becomes* the theory of capitalism. In other words, the object of Marxist economic theory becomes what you might call the *external* relations of capitalism, its interactions with *non-capitalism* and the interactions among capitalist states in relation to the non-capitalist world. For all the profound disagreements among the classical Marxist theorists of imperialism, they shared one fundamental premise: that impe-

rialism had to do with the location of capitalism in a world that wasn't — and never would be — fully, or even predominantly, capitalist. Take, for instance, the basic Leninist idea that imperialism represented “the highest stage of capitalism.” Underlying that definition was the assumption that capitalism had reached a stage where the main axis of international conflict and military confrontation would run between imperialist states. But that competition was, by definition, competition over division and redivision of the world, that is, a largely non-capitalist world. The more capitalism spread (at uneven rates), the more acute would be the rivalry among the main imperialist powers. At the same time, they would face increasing resistance. The whole point — and the reason imperialism was the highest stage of capitalism — was that it was the *final* stage, which meant that capitalism would end before the non-capitalist victims of imperialism were finally and completely swallowed up by capitalism.

The point is made most explicitly by Rosa Luxemburg. The essence of her classic work in political economy, *The Accumulation of Capital*, is to offer an alternative to Marx's own approach. It is meant ‘to be precisely an alternative to Marx's analysis of capitalism as a self-enclosed system. Her argument is that the capitalist system needs an outlet in non-capitalist formations — which is why capitalism inevitably means militarism and imperialism. Capitalist militarism, having gone through various stages beginning with the straightforward conquest of territory, has now reached its “final” stage, as “a weapon in the competitive struggle between capitalist countries for areas of non-capitalist civilization.” But one of the fundamental contradictions of capitalism, she suggests, is that “Although it strives to become universal, and, indeed, on account of this tendency, it must break down—because it is immanently incapable of becoming a universal form of production.” It is the first mode of economy that tends to engulf the whole world, but it is also the first that *can't* exist by itself because it “needs other economic systems as a medium and soil.”¹ So in these theories of imperialism, capitalism by definition assumes a non-capitalist environment. In fact, capitalism depends for its survival not only on the existence of these non-capitalist formations but on essentially pre-capitalist instruments of “extra-economic” force, military and geo-political coercion, and on traditional forms of colonial war and territorial expansion.

And so it goes on, in other aspects of Marxist theory too. Trotsky's notion of combined and uneven development, with its corollary notion of permanent revolution, probably implies that the universalization of the capitalist system will be shortcircuited by capitalism's own demise. Gramsci was writing very consciously in the context of a less developed capitalism, with a pervasive pre-capitalist peasant culture. And this surely had a lot to do with the importance he attached to ideology and culture, and to intellectuals, because something was needed to push class struggle beyond its material limits, something was needed to make socialist revolution possible even in the absence of mature material conditions of a well developed capitalism and an advanced proletariat. In a different way, the same is true of Mao. And so on.

What I'm saying, then, is that non- or pre-capitalism permeates all these theories of capitalism. Now all of these Marxist theories are profoundly illuminating in various ways. But in one way, they seem to have been proved wrong. Capitalism *has* become universal. It has totalized itself both intensively and extensively. It's global in reach, and it penetrates to the heart and soul of social life and nature. This doesn't, by the way, necessarily mean the disappearance of the nationstate. It may just mean new roles for nation-states, as the logic of competition imposes itself not only on capitalist firms but on entire national economies, which, with the help of the state, conduct their competition less in the old “extra-economic” and military ways than in purely “economic” forms. Even imperialism now has a new form. People like to call it “globalization,” but that's really just a code-word, and a misleading one at that, for a system in which the logic of capitalism has become more or less universal and where imperialism achieves its ends not so much by the old forms of military expansion but by unleashing and manipulating the destructive impulses of the capitalist market. Anyway, though this universalization of capitalism has certainly exposed some fundamental contradictions in the system, we have to admit that there's no sign of its demise in the near future.

So what theoretical response has there been to this new reality? Well, to begin with, you could say that there's been a real paradox here: the more universal capitalism has become, the more people have moved away from classical Marxism and its main theoretical concerns. This is certainly true of postMarxist theories and their successors, but I suppose you could argue that it's true even of more recent forms of Marxism — say, the Frankfurt School, or the tradition of Western Marxism in general. For instance, the famous shift from the traditional Marxist concern with political economy to culture and philosophy in some of these cases seems to be related to the conviction that the totalizing effects of capitalism have penetrated every aspect of life and culture — and also that the working class has been thoroughly absorbed into that capitalist culture. (I happen to think, by the way, that there may be another explanation for this shift, which has to do not with the universalization of capitalism but, on the contrary, with the ways in which pre-capitalist forms still pervade the consciousness of thinkers like the Frankfurt School—but I don't have time to go into that here, and anyway, I'm far from being able to make a coherent argument about it.)²

The point I want to make is this: there are, I think, two possible ways of responding to the universalization of capitalism. One is to say that if, contrary to all expectations, capitalism has after all become universal instead of dissolving before it had a chance to totalize itself, this is truly the end. This can only be the system's final triumph. I'll come back to the other possible response, but this one, the defeatist one, the one that represents the other side of the coin of capitalist triumphalism, is the one that has generally taken hold of the left today.

This is where post-Marxist theories come in — and I think that to understand them, it's useful to consider them against

the background of the Marxist theories I've been talking about here. If you look at the history of so-called post-Marxism, you'll find that it started from the premise that capitalism has indeed become universal. In fact, for post-Marxists the universality of capitalism is precisely the reason for *abandoning* Marxism. You might think this is a bit odd, but the reasoning goes something like this: the universal capitalism of the postwar world is dominated by liberal democracy and a democratic consumerism, and both of these have opened up whole new arenas of democratic opposition and struggle, which are much more diverse than the old class struggles. The implicit — though sometimes more explicit — conclusion is that these struggles can't really be *against* capitalism, since it's now so total that there really is no alternative — and it's probably the best of all possible worlds anyway. So in this universal system of capitalism, there can be, can *only* be, lots of fragmented particular struggles within the interstices of capitalism.

Post-post-Marxist — or maybe postmodernist — theories have gone one step further. Now, it's not even just a question of a universal capitalism. Now, capitalism is *so* universal that it's basically invisible, as air is to us human beings, or as water is to fish. We can play around in this invisible medium, and maybe we can even carve out little enclaves, little sanctuaries, of privacy, seclusion, and freedom. But we can't escape — or even *see* — the universal medium itself.

So is this the right conclusion to draw from the universality of capitalism? I don't suppose I'll surprise anyone if I say that I'm convinced it's precisely the wrong conclusion. I happen to think that the disposition to reach that conclusion has something to do with the historical roots of the generation — admittedly my own generation — which has produced these varieties of post-Marxism and postmodernism. I think it has a lot to do with the fact that these people are still rooted in the golden age of the long postwar boom. I've been very impressed for some time with the degree to which the theorists of the so-called 60s generation, and even their students whose recent experience has been very different, have been shaped by the assumptions of the postwar boom. In other words, they haven't yet learned to dissociate the universality of capitalism from capitalist growth, prosperity, and success, or apparent success, and they take for granted its total hegemony.

But if these theories seem to have bought into capitalist triumphalism, it may also be partly because of the intellectual background of 20th century Marxism. Against that background and its assumptions about the limits of capitalism, maybe it's hard to imagine any other measure of success than its capacity to spread throughout the world. It's as if the limits of capitalism can be measured only by the limits of its geographic expansion. And if it proves itself capable of breaching those geographic limits — as it now apparently has — it must surely be judged an unchallengeable success. But suppose we go back to Marx and to his internal analysis of capitalism as a self-enclosed system — which I think the very totality of capitalism

actually entitles us to do. We really can begin to look at the world not as a relationship between what's inside and what's outside capitalism but as the working out of capitalism's own internal laws of motion. And that might make it easier to see the universalization of capitalism not just as a measure of success but as a source of weakness. Capitalism's impulse to universalize itself isn't just a show of strength. It's a disease, a cancerous growth. It destroys the social fabric just as it destroys nature. It's a contradictory process, just as Marx always said it was. The old theories of imperialism may not have been strictly right to suggest that capitalism can't become universal, but it's certainly true that it can't be universally successful and prosperous. It can only universalize its contradictions, its polarizations between rich and poor, exploiters and exploited. Its successes are also its failures.

Now, capitalism has no more escape routes, no more safety valves or corrective mechanisms outside its own internal logic. Even when it's not at war, even when it's not involved in the old forms of inter-imperialist rivalry, it's subject to the constant tensions and contradictions of capitalist competition. Now, having more or less reached its geographic limits and ended the spatial expansion that supported its earlier successes, it can only feed on itself; and the more successful it is on its own terms — in other words, the more it maximizes profit and so-called growth — the more it devours its own human and natural substance. So maybe it's time for the left to see the universalization of capitalism not just as a defeat for us but also as an opportunity — and that, of course, above all means a new opportunity for that unfashionable thing called class struggle.

Notes

1. Rosa Luxemburg, *The Accumulation of Capital* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963), p. 467.
2. For those few readers who may be interested in this point, let me just give a very sketchy idea of what I have in mind. I think, for example, that the Frankfurt School was in a sense more preoccupied with bourgeois society than with capitalism (which to me are not the same thing, as I suggested, for instance, in "Modernity, Postmodernity, or Capitalism?," *Monthly Review* 48 no.3, July-August 1996). So the famous shift from political economy to culture and philosophy may have had to do not just with an intellectual shift of focus from the material to the ideological, but with a focus on a different material reality. It had at least a little to do with a view of society in which the main axis of division was not capital vs labour but non-capitalist bourgeoisie (especially, in the German model, a bourgeois of intellectuals and bureaucrats) vs the "masses." And the problem is further complicated by the fact that these critics of bourgeois society and culture themselves belonged to that very particular kind of bourgeoisie, were steeped in its culture, and (dare I say it?) sometimes shared its contempt for the masses. But leaving that complication aside, the point is that this form of theory may not only be seeing *capitalism* from a different angle but may have one eye fixed on a different, *pre-capitalist* social world.

Karl Marx and the Trotskyist Tradition

From a Lecture by Cyril Smith

Trotskyism - Trotsky himself preferred to say 'Bolshevik-Leninism' - continued the fight for the traditions of the October Revolution, when the degeneration of the revolution became apparent to some of its supporters in the Communist International. Answering Trotsky's call for a new 'World Party of Socialist Revolution', the small groups of Left Oppositionists, now calling themselves the Fourth International, battled against the betrayals, lies and murders of Stalinism.

We can be proud of this tradition. Almost alone, it kept alive within the workers' movement the knowledge that world capital would be overthrown and that the transition to a socialist future was on the historical agenda. With the outbreak of the Second World War, and the assassination of the Old Man, the movement already faced enormous problems. After the war, we grappled with increasing difficulty with the task of comprehending the very changed world situation within Trotsky's theoretical framework. As the century reaches its close - the century which we thought would see the destruction of bourgeois society - we have to ask ourselves: is the theoretical legacy of this tradition adequate for the victory of the socialist revolution?

Indeed, we ought to look carefully at these very notions, 'theoretical framework' and 'theoretical legacy'. Why should any set of ideas be taken as a basis for all thought and action? How can any 'legacy' from past struggles simply be taken on trust as a foundation for revolutionary ideas, whatever course history may take? A 'framework' can be a support, enabling us to build a new structure, or it can be a prison. Today, when so much has changed in the world, those who uncritically take any of their assumptions from the past, are clinging to their prison bars.

Some people refuse to contemplate such questions. Either they want to continue to uphold the old ideas, however much the real world contradicts them, or they have discarded the notion of communism completely. I think that each of these options is false. Against the dwindling resistance of those who still want to 'uphold the heritage', and in opposition to those who want to get rid of it, we are obliged to question every side of the legacy with rigorous objectivity. Amending this or that aspect of our old ideas, trying to patch them up to make them fit the modern world, is the very worst thing to do.

I believe that a first step in the regeneration of revolutionary socialism is to check the tradition against the ideas of Karl Marx himself. I don't mean to imply that

the founder of our movement, who began work a century and a half ago, can provide us with ready-made answers to the problems of today. I am sure there are no such answers to any worthwhile question! But I am convinced that, even while Marx was still alive, his followers lost sight of the chief ideas on which Marx's communism was founded. Certainly, we have to surpass Marx, to develop his work to face the new century, but first we have to catch up with him. In this lecture, I want to use Marx's writings to question some of the ideas which we used to assume were unquestionable.

This wholesale re-examination is made inescapable by the death of the last remnants of the Russian revolution. 1917 was the most important event of the twentieth century, and its negation changes everything. We believed that 1914 had ushered in the final period of class society, and that 1917 was the start of the world revolution. We had no doubt that the Third International, later replaced by the Fourth, would emerge as its leadership. The survival of capitalism we entirely explained by the betrayals of social democracy and Stalinism. Looking back at the situation after the Second World War, it now seems clear that, even then, we should have been more true to the spirit of Trotsky's fight, if we had not just tried to fit the real world into our old conceptions.

We must make up for lost time and ask ourselves some difficult questions. Did the world socialist revolution really begin in 1917? What is the significance of the Russian revolution for the transition to communism? What kind of state and social order emerged from that revolution? In general, what is the communist revolution? How is the leadership of the revolution related to the mass of the working class, and how are our ideas related to the consciousness of this mass? How should the revolutionary leadership organise itself? What, indeed, is revolutionary leadership? Yes, the tradition of struggle for the Fourth International must be maintained, preserved for future generations. But if this is to be done, it has to be transformed in tune with the new problems faced by the working class. Otherwise, IT WILL DIE.

"The economic prerequisite for the proletarian revolution has already in general achieved the highest point of fruition that can be reached under capitalism", Trotsky wrote in the **Transitional Programme**. "Mankind's productive forces stagnate." In 1938, that was a great idea. But ten, twenty and thirty years afterwards, I heard Trotskyists repeating these sentences, while all around them technological advance and economic expansion were

proceeding at an unprecedented rate. Many of us scanned the economic horizons for signs of a recurrence of the 1929-33 slump, which, we imagined, would automatically bring the working class back into mass revolutionary action.

I don't think these notions were really in line with Marx's conception of the communist revolution. Marx showed that capital was an exploitative, oppressive, antagonistic social relation, which continually produced and reproduced itself. As it robbed the workers of their lives and the results of their labour, it drove them to revolt, not simply as victims, but as the bearers of human productive power, potentially, the power of free creation. The communist revolution could not be an unconscious reaction to suffering, for its outcome was to be a truly human society, in which human beings would consciously produce their own social relationships. Yes, the instability of bourgeois society points to the need for its overthrow. But simply watching for the intensification of suffering through an economic crisis, was to fall victim to that 'economic determinism' which led Marx to deny that he was a 'Marxist'. We saw the 'subjective factor' - what we called 'leadership' - separated from these 'economic prerequisites'.

Trotsky's greatest theoretical contribution was to show how the international character of the revolution interacted with national peculiarities. This was in direct opposition to Stalin's reactionary conception of 'socialism in one country'. Trotsky began his political work at a time when the bourgeoisie had not yet conquered state power in many parts of the world, including, of course, his native Russia, while it had already run its course in the older capitalist countries.

Even before Lenin, Trotsky considered the possibility of the working class taking the lead in what they called the 'bourgeois-democratic revolution', so that countries where capital had not yet taken root, and the proletariat formed only a small minority of the population, could begin the world overthrow of capital, before the older capitalist countries. Today, that epoch has passed, and capital now holds state power in every part of the globe. We must re-examine all such questions.

It is hard, now, to recall the extent to which our conceptions of revolution were derived from the Russian model. We understood the development of the working class and its leadership in terms of the slogans, and even the vocabulary of the Comintern. We used words like 'perspectives', 'leadership' and 'crisis' without really questioning their meaning. We modelled the organisation of our own tiny forces on that 'democratic centralism' which was shaped to fit Zinoviev's apparatus. Lenin would sometimes emphasise the backwardness of Russia and look forward to the time when the language of the International would be German, not Russian. But the experience of Bolshevism, of the Revolution and of the Civil War, inevitably moulded the foundation for the Third In-

ternational and its Sections.

The **Transitional Programme** told us that

the Soviet Union emerged from the October revolution as a workers' state. State ownership of the means of production, a necessary prerequisite to socialist development, opened up the possibility of rapid growth of the productive forces.

But the apparatus of the workers' state underwent a complete degeneration at the same time: it was transformed from a weapon of the working class to a weapon of bureaucratic violence against the working class, and more and more a weapon for the sabotage of the country's economy.

But what was a 'workers state'? It was a term that Marx himself never used. Instead, he explained that

between capitalist and communist society lies the period of transition from one to the other. Corresponding to this is also a political transition period in which the state can be nothing but the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat. (**Critique of the Gotha Programme**)

This phrase, 'dictatorship of the proletariat', was used by Bolshevism quite differently from Marx's intended meaning. He aimed it against his opponents, the Blanquists. Their Utopian conception of revolution was to prepare secretly to take over the state power, letting the working class know afterwards what had been achieved on its behalf. Marx, on the contrary, saw the revolution as the task, the conscious task, of the working class itself. Those of the state's social functions which will remain in communist society, he insisted, those 'analogous to present state functions', will be carried out by the class as a whole, not by any self-appointed group of revolutionaries, however devoted they may be.

From its very inception, the State has expressed that separation of economic and communal life, which was the consequence of private property. In the **Communist Manifesto**, Marx described how, after the overthrow of the bourgeois state, what would replace it would be 'the state, i.e., the proletariat organised as the ruling class'. This 'state' would thus 'lose its political character'. But the phrase 'workers' state' came to imply that the instrument of violence by which the bourgeoisie imposes its rule over the working class, would be replaced by another 'weapon', equally violent, by which the proletariat, in the shape of its Party, would force its will on society.

The experience of the Russian revolution and the civil war which followed it led us to see the transition period in terms of bloody conflict. The history of that heroic and brutal struggle made us emphasise the necessity for harsh measures, not only against the old ruling classes, but

also to discipline the masses of toiling people, including the working class itself. The brutality of the civil war in backward Russia became the norm for the transition to socialism. It would be interesting for someone to study in detail the evolution of the ideas of Lenin and Trotsky, from the writing of **The State and Revolution**, to Trotsky's last writings. Then we could trace the way that the idea of proletarian dictatorship was transformed from 'an instrument of the working class' into a form of rule in which the Party acted on behalf of the working class.

In 1920, while living in the famous armoured train and directing the Red Army, Trotsky wrote his **Terrorism and Communism**. (A copy was given to every delegate to the Second Congress of the International, together with Lenin's **Left-wing Communism**.) In this reply to Kautsky, Trotsky explained the conception held by the Bolsheviks of the necessity for iron discipline to defeat the class enemy. It could be argued that at that time such methods were inevitable, maybe even necessary. But they were turned into the norm for socialist revolution. Sixteen years later, by then an exile, Trotsky issued a French translation, prefaced with the words:

This book is devoted to elucidating the revolutionary policies of the proletariat in our epoch.

Among the ideas it included are the following:

In the hands of the Party is concentrated the general control. ... It has the final word in all fundamental questions. ... The last word rests with the Central Committee. ... We have more than once been accused of having substituted for the dictatorship of the soviets the dictatorship of our party. Yet it can be said with some confidence that the dictatorship of the soviets became possible only by means of the dictatorship of the party.

What was the aim of this 'dictatorship of the Party', and what did it mean for our conception of the state? Among many other things, Trotsky told the Communists of 1920, and repeated to his followers in 1936, that

just as a lamp before going out shoots up a brilliant flame, so the state before disappearing assumes the form of the dictatorship of the proletariat, the most ruthless form of the state, which embraces the life of the citizens most authoritatively in every direction.

When Trotsky wrote this book, the term 'workers' state' had not yet become current in the movement. It seems to have been used by Lenin for the first time at the end of the year 1920, in his attack on the ideas of Trotsky and Bukharin in the Trades Union discussion, and then only in the phrase 'a workers' state with bureaucratic deformations'. By then, the Soviets and the factory committees of 1917 existed in name only. The idea was now that the

transition to socialism could be carried out by a workers' state which was 'healthy'. The existing Soviet state was an unhealthy version of the same ideal form.

We must re-examine many issues which used to be built into our thinking. For instance, Trotsky in the 1930s was unable to look objectively at the role of the Cheka at the time of the civil war, or at the Kronstadt episode. We ought to look at these issues again, especially now that new material is available.

Thus already by the 1930s, the ideas of the Marxists were far away from those of Marx. The emergence of Stalin's murderous regime made our task even more difficult. To describe this new social formation, Trotsky introduced the description 'degenerated workers' state'. The effect of this formulation, in my view, was to rob us of any real understanding of what Marx meant by the communist revolution.

Still worse was to follow after the Second World War. The Fourth International tried to grasp the changes in Eastern Europe and China within the same theoretical scheme. Since these states under Stalinist leadership were not bourgeois states, and had never been 'healthy', the label 'deformed workers' state' was invented for them. No-one ever coherently explained just what these monstrosities had to do with Marx's communism. Somehow, in some mystical fashion, they embodied a few crumbs of 'the gains of the Revolution'.

Trotsky, in **The Revolution Betrayed**, had said that 'the revolution, betrayed by the ruling party, still exists in property relations and the consciousness of the toilers', 'property relations' presumably meaning the state ownership of industry. In Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia etc., industry was owned by the state, without a revolution having given rise to this state of affairs. (In fact the nationalisations in those countries were, in general, carried out after the working class had been crushed by the bureaucracy.) Bureaucratic state ownership came to be confused with socialism, and the Chinese revolution merely added to our confusion. If bureaucracies could overthrow the bourgeois state, with little if any independent working-class activity, what was left of Marx's idea of communist revolution as the task of the proletariat itself?

The splits which then affected the world movement were the inevitable outcome of this theoretical chaos, and did little to clarify it. When Castro began to nationalise Cuban industry, in response to the US blockade of the Cuban revolution, it was still further intensified. Now, it seems to me, we must carefully retrace our steps, returning to the original ideas of Marx, in order to regain his fundamental concept of communism.

Behind these problems lies the notion which Marxism had about itself, and about its relation with the ideas held by the mass of workers. Lenin, following Karl Kautsky, had

argued in 1902 that

there could not have been Social-Democratic consciousness among the workers. It would have to be brought to them from without ... The working class, exclusively by its own effort, is able to develop only trade-union consciousness. **(What is to be done?)**

Neither Trotsky nor Rosa Luxembourge ever accepted this idea, and Lenin himself qualified and modified it many times. But on the crucial issue of how Marxism and the Marxist Party relate to the thinking of workers, confusion reigned.

We must ask ourselves again just what we mean by an International. How does a world organisation of revolutionaries relate to the consciousness of the working class? This is how Marx himself saw the problem, in 1846:

Just as the economists are the scientific representatives of the bourgeois class, so the socialists and communists are the theoreticians of the proletarian class. ... In the measure that history moves forward, and with it the struggle of the proletariat assumes clearer outlines, they no longer need to seek science in their minds; they have only to take note of what is happening before their eyes and become its mouthpiece. So long as they look for science and merely make systems, so long as they are at the beginning of the struggle, they see in poverty nothing but poverty, without seeing in it the revolutionary, subversive side, which will overthrow the old society, From this moment, science, which is the product of the historical movement, has associated itself consciously with it, has ceased to be doctrinaire and has become revolutionary. **(Poverty of Philosophy)**

This revolution was

carried through by the class which no longer counts as a class in society, which is not recognised as a class, and is itself the expression of the dissolution of all classes, nationalities, etc. within present society.

For this, 'the production of communist consciousness on a mass scale' was needed. It was not just a matter of the overthrow of the ruling class, but also

the alteration of humans on a mass scale ... because the class overthrowing it can only in a revolution succeed in ridding itself of all the muck of ages. **(German Ideology)**

There can be no short cuts to such a development. 'The first step in the revolution is to raise the proletariat to the position of ruling class, to win the battle of democracy'. **(Communist Manifesto)** This can only arise from the development of capital itself, and the task of the communists is to 'become the mouthpiece' of this development.

The Communists, therefore, are on the one hand, practically, the most advanced and resolute section of the working-class parties of every country, that section which pushes forward all the others; on the other hand, theoretically, they have over the great mass of the proletariat the advantage of clearly understanding the line of march, the conditions, and the ultimate general results of the proletarian movement.

It is time to get back to this outlook, and to earn the right to be a communist leadership through 'understanding the line of march'. Only then can we show the way forward to the goal, by means worthy of it:

In place of the old bourgeois society, with its classes and class antagonisms, we shall have an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all.



Wealth, Value and Nature

Cyril Smith

What is Economics? My dictionary says it is 'the science of the production, distribution and consumption of wealth'. Alfred Marshall described economics as 'on the one hand a study of wealth, and on the other ... a part of the study of man' [1], while Lionel Robbins defined it as 'the science which studies human behaviour as a relationship between ends and scarce means' [2]. He wrote this in 1932, by the way, when unemployment and poverty were rife throughout the world, and when, for millions of people, 'means' were indeed scarce. Surely, economic behaviour was more inhuman than human. Earlier, Friedrich Engels had a different view of the subject: in his brilliant essay of 1843, he called political economy 'the science of greed'. [3]

If economics is about wealth, what is wealth? '*Riqueza*', '*richesse*', '*Reichtum*', '*riches*', all carry with them the question: whose wealth are we talking about? In English, the old meaning of the word 'wealth' is associated with weal, well-being, like the German *Wohlstand* and *Gemeinwohl*, meaning the prosperity of a whole community. But, as we know, prosperity for a few can easily mean starvation for the many. John Stuart Mill says wealth is 'all useful or agreeable things, which have exchangeable value.' [5] But that only deepens the mystery, for it says nothing about how exchangeability relates to 'agreeableness'.

Aristotle was the first to study such issues, but his aim was quite different. He wanted to find out how humans could live in accordance with what they were 'by nature'. He had no doubt that communal life was natural for humans. On the other hand, the drive to make money, being unbounded, tends to break up the community and does not accord with nature. [5] All such forms are produced by convention, not nature. Retail trade, he believes, is 'unnatural, and a mode by which men gain from one another. The most hated sort ... is usury, which makes a gain out of money itself.' [6]

Bourgeois thought completely reversed Aristotle's priorities. Hobbes, deliberately thumbing his nose at the Greek philosopher, declared that the 'natural condition of man' was that of 'the war of all against all'. Only state-power, brought about by convention, made possible social cohesion, and thus the survival of the human race. Rousseau made the 'state of nature' seem rather more pleasant, but he also saw society as the outcome of human decision, a 'social contract'.

This is the view of social life on which the political

economists based themselves. Adam Smith, the founder of modern political economy, whose philosophy, following the Stoic tradition, was also opposed to that of Aristotle, called his book **An Inquiry into the Causes and Nature of the Wealth of Nations**. But he begins without asking himself what he means by 'wealth'. Instead, his first chapter jumps straight into a discussion of 'the causes of improvement in the productive powers of labour'. The chief cause, he finds, is the division of labour, the necessary consequence of 'a certain propensity in human nature ... to truck, barter and exchange ... common to all men, and to ... no other species of animal'. [7] So Smith also directly reverses Aristotle's view of what is 'natural' and what is conventional.

In general, Chapter 1 of **Capital** owes a great deal more to Aristotle than used to be understood. On this vital issue, Marx is especially close to his Greek predecessor. For Marx's whole life was devoted to finding the way to a 'truly human' way of life, one in which we did not 'truck, barter or exchange', but associated freely in the collective production of real wealth, that is, of the good of all. Being human, as Aristotle also knew, does not mean acting out a script provided by our nature. What he did not know is that it involves humans acting as socially self-conscious and self-creating parts of nature. 'In changing Nature, man changes his own nature.' [8] So human nature is not something fixed. Its essence resides in a continually changing 'ensemble of social relations'.

Capital, a critique of political economy, is devoted to showing how, at the same time as bourgeois society develops material production, it denies this essence of humanity, perverting and distorting it. Living as if they were self-contained atoms, driven by self-interest, individuals cut themselves off from each other, from nature and from their own nature. (Here is the root of all 'environmental' problems.)

Smith and other political economists knew that a commodity, wealth produced for exchange, had two sides: it was simultaneously an item of utility, satisfying a human need of some kind, and an 'exchangeable value', the latter being the basis for all social connection. But how are these two sides related? Aristotle puzzled over the same question, but failed to find an answer which satisfied him. If two commodities are exchanged, they must, of course, be different utilities, made by different kinds of work. How, then, could their exchange-values be compared? Were they incommensurable? If so, how could exchange accord with Justice?

Political economy thought it had begun to find an answer. When two items - a loaf of bread and a bag of nails, for instance - were exchanged, something about them was being equated, something purely quantitative. What they had in common was that they were both products of labour. True, they were qualitatively different. In one case the labour was baking, in the other, nail-making. But each of them was a specific form of the same essential human activity, labour in some general sense.

Aristotle could not work this out, and Marx points out why. Because of the nature of Greek society in his time, there could be no conception of 'labour in general'. Producers, whether they were slave or free, engaged in making particular kinds of goods. What mattered was only the quality of what was produced. Was the bread good bread, the nails good nails? Two thousand years later, as wage-labour came to predominate, it had become far easier to see each kind of work as a form of social labour in general. This is what Marx called abstract labour, and its quantitative measure was simply labour-time.

Marx comes to the conclusion that this is what is objectified in the exchangeability of the commodity. On the other hand, the specific kind of work, baking or nail-making, he called concrete labour. It is embodied in the particular use-value of each commodity, bread or nails. What must be stressed is that this points directly to a defect of commodity production as a way of life.

Chapter 1 of **Capital** begins with the assertion that 'wealth ... appears as a monstrous [*ungeheure*] collection of commodities'. Immediately, Marx starts to dig behind this appearance, and begins his critique of political economy. People still chatter about 'Marx's labour theory of value'. Actually, he is showing the incoherence of any such theory. His pounding critique breaks up the categories which political economy takes for granted. Then he begins to find hidden inside them, not only 'human behaviour', but at the same time the forms of inhumanity. A truly human society means the disappearance of the 'dual character of labour', for wealth would be created for the use of society, by means which would enhance and develop the lives of the producers.

Exchange of commodities, in all its many forms, is the only way that modern society holds together. Money has become the only connection between individual human beings. But this connection is abstract, external, purely quantitative, indifferent to any specific quality, anything which makes a use-value what it is, and any characteristic of its producer as a person.

In modern society, nothing appears as itself, but only as its own opposite. Exchange-value, Marx explains, is only the form of appearance, the 'phenomenal form', of a 'purely social substance' which he calls value. You cannot see this substance in the commodity which possesses it. All that appears is its exchange-value, in the

shape of the other commodity - not the exchange-value of that second commodity, but its actual body as a use-value.

That is the central importance of Section 3 of Chapter 1 of **Capital**, 'The Form of Value, or Exchange-Value'. Political economy simply accepted the existence of money, while Marx sees the need to 'derive the money-form'. (Later economics, which Marx called 'vulgar', cannot conceive of such a question.) The commodity form developed into the money form, not through human decision, but 'behind the backs' of individuals. A particular commodity was selected to act as the 'universal equivalent' through the joint action of all the other commodities. The money form then inevitably moves forward, transforming itself into various forms of capital, that vast impersonal power which exploits wage-labour and dominates all our lives.

Let me stress: this is not a matter of historical description. Marx does introduce a huge amount of empirical data into the book, but this is to illustrate the results derived through the critique of Smith and Ricardo. For instance, writing about the relationship of money to capital, he says: 'We do not need to look back at the history of capital's origins in order to recognize that money is its first form of appearance. Every day the same story is played out before our eyes.' [9]

The same thing applies to each of the transitions in the book. To take another example, capital began its historical career when a mass of producers were separated from the means of production. But that does not just refer to a single event in the past. It happens all the time in the course of the exploitation of the wage-worker. At each stage, Marx is concerned with the forms of consciousness in which social relations are falsely understood by those who live under them. That is why he devoted so much effort to Section 4, 'The Fetish-character of the Commodity and its Secret'. Since the producers of different commodities are linked only through the values exchanged, 'the relation between their own private labours and the collective labour of society appears to them in exactly this crazy [*verrückte*] form. The categories of political economy consist precisely of forms of this kind.' [10]

This passage should be compared with Aristotle's contention that commerce does not accord with the nature of humanity. (It is interesting to note that the etymology of '*verrückte*' connects it with the meaning 'misplaced'.) This Section explains how the exchange of commodities and the existence of money come to seem to belong to society 'by nature', even though other social forms operate without such forms. In particular, Marx considers 'an association of free men, working with the means of production in common'. [11]

The ideas in this Section are essential for the whole of **Capital**. Bourgeois social relations not only appear to

dominate the individuals related, but actually do dominate them. These relations take the form of things, like pieces of gold, or machines or finished products. Thus things, created by humans, are treated by them as if they were subjects, endowed with wills and with their own rights. On the other hand, the human individual is treated as an object, a mere thing.

Only if we keep this in mind can we grasp Marx's understanding of wage-labour and its exploitation, what he means by the power of capital, his attitude to the relationship of humans to machines, the significance of class struggle and his conception of the revolutionary overthrow of the existing order. The proletariat is not simply an exploited section of society. It is that element of capital which is human. As it becomes conscious of its humanity, it fights against its treatment as a 'factor of production'.

Hegel stood in the tradition of Aristotle, as much as Marx did. But Hegel, who studied Smith and Ricardo carefully, could never penetrate to the core of the opposition between the two ways of thinking. Essentially, 'Hegel's standpoint is that of modern political economy', [12] and he accepts the main results of Smith and Ricardo without question. Marx's critique begins with a challenge to all their basic assumptions about the modern world.

Adam Smith tried to develop a theory of value, albeit inconsistently, and David Ricardo attempted to perfect it. But, as you can see from Ricardo's chapter on 'Value and Riches, their Distinctive Properties' [13], he can say little about the relation of wealth and value, or use-value and exchangeability. In **Capital**, Chapter 1, this distinction is made very clear, and its relation to nature. On the one hand, William Petty is quoted with approval: 'Labour is the father and the earth the mother of wealth.' [14] On the other, Marx says:

The degree to which some economists are misled by the fetishism attached to commodities, or the objective appearance of the social characteristics of labour, is shown, among other things, by the dull and tedious dispute over the part played by nature in the formation of exchange-value. Since exchange-value is a definite social manner of expressing the labour bestowed on a thing, it can have no more natural content than has, for example, the rate of exchange. [15]

Political economy, even its best representatives, could not get to grips with this issue. Its categories, 'formulas which bear the unmistakable stamp of belonging to a social formation in which the process of production has mastery over man', seem to them 'self-evident and nature-imposed'. [16] Only through the critique in which Marx was engaged can we get behind this barrier. And what lies behind it is a truly human way of life.

In **Grundrisse**, Marx put the matter even clearer:

If the narrow bourgeois form is peeled off, what is wealth if not the universality of the individual's needs, capacities, enjoyments, productive powers, etc., produced in universal exchange; what is it if not the full development of human control over the forces of nature - over the forces of so-called Nature, as well as those of his own nature? What is wealth if not the absolute unfolding of man's creative abilities, without any precondition, other than the preceding historical development, which makes the totality of this development - ie the development of human powers as such, not measured by any previously given yardstick - and end-in-itself, through which he does not reproduce himself in any specific character, but produces his totality, and does not seek to remain something he has already become, but is in the absolute movement of his becoming. [17]

What is important about this passage is that it shows how Marx's understanding of true humanity emerges from his critique of political economy. Bourgeois thinkers, even the greatest and most honest of them, starting with a belief that society is a collection of independent human atoms, could not do more than describe the necessity of the existing socio-economic forms. Marx, setting out from the essentially social nature of humanity, can penetrate to the merely transient character of these forms, and the possibility of peeling them away, to reveal their human content.

Notes

- [1] Marshall, **Principles of Economics**, 1890.
- [2] Robbins, **Nature and Significance of Economic Science**, 1832.
- [3] Engels, **Outlines of a Critique of Political Economy**, 1843.
- [4] JS Mill, **Principles of Political Economy**. 18
- [5] Aristotle, **Politics**, 1, 8-10 and **Ethics**, 5, 5.
- [6] **Politics**, 1, 10. Compare the remark in **Ethics**, 1, 5, where the mass of mankind is said to 'prefer a life suitable to grazing animals', Glaucon's remark about 'a city fit for pigs', in Plato, **Republic**, 372, and 'The Animal Kingdom of the Spirit, in Hegel, **Phenomenology of Spirit**,
- [7] *Op cit*, Chapter 2.
- [8] **Capital**, Chapter 7.
- [9] *Ibid*, Chapter 4: The General Formula for Capital.
- [10] *Ibid*, Chapter 1, Section 4.
- [11] *Ibid*.
- [12] **Paris Manuscripts**, 1844.
- [13] Ricardo, **The Principles of Political Economy and Taxation**, 1821, Chapter XX.
- [14] **Capital**, Chapter 1, Section 1.
- [15] *Ibid*, Section 4.
- [16] *Ibid*.
- [17] **Grundrisse**, MECW in English, Vol. 28, pp 412-3.

Beyond Kronstadt

The Bolsheviks in Power

MK

An understanding of the Russian revolution is vital for any understanding of why the left failed in the 20th century. Yet most discussion amongst revolutionaries never goes beyond the usual argument about the Kronstadt rebellion.

The left's present crisis has forced rethinking in some circles but many of us continue to cope with isolation by clinging onto our respective traditions. Anarchists and libertarian communists emphasise the Bolsheviks' authoritarian policies, blaming them for the revolution's failure, while underestimating the difficulties of constructing a new society in an isolated country devastated by civil war. In contrast Trotskyists blame these material conditions exclusively for the revolution's degeneration, dismissing most left-wing criticisms of the Bolsheviks as giving comfort to the right.

However it seems self-evident that there were ideological and material factors in the revolution's degeneration and any serious evaluation of the issue should take account of both. Unfortunately on the rare occasions when this dispute might have developed further, such as when Maurice Brinton debated Chris Goodey in *Critique*, the discussion was never continued.

This is especially unfortunate because, since the 1980s, there has been an ever growing literature on the social history of the period; with work such as S.A. Smith's book on the factory committees or William Rosenberg and Jonathan Aves' writing on the strike waves of 1918 and 1921. Though many social historians have some sympathy with the Bolsheviks, much of their work has been overlooked by the left. Nevertheless an ex-member of the International Socialists, Sam Farber, has used some of this material to provide an interesting, if flawed, critique of the Bolsheviks in *Before Stalinism; The Rise and Fall of Soviet Democracy*. This book complements Carmen Sirianni's earlier work, *Workers' Control and Socialist Democracy; The Soviet Experience*, by analysing not only the economic but also the political dimensions of Bolshevik rule.

This article is a further attempt to return to this social history to help develop a revolutionary politics that can break from the tragedies of 20th century socialism. It will show that Bolshevik policies were problematic from the start. In 1917 Lenin argued that, as private capitalism could not develop Russia, a revolutionary state would have to use 'state capitalism' to build the prerequisites for the transition to communism. This approach was always likely to

come into conflict with the working class. Then, as the revolution failed to spread outside Russia, the Bolsheviks imposed even more external discipline on workers, effectively abandoning Marx's insistence on "the self-emancipation of the working class".

This concept of "self-emancipation" implies that the working class can only create communism by freely making and defending the revolution themselves. So the action of workers taking day-to-day control of every aspect of society is itself the essence of the revolutionary process. Considerable compromises with the ideals of self-emancipation were inevitable in the crippling conditions of the Russian revolution, but the extent of such compromises is the extent to which any proletarian revolution is defeated. This article will show that the 'compromises' made by the Bolshevik leadership were so opposed to workers' self-emancipation that the main responsibility of contemporary revolutionaries should be to supersede rather than emulate their political theories. Those who defend the crimes of capitalism have no right to criticise Bolshevik policies but revolutionaries have a duty to do so.

1917

The collapse of Tsarist autocracy during the First World War led to an explosion of new popular institutions from cooperatives to cultural organisations. By October 1917 there were 900 workers' councils or soviets, controlling everything from housing to hospitals. There were also more than 2,000 elected factory committees which were even more powerful because they had been compelled to supervise the factory owners and production.

The Bolshevik party was dwarfed by these bodies and was often overtaken by the rapid radicalisation of workers. However, unlike the reformist Mensheviks or the peasant oriented Socialist Revolutionaries (SRs), it had not joined the repressive Provisional Government; a regime that had totally discredited itself by its failure to maintain living standards, authorise land seizures or provide peace. The openness and flexibility of the Bolshevik party allowed it to express workers' desire for a government of all the soviet parties. On 25 October it organised the overthrow of the Provisional Government and set up a Soviet government headed by Lenin.[1]

Workers' Control Before The Civil War

Once in power the overriding concern of the Bolshevik

leadership was the revival of industry to overcome a largely feudal crisis-ridden society. To this end they proposed to nationalise the largest monopolies, initially leaving the rest of industry under capitalist ownership combined with both government and workers' control. This was consistent with Lenin's arguments before October that "socialism is merely state-capitalist monopoly which is made to serve the interests of the whole people and has to that extent ceased to be capitalist monopoly."

He later said, "we recognise only one road - changes from below; we wanted the workers themselves, from below, to draw up the new, basic economic principles." But, like the Second International he came from, Lenin never developed a consistent theory of workers' self-management, tending to only advocate "inspection", "accounting and control" by workers of the decisions of others.[2]

So on the first day of the new government Lenin asked the ex-Menshevik Larin to begin negotiating with capitalists to set up state-capitalist trusts. He also met with the mainly Bolshevik leaders of the Petrograd Central Council of Factory Committees (PCCFC) to discuss their proposal for a central Supreme Economic Council (SEC) to coordinate the economy. Lenin was interested in their proposal but he declined to make it official and instead drafted a decree which stressed issues of local workers' supervision that the Petrograd factory committees probably already took for granted. This decree did state that the committees' decisions would be binding on the employers but it also said they could be annulled by the trade unions.[3]

By November Lenin's document had developed into an official decree whereby the factory committees were now subject to the All-Russian Council of Worker's Control (ARCWC). This body was dominated by representatives from the soviets, cooperatives and the trade union council. It consequently produced instructions that subordinated the committees to the unions and stated that the employers, not the committees, controlled production.

The committee leaders accepted this official decree but they ignored the ARCWC. They then issued quite different instructions which called for the committees' decisions to be binding on management and for the committees to unite into a hierarchy of federations to coordinate the economy. These instructions had considerable support amongst both workers and Bolsheviks. However Lenin never made them official and by December his government had set up its own version of an SEC. This body had a minority of committee representatives, no real accountability to the committees and it was always overshadowed by the Commissariats.[4]

These differences over workers' control took place in the context of a deepening of the economic crisis that had provoked the revolution in the first place. Putilov workers appear to have gone on strike from as early as December and the new authorities soon turned to the idea of increasing discipline. They attempted to prohibit alcohol and

an indication of Lenin's thinking, only nine weeks after October, can be found in a draft article in which he wrote:

"not a single rogue (including those who shirk their work) to be allowed to be at liberty, but kept in prison, or serve his sentence of compulsory labour of the hardest kind.... ... [In order to] *clean* the land of Russia of all vermin....In one place half a score of rich, a dozen rogues, half a dozen workers who shirk their work (in the manner of rowdies, the manner in which many compositors in Petrograd, particularly in the Party printing shops, shirk their work) will be put in prison....In a fourth place, one out of every ten idlers will be shot on the spot."

With the war ending, the Bolsheviks now found themselves presiding over the collapse of much of Petrograd's war related industry. There was a major crime wave and in January 1918 a severe cut in the bread ration led to a mass exodus from Petrograd to find food. Meanwhile the policy of retaining capitalist owners in the factories encouraged conflicts that only exacerbated this crisis. Owners increasingly refused to submit to workers' control. They sabotaged production or fled so forcing the committees to take over a number of factories and insist on their nationalisation. Yet, unable to take responsibility for every factory, the new government strongly opposed these actions and made repeated attempts to outlaw unauthorised takeovers. By the spring only sixteen Petrograd companies had been formally nationalised.[5]

The Demise of the Factory Committees

The factory committees had set up the Red Guards and had been the first workers' organisations to support Bolshevik policies in 1917. Involved in the day-to-day running of the factories they also had more experience at managing industry, and, as S.A. Smith says, the committee leaders were "the most vocal section of the party pressing for a system of central economic planning". Nevertheless the unions soon persuaded Lenin that the committees suffered from too much localism and should be subordinated to themselves.[6]

There certainly were cases of localism, of committees selling factory stock or hoarding resources. But the PCCFC tried hard to counter these tendencies. It distributed materials and fuel and set up organisations for technical advice. There were similar councils in fifty other cities and a national congress had elected an All-Russian Centre as early as October. Furthermore the committees were not reluctant to impose work discipline and a number even used armed guards to enforce order. All their official instructions specified the retention of technical specialists and some managed to double or treble production levels to those of 1916 and beyond. Indeed it was primarily due to PCCFC efforts that Petrograd's industry did not totally collapse that winter.[7]

The PCCFC did have major problems coping with the cri-

sis but so too did the Commissariats and the SEC. These bodies had little knowledge of the local situation and often gave orders that contradicted each other, so encouraging factories to ignore the centre. In other words the government's attempts to centralise actually led to localism.[8]

In January the trade union congress endorsed the ARCWC instructions and called for industrial reconstruction based on foreign investment and Taylorism. The leading Bolshevik Zinoviev explicitly rejected the right to strike and asked the congress to "proclaim the trade unions state organisations". The Bolshevik union leader Ryazanov also called on the factory committees to choose "suicide" and a week later the party leadership persuaded the last factory committee conference to dissolve the committees into the unions.[9]

Although the committee leaders accepted this absorption into the unions they still did not want to be subordinated to them and their conference proposed that the committees themselves should elect union boards. It reaffirmed their more radical workers' control proposals and demanded the complete nationalisation of industry. However at this time the government was more concerned with trying to set up joint trusts with capitalists and a number of Bolsheviks were even favourable to some reprivatisation of the banks. Indeed it seems to have required considerable opposition from both metalworkers and the large Left Communist faction in the Bolshevik party to end negotiations with the metal industry owners in April.[10]

Trotskyists and Workers' Control

The Bolshevik leadership's attitude to the factory committees and self-management is the classic example of thinking limited by the Marxism of the Second International. Yet no contemporary Trotskyists have any real doubts about their initial state-capitalist programme and most simply denigrate the committees as localist. In *Critique* no.4 Goodey does accept that the committees wanted to build a centralised economic apparatus. But he also argues that, if there was an embryonic bureaucracy in 1917, the committees were very much part of it. He points out that the committee leaders often successfully resisted reelection, that many supported centralisation during the civil war and that some became supporters of Stalin. In other words the isolation of the revolution encouraged bureaucratic tendencies at every level and these should not be blamed on the Bolshevik leaders.

These are powerful arguments. On the other hand they do not excuse the fact that all the plans of the Bolshevik leadership were considerably less democratic than those of the committees or that the leadership failed to insist on democracy in the committees. The attitudes of the committees did degenerate but so too did the attitudes of officials in every part of the new state, including Lenin and Trotsky. Goodey fails to recognise that their views were as restricted by historical conditions as those of the com-

mittee leaders.

The committees also did use quite severe discipline. But at least this had an element of self-discipline unlike that imposed by the state. Furthermore the committees had the potential to try to create a system of self-management that would have slowed the process of degeneration. As the Bolshevik Tsyperovich said in 1927: "there are still more than a few old factory committee men who think, in essence, that the committees ... contained within themselves enough for a further development along their original lines." [11]

Other Trotskyists imply that it was right to bypass the factory committees because the soviets were more representative of the whole population. Not only does this approach underestimate the rapid decline of soviet democracy itself, it suggests that alienation from the means of production could have been significantly reduced by allowing workers to occasionally take part in national planning. Yet people would still have suffered the same relations at work as they do under capitalism. Certainly you cannot build communism in one country. However it should be obvious to Marxists that capitalists can hold considerable power, whether or not there is formal democracy, by owning the means of production but workers can only do so if they democratically control production.

Lenin Debates the Left Communists

The Brest-Litovsk peace treaty ceded three quarters of the Soviet state's iron and coal to Germany and, by the spring of 1918, half of Petrograd's work force was unemployed. A debate then developed on how to survive this crisis while waiting for revolution in the West. Lenin argued that "we must 'suspend' our offensive" on capital because the priority was to organise production in the enterprises they had already expropriated. He began campaigning for 'one-man management' at work, claiming that there is "absolutely no contradiction in principle between soviet (that is, socialist) democracy and the exercise of dictatorial powers by individuals." He also wrote that: "We must learn to combine the 'public meeting' democracy of the working people - turbulent, surging, overflowing its banks like a spring flood - with iron discipline while at work, with unquestioning obedience to the will of a single person." [12]

None of the Left Communist leaders, such as Bukharin, Preobrazhenski, Radek, Bela Kun or Osinsky, had supported the factory committees, but their approach was not dissimilar. Osinsky argued that Lenin's programme of combining "capitalists and semi-bureaucratic centralisation" with "obligatory labour" would lead to "bureaucratic centralisation, the rule of various commissars, the deprivation of local soviets of their independence, and in practice the rejection of the type of 'commune state' administered from below." Having chaired the SEC, Osinsky appreciated the depth of the economic crisis but he still ad-

vocated an alternative system of economic democracy based on the economic councils.[13]

Unfortunately Lenin dismissed his arguments. In *'Left Wing' Childishness and the Petty Bourgeois Mentality* he wrote that: "While the revolution in Germany is still slow in 'coming forth', our task is to study the state capitalism of the Germans, to spare no effort in copying it and not to shrink from adopting dictatorial methods to hasten the copying of it."

In March the Bolsheviks resolved to adopt "mercilessly resolute, and draconian measures" to heighten discipline and Lenin said "punishment [for breaches of labour discipline] should go to the length of imprisonment". The authorities appointed Commissars to run a number of factories and they introduced "dictatorial" powers to try to contain the crisis on the railways. Preobrazhenski responded by warning that "the dictatorship of individuals will be extended from ...the economy to the Russian Communist Party", and by May some Left Communists were indeed expelled.[14]

It took the threat of capitalists transferring enterprises to German ownership under the terms of the Brest-Litovsk treaty, as well as widespread workers' unrest, to finally compel the government to announce the nationalisation of all large-scale industries in June. However nationalisation often led to factory committees being restricted to their original monitoring role and, once the civil war was under way in December, it was decided to appoint all management from above.[15]

Soviet Democracy Before the Civil War

In contrast to their attitude to self-management the Bolshevik leadership did claim a commitment to soviet democracy. Their dissolution of the Constituent Assembly can be justified as a defence of this democracy and their coalition with the Left SRs had nationwide support. Nevertheless in his study of one of Petrograd's local soviets Alexander Rabinowitch points out that "the breakdown of democratic practices ... began almost at once after October." At a higher level the central government only submitted a fraction of its decrees to the Central Executive Committee of the national soviet. Eighty per cent of senior bureaucrats had been officials before the revolution and T.H.Rigby says that "the structural changes were scarcely greater than those sometimes accompanying changes of government in Western parliamentary systems." [16]

Despite some opposition, the authorities began absorbing the workers' militias into the Red Army from January 1918. Lenin removed the stipulation that enlistment should be voluntary and, with the failure to hold back the German army, Trotsky was soon trying to disband the soldiers' committees and end their right to elect officers.

Meanwhile the desperate economic crisis led to a significant fall in support for the Bolsheviks that winter. Party membership temporarily plunged by 70% and the subsequent increase in support for the Mensheviks and SRs led to members of these parties being driven out of some soviets. This may have been justified for the SRs but, although the Mensheviks were very hostile to the new regime, the majority of them had always kept to non-violent opposition. Indeed the Bolsheviks had some difficulty finding justifications to ban their papers and tried to do so merely on the grounds that they had reported about conflicts between workers and the government.[17]

Not surprisingly Menshevik and SR activists now argued that the soviets were no longer representative and by March they had set up an 'Assembly of Factory Representatives' in Petrograd. Its delegates blamed the economic crisis on everything from the factory committees to the government and even on the whole "experiment of soviet socialism". Ryazanov quipped that the situation seemed to be the direct opposite of that a year earlier and Bolshevik representation in the Kronstadt soviet fell from 46% to 29%. The party also lost every recorded election held in the provincial capitals that spring and the anti-Bolshevik historian Vladimir Brovkin shows that local Bolsheviks resorted to arrests, shootings and the forcible disbanding of many of the newly elected soviets.[18]

The first concerted action of the political police, the Cheka, took place at this time when they raided anarchist centres throughout Russia. In Moscow they raided 26 centres, leaving 12 Cheka agents and 40 anarchists dead in the process. These anarchists had been armed and could have posed some physical threat. On the other hand the leading Cheka official, Peters, has written that: "In Moscow in general at that time there was a peaceful mood, and the Moscow military commissariat even issued arms to the anarchist headquarters". So the raids certainly had a political motive and in May the authorities closed down several anarchist periodicals.[19]

The Summer of 1918

All the restrictions on workers' democracy described so far occurred before the full scale civil war. From May the Soviet government did have to deal with the first major clashes of that conflict but the war did not get going in earnest until October. Moreover the extent to which the Bolsheviks had lost popular support even before the first anniversary of October is striking.

Many Bolshevik workers left their factories to work or fight for the new state. However the fact that many of the remaining workers appear to have stayed away from its first May Day celebrations must have worried the new authorities. Against the party's wishes Petrograd's local soviets now set up several "non-party" workers' conferences. At these meetings the delegates had many criticisms of the government's handling of the economic cri-

sis as well as its requisitioning of grain from the peasants. Some also made demands for a more broad based government and the reconvening of the Constituent Assembly.

The killing of at least one worker at a demonstration for bread then led to several factory meetings making similar demands and taking strike action. This in turn led to arrests that helped provoke a wave of demonstrations, meetings and eighteen strikes, mainly against repressive acts such as shootings and censorship. Most of those involved in this agitation were metalworkers who had been major supporters of the Bolsheviks in October but had been severely affected by unemployment.[20]

Hunger was a major cause of this discontent. The Soviet state had lost a quarter of its arable land to Germany and this, combined with transport difficulties, led to a situation in which during some months only 6% of the grain allocated to Petrograd and Moscow was delivered. Emergency measures were certainly needed if the cities were not to starve but Lenin's approach was disastrous. He blamed the crisis on grain hoarding by the better-off peasants, the kulaks. "Merciless war" was declared on them and the compulsory requisitioning of peasants' produce began in May.

This rapidly turned into indiscriminate pillaging which discouraged planting and helped provoke over a hundred large scale peasant revolts that year alone. These armed uprisings involved all the peasantry, not just the kulaks, and Lenin's furious response to one revolt in Penza was to instruct local Bolsheviks to carry out "ruthless mass terror" and to: "Hang no fewer than a hundred well-known kulaks, rich bags and bloodsuckers (and be sure that the hanging takes place in full view of the people)." [21]

The Menshevik leadership expelled members who actively supported such armed revolts. However they remained neutral in the first clashes of the civil war and in June the national Soviet excluded all its Menshevik delegates and called on the local soviets to do likewise. Meanwhile the mood in the factories finally persuaded the Petrograd soviet to hold the elections that it should have held in March. During the election campaign Commissar Volodarskii was assassinated and, although the Petrograd authorities ignored Lenin's call for "mass terror", they did declare martial law and forbid meetings.[22]

The election results in the factories gave the Bolsheviks around 50% of the vote, which, combined with significant support in the Red Army, still gave them a democratic majority in Petrograd. Nevertheless they had needed to resort to lay-offs, lockouts and widespread arrests to contain that summer's protests, and Assemblies of Factory Representatives had continued to spread to other regions. The Assemblies made preparations for a national congress and called a general strike for 2 July. Consequently the newly elected Petrograd soviet decided to ban the movement. Machine guns were placed at strategic

points in both Petrograd and Moscow, and the Moscow Assembly, which had apparently attracted 4,000 workers, had its delegates arrested.

The outcome was that, although a few strikes and protests continued that summer, the response to the Assemblies' general strike call was very limited and the movement soon collapsed. Yet repression was not the only factor in this collapse. Workers' indifference was also important and the Assemblies appear to have been unable to provide an alternative to Bolshevik policies. On the other hand, in contrast to the view that the civil war simply created problems for the Bolsheviks, it could be argued that the threat from the Whites consolidated support for the government and saved it from even more damaging workers' unrest.[23]

These were not the only problems the Bolsheviks faced that summer. Their representation in county soviets fell from 66% to 45%. They responded by disbanding several soviets, violently suppressing protest strikes and artificially inflating their party's representation at the Soviet Congress.

Unable to alter Soviet policy democratically, the Bolsheviks' recent allies, the Left SRs, then resorted to assassinating the German ambassador on 6 July in an attempt to restart the war. The commander of the Bolshevik forces later said "there were few military formations on which the Bolshevik Party could rely" and that "the mass of the Moscow workers maintained a neutral position too." So it was only because the Left SRs had made no plans to overthrow the government that the Bolsheviks were able to rapidly suppress them the next day. They now had no hesitation in excluding many Left SRs from the soviets and banning their papers. Scores of other socialist publications had already been closed down and non-Bolshevik newspapers soon disappeared from Soviet Russia.[24]

The root cause of this split with the Left SRs was their opposition to government policy towards the peasants. Their reluctance to hand over grain, especially when the Bolsheviks had so few goods to give in exchange, made some requisitioning inevitable. However requisitioning was often ineffective and counter-productive, turning the majority of the population against the new state. Possible alternatives could have included the greater use of a tax-in-kind, higher grain prices, limited free trade or local soviets doing any necessary requisitioning. Such policies would have been very difficult to implement but they would have needed no more effort than that required to impose state requisitioning and could have reduced the need for external coercion.[25]

Soviet Democracy During the Civil War

During the civil war the Whites were helped by fourteen Allied armies. However none of these armies fought in the main battles and both sides spent much of their time

fighting national minorities and peasant insurgents. For example it appears that in June 1919 the Red Army's rear was engulfed by peasant uprisings against conscription.

Throughout the war some eight million lives were lost. Disease, malnutrition and constant insecurity, combined with widespread illiteracy, made democratic participation difficult in the extreme. All the same, many Bolshevik policies discouraged any participation that may have been practical.[26]

After their expulsion from the soviets the Menshevik leadership had difficulty preventing some provincial members from supporting anti-Bolshevik revolts. But by the autumn they had regained control of their party and the Bolsheviks reinstated Mensheviks in a number of soviets and legalised their paper. Nevertheless they soon closed this publication down again and the repeated arrests of leaders and outright bans in some towns made organised existence extremely difficult. This repression continued even when the Mensheviks recruited for the Red Army from the autumn of 1919.[27]

The authorities treated the anarchists and SRs in a similar way and Richard Sakwa says "there is mass evidence to support accusations of electoral malpractice." Non-Bolshevik representation at the national Soviet congress fell to only 3% but Lenin was not particularly disturbed that many workers could no longer elect the representatives of their choice. He openly said: "Yes, it is a dictatorship of one party! This is what we stand for and we shall not shift from that position because it is the party that has won ... the position of vanguard of the entire ... proletariat. This party had won that position even before the revolution of 1905." He also said, "all claptrap about democracy must be scrapped", and in *'Left-Wing' Communism - An Infantile Disorder*, he dismissed concerns about substitutionism, "about the dictatorship of leaders or the dictatorship of the masses" as "ridiculous and childish nonsense".[28]

Lenin's reluctance to allow real soviet democracy is not surprising considering that, despite all the repression, non-Bolshevik candidates still managed to win a third of the seats elected in Petrograd factories in 1920. However the result of his policies was now a dictatorship over the proletariat rather than one of the proletariat. In the provinces it appears that the same person frequently became chair of the party, soviet and Cheka, and, despite his unease, a personality cult soon began to develop around Lenin.

High-ranking party members in the Democratic Centralist group and union based Workers' Opposition had many criticisms of this situation. They argued for elections, not appointments, to posts and the Military Opposition called for less harsh discipline in the army. Trotsky's order to have "every" deserter on the Southern Front "shot" was never fully implemented but he advocated executions for people who merely harboured deserters. Indeed Lenin admitted that Red Army discipline was more "strict" than

that of "the former government".[29]

The Red Terror

The Red Terror was partly a reaction to the greater horrors of the anti-Bolshevik terror in which 23,000 Reds were killed in Finland and 100,000 Jews were murdered in the Ukraine. Nevertheless Lenin repeatedly advocated terror even before the attempt on his life in September 1918. For example during one anti-Bolshevik revolt he told the authorities to organise "mass terror, shoot and deport the hundreds of prostitutes who are making drunkards of the soldiers."

Such attitudes enabled the Cheka to acquire widespread powers with virtually no external controls. By the end of the war its head, Dzerzhinsky, was able to say that "the prisons are packed chiefly with workers and peasants instead of the bourgeoisie", and one of his chief lieutenants, Latsis, wrote that: "there is no sphere of life exempt from Cheka coverage." Lenin himself said that "during the war - anybody who placed his own interest above the common interests ... was shot.... we could not emerge from the old society without resorting to compulsion as far as the backward section of the proletariat was concerned."

Estimates of the numbers executed include 50,000 and 140,000 and George Leggett lists many unsubstantiated accusations of torture. Victor Serge later claimed that "during the civil war there was perfect order behind the front itself.... There was nothing to prevent the functioning of regular courts." But most of those killed never had a trial and one Cheka member recalled that "our Red detachments would 'clean up' villages exactly the way the Whites did. What was left of the inhabitants, old men, women, children, were machine-gunned for having given assistance to the enemy." [30]

The Bolshevik leadership sometimes clearly encouraged brutality. For instance, as the Whites threatened Petrograd, Lenin asked Trotsky: "Is it impossible to mobilise another 2,000 Petrograd workers plus 10,000 members of the bourgeoisie, set up cannons behind them, shoot a few hundred of them and obtain a real mass impact on Yudenich?" Trotsky thankfully disregarded this but the Bolsheviks did use terror against whole groups of people such as the Cossacks or the Tambov peasants. The Tambov rebellion of 1920-21 was extremely brutal and the Red Army crushed the uprising with the burning of villages and mass executions. One government order demanded that peasants should be shot simply for "giving shelter to members of a 'bandit's' family".

The Terror encouraged many anarchists to join Nestor Makhno's peasant movement in the Ukraine. This movement was much more popular than the Bolsheviks in some areas so the Red Army made three successful alliances with him against the Whites. In these areas only 'working people' could stand for soviet elections, not Bolsheviks

or SRs, but there were no restrictions on their press provided they did not advocate an armed uprising. However in the summer of 1919 the Bolsheviks executed several of Makhno's officers and tried to ban the Makhnovist peasant congresses. From then on the two sides fought fiercely whenever the White threat diminished. Both sides shot prisoners but Makhno's army tended to restrict executions to those in authority whereas the Bolsheviks shot many rank-and-file Makhnovists.[31]

'War Communism'

As the war intensified, many workers left the factories to search for food and industrial production collapsed. Lenin had been advocating "universal labour conscription" since before the revolution and in 1919 the militarisation of labour was widely used to cope with this desperate situation, with all citizens becoming liable for compulsory labour duty by 1920. Both Lenin and Trotsky advocated the use of "concentration camps" to deal with absenteeism and, in Moscow alone, the authorities executed 47 people for 'labour desertion'.[32]

To support the war against the Whites many workers worked day and night just for food but, when rations became intolerable, strikes often broke out. They occurred in all the major cities and compulsory labour and repression were important issues in a number of disputes. The stoppages in Petrograd in 1919 involved at least half the work force but Mary McAuley says they "posed no real threat to Bolshevik rule". This did not prevent the authorities from responding with what Lenin at one point called, "merciless arrests". There were also shootings and when a strike coincided with an army mutiny in the strategically important town of Astrakhan perhaps as many as 2,000 people were killed in street clashes.[33]

Such events were a product of civil war conditions but 'War Communist' measures like the militarisation of labour were also intensified for post-war reconstruction. Indeed Bukharin admitted that they had "conceived War Communism ...not as being related to the war", and he wrote that: "proletarian compulsion in all its forms, from executions to compulsory labour, constitutes, as paradoxical as this may sound, a method of the formation of a new communist humanity." This text has since been published with Lenin's notes and against this sentence the Bolshevik leader has simply written the word "precisely". At one point Lenin did say that there "is not yet anything communist in our economic system". However on several other occasions he described their policies towards the peasantry as "communist" and in 1919 he stated that: "The organisation of the communist activity of the proletariat and the entire policy of the Communists have now acquired a final, lasting form." [34]

Trotsky also said that they had hoped "to develop these methods of regimentation directly into a system of planned economy.... In other words, from 'military communism'

it hoped gradually, but without destroying the system, to arrive at genuine communism." Lenin later convinced him that they had been wrong to assume they could run the economy on "communist lines" at this time. But, in 1920, Trotsky wrote that the "militarisation of labour ... represents the inevitable method of organisation and disciplining of labour-power during the period of transition from capitalism to socialism", and that "the road to Socialism lies through a period of the highest possible intensification of the principle of the state ... which embraces the life of the citizens authoritatively in every direction".

Having militarised the rail union, Trotsky then proposed that every union should become completely subordinated to the state. At first Lenin supported him, but around 80% of the Petrograd work force took strike action that year and the union leaders soon persuaded Lenin that Trotsky's overt totalitarianism was inadvisable. So Lenin now opposed him using the argument that the unions needed a measure of autonomy so they could protect workers from their "workers' state with a bureaucratic twist". He then organised the defeat of Trotsky's faction at the 1921 party congress, a blow from which the Red Army leader never fully recovered.[35]

Lenin's surprising support for union autonomy never went beyond rhetoric. His government forcibly purged any independent unions, such as the printers', bakers' or women's unions, and when the 1921 trade union congress voted for union autonomy he had the decision reversed and the congress leaders demoted. Furthermore, although the unions, the SEC and the Moscow party all put up considerable resistance to 'one-man management', Lenin continued to oppose collegial administration, saying that they should "struggle against the remnants of [this] notorious democratism ... all this old harmful rubbish."

Lenin and his supporters were even more hostile to Alexandra Kollontai and the Workers Opposition who proposed that the unions should elect the various economic organs. The party leadership imposed their own people on the metalworkers' union, disbanded the Ukrainian central committee, expelled a number of oppositionists and banned all factions in the party.[36]

1921: Workers' Revolt and Kronstadt

After mass desertions earlier in the war it was the return of many peasants to the Red Army that helped clinch its victory over the Whites. Yet once this threat was over with the end of the fighting in November 1920, discontent erupted throughout the country. There were 118 peasant revolts in February 1921 alone. Unrest in the Red Army was comparable to that in the Imperial Army in 1917 and the Cheka had to put down a number of mutinies.

Zinoviev is reported to have said that 90% of the union rank-and-file opposed the government and severe food shortages provoked a huge wave of demonstrations and

strikes throughout the country. These protests were mainly initiated by workers rather than opposition activists. Their demands included free elections, the reconvening of the Constituent Assembly and an end to commissar privilege. Despite his sympathies with the Bolsheviks, Lewis Siegelbaum writes that "it would appear that workers' hostility towards Communist authority was as intense as it had been four years earlier with respect to the Tsarist regime." [37]

The Bolsheviks tried to contain the protests with martial law, the purging of activists from the factories, mass arrests and several shootings. However sailors at the off-shore Kronstadt naval base were able to continue demanding political reforms such as the freeing of socialist prisoners, new elections to the soviets and freedom to every left socialist party including the Bolsheviks. The majority of Kronstadt's Bolsheviks supported these demands but the party leadership made no serious attempts to negotiate and quickly moved to suppress the rebellion. They had to order some of their soldiers to attack the well-fortified base at gunpoint and it appears that hundreds of captured rebels were later killed.[38]

Trotskyists usually justify the Bolshevik's actions on the grounds that the heroic sailors of 1917 had been replaced by newly recruited peasants, easily influenced by counter-revolutionary ideas. But Evan Mawdsley and Israel Getzler cite Soviet research which shows that three-quarters of all the sailors in Kronstadt in 1921 had probably been there since World War One. It also clearly demonstrates that 90% of the sailors on the two main battleships were drafted before 1918.[39]

White exiles had tried to help the mutineers and the main leader of the rebellion, Petrichenko, did join the Whites for a period after the mutiny was suppressed. Still, there is no convincing evidence that the mutineers had any ties to the Whites during the rebellion itself and it appears that no foreign power even attempted to take military advantage of the situation. Moreover Lenin himself said, "there they do not want either the White Guards or our government". So the Bolshevik regime's need to suppress any rebellion calling for democracy was at least as much a factor in its attitude to the sailors as the threat of intervention from abroad.[40]

The Descent into 'Stalinism'

'War Communist' policies had led to administrative disintegration and a widespread reliance on the black market and corruption. Yet Lenin was still signing orders militarising industries in February 1921 and Siegelbaum says: " 'statism' ... reached its post-1917 height just when the military threat ... was receding. Not until the party was confronted with a major revolt (in 1921) ... was the leadership persuaded that this was not the way to proceed." The introduction of the New Economic Policy could not prevent scores of strikes that summer but it did stop

them spreading. From then on market forces, rather than the government, could be blamed for workers' plight.

The appalling famine of 1921-22 killed 3-6 million people and made any revival of workers' democracy difficult in the extreme. Nevertheless the Bolshevik dictatorship had exacerbated the death toll by failing to halt grain requisitioning in time and by delaying calls for international aid. Indeed, although the civil war was over, their use of repression became more systematic than ever.[41]

Trotsky argued that the Bolshevik party was "obliged to maintain its dictatorship ... regardless of the temporary vacillations even in the working class." While Lenin said: "we do not promise any freedom, or any democracy". He rejected the recommendations of a Cheka report calling for the legalisation of some of the socialist opposition, and his government responded to the nationwide resurgence of Mensheviks, SRs and anarchists by arresting thousands, including soviet deputies and former Bolsheviks. That year the authorities sentenced over 3,000 workers to forced labour for breaches of work discipline and the Red Army invaded Georgia in the face of much working class hostility.[42]

In 1922 Lenin recommended that "the application of the death sentence should be extended (commutable to deportation)... to all forms of activity by the Mensheviks, SRs and so on", and that: "The courts must not ban terror ... but must ... legalise it as a principle." He expelled 150 intellectuals from the country and party leaders banned the import of books they considered 'idealistic' or 'anti-scientific'. The authorities censored plays and sheet music and by 1924 there were even attempts to forbid the public performance of the foxtrot. Whatever Trotsky's attitude was to this he certainly advocated art "censorship" at this time.[43]

Before his death in 1924 Lenin did become genuinely worried about bureaucratisation. However, although his regime was less brutal than Stalin's, it still had no democratic mandate to rule from the working class. Many contemporary Trotskyists follow Lenin in arguing that the civil war had been so destructive that the Russian proletariat had "ceased to exist as a proletariat" so such a mandate was no longer an issue. Yet, even if the proletariat had disappeared, the idea of staying in power without a working class contradicts any principle of workers' self-emancipation. Moreover social historians have shown that the proletariat did survive the civil war, albeit in reduced numbers from 3.5 to 1.5 million.

Diane Koenker shows that, although Moscow's population halved in the war, only a third of those that left were workers. S.A.Smith says a proletarian core remained in all the industrial centres during the civil war, then, after the war, many workers returned to the cities. While Aves says that the evidence suggests that it was long-standing workers that took the initiative in the 1921 strikes. So it appears that Koenker is right to conclude that the govern-

ment made 'deurbanisation' and 'declassing' the "scapegoats for its political difficulties".[44]

The Bolshevik leadership also stifled democracy within the party and Lenin never seems to have considered lifting the faction ban. Many oppositionist Bolsheviks therefore left, or were expelled, and some joined organisations such as the Workers' Truth or Workers' Group. Discontent in the form of absenteeism and slow-working was still very common and after around 500 strikes in 1922 some of these oppositionists intervened in the large strike wave of 1923. This led to their arrest and the first significant imprisonments of Bolshevik oppositionists. In contrast the Left Opposition looked to Trotsky, even though, in the 1920s, he could not bring himself to criticise the faction ban, let alone the one-party state. Indeed, as Ernest Mandel said, he "led the way in formulating the condemnations" of groups like the Workers' Group.[45]

By 1927 unemployment exceeded two million and the peasants' reluctance to sell grain was jeopardising ambitious plans for industrialisation. The regime responded to this crisis by returning to the spirit of 'War Communism', with attacks on the 'kulaks', compulsory labour and terror. Over the next decade perhaps ten million people died, including many old Bolsheviks.

Trotsky's exclusion from power enabled him to make severe criticisms of Stalin's leadership. But in exile in 1932 he was still claiming that the achievements of Soviet industrialisation meant that "socialism as a system for the first time demonstrated its title to historic victory". He argued that the Opposition "may have temporarily to support" Stalin and as late as 1933 he even wrote to the Politburo advocating "agreement" and "full cooperation" with them if the Opposition returned to the party leadership. Indeed, no matter how critical he became of the Soviet Union, Trotsky never stopped defending this unprecedented barbarism as some sort of 'workers' state'.[46]

Trotskyists and the Bolsheviks in Power

This article raises numerous theoretical questions about the precise nature of the degeneration of the Russian revolution. However the surprising lack of knowledge of even the best contemporary revolutionaries makes it necessary to emphasise basic historical arguments rather than theory. Hopefully such basic history might now help lay the basis for analysis and debate that is based on the empirical realities of the time rather than prejudice.

Two major themes should be clear. The first, usually emphasised by Trotskyists, is the extent of the economic and social crisis throughout this period, making any attempts at workers' democracy difficult in the extreme. The second, promoted by anarchists and libertarians, is the total failure of the Bolshevik leadership to encourage workers' democracy to the greatest extent that was practical in these circumstances. Failure to do this permitted workers to lose

power faster than they might otherwise have done and it created a situation in which repression deprived the Soviet working class of any ability to resist the development of 'Stalinism'.

Trotskyists are right to say that a major cause of the degeneration of the revolution was its inability to spread which meant that it was crippled by objective factors such as economic backwardness, isolation and civil war. Nevertheless they are wrong to advocate a rigid determinism, minimising ideological factors. This is especially the case when at every stage of the bureaucratisation of the regime there were vocal critics within the Bolshevik party itself who proposed alternative policies that might have slowed this process.

Even if the appalling conditions of the civil war justified their policies then, they cannot excuse the repression both before and after the war. Of course Trotskyists could argue that the civil war and economic collapse started in 1917 so Lenin's attitudes were justified from the beginning. But soviet democracy withstood the crises of 1917 and then expanded sufficiently to make a revolution in October. So it must have had the potential to survive the threats of 1918 better than it did, especially as it was supposedly holding state power.

The civil war also cannot be used to excuse the Bolshevik leaders' lack of regret about their use of repression. For instance, although Lenin described the NEP as a 'defeat', at no stage did he describe the suppression of soviet democracy and workers' control in such language. Indeed the Bolsheviks even called their civil war policies "communist" although they were obviously the antithesis of genuine communism.

It is easy to criticise with the benefit of hindsight. However there is something very disturbing about the fact that Trotskyists still claim that the Bolsheviks were acting as communists after 1918 when they were clearly acting more as agents of the degeneration of the revolution. Material conditions did limit everything at this time but this includes Lenin and Trotsky's ideas so their applicability eighty years later is surely also severely limited.

Effectively many Trotskyists are arguing that, if it is necessary, Marx's insistence on "self-emancipation" and a democratic workers' republic can be postponed provided people like Lenin and Trotsky run the 'workers' state' and raise the red flag for international revolution. Yet for the Bolsheviks to suppress the Russian working class - on behalf of a world working class that has no say in this policy - contradicts any concept of proletarian self-emancipation. Workers will never be inspired by a Marxism that offers the possibility of state subjugation in a 'holding operation' until the whole world has had a revolution. This argument also assumes that Lenin's internationalism could have remained intact while the revolution degenerated all around him. But future writing will show that his internationalism was compromised not long after

October.

Some Trotskyists do have criticisms of a number of Bolshevik policies, such as the post-war restrictions on soviet democracy. However none of them are willing to stray too far from Trotsky's own reservations which he only really voiced when he had lost power. Their lack of appreciation of what might be valuable in the Bolshevik tradition is shown by the fact that no Trotskyist organisation today allows the range of views that coexisted in the Bolshevik party even during the civil war. Besides, considering the extent of the repression resorted to by Lenin's regime, the priority is not to criticise individual policies but to try and work out how revolutionaries could have avoided getting into this appalling situation in the first place.

If the Bolsheviks had respected workers' democracy they may well have lost power. Nevertheless this would have been a gamble, like the October revolution, that they would have been right to take, one that in itself would have restored some of the party's popularity. It would also have had more chance of success than Trotsky's bureaucratic attempts to prevent Stalin's dictatorship. Even if the gamble had failed, the outcome could not have been worse than 'Stalinism', which not only slaughtered millions, but did so in the name of communism and so stifled the prospects for revolution world-wide for the rest of the century. Furthermore some of the revolutionary consciousness of the Russian working class might have survived a capitalist restoration, whereas 'Stalinism' totally destroyed it.

The only real problem with this argument is that it marginalises the role of the working class by emphasising the choices the Bolshevik leaders could have made. These choices were limited, in part, by the limitations of the whole Bolshevik approach; for instance even the Workers' Opposition joined the suppression of Kronstadt.

Trotskyists could use such examples to defend Lenin on the grounds that even his critics agreed with him on the need for repression. However it seems better to use them to reveal more fundamental limitations in the whole ideology and practice of 20th century revolutionary socialism, whether anarchist or Marxist. This politics was always constrained by the requirement to develop the productive forces. As Goodey shows, the factory committees were just as keen on this 'productivism' as Lenin and simply making this sort of socialism more democratic, as Farber and Sirianni suggest, is insufficient as an alternative. On the other hand revolutionary Russia would have had to develop industrial production, an ideal communist society was obviously not an immediate possibility.

In the end perhaps the most interesting aspect of this whole issue is why so many Marxists who claim to believe in workers' self-emancipation defend a politics that effectively denies it. One reason is that neither anarchists nor libertarian communists have succeeded in fully develop-

ing a critique that could lead to a practical alternative to the top down approach of the Bolsheviks. Without revolution in the West the Russian revolution was doomed to fail. But unless the revolutionary left can develop a coherent self-emancipatory politics that fully dissociates itself from its horrific degeneration the working class will, rightly, continue to reject our ideas. I hope to discuss such a politics in future writing.

Notes

Rosenberg, McAuley, Rabinowitch, Malle, Smith and Rigby have significant sympathies with the Bolsheviks. Medvedev, Fitzpatrick, Sirianni, Avrich, Sakwa, Remington, Aves and Service are more critical. Leggett, Figs and Shkliarevsky are right-wing.

1 S.A.Smith in H.Shukman, *The Blackwell Encyclopaedia of the Russian Revolution*; Goodey, *Critique*, n3; R.Suny in D.Kaiser, *The Workers' Revolution in Russia*, 17.

2 Lenin, *Collected Works* (henceforth LCW) v25, 361-4; v26, 467-8; S.A.Smith, *Red Petrograd*, 228. See *Radical Chains* no.3 on Lenin's views before October.

3 C.Sirianni, *Workers' Control...*, (henceforth Sirianni), 150-1, 116, and *Economic and Industrial Democracy* v6n1 (henceforth Sirianni, Economic), 65; LCW v26, 264-5.

4 Smith, 209-14, 259; Sirianni, 100-1, 116-20; T.Remington, *Building Socialism in Soviet Russia*, 38-45; Remington in D.Koenker, *Party, State and Society in the Russian Civil War*, 213-5, 228.

5 G.Shkliarevsky, *Labour in the Russian Revolution*, 150; S.White, *Russia Goes Dry*, 17; LCW v26, 414; Smith, 239; Sirianni, 123. R. Service says these print workers were Mensheviks who threatened strikes against press restrictions. *Lenin, A Political Life* v2, 301-2.

6 Sirianni, *Economic*, 79-80; Smith, 203-4, 226, 256-9; Smith in Kaiser, 71; S.Malle, *The Economic Organisation of War Communism*, 94-5; Sirianni, 130-3. Shkliarevsky (117-19, 172-5) claims that Lenin had only supported the committees because he needed an ally in the first weeks of the new regime. This might explain his lack of support for them once the Bolsheviks gained the allegiance of the trade union congress in January. G.Swain, *Sbornik*, n12.

- 7 Sirianni, *Economic*, 72-77; Sirianni, 109-15; Smith in Shukman, 23; Smith, 247, 260; Malle, 101. Factory committees even called for labour conscription.
- 8 Sirianni, *Economic*, 72-3; Sirianni, 118-20; W.Rosenberg, *Slavic Review* v44n2, 227 (also in Kaiser).
- 9 Smith, 218-21; Sirianni, 125-7.
- 10 Sirianni, *Economic*, 65; Smith, 222-5, 239-40; M.McAuley, *Bread and Justice: State and Society in Petrograd 1917-22*, 216; Sirianni, 151-3; R.Pipes, *The Russian Revolution*, 676-7; Malle, 56-7, 159; E.Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution* v2, 90n, 253.
- 11 Goodey, 30-45 (and *Critique* n4 and 5); Smith, 203-8, 305; McAuley, 218.
- 12 LCW v27, 245-6, 253, 267-71. Lenin was still defending local nationalisations in January but had clearly changed his mind by the spring.
- 13 R.Daniels, *A Documentary History of Communism* v1, 100; Sirianni, 146-9.
- 14 R.McNeal, *Resolutions and Decisions of the CPSU* v2, 48; LCW v27, 300, 338-40; v42, 86; Smith, 247-5; Malle, 112; *Critique* pamphlet n1, 'Theses of the Left Communists', 5; R.Kowalski, *The Bolshevik Party in Conflict*, 21. Shkliarevsky (188) cites Lenin saying: "Entrepreneurs should be entrusted with creating the norms of labour discipline".
- 15 Rosenberg, 236; D.Mandel, *The Petrograd Workers...* v2, 378. Lenin angrily rejected proposals that workers in nationalised industries should elect the majority of their management boards even though they would still be subject to the SEC. Consequently the June congress of economic councils decided that only a third of management was to be elected by workers and the rest by the economic councils or the SEC. The SEC could permit the regional unions to nominate a third of management but union leaders were becoming increasingly dependent on the new regime for funding and jobs and the trade union council even opposed workers meeting during work hours. Smith, 241; Sirianni, 123-9, 155-7, 213-7, 225-7; Malle, 115-7.
- 16 Rabinowitch in Koenker, 153, 138; Sirianni, 204; T.Rigby, *Lenin's Government*, 51, 62.
- 17 McAuley, 91-4, 62; Adelman, *Russian History* v9, 93; P.Kenez, *The Birth of the Propaganda State*, 43; R.Wade, *Red Guards and Workers' Militia...*, 318-29; Shukman, 186.
- 18 Farber, *Before Stalinism...*, 22-3, 194-5; Remington, 101-5; McAuley, 94; V.Brovkin, *The Mensheviks after October* (henceforth Brovkin, *Mensheviks*), ch.5; LCW v27, 126, 133, 272. Shkliarevsky (154) says Red Guards opened fire to disperse workers in Tula in January 1918 and Brovkin that 28 were shot that spring in the Urals.
- 19 P.Avrich, *The Russian Anarchists*, 183-9; R.Sakwa, *Soviet Communists in Power, a Study of Moscow...*, 171. Serge later wrote that counter-revolutionaries had infiltrated these centres, but the Cheka did not justify the raids in these terms at the time.
- 20 Rosenberg, 230-8; McAuley, 99-108; Shkliarevsky, 155; J.Von Gelderen, *Bolshevik Festivals*, 88-91.
- 21 R.Medvedev, *The Bolshevik Revolution*, 156-9; O.Figes, *Peasant Russia, Civil War*, 197-8, 253-7, 335; Sirianni, 177-9, 189; LCW v36, 489, 695n; Farber, 46; R.Service, *Lenin, a Political Life* v3, 43. In *State within a State* (97) E.Albats cites Cheka documents authorising "concentration camps" for Mensheviks as early as spring 1918.
- 22 I.Getzler, *Martov*, 181; Farber, 124, 27; LCW v35, 336; McAuley, 103-7, 381; Rosenberg, 236. Some Trotskyists claim the Menshevik leader Martov told rail workers they should be "friendly to the Czechs and hostile to the Bolsheviks", but the only source for this is a Right Menshevik who was "in the process of working his passage to Bolshevik favour" at the time. D.Footman, *The Russian Civil War*, 101.
- 23 D.Mandel, 356, 381, 406; Sakwa, 72; Rosenberg, 236-8; Smith, 250.
- 24 Medvedev, 148; Brovkin, *Slavic Review* v44n3, 244-9; Rabinowitch, *Russian Review* v54, 426; G.Leggett, *The Cheka...*, 74-82; V.Brovkin, *Behind the Front Lines of the Civil War* (henceforth Brovkin); Brovkin, *Mensheviks*, 123-4; P.Kenez in Shukman, 154. The Left SRs told Dzerzhinsky "you can retain power". L.Hafner says that actions such as hostage taking and the mutiny of an Eastern Front commander only occurred after the Bolsheviks began to repress them by, for instance, arresting the Left SR delegates at the Soviet Congress. And the author of the telegram usually quoted to claim that the Left SRs thought they had taken power was not a Left SR at all. *Russian Review* v50, 329-42.
- 25 Malle, 373-5, 498-9; Farber, 48; Sirianni, 189-197; Medvedev, 183-4; L.Lih, *Bread and Authority...*, 147, 168, 187; L.Siegelbaum, *Soviet State and Society between Revolutions*, 43-5. In 1920 Lenin appears to have rejected proposals from both Trotsky and the Congress of Economic Councils to reduce requisitioning. This and the fact that local Bolsheviks argued the local soviets could do any requisitioning and that the NEP was introduced in conditions even worse than those of 1918 all indicate that alternatives were possible. Nove in T.Brotherstone, *Trotsky Reappraisal*, 193.
- 26 Figes, *Past and Present*, n129, 182.

27 Brovkin, *Mensheviks*, ch.9; Farber, 99, 124-5; J.Aves, *Workers against Lenin*, 37, 18-20, 56, 72; V.Broido, *Lenin and the Mensheviks*, 39; Brovkin, 63-6, 119, 167, 284-7; McAuley, 137-8. The Central Committee exhorted Bolsheviks to "imprison and sometimes even to shoot hundreds of traitors among the Kadets, the politically neutral, the Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries, who act (some with arms, some conspiring, others agitating against mobilisation, like the printers and the railwaymen among the Mensheviks) against the Soviet Government, i.e. for Denikin." Leggett, 319.

28 Sakwa, 178; Farber, 27; LCW v29, 535; v30, 506; v31, 175-6, 40-1, 49. In 1919 anarchists threw a bomb at the Moscow Bolshevik leadership in revenge for continued arrests. The attack was disavowed by most anarchist leaders but it provoked further repression. Avrich, *The Russian Anarchists*.

29 McAuley, 135-9; D.Gluckstein, *The Tragedy of Bukharin*, 38; N.Tumarkin, *Lenin Lives!*, ch.13; Farber, 173; B.Pearce, *How the Revolution was Armed* v1, 487-8; LCW v33, 70-1.

30 Farber, 117-19; LCW v35, 349; v30, 510; Leggett, 465, 198, 184, 328-33, 349; E.Poretsky, *Our Own People*, 214. In the first months repression was relatively mild and many prisons had education facilities. However concentration camps were set up from July 1918 and mortality reached 30% in those in the north. Leggett says they were sometimes cleared by mass executions. The death penalty was formally abolished in 1920 but it was evaded by the local chekas and revoked by the summer. M.Jakobson, *The Origins of the Gulag*, 37, 23-4, 40.

31 Farber, 123; Service, 43; M.Palij, *The Anarchism of Nestor Makhno*, 151-2, 175-7, 212-19; M.Malet, *Nestor Makhno...*, 32, 39, 100, 129, 136.

32 Sakwa, 62-90; LCW v26, 65, 467-8; v42, 170; J.Bunyan, *The Origin of Forced Labour in the Soviet State*, 127, 166. Dzerzhinsky even recommended "concentration camps" for "lateness". Pipes, 834.

33 McAuley, 239-52; Aves, 69, 41-55; Sakwa, 94-5; R.Pipes, *The Unknown Lenin*, 66; Brovkin, 67-95.

34 Aves, 5, 37; L.Szamuely, *First Models of the Socialist Economic System* p108n; Bukharin, *The Economics of the Transition Period*, 160, 221; LCW v30, 143-4, 286; v27, 439; v33, 58-64, 421-2.

35 Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed*, 28-9, 169-70, 137 and *Terrorism and Communism*, 143, 162-3; LCW v33, 58; Tsuji, *Revolutionary Russia* v2n1, 67-8, 59; Service, 153; Brovkin, 287-99; Aves, 81, 33, 69; S.Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution ('94)*, 100; M.Brinton, *The Bolsheviks and Workers Control*, 61-4. Trotsky also said "the working class ... must be thrown here and there, appointed, commanded, just like soldiers" and compulsory labour

"is the basis of socialism". At least 82 railworkers were shot that year.

36 Farber, 84-6, 30; Sirianni, 232-3; Aves, 57, 66-7, 178, 167-9; Siegelbaum, 36, 82; Fitzpatrick, 101. Serge witnessed the rigging of an election to ensure Lenin's victory in the trade union debate. Lenin said they should "keep quiet" on state/union "coalescence" because it was happening anyway, and, although he advocated strike funds during the NEP, most strikes occurred without union sanction. Serge, *Memoirs of a Revolutionary*, 123, 115; LCW v32, 26-7, 61; Hatch in Fitzpatrick, *Russia in the Era of the NEP*, 64-5.

37 Figes, *Past and Present*, n129, 199; P.Avrich, *Kronstadt 1921*, 14, 20; Hagen in Fitzpatrick, *Russia in the era of the NEP*, 161; Farber, 88; Siegelbaum, 77. Service says there were already secret shops for Bolshevik officials, and over 4,000 soldiers were executed in 1921. *New Statesman*, Jan. 27, '95, 22-3; Volkogonov, *Trotsky...*, 181.

38 McAuley, 407-9; Aves, 62, 72, 114-29, 139-54, 165-82; Farber, 125, 188-9; Sakwa, 241-7; Brovkin, 392-9; Avrich, 6, 47, 71-87, 135-44, 154, 181, 207, 215-20. Workers also demanded the removal of armed squads from the factories. The Petrograd soviet did propose a visit to Kronstadt but this was after the regime had executed 45 unarmed mutineers at Oranienbaum and had demanded they 'surrender unconditionally'. Avrich says the sailors' slogan was never "soviets without communists" but: "All power to the Soviets and not to the Parties". He also says that "the historian can sympathise with the rebels and still concede that the Bolsheviks were justified and Serge did choose the Bolsheviks over the rebels. On the other hand Serge later wrote that "it would have been easy to avoid the worst: it was necessary only to accept the mediation offered by the anarchists". D.Cotterill, *The Serge-Trotsky Papers*, 164, 171.

39 I.Getzler, *Kronstadt 1917-21*, 207-8; Mawdsley, *Soviet Studies* v24, 509; Farber, 192-3.

40 Avrich, 94-5, 118-22, 217; McAuley, 389; LCW v32, 184, 228. Avrich says that, even if the rebels had received considerable aid, "sooner or later they were bound to succumb". There was anti-Semitism in both Kronstadt and Petrograd but it was no worse than that in the Red Army and Trotsky received hundreds of reports of his soldiers attacking Jews. Figes, 196.

41 Gluckstein, 47; Siegelbaum, 37, 89; Malle, 501-6; T.Friedgut, *Iuzovka and Revolution* v2, 429-33; Edmondson, *Soviet Studies* v29, 507ff.; Lih, 254. In *Peasant Russia...* (268-72) Figes says requisitioning continued despite "clear signals" of the famine. Meanwhile the Cheka was still ordering beatings of oppositionists. Albat, 98.

42 LCW v32, 494-5; v45, 84; Deutscher, *The Prophet Armed*, 508-9; Sakwa, 245-6; Farber, 134-5, 197; Hatch,

Soviet Studies v39, 560, 570; Siegelbaum, 77, 84, and in *Slavic Review* v51, 712-4; Sakwa in J.Cooper, *Soviet History*, 47; R.Debo, *Survival and Consolidation*, 178-9, 358-63; G.Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, 205. Lenin said, an offensive by the bourgeoisie “is never ruled out. Until the final issue is decided, this awful state of war will continue. And we say: ‘A la guerre comme a la guerre; we do not promise any freedom, or any democracy’. We tell the peasants quite openly that they must choose between the rule of the bourgeoisie or the rule of the Bolsheviks.” He was hesitant to invade Georgia but his Central Committee supported preparations for war and he never argued for withdrawal.

43 LCW v33, 358; v42, 419; v45, 555; Cliff, Trotsky v2, 25; C.Read, *Culture and Power in Revolutionary Russia*, 181; Fox, *Soviet Studies* v44n6, 1053-8; Service v3, 245-6; Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution*, 221. L.Schapiro says Lenin briefly considered the “legalisation” of the Mensheviks in 1922 but soon abandoned the idea. *The Origins of the Communist Autocracy*, 208.

44 Smith in Shukman, 25; Siegelbaum and Chase, *Modern Encyclopaedia of Russian and Soviet History* v55, 59-64; Koenker, 91-100; Aves, 48-51, 91, 125-6, 148; N.Harding, *Lenin's Political Thought* v2, ch.13. Many new workers were spouses and children of long-standing urban workers and, although many of the most politicised workers had left Moscow's factories, when they joined the Red Army they were often still stationed in the city. Then from 1922-23 to 1925-26 the number of wage earners increased by 50%. McAuley (244-5) argues that by calling oppositionist workers ‘backward elements’ the Bolsheviks were just resorting to the same accusations that the SRs and Mensheviks had levelled at their supporters in 1917. Rassweiler, *The Journal of Social History* v17, 149-50; P.Bellis, *Marxism and the USSR*, 79.

45 Service, *The Bolshevik Party...*, 165 and *International Socialism*, n55, 79; W.Chase, *Workers, Soviets...*, 258-9, 222; Aves, 184; Siegelbaum, 104-8, 130-6; E.Mandel, *Trotsky as Alternative*, 37; T.Cliff, Trotsky v3, 17, 56, 154. Avrich says the GPU made a bungled attempt to execute the Workers Group leader in 1922. *Russian Review* v43, 16.

46 Fitzpatrick, 120; *Writings of Leon Trotsky*, 1932, 260; ...1932-33, 142; Deutscher, *Prophet Outcast*, 175; Getty, *Soviet Studies* v38, 25-30. Serge said that Bolshevism may have contained the germs of Stalinism but it contained “a mass of other germs”. However in 1921 he identified those ‘Stalinist’ germs by saying: “the central error of the present Russian regime is its establishment of a whole bureaucratic-state mechanism to administer production, instead of (as in syndicalism) leaving this to the workers organised by industry. And its major misfortune is that it has fought against every individual initiative, every opposition, every criticism - however fraternal and revolutionary - every infusion of liberty, by methods of centralised

discipline and military repression.” Cotterill, 14.

47 My selective use of recent social history does not do full justice to this work and this should be read directly to get a better idea of the period.



Dictatorship and Democracy in the Russian Revolution

Simon Pirani

One of the great consequences of Stalinism's downfall is the opportunity it has created to study the Russian revolution anew. The Stalinist lie machine, which tried so hard to bury this history, has disintegrated. Many of the lies against which generations of Trotskyists fought - that Trotsky was a counter-revolutionary agent, etc - have evaporated. Of course now the bourgeoisie insists, louder than ever, that the whole revolution led inevitably to Stalinism. But for those who want to study the revolution in the context of developing a truly communist outlook for the 21st century, there are welcome possibilities. Russia in general, and the historical archives in particular, are open to us. As a result, the body of serious scholarship on the revolution, and particularly its social history - to which the article *Beyond Kronstadt* refers - has swelled as a result. So the article's call to develop discussion on the left 'beyond the usual argument about the Kronstadt rebellion' is welcome. Here I suggest some directions in which the discussion could go.

How to approach the revolution

MK, author of *Beyond Kronstadt*, raises questions about the character of the Bolshevik dictatorship which, when raised in the past, provoked a knee-jerk reaction from many Trotskyists. They would refer to the unfavourable objective circumstances in which the Bolsheviks ruled ... and scurry back to Trotsky's writings in the hope of finding reference to the particular issue raised.

They rarely found anything helpful, of course. In his final exile, when he could view the Bolshevik regime with hindsight, Trotsky wrote very little about many particular issues of the type raised by MK. The reason is not hard to work out. Trotsky's priorities at that time were to elaborate the political and theoretical bases of the Fourth International and to defend himself and others against the Stalinist terror. As for Russia, Trotsky in *The Revolution Betrayed* deals with broad outlines; in *The History of the Russian Revolution* he stops in October 1917; in *My Life* and *Stalin* he certainly deals with particular incidents, but mainly those which personally involved either himself or Stalin, mainly from the standpoint of answering Moscow's fantastic falsifications, and often avoiding, for obvious political reasons, one of the most interesting historical issues - his own disagreements with Lenin.

However Trotsky *did* indicate the basis of a theoretical approach to the Bolshevik dictatorship. Arguing against those who saw Stalinism as a continuation of Bolshevism,

he wrote: 'Bolshevism [...] is only [only!] a political tendency, closely fused with the working class but not identical with it. And aside from the working class there exist in the Soviet Union a hundred million peasants, various nationalities, and a heritage of oppression, misery and ignorance. The state built up by the Bolsheviks reflects not only the thought and will of Bolshevism but also the cultural level of the country, the social composition of the population, the pressure of a barbaric past and no less barbaric world imperialism.' (1)

In a letter to Margaret De Silver, companion of the Italian-American anarchist Carlo Tresca, Trotsky, specifically defending the imposition of a single-party dictatorship from 1920, returned to the theme of barbarism: 'The dictatorship of a party belongs to the barbarian prehistory as does the state itself, but we can not jump over this chapter, which can open (not at one stroke) genuine human history. [...] Abstractly speaking, it would be very well if the party dictatorship could be replaced by the "dictatorship" of the whole toiling people without any party, but this presupposes such a high level of political development among the masses that it can never be achieved under capitalist conditions. The reason for the revolution comes from the circumstance that capitalism does not permit the material and the moral development of the masses.' (2).

Comments such as these have been taken by 'Trotskyists' as the last word of a saint on the subject of dictatorship, and by anarchists as the self-justification of a sinner. I propose instead they should be taken as a starting-point. Barbarism, Bolshevism, international isolation ... all were factors in the revolution and its degeneration. We must untangle how they confronted each other and combined with each other.

How the Bolsheviks fell out with the Petrograd workers

MK, author of *Beyond Kronstadt*, focuses on the fact that ideals of mass democratic decision-making were never achieved in the Russian revolution, and indeed appeared to have been all but forgotten by the summer of 1918.

Even by the spring of that year, the explosion of revolutionary organisation that had made the Bolshevik seizure of power possible - the formation of factory committees, Red Guards and soviets, the revolt in the army and the

peasant seizures of land - had already receded. Industrial administration, to the extent that there was any, was being centralised under state control. The factory committees, as MK shows, never progressed from workers' control (in the sense of checking and accounting) to any system of self-management.

MK emphasises that the attitudes of both factory committees and of state officials 'degenerated' and became less democratic; 'the plans of the Bolshevik leadership were considerably less democratic than those of the factory committees'; 'the [Bolshevik] leadership failed to insist on democracy in the committees'. He mentions the collapse of Petrograd's industry in the winter of 1917-18, but the implications of this need further thought.

In Petrograd, the citadel of the revolution, the number of employed industrial workers fell from 406,312 (January 1917) to 339,641 (January 1918) and thence to 120,553 (September 1918). There was 'one of the most rapid and least controlled demobilisations [from the army] in history'. Bread supplies fell to one-third of what they had been in early 1917. There was malnutrition and then typhus. (3)

How on earth could the factory committees, or the Bolsheviks, build anything in these circumstances? The Petrograd workforce, which had been central to the seizure of power, was literally breaking up. The number of rank-and-file Bolsheviks in the city fell from 43,000 in October 1917 to 7,000 in August 1918. The factory committees had to use armed force to fetch the workers' wages and to protect goods, stores, railway lines and even their workforce from marauding bands from other factories (4).

Incidentally, it is in this context that Lenin's draft article of December 1917, *How To Organise Competition*, quoted by MK, should be placed. The article's theme is the development of the 'independent initiative of the workers, and of all working and exploited people generally'. The punitive measures Lenin advocates are to him 'practical successes our "communes" and our worker and peasant organisers should be proud of'; that is, Lenin thought of them as measures to be taken by the mass organisations. The 'rogues' against which Lenin advocates punishments are bracketed with 'the rich'. In referring to 'shirkers' and 'idlers' he probably meant the 'newcomers' who arrived in the factories during the war, whose backwardness he contrasts with the 'advanced, class-conscious workers' who made the revolution (5). What is unpleasant about such statements is the way that 'Leninists' subsequently made them a model of how to behave. On the contrary, they are evidence of how revolutionaries reacted when faced with trying to feed a starving population, i.e. the impact of barbarism on Bolshevism.

Could the factory committees, working under these conditions, have gone further in developing workers' self-management? It is hard to see how. In the debate in *Critique* mentioned by MK, the one thing that Chris Goodey

and Maurice Brinton agree on is that the committees 'were the most powerful institution in Russia by the end of 1917' (6). But neither of them address the crippling limitations imposed on this power by the appalling material deprivation.

The Bolshevik leadership's answer to these impossible circumstances was the centralisation of industry under the Supreme Economic Council. The factory committee leaderships supported this. Brinton's original pamphlet, *The Bolsheviks and Workers Control*, claims that the factory committees were subordinated to the unions, the unions to the Supreme Economic Council, and the latter to Lenin's closest supporters; at every stage the adversary of self-management 'appeared in the garb of the new proletarian power' (7). In fact centralisation was the response to chaos; within a few months it developed into ultra-centralisation as a response to civil war.

MK says that the problem was Bolshevik thinking, 'limited by the Marxism of the Second International'. Surely the point is that the seizure of power opened the door to developing the practice of workers' self-management and thereby the thinking on the subject - and such development began. But economic collapse, famine and civil war rapidly closed the door again. The damage has been done subsequently, by those who want to take Bolshevik responses of that period as a model for future socialist revolutions. In fact future revolutions will certainly be made on a higher material basis.

As MK states, by the spring of 1918 relationships between the centralised state power and the Petrograd working class, strained by devastating poverty, had to a large extent broken down. But does this tragic breach not underline just how unfavourable conditions were for the development of, and experimentation with, workers' self-management? (Arguments to the effect that for some reason it 'should not have been' developed must be consigned to the dustbin along with all arguments about what 'should' or 'should not' have been done).

What remained of the factory committees came together in the Assembly of Factory Representatives mentioned by MK. The most popular demands were for action on food supplies. Mensheviks and SRs became active in the assembly, linking these issues to their own calls for the convocation of the Constituent Assembly. The movement was met by government repression, most notoriously on 7 May, 1918, when Red guards opened fire on a crowd of women who marched from their food queues to protest in the town square. Red guards were used to patrol workers' districts and to arrest SRs and other opposition forces (8).

War communism

MK presents the period 1917-21 as a series of dilemmas about workers' democracy. Few people saw it like that at the time. The dilemmas were more often posed in terms

of centralisation. The Bolshevik leaders tried to resist the centrifugal tendencies inevitably set in motion by the historical explosion of 1917; to the working-class rank-and-file, this often looked like treachery. Once the civil war broke out in earnest, the Bolsheviks regarded overcoming these tendencies as a matter of survival.

At this point (mid-1918), hopes of international revolution were receiving one setback after another. After the crippling Brest Litovsk treaty (March) came the bloodbath which drowned the Finnish communist uprising (April), Kamenev's return from a trip to western Europe from which he reported 'comrades, we are alone' (August) (9), and the defeat of the German revolution (November). Deprived of the support that international revolution might have provided, the Bolsheviks tried to defend what had been gained. The most centralising act was the formation of the Red Army. This itself was a break with the traditions of the left of the Second International; that left had championed the slogans of 'people's militia' and 'the armed nation' against social chauvinism. Now hopes of a people's militia vanished even more rapidly than those of workers' self-management. Trotsky's proposals to subsume autonomous Red guard units into the army, to scrap the election of officers and soldiers' committees (practices adopted in the course of the 1917 revolution) and to introduce military justice met with stringent opposition (10). Then came the more long-lasting dispute over the use of military specialists.

The economy was centralised to serve the needs of the centralised army. The government declared Russia 'a single military camp' and army requirements took first priority; forcible requisitioning of grain was introduced; there was widespread nationalisation; the currency devalued into oblivion and trade was widely replaced by rationing on one hand and barter on the other.

So communists who had certainly stood for the self-activity of the masses in 1917 now saw the only way forward as super-centralisation. The Left Communists, whose stand against the Brest-Litovsk treaty had won the support of many of the strongest Bolshevik party organisations, were effectively split down the middle by the issue of centralisation. The Left Communist leader Bukharin became its most enthusiastic advocate; his erstwhile Left Communist comrades Osinsky, Sapronov, Smirnov and others saw the bureaucratism which accompanied centralisation as the main danger, and formed the Democratic Centralist opposition to fight it (11).

The Democratic Centralist group continued to warn of the consequences of such bureaucratisation throughout the civil war. It is to be hoped that their documents (which, like those of most of the early opposition groupings, are not available in English) will now be studied. However, of equal interest may be the dilemma of 1920 when, having won the civil war with this highly-centralised state machine, the communists were faced with building the new world for which they had been fighting. Was the su-

per-centralised machine to be switched to peace-time use? Or did it need to be partly dismantled? Could it survive without retreating before the tide of peasant discontent? Could it be used to spread the revolution westwards?

At the end of the civil war most communists believed the world was truly at their feet. They had overwhelmed the Whites and defied the imperialist blockade. Now they convinced themselves that, by continuing the measures that had worked so well in wartime, they could find a shortcut to communism. As the country sank deeper into poverty, many of the communists and their allies became filled with an incredible revolutionary optimism. To the question, how had he managed to live with no money in 1920, the anarchist-minded modernist novelist, Boris Pilniak, replied that he had lived very well; 1920, he said, 'should be written about - not only for Russia, but for the entire world, because that year was the most wonderful in the history of humanity.' Those in communist circles who saw the wartime measures as temporary were 'regarded with disdain' (12).

The unreality of the situation was patent. However high the vanguard's hopes, Russia's industry and economy were wrecked. Peasant and workers were in revolt. In February 1920, Trotsky proposed to retreat out of the blind alley; he urged an abandonment of requisitioning and greater freedom of trade, to try to restart the economy; this was rejected by the Bolshevik central committee. He then returned with redoubled vigour to proposals he had made in December 1919 to militarise labour. This meant, principally, the mobilisation of Red Army units for civil construction projects. It was combined in industry with the replacement of collegial management by one-man management (13).

If Trotsky temporarily saw the Red Army as a shortcut to economic reconstruction, Lenin saw it as a shortcut to an even more basic goal: to spread the revolution to western Europe. In April 1920, the Polish nationalist leader Pilsudski invaded Ukraine and handed Lenin the chance to try this shortcut. The Red Army was ordered to pursue Pilsudski back into Poland. During the second Comintern congress in July that year, its progress was monitored by excited delegates on a map. But the Red army found little support from the Polish population and suffered a very serious defeat. Lenin's speech on the lessons of this defeat, buried in the secret archives by the Stalinists until 1992, makes fascinating reading.

Lenin's error in pressing for this offensive revolutionary war without the support of a movement in Poland had 'great historical consequences', Trotsky wrote later; it was a 'grave' mistake whose scale was 'in accord with the titanic scope of [Lenin's] work'. We would do well to develop this line of thinking, rather than emulating the 'ikon painters' and hero-worshippers of Lenin whom Trotsky derides in the same passage (14).

Making a virtue out of necessity

In 1920 some key Bolshevik leaders not only hoped that a shortcut to communism was possible but theorised about it in a manner which they largely repudiated within a few months. 'Ideology, which had taken on its own dynamic, very often transformed provisional, transitional measures into a system - which in its turn influenced the measures and prolonged them beyond what was necessary,' Karl Radek wrote, with reference to such theorising, in 1922.

The most worked-out theoretical justification of civil war centralisation was Bukharin's *The Economics of the Transitional Period*. Trotsky's *Terrorism and Communism* also contains an extensive defence of the militarisation of labour as a means for 'the transition to socialism'. Trotsky wrote that one-man management in industry was desirable *regardless* of the civil war - which implied that it was desirable out of principle, not out of necessity. 'The dictatorship of the proletariat is expressed in the abolition of private property, [...] in the supremacy over the whole Soviet mechanism of the collective will of the workers, and not at all in the form in which individual economic enterprises are administered'. At this time workers' self-management could not have been further from his mind. (15)

What happened to all these ideological pronouncements when, virtually overnight, the 'war communist' policies were abandoned and replaced by the New Economic Policy? In a report to the Comintern in 1922, Trotsky critically surveyed 'war communism'; he said that the policy of confiscating peasant surpluses had lowered agricultural production; the policy of equal wages had lowered labour productivity and 'centralised bureaucratic management' had obstructed 'genuine centralised management'. Inherent in the assumptions of war communism, he said, had been the idea that 'the revolutionary development in western Europe would proceed more swiftly'; this would have enabled the backward Russian economy to overcome many of its problems (16).

In the early years of NEP, there were widespread discussions in the Bolshevik party about the mistakes of the previous period, and a study of these would no doubt deepen our understanding of the revolution's history (17). However it surely is already clear that *The Economics of the Transition Period*, *Terrorism and Communism* and also Bukharin and Preobrazhenskii's *ABC of Communism* are to be studied as records of socialism's past travails and in no sense as guidebooks for the future. (They certainly have been used as guidebooks. The *ABC of Communism* was treated as a manual for building socialism in the International Socialists in the 1970s. In the Workers Revolutionary Party, extensive analogies were drawn between the WRP, Trotsky in the civil war and Cromwell; both *Terrorism and Communism* and Trotsky's *Military Writings* were highly recommended reading.)

1921 - Lenin's Thermidor?

While in 1920 Pilniak was experiencing the most wonderful year in history, and communists were enthusing about rapidly building the new society, discontent was growing among both workers and peasants. A powerful strike movement swept through many industrial areas. The peasant revolts were on an even greater scale: that led by Antonov in Tambov province, starting in the autumn of 1920, was a miniature civil war; there were also uprisings on the Volga, in central Russia and in Siberia (18). It is the scale of this movement that makes the issue about the class background of the Kronstadt sailors who revolted - raised by Trotsky in 1938 in his dispute with Serge and argued about ever since - seem very much a secondary one. For it is indisputable that, having suffered the civil war, workers were now demanding improved living standards and peasants were now seeking an end to grain requisitioning. Kronstadt came at the height of a much wider movement. All this forced Lenin to the conclusions mooted by Trotsky a year earlier: that it was necessary to reverse centralisation, to allow private trade and to buy, rather than seize, the peasants' surplus product ... in other words, to retreat.

At this point, the Bolsheviks were in many respects stranded. The revolution had not expanded westwards; the Hungarian workers had been defeated, the Polish invasion and the 'March action' by German communists had proved disastrous. The debate in the Comintern now centred on the prospect of revolution in the west after a prolonged period of preparation rather than immediately.

In Russia the old ruling class was smashed, but the working class, in whose name the Bolsheviks ruled, was a shadow of its former self. MK writes: 'Even if the proletariat had disappeared, the idea of staying in power without a working class contradicts any principle of workers' self-emancipation.' The issue has been raised before. 'The Bolshevik party had the usurper's role thrust upon it [wrote Trotsky's biographer, Deutscher]. It had become impossible for it to live up to its principle once the working class had disintegrated. [...] Should it have thrown up its hands and surrendered power? A revolutionary government which has waged a cruel and devastating civil war does not abdicate on the day after its victory and does not surrender to its defeated enemies and to their revenge, even if it discovers that it can not rule in accordance with its own ideas and that it no longer enjoys the support it commanded when it entered the civil war.' (19)

Lenin was quite conscious of all this in 1921. In his notes for the article which heralded NEP, *The Tax In Kind*, he wrote (twice): '1794 versus 1921'. (In 1794 Robespierre, having tried to press forward with economic centralisation and terror, ended up himself being guillotined. This was the point, Thermidor, at which the French revolution began to recede.) Victor Serge reports Lenin saying in 1921: 'This is Thermidor. But we shan't let ourselves be guillotined. We shall make Thermidor ourselves.' (20)

What did Lenin mean? It seems that for him, 1921 was a Thermidor 'of a special type'. The turning-back of the revolution would be conducted by the revolutionaries themselves. Lenin outlined the direction of this 'disciplined retreat' in his report to the Bolsheviks' 11th party congress in 1922. The communists, he said, were a tiny minority atop a gigantic bureaucratic 'heap' in the state machinery; the heap was directing the communists, instead of the other way round. The communists were 'but a drop in the ocean' in peasant Russia; they were drowning in 'an alien culture' (21).

Here is Lenin at his most realistic and sanguine; he is also at his furthest from the ideas of working-class self-emancipation set out in *State and Revolution* and practiced in the October 1917. If in 1918-19, principles of workers' democracy inevitably took second place to the necessities of war, did it not follow in 1921 - once it had been accepted that a long-term struggle between working-class and bourgeois forces would ensue, in the context of NEP - that the reconstitution of workers' organisations and workers' democracy should be a central part of the Bolshevik strategy? Not for Lenin.

As he made the 'disciplined retreat' of 1921-22, far from reawakening alliances with revolutionary workers who opposed the Bolshevik majority's line (as he had for example with the Left Communists in late 1918), Lenin sought to silence them with disciplinary measures. In the above-quoted speech to the 1922 congress, he warned the Workers Opposition and others that indiscipline would be dealt with severely. Immediately after the congress, some of the Workers Oppositionists were expelled. The membership of Alexandr Shliapnikov, a Petrograd metalworkers' leader, key figure in the 1917 seizure of power and leader of the Workers Opposition, was saved by one vote. Another oppositionist who was expelled was Gavriil Miasnikov, a communist factory workers' leader from Perm, civil war hero who had organised the execution of the tsar's brother, and a polemicist against Lenin on issues of workers' democracy since 1918. After his expulsion in 1922 Miasnikov was arrested and briefly imprisoned by the Cheka (22). Furthermore, a ban on party activity - backed up with arrests, closures of newspapers, etc - was in place not only against the SRs and Mensheviks, who in the civil war had either supported the Whites or vacillated, but also against non-Bolshevik workers' organisations who had consistently sided with the Reds, such as left Mensheviks, some left SRs and anarchists.

As for the unions, Lenin had recognised during the 'trade union debate' of 1920-21 the need for their independence from the state, since the interests of the state and of workers could not at all points coincide. And yet a few months later, apparently with his agreement, dissident communists elected to the leadership of the metalworkers' trade union were removed and replaced by supporters of the CC majority. When the fourth congress of trade unions passed a resolution on workers' democracy, Lenin was

among those who descended on its presidium like a ton of bricks and removed Tomsky and others who had failed to ensure that it adhered to the CC majority line (23).

There had been one notable case during the civil war in which disciplinary measures were used against dissident communists: the summary disbanding in 1919 of the Ukrainian party central committee dominated by the Democratic Centralist faction. It was after the party congress in 1921, which formally adopted the ban on factions - of which Lenin was an enthusiastic proponent - that such disciplinary measures became the norm. In 1935 Trotsky wrote in a draft article: 'It is possible to regard the decision of the Tenth Congress [to ban factions] as a grave necessity. But in light of later events, one thing is absolutely clear: the banning of factions brought the heroic history of Bolshevism to an end and made way for its bureaucratic degeneration' (24). What, then, was the Russian Communist Party of the early NEP period, if its 'heroic history' had already ended?

Democracy and dictatorship

The use of disciplinary measures against communist dissidents was of course far from being the first issue of workers' democracy that came up in the revolution. MK's article raises many more. And yet although he refers both to the material conditions and the way that these were reflected in the Bolshevik leaders' attitudes, his approach remains normative, i.e. he sets up a standard of 'workers' democracy' (which also, presumably, reflects the material conditions in which he worked it out, i.e. late 20th century western Europe), and measures Russian events by this standard.

He argues that 'the priority is not to criticise individual policies [which led to repression] but to try and work out how revolutionaries could have avoided getting into this appalling situation in the first place.' But surely the point is that, like all attempted revolutions, the October revolution was a gamble. Once it had been carried through, both the Bolsheviks and the workers found themselves willy-nilly confronted by a series of 'appalling situations' which could presumably only have been avoided by not overthrowing the provisional government in the first place. In 1920, workers surely took no more pleasure from striking than the Bolsheviks took from quelling the strikes. But could either side have avoided this unwanted conflict?

MK argues that: 'If the Bolsheviks had respected workers' democracy they may well have lost power. Nevertheless this would have been a gamble, like the October revolution, that they would have been right to take.' Is MK here not doing what he himself counsels against: being wise after the event? In 1920-21 the question of workers' democracy was obviously never posed in the yes-or-no manner in which the question of seizing power was in October 1917.

This is not to deny the importance of the questions MK raises. But a more concrete approach is needed to deal with them. The beginnings of such an approach may be found in the writings of Victor Serge. I will mention two of these.

The first passage, from an article sent by Serge in 1920 to a French anarchist newspaper, deals with the question of centralisation referred to above (25). Serge had come from an anarchist background, travelled to Russia in 1919 to join the revolution and the Communist Party. His article sought to convince his anarchist comrades of the necessity of measures taken by the Bolsheviks during the civil war - in particular Red terror and the subordination of the economy to military requirements. The article also deals with more general theoretical questions including the 'danger of state socialism', about which Serge writes with great foresight: 'The socialist state, which has become omnipotent through the fusion of political and economic power, served by a bureaucracy which will not hesitate to attribute privileges to itself and to defend them, will not disappear of its own accord. [...] In order to uproot and destroy it, the Communists themselves may need to resort to profoundly revolutionary activity which will be long and difficult.'

Under the heading *Centralisation and Jacobinism*, Serge argues as follows ... The anarchist tradition is one of decentralisation. But should we not state aims more precisely, he asks. 'The pernicious form of centralisation, that which kills initiative, is *authoritarian centralisation*. [But] it is self-evident that even in the most libertarian communist society, at least certain industries (let us say by way of example) must be run on the basis of a single plan, according to an overall picture and on the basis of precise statistics. [...] the function of this centre will be to manage on the basis of science and not of authority [...] What is pernicious in the principle of centralisation [...] is the authoritarian spirit. If this spirit is set aside, all that remains is co-ordination. The future will doubtless eliminate, although not without great struggles, the authoritarian spirit, the last trace of the spirit of exploitation. To aspire towards this, in revolutionary periods, anarchists can no longer deny the need for a certain degree of centralisation. [...]

'What they must say is as follows: Centralisation, agreed. But not of the authoritarian type. We may have recourse to the latter *from necessity, but never from principle*. The only revolutionary form of organisation is: *free association, federation, co-ordination*. It does not exclude the centralisation of skills and information; it excludes only the centralisation of power, that is, of arbitrariness, of coercion, of abuse. It must spring from the masses and not be sent down to them in order to control them.

'[...] In Russia the dictatorship of the proletariat had to apply an authoritarian centralisation which became ever fuller. We may and should deplore this. Unfortunately I do not believe it could have been avoided. [...]

'The pitiless logic of history seems hitherto to have left very little scope for the libertarian spirit in revolutions. That is because human freedom, which is the product of culture and of the raising of the level of consciousness, can not be established by violence; [and yet] precisely the revolution is necessary to win - by force of arms - from the old world [...] the possibility of an evolution [...] to spontaneous order, to the free association of free workers, to anarchy. So it is all the more important throughout all these struggles to preserve the *libertarian spirit*.' Further on, Serge writes of the 'pernicious influence' of power expressed in 'professional deformations' and bureaucratism; the task of 'libertarian Communists' will be to 'recall by their criticisms and by their actions that at all costs the workers' state must be prevented from crystallising.'

We know with hindsight that the workers' state not only crystallised but degenerated. In examining its history, Serge's point that communism may have recourse to authoritarian centralisation '*from necessity, but never from principle*' is important. How did necessity manifest itself? When was centralisation imposed not 'from necessity', but 'from principle'? In other words, how did the 'authoritarian spirit', an inevitable legacy of the old world we seek to destroy, play its part? And when did necessity give rise in revolutionaries' minds to false (illusory) principle, in the way that Radek described with respect to the 'principles' of 'war communism'?

The second passage from Serge deals more directly with problems of dictatorship and democracy. It is from an article in the *New International* of July 1938, when he was debating Kronstadt with Trotsky: 'The question which dominates today the whole discussion is, in substance, this: When and how did Bolshevism begin to degenerate? When and how did it begin to employ towards the toiling masses, whose energy and highest consciousness it expressed, non-socialist methods which must be condemned because they ended by assuring the victory of the bureaucracy over the proletariat?

'[...] The first symptoms of the evil date far back. In 1920, the Menshevik social-democrats were falsely accused, in a communique of the Cheka, of intelligence with the enemy, of sabotage, etc. This communique, monstrously false, served to outlaw them. In the same year, the anarchists were arrested throughout Russia, after a formal promise to legalise the movement and after the treaty of peace signed with Makhno had been deliberately torn up by the CC which no longer needed the Black Army. The revolutionary correctness of the totality of a policy can not justify, in my eyes, these baneful practices. [...]

'Has not the moment come to declare that the day of the glorious year 1918, when the central committee of the party decided to permit the Extraordinary Commissions [i.e. the Cheka] to apply the death penalty on the basis of secret procedure, without hearing the accused who could

not defend themselves, is a black day? That day the CC was in a position to restore or not restore an inquisitorial procedure forgotten by European civilisation. It committed a mistake. [...] The revolution could have defended itself better without that.

'[...] Out of the vast experience of Bolshevism, the revolutionary Marxists will save what is essential, durable, only by taking up all the problems again from the bottom, with a genuine freedom of mind, without party vanity, without irreducible hostility (above all in the field of historical investigation) towards the other tendencies of the labour movement. On the contrary, by not recognising old errors, whose gravity history has not ceased to bring out in relief, the risk is run of compromising the whole acquisition of Bolshevism.'

Replying to the article, Trotsky concentrated on an earlier section, not quoted here, in which Serge criticised the manner in which the Kronstadt rising was suppressed - and ignored these general questions. The polemic ended with a bad-tempered outburst by Trotsky against Serge. Much of it centred on a malicious introduction to the French edition of Trotsky's pamphlet *Their Morals and Ours*, which Trotsky assumed, wrongly, was Serge's work. Research has shown that the dispute between the two men may well have been deliberately stirred up by GPU agents in the-Trotskyist movement at the time. (26)

That these two revolutionaries - exhausted, persecuted by the Stalinist murder machine, and grieving for Trotsky's son and other slaughtered comrades - did not pursue this discussion, was a tragedy. Not to do so now would be a farce.

Notes

1. Trotsky, 'Stalinism and Bolshevism', 1937.
2. Trotsky, *Writings 1936-37*, pp.513-4.
3. David Mandel, *The Petrograd Workers and the Seizure of Power*, p.379. Rosenberg, in Kaiser (ed.) *The Workers Revolution in Russia: The View from Below*, p.110. Mandel, p.380.
4. Mandel, p.384. Rosenberg, in Kaiser, p.113.
5. Lenin, *Collected Works*, v.26, pp.404-415.
6. Goodey, *Critique 3*, p.36.
7. Brinton, *The Bolsheviks and Workers Control*, p.23.
8. Mandel, p.398.
9. Serge, *Year One of the Russian Revolution*, p.286.
10. Mark von Hagen, *Soldiers in the Proletarian Dictatorship*, pp.25-52.
11. Daniels, pp.92-95.
12. Serge, *Memoirs of a Revolutionary*, p.115. Pilniak quoted in Reck, Boris Pilnyak, p.78.
13. Nove, *Economic History of the USSR*, chap.4. Deutscher, *The Prophet Armed*, p.497. Von Hagen p.117. Daniels, *The Conscience of the Revolution*, p.108-9.

Remington, *Building Socialism in Bolshevik Russia*, p.82-92.

14. Lenin in Richardson (ed.), *In Defence of the Russian Revolution*, pp.134-158. Trotsky, *My Life*, pp.461-2.

15. Radek in Richardson, p.65. Trotsky, *Terrorism and Communism*, pp.151-152, p.170.

16. Trotsky, *First Five Years of the Comintern*, v.2, p.230.

17. Nove, chap.4, quotes from debates at the economics academy in 1922-24. See also Richardson, pp. 185-216.

The Economist, April 19 1997, states that minutes of a party conference in May 1921 on NEP have recently been published in Russia for the first time.

18. Aves, *Workers Against Lenin*. Radkey, *The Unknown Civil War in Soviet Russia*. Figes, *Peasant Russia, Civil War*.

19. Deutscher, p.10-11.

20. Lenin, v.32, pp.326-7. Serge, *Memoirs*, p.131.

21. Lenin, v.33, pp.263-309.

22. Daniels, pp.162-5. Avrich, 'Bolshevik Opposition to Lenin', *Russian Review*, vol. 43, 1984, pp.1-29.

23. Daniels p.157.

24. Daniels, p.98-104. J. Borys, *Sovietization of the Ukraine*. Trotsky, *Writings 1935-36*, p.186.

25. 'The anarchists and the experience of the Russian revolution', in Serge, *Revolution in Danger*, pp. 81-120.

26. Cotterill (ed.), *The Serge-Trotsky Papers*, pp.171-2; pp. 151-161.



Geoff Pilling (1940-97)

Terry Brotherstone

The work of Geoff Pilling, the political economist who has died aged 57, will play its part in the revival of Marxist theory for years to come. A working-class boy from Ashton-under-Lyne [Lancashire] who, with his parents' encouragement, did well, he brought the same critical unorthodoxy to his academic writing as inspired his activity as a socialist militant.

He went from Audenshaw Grammar School to Leeds University where, in 1961, he graduated in economics. Posts at Leeds, Sheffield and Bradford universities preceded a move to Middlesex Polytechnic (now University) in 1969 where he progressed to a readership.

In the 1980s, he published two important books; the first on the relationship between political economy and philosophy in Marx's *Capital*, the second an analysis of *The Crisis of Keynesian Economics*. But he had already made his mark with an article on the law of value in Ricardo and Marx, in which he launched a salvo against one of the *seniores* of British Marxist scholarship, Ronald Meek.

It was an intellectually courageous act for a young left-wing scholar, and one which looks all the more important today, given the need to re-examine Marxist orthodoxy in the aftermath of the collapse of Stalinism. The article was reprinted in several languages.

Pilling's other writing reflected his wide historical and sociological as well as economic interests. Coupled with his sociability, this range served Middlesex's undergraduate and postgraduate students well.

It was underpinned by broad cultural tastes, embracing Beethoven, Paul Robeson, Chaplin and Ryan Giggs. Pilling belonged to a generation which still laughs spontaneously at the Marx Brothers: he often did. He was a fund of good stories about family, friends, politics and the cash-strapped, managerial absurdities of the post-Thatcher universities.

He never lost touch with his roots and was sensitive to the rigours, and the humour, of working-class life. His greatest passion went into his political work for the workers' movement and in the cause of the rebuilding of Trotsky's Fourth International.

This commitment began at Leeds, where he joined the Marxist Society, set up by his future wife, Doria Arram; and met, amongst others, two Yorkshire-based Marxist lecturers, Cliff Slaughter and Tom Kemp. They had bro-

ken with the Communist Party in 1956, when it was plunged into crisis by Khrushchev's revelations about Stalinism and the Soviet suppression of the Hungarian revolution.

Convinced that an understanding of what had happened depended on a study of the hitherto taboo subjects of Trotsky and the Trotskyist movement, they were engaged in a re-examination of Marxism. Pilling was an able recruit to this project.

He joined Gerry Healy's Socialist Labour League (later the Workers Revolutionary Party), but his loyalty was to a theory and a class, rather than an organisation or a leader. When, in 1985, Healy was expelled for abuse of his political authority to acquire sexual favours, Pilling was amongst those who took up the task of regenerating the ideas which had been so besmirched.

He saw the breach of the Berlin Wall in 1989 as Marxism's opportunity, rather than the signal of its demise. He worked for the revival of internationalism, through Workers Aid for Bosnia, then by his support, since their current fight began in 1995, for the Liverpool dockers in what is now a world-wide campaign against the casualisation of labour. Pilling is survived by his wife, his parents, his son and daughter-in-law. There are two small grandsons, in whom he took great delight.

[Geoffrey Pilling, university teacher, Marxist political economist and revolutionary socialist; born Ashton-under-Lyne, March 3, 1940; died, London, August 20, 1997].



Conference Marks 80th Anniversary of Russian Revolution

Scholars and political activists from Russia, western Europe, the Middle East, Japan and north and south America took part in a conference on Lev Trotsky and the Russian Revolution, 1917-1997, in Moscow on 10-12 October. The conference, organised by the International Committee for the Study of Trotsky's Legacy, heard papers by historians studying various aspects of the revolution and Trotsky's role; it also became a forum for passionate political debate.

Valerii Bronstein, grandson of Trotsky's older brother Alexandr, opened the conference and reported on research of his family history. All his relatives faced repressions and privations from the 1920s, simply for being related to Trotsky. Bronstein, who himself spent years in a Siberian labour camp, is now active in the Moscow branch of the Memorial society which commemorates victims of repression.

Another speaker from the older Russian generation was Zoria Serebriakova, daughter of Leonid Serebriakov, a leader of the revolution and the Left Opposition. Her paper dealt with how Stalin had tampered with Bolshevik party records from 1917 to inflate his own role in the seizure of power.

The historiography of the revolution was discussed by Terry Brotherstone of Aberdeen University, who rebutted recent attacks in historical journals on Trotsky's History of the Russian Revolution, and by Dmitrii Churakov of Moscow University, who spoke on Trotsky and the Development of the Left-Bolshevik Interpretation of October.

A series of round-table political debates provided other highlights.

In one session, entitled Was Trotsky An Alternative?, Hillel Ticktin, editor of the journal Critique, debated with Russian historian Vadim Rogovin, author of a multi-volume popular history of the Trotskyist opposition, Mikhail Voeikov of the Institute of Economics in Moscow, and Alexei Gusev, a history lecturer and socialist activist.

The counter-factual historical argument - i.e. about 'what could have been' - certainly provided food for thought. Ticktin said that, given the Bolsheviks' isolation internationally and even within Russia, Trotsky could have come taken power only with a narrow support base, perhaps only via a military coup. Had he done so, forced collectivisation, the purges, and the second world war could have been avoided. Rogovin presented the Left Opposition's policies in the 1920s and 1930s as the principle alternative to Stalinism; Gusev disputed that, insisting that the real alternative was to work for a new revolution from the

late 1920s - as some oppositionists did, much earlier than Trotsky. Each of the dozen or more speakers in discussion had a quite different view.

A session on Trotsky's Theory of Permanent Revolution and its Development Today heard an Iranian speaker outline the experience of the 1979 Iranian revolution and present the viewpoint of The Minimum Platform of Revolutionary Socialism (see ISF issue no. 1). Also speaking were Shigeru Mori of the Revolutionary Communist League of Japan, and two Russian socialists.

The International Committee for the Study of Trotsky's Legacy met during the conference. It was agreed that a session on its work will be held during the conference on '150 Years of the Communist Manifesto' at the Centre for the Study of Socialist Theories and Movements at Glasgow University on May 24-26, 1998. A further conference in Moscow in the following year was mooted, as was the possibility of widening its subject matter to include broader issues of socialist theory and history. Work in progress was reported: the translation into Russian of The Case of Leon Trotsky (the minutes of the Dewey commission hearings on the Moscow trials) and of The Life and Death of Leon Trotsky by Victor Serge and Natalia Sedova, and the preparation for publication of previous conference papers.

It was apparent from the bookstalls that more literature by and about Trotsky is becoming available in Russian, albeit in small print runs. As well as The Party of the Assassinated, the latest volume of Rogovin's series, and a new pamphlet by Voeikov, The Russian Revolution In The Light of Trotsky's Theoretical Legacy, a new two-volume edition of Trotsky's biography of Stalin was on sale. Also, a US-based publisher, Iskra Research, has published in Russian In Defence of Marxism (for the first time), and an expanded edition of Permanent Revolution, including not only Trotsky's writings on the subject but also pre-1917 letters and articles by others in the left wing of the Second International.

By way of political comment, two points may be made. First, since Gorbachev, socialists in Russian universities have been discussing 'alternative models' to Stalinism, i.e. means by which 'it could have been done differently' in the USSR. Discussion at this conference, as at previous ones in Moscow, tended to revolve around this, rather than the broader significance of Trotsky and other dissident communist traditions for the 20th, and indeed the 21st, century. While it is only too obvious why Russians should be concerned first with their own past - it would be strange if they were not - it is also true that the history of the revolution and the fight against its degeneration is important, above all, as part of the history of the international class struggle. Hopefully this point will be developed further.

Second, neither this point nor any other will be developed by comrades, however well-meaning, coming to confer-

ences and repeating what they learned in Trotskyist groups (or other groups for that matter) in the west 20 years ago. At best this attitude obstructs discussion, at worst it turns theory into dogma expounded by missionaries. There was an undue amount of such repetition at the conference, and perhaps that reflects the stage our movement is at internationally. It must be broken through by collective work to develop our ideas, question past assumptions, and surpass past limitations.

Simon Pirani

For information on the International Committee for the Study of Trotsky's Legacy contact: Professor M. Voeikov, Institute of Economics (Russian Academy of Sciences), Ulitsa Krasikova 27, 117218 Moscow, Russia; tel +7-095-332-4525. In the UK: Terry Brotherstone, Aberdeen University; tel: 01224 272466; fax 01224 272203; e-mail t.brotherstone@abdn.ac.uk.

Revolutionary Publishing in Russia

Six years since the Soviet Union collapsed you would have thought that classic writings on the Russian Revolution by witnesses such as Ciliga, Serge, Berkman, Goldman, Maximoff, Voline and Ruhle would have been published in Russian. Unfortunately these writings are still unavailable due to lack of money - Russia has suffered the worst economic crisis in history.

It would be tragic if, 80 years since 1917, the 'Stalinist' regime's determination to wipe out the real history of the revolution were to be successful into the next century. Consequently a journal is now being set up in Moscow to start publishing these and other, more contemporary, texts by, for example, Debord, Ticktin, Negri, Avrich, Bookchin, Gorz, Meszaros etc.. The editorial board includes people from both Trotskyist and anarchist backgrounds who intend to publish a wide variety of materials on the basis that its up to the Russian readership to decide between different political perspectives.

Appeal from the Moscow working group for the publication of a journal of the history and theory of international socialism

To socialists, Marxists, anarchists and all who stand for social liberation

Comrades,

We appeal to you to support an initiative to publish a journal, in Russian, devoted to problems of the history and theory of international socialism. Working in fields of academic study or in social movements in Russia, and sharing socialist convictions, we have come together in a working group which bases itself on the following:

1. The downfall of the pseudo-socialist bureaucratic regime opened the way for the formation of a socialist movement of working people in Russian and other countries of the former USSR. But such a movement has so far not come into being. The forces of anti-bureaucratic socialism are extremely weak and isolated. This can in large part be explained by the fact that people see no global alternative to the existing bourgeois-bureaucratic system. The future of socialism depends on the working-out of such an alternative.

2. Decades of totalitarian dictatorship, practice in the name of "socialism" and "communism", has deeply discredited the idea of social liberation. In mass consciousness, socialism is identified with authoritarianism, bureaucratic hierarchy, belief in a great state power and totalitarian ideological control. The discrediting of socialism goes on even today, when the revolting mutant of "red-brown" ideology crawls onto the political stage under the banner of "Russian" or "national" communism. Socialism will be rehabilitated in the eyes of the masses only by return-



ing to its authentic libertarian and egalitarian meaning.

3. For decades the "iron curtain" prevented the penetration into the USSR of the ideas of the non-Stalinist left, and their working out in practice. And as soon as the "curtain" fell, the vacuum began rapidly to be filled with theories and teachings of every reactionary tendency imaginable, from the Jehovah's Witnesses to the post-modernists. The only ideas which remain practically unknown are those developed by the Western left from the 1920s to the 1990s. This situation is intolerable. The socialist intellectual tradition in the countries of the former USSR, whose gradual rebirth began at the end of the 1980s, will attain real value only if it is enriched by the lessons and achievements of radical thought in other countries and the experience of the international workers' movement.

4. Stalinism not only cut off the present generation of Russian socialists from the course of development of international socialist thought, but also from the experience accumulated in the past by socialists in Russia itself. Every tendency which fell outside the boundaries of official state ideology either fell silent or suffered distortion to the point of unrecognisability. Even today, therefore, the history of various socialist tendencies in Russia and in the Russian emigration, and their contribution to the development of revolutionary and socialist theory, remain to a great extent "terra incognita". It is vital to appropriate for today the rich tradition of Russian socialism.

5. Revolutionary, emancipatory thought will be developed only by means of dialogue between various tendencies. Sectism and the psychology of "the chosen few" can lead only to a dead end. Discussion, comparison of different attitudes to the basic problems of socialism, study of the history of the arguments for and against one or other theory or programme ... all this is a necessary precondition for the formation - not superficially but seriously - of a genuine scientific left-wing world view. To create the conditions for a dialogue, to provide for it a platform, is our aim today.

We, adherents of free, anti-bureaucratic and international socialism, Marxists and anarchists of various tendencies who see the situation in the manner outlined above, call for the formation of a united editorial collective of the proposed historical-theoretical journal, consisting of:

A.V.Gusev, doctor of history (Moscow State University); V.V.Dam'e, doctor of history (Institute of World History, Russian academy of sciences); A.A. Tarasov, senior researcher at the Phoenix centre for the study of modern sociology and practical politics; Iu.V.Guseva, translator and librarian at the Victor Serge Free Public Library, Moscow; V.A.Efstratov, research student (Institute of Economics, Russian Academy of Sciences).

THE JOURNAL NEEDS YOUR SUPPORT!

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Critique 25th Anniversary Conference February 1998

New Labour-New Left?

New Labour may be regarded as the final nail in the coffin of the old 'social democratic' Labour Party with links to the working class. It can be argued that it ought to be regarded as the reform party of the bourgeoisie, with all the consequences that follow. The trade unions can be expected to break away, other parties will develop to replace it. The British process is part of a more general decay of social democracy. Those parties that remain with a social democratic platform, such as the British Socialist Labour Party, the American Labour Party etc remain tied to bureaucratic entities and without a realistic or attractive programme. Where did New Labour come from? Why was it successful? What is the logic of its future development and how should the left orientate towards it? How important was the left in keeping the Labour Party going? What role did Stalinism play in maintaining it? Is the old organised far left a barrier to the formation of a genuine Marxist formation? It is argued that the Labour party has become the reform party of the bourgeoisie. What does that mean? Can there be a left in the Labour Party?

150 Years of the Communist Manifesto May 22-23 1998 Glasgow University

The Validity of the Communist Manifesto after Stalinism

Call for Papers

The fundamental concepts of the Communist Manifesto, Class, Class Struggle, the Communist Society, feudalism, capitalism etc. have been much reinterpreted particularly by the Stalinists, neo-Stalinists, post-Stalinists and those who have evolved out of Stalinism by dropping Marxism. The task of this conference is to understand the original concepts and re-apply them to the present either in thought or in reality. The Manifesto itself has to be seen in the context of Marx's other works of the time: Class Struggles in France, the German Ideology, Addresses to the Communist League and in 1852: The 18th Brumaire of Louis Napoleon. In these works, Marx puts forward a politics based on the proletariat as the universal class and formulates the concept of permanent revolution.

We propose to include the following plenaries and study

groups: In addition it is proposed that there be 3 overall streams: 1. Political Economy 2. Philosophy 3. History

Sections:

Section on Socialist Society

Section on the Effects of Stalinism i. On FSU and Eastern Europe ii. On Marxism iii. On the World Economy

The Nature of the State "The executive of the modern state is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie."

Section on Permanent Revolution as a Concept

Section on the Nature of Class and Proletariat
The Relationship between the Party and the Class:

"The Communists fight for the attainment of the immediate aims, for the enforcement of the momentary interests of the working class; but in the movement of the present, they also represent and take care of the future of the movement." (section iv, para 2).

The Working Class as the Universal Class

"Of all the classes that stand face to face with the bourgeoisie today, the proletariat alone is a really revolutionary class. The other classes decay and finally disappear in the face of modern industry; the proletariat is its special and essential product.."(section 1, para 10th from end)
Section on the concrete forms of struggle-historically and today.

"The Communists turn their attention chiefly to Germany...." (section iv)

Ideology and Social Science

" fanatical and superstitious belief in the miraculous effects of their social science" (section 3, part 3, third last paragraph-speaking of the degeneration of utopian socialism into social science)

The position of women and the family "The less the skill and exertion of strength implied in manual labour, in other words, the more modern industry becomes developed, the more is the labour of men superseded by that of women"(section 1 para 31)

"The bourgeois family will vanish as a matter of course..... with the vanishing of capital." (section ii para 43)