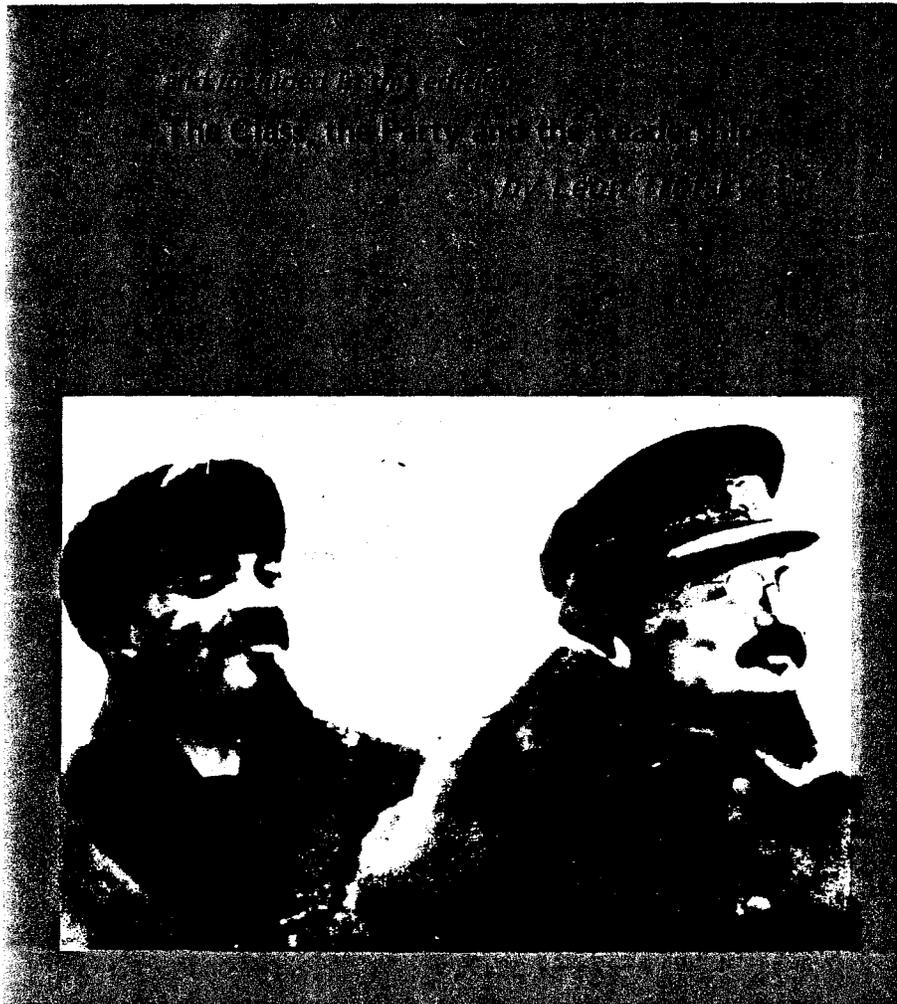


# What Is Revolutionary Leadership?

SECOND EDITION

FOUR ARTICLES FROM LABOUR REVIEW



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SECOND EDITION

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political accommodation and organizational capitulation to the national bourgeoisie in the colonial countries, to liberalizing sections of the Soviet bureaucracies, and to left-posing political leaders and trade union centrists at home. Since the Trotskyist movement has historically lacked a mass base, this course poses the threat not only of revisionist degeneration but of ultimate total liquidation as well.

The Socialist Workers Party has now definitively embraced these revisionist tenets as the basis for its world view. At home it has eagerly capitulated to the reactionary ideology of black nationalism, thus undercutting its role on the only active front in the U.S.A. Having proclaimed Cuba a workers state without significant deformations, the S.W.P. is unable to bring forward even a blush at Comrad Castro's endorsement of peaceful coexistence, or more than a sotto voce "they had it coming" at the arrest and imprisonment of the entire Cuban Trotskyist leadership. In the crisis over the Kennedy assassination, it crawled before bourgeois public opinion. With political decay has come, inevitably, decay of internal life. For the last year the S.W.P. majority has taken to expelling its left critics from the party.

The four pieces which we now present to an American radical audience are part of the struggle against this revisionist tendency in the world Trotskyist movement. They were published in 1960, 1961, and 1962 in Labour Review, theoretical organ of the Socialist Labour League of Great Britain. With the defection of the S.W.P. to the enemy camp, the burden of the struggle has fallen mainly on this organization. Labour Review, and its successor, the British Fourth International, have been valued weapons for English reading Marxists. Although dealing with such apparently disparate topics as pacifism, the Soviet social order, and the history of the Russian Bolsheviks, the articles illuminate various aspects of one central question, the need for conscious Marxist leadership, organized in a revolutionary party, at the head of the industrial working class.(2) They are a sharp attack on the spontaneous growing-over theories of the revisionists. One

need not be in agreement with every detail they contain to find in them understanding and guidance on the central tasks of revolutionists today. It is enough that they are, taken as a whole, an invaluable collective contribution to the current phase of the struggle for revolutionary socialism.

Geoffrey White  
Berkeley, August 1964

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(2) The revolutionary Marxist program flowing from this aim has been systematically and comprehensively set forth in the international resolution "World Prospect for Socialism."

## Preface to the Second Edition

The re-issuance of this pamphlet, after a long period of unavailability, is indeed a welcome event. These articles on revolutionary leadership are still, as Geoffrey White's introduction of 1964 described them, "an invaluable collective contribution to the current phase of the struggle for socialism." The title piece by Cliff Slaughter is perhaps the best re-statement of the Trotskyist purpose in English since the death of Trotsky. Furthermore, we have been able to add to the pamphlet Trotsky's long out-of-print superlative article, "The Class, the Party, and the Leadership", which stands among the most valuable and incisive treatments of the revolutionary vanguard and its relation to the class in Marxist literature.

The unfortunate fact that the movement to which the authors of the original four articles from Labour Review belong, the Healy-Banda Socialist Labor League of Great Britain and its International Committee of the Fourth International, has degenerated considerably from the anti-revisionist position it held earlier requires some explanation. These articles reflect a stage through which the SLL was passing, a stage in which it possessed the formal political program of Trotskyist opposition to the Pabloite revisionism within the Fourth International discussed in White's introduction, as well as the not inconsiderable talents of Marxist scholarship to be found here. It lacked the fundamental theoretical keys to understanding the origins of Pabloism, however, and its rigid orthodoxy was incapable of answering the questions which gave rise to the revisionism in the first place. Furthermore, the Healy group persisted in such destructive political and tactical errors that its actual program—that is, the sum total of its actions, as opposed to its words—was one of splitting and sabotaging the struggle to rebuild a Trotskyist international movement. Since the period in which this pamphlet was first printed, the SLL's mistakes and theoretical incapacities have led to greater and greater contradictions, and finally, in a process not yet complete, to an abandonment of Trotskyism and capitulation to the very Pabloism it supposedly set out to combat.

This history is intimately bound up with the origins and development of the Spartacist League of the U.S. The S.L. grew out of a tendency within the Socialist Workers Party which, in its struggle against the rampaging Pabloism seizing control of the SWP in the early sixties, attempted to align itself with the International Committee on the basis of agreement with the IC's formal anti-Pabloist stand. This collaboration proved difficult at best, and was ultimately smashed in a grotesque split engineered

in truly Stalinist fashion by the Healy clique at an IC international conference in London in 1966.

The Healyites, including Healy's subservient American mentors, the "Workers League" of Wohlforth & Co., continually attempt to make political capital out of the fact that the SL existed separately from the IC for a long period of substantial political agreement. Wohlforth has just completed a six-part, 24-page series on Spartacist in his Bulletin, which, among many other distortions, outright lies and horrendous slanders much too numerous to go into here, asserts that we of the SL are unable to explain the political basis for the split. Parodying Trotsky, Wohlforth demands that we explain the "social origins" of Healy's well-documented comintern-like bureaucratism, which includes physical gangsterism and use of the bourgeois apparatus of repression against other tendencies within the labor movement. Actually, the Spartacist League and its predecessor, the Revolutionary Tendency in the Socialist Workers Party, were cognizant of the errors of Healy—both organizational and political—at least since 1962. Indeed, it was the fact that the Spartacist tendency spoke of these errors and sought to correct them within the framework indicated by the principled political agreement with the IC, which made the Healyites seek to drive us from their midst at all costs!

The theoretical problems which had led to the dominance of Pabloism within the Fourth International centered on the expansion of Stalinism after World War II, and, particularly, on the creation of new, anti-capitalist states in Yugoslavia and later in China and finally Cuba, not on the basis of proletarian revolution, but on the basis of independent Stalinist or petty-bourgeois-led movements based primarily on the peasantry. The Pabloist response to these developments involved abandonment of the vanguard party and a working-class perspective (see White's introduction). The Spartacist tendency felt that the early opposition of the SWP to Pabloism was based on a rigid orthodoxy which failed to solve the problem and left the SWP open to make the same capitulation themselves on the question of Cuba a decade later, and furthermore that the opposition of the IC to Pabloism had much the same character. In his remarks on the political report at the 1966 London conference, Spartacist delegate Robertson said, "Two decisive elements have been common to the whole series of upheavals under Stalinist-type leaderships, as in Yugoslavia, China, Cuba, Vietnam: 1) a civil war of the peasant-guerrilla variety, which . . . if victorious . . . smashes capitalist property relations . . . (and) 2) the absence of the working class as a contender for power, in particular, the absence of its revolutionary vanguard; this permits an exceptionally independent role for the petty-bourgeois sections of society . . ." These circumstances do not open the road to socialist development without a further, political revolution, nor do they in any sense deny the need for proletarian revolution or assert an

historically independent role for the petty-bourgeoisie: "On the contrary, precisely the petty-bourgeois peasantry under the most favorable historic circumstances conceivable could achieve no third road... Instead all that has come out of China and Cuba was a state of the same order as that issuing out of the political counter-revolution of Stalin in the Soviet Union, the degeneration of October."

Comrade Robertson then went on to warn of the fundamental nature of the SLL's mistakes, which prevented them from developing any analysis at all of the origins of the Chinese Revolution, and led them to see Castro's Cuba as still capitalist: "This is a bad method: at bottom it equates the deformed workers' state with the road to socialism; it is the Pabloite error turned inside out, and a profound denial of the Trotskyist understanding that the bureaucratic ruling caste is an obstacle which must be overthrown by the workers if they are to move forward."

One year later, the SLL endorsed the Chinese bureaucracy's "Cultural Revolution" and Mao's Red Guards, despite "...some of the extravagant, improbable and Utopian ideas of Mao Tse Tung;...his refusal to repudiate Stalin, his support of the Soviet intervention in Hungary, (and) his acceptance of 'socialism in a single country'..." (SLL Newsletter 14 Jan. 1967, emphasis mine) Healy and Banda (who wrote the article) know that "socialism in a single country" is the very essence of Stalinism, not just "some improbable idea of Mao's". This is a complete abandonment of the Trotskyist program in favor of capitulation to a wing of the Stalinist bureaucracy. Wohlforth attempts to slide over this by tossing off the horrendous, total lie that the SL gave "support to the Liu faction in China against the Red Guards..."! (Bulletin, 10 Aug. 1970, emphasis mine) Soon thereafter, the IC adopted the equally unprincipled position of support to the "Arab revolution", which, somehow, seems to have a consistent outward thrust and to be dominated by pop front alliances with reactionary Arab regimes. Thus a political departure from Trotskyism has been the result of a course which began with the Healy movement's inability to develop Marxism theoretically in response to new events.

The Spartacist tendency opposed many other mistakes of Healy-Wohlforth. The complete failure of Healy & Co. to comprehend the concept of principled factional struggle led them to substitute opportunist and sectarian gyrations which undermined the international struggle against Pabloism. Thus Healy ordered the split in the tendency in the SWP in 1962—demanding that the majority renounce their views as a precondition for membership in the "Reorganized Minority Tendency"—in order to consummate an unprincipled bloc with the central leadership, which was Pabloist! Wohlforth now admits the unprincipled character of this maneuver when he says, "we considered the current positions of the SWP to be cen-

trist and revisionist and its movement to be back into the petty-bourgeois revisionist Pabloite camp under the pressure of alien class forces." (Bulletin 22 June 1970) This is the very same position he and Healy demanded the tendency renounce in 1962 as against their assertion that the SWP was still revolutionary! After solidarizing with the Dobbs-Kerry leadership of the SWP by helping to expel the Revolutionary Tendency leaders, Wohlforth-Healy then flip-flopped, engineered their own expulsion from the party and declared that it had never been revolutionary! (Documentation on the 1962 split may be found in Marxist Bulletin #3, from Spartacist).

Beneath this abominable behavior lay a fundamentally false perspective, which led to worse behavior later and to an eventual excuse for abandonment of any factional struggle against Pabloism in the Fourth International. The Healyites didn't want a real fight for a Trotskyist international based on struggle, splits and fusions, but instead, having failed in their earlier maneuvers, merely wanted to consummate a split, grab what they could and have their own pond to swim in. Hence their righteous proclamations that the IC is the Fourth International, despite its failure to break the Pabloite grip in more than a few countries, and that Pabloism has been smashed, etc. This latter claim, which we fought as being pure illusion and an excuse for abandoning the struggle, now seems somewhat contradictory with Healy's call recently for joint discussions with the Pabloite Unified Secretariat leading to an international conference!

Recognizing that the struggle is still going on in the Pabloite sections, Healy is now making his attempt to crawl back in typical opportunist fashion, but this time, the principled, Trotskyist political basis for confronting Pabloism is gone. In its place, now standing more fully revealed, is a cravenly opportunist movement which furthermore deals wantonly in financial chicanery, and provocation, violence, and use of capitalist "justice" against its socialist opponents! The Healy-Wohlforth gang is a complete fraud; their avowed Trotskyism is totally foreign to their actual method and now to most of their formal politics as well. It is to be regretted that the potentially serious Marxists we see here have been unable or unwilling either to see this fraud for what it is or to struggle against it. Time is running out for them but, meanwhile, the struggle to rebuild the Fourth International and a Leninist vanguard party in the U.S. continues—set back, perhaps, but enriched by the experience and moving ahead. We are determined to incorporate the contributions to Marxism which members of the Healy movement were able to make, and, like the lessons of the struggle with the Healyite bandits themselves, put them to good use in the struggle for socialism.

-Chris Kinder  
September 1970

# Building the Bolshevik Party: Some Organizational Aspects

Brian Pearce

IN discussions about the best form of organization for a Marxist workers' party reference is often made, in one spirit or another, to the experience of Russia. Sometimes such reference is made confusedly. Three distinct entities are mixed up; the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party of 1903-1911, within which various factions strove for ascendancy; the Bolshevik faction in that 'Party'; and the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party (Bolsheviks) formed in 1912. Often misunderstood, also, are the two fundamental presuppositions made by Bolsheviks in their approach to organizational problems.

The first of these was that the working class would have to undertake a struggle for power in which both legal and illegal activity would be involved, a struggle in which all kinds of persecution by the ruling class would have to be faced, a struggle which must culminate in the forcible seizure of power and the forcible defence of the power thus seized against counter-attack. In a word, the Bolsheviks saw before them, and before the workers of every country the prospect of *revolution*, and therefore the need for a party capable of preparing the carrying through of a revolution. The *special* features of Tsarist Russia in the early twentieth century were not decisive in relation to *this* point; in any case, these features fluctuated and changed, and the Bolsheviks' concrete ideas about party organization in Russia were modified accordingly, but without the fundamental principle being affected.

The second presupposition was that the working class everywhere needs not less but *much more* 'party organization' in order to conquer power than was needed by the bourgeoisie in its great revolutions of the 17th and 18th centuries. Trotsky (who arrived late at an understanding of this point but thereafter defended the Bolshevik position most staunchly) put it thus in his *Lessons of October* (1924): 'the part played in bourgeois revolutions by the economic power of the bourgeoisie, by its education, by its municipalities and universities, is a part which can be filled in a proletarian revolution only by the party

of the proletariat'. That is to say, the bourgeoisie while still an oppressed class acquires wealth, and important footholds in the institutions of the old régime, but the working class lacks these advantages and has to compensate by intense organization of those forces which it does possess. In Lenin's words, 'in its struggle for power the proletariat has no other weapon but organization'.

When the Russian Marxists were still operating through the rudimentary forms of study-circles living separate lives in the principal cities, and just beginning to apply themselves to study of the detailed problems of their actual setting and to intervention through leaflets in the current struggles of the Russian workers, Lenin raised (in 1894) the question of working towards the formation of a 'socialist workers' party'. The first coming together of representatives of local 'Leagues of Struggle for the Emancipation of the Working Class', at Minsk in 1898, the so-called First Congress of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party, achieved nothing in the organizational sphere and was followed by arrests and police repressions of a devastating character. Preparations for another, similar gathering, led to further arrests, and drew from Lenin in 1900 the observation that 'congresses inside autocratic Russia are a luxury we can't afford'. Instead, he and his associates got down to the publication outside Russia of a newspaper, *Iskra*, to be smuggled into the country and serve as the means to prepare for another congress. Around the work for this paper, cadres of revolutionaries organized themselves in an all-Russia network, and through this paper a clarifying discussion was carried on for two years about the political tasks and functions of the party to be created.

Already before the Second Congress met, Lenin had outlined, particularly in *Letter to a Comrade on Our Organizational Tasks* (1902), as well as in the more famous *What Is To Be Done?* his conception of what a revolutionary party must be like. Its dominant characteristic should be *centralism*, the concentration in the hands of a stable, continuing leadership of all the resources

of the Marxist movement, so that the most rational and expedient use might be made of these resources. Party membership must be strictly defined so that the leadership knew exactly who was who and what forces they possessed at any given moment. In the *then* existing conditions there could be little *democracy* in the party, desirable as this was, without over-simplifying the task of the police. The local 'committees' of the party would have to be appointed from above and consist entirely of professional revolutionaries, and each of the party organizations in the factories and elsewhere ('every factory must be our fortress') would operate under the instructions of the local committee, conveyed through one of the committee members who would be the organization's only contact, for security reasons.

When at last the Second Congress met, in 1903 (at first in Brussels, later moving to London), and got down to settling organizational as well as political problems, the political differences among the Russian Marxists arising from their different estimates of the course of development and relationship of class forces<sup>1</sup> at once found reflexion in the sphere of organization, though not in a clear-cut way, there being at this stage much cross-voting. Lenin and Martov confronted each other with their opposing formulae for Rule One, defining what constituted Party membership. Lenin wanted a tight definition obliging members not merely to acceptance of the Party programme and the giving of financial support, but also to 'personal participation in one of the Party's organizations', whereas the Congress agreed with Martov that the rendering of 'personal assistance under the direction of one of the Party's organs' was sufficient. In Lenin's difference with Martov on this point was expressed Lenin's conviction that 'the party, as the vanguard of the class, should be as *organized* as possible, should admit to its ranks only such elements as lend themselves to at least a minimum of organization', because, 'the stronger the party organs consisting of real Social-Democrats are, the less instability there is within the party, the greater will be its influence on the masses around it'. Connected with the divergence of views about what should constitute Party membership was a more fundamental difference—which was to emerge more and more clearly in subsequent years—about the character of the party structure. Lenin's conception was one of 'building the party from the top downwards, starting from the party congress and the bodies set up by it', which should be possessed of full

<sup>1</sup> These political differences, which are outside the scope of this article, were largely concerned with relations with the bourgeois liberals.

powers, with 'subordination of lower party bodies to higher party bodies'. Martov revealed already at this stage a conception of each party organization as being 'autonomous'. On the internal political life of the party Lenin's view was that 'a struggle of *shades* is inevitable and essential as long as it does not lead to anarchy and splits, as long as it is confined *within bounds* approved by the common consent of all party members' (*One Step Forward, Two Steps Back*, 1904.)

In spite of the defeat on Rule One, Lenin and his associates carried the majority with them in the voting on the main *political questions* (as a result of which they thereafter enjoyed the advantage in the party of the nickname of *Bolsheviks* majority-ites), but the deep divergences which had revealed themselves were reflected in the Congress decisions on the central party bodies. A sort of dual power was set up, equal authority being accorded to the editorial board of the party paper *Iskra*, residing abroad, and to the Central Committee, operating 'underground' inside Russia. A Party Council, empowered to arbitrate in any disputes that might arise between these two centres of authority, was to consist of two members representing the editorial board, two from the Central Committee, and one elected directly by the party congress. At first the Bolsheviks appeared to dominate both editorial board and Central Committee, but very soon after the Second Congress a shift of allegiance by a few of the leaders of what was then a very small group of people enabled the *Mensheviks* ('minority-ites') to turn the tables. The Bolsheviks mustered their forces into a faction, set up a 'Bureau of the Committees of the Majority' to lead it, produced a faction paper, *Vperyod*, and conducted a campaign within the party for the convening of a fresh, Third Congress. By early 1905 they had the majority of the local Committees on record in favour of such a congress, and according to the party rules adopted in 1903 the Party Council should thereupon have convened the congress, but the Mensheviks in control of that body found pretexts not to do so. Accordingly the 'Bureau of the Committees of the Majority' went ahead and convened the Third Congress on its own initiative.

This purely Bolshevik gathering decided to abolish the 'bi-centrism' established in 1903. The editorial board of the party paper had proved to be unstable, while the party organizations inside Russia had grown and become strong. A central committee with full, exclusive powers, including the power to appoint the editorial board, was elected. All party organizations were instructed henceforth to submit fortnightly reports to the central committee: 'later on it will be seen

how enormously important it is to acquire the habit of regular organizational communication'. As regards the Mensheviks, their right and that of all minorities to publish their own literature within the party was recognized, but they must submit to the discipline of the Congress and the Central Committee elected by it. A special resolution charged all party members to 'wage an energetic ideological struggle' against Menshevism, while at the same time acknowledging that the latter's adherents could 'participate in party organizations provided they recognize party congresses and the party rules and submit to party discipline'. Party organizations where Mensheviks were predominant were to be expelled *only* if they were 'unwilling to submit to party discipline'.

The Mensheviks refused to recognize the authenticity of the Third Congress and held a parallel congress of their own, which set up a rival leading body called the Organizational Committee. To this they accorded only vague and limited powers, and they introduced some ultra-democratic provisions into party life, such as that every member of a local organization was to be asked to express an opinion on every decision of the appropriate local committee before this could be put into force.

With the revolutionary events of 1905 the situation in and around the party changed very rapidly. Great numbers of workers joined its ranks, the opportunities for party work became greater and more diverse, and *de facto* civil liberty expanded, enabling the party to show itself more openly. Lenin led the way in carrying through a reorganization of the party on more democratic lines, so as to meet and profit by the new situation. Larger and looser party organizations were to be created, and the elective principle introduced in place of the old tutelage by committees of professionals. Such changes were possible, Lenin stressed, only because of the work done in the preceding phase. 'The working class is instinctively, spontaneously, social-democratic,<sup>1</sup> and the more than ten years of work put in by the social-democrats has done a great deal to transform this spontaneity into class consciousness.' (The latter part of this sentence from Lenin's article on *The Reorganization of the Party*, November 1905, is sometimes omitted when it is quoted by unscrupulous anti-Leninists.) There need be no fear that the mass of new members would dilute the party, *because* they would find themselves under the influence of the 'steadfast, solid core' of party members forged in those previous ten years. At the same

<sup>1</sup> Until 1918 the name 'social-democrat' was common to Bolsheviks and Mensheviks.

time, there could be no question of liquidating the secret apparatus the party prepared for illegality; and in general, Lenin warned, it was necessary to 'reckon with the possibility of new attempts on the part of the expiring autocracy to withdraw the promised liberties, to attack the revolutionary workers and especially their leaders'. It was to the important but carefully-considered changes made at this time that Lenin was mainly referring when he wrote in 1913 (*How Vera Zasulich Slays Liquidationism*) that, organizationally, the party, 'while retaining its fundamental character, has known how to adapt its *form* to changing conditions, to change this *form* in accordance with the demands of the moment'.

The newly-recruited worker-members showed themselves somewhat more resistant to the guiding influence of the old cadres than Lenin had hoped, and, unable to grasp what all the 'fuss' was about between Bolsheviks and Mensheviks, brought strong pressure to bear for immediate reunification of the party. The very successes achieved by the revolution, with such comparative ease, caused many workers to see the Bolsheviks as gloomy, peculiar folk obsessed with non-existent problems. Zinoviev recalls in his lectures on party history how there was a period in those days when Bolshevik speakers found it hard to get a hearing in the Petersburg factory district called 'the Vyborg side' of the River Neva)—which was to become a Bolshevik stronghold in 1917. It proved impossible not to yield to the pressure from below for 'unity', in spite of prophetic misgivings. A joint central committee was set up, composed of both Bolsheviks and Mensheviks, and proceeded to convene a new party congress.

This congress—the Fourth, or 'Unity' congress, held at Stockholm—was elected more democratically than its predecessors, full advantage being taken of the easier conditions for open activity. Thirty-six thousand members took part in the election of the delegates, and one delegate was elected for every 250-300 members—really elected, by the rank and file, not, as on previous occasions, chosen by the local committees of professionals. As a result, the Mensheviks found themselves with a majority on the most important political questions—though they were obliged to accept Lenin's formulation of the rule regarding party membership which they had successfully voted down in 1903! A central committee consisting of six Mensheviks and three Bolsheviks was elected.

Following the Congress, those delegates 'who belonged to the late "Bolshevik" faction', issued (May 1906), an appeal to the party membership in which they declared: 'We must and shall fight ideologically against those decisions of the Con-

gress which we regard as erroneous. But at the same time we declare that we are opposed to a split of any kind'. To work for another congress with a Bolshevik majority, Lenin and his associates formed a secret factional centre—what Zinoviev called 'an organization which was doubly illegal: in relation to the Tsarist regime and in relation to the Mensheviks'. Those local party committees which had Bolshevik majorities sponsored a paper called *Proletary*, and the editorial board of this paper functioned as the leadership of the Bolshevik 'double underground'.

This was an extremely difficult period for the Bolsheviks in the party, but they were saved from it by the development of events in Russia in general and among the Mensheviks in particular in ways which they had foreseen. Evidence accumulated that political progress was not after all going to proceed as smoothly as the Mensheviks had claimed, while at the same time some of the Menshevik leaders came out more and more openly as people who were ready to destroy the independence of the party and even the party itself for the sake of a coalition with bourgeois liberals. Already before 1906 was out proposals began to be canvassed in Menshevik circles for dissolving the RSDLP in a 'broad Labour congress' modelled on the British Labour Party of that time—a loose, comprehensive body which would embrace the trade unions, the co-operatives, petty-bourgeois radical groups, etc. In Petersburg the local Mensheviks defied the views of their Bolshevik comrades in the 'united' party organizations and linked up electorally with the liberals. Lenin's reply to this was to publish a pamphlet attacking the Mensheviks for treason to the common cause. Summoned before a party court on a charge of violating discipline, he showed himself quite unrepentant and aggressive. There was no real unity in the party, he said, and a *de facto* split had taken place. 'What is impermissible among members of a united party is permissible and obligatory for the parts of a party that has been split.' The Mensheviks of the party court had better think carefully before coming to a decision to expel him: 'Your judgement will determine whether the shaken unity of the RSDLP will be weakened or strengthened'. Lenin was not expelled.

The balance of support within the party was now moving slowly but steadily towards the Bolsheviks again, as fair-weather members dropped away and the more stable of the new members learnt from experience, observed the conduct of the Menshevik leaders and absorbed the influence of the old cadres. The Fifth (London) Congress, held in 1907, and elected no less democratically than the Fourth, proved to have a small pro-Bol-

shevik majority. It was at this congress that the party adopted as Rule Two of its organizational statute: 'All party organizations are built on the principles of democratic centralism'. A number of decisions in the direction of further democratization were taken; a congress was to be held every year, with one delegate for every thousand members, and an all-Russia conference every three months, with one delegate for every 5,000 members.

No congress could in fact be held thereafter until 1917, owing to the onset of reaction. Only two days after the close of the Fifth Congress came the Tsarist coup d'état of June 3, 1907, and a more severe reign of terror than ever began. The central committee elected by the Congress, though predominantly pro-Bolshevik, was very mixed, and the Bolshevik faction decided to keep its secret leading centre in being.

In the second half of 1907 Lenin prepared for publication a collection of his writings to be entitled *Twelve Years*. Only one and a half of the three projected volumes were actually published, and these were seized by the police. (A few copies circulated illegally, but not until 1918 did *Twelve Years* appear again, in full and openly.) The preface which Lenin wrote for this collection, in September 1907, is often referred to by opponents of Leninism as proof that at this time (the opening of the period of blackest reaction!) Lenin repudiated the ideas on party organization which he had expounded in 1902 in *What Is To Be Done?* and elsewhere. To show the mendacity of this allegation and to present Lenin's own estimation of the balance sheet of the 'twelve years' from the organizational standpoint, here is a lengthy quotation from the preface in question:

'The basic mistake which is made by people who nowadays polemicize against *What Is To Be Done?* consists in their completely detaching this work from its connexion with a definite historical situation—a definite, and now already long-past period in the development of our party. This mistake was strikingly committed by Parvus, for example (not to mention innumerable Mensheviks), when he wrote, many years after the appearance of this pamphlet, about its incorrect or exaggerated ideas regarding the organization of professional revolutionaries.

'At the present time such statements make a frankly comical impression. It is as though people want to brush aside a whole phase in the development of our party, to brush aside those conquests which in their day cost a struggle to achieve but which now have long since become consolidated and done their work. To argue today about *Iskra's* exaggerations (in 1901 and 1902!) of the idea of an organization of professional revolution-

aries is the same as though, *after* the Russo-Japanese War, one were to reproach the Japanese for having exaggerated the strength of Russia's armed forces, for having been exaggeratedly anxious before the war about the struggle against these forces. The Japanese had to summon up all their strength against the maximum possible power of Russia, so as to ensure victory. Unfortunately, many people judge our party from outside, without knowing what they are talking about, without seeing that *now* the idea of an organization of professional revolutionaries has *already* won complete victory. But this victory would have been impossible unless this idea had been put *in the forefront* in its day, so as 'exaggeratedly' to make those people grasp this idea who were hindering its realization.

'*What Is To Be Done?*' is a *summary* of the *Iskra* group's tactics and organizational policy in 1901 and 1902. Just a summary, no more and no less. Whoever will take the trouble to familiarize himself with the *Iskra* of 1901 and 1902 will undoubtedly convince himself of that. And whoever judges this summary without knowledge of *Iskra's* fight against the then *predominant* economism<sup>1</sup> and without an understanding of this struggle is merely talking through his hat. *Iskra* fought for the creation of an organization of professional revolutionaries, fighting especially energetically in 1901 and 1902; overcame the economism which then predominated; *created* the organization at last in 1903; upheld this organization, in spite of the subsequent split in the *Iskra* group, in spite of all the troubles of this period of storm and stress, upheld it during the whole of the Russian revolution, upheld and preserved it from 1901-02 through to 1907.

'And behold, now, when the fight for this organization has long since been concluded, when the ground has been sown, when the grain has ripened and the harvest has been reaped, people appear and announce that there has been: "an exaggeration of the idea of an organization of professional revolutionaries"! Isn't it laughable?

'Take the entire pre-revolutionary period and the first two-and-a-half years of the revolution (1905-07) as a whole. Compare for this period our Social-Democratic Party with the other parties, from the standpoint of cohesion, organized character, continuity of purpose. You will have to acknowledge that from *this* standpoint the superiority of our party over *all* the others—the Cadets, the SRs and the rest—has been *indubitable*. The Social-Democratic Party worked out before the revolution a programme which was formally ac-

cepted by all members and, while making amendments to it, never broke away from this programme. The Social-Democratic Party (in spite of the split from 1903 to 1907 (formally from 1905 to 1906), made public the fullest information about its internal situation, in the minutes of the Second (general) congress, the Third (Bolshevik) congress, and the Fourth or Stockholm (general) congress. The Social-Democratic Party, in spite of the split, utilized the momentary gleam of freedom earlier than any of the other parties to introduce an ideal democratic structure for its open organization, with an elective system and representation at congresses according to the number of organized members of the party: Neither the SRs nor the Cadets have done this yet—these almost-legal, very well organized bourgeois parties which possess incomparably greater financial resources, scope in use of the press and possibility of functioning openly, than ourselves. And did not the elections to the Second Duma, in which all parties took part, show graphically that the organizational cohesion of our party and our Duma group is higher than that of any other?

The question arises—who achieved, who realized this greater cohesion, stability and staunchness of our party? This was done by the organization of professional revolutionaries created above all with the participation of *Iskra*. Whoever knows the history of our party well, whoever has himself lived through the building of our party, needs only to take a simple glance at the composition of the delegation of any faction, let us say, at the London congress, to be convinced, to note at once the old basic nucleus which, more diligently than anybody else, cherished and reared the party. The basic condition for this success was, of course, the fact that the working class, the flower of which created the Social-Democratic Party, is distinguished, owing to objective economic causes, from all other classes in capitalist society by its greater capacity for organization. Without this condition the organization of professional revolutionaries would have been a toy, an adventure, a meaningless signboard, and the pamphlet *What Is To Be Done?* stresses repeatedly that only in connexion with a "really revolutionary class which spontaneously rises in struggle" does the organization which this pamphlet defends make sense. But the objectively very great capacity of the proletariat to be organized is carried out by living people, is carried out not otherwise than in definite forms of organization. And no other organization than that put forward by *Iskra* could, in our historical circumstances, in the Russia of 1900-05, have created such a Social-Democratic Workers' Party as has now been created. The professional revolutionary has done

<sup>1</sup> I.e., the view that the activity of the party should be limited to 'strike-making' on immediate economic issues.

his job in the history of Russian proletarian socialism. And no power will now disrupt the work which has long since outgrown the narrow limits of the "circles"; no belated complaints about exaggerations of the fighting tasks by those who in their day could only by struggle ensure a correct approach to the fulfilment of these tasks will shake the significance of the conquests which have already been achieved.'

With the advance of reaction and dissipation of the rosy illusions of 1905 the Bolshevik *proportion* in the ranks of the party continued to grow. At the Party Conference held in November 1907, the Bolsheviks were able to secure the passing of resolutions which subordinated the Social-Democratic group in the Duma to the Central Committee and forbade Party members to contribute articles to the bourgeois press on inner-party questions. At the Party Conference held in December 1908, in view of the now intense police terror in Russia, the elective principle in organization was sharply modified and the party regime of before 1905 was in the main restored. This conference also passed a resolution condemning 'liquidationism' (advocacy of dissolving the party in a broad Labour Congress), a political disease now spreading very rapidly in the upper circles of the Menshevik faction.

While extreme right-wing tendencies grew among Mensheviks, an ultra-left tendency appeared in the ranks of the Bolsheviks under these conditions of reaction. This took the form of 'Otzovism' ('recall-ism'), a system of ideas justifying withdrawal from all attempts to work in the Duma and other legal organizations and concentration of activity exclusively on underground work. At a meeting of the editorial board of *Proletary* (the secret Bolshevik factional leadership) in the summer of 1909 'Otzovism' was condemned as having nothing in common with Bolshevism, and members of the faction were called upon to fight against it. So far as the leading 'Otzovist', Bogdanov, was concerned, it was resolved that the fraction took no further responsibility for his doings (he had set up a 'Party school' at which he preached his doctrines); but it is not correct to say that the 'Otzovists' were expelled from the Bolshevik faction. On the contrary, the factional leadership stated that it aimed at avoiding an *organizational* split with the 'Otzovists' and would strive to win them back to Bolshevism. (They themselves broke away, trying to form a faction of their own around a paper they called *Vperyod*, after the Bolshevik factional paper of 1904; but this did not win much influence, and most of the 'Otzovists' found their way back to Bolshevism in due course.)

At this same meeting a decision was taken

against agitation for a separate Bolshevik congress to be convened at once, as advocated by some comrades indignant with the degeneration of Menshevism into 'liquidationism'. The latter development had aroused misgivings among many of the Menshevik rank and file who, though they disagreed with the Bolsheviks on some important political points, shared with them the conviction that the workers must retain an independent party of their own, organized for illegal as well as legal activity. If the Bolsheviks played their cards properly they could win over a substantial section of this Menshevik rank and file; at this stage it would be wrong to take the initiative in splitting the party, though a split was inevitable in the not too distant future. A fight must be waged under the slogan of 'preservation and consolidation of the RSDLP'.

One of the most influential Menshevik leaders, the veteran propagandist of Marxism, Plekhanov, came out against 'liquidationism' and gathered around him those Mensheviks who regarded the continued existence of the party as a *sine qua non*. With these 'pro-Party Mensheviks' Lenin formed an alliance for the specific purpose of fighting the 'liquidators'. Plekhanov had played a negative role in 1904-1908 and was to return to that role later, but, in Zinoviev's words, 'during the difficult years 1909, 1910 and 1911 Plekhanov rendered invaluable services to the party'. Through his alliance with Plekhanov Lenin was able to make contact with wide sections of the Menshevik workers whom otherwise he could not have approached so easily.

The Bolsheviks' striving to isolate and eliminate the liquidators was for a time complicated by the appearance in their own ranks of a 'conciliationist' tendency which, demoralized by the shrinking in the size and influence of the RSDLP under the blows of reaction, and by the sneers of outsiders, including the spokesmen of the Second International, at the 'faction-ridden' state of the Russian workers' movement, wearily urged the dissolution of all factions, 'mutual amnesty' and general brotherhood at the expense of all differences of principle. At a meeting of the Central Committee in January 1910, these 'conciliationists' carried a resolution obliging everybody to dissolve their factions and close down their factional papers. The Bolsheviks fulfilled their obligations under this resolution, but the liquidators failed to do so. This open flouting of the party finally exposed the liquidators in the eyes of numerous Mensheviks, and Lenin and Plekhanov made the most of the situation. At the end of 1910 the Bolsheviks announced that they regarded themselves as released from the undertaking they had given in January, and launched

a weekly paper, *Zvezda*, which was edited jointly with the 'pro-party Mensheviks'.

*Zvezda* functioned in the years 1910-12, as *Iskra* had functioned in 1900-03, as the organizer of a regrouping of political forces on a basis which it helped to clarify. The task, said Lenin, was not to 'reconcile certain given persons and groups, irrespective of their work and attitude' but to organize people around 'a definite party line'. 'Unity is inseparable from its ideological foundation.' The Bolsheviks were aided in their work now by the revival of the working-class movement which was beginning, favoured by the boom which had started in 1909. With less danger of unemployment—and with the paralysing shock of the reaction of 1907 somewhat worn off—the workers began to recover their militant spirit. Strikes increased; and in 1912 the shooting down of some strikers in the Lena goldfields was to enable the Bolsheviks to infuse political consciousness into this militancy on a large scale. Pressed between the increasingly restive working class on the one hand and the grim wall of Tsarism on the other, the liquidators were obliged to move ever faster and show their full intentions without dallying any longer. In June 1911, Martov and Dan, leading liquidators, resigned from the editorial board of the official organ of the RSDLP and declared the latter to be no longer existent so far as they were concerned.

The moment had come to carry out the reconstitution of the party on new lines. In December 1911 Lenin was in a position to record that the Bolsheviks and 'pro-party Mensheviks' had formed an Organization Committee to prepare for a special party conference; that in the course of joint work these two factions had practically fused

in such key centres as Baku and Kiev; and that, 'for the first time after four years of ruin and disintegration', a Social-Democratic leading centre had met inside Russia, issued a leaflet to the party, and begun the work of re-establishing the underground organizations which had broken up under the combined action of police terror and liquidationist propaganda.

When the special party conference met in Prague in 1912 it was found to be the most representative party gathering since the Second Congress. Every faction in the RSDLP had been invited, but only Bolsheviks and 'pro-party Mensheviks' attended; the underground organizations on which the conference was based were now practically entirely in the hands of these two factions. The conference took to itself all the rights and functions of a party congress, and formally expelled the liquidators from the RSDLP. A new central committee was elected to replace the one elected in 1907, which had collapsed after the fiasco of 1910; this central committee was entirely Bolshevik in composition except for one 'pro-party Menshevik'. The faction of 'pro-party Mensheviks' disappeared soon afterwards; while Plekhanov and a few other leaders broke with the Bolsheviks, the bulk of the rank and file came over completely to the Bolshevik position, as Lenin had foreseen. Henceforth, until it changed its name to 'Communist Party' in 1918, the party was the 'RSDLP (Bolsheviks)', with the Petersburg daily *Pravda* as its central organ. The Bolshevik *faction* had at last completed its development into the Bolshevik *party*—the party which, after fusing in 1917 with Trotsky's *Mezhrayontsi* ('inter-ward group'), led the great October proletarian revolution.

# What is Revolutionary Leadership?

Cliff Slaughter

'An important element in the strength of a party or a class is the conception which the party or the class has of the relationship of forces in the country.'

Leon Trotsky, 1931.

'But it is absurd to think of a purely "objective" foresight. The person who has foresight in reality has a "programme" that he wants to see triumph, and foresight is precisely an element of this triumph.'

Antonio Gramsci.

'... every shortcoming in historical duty increases the necessary disorder and prepares more serious catastrophes.'

Antonio Gramsci.

'The decisive element in every situation is the force, permanently organized and pre-ordered over a long period, which can be advanced when one judges that the situation is favourable (and it is favourable only to the extent to which such a force exists and is full of fighting ardour); therefore, the essential task is that of paying systematic and patient attention to forming and developing this force, rendering it ever more homogeneous, compact, conscious of itself.'

Antonio Gramsci.

(In this article I have drawn heavily upon Gramsci, *The Modern Prince* and to a lesser extent on Lukacs, *History and Class Consciousness*.)

GRAMSCI, brilliant intellectual and founder of the Italian Communist Party, and Trotsky, towering example of revolutionary leadership in theory and in practice, had good reason to write the words cited above. Trotsky, exiled by the Stalinist bureaucracy, was urging a policy of United Front on the Communist Party of Germany as the only defence against the danger of Nazism. Gramsci, after the defeat of the Workers' Councils movement in Italy, in which he himself was so prominent, found himself in Mussolini's jail. Eventually Trotsky met his death, 20 years ago, at the hands of Stalin's agents; Gramsci's health was destroyed in prison

and he died a young man, a few days after his release in 1937.

Neither of these two men, the most original Marxist thinkers since Lenin, is regarded with favour by the official 'Communist' movement. Despite Khrushchev's admission that the trials of the 1930s were based on confessions extracted by torture, the slanders about Trotsky's plot against the USSR, his alliance with Hitler, and so on, are allowed to remain as part of the total censorship on his work that exists in the Communist Parties. In 1957 a small selection of Gramsci's writings was published by Lawrence and Wishart. However, *The Modern Prince*, longest essay in this selection, was quite heavily cut, and precious little space was devoted to Gramsci's major contribution on Workers' Councils. One appreciates the great effort made by Dr. Louis Marks, the translator, to bring even this much of Gramsci to English readers; at the same time it must be said that the cuts in *The Modern Prince* are unacknowledged, and that several of the omitted sections (dealing with Rosa Luxemburg, with 'Caesarism', etc.) would have posed awkward questions for Stalinists.

## STALINISM AND HISTORICAL MATERIALISM

It is characteristic that these two men should have laid great stress on the role of human consciousness, and of political leadership. Stalinism can no more entertain such an emphasis than can Social-Democracy. Reformism and opportunism are tied to the existing structure of power: a confused mixture of notions of fair play and expediency is the nearest they ever get to theory. Their political actions are based on an adjustment of the partial and temporary interests of sections of the working class to the existing economy and state power. This is why opportunists abhor theory, for theory insists on an understanding of each problem in terms of the all-round development of society, focused in our epoch on the working-class struggle

for state power. Nor are the Stalinists in any better position; in the 'Communist' movement Marxist doctrine has hardened into an ideology: that is to say, particular phrases are taken from Marx and Lenin and used to justify the particular course taken by the Soviet bureaucracy. The authority naturally accruing to the Russian Communists after the October Revolution facilitated the spread of the degeneration of the Russian to the other Parties in the Communist International. These parties were 'shaken up', their leaderships changed, their structure arbitrarily fixed (under the name of 'Bolshevisation' of course!) until they were transmission belts for the international policies of Stalin's bureaucracy, rather than revolutionary parties of the working class.\* In latter years, despite the 'exposure' of Stalin by Khrushchev, the political consequences of this relationship have even deepened, though of course they will inevitably produce a reaction inside the foreign parties, and eventually in the Soviet Party. Peaceful competition between the Soviet and the U.S. economies is now clearly stated to be the major form of the conflict between imperialism and socialism. For this to go on, peaceful relations in the rest of the world must be preserved. And so the 'Communist' parties 'take the lead in the fight for peace'.

As a part of this process, certain theoretical distortions of Marxism play an important part. Above all, Marxism is twisted into an economic determinism. The dialectic is abstracted from history and reimposed on social development as a series of fixed stages. Instead of the rich variety and conflict of human history we have the natural series of slavery, feudalism, capitalism and socialism through which all societies pass. The USSR's present structure is thus sanctified as an 'inevitable' successor of capitalism and any 'criticisms' of its social and political structure must be regarded as 'secondary'. An apparent touch of flexibility is given to this schematic picture by the doctrine that different countries will find their 'own' roads to Socialism, learning from the USSR but adapting to their particular national characteristics. This is of course a mechanical caricature of historical materialism. The connection between the struggles of the working class for Socialism in, say, Britain, Russia and Vietnam, is not at all in the greater or lesser degree of similarity of social structure of those countries, but in *the organic interdependence of their struggles*. Capital-

\* For the process by which the Communist Party of the Soviet Union fell under the control of Stalin's faction, representing the class pressures of the petty-bourgeoisie in Russia on the basis of the international defeats of the working class, see L. D. Trotsky, *Third International After Lenin*, pages 147-163, and *The Revolution Betrayed*, and I. Deutscher, *The Prophet Unarmed*.

ism is an international phenomenon, and the working class is an international force; the USSR is the result of the first break-through of the world revolution, a result distorted by Russia's particular economic development before and after the October Revolution, and by the impact of imperialism and the fate of the working-class movement since then. Trotsky laid a firm basis for the study of the relation between the Soviet workers' state and the world working class in his writings between 1924, when 'Socialism in One Country' was first theoretically presented, and his death in 1940.

There are many Socialists who are naturally repelled by the bureaucratic distortion of Soviet society and of the Stalinist parties, as well as by the shameful record of Social-Democracy, and yet fail to escape from the distorted theory and method of Stalinism. Retaining that fundamental characteristic of Stalinism, loss of confidence in the ability of the working class of the advanced capitalist countries to conquer power, they dress up this loss of nerve with 'theoretical' ideas which have been current in the anti-Bolshevik sections of the Left since the October Revolution and even before. Elsewhere in this issue Brian Pearce takes up certain historical questions bound up with the periodical 'discovery' that the USSR is a capitalist state, a discovery which of course leads away from certain uncomfortable political duties, such as the defence of the USSR against imperialism. In this article I want to take up another argument closely bound up with these same ideas, viz., that the root of the trouble lies in the Leninist concept of leadership of the working class by a centralized party—Lenin's 'party of a new type'.

## THE ROLE OF CONSCIOUSNESS IN HISTORY

Although this argument takes various forms (Lenin's type of party was suited to autocratic Russia but not to democratic Britain; leadership will emerge naturally from the working class; all organizations develop bureaucracy; the success of 1917 was a 'historical accident' taken advantage of by a brilliant Bolshevik élite; Rosa Luxemburg and Trotsky predicted the degeneration of the party, etc., etc.), it is always underpinned by a false conception of the role of theory and consciousness in history, a tendency towards economic determinism, a notion that the laws of social development are something 'natural', standing above men and deciding their destinies. Political events and tendencies are seen as the 'natural' and inescapable reflection of economic interest; Marx's concept of the political and ideological superstructure on the economic basis becomes a 'mere superstructure' of the economic struggle, as one of the founders of the

new 'Workers' Party' recently put it. This implies that politics is only the froth of history, whereas Marx was quite clear that it is in the sphere of politics that men become more or less conscious of the economic contradictions and fight out the issues. Precisely in politics, in the struggle for state power, is the decisive conflict fought out. Trade union and industrial struggle is a school of politics for the working class, in the older capitalist countries decades of trade union struggle were a necessary prelude to real *class conflict*; but the overthrow of political power and the institution of proletarian dictatorship is a qualitatively different question. For this, organization of a more advanced character, and therefore theory of a much wider and deeper character, is required. This means a political party which subordinates all partial struggles to the construction of a leadership firmly welded to the working class and completely devoted to the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism. Such a task requires the ability to learn from all past class struggles in society, particularly the failures and successes of the working-class movement, and an understanding of this history in relation to the total existing structure of society, not only in relation to the daily experience of the working class. The consciousness and organization required to achieve the greatest social overturn in history, these are the basic reasons for what has come to be known as democratic centralism, the bogey of so many 'Left-wingers'.

The revolutionary party must incorporate as far as possible the understanding of capitalist society derived from all past theoretical advances and their testing-out by the working-class movement in history. In this tradition and theory there resides a more scientific truth than the working class can derive from its experience of exploitation and day-to-day struggle. Rather than humbly bowing before the experience of the class at 'the point of production', rather than assuming that the workers' own experience will give rise to revolutionary consciousness, Marxists must on the contrary subordinate their political and theoretical work to the revolutionary party. This is the meaning of revolutionary discipline: that the consciousness represented by the Marxist party constitutes a higher consciousness of the historical tasks of the working class than does the immediate consciousness of the class itself. Only by accepting the discipline of the party, then, does the individual Marxist achieve the prospect of playing an independent historical role. This has nothing in common with the bourgeois notion of 'free' individuals imposing their reason upon the world. Rather, an objective analysis of capitalist production demonstrates that the working class is its gravedigger; the working class is consequently the only independent and decisive force in the

modern epoch. But classes and social movements have to be welded together as *forces* by consciously grasping their situation and organizing to overthrow the classes which stand in their way. The relation between party and class is an aspect of this process; it is not enough for the workers to constitute a class 'objectively', by reason of their all being wage-labourers: from being 'a class *in* itself' the proletariat must become 'a class *for* itself'.

Now Lenin's primary concern was to find the form of organization and strategy which would express this *political independence* of the working class. It is true that in Russia his opponents, the Mensheviks, were victims of the mechanical idea that the bourgeoisie was destined to come to power after the defeat of Tsarism; they therefore disagreed with Lenin's notion of the proletariat *leading* the struggle against Tsarism, and so the political independence of the class did not arise for them until after the bourgeois revolution. However, Lenin's conviction that the working class was the leading independent force in the modern era was part of his general view of 'imperialism' as the final stage of capitalism. The fundamentals of organization required for a politically independent working class are not in anyway specific to Russian conditions. Indeed, the essence of Lenin's position against the Mensheviks should be much easier to grasp in a country which is highly mechanized, where a large proletariat confronts a bourgeoisie firmly established in power.

## IMPERIALISM AND LENIN'S CONCEPTION OF THE PARTY

It is important to stress the connection between Lenin's characterization of our epoch and his ideas on organization. Imperialism, with its rapid expansion of capital investment, the organization of production on a very large scale, more and more domination by finance-capital, and the concentration of standing armies and repressive forces equipped with weapons based on the highest levels of technique of mass production, has given rise to social forces and ideas which restrict and hold back the working class. In the imperialist countries themselves, a considerable stratum of the working class identifies its interests with the expansion of capitalism itself. The new bureaucratic state provides a larger number of administrative jobs for the upper layers of the working class and absorbs most of the disappearing old middle class. A new social group of functionaries, officials, managers, teachers, has grown up, and on the basis of this group, together with the skilled working class, a strong opportunist tendency developed in the Labour Movement. In Britain, the early defeat of Chartism and the subse-

quent prolonged economic expansion led to the development of craft unionism at the expense of political organization. When the new general unions had come on the scene, and the need for independent political representation was recognized, it was not revolutionists who presented themselves as the leaders, but men with a very different standpoint. Fabianism started not from the conception of the working class as a revolutionary force, with the struggle for reforms as part of the building of that force, but from the idea that the state should intervene to alleviate the insecurity and poverty caused by the unrestricted operation of the capitalist market. The more extreme reformists thought that state ownership of certain industries might be necessary to achieve this. In Germany, although the Marxist phrases of the Erfurt programme continued to dominate the statements of the Social-Democratic leaders, a similar development was taking place. The SPD (German Social Democratic Party) became a church of the working class rather than a revolutionary party. When the war of 1914-18 broke out, not only did the SPD deputies vote war credits to their 'national' governments, like almost every other reformist party in Europe, but they boasted of the service they had given the nation by helping create a disciplined, organized and cultured working class. This conduct of the SPD at the outbreak of war closed a chapter in the history of Marxism. In the epoch of imperialist wars there must be parties of men steeled to resist all jingoism and patriotism, to proclaim the slogan 'Turn the imperialist war into a civil war!' The working class of each country had the duty of 'revolutionary defeatism' since the main question was one of cracking the front of imperialism.

To many 'orthodox' Marxists this turn by Lenin was a leap in the dark, adventurism, folly, typical of the 'Blanquist', 'voluntarist' tendencies for which he had been so often criticised. But Lenin's 'fantastic' slogan was deeper and nearer to the needs of the masses than all the 'realism' of the old Social-Democracy. The German Social-Democratic leaders ended up, at the height of the Revolution in 1918, failing to support the demand for the Kaiser's abdication; and they gave 'Marxist' reasons for doing it — 'For the Social Democracy, the external form of the State is unimportant!'. And when pressure from below forced their hands they issued a public statement to the effect that 'in insisting upon abdication, they had been motivated solely by the thought that only abdication could preserve order and prevent the spread of anarchy'. Without a doubt, a big factor in the fright of the Social Democratic leaders was the fact that the Russian Bolsheviks were already in power, and there was no telling where the process might stop in Germany. But again a 'Marxist' rationalization was offered: Scheidemann

said afterwards, 'Political actions can, essentially, only confirm an economic development'. It was just this kind of 'Marxism' that Lenin had to defeat in the course of building a revolutionary party in Russia. His whole effort was to assert the *dominance* of the role of the proletariat in determining the course of history in the 20th century, a dominance flowing not from any 'voluntarism' but from the nature of the crisis of capitalism, the character of imperialism as the highest form of capitalist contradictions.

Kautsky and others in the old Social-Democracy fell down on just this point. They were great exponents of Marxism as an explanatory theory of past history, but Marx's conclusion about the necessity of proletarian dictatorship on the basis of modern socialized production was not fully grasped. To do this meant seeing the working class, its consciousness and its organization, as themselves decisive forces in history, not just as the *results* of history. That is the meaning of Gramsci's remarks at the head of this article. It is the direct opposite of Scheidemann's 'Political action can only confirm an economic development' and of all nonsense about politics being 'only the superstructure of the class struggle'. An interesting example of Lenin's method in these questions may be found in his writings during the period of reaction following the 1905 revolution. A certain Levitsky, somewhat in the strain of our own 'proletarian' Left-wingers, objected to the Bolshevik strategy of the working class leading the struggle for liberty against Tsarism. This he saw as a watering down of principle and advanced the slogan '*Not* hegemony in the national struggle for political liberty, *but* a class party!' Lenin roundly condemned this sectarian nonsense, which amounted in effect to an abandonment of the political field to bourgeois leadership.\*

## SPONTANEITY AND SECTARIANISM

In the Socialist Labour League recently, a small minority developed the idea that as the Labour Party was drifting rapidly to the Right, the only way for the Marxists to preserve their integrity was to set up a party quite independent in every way from the Labour Party. The Labour Party had ceased to be a working-class party in any sense, and a party must be formed which concentrated on the 'real' class struggle at 'the base', 'the point of pro-

\* Incidentally, Lenin's insistence on the leading role of the working class even during the period of defeat makes nonsense of those of his critics who claim that only during the revolutionary upsurge did Lenin stress this role of the proletariat (e.g., H. Marcuse, **Soviet Marxism**).

duction'. Not only did Behan and the others show by this trend their utter misunderstanding of the Marxist theory of society and politics, but their conduct gave a valuable lesson in the political importance of theoretical weakness of this kind, showing that with an incorrect theoretical approach and a wrong method, first-class historical blunders can be made. Just when the crisis in the British working-class movement approaches precisely its political peak, just when the contradiction between Social-Democracy and the historical needs of the working class is most sharply expressed in the issues of public ownership, defence and the relation between the organized working class and the Labour Party—at this point the cry goes up: abandon ship! It is the industrial struggle that matters above all! 'Reformism is best exposed at the point of production!'—once again those who fail to grasp the nettle of political action explain their failure with the most resounding of 'Marxist' phrases. Precisely by clinging to such abstract generalities do men get left behind by historical development. The essence of dialectics is not the ability to stand by and pronounce what is base and what is superstructure, but to know when, where and how to *act*. Behan insists on the need to go back to the programme of the Industrial Rank-and-File Conference of November, 1958, as if nothing has happened in the trade union movement and the Labour Party since then. To confine the demands and activity of the working class at this point to the factory level would amount to betrayal; this is what was meant by the reply given to Behan's group at the Socialist Labour League Conference. Our resistance to sectarianism is not a doctrinal one only, but part of the lessons learned from the beheading of the German working-class movement, among others, when the Communist Party failed to follow the policy of the United Front of the working class from 1929 onwards.

One of the interesting features of sectarians is their ability to take up very opportunist positions on certain questions, and particularly on questions of organization. Again the basic theoretical weakness here is lack of understanding of the role of consciousness. To criticise Brian Behan's 'Workers' Voice' would amount to the mistake of taking on not the strongest but the weakest statement of one's opponents' case, and so I take certain points in the first issue of that journal only as an aside, and in order to introduce some more general points. In line with his idea that the class itself must lead the revolution, Behan writes that any workers' organization, shop stewards' committee, etc., may submit amendments to the Constitution of the Workers' Party. This gives an appearance, of course, of a party open to the working class, not dictating to it but responding to it, and so on. But it is clearly only another example of the old 'economism'.

Certainly no workers' party will be successful which is not responsive to changes in the moods of the working class, but that is a matter of *tactics*, of timing, of the form of propaganda, etc., and certainly *not* a question of programme, policy, constitution, which are determined on a basis of *theory*. The correctness of the policy of a Marxist party is not the extent to which it corresponds to the immediate consciousness of the workers. It is a matter rather of correct theoretical appraisal of all the social forces at work in a given period, including the role of the class and the party itself.

This raises the old question of the working class 'throwing up its own leadership' in times of struggle. It is a fact that in every section of the working class there spring up first-class militants with great organizing power and ability to advance the consciousness of their fellow-workers. Without such spontaneous rank-and-file leadership there could be no talk of revolution. But a revolutionary leadership is not just the sum of all these rank-and-file leaders, not just the 'linking-together of rank-and-file committees'. There must be beyond that, *above* that level, a *political* leadership. It is not just a matter of daily struggle between employers and workers, which might even culminate in 'one big strike', but of the conquest of state power, of asserting the revolutionary role of the working class in the transformation of every aspect of capitalist society. The place of the workers in capitalist production is the basis of their revolutionary historical role, but to assert that role they have to be organized politically and theoretically as well as industrially, and the theory required to do this represents a higher form of consciousness than that which flows from the experience of the proletariat. If Lenin was right to condemn the 'Economists' for bringing no theory to the Russian workers other than the news that their industrial struggles were vital, how much more necessary it is to insist on advancing the theory required by the British working-class movement, with its scores of years of industrial organization, its opportunist leadership, and the complex international problems of leadership that have developed since Lenin's day?

This brings out another fundamental weakness of sectarianism: its tendency towards idealism. All the talk about 'no compromises' and keeping clear of the rottenness of reformism amounts to a fear of rubbing up against reality, and is accompanied by the search for some section of workers which remains unaffected and pure despite the economic boom, as a jumping-off ground to defeat reformism. No doubt it is a healthy reaction against bureaucratic reformism to insist on the roots of militancy in the working class itself, but there is no substitute for fighting the political battle. It is not enough to know that reformism is rotten, to condemn it

roundly, and to insist on one's separateness from it; the point is, to take it seriously as a force in the British working class and defeat it on the arena of struggle. At this point, the political mistake of sectarianism ties in with the theoretical mistake of economic determinism or 'economism'. Somehow, it is assumed, the working class will develop revolutionary consciousness because it is exploited. But the ideological struggle within the working class is *real*, it has to be bitterly fought and won before the class can be fully mobilized for battle. When we say that the long-drawn-out crisis of British imperialism rots away the social basis of reformist politics, that is *not* to say that the reformists simply leave the scene and leave a vacant place for a naturally radicalized working class desiring a new form of party. Such a party has to be built in the course of struggle with the reformists, and *it has to be built by those who grasp the historical process theoretically; it does not grow 'naturally' or 'organically' out of the economic base.*

### **THEORY AND IDEOLOGY IN THE WORKING CLASS**

When we say that political ideas and movements reflect the economic base we should remember that such reflection is a series of conscious acts. Men's consciousness is formed in an environment of social institutions controlled by the ruling class, institutions of repression and institutions for educational conditioning, staffed by people trained to operate these institutions as though they were part of a naturally or divinely ordained system. The majority of labour's own organizations have become tied to this structure of established institutions, and are staffed by the 'labour lieutenants of capitalism'. The proletariat's consciousness of its role has to be achieved in struggle against all these institutional forms and their ideological results. Without the highest degree of centralized organization, these ideological battles cannot be won. The crisis of imperialism, which is expressed in the colonial struggle, the arms race and atomic war as well as in the tendency towards slump, constantly produces cultural decay and breakdown. Movements of the extreme Right, like Fascism, are able to call upon depraved elements of the intelligentsia to mobilize petty bourgeois, lumpen proletarians and even numbers of industrial workers behind the most foul and hideous social programmes. The alternative of socialism or barbarism did not pose itself only after Hiroshima, but was clearly before the eyes of the Bolsheviks and Rosa Luxemburg during the First World War. We are in an epoch which has been correctly characterized as one of a crisis of leader-

ship. What is needed *above all* is a strongly disciplined leadership able to develop the theory of Imperialism, the Permanent Revolution, the relation between the Workers' States and the world revolution, and to establish its leadership of the working class. Unless this crisis of leadership is solved, there will be no 'natural' growth towards Socialism, but there will be all the danger of war and barbarism. In this vital sense those who protest against 'vanguardism', against 'too much centralization', represent a reactionary tendency in the working-class movement.

The opponents of democratic centralism like to talk about the inevitable crisis of capitalism as the source of revolutionary action in the working class: this is counterposed to the so-called 'voluntarism' of the Leninists, who are supposed to think they can suck revolutionary situations out of their thumbs. But preparation of the class and of the party is the decisive question in social crises. It is true that periodically capitalism has undergone the most profound crises. We need only mention the Great Crash of 1929 and the consequent depression, and the post-war situation (1945) in Europe, when there returned, particularly in France and Italy, capitalists discredited by their war record and faced with the armed working class. In neither of these cases was revolution the outcome. Instead, helped by the Social-Democratic and Stalinist betrayals of the working class, the capitalists were able to ride the storm and in the earlier case to establish regimes which destroyed the possibility of revolution for many years. The elementary mistake of supposing that in the Marxist view consciousness and organization directly reflect economic need is one that must be conquered if there is to be a victorious revolution. The ideological reflection of changes in the economy lags behind, the machinery of this 'lag' is the structure of ruling-class power and education. There is necessary a theoretical *leap* in the working-class movement, the development of leadership which can grasp the significance of the underlying crisis in society and inform the activity of the class with that consciousness. What is important for the revolutionary class is that it must *not* remain determined in its thinking by the existing economy and institutions. As Gramsci puts it: 'An appropriate political initiative is always necessary to *free* the economic drive from the tethers of traditional policies'. (My emphasis—C.S.)

Important here is the difference between the working class and other revolutionary classes in history. When Lenin says that the only weapon of the working class is organization, he means that whereas the rising bourgeoisie, for instance, developed its own economy, its art, its religion, its schools, its philosophy, and so on, as the expression and organization of its social consciousness, *before*

the political overthrow of the feudal political system, the proletariat does not construct the institutions of the new society within capitalism (despite the Fabians and the New Left). Capitalism is the only system of production in history whose inner dynamism has pushed it to develop the productive forces incessantly and to drive out all other forms of production. In order to mobilize for the overthrow of feudalism, it was sufficient for the bourgeoisie and its allies to recognize and feel the political restrictions upon their growing economic and cultural strength. Their own organic development within feudalism drove their 'own' institutions into conflict with the political regime which prevented their natural expansion. But bourgeois power is total social power: capital dominates all relationships like an elemental natural force. In order to seize in consciousness the nature of this power and to organize for its overthrow, there is necessary a *scientific* consciousness of the whole system of social relationships, and not just a sense of the degradation and exploitation suffered in the process of production, or the abstract knowledge that planned production for use would be more reasonable. There is no repository of this consciousness, and no guarantee of its necessary constant development in theory and practice, other than the proletarian party. To talk about the working class 'itself' as an undifferentiated, potentially revolutionary whole is to substitute myth for reality.

Because it is exploited in an inhuman system, commandeered and degraded in the service of capital, the working class is unevenly developed, apathetic under most circumstances, split into different sections, often backward in its view of most cultural and social problems, unless there is a conscious leadership differentiated from the class itself, not at the daily service of capital, determined to explode the *false* consciousness in which men grasp reality under capitalism. Abdication from the responsibility of constructing such a leadership, under the guise of 'faith in the workers themselves' is capitulation to the forces that numb the consciousness of the working class—the institutions of capitalist society itself. The centralized party is needed by the working class, then, for the purpose of 'breaking up the unity based on traditional ideology, without which the new force (the working class) would be unable to gain awareness of its own independent personality'. (Gramsci). The working class cannot make do, like the bourgeoisie in its revolutionary period, with a crude empiricism or idealism. Because the whole of the capitalist structure must be grasped in consciousness and because this whole and its laws of development are different from the immediate consciousness and experience of the proletariat, *dialectical* theory, advanced theory based on the notion of developing

contradictions in the material world, is the basic element of revolutionary theory. Marx's achievement was to show the working class a mode of action based on this dialectical approach to history. Bourgeois thought had ceased to develop just at this point, and it took the the highest synthesis of philosophical and scientific thought to make the leap forward. It is in this sense that one should understand Lenin's insistence that the programme and strategy of the revolutionary party are based on *theory*, and that this theory is brought to the working class *from outside*, from bourgeois intellectuals. The development of theory among the revolutionary workers themselves, once that leap has been made is, of course, a necessity for any revolutionary party. So long as the working class is not mobilized by a party based on such a theory, its consciousness remains determined by bourgeois culture, a culture which leads man to see society as a set of separate things, not open to his own control and overthrow, but naturally fixed and with independent reality. Marxist theory explains, on the other hand, that the world of men is a man-made world, that the powers standing over men are products of labour, and that if the whole system of labour-exploitation is abolished, man will become free, will dominate social reality instead of being at its mercy. A revolutionary party is one whose strategy and tactics flow from this total conception. Without it, the working class struggles only against partial features of bourgeois domination and, unable to see their connection, tends to fall back after partial victories and defeats.

## REVOLUTIONARY CRISES AND THE VANGUARD PARTY

Of course, the building of a leadership capable of theoretical firmness and of combating those tendencies in the Labour movement which reflect other classes, is not the whole of the task by a long way. The actual organization in a revolutionary crisis, the rapid changes of tactics necessary, the planning of insurrection and military operations, all this quite clearly requires centralized authority and discipline of the highest order, and only a leadership developed over a long period will be capable of the task. While this phase of the development of the working-class leadership is not our immediate subject, a few general points should be made here. Certain 'anti-vanguardist' groupings, such as that represented by the journal *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, put forward the idea that the nearer the revolution approaches, and the more the working class itself fills the historical stage, so the leadership 'must prepare its own dissolution'. It is difficult to see exactly what this can mean, but at best it probably

means that as the class itself approaches revolutionary consciousness, the leadership can safely quit the scene. Of course, the outstanding characteristic of revolutions is the entry of the broadest masses into political action, but that is a very different notion from supposing that consciousness of the historical process is clearly fixed in the minds of the people. The possibility of victory in such crises depends above all on the preparation of a leadership, and is inextricably bound up with the earlier phases discussed in this article. Those masses intervening in revolutionary actions are what Lenin called the untrained, undisciplined, undirected forces. The depth of the crisis arouses tremendous force, but the great task of the party, the 'disciplined, trained units' is to give this force its maximum results, to make sure that it is not broken against a wall, dissipated in useless channels, and so on. Rosa Luxemburg, whose shabby 'friends' emphasize her weakest point, and are incapable of learning from her strength, encountered this dilemma in January, 1919. The working class of Berlin was led by rioters and provocateurs to expose itself to bloody repression by the Social-Democratic government; the young Communist Party had had no time to organize the insurrection or to knit together its followers in the rest of Germany. Such a situation could confront the most mature leadership; and the correct lead to the workers would be to sound a tactical retreat, as the Bolsheviks did in the 'July Days' of 1917. But the German Communists lacked the authority and the confidence for such a lead, and the suppression of the Berlin riots was only the beginning of the terrible carnage of 1919, as workers in city after city took up arms against the government, only to be crushed and murdered in thousands.

Rosa Luxemburg had criticized Lenin's centralism and 'overstress on organization' and she had trusted a little too much to the 'organic' growth of the struggle of the working class. Even though she had realized before Lenin the reactionary tendency of Kautsky and the German Social-Democratic leadership, she lacked Lenin's political sense and initiative in seeing the need for organizational expression of the opposition tendency in European socialism. It was not a question only of the Right wing having fallen into conservative habits of distorting Marxism, but of the victory of an alien class tendency in the movement. And since the world had entered the final stage of capitalism, the construction of a leadership devoted unswervingly to the political independence of the proletariat was vital. Because this conclusion was not drawn earlier, because Rosa clung to the view that an ideological (not organizational) struggle within the movement would be sufficient to win the working class, the Left turn of the masses in November, 1918, in Germany did not result in automatic support for Rosa's Spartacists,

the future Communists, but for the 'Independent' Socialists, who appeared to the masses as the Left of Social Democracy. In other words, the shift in the masses was not automatically reflected in revolutionary politics, but was 'mediated' through the existing organisations and forms of consciousness.

One of the favourite references for opponents of the centralized 'vanguard' party conception is the Paris Commune of 1871. It was as a result of the brief experience of workers' rule in that city that Marx sharpened his views on the state and revolution. It was now clear, he said, that the bourgeois state must be smashed, not 'taken over', and that the new state, the proletarian dictatorship, must be the rule of the workers themselves. Latter-day critics of Leninism hold up this picture as a contrast to the centralized 'dictatorship' of Stalin's state and Lenin's party, but in the process they make a mistake which Marx himself could never have made. The conclusions drawn from the Commune about the form of the proletarian dictatorship are not in any way the same thing as the requirements of a revolutionary party to conquer power! *Socialisme ou Barbarie* and similar tendencies argue directly from the form of the future proletarian state to the character of the workers' party under capitalism. But such a party must above all be capable of action and leadership, and it is not identical with the class. We have mentioned the argument that in revolutionary situations, 'the class itself' comes to the fore, and makes the leadership more and more superfluous. Perhaps the best antidote to that argument comes from Marx himself. In a letter to Kugelmann, he made a criticism of the political leadership of the Commune which sets him quite apart from those who invoke him against the Leninists. He criticized the Central Committee of the National Guard for holding democratic elections at a time when it should have exerted its authority, prolonged its 'dictatorship', in order to crush the enemy. For this, the best proletarian elements would have to go to the front, and so a more stringent regime would have been necessary to retain revolutionary authority in Paris itself. But in the absence of a firm revolutionary leadership, it was decided that democracy must have its day; the Commune was defeated. This was only part of the consequences of lack of preparation and revolutionary organization before the Commune (Trotsky —*The Defence of Terrorism*).

## LENIN AND INNER-PARTY STRUGGLE

Lenin's firmness and sharpness in defending his political line and organizational discipline was derived precisely from this necessity for training a contingent which will not be 'over-run' by the ir-

regular troops' of the revolution, and not at all to any personal ambition or dictatorial habits, as his opponents unceasingly declared. Bolsheviks are determined to base their party only on the firmest theoretical principles, and to subordinate all party work to these principles. A movement of this kind examines scrupulously all political ideas in the light of the needs of the working class and the party, and ruthlessly fights against all tendencies which divert the movement from its revolutionary path. The method of analysis is always to test these ideas against the needs of the classes in society, both in theoretical argument and in the work of the party.

In the course of the 1903 conference of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party, scene of the famous dispute between Lenin and Martov over the conditions of party membership, Trotsky and others of the *Iskra* group originally supported Lenin's political line, but found themselves driven towards the opportunists by what they considered to be Lenin's organizational rigidity. Trotsky later gave his verdict on this episode, and it is worth quoting as an antidote to those who are fond of using Trotsky's early writings about dictatorship over the party. 'It was not for nothing', says Trotsky in *My Life*, 'that the words "irreconcilable" and "unsparing" occurred so frequently in Lenin's vocabulary. Only the highest concentration on the goal of revolution, free from everything pettily personal, can justify this kind of personal ruthlessness. . . . His behaviour seemed to me inadmissible, terrible, shocking. Yet at the same time it was politically correct and therefore indispensable from the point of view of organization'. It is in this very important sense that the lessons of building the Bolshevik Party are lessons for all revolutionaries. The whole *method* of building the party politically is involved. Lenin, who had agreement with Martov on political questions at the beginning of the Congress, quite agreed that his difference over the rules was a small one. It became important in the course of the Congress, as it became clear that from this one opportunist formulation Martov was to fall into the hands of the opportunists. In order to preserve the narrow circle atmosphere at the head of the émigré Marxists, he was prepared to line up with the opportunists in opposition to Lenin. Lenin was not only insisting on organizational points when he hammered home the authority of the Congress and the leading role of the majority. The *Iskra*-ites, including Martov, had not gone to the Congress with a factional mandate—that would deny the supreme authority of the Congress, always so dearly cherished by Lenin—but what they did agree, on Lenin's insistence, was to accept all the decisions of the Congress.

This seemed 'innocent enough' at the time, as Lenin wrote, but once 'unfavourable' decisions

(e.g., on the composition of *Iskra's* Editorial Board) were arrived at, the discipline was broken. Lenin, convinced that without a proletarian party of iron discipline there could be no revolution, was prepared to subordinate everything to insistence on this task. Martov's indiscipline and veering towards the opportunists was a capitulation to the bourgeois tendency in the party, the tendency which shrank from independent mobilization of the working class for leadership against Tsarism; hence a split was necessary.

Political and organizational questions therefore cannot be separated. In an epoch where the construction of a leadership of the working class is the most vital historical problem, it is exactly on the questions of concrete planning and discipline for revolutionary work that political differences became explicit. Some Marxists seem to conceive of the party as simply a contractual discipline to stop individuals from going off the rails as they react to class pressure. But it is more than that: it must become the vanguard of revolutionary action, the representative of the general interest of the working class.

In the construction of a revolutionary party, there is a constant need to strive to maintain a correct relationship between democracy and centralism. The balance of this relationship tends to change with the objective situation. During times when the revolutionary movement operates under legal conditions, as in Britain today, it is essential to have full democratic discussion on all questions concerning the working class and the party. This does not, however, mean that democracy is a free-for-all, with nothing being decided. To the Marxist, democracy is a weapon in the struggle against capitalism. Discussion is necessary to arrive at decisions upon which the activity of the party can be based.

The constant training of new leaders in the revolutionary party requires the greatest patience by the leadership. Local autonomy and initiative, allowing the leaders and the rank and file to learn from their mistakes, is essential for the branches of the revolutionary party. The more experienced the revolutionary leadership the more flexible it will be in assisting the ranks by theory and practice to understand the need for a democratic centralist party.

In such an atmosphere differences of opinion can flourish provided such differences do not set out to overthrow the programme and policy of the Marxist movement. Fundamental differences along these lines in an unfavourable objective situation generally lead to a split. Splits of this kind cannot be avoided, and a mature leadership will see to it that the experiences of such a struggle are utilized to educate a membership in the superiority of the

democratic centralist method. Any premature attempt to resolve the internal crisis, based upon excessive centralism and factionalism, will have serious consequences for the revolutionary party. That is why a revolutionary leadership must be the most vigilant custodian of party democracy and the firmest defender of the discipline and rights of the party as a whole. It is the interrelationship between democracy and centralism that constantly confuses the idealist opponents of Leninist organization. In their effort to run away from centralism they embrace a theory of spontaneity and proceed to liquidate the party into the class. The Marxist's interpretation of democratic centralism is part of the fact that he derives his political conclusions from an objective historical study of the political situation, and not only from the existing consciousness of the class. The relation between democracy and centralism to him is based upon the constant requirements of the class struggle. The great problem in Britain today is to obtain a Marxist conception of the party. Capitalist propaganda constantly seeks to equate Marxist discipline with Stalinism. When 'Socialist' opponents of revolutionary discipline make the same equation, they are reflecting capitalist public opinion, regardless of their good intentions in this sense they play a definite part in obstructing the solution by the working class of its most pressing need.

### **THEORETICAL DIFFERENCES—PRACTICAL CONSEQUENCES**

One aim of this article is to make a little clearer the reasons why Marxists concentrate so much attention on theoretical discussion, even on questions which appear at times to be obscure and remote from the struggle. There are always critics who say: the important thing is to get on with the struggle and get away from this arid and doctrinaire wrangling.

A good example is the 'Russian question'. The nature of Soviet society is a vital question for Marxists and it can only be studied historically. After the Khrushchev exposures of 1956 certain prominent 'New Left' ex-Communists said quite explicitly that Russia had dominated the Left for too long and that in future we should concentrate on contemporary British problems. There were only jeers for those who wanted to know 'what Trotsky said in 1924', and yet without a study of the *social roots* of Stalinism, rather than the horrified turning of one's back on it, there could be no renewal of Marxism. Even if the 1920s in Russia seemed irrelevant to British problems in 1956, it was an essential clue to the balance of forces in the class struggle and the play of tendencies in the

Labour movement of the world. Not only that, but the very existence of the USSR, its bureaucracy's domination over great parties all over the world, and its relationship with imperialism, all the time create situations where one's evaluation of the Soviet social system takes on immediate importance, and for the movement to leave the question open is inadmissible.

One tendency which attracts a certain number of 'Marxists' is that which considers the USSR's economy to be 'state capitalism'. Now the actual consideration of 'State capitalism' as a theory cannot be undertaken here, but some of its adherents illustrate very well the connection between organizational and political questions. The claim that the USSR is 'state capitalist' is usually accompanied by the view that American, British and all advanced capitalisms are tending in the same direction as the USSR—towards a bureaucratic, state-controlled if not state-owned industry, with the workers exploited in ever larger productive units. As in Burnham's *Managerial Revolution* (the product of a similar breakaway from revolutionary Marxism in 1940), the tendency of such theories is to assume that this bureaucratic centralization ('statification', 'managerialism') actually corresponds to the needs of science and technique at their present level of development, that it represents a naturally higher stage than imperialism. And so one is tempted to conclude *either* that all talk of the working class as a revolutionary force is nonsense (Burnham) *or* at least that the age of imperialism, with all the political conclusions drawn from it by Lenin, lie in the past. In the latter case what is required is a completely new analysis to tell us what sort of contradictions dominate the new society and in what sense a revolutionary class might overthrow it, whether that class is the working class, etc. What is usually done (and it is very unsatisfactory) is to cling to the idea of the working class as revolutionary while rejecting: (a) the economic basis (capitalism and imperialism) for this; and (b) the organizational consequences drawn by the Marxists.

As a result, we get among the 'state capitalists' a very abstract, general protest against tyranny and oppression, in many cases a strong leaning towards 'anti-totalitarianism' in the style of the cold war or State Department Socialists. Lenin's organizational conceptions are seen as disastrous, for they paved the way for Stalin's dictatorship, a dictatorship not *of* the working class, but *over* the working class. Bureaucracy 'in itself' is seen as reactionary since it offends against the idea of self-government by the working class.

Currently circulating in translation is a programmatic statement of the group around the French journal *Socialisme ou Barbarie*. This document entitled 'Socialism Reaffirmed' arrives at the fol-

lowing conclusions:

'Moreover, the objective existence of the bureaucracy, as an exploiting stratum, makes it obvious that the vanguard can only organize itself on the basis of an anti-bureaucratic ideology. . . .

'The main features of a political organization that has become aware of the need to abolish the distinction in society between people who decide and people who merely execute is that such an organization should from the onset seek to abolish such a distinction within its own ranks.'

In place of the concrete development of organizational forms from the specific development of stages of the class struggle and of the type of social crisis arising under capitalism, indeed reacting in a quite topsy-turvy way to the growing concentration of bourgeois state power, we have the abstract argument from general principles. Thus, the aim is workers' rule; therefore the means, the movement, must do away with authority. But how can the working class combat alien tendencies, how can it consolidate its victories and learn from its defeats, how can it organize to crush the powerful enemy, how can it conduct the political struggle from hour to hour, without a leadership, a leadership with *authority*? All the concentration and centralization of bourgeois power, its ideological weapons and its control of leading political elements in the labour movement, all of these make more vital the need for centralized and authoritative revolutionary

leadership. Somehow we are asked to accept that authority in itself is a bad thing, indeed the main enemy.

This is really a retreat from Marxism. It is not bureaucratic or authority-wielding individuals who rule the lives of men under capitalism, but the force of capital, produced by men, yet alienated from them in a structure with its own law of motion, its own imperious demands in terms of human life and effort. Our aim is not the abstract one of 'abolishing the distinction between order-givers and order-takers' but the political overthrow of the class whose interests lie in the perpetuation of the domination of capital, in order that the forces produced by man shall be at his service. For that task we need, not an abandonment of discipline and centralized authority, but its heightening to an unprecedented degree. It is nonsense to suppose that as the working class itself comes on to the political scene, its consciousness developing to new heights, the need for organization and discipline will decline. On the contrary, a more active and politically conscious labour movement will demand it all the more insistently. Just because the rise of the working class is the most universal and world-shaking of all historical transformations, against the strongest ruling class in history, so it requires a higher level of consciousness and a higher degree of organization than any previous class in history.

# Lenin and Trotsky on Pacifism and Defeatism

Brian Pearce

'Only very slight injury can be done to the machinery of war of the ruling class by pacifism. This is best proved by the courageous but rather futile efforts of Russell himself during the war. The whole affair ended in a few thousand young people being thrown into prison on account of their "conscientious objections".

'In the old Tsarist army the sectarians, and especially the Tolstoyans, were often exposed to persecution because of their passive resistance to militarism; it was not they, however, who solved the problem of the overthrow of Tsarism.'

L. D. Trotsky, 'On Pacifism and Revolution' (1926: written in reply to a review by Bertrand Russell of Trotsky's book 'Where Is Britain Going?')

'Bourgeois pacifism and patriotism are shot through with deceit. In the pacifism and even the patriotism of the oppressed there are elements which reflect on the one hand a hatred of destructive war and on the other a clinging to what they believe to be their own good—elements which we must know how to seize upon in order to draw the requisite conclusions.

'Using these considerations as its point of departure the Fourth International supports every, even if insufficient, demand, if it can draw the masses to a certain extent into active politics, awaken their criticism and strengthen their control over the machinations of the bourgeoisie.'

L. D. Trotsky, Transitional Programme of the Fourth International, 1938

The historic decision of the Scarborough conference of the Labour Party has brought to the forefront once again the great question of the attitude of the working-class movement towards imperialist war—how to prevent it, and how to stop it should it break out in spite of all efforts to prevent it. A major discussion on socialism in relation to war and peace is under way in the Labour Party; and this discussion has obvious points of contact with the discussion about peaceful co-existence and the foreign policy of workers' states which has been stirred up in the Communist Party through the disagreements exhibited by the Soviet and Chinese leaderships.

This article aims to assist the progress of these discussions by recalling the main phases and the main controversies in the development of Marxist theory and practice concerning imperialist war during the period of the First World War. The most important benefit to be obtained from such a study is, of course, not the discovering of 'analogies' but the clarification of *principle* and *method*.

The operative resolution of the Socialist International with regard to war which was in force in 1914 at the time of the outbreak of the First World War was that which had been adopted at the Stuttgart congress in 1907 and which was reaffirmed at Copenhagen in 1910 and at Basle in 1912. After outlining the responsibility of socialists to work to prevent the outbreak of war, this resolution went on to add: 'Should war none the less break out, their duty is to intervene and bring it to an end, and with all their energies to use the political and economic crisis created by the war to rouse the masses of the people and to hasten the fall of capitalist domination.'

To pass such a resolution is one thing, to carry it out in face of martial law and mass patriotic hysteria is quite another. Raymond Postgate commented thus on the loyalty of the various parties composing the International to this resolution, in his book *The International During The War* (published by *The Herald* in 1918): 'The Russian section has carried out this programme to the letter. No other section seems to have taken it seriously. Socialists in most other countries have supported their governments, or, if they have not, have been forced to confine themselves to agitation.'

In order to understand how it was possible for open betrayal on the part of some socialist leaders and hopeless confusion on the part of the others to take place in July-August 1914 in spite of the decisions of the international congresses, it must be appreciated that these decisions, then still comparatively recent, marked a break with the previous Marxist approach to international wars, and also that in 1914 the motivation of this break, and its implications, had not yet been fully worked out. It was not difficult, for instance, for German Social-

Democrats to hark back to Marx in 1870, or Engels in 1891, for justification of the support they gave to their own government in its war with Tsarist Russia and her allies; with a little sophistry, this could even be 'reconciled' with the 1907-1912 resolutions. Nobody at that stage had got around to analyzing whether the new line on war meant that Marx and Engels had been wrong in their practice of 'choosing sides' in the inter-state conflicts of their time, or, if not, what exactly were the changes in the world situation which dictated a change of line by socialists on this vital question. Even less attention had been given to working out the precise practical conclusions to be drawn from the general phrases of the 1907-1912 decisions.

## CHANGES SINCE ENGELS

Over two years after the outbreak of the First World War it was still necessary for Lenin to explain to the experienced Bolshevik activist Inessa Armand what crucial changes had taken place at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th. Engels, Lenin insisted, was quite right to advocate in 1891 national defence by Germany in face of the Franco-Russian alliance. 'In 1891 there was no imperialism at all (I have tried to show in my pamphlet<sup>1</sup> that it arose in 1898-1900, not before) and there was not, nor could there have been, an imperialist war on the part of Germany. (Incidentally, there was no revolutionary Russia either; this is very important.)' There was a most significant difference between the situation in 1891 and in 1914—when, not only was imperialism dominant, but 'Tsarism had been undermined by 1905' (Lenin, Letters to Inessa Armand, 25 December 1916 and 19 January 1917). Marx and Engels had had to determine their line in circumstances in which there was no modern imperialism and no mature objective conditions for socialism, so that there could be no other question for the workers than the question as to which bourgeoisie's success was to be preferred. There were no mass socialist parties in all the belligerent countries—indeed, the building of such parties was the central task to which Marx and Engels devoted themselves. In particular, Russia stood in isolation as a fortress of feudal-absolutist reaction, unshaken by internal revolt and presenting a very real threat to every democratic striving in other countries, both in Europe and in Asia.

In a number of writings of his in 1915-1917, Lenin stressed the *two* changes which he saw as underlying and justifying the new line on war first

<sup>1</sup> Presumably a reference to 'Imperialism', published in the spring of 1916.

adopted by the international socialist movement in 1907. Besides the passing of the advanced capitalist countries into the phase of monopoly capitalism, imperialism, with its implications of 'reaction all along the line', there was the 1905 revolution in Russia. In a sense, 1905 rather than '1898-1900' was the real turning-point. Lenin appears never to have repudiated the attitude he took up at the time of the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905, an attitude in accordance with the Marx-Engels tradition. At that time he did not merely oppose the war aims of Tsarism, he explicitly approved those of Japan. In his article on 'The Fall of Port Arthur' (January 14, 1905) he wrote about how 'progressive, advanced Asia has struck an irreparable blow against reactionary and backward Europe'. . . 'The war of a progressive country with a backward one has this time, as more than once in the past, played a great revolutionary role . . .' And he poured scorn on those Russian commentators who said that a socialist could be only for a workers' Japan but not for a bourgeois Japan. Looking back on that episode in 1908 (in 'Inflammable Material in World Politics'), Lenin still saw fit to characterize the victories of Japan in 1905 as 'victories which ensured her independent national development'.<sup>2</sup>

The overwhelmingly important result of Tsarist Russia's defeat in 1905, however, was to put an end to the 'special question' of Russia as a question to be solved on the international plane. Whereas Marx and Engels had had to decide in all international conflicts which outcome would be most disadvantageous to Russia, and work for that, and even to incite war against Russia, from 1905 onward the liquidation of Tsarism could be safely left to the Russian working class, which had now stepped into world history.

## DEFEATISM

Or could it? At any rate, did this mean that after 1905 the Russian workers could have no different or additional consideration of principle to guide them in war, as compared with the workers of, say, Germany? This question was to give rise to controversy among Russian Marxists when the war came. The opportunist leaders of the German Social-Democratic Party justified their support for the Kaiser's war by references to the special character of Tsarism and the need for blows from outside Russia to bring it down, in the interests of the workers of Russia as well as of Germany. To this

<sup>2</sup> Lenin may not have regarded the Japan of 1904-1905 as **already** an imperialist power. In 'Imperialism' (1916) he wrote: 'new imperialist powers are emerging (e.g., Japan)'.

the central committee of the Bolsheviks replied, in their manifesto of October 1914, 'The War and Russian Social-Democracy', drawn up by Lenin: 'During the past few years, the revolutionary movement against Tsarism in our country has again assumed tremendous proportions [i.e., after the lull of 1908-1910] . . . The Russian proletariat has not shrunk from any sacrifice to free humanity from the shame of the Tsarist monarchy. But we must say that if anything can, under certain conditions, delay the destruction of Tsarism, if anything can help Tsarism in its struggle against the whole of Russian democracy, it is the present war . . . And if anything can hinder the revolutionary struggle of the Russian working class against Tsarism, it is the behaviour of the leaders of German and Austrian Social-Democracy, which the chauvinist press of Russia is continually holding up to us as an example.' At the same time, the manifesto affirmed that '*from the standpoint of the working class and of the labouring masses of all the peoples of Russia* [my emphasis, B.P.], the lesser evil would be the defeat of the Tsarist monarchy'. Some of Lenin's associates questioned whether there was not room for 'a misinterpretation of this passage: that the Russian Social-Democrats wish for the victory of the Germans . . .' (Karpinsky, letter to Lenin, September 27, 1914), but Lenin at this stage refused to budge. 'Tsarism is a hundred times worse than Kaiserism', he wrote to Shlyapnikov, October 17, 1914. Lenin's 'defeatism' is here advanced, it will be observed, as something special for Russia, not as an international line.

Lenin soon clashed with Trotsky over 'defeatism', and also over what was called at the time 'the peace slogan'. As regards the latter, Lenin was desperately anxious to prevent the revolutionary socialists from being taken in tow by various pacifist trends. Only by fighting to overthrow capitalism, to mobilize the workers to carry out a socialist revolution, by 'turning the imperialist war into civil war', could the war be ended in a fashion advantageous to the masses. Any other line would lead merely to the victory of one imperialist coalition or the other or to a compromise at the expense of the peoples which would prove merely an armistice followed by renewal of conflict. Lenin knew the heavy pressure on his comrades, if not to join the 'patriots' then to drop their revolutionary work in favour of abstract peace propaganda of a kind which would find echoes even in some capitalist circles. In reply to Alexandra Kollontai, he wrote at the very end of 1914: 'You emphasize that "we must bring forward a slogan which will *unite us all*". I tell you frankly that at present what I am afraid of is just this indiscriminate uniting, which in my opinion is most dangerous and most harmful to the proletariat'. He never ceased,

throughout the war, to combat the illusions of pacifism. The two major fallacies in the pacifist approach he saw as these. First, the idea that it is possible to abolish war without abolishing capitalism: 'only after we have overthrown, finally vanquished, and expropriated the bourgeoisie of the whole world, and not only of one country, will wars become impossible' ('The War Programme of the Proletarian Revolution', September 1916). Second, avoidance of the hard fact that the process of extirpating the causes of war must itself include a series of wars of various kinds: 'civil wars of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie for socialism are inevitable. Wars are possible between a country in which socialism has been victorious and bourgeois or reactionary countries' ('The "Disarmament" Slogan', Autumn 1916). Far from turning their backs on weapons and military knowledge, the workers must strive to obtain both, since only with their aid would the capitalist class, the source of war, be overthrown and put down, nationally and internationally. 'We must not let ourselves get mixed up with the sentimental liberals. A bayonet period has begun! And that is a fact which means that we must fight *with the same kind of weapon*.' (Letter to Shlyapnikov, November 14, 1914).

## PEACE BY REVOLUTION

So profoundly concerned was Lenin to draw a sharp distinction between the revolutionaries and those who were vaguely 'for peace' that he at first viewed with extreme suspicion all attempts to put forward 'peace programmes'. 'Not "peace without annexations" but peace to the cottages, war on the palaces; peace to the proletariat and the toiling masses, war on the bourgeoisie!' (Lenin, "'Peace Without Annexations'", February 29, 1916). On this issue Lenin found himself at odds with Trotsky, who considered from the start that the slogan of peace, linked with a programme for a democratic peace settlement, provided 'the surest way by which Social-Democracy can isolate militarist reaction in Europe' ('The War and the International', 1914).<sup>3</sup> In the opening phases of the war, Lenin and Trotsky thus placed the emphasis differently—Lenin upon the need to prevent any illusions arising about the possibility of peace without revolution, Trotsky upon the need to find transitional demands which would enable the revolutionaries to link themselves with the broad movement of opposition to the war.

<sup>3</sup> An English version of this was published in 1918 under the misleading title **The Bolsheviks and World Peace**. Trotsky was not, of course, a Bolshevik when he wrote this work. (He joined the Bolsheviks informally in May 1917, formally in July.)

It must be appreciated that Lenin did not, of course, ignore in the sectarian manner the broad anti-war movement or fail to see that the revolutionaries had to make contact with it. Already in May 1915 ('Bourgeois Philanthropists and Revolutionary Social Democracy') he noted that alongside all sorts of intrigues and diversions there were also the 'peace sympathies' of 'the unenlightened masses', expressing a 'growing protest against the war', and that the revolutionaries must take these into account. And in the pamphlet 'Socialism and War' (Summer 1915), Lenin and Zinoviev pointed to the popular sentiment for peace and observed: 'It is the duty of all Social-Democrats to take advantage of this sentiment. They will take the most ardent part in every demonstration made on this basis, but they will not deceive the people by assuming that in the absence of a revolutionary movement it is possible to have peace without annexations. . . .' 'Socialists of a pacifist shade . . . can be our fellow travellers'; we have 'to get closer to them' in order to fight the social-patriots. But in doing so, the revolutionaries must never forget the limitations of the political position of these elements, and must certainly never confine themselves 'to what is acceptable to them'.

Parallel with Lenin's differences with Trotsky on the 'peace slogan' and 'peace programmes', and also to some extent on 'defeatism', were differences on organizational questions. Trotsky clung much longer to the hope that it would not be necessary to make a clean break with the various centrist trends in the Russian and internationalist movements. In the end, of course, Trotsky came over to Lenin's view on this matter, as on that of the type of internal organization of the party. On organizational questions Lenin convinced Trotsky: it is by no means clear, however, that Lenin did not come round eventually, on questions of the tactics and slogans of the fight against war, as on the 'permanent revolution' approach to Russia's politics, to something closer to Trotsky's position.

## TROTSKY VERSUS LENIN

Trotsky protested sharply against the slogan of 'Russia's defeat the lesser evil'. In his 1914 (Zurich) pamphlet on 'The War and the International' he declared: 'We must not for a moment entertain the idea of purchasing the doubtful liberation of Russia by the certain destruction of the liberty of Belgium and France, and—what is more important still—thereby inoculating the German and Austrian proletariat with the virus of imperialism.' Was it not 'possible that the defeat of Tsarism might actually aid the cause of the Revolution? As to such a possibility, there is nothing to be said against it'.

That had happened, indeed, in 1905; but one ought not to forget that 'while the Russo-Japanese war weakened Tsarism, it strengthened Japanese militarism. The same considerations apply in a still higher degree to the present German-Russian war'. Moreover, a revolution in Russia which was brought on by defeat would find the German bayonets at its chest at the moment of birth, and that would not help it. No, 'the Social Democrats could not and cannot now combine their aims with any of the historical responsibilities of this war, that is, with either the victory of the Triple Alliance or the victory of the Entente'. Trotsky's Paris paper *Nashe Slovo* ridiculed Lenin's defeatism as 'defencism turned inside out' and 'social-patriotism standing on its head'. In an open letter to the editorial board of *Kommunist*, June 1915, Trotsky explained his disagreements with Lenin on both the peace slogan and defeatism. 'I cannot reconcile myself', he wrote, 'with the vagueness and evasiveness of your position on the question of mobilizing the proletariat under the slogan of *struggle for peace*, the slogan under which, as a matter of fact, the labouring masses are now recovering their political senses and the revolutionary elements of socialism are being united in all countries; the slogan under which an attempt is being made now to restore the international contacts among the socialist proletariat. Furthermore, under no condition can I agree with your opinion, which is emphasized by a resolution, that Russia's defeat would be a "lesser evil". This opinion represents a fundamental connivance with the political methodology of social patriotism, a connivance for which there is no reason or justification, and which substitutes an orientation (extremely arbitrary under present conditions) along the line of a "lesser evil" for the revolutionary struggle against war and the conditions which generate this war'.<sup>4</sup>

The resolution referred to by Trotsky was that adopted by the foreign (i.e., outside Russia) sections of the Bolshevik party at their conference in Berne in March 1915. In this document two things were said

<sup>4</sup> Alfred Rosmer, who took part in the internationalist struggles and polemics of this period, wrote in the first volume (1936) of his *Le Mouvement ouvrier pendant la guerre mondiale*; 'The consequences of our activity are of interest to us only in relation to our purpose, revolution, and not in relation to "victory", which is the business of the imperialist bourgeoisie. Does "revolutionary defeatism" add anything to this? I do not think so. On the contrary, I see clearly the dangers which it involves. . . . "Defeatism", even followed by the adjective "revolutionary", puts the emphasis on defeat, whereas we should put it on revolution.' Trotsky admired Rosmer's book very much, and in his review of it in *New International*, June 1936, went so far as to declare that 'the rule should be established: nobody in our ranks who has not studied Rosmer's work ought to be allowed to speak publicly on the question of war.'

about the question of defeat. First, that 'in every country, the struggle against a home government conducting an imperialist war must not be stopped by the prospect of the country being defeated as a result of revolutionary agitation'. It will be noticed that Trotsky raised no objection to this idea. But, second, it went on to assert that defeat actually facilitates revolution, that 'this proposition is particularly true as regards Russia', and, finally, that 'the defeat of Russia is, under all conditions, the lesser evil'.

The text of this resolution itself represented a certain retreat from a position Lenin had taken up a little earlier. In his article 'Under A Stolen Flag' (February 1915) Lenin replied to the Russian defencist Potresov, who tried to shelter behind the Marx-Engels approach to wars, that in the present war 'both sides are worst', and that for this reason the socialist workers must desire 'the defeat of every imperialist bourgeoisie'. In this article the special characteristics of Russia were relegated to the past: 'Potresov cannot fail to know that in our epoch not one of the backward state formations is or can be "the central evil"'. This was done, however, in order to apply to *every* country the slogan originally devised for Russia alone. A group of Bolsheviks which included Bukharin (the 'Baugy group') objected to this 'wish-defeat' formulation as an *international* slogan, and their objections were reflected in the final terms of the Berne resolution. (As can be seen, this resolution actually goes back to the idea that Tsarist Russia is in some way specially noxious, and it even specifies that 'the victory of Russia would bring with it a strengthening of world reaction'; which was just what the German social-patriots claimed.)

In the summer of 1915, doubtless as a result of the clash with Trotsky over the Berne resolution, Lenin and Zinoviev, in their pamphlet 'Socialism and War', reverted to the formulation to which Bukharin had objected, and declared that 'the Socialists of *all* the belligerent countries should express their wish that *all* "their" governments be defeated'. Lenin went even further in his article (August 1915) on 'Defeat of One's Own Government in the Imperialist War'. 'Revolutionary action against one's own government undoubtedly and incontrovertibly means not only desiring its defeat but really facilitating defeat.' He added however: '(For the "penetrating reader": this does not mean "blowing up bridges", organizing unsuccessful military strikes, and in general helping the government to inflict defeat upon revolutionaries.)' Just what it did mean, in what sense it meant anything more than carrying on the class struggle *without* regard to the effects this might have on the fortunes of war, was not really made clear. The only special, novel kind of activity specified as needed in wartime was the promoting of fraterniza-

tion between the rank and file soldiers at the front; and this was not in dispute.<sup>5</sup>

## ZIMMERWALD AND AFTER

The Zimmerwald conference in September 1915 brought together for the first time since the outbreak of war representatives of the socialist groups in the different belligerent countries who wished to renew international contacts and to summon the working class to 'begin the struggle for peace', as the conference manifesto put it. This manifesto, drafted by Trotsky, advanced the slogan of a peace without annexations or war indemnities and based on self-determination for *all* peoples. It was essentially a compromise document and though 'the sacred aims of socialism' were mentioned, the precise connexion between a democratic peace and social revolution was left unstated. Lenin voted for the Zimmerwald manifesto because, in spite of its shortcomings, it constituted 'a step towards an ideological and practical rupture with opportunism and social-

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<sup>5</sup> After the October revolution, Trotsky's wartime articles in *Nashe Slovo*, 'What Is A Peace Programme?' were published by the Soviet Government (1918), and his 1914 pamphlet 'The War and the International' went through several editions, 'serving as a textbook for the study of the Marxist attitude towards the war' (Trotsky, *My Life*) until it was banned in 1924. The year 1924 saw an outburst of articles and republications of documents in the Soviet and international Communist press which revived the story of the wartime differences between Lenin and Trotsky about the peace slogan and defeatism (on which neither of these leaders had commented after 1917); and it became an article of faith in the bureaucratized Bolshevik Party to believe that Lenin was *always* right against Trotsky.

Trotsky never analysed the differences between himself and Lenin on the war question, but always wrote about the struggle against imperialist war in a way which sought to unite Lenin's form with Trotsky's content, e.g., in 'Learn To Think' (1938): 'Revolutionary defeatism signifies only that in its class struggle the proletarian party does not stop at any "patriotic" considerations, since defeat of its own imperialist government, brought about, or hastened, by the revolutionary movement of the masses, is an incomparably **lesser evil** than victory gained at the price of national unity, that is, the political prostration of the proletariat.' Again, in 'A Step Towards Social Patriotism' (1939): 'The idea of defeatism signifies in reality the following: conducting an irreconcilable revolutionary struggle against one's own bourgeoisie as the main enemy, without being deterred by the fact that this struggle may result in the defeat of one's own government: **given a revolutionary movement**, the defeat of one's own government is a **lesser evil**.' And in the book *Stalin* (written in 1940) Trotsky asserts that 'the essence' of 'what has been called Lenin's theory of "defeatism"' is that one must not be held back by the possibility that one's revolutionary agitation may facilitate the defeat of one's own government. Nothing is said about **wishing for** defeat, **trying to facilitate** defeat, etc.

chauvinism' and he considered it would have been sectarian to stand aside. But he reserved full freedom to criticize the weaknesses of the manifesto, and his own group issued a declaration regretting the absence of either a pronouncement on the opportunism in the socialist movement which was not only the chief cause of the collapse of the international but also strove to perpetuate that collapse, or of a 'clear pronouncement as to the methods of fighting against the war'.

After Zimmerwald, Lenin continued for just over a year to plug away at his 'defeatism' thesis, which he continued to present as valid for all countries participating in the war, and not merely for Russia. Thus, in February 1916, replying to a German social-patriot who had asserted that the anti-war fight of Karl Liebknecht helped the Allies, Lenin observed: 'Kolb is right when he says that the tactics of the Left. . . mean the "military weakening" of Germany, i.e., desiring and aiding its defeat, defeatism. Kolb is wrong only—only!—in that he refuses to see the international character of these tactics of the Left' ('Wilhelm Kolb and George Plekhanov'). In other words, if Liebknecht was helping the Allies, Lenin was no less helping the German-led group of powers. When the internationalist socialists held a second gathering at Kienthal in April 1916, Lenin submitted proposals which explicitly affirmed that it was not sufficient to say that 'the workers in their revolutionary struggle must not take into account the military situation of their country'—one must go further and show that defeat was a good thing, for 'every defeat of the government in a reactionary war facilitates revolution, which alone is capable of bringing about a lasting and democratic peace'. Replying to Rosa Luxemburg's 'Junius Pamphlet', in August 1916, Lenin posed rhetorically the question whether it was not true that 'defeats help the cause of the revolutionary class'. In 'The War Programme of the Proletarian Revolution' (autumn 1916), he reaffirmed that 'the proletariat must not only oppose' all wars waged by the imperialist great powers, 'but it must also wish for the defeat of "its" government in such wars'.

That appears to be the *last* statement of the 'defeatism' thesis by Lenin in its 'internationalised' form. And the *last* statement of it in its original narrower form as special to Russia appears to have occurred in the article 'On Separate Peace', written in November 1916—in a form which implies that, in spite of 1905, Tsarism remained after all a reactionary power *sui generis*, not merely one imperialist power among several. Whatever the outcome of the war, he wrote, 'it will prove that the Russian Social-Democrats who said that the defeat of tsarism, the complete military defeat of tsarism, is "at any rate"

a lesser evil were right'. Even if the workers of Europe should prove unable to advance to socialism during the war, at least 'Eastern Europe and Asia can march with seven-league strides towards democracy only if tsarism meets with utter military defeat'.

## TOWARDS UNITY

The disappearance of 'defeatism' from Lenin's writings seems to constitute one aspect of a change in his outlook about this time the other aspect of which is an increasing readiness to link the revolutionary struggle with a programme of definite demands in relation to peace. Thus, in 'The "Peace Programme"' (March 1916), while warning as vigorously as ever against the danger that talk of a democratic peace can be used to divert the workers from the real struggle, he now approaches the question rather from the standpoint of *clarifying* and *sharpening* the 'peace programme': 'our "peace programme" demands that the principal democratic point on this question—the repudiation of annexations—should be applied in practice and not in words, that it should serve to promote the propaganda of internationalism, not of national hypocrisy', etc.

With the passage of time, experience<sup>6</sup> seems to have brought home to Lenin the reality of the danger of a sterile nihilistic conclusion being drawn from his presentation of the way to fight against the war—the existence of that ditch on the *other* side of the road which Trotsky had had clearly in view since

<sup>6</sup> Already long before the war, Lenin had encountered and rejected the negative, flippant semi-anarchist views of Hervé (who, when the war came, made a right-about turn into the extremist French chauvinism). 'That the "proletarians have no fatherland" is actually stated in the Communist Manifesto; that the [social-patriotic] position of Vollmar, Noske and company is a "flagrant violation" of this fundamental proposition of international socialism is equally true. But it does not follow from this that Hervé and the Hervéists are right when they assert that it is immaterial to the proletariat in which fatherland it lives: whether it lives in monarchist Germany, republican France or despotic Turkey. The fatherland, i.e., the given political, cultural and social environment, is the most powerful factor in the class struggle of the proletariat, and if Vollmar is wrong in establishing a kind of "truly German" attitude of the proletariat towards the "fatherland", Hervé is not less wrong in treating such an important factor of the proletarian struggle for emancipation in an unpardonably uncritical fashion. The proletariat cannot treat the political, social and cultural conditions of its struggle with indifference or equanimity, consequently it cannot remain indifferent to the destiny of its country. But it is interested in the destiny of its country only in so far as it affects its class struggle, and not by virtue of some bourgeois "patriotism" which sounds altogether indecent on the lips of a Social Democrat' ('Militant Militarism and the Anti-Militarist Tactics of Social Democracy', 1908).

the beginning of the war. Very early on, in January 1915 ('Reply to Basok'), Lenin had had to rebuff the hopeful overtures of a Ukrainian nationalist working for Russia's defeat who thought Lenin could only mean the same as himself, and sought a working agreement. 'We are not travelling the same road' was Lenin's laconic reply. Regarding the Bundists, the Jewish socialists in Russia, who advocated the defeat of Russia by Germany during the war, Lenin had also early indicated that there was no basis for solidarity on the part of the Bolsheviks. 'The Bundists . . . are generally Germanophiles and rejoice at the thought of Russia's defeat, but how are they any better than Plekhanov?' (Plekhanov, the Russian social-patriot, claimed that it would be good for Germany to be defeated by Russia.)<sup>7</sup> Confusion on the implications of 'defeatism', as on the 'peace slogan', developed during 1916 among a section of the Bolsheviks, and Lenin found it necessary to wage a polemic against their spokesman 'Kievsky' (Pyatakov) in the autumn of 1916 which may well have served to clarify his own thinking as well as theirs. In 'A Caricature of Marxism', Lenin denounced the views of those who, from the rejection of abstract peace propaganda, deduced that 'we are not in favour of a democratic peace'. Merely negative, 'down-with' slogans were no good. 'Social Democracy does not and cannot advance a single "negative" slogan that would merely merely serve "to sharpen the consciousness of the proletariat against imperialism" [a phrase of Pyatakov's] without at the same time giving a positive answer to the question as to *how* Social Democracy would solve the same problem if it were in power. A "negative" slogan that is not connected with a definite positive position does not "sharpen" the mind but blunts it. . . .' And in 'The Discussion on Self-Determination Summed Up' he finally flings away the special defeat-worthy characteristics of Tsarist Russia: 'Tsarism has obviously and incontrovertibly ceased to be the chief mainstay of reaction, firstly because it is supported by international finance capital, particularly French; secondly, because of 1905'. Lenin's investigation of the nature of imperialism had evidently led him to a realization of the *subordination* of Tsarist absolutism

<sup>7</sup>Trotsky wrote to the French socialist-turned-chauvinist Jules Guesde, October 11, 1916, replying to the charge that he and other opponents of war from the Marxist standpoint were so many agents of the German General Staff: 'I believe I have the right to assert that we revolutionary internationalists are far more dangerous enemies of German reaction than all the governments of the Allies put together. Their hostility to Germany is, at bottom, nothing but the mere rivalry of the competitor, whereas our revolutionary hatred of its ruling class is indestructible. Imperialist competition may again unite the enemy brethren of today.'

to 'international finance capital', its dependent relationship to the latter, which was one of the starting points of Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution.

The article 'On Separate Peace', mentioned above, dealt with rumoured moves for a peace between Russia and Germany, directed against Britain. This theme recurs in Lenin's writings thereafter, at the end of 1916 and the beginning of 1917, e.g., in 'A Turn in World Politics' (January 31, 1917). There was a definite turn on the part of certain ruling-class circles, Lenin perceived, from imperialist war to imperialist peace, partly in order to avoid the danger of revolution. Such a peace would, of course, be merely an armistice before another bout of imperialist war with different alignments. Implicit in moves of this kind was the possibility of some countries being sacrificed for the benefit of others, the possibility of a sort of *reactionary* defeatism, and the danger that some tired and confused people would say that, 'after all, an imperialist peace is better than imperialist war'. Another factor in Lenin's thinking in the weeks immediately preceding the February (March) revolution in Russia was the direct contact he was now able to make with ordinary Russian rank-and-file soldiers, so that he could ascertain at first hand their moods and their ways of thinking. In his letter of January 30, 1917 to Inessa Armand he describes a talk he had had with some escaped Russian prisoners of war. He learnt with interest how these men, though bitterly hostile to the Tsar, had resisted with indignation attempts by their German captors to win them over for defeatist purposes, and how, though they wanted the war to stop, they could not agree to a purely pacifist position: 'If the Germans press hard, how is it possible not to defend oneself?' Rosmer suggests that the difference between Lenin and Trotsky on anti-war tactics was derived to a large extent from the differences in their location during the war—Lenin being in neutral Switzerland while Trotsky was in France, in closest touch with the masses of a belligerent country. Trotsky may sometimes have yielded unduly to the influence of the moods of these masses; it was certainly impossible for him to ignore them. With the irruption of those escaped prisoners of war into Switzerland Lenin was already, before his actual return to Russia, in direct touch with the Russian workers and peasants.

#### NEITHER DEFENCIST NOR DEFEATIST

The overthrow of the Tsarist monarchy created a fresh situation in Russia. That which had made it possible to think of Russia as in some special sense

a stronghold of reaction had been swept away.<sup>8</sup> On the contrary, Russia was now 'the freest country on earth', and the scene of a unique political phenomenon, the *dual power* of the workers', soldiers' and peasants' soviets and the bourgeois Provisional Government. The Russian revolution had begun, but the main battle still lay ahead. Russia was not yet workers' and peasants' Russia, though it could become that as soon as the workers and peasants decided to make it so, ending the 'dual power' in their own favour. How to bring that about?

There could be no question of going over to 'defencism', i.e., political support of the war, which remained an imperialist war so long as the bourgeoisie remained in power. Lenin struck sharply at Stalin and Kamenev, who at first advocated a line of 'pressure on the Government to open peace negotiations' (see Stalin's article in his *Works*, Volume III, English edition, page 8). In his historic 'April Theses' Lenin insisted on 'exposure as a policy instead of the inadmissible and illusion-sowing "demand" that this government, a government of capitalists, should cease to be imperialist'. At the same time, one could not continue in the old way. 'The slogan "Down With The War" is correct, to be sure, but it does not take into account the peculiarity of the tasks of the moment, the necessity to approach the masses in a different way. It reminds me of another slogan, "Down With The Tsar", with which an inexperienced agitator of the "good old days" went directly and simply to the villages to be beaten up'. One had to undertake careful, patient, tactful work of explanation among the masses who were honest defencists, in order to show them *how* the war could be ended in a way to the people's advantage: 'It cannot be ended by "sticking the bayonet into the ground", to use the expression of a soldier defencist' ('The Tasks of the Proletariat in Our Revolution').

Again, at the April conference, of the Bolshevik Party: 'Many of us, myself included, have had occasion to address the people, particularly the soldiers, and it seems to me that even when everything is explained to them from the point of view of class interests there is still one thing in our position that they cannot fully grasp, namely, in what way we intend to finish the war, in what way we think it possible to bring the war to an end'. Clearly, 'the war cannot be ended by a simple refusal of the soldiers of one side only to continue the war', and the Bolsheviks had to work in a

<sup>8</sup>In their introduction to the 1918 re-issue of their 1915 pamphlet 'Socialism and War', Lenin and Zinoviev make a point of reminding the reader of when it was written: 'It is particularly necessary to remember this in connexion with the passages dealing with Russia. Russia then was still Tsarist, Romanov Russia.'

situation in which 'the idea of thus concluding the war had been attributed to us over and over again by persons who wish to win an easy victory over their opponents by distorting the latter's views'. Addressing the Petrograd city conference of the party Lenin reminded them that 'here the power is in the hands of the soldiers, who incline towards defencism'. He drew the attention of the Bolshevik fraction in the Congress of Soviets to the need to take account of the defencist feeling of the masses, which was based on the fact that 'nowhere else is there the degree of freedom we have'. 'The masses approach this question not from a theoretical but from a practical viewpoint. Our mistake lies in our theoretical approach'. One had to appreciate what the defencist worker *meant* by his 'defencism', and try to find a bridge to him.<sup>9</sup>

Looking back on that period a year later, after the October Revolution, Lenin had occasion to define in a clear-cut way the change of line which the Bolsheviks had made. This occurred at the Congress of the Soviets which was discussing whether or not to ratify the peace treaty of Brest-Litovsk. In his concluding speech in this debate made on March 15, 1918, Lenin replied to some remarks by Kamkov, a Left Socialist-Revolutionary. 'I will quote you yet another passage from Kamkov's speech, in order to show how any representative of the working people and the exploited masses will react to this speech. "When Comrade Lenin declared here yesterday that Comrades Tsereteli and Chernov and others [leaders of the Menshevik and Socialist-Revolutionary parties in 1917] disrupted the army, can we not find the courage to say that Lenin and ourselves also disrupted the army?" Kamkov missed his mark. Having heard that we were defeatists, he remembered this fact at a time when we have ceased to be defeatists. He did not remember it at the right time. They have memorised this tag, it serves as a revolutionary rattle for them to make a noise with, but they can't think out what it means, as they should. I declare that out of a thousand village assemblies where Soviet power has been consolidated, in more than nine hundred of such assemblies there are people who will tell the Left S - R party

<sup>9</sup>Cf. Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution*, Vol. I, pp 276-277: 'Deserting, extraordinarily frequent on the eve of the revolution, was very infrequent in the first weeks after. The army was waiting. In the hope that the revolution would give peace, the soldier did not refuse to put a shoulder under the front: otherwise, he thought, the new government won't be able to conclude a peace. . . . "We mustn't stick our bayonets in the ground!" Under the influence of obscure and contradictory moods the soldiers in those days frequently refused even to listen to the Bolsheviks. They thought perhaps, impressed by certain unskilful speeches, that the Bolsheviks were not concerned with the defence of the revolution. . . .'

that it deserves no confidence whatever. They say, just think: we disrupted the army and now we ought to remember that fact. But how did we disrupt the army? *We were defeatists under the Tsar, but under Tsereteli and Chernov we were not defeatists.* [My emphasis, B.P.] We published in *Pravda* the appeal which Krylenko, who was then still on the run, addressed to the army: "Why I Am Going To Petrograd". He said: "We don't call on you to make riots". This was not disintegrating the army. Those who declared this great war were the ones who disintegrated the army. . . . And I affirm that, beginning with this appeal of Krylenko's, which was not the first and which I recall to you because it has particularly stuck in my memory, we did not disrupt the army but said: hold the front—the sooner you take power the easier you will be able to maintain it. . . .'

Krylenko's appeal, to which Lenin here referred, had been issued by him when, though wanted by the police, this Bolshevik junior officer had been elected as the delegate of part of the army at the front to the Congress of Soviets in Petrograd. 'Beware of provocateurs who, posing as Bolsheviks, will attempt to lure you into disorders and riots . . . The real Bolsheviks appeal to you not to make riots, but to carry on a class-conscious revolutionary struggle'. Lenin had himself quoted it in *Pravda* of June 16, 1917, in an article entitled: 'Bolshevism and the "Disintegration" of the Army', in which he wrote, in reply to slanderers and persecutors: 'where Bolshevism has a chance to appear in the open, there we find no disorganization. Where there are no Bolsheviks, or where they are not permitted to talk, there we find excesses, disintegration and pseudo-Bolsheviks. And this is just what our enemies need. They need a pretext for saying that "the Bolsheviks are disorganizing the army", in order later to shut the mouths of the Bolsheviks'.

### ON THE ROAD TO OCTOBER

A few further quotations may help to clarify the position of the Bolsheviks on the war during the period between the two revolutions of 1917. 'The programme [of our party] says: stimulate fraternization (but do not permit the Germans to deceive the Russians) . . .' (Lenin, 'A Virtual Truce', in *Pravda* of May 22). On his open letter to the delegates to the All-Russia soviet of peasants' deputies, May 24, Lenin urged the peasants to take over the land at once and get on with the spring sowing: 'The cultivation of the fields is absolutely essential. . . . This is necessary in order to improve the provisioning of the soldiers at the front.' In the same letter: 'This terrible war must be ended as soon as possible—not by a separate peace with Germany, but by a general peace, not by a peace concluded by the

capitalists, but by one forced on the capitalists by the working masses. There is only one way to do this, that of transferring the whole power of the state into the hands of the soviets of workers', soldiers' and peasants' deputies, in Russia and other countries.' At the Congress of Soviets, on June 22, Lenin retorted to accusations of defeatism: 'We are reminded here of the German front, concerning which not one of us has suggested any change, except the free distribution of our proclamations, which have the Russian text printed on one side and the German on the other. . . .'

The weeks between August and October saw reactionary defeatism come out into the open more than ever before, and imposed a highly complicated task upon the Bolsheviks, especially those in the army at the front. This was when the generals deliberately surrendered the city of Riga to the Germans and left the approaches to Petrograd unguarded. A report by the Rumanian ambassador, published after the October Revolution, revealed that the commander-in-chief, Kornilov, calculated 'that the impression which the capture of Riga will produce on public opinion will permit the immediate restoration of discipline in the Russian army' (*Pravda*, December 1, 1917). How did the soldiers, more influenced by Bolshevism on this sector of the front than anywhere else, behave in this crisis? Trotsky quotes official accounts: 'The spirit of the soldiers was astonishing. According to the testimony of . . . officers, their staunchness was something never before seen.' 'In the centre of the point of attack was a Lettish brigade consisting almost exclusively of Bolsheviks. . . . Receiving orders to advance the brigade went forward with red banners and bands playing and fought with extraordinary courage.' He notes that official reports also testify that the sailors who took part in the defence of the Moonsund archipelago, in the Gulf of Riga (where treachery by the Russian command was intensified by the sinister attitude of the British naval authorities), showed unusual bravery, and comments: 'A part was played in determining the mood of the servicemen, especially the Lettish riflemen and the Baltic sailors, by the fact that this time it was a question of the direct defence of two centres of the revolution Riga and Petrograd. The more advanced of the soldiers and sailors had already got hold of the Bolshevik idea that "to stick your bayonet in the ground does not settle the question of the war", that the struggle for peace was inseparable from the struggle for power for a new revolution' (*History of the Russian Revolution*, volume II, pages 193-194).

In this new situation, not only Trotsky (in 'What Next?', September 1917) could *accuse* certain Russian generals of working for the defeat of Russia (in order to facilitate not revolution but counter-

revolution), but Lenin himself as well. In his 'Draft Resolution on the Political Situation' Lenin wrote that the landlords and bourgeoisie 'are now ready to commit, and are committing, the most outlandish crimes, such as giving up Riga (and afterwards Petrograd) to the Germans, laying the front open . . .' In 'The Tasks of the Revolution' he declared that 'the Kornilovist generals and officers remaining in power will undoubtedly *open the front to the Germans on purpose*, as they have done in Galicia and near Riga. This can be prevented only by the formation of a new government on a new basis. . . .'

The pamphlet 'The Impending Catastrophe and How To Combat It' set forth a programme of demands—nationalization of the banks, a democratically controlled rationing system, etc.—which was frankly inspired by the example of the Jacobins in 1793: 'The example of France shows one thing and one thing only, namely, that in order to render Russia capable of self-defence, in order to obtain in Russia too "miracles" of mass heroism, all the old ways must be swept away with "Jacobin" ruthlessness and Russia rejuvenated and regenerated *economically*.' This idea was reiterated in 'Will The Bolsheviks Maintain Power?'—'The defensive power of the country, after ridding itself of the yoke of capitalism and after giving the land to the peasants and placing the banks under workers' control, would be many times stronger than the defensive power of a capitalist country.'

## APPENDIX

### Learn to Think: A Friendly Suggestion to Certain Ultra-Leftists

The following short article was first published in English in the (American) *New Internationalist* of July 1938 and the (British) *Workers' International News* of August 1938 at the time when German Fascism was strengthening its hold in Central Europe, with the occupation of Austria and threats to Czechoslovakia. It was then still unclear whether the British and French imperialists would form an alliance with the Soviet Union or would continue to try to deflect Nazi aggression against that country.

Certain professional ultra-left phrasemongers are attempting at all cost to 'correct' the thesis of the Secretariat of the Fourth International on war in accordance with their own ossified prejudices. They especially attack that part of the thesis which states that in all imperialist countries the revolutionary party, while remaining in irreconcilable opposition to its own government in time of war, should, nevertheless, mould its practical politics in each country to the internal situation and to the international groupings, sharply differentiating a workers' state from a bourgeois state, a colonial country from an imperialist country.

The proletariat of a capitalist country which finds

Almost on the very eve of the October insurrection in his urgent 'Letter to Comrades' inciting the Central Committee to go into action at once, Lenin pointed to the *danger* of a collapse of the front, with possible collusion between the Russian bourgeoisie and the Kaiser, based on mass desertion by the weary and disillusioned soldiers. The Bolsheviks seized power in time to prevent the surrender of Petrograd, to deprive the capitalists of the opportunity to send 'send the workers to school under Ludendorff', as Trotsky expressed it.

**Note on sources:** The following works were utilized in the above article, in addition to the writings of Lenin and Trotsky themselves and Rosmer's book mentioned in the text: *Marxism, Nationality and War*, by Dona Torr, and *The Bolsheviks and the World War*, by Olga Gankin and H. H. Fisher, both published in 1940; and Hal Draper's articles on Lenin in *The New Internationalist* in 1953-1954.

**Further reading:** For the foreign policy of the Bolsheviks after their capture of power, see '“Export of Revolution”, 1917-1924', by Brian Pearce in *Labour Review* for August-September 1958; and for the application of the lessons of 1914-1917 by the Trotskyists in 1939-1945, see '“Marxists in the Second World War”', by B. Farnborough [Brian Pearce] in *Labour Review* for April-May 1959.

itself in an alliance with the U S S R<sup>1</sup> [states the thesis] must retain fully and completely its irreconcilable *hostility to the imperialist government of its own country*. In this sense its policy will not differ

<sup>1</sup> We can leave aside here the question of the class character of the U S S R. We are interested in the question of policy in relation to a workers' state in general or to a colonial country fighting for its independence. So far as the class nature of the U S S R is concerned we can incidentally recommend to the ultra-leftists that they gaze upon themselves in the mirror of A. Ciliga's book 'In the Country of the Big Lie'. This ultra-left author, completely lacking any Marxist schooling, pursues his idea to the very end, that is, to liberal-anarchic abstraction.

from that of the proletariat in a country fighting against the U S S R. But in the nature of practical actions considerable differences may arise depending on the concrete war situation ('War and the Fourth International', page 21, para. 44).

The ultra-leftists consider this postulate, the correctness of which has been confirmed by the entire course of development, as the starting point of . . . social-patriotism.<sup>2</sup> Since the attitude towards imperialist governments should be 'the same' in all countries, these strategists ban any distinctions beyond the boundaries of their own imperialist country. Theoretically their mistake arises from an attempt to construct fundamentally different bases for war-time and peace-time policies. Let us assume that rebellion breaks out tomorrow in the French colony of Algeria under the banner of national independence and that the Italian government, motivated by its own imperialist interests, prepares to send weapons to the rebels. What should the attitude of the Italian workers be in this case? I have purposely taken an example of rebellion against a *democratic* imperialism with intervention on the side of the rebels from a *fascist* imperialism. Should the Italian workers prevent the shipping of arms to the Algerians? Let any ultra-leftist dare answer this question in the affirmative. Every revolutionist, together with the Italian workers and the rebellious Algerians, would spurn such an answer with indignation. Even if a general maritime strike broke out in fascist Italy at the same time, even in this case the strikers should make an exception in favour of those ships carrying aid to the colonial slaves in revolt; otherwise they would be no more than wretched trade unionists—not proletarian revolutionists.

At the same time, the French maritime workers, even though not faced with any strike whatsoever, would be compelled to exert every effort to block the shipment of ammunition intended for use against the rebels. Only such a policy on the part of the Italian and French workers constitutes the policy of revolutionary internationalism.

Does this not signify, however, that the Italian workers moderate their struggle in this case against the fascist regime? Not in the slightest. Fascism renders 'aid' to the Algerians only in order to weaken its enemy, France, and to lay its rapacious hand on her colonies. The revolutionary Italian workers do not forget this for a single moment. They call upon the Algerians not to trust their treacherous 'ally' and at the same time continue their own irreconcilable struggle against fascism, 'the main enemy in their own country'. Only in

<sup>2</sup> Mrs. Simone Weil even writes that our position is the same as Plekhanov's in 1914-18. Simone Weil, of course, has a right to understand nothing. Yet it is not necessary to abuse this right.

this way can they gain the confidence of the rebels, help the rebellion and strengthen their own revolutionary position.

If the above is correct in peace-time, why does it become false in war-time? Everyone knows the postulate of the famous German military theoretician, Clausewitz, that war is the continuation of politics by other means. This profound thought leads naturally to the conclusion that the struggle against war is but the continuation of the general proletarian struggle during peace-time. Does the proletariat in peace-time reject and sabotage all the acts and measures of the bourgeois government? Even during a strike which embraces an entire city, the workers take measures to ensure the delivery of food to their own districts, make sure that they have water, that the hospitals do not suffer, etc. Such measures are dictated not by opportunism in relation to the bourgeoisie but by concern for the interests of the strike itself, by concern for the sympathy of the submerged city masses, etc. These elementary rules of proletarian strategy in peace-time retain full force in time of war as well.

An irreconcilable attitude against bourgeois militarism does not signify at all that the proletariat *in all cases* enters into a struggle against its own 'national' army. At least the workers would not interfere with soldiers who are extinguishing a fire or rescuing drowning people during a flood; on the contrary, they would help side by side with the soldiers and fraternize with them. And the question is not exhausted merely by cases of elemental calamities. If the French fascists should make an attempt today at a coup d'état and the Daladier government found itself forced to move troops against the fascists, the revolutionary workers, while maintaining their complete political independence, would fight against the fascists alongside of these troops. Thus in a number of cases the workers are forced not only to permit and tolerate, but actively to support the practical measures of the bourgeois government.

In ninety cases out of a hundred the workers actually place a minus sign where the bourgeoisie places a plus sign. In ten cases, however, they are forced to fix the same sign as the bourgeoisie but with their own seal, in which is expressed their mistrust of the bourgeoisie. The policy of the proletariat is not at all automatically derived from the policy of the bourgeoisie, bearing only the opposite sign—this would make every sectarian a master strategist; no, the revolutionary party must each time orient itself *independently* in the internal as well as the external situation, arriving at those decisions which correspond best to the interests of the proletariat. This rule applies just as much to the war period as to the period of peace.

Let us imagine that in the next European war the Belgian proletariat conquers power sooner than the proletariat of France. Undoubtedly Hitler will try to crush proletarian Belgium. In order to cover up its own flank, the French bourgeois government might find itself compelled to help the Belgian workers' government with arms. The Belgian soviets of course reach for these arms with both hands. But, actuated by the principle of defeatism, perhaps the French workers ought to block their bourgeoisie from shipping arms to proletarian Belgium? Only direct traitors or out-and-out idiots can reason thus.

The French bourgeoisie could send arms to proletarian Belgium only out of fear of the greatest military danger and only in expectation of later crushing the proletarian revolution with their own weapons. To the French workers, on the contrary, proletarian Belgium is the greatest support in the struggle against their own bourgeoisie. The outcome of the struggle would be decided, in the final analysis, by the relationship of forces, into which correct policies enter as a very important factor. The revolutionary party's first task is to utilise the contradiction between two imperialist countries, France and Germany, in order to save proletarian Belgium.

Ultra-left scholastics think not in concrete terms but in empty abstractions. They have transformed the idea of defeatism into a vacuum. They can see vividly neither the process of war nor the process of revolution. They seek a hermetically sealed formula which excludes fresh air. But a formula of this kind can offer no orientation for the proletarian vanguard.

To carry the class struggle to its highest form—civil war—this is the task of defeatism. But this task can be solved only through the revolutionary mobilization of the masses, that is, by widening, deepening, and sharpening those revolutionary methods which constitute the content of class struggle in 'peace'-time. The proletarian party does not resort to artificial methods, such as burning warehouses, setting off bombs, wrecking trains, etc., in order to bring about the defeat of its own government. Even if it were successful on this road, the military defeat would not at all lead to revolutionary success, a success which can be assured only by the independent movement of the proletariat. Revolutionary defeatism signifies only that in its class struggle the proletarian party does not stop at any 'patriotic' considerations, since defeat of its own imperialist government, brought about, or hastened, by the revolutionary movement of the masses is an incomparably *lesser evil* than victory gained at the price of national unity, that is, the political prostration of the proletariat. Therein lies the complete meaning of defeatism and this meaning

is entirely sufficient.

The methods of struggle change, of course, when the struggle enters the openly revolutionary phase. Civil war is a war, and in this aspect has its particular laws. In civil war, bombing of warehouses, wrecking of trains and all other forms of military 'sabotage' are inevitable. Their appropriateness is decided by purely military considerations—civil war continues revolutionary politics but by other, precisely, military means.

However, during an imperialist war there may be cases where a revolutionary party will be forced to resort to military-technical means, though they do not as yet follow directly from the revolutionary movement in their *own* country. Thus, if it is a question of sending arms or troops against a workers' government or a rebellious colony, not only such methods as boycott and strike, but direct military sabotage may become entirely practical and obligatory. Resorting or not resorting to such measures will be a matter of practical possibilities. If the Belgian workers, conquering power in war-time, have their own military agents on German soil, it would be the duty of these agents not to hesitate at any technical means in order to stop Hitler's troops. It is absolutely clear that the revolutionary German workers also are duty-bound (if they are able) to perform this task in the interests of the Belgian revolution, irrespective of the general course of the revolutionary movement in Germany itself.

Defeatist policy, that is, the policy of irreconcilable class struggle in war-time cannot consequently be 'the same' in all countries, just as the policy of the proletariat cannot be the same in peace-time. Only the Comintern of the epigones has established a regime in which the parties of all countries break into march simultaneously with the left foot. In struggle against this bureaucratic cretinism we have attempted more than once to prove that the general principles and tasks must be realized in each country in accordance with its internal and external conditions. This principle retains its complete force for war-time as well.

Those ultra-leftists who do not want to think as Marxists, that is, concretely, will be caught unawares by war. Their policy in time of war will be a fatal crowning of their policy in peace-time. The first artillery shots will either blow the ultra-leftists into political non-existence, or else drive them into the camp of social-patriotism, exactly like the Spanish anarchists, who, absolute 'deniers' of the state, found themselves from the same causes bourgeois ministers when war came. In order to carry on a correct policy in war-time one must learn to think correctly in time of peace.

LEON TROTSKY

Coyoacan, D.F., May 22, 1938.

# Class, Caste and State in the Soviet Union

*by*

*Tom Kemp*

FOR those who wish to make a serious study of the Soviet Union and reach conclusions about its social character and the direction in which it is moving there are no sacred texts. Everything which has been written by Marxists and others must be checked and re-checked against the facts in their development. Such a study is not only important, it is also unavoidable, for it is impossible to operate in politics today without having in mind a definite conception of what the USSR is and where it is going—what form of society it is, what relation its leaders have to that society, what their real aims are and how they are related to their ideology, i.e., to what they say these aims are. Even among those who are critical of, or hostile towards, the Soviet Union there are wide divergences of opinion on these questions; but the need for an opinion of some kind, backed up by a coherent theory, is generally accepted to be inescapable. In the working-class movement insufficient independent thought is given to these questions, for understandable reasons. On the one hand there are the official or self-appointed apologists of the Soviet regime who claim that 'socialism' was achieved in about 1936 and that the present period is one of the threshold of communism. If such views are only accepted in full by Communist Party members and fellow-travellers, such is the power of the Russian Revolution that, at least in some part, and particularly at the rank-and-file level, they influence even many who, in other respects, are far from being on the Left. On the other hand, especially since the onset of the Cold War, the ranks of the Labour movement in Britain, America and the non-communist sections in the Western European countries, have been strongly receptive to the anti-Soviet theories current among the propagandists and ideologists of the capitalists. Given all the difficulties standing in the way of fathoming the 'Russian enigma', and the impact of the 'revelations' of the period since 1956, it is perhaps understandable that some people, even on the 'Left', should seek to wash their hands of these questions, claiming that they are irrelevant to the tasks of British socialists. Such a withdrawal into a perplexed insularity was characteristic of many of those who broke with the Communist Party in or after 1956 and subsequently presented themselves as 'the new Left'. In fact, unwillingness to pursue to the end the necessary discussion of Stalinism and its origins was a major source of the weakness of this trend and, paradoxically, a reason for its failure to establish a place in the politics of the Labour movement in Britain, since it meant that policies on a whole series of questions were left vague, hesitant, obscure and confusing.

We have today, then, the disarray of the apologists,

making the best of the achievements of the Soviet Union and vainly trying to evade the question of how Stalinism arose; at the other pole those who accept that the USSR is nothing but an oppressive and aggressive force bent on world conquest; there are all manner of other interpretations between these extremes. What has to be counted with, in particular, is the force of the revulsion against Stalinism found among many socialists and the pressure of 'public opinion' created by this, enhanced

by the Cold War and cleverly exploited in intellectual circles by such organs as the Congress for Cultural Freedom. We should not be surprised to find on the Left, then, a number of 'theories' of rejection of the Soviet Union with a certain degree of attractive power for young people and intellectuals, who are looking for correct explanations and yet, at the same time, are sensitive to the pressures in their own social milieu.

## I

The theories which we are about to examine have in common that they discern in the set-up in the Soviet Union a new form of class-divided, exploiting society with its specific ruling class and political system. Apart from this they have secondary differences: some consider that this represents a form of capitalism—'state capitalism', 'bureaucratic capitalism'; others see in it something quite distinct from capitalist society and describe it as 'bureaucratic collectivism', 'managerial society' or 'state socialism'. Various other sub-classifications may be made: for example, there are several variants of the 'state capitalist' theory, which is of special interest both because it claims to analyse Soviet economy in the precise terms of Marx's *Capital* and because, in a looser way, many people today speak of the Soviet Union as 'state capitalist' without really having thought out the reasons for doing so. In addition, adherents of this theory represent a definite trend in the 'Left' in Britain and a number of other countries to a much greater extent than the adherents of the 'bureaucratic collectivist' theory.

All these theories can claim intellectual roots in discussions in Marxist circles which go back to before 1914, to the classic tenets of anarchism or anarcho-syndicalism and, more particularly, to the attempts made, first in Russia, then in the workers' movement internationally, to describe and account for the degeneration of the Soviet power from the early 1920s onwards. A full history of such trends would thus have to deal with the Bordigists and other groups which broke from the Communist International in this period, the Workers' Opposition in Russia, the rise of the Left Opposition and the discussions which arose within its ranks from its very inception. There is certainly little novelty in the principal ideas of the versions which have found currency more recently in the writings of James Burnham, Tony Cliff, the French review

*Socialisme ou Barbarie*,<sup>1</sup> Shachtman and his group in the U.S.A., Milovan Djilas and many others. What is important at this stage is less the

1. Burnham wrote his book, **The Managerial Revolution**, after his departure from the American Socialist Workers' Party following a lengthy factional discussion in 1939-40 over the nature of the USSR. It was, in the main, a working out, even to the point of absurdity, of themes which had been prominent in this discussion. The principal ideas had already found expression in writings by Laurat, Hilferding and Bruno Rizzi (the latter in a work entitled **La Bureaucratization du Monde**). Whether or not Burnham was directly inspired by Rizzi has been the cause of some controversy. See **Le Contrat Social**, Nov. 1958, Jan. and March 1959, **Arguments**, No. 17 and No. 20 with communications from Naville, H. Draper, Rizzi himself and others.

Shachtman was co-leader of the SWP minority and developed, in the magazine **The New Internationalist**, the theory of 'bureaucratic collectivism'.

**Socialisme ou Barbarie** has been published in Paris since 1949. The fullest statement of its own 'state capitalist' theory is in No. 2, 'Les rapports de production en Russie' by P. Chaulieu.

Tony Cliff is the only consequential theorist of the 'state capitalist' tendency in Britain. His book **Stalinist Russia** appeared in 1955; the implications of the theory appear in the pages of the magazine **International Socialism**.

Djilas, former Yugoslav partisan leader and minister, developed a 'state capitalist' theory to explain Soviet society in the period after the break between Stalin and Tito. When he extended it to Yugoslavia as well he soon found himself in gaol. His book, **The New Class**, theoretically inferior to the former works, nevertheless became a best-seller. See my discussion in **Labour Review**, Vol. 3, No. 3, 1958.

Bordiga seems to have found no disciples in Britain, but his tendency continues to exist in Italy and France (where it publishes **Le Programme Communiste**).

The 'Johnson-Forrest' tendency in the USA developed a rather incoherent 'state capitalist' theory, an exposition of which, **State Capitalism and World Revolution**, was published in Britain in 1956.

More 'academic' versions of the same or similar trends of thinking are represented by Wittfogel, Seton-Watson, etc. (see Bell, D. 'Ten Theories in Search of Soviet Reality', **World Politics**, April 1958).

differences which undoubtedly exist between these theories than the common ground which they share. However, relatively more attention will be given to the theory of 'state capitalism' than to the others

The problems presented by the development of the Soviet Union and the emergence of other states with a similar social system are undoubtedly difficult because of the unprecedented character and scale of the social transformation involved, as well as the deliberate policy of concealment and falsification of data pursued by the rulers of these states. In the years following the Russian Revolution, for example, features developed in Russia, owing to the isolation of the revolution in a backward country, very different from those which socialists had expected after the overthrow of capitalism. The process of degeneration which took place in the Bolshevik Party, which changed it out of all recognition; the altered relations between the party, the state and the working class; and the emergence of a politically dominant stratum enjoying economic privileges amid general hardship and poverty, strained the resources of description, theoretical perception and vocabulary. The search for a short-cut, the need for a simple key to the unravelling of complex and disheartening problems, soon brought suggestions that nothing had changed or that there had been a relapse into capitalism or into a new exploiting society. After all, the Mensheviks had argued that the revolution ought to have been a bourgeois revolution leading to the full establishment of capitalism in backward Russia; what was more natural than to see in the developments of the 20s the carrying out of capitalist tasks by capitalist methods leading to the installation of capitalism of a new type? Either the Russian Revolution had been a mistake or, presumably by a series of imperceptible stages, power had been taken from the workers and assumed by a new exploiting class corresponding to the bourgeoisie under capitalism.

In their earlier forms such theories were not worked out to their logical conclusion. That came later, and what it meant, in short, was that the categories of *Capital*, intended to apply to competitive private enterprise capitalism, could be affixed to Russian society in the Stalinist phase. Instead of many competing capitalists there was now a single capitalist, the state. The complete fusion of

economic with political power brought into being 'integral bureaucratic capitalism' which only 'applies to the whole of the economy and society the methods which private capitalism created and applied in each particular factory'. Far from being socialism, or anything resembling it, 'it is the most finished realisation of the spirit of capitalism, it pushes to the limit its most significant tendencies. Its essence consists, like that of capitalist production, in reducing the direct producers to the role of pure and simple executants of orders received'.<sup>2</sup> All that Marx wrote about the impoverishment, alienation and divorce from the means of production of the worker is regarded as strictly applicable to the USSR. If one enquires about the reason for the absence of periodical crises of over-production, or of problems arising from the tendency of the rate of profit to fall, these are held to be 'inessential' aspects of Marx's analysis of capitalism.<sup>3</sup>

Although some bourgeois observers have pointed out parallels, in fact superficial ones, between Soviet and capitalist societies, economists have not fallen into the error of establishing such an identity.<sup>4</sup> The kind of economic theory accepted as orthodox in capitalist countries does not recognise the kinship of Soviet economy with that in these countries. This theory is, indeed, for the most part incapable of analysing Soviet economy in the same terms as that which it employs in relation to capitalist economy; the former it sees as a planned economy, the latter as economies which, in greater or lesser degree, are beholden to the laws of the market. It has been left to self-styled Marxists to turn superficial resemblances into the claim that Soviet 'state capitalism' is the 'most finished realisation of the spirit of capitalism', prefiguring in fact the situation towards which monopoly capitalism in America and Western Europe is tending.

2. 'The concrete development of the Russian economy under bureaucratic domination **differs in no way**, as far as its general orientation is concerned, from that of a capitalist country . . . ' . . . the essential objectives and the fundamental means (the exploitation of the workers) are **identical** with those of capitalist economies.' (My emphasis—T.K.) *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, No. 2, p. 20.

3. *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, No. 2.

4. e.g., de Jouvenel, R. in *The Soviet Economy* (Congress for Cultural Freedom, 1956) 'Some Fundamental Similarities between the Soviet and Capitalist Economic Systems'.

## II

A detailed theoretical refutation of these claims is not necessary; it cannot be made on a point-by-point basis. The theories are vitiated by the premises from which they start. Once one has made up one's

mind that, in a literal sense, the understanding of Soviet society can be read off from *Capital* it is only a question of finding the most convincing analogies, affixing the right labels and glibly discarding what

does not fit the thesis. Isolated aspects of Soviet experience are abstracted unhistorically and compared to equally isolated aspects of capitalist society. This method itself depends greatly on a display of 'Marxist' erudition and upon emotional reference to disagreeable sides of Stalinism. It is typical, for example, that it should hold up the ugly reality of Russian experience for comparison with some abstract model of a healthy workers' state, as though this clinched the argument about the social nature of the USSR. The reader does not realise that he is being gripped by his emotions and blinded by knowledge, but a moment's pause will show that the reasoning is entirely mechanical. It is based on the conception of some ideal type for a workers' state, torn out of all historical reference, and of the Soviet Union as a finished social formation, subject, at any rate according to the 'state capitalists', to the same laws of capitalism as were analysed by Marx, and with a new ruling class represented by the bureaucracy, the collective capitalist.

Adherents of the theories of 'state capitalism' and 'bureaucratic collectivism' want us to believe that in the USSR and Eastern Europe a functional bureaucracy has become a new ruling class. Thus we find assertions like the following: 'The bureaucracy does not individually own, it collectively controls—and hence prevents other strata from participation in decision-making. Individual members of the bureaucracy, like individual entrepreneurs, may run the risk of elimination from its ranks, but the bureaucracy as such is a self-perpetuating ruling class whose power is defined by its relation to the means of production, i.e., by its relation to the state. Far from being a parasitic excrescence on a healthy body it is an integral element in a corrupt social structure.'<sup>5</sup>

It was against theories of this kind, put forward inside the American Socialist Workers' Party in 1939-40, that Trotsky fought his last theoretical battle, as he had fought before against those who had maintained that the Soviet Union had become a new form of exploiting society.<sup>6</sup> He fought to maintain a view which, in association with the Left Opposition, first in Russia, then outside, he had evolved over the previous ten years. This view finds its most complete expression in a book which, at the same time, is a major contribution to Marxist theory, *The Revolution Betrayed*. It takes the form, not of a snap definition, but of a sociological characterization too long to quote here. Trotsky does not accept the view that the question has been finally

5. Coser, L. and Howe, I., editors of the American review *Dissent*, a haven for ex-radicals of varied hues, in *Voices of Dissent*, p. 98. They were members of, or sympathetic towards, the Shachtman group of 'bureaucratic collectivists'.

6. See Trotsky, L. D. *In Defense of Marxism*.

**Trotsky:**  
*he always defended  
 the property forms  
 of the Soviet Union,  
 against the imperial-  
 ists and against the  
 parasitic Stalinist  
 bureaucracy.*



settled by history but says that it 'will be decided by a struggle of living social forces, both on the national and the world arena'.<sup>7</sup> Trotsky maintained that despite the usurpation of *political* power by the bureaucracy the essential conquests of the Revolution had been preserved: nationalized property and planned economy corresponded to the social basis of proletarian hegemony. In the special conditions of Russian development the bureaucracy had emerged from the working class and became 'the sole privileged and commanding stratum'. Trotsky was prepared to admit that 'the very fact of its appropriation of political power in a country where the principal means of production are in the hands of the state, creates a new and hitherto unknown relationship between the bureaucracy and the riches of the nation'.<sup>8</sup> A real qualitative leap would, however, be required before the bureaucracy could legitimise its rule and make itself a new ruling class. In 1939, with the conclusion of the Hitler-Stalin pact—which blew sky-high the tacit pro-Sovietism of progressive petty-bourgeois and intellectual circles—the minority in the SWP argued that somewhere along the line such a change had taken

7. *The Revolution Betrayed*, p. 255. This comes at the end of an almost page-long definition of the transitional nature of the Soviet Union. 'Doctrinaires', Trotsky added, prophetically, 'will doubtless not be satisfied with this hypothetical definition. They would like categorical formulae: yes—yes, and no—no. Sociological problems would certainly be simpler, if social phenomena always had a finished character.'

8. *Ibid.*, p. 249. See also 'The USSR in War' in *In Defense of Marxism*.

place; they were not sure when, but they were anxious to find coherent theoretical reasons no longer to have to defend the Soviet Union at a time when this had become difficult and unpopular.



**Hitler-Stalin Pact:** the event which signalled 'Abandon Ship!' to so many 'progressives' and 'friends of the Soviet Union'.

In the course of the discussion which subsequently took place Trotsky, as it were, put into the mouths of his critics arguments which they accepted and built upon. We have already examined the basis of these arguments. In fact Trotsky did accept that a 'bureaucratic collectivist' society was a *theoretical* possibility. One of the leaders of the struggle against Trotsky, Max Shachtman, has recently argued that this marked a sharp change in Trotsky's thinking.<sup>9</sup> In fact this was not so; perhaps less explicitly he had said much the same thing in his earlier polemic against Urbahns,<sup>10</sup> as well as in *The Revolution Betrayed*. What Shachtman dare not face up to is that Trotsky set certain conditions for accepting that the corner had been turned and that a new exploiting society had been established in the USSR. It would have been necessary to accept that the definite defeat of the Russian working

9. In *Survey*, No. 41, April 1962: 'Having insisted that Russia remained a workers' state because the rule of the bourgeoisie had not been restored and nationalised property still prevailed, he—Trotsky—now conceded that the workers' state could be utterly destroyed even if the bourgeoisie did come to power and even if property remained nationalised.' p. 106. Note that Trotsky was speaking about Russia as a **degenerated** workers' state and traced out the processes of that degeneration. To concede the **theoretical** possibility, which Shachtman takes to be a change in Trotsky's thinking, is one thing; to establish its actuality is another. For what this would imply see the text of this article.

10. Urbahns, a German Communist leader, adopted a state capitalist position after breaking with the Comintern. Trotsky's polemic against him, first published as *The Soviet Union and the Fourth International*, but subsequently as *The Class Nature of the Soviet State*, dates from 1933, at a time when Shachtman had not yet discovered his differences. Trotsky then wrote: 'The bureaucracy is not a ruling class. But the further development of the bureaucratic regime can lead to the inception of a new ruling class: not organically through degeneration, but through counter-revolution'. Such a counter-revolution has not, in the intervening period, been in the bureaucracy's power to make; its defensive position in Soviet society has been increasingly evident since the death of Stalin in 1953.

class at the hands of the bureaucracy had taken place and that the social conquests of the Revolution of 1917 had been finally liquidated. The significance of this on the international plane would be correspondingly immense. The way would be open for the assumption of power by such a new ruling class on a world scale, as Bruno Rizzi and later Burnham argued was taking place. It would suggest that the working class was incapable of assuming power, or at least of holding it for any length of time. It would assume the indefinite continuance of capitalism, or its supersession, in decline, by something worse. The logic of this, too, was accepted by Burnham: the real theme of his *The Managerial Revolution* is the failure of the Russian revolution and abandonment of all confidence in the working class.<sup>11</sup> Burnham went logically, and rapidly, into the camp of reaction. The movement of Shachtman was slower: he wanted to accept part of the sociological analysis, without accepting all the political implications. Even so, he accepted the basic one in the situation of 1940: the abandonment of defence of the Soviet Union. This meant then, as it does now—as a direct derivation from the theory of 'bureaucratic collectivism', or, for that matter, of 'state capitalism'—that there was no difference between the USSR and a capitalist country: the defeat of the USSR was of no particular concern to the world working class. But, as Trotsky pointed out in the course of the controversy, 'the system of planned economy [despite the profound deformations introduced by the bureaucracy], on the foundation of state ownership of the means of production, has

11. Burnham claimed the support of the discoveries of modern bourgeois sociology for his view of the new 'managerial society'. Michels and others argue that administrative power as such gives rise to undemocratic and privileged rule, and since administration will always be required there will always be class divisions and class power. One of the assumptions behind this is the lack of initiative and interest on the part of the vast mass of mankind, who remain incompetent to take on the responsibility of rule. They, and Burnham along with them (see his book, *The Machiavellians*), fail to see that this characteristic which they claim to see in the masses is itself a product of the separation of mental and manual labour and the monopoly of education and culture in the class societies they know. Their own position in these societies prevents them from understanding the real initiative and ability of the masses. Some historical accounting by the founder of the 'managerial revolution' theory would not be out of place. In 1940 Burnham saw all the advanced countries and particularly the USSR as examples of the triumph or impending triumph of the managerial 'class'. But in which of these countries has the managerial 'class' been able to consolidate its rule as the leader of the new social order? German 'national socialism' is in ruins; the Soviet bureaucracy is experiencing a prolonged and bitter crisis because it stands in contradiction to the nationalized property forms; victories against the 'old' capitalism? (See P. Naville, in *Arguments*, No. 17.)

been preserved and continues to remain a colossal conquest of mankind. The defeat of the USSR in a war with imperialism would signify not solely the liquidation of the bureaucratic dictatorship, but the planned state economy; the dismemberment of the country into spheres of influence; a new stabilisation of imperialism; and a new weakening of the world proletariat'.<sup>12</sup> This remains as true in the era of Cold War as it was at the time when it was written. It is not true, as Shachtman argues, that Trotsky determined the nature of a social order (i.e., the USSR) by appraising the prospects for political success of its upholders and opponents. Trotsky tried to work out the dialectical relationship between them in the whole international context of the struggle between classes. Shachtman eventually tired of his ambiguous position; after many years he led his followers into the bosom of American Social Democracy which had long since come to terms with the State Department.<sup>13</sup>

12. In *Defense of Marxism*, p. 122.

13. Shachtman's 'Independent Socialist League', formerly 'The Workers' Party', ingloriously dissolved itself in 1958 and its members entered the SP-SDF. Its final statement stated: 'We do not subscribe to any creed known as Trotskyism or defined as such. . . . We are strongly in favour of a broad party with full party democracy for all, which does not demand creedal conformity on all questions, etc. . . .' The sudden demise of the journal *The New Internationalist* was a shock to the 'state capitalists' in Britain who had co-operated closely with it for some years.

In the course of this prolonged itinerary, during which Shachtman showed many flashes of polemical skill, he and his followers co-operated with the adherents of 'state capitalist' theories. This was typical of the unprincipled politics which followed from the position both had adopted on political questions. Because they temporarily drew similar political conclusions they were quite prepared not to raise the very different sociological paths which had led them to such conclusions. In the article already quoted he sums up his opposition to 'state capitalism'. 'A social order', he writes, 'in which there is no capitalist class, no capitalist private property, no capitalist profit, no production of commodities for the market, no working class more or less free to sell its labour power on the open market—can be described as capitalist no matter how modified by adjectives, only by arbitrary and meaningless definition'.<sup>14</sup> One would hardly imagine that he co-operated with 'state capitalists' for many years; presumably no explanation ever took place between the two trends on such questions. Certainly Shachtman's arguments against 'state capitalism' are dealt with in all the expositions of the theory and dismissed as concerning the inessential attributes of capitalism, and the 'bureaucratic collectivist' theory remains weakest on its economic side.

14. *Survey*, No. 41, p. 104.

### III

Before we can deal satisfactorily with these theories it is necessary to discuss, from a Marxist point of view, the meaning to be given to key terms in the controversy. We shall therefore need to say what we understand by 'class', 'ruling class', 'bureaucracy', 'capital' and 'capitalism' and shed light, as this is done, upon the issues which are in question. Of course, this can only be done very inadequately within the limits of a single article. In fact, Marxists need to give much more attention than they do to these questions. It is not surprising that those Marxists who owe allegiance to the official Communist Party line can offer little or no assistance in this field. It is notorious that Soviet sociologists do not dare to ask the most elementary questions about their own society. The ideological bankruptcy of the Stalin period was officially admitted at the 22nd Congress, and a great

theoretical void now exists in the world communist movement—which is temporarily filled by vacuous declarations and misquotations from Lenin. The inability and unwillingness to consider the social roots of Stalinist degeneration has made it necessary to attribute all the excesses to the personal characteristics of one man—a hair-raising disregard for the elements of Marxism. The few attempts which have been made to carry on a discussion in Marxist terms have been hastily scotched. When the basic questions have been raised the answers given have generally been puerile. In fact, however, there can be no development of Marxist analysis which does not consider carefully, in Marxist terms, the social and class nature of the Soviet state. The inability of the 'orthodox', i.e., Communist Party, Marxists, to reply to the theories of 'state capitalism', 'bureaucratic collectivism', etc., derives from the fact that

they cannot begin to do so without treading on dangerous ground.<sup>15</sup> The great merit of Trotsky, and in this he developed Marxism in a creative way, was that he did carry forward such an analysis—pointing out much which even the apologists for the ruling clique had to admit, 20 years after—and drew the necessary political conclusions. No apology is necessary, therefore, for the fact that this exposition and polemic are made along the lines which he indicated. In fact, no one can venture into this field with any authority without having mastered *The Revolution Betrayed* and *In Defense of Marxism*. Nothing much of what the state capitalists and 'bureaucratic collectivists' claim as their own thought will not be found, duly refuted, in these works.

The existence of *classes* is determined by the fact that different social groups stand in different specific relationship to the means of production, and thus to the allocation of the social product.

It is often said that Marxists have never clearly defined their approach to the concept of class. Perhaps the following quotations may take the place of a full exposition:

'Classes are large groups of people which differ from each other by the place they occupy in a historically definite system of social production, by their relation (in most cases fixed and formulated in laws) to the means of production, by the dimensions and method of acquiring the share of social wealth

15. One may instance the discussions in the Italian Communist Party which, while aware of the incompatibility of the Khrushchev 'explanations' of the 'personality cult' with historical materialism, have not dared to go much further than to state this fact, and which have now been reined in by Togliatti in any case. As an example of theoretical banality we may quote from the book *Inside the Khrushchev Era* by G. Boffa, *L'Unita* correspondent in Moscow, which has enjoyed some vogue in Europe among fellow-travellers for its 'admissions', now part of the new apologetics—the starry-eyed, Dean of Canterbury type being *vieux jeu*. Daringly raising the question—'The social democrats, the Trotskyists, and later the Yugoslavs spoke of a "new class" emerging from the so-called "Stalinist bureaucracy";' he goes on to provide 'the answer'—'This concept of new class is completely invalid. At no time was the bureaucracy able to change the relations of production in its own favour. It never even approached this area. Not one of the fundamental principles of socialism was ever undermined (sic). Bureaucratic elements do tend to separate out and form distinct strata, detached and isolated from the people—this is the nature of bureaucracy, its outstanding characteristic. But such a tendency does not strengthen bureaucracy. Instead it brings it into open conflict with Soviet society.' The feebleness of this argument requires no demonstration. It is interesting, that Boffa, like all the orthodox, deliberately confuses the use of the term 'bureaucracy' as applied to a distinct social layer—whose existence is denied—with that of certain administrative vices, red tape, etc., which causes accidental divisions between some functionaries and the public at large.

that they obtain. Classes are groups of people one of which may appropriate the labour of another owing to the different places they occupy in the definite system of economy.'<sup>16</sup>

'A class is defined not by its participation in the distribution of the national income alone but by its independent roots in the economic foundation of society.'<sup>17</sup>

The ruling class is that class which, through its ownership of the main means of production, is able to appropriate the social surplus, i.e., that part of total output over and above what is received by the direct producers.

To a given ruling class, therefore, correspond particular property forms and specific relations between it and other classes in the society. Such a ruling class will itself be stratified; there may also be conflict between its different sections. The relation between political power, concentrated in the state, and the ruling class as a whole shows considerable variation. In complex, class-divided societies of the capitalist type, the actual exercise of state power may be in the hands of a stratum which enjoys some independence from the ruling class as such, though it is ultimately answerable to it. Indeed, there is room for considerable variation in the form of capitalist rule—parliamentary democracy, bonapartist dictatorship, presidential government, fascism. In any case, the actual authority of the state is vested not in capitalists as such, not in property owners, but in a hierarchy of salaried servants—the upper layers of which will have the closest ties with the economic ruling class—who form a functional bureaucracy. Even in business considerable powers, but not ultimate determining *power*, have, of necessity, to be vested in similar people. The relations between the ruling class and the bureaucracy which is an emanation of it are not fixed and constant; they vary with innumerable factors, some of which tend to increase the autonomy of the latter while others restrict it. There is no recorded case, however, in a capitalist society of such a bureaucracy (even taken in the widest sense, to include business executives, party bosses, etc.) establishing itself as a ruling class. The test of a state apparatus and those who occupy positions in it is whether their policies and exercise of power, internally and externally, have the function of preserving the social foundations, legal protections and ideological domination of the class which owns the main means of production. It would be a very foolhardy man who suggested that the political regime of the USSR had acted in any way to stabilize, strengthen and legitimize the power and privilege of the managers and technical intelligentsia

16. Lenin, 'A Great Beginning: the Heroism of the Workers in the Rear. On Communist Subbotniks', in *Selected Works*, Vol. IX, p. 432.

17. Trotsky in *The Class Nature of the Soviet State*.

since Burnham's book was written. In practice, as distinct from the manuals of speculative sociology of *The Managerial Revolution* type, the ruling class under capitalism has remained firmly based upon the ownership of the means of production, and the attempt to establish a distinction between this and 'control' has remained a fiction.

It is a mistake of many writers to use the term 'capitalism' with no discrimination. Eminent economic historians, for example, have been known to argue that capitalism began when primitive man began to use a digging stick, and have subsequently distinguished numerous varieties of capitalism from that day to this. Other non-Marxists refuse to use the term at all. Marx, however, was interested in precisely what distinguished what he called the 'capitalist mode of production' from all economic systems which preceded it. He recognised, of course, that it had certain features in common with its predecessors and, as though to anticipate the misuse of his own terms, he made it clear that a distinction had to be made between these and the essence of capitalist relations which defined that mode of production. Answering those who wished to blur the distinction between capitalism and other forms of economy he wrote: 'Because a form of production may . . . be brought into line with its forms of revenue—and to a certain extent not incorrectly—the illusion is strengthened so much the more that the capitalist conditions are the natural conditions of any mode of production.'<sup>18</sup> As for the division of the product he went on to say 'if we deprive both wages and surplus labour of their specifically capitalist character, then we have not these forms, but merely their foundations, which are common to all social modes of production'.<sup>19</sup> Nor does accumulation necessarily indicate the presence of capitalism. 'In economic forms of society of the most different kinds,' wrote Marx, 'there occurs not only simple reproduction, but, in varying degrees, reproduction in a progressively increasing scale. By degrees more is produced and more consumed, and consequently more products have to be converted into means of production. This process, however, does not present itself as accumulation of capital, nor as the function of a capitalist, so long as the labourer's means of production, and with them, his product and means of subsistence, do not confront him in the shape of capital.'<sup>20</sup>

Anyone who wants to apply the term 'capitalist', however qualified, to the form of production which prevails in the Soviet Union has therefore to prove that the means of production are 'capital' and do

so confront the working class. Whether some of the 'forms' are similar to those in unquestionably capitalist countries: whether there are wages, surplus value or classes, are secondary matters. From the very first chapter of *Capital* Marx is concerned with social relations, relations between men, whose real character is hidden and deformed. Thus, under capitalism these relations take the form of the exchange of commodities, with labour power itself a commodity bought in the market by the owners of the means of production, the capitalists. When the means of production acquire the form of capital, that means that they—'dead labour'—have the power to extract a surplus from the living labourers which is appropriated by the owners of the means of production. The capitalists personify this relationship between the means of production and the working class, with nothing to sell but its labour power. The capitalists produce not for their own enjoyment, or to satisfy social needs, but in order that, from the surplus value extracted from the workers, they may accumulate. This they do, not from choice, but from necessity; not to accumulate is to fall behind in the race and eventually to perish. The standstill of accumulation is the decline of capitalism.

To the basic capitalist relationship in production correspond the intricate 'laws of motion' of the capitalist mode of production with which Marx was concerned. With this relationship, too, goes the allocation of social power to the class which owns the means of production and appropriates surplus labour: i.e., the predominance of the bourgeoisie and the various state forms by which this class preserves its hegemony. Correspondingly, the division of society into classes, determined by ownership or non-ownership as the basic criterion, gives rise to the struggle between classes in which the maintenance or winning of state power is, in the last analysis, at stake.

In the Soviet Union the means of production are not owned by the bureaucracy, they are nationalized, state property. The additions which are made to them from the surplus labour of the direct producers become part of the nationalized property and cannot be appropriated either individually or collectively by the bureaucracy. This inability to appropriate the means of production does not prevent the bureaucrats, as effective controllers of the means of production through their monopoly of political power, from according themselves excessive incomes either for services rendered, at their own valuation, or by illicit means. Yet if the bureaucracy controls the state, it is not avowedly in its own name but as the representative of the proletariat. The distribution of the social product is, in part, arbitrarily determined by those who possess the monopoly

18. Marx, K., *Capital*, Vol. III, p. 1021 (Kerr ed.); p. 853 (FLPH ed.).

19. *Ibid.*, p. 1022 (Kerr ed.); p. 854 (FLPH ed.).

20. *Capital*, Vol. I, p. 609-610. (Allen & Unwin ed.).

of political power. On the other hand the disposal of the surplus product, as part of the social product, is neither under the control of the bureaucracy to do as it likes with nor is it subject to the pressure of accumulation for accumulation's sake, as under capitalism, bringing into existence more 'capital' in the shape of means of production alienated from the workers.

Those who argue that the bureaucracy 'really' own the means of production through their control of the state have produced no *economic analysis* to explain the specific workings of this new exploiting system. Certainly the bureaucracy has great privileges in income, but even the greatest of these differentials can only lead to differences in *consumption*, whereas the surplus appropriated by capitalists plays a specific role in the whole productive mechanism, constantly consolidating the 'domination of dead labour over living labour'. The high incomes of the bureaucrats can in no way be used to build up their power over the direct producers. In many ways, the high income of the bureaucrats weakens rather than strengthens the base of their power: by exposing the parasitic role of the bureaucracy and contributing to the corruption and isolation of its members from the workers and peasants, it produces contradictions precisely in that sphere of the political and ideological superstructure where the bureaucracy's power is rooted. In this way the specific contradictions of the bureaucracy's rule necessitate the *political* revolution which began in the 1953 rising in Eastern Germany and in Hungary in 1956.

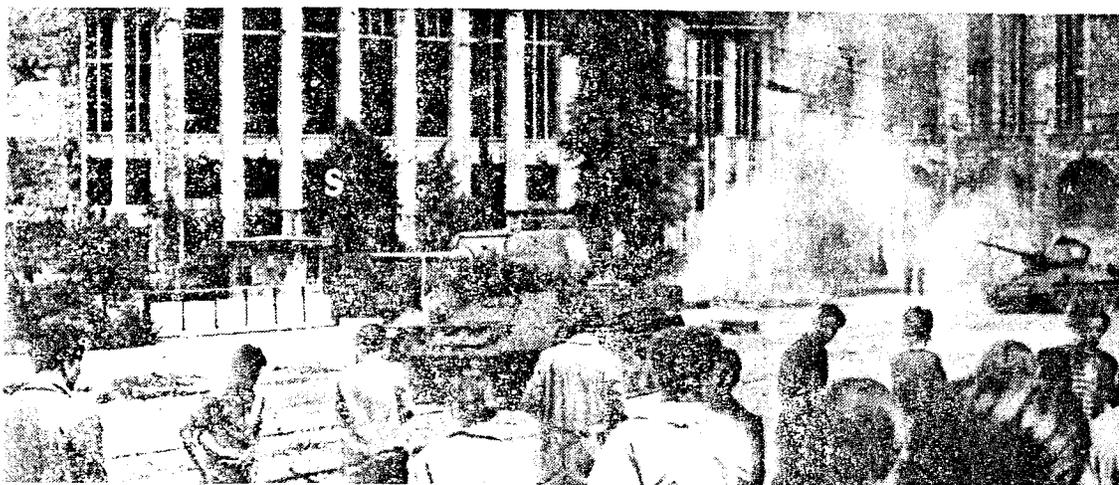
Nominally the means of production are the property of the whole people. Far from being able to renounce this conquest of the Revolution of 1917 and replace it by a frank assertion of supremacy, the ruling stratum is obliged, by propaganda and programme, by education and the distribution of the

works of Marx and Engels and Lenin, to conceal itself behind an ideological smokescreen. Even when the variance between the officially proclaimed theory and current practice is most glaring, nevertheless their consistency must be proclaimed or, by some subtle casuistry, an explanation must be offered for popular consumption.

This is not the behaviour of a ruling class. Nor does the individual insecurity of its members which, under Stalin could lead to instant physical elimination, find an easy explanation within the terms of state capitalist theory. More and more, on investigation, and in the light of actual developments since Stalin's death, does the view of the bureaucracy as a ruling class prove unacceptable. It has no necessary place as such in the circuit of exchange. The source and form of its incomes, leaving aside its illicit predations, however high, are precisely the same as those of the working class as a whole. The pressure of the working class and peasants for increased consumption, as well as the internationally-imposed need to build up and extend the means of production—always outside its ownership—provide objective limits to its distributive share.<sup>21</sup> In those circumstances it is by no means free to use and abuse the means of production in its custody. Certainly the bureaucracy as a whole has to wage a struggle against such abuses getting out of hand on the part of individual members. Collectively it is increasingly sensitive to the fact that its continued political predominance depends upon delivering the goods and concealing its economic privileges. Its continued predominance is not made necessary by a specific form of property. The form of property corresponds already to the hegemony of the proletariat brought about through a social revolution. The bureaucracy was always an historical anomaly; its role was,

21. Any such objective limits are denied by Chaulieu, op. cit.

**East Berlin uprising:**  
*the first great stirring of the workers towards the 'political' revolution'.*



and remains, parasitic.<sup>22</sup> It cannot back up its political rule by establishing a new form of property, nor does it personify capital, as required by the state capitalist theory.<sup>23</sup>

Of course, all this does not prevent the appearance in the Soviet Union of all sorts of abhorrent practices, but these horrors were tied up from the first with the parasitism of the bureaucracy. They followed precisely from its insecurity, from its anomalous position, from its usurpation, from the contradiction between theory and practice—which, in the special conditions of backward Russia's isolation in a period of capitalist decline, led to Stalinism. The bureaucracy, like Stalinism, did not spring from nowhere. Both had the same social roots and were interlaced for a whole era. The procedures of Stalinism were inescapable for the bureaucracy in a particular phase of Russian development. When those conditions changed it sought to rationalise those procedures as a way of maintaining its power, confronted as it was by a large, growing and increasingly self-conscious working class which wanted to enter fully into its legacy, the legacy of the October Revolution. For this to become effective there will be no need to change the property relations, which correspond fully to those of a workers' state. What must go is the usurping political function of the bureaucracy which it exercises, of course, already in the name of the working class. The way to put paid to the political degeneration which led to the rule of the bureaucracy lies in the political revolution which, through workers' councils and militias, enables the working class to rule in its own right.

The conclusion of this discussion must be that in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe what is called the bureaucracy does not form a new ruling class and that there is not to be found in these countries a new form of exploiting society. Appearances apart, the evidence of history and the conclusions of Marxist sociology are conclusive on these points. Traditional terminology, even that of

22. As Trotsky puts it, 'in so far as the bureaucracy robs the people (and this is done in various ways by every bureaucracy) we have to deal not with **class exploitation** in the scientific sense of the word, but with **social parasitism** although on a very large scale'. **The Class Nature of the Soviet State**, Ceylon ed., p. 13.

23. Needless to add, the formulations of the official sophists, as expressed, for example, in **The Political Economy Textbook** which claim to have 'abolished the antagonistic contradiction between accumulation and consumption' (p. 549) because the means of production are 'at the disposal of society for further production, serve the interest of the whole people and cannot provide the basis for exploitation' (p. 512) have no scientific value. They merely provide the verbal smoke-screen behind which the bureaucracy maintains its usurpation.

Marxists, is not always adequate to cope with the infinite variety of living social forms. Certainly what we call 'the bureaucracy' comprehends a social layer representing some 10 to 15 per cent of the population, larger in size and more varied in composition than those generally included in the term in orthodox sociology. There is no doubt that many of these people are carrying out functions which would be necessary in a healthy workers' state. Large sections, however, such as the secret police, or those concerned with industrial discipline, only exist because of the antagonisms which result from the privileged and usurping position of the stratum as a whole. It is this special and anomalous position which, while preventing the bureaucracy from being a class, makes necessary the use of some other term. When Trotsky hit on the term 'caste' he was aware that this, too, had its shortcomings. 'We frequently call the Soviet bureaucracy a caste, underscoring thereby its shut-in character, its arbitrary rule, and the haughtiness of the ruling stratum which considers that its progenitors issued from the divine lips of Brahma whereas the popular masses originated from the grosser parts of his anatomy. But even this definition does not of course possess a strictly scientific character. Its relative superiority lies in this, that the make-shift character of the term is clear to everybody, since it would enter nobody's mind to identify the Moscow oligarchy with the Hindu caste of Brahmins.'<sup>24</sup>

An important point is that a caste is not defined by its relationship to the means of production; it is not economically necessary but is a product of superstructural forces—ideology, religion, war, conquest. Thus, in these states, the caste-like peculiarities of the bureaucracy arise from the political degeneration of the Stalin era, the isolation of the revolution in a backward country and the precautions which the bureaucracy has taken to preserve its anomalous position and social privileges. It performs no function in the course of production which justifies its de facto monopoly of political power. Its role is not made necessary by the form of property. Its existence is bound up with the preservation of the conquests of a working-class revolution, but is actually in conflict with the property forms. In fact no independent basis for its rule exists; in that respect it is not a class, independent of the working class of which it is, historically, an emanation and from which, in terms of source of income, it is not distinguished. If it absorbs a disproportionate share of the social product that is because it disposes of the social surplus—but still can do no other than deploy most of it in the building up of additional means of pro-

24. **In Defense of Marxism**, p. 6.

duction. In doing so, however, it does not create capital or behave as a capitalist class. It cannot alter the nationalized basis of the economy nor is it, as a specially privileged ruling stratum, necessary to it. It is best described, then, as a parasitic excrescence which arose in the course of the process of degeneration which went on in the USSR or, by transference, affected the East European countries. It can be removed by a political revolution which will not only leave intact the social-economic base but will enable the full flowering of the latter to take place. The road to socialism in these countries thus lies through the re-establishment of workers' power; the Hungarian Commune of 1956, based as it was on workers' councils, foreshadows the future line of development. Whatever adaptations the bureaucracy may make, it is confronted by an increasingly powerful and self-conscious working class which no attempt at self-reform will satisfy. The political monopoly of the bureaucracy is, indeed, the only basis for its social existence in these countries. The fragile and contingent nature of its rule, which now moves from crisis to crisis as the events since 1953 have demonstrated, removes any possibility that it can consolidate its position and create a new form of class rule. A product of international defeats for the working class and of hardship and penury in the USSR, it cannot survive a period of international working-class advance.

Trotsky, in all his writings on the social character of the Soviet Union, never lost sight of the international and political conditions of the domination and the overthrow of the Stalinist

bureaucracy. Succeeding in the period of exhaustion of the Russian masses, and contributing with its strategy of 'socialism in one country' to the international defeats which further isolated and discouraged the Russian workers in the 1920s, the bureaucracy came to stand between the Soviet proletariat and its true role beside the workers of the world in the struggle against imperialism. The basic class antagonisms remain the same: the struggle between the imperialists and the international proletariat, with the Russian workers having made a major breakthrough in 1917, but prevented from playing the necessary role of ally with the workers of the advanced and colonial countries by the political policy of the Stalinist bureaucracy. 'The bureaucracy upon which Stalin leans is materially bound up with the results of the consummated national revolution, but it has no point of contact with the developing international revolution.'<sup>25</sup> The combination of the struggles of the large and developed industrial working class in the USSR itself together with the solution of the 'crisis of leadership' in the labour movements of the advanced countries, is the death-knell of the bureaucracy. This perspective points clearly to the major responsibility of Marxists in relation to the USSR: defence of the conquests of October, together with implacable struggle against the Stalinist bureaucracy in the creation of a Marxist leadership, both in the capitalist countries and in the 'Soviet bloc'.

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25. L. D. Trotsky. *The Workers' State and the Question of Thermidor* (1935), Socialist Labour League pamphlet.

#### IV

Something has already been said about the practical political conclusion which should be expected to follow from the type of theory now under consideration. In the light of events, while adherents of these trends have rejected defence of the Soviet Union, they have not always been able to resist being impressed by the economic, and even by the social, accomplishments of that country. Since they have decided that the bureaucracy is a new ruling class, moreover, it is difficult for them to deny it a valid place in history and thus to ascribe to it these very accomplishments, albeit achieved with the help of exploitation and ruthless oppression. Remarkably enough, therefore, a rapprochement takes place between the open apologists of the bureaucracy and the 'state capitalists' (the 'bureaucratic collectivists', strongest in the USA, are more consistently anti-Soviet): for both historical necessity and objec-

tive laws made Russian development what it was and justify, or legitimize, the rule of the bureaucracy, including at least some of its draconian measures. The position adopted on this question is not free from contradiction and is obscured by the weakness of the 'state capitalist' analysis of the post-Stalin developments in the Soviet Union. Thus, in one place, Cliff, writing of the bureaucracy, states: 'Unable to rely on the self-activity of the people, denying all working-class democracy, Khrushchev has to rely on bureaucrats to control other bureaucrats. The hydra of bureaucratic anarchy and its concomitant bureaucratic control, grows on the soil of worker's alienation from the means of production and exploitation of the labourer.'<sup>26</sup> But a page or so further on in the same article he says, '*The efforts and self-sacrifice of the people* have raised Russia,

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26. *International Socialism*, No. 1, Summer 1958, p. 45

despite bureaucratic mismanagement and waste, to the position of a great industrial power from being, in terms of industrial output, fourth in Europe and fifth in the world to being first in Europe and second in the world. She has stepped out of her sleepy backwardness to become a modern, powerful, industrially advanced country. *The bureaucracy has thus earned as much tribute as Marx and Engels paid to the bourgeoisie.*' (My emphasis—T.K.)<sup>27</sup> Why, under the conditions of extreme exploitation described in his earlier book 'Stalinist Russia' the people should display such efforts and self-sacrifice is not explained; nor, in a study which lays heavy emphasis on bureaucratic mismanagement and waste, is it clear why he should wish to praise the bureaucracy, if only in the same terms as those used by Marx and Engels of the bourgeoisie. The only feasible explanation seems to be that the 'state capitalists' have become impressed by the indices of industrial production and by the scientific and technological achievements to which even the most hostile publicists are now obliged to pay tribute and are trying to integrate as best they can into their scheme of things. Since, according to them, all the conquests of the Revolution have been filched away by the new bureaucratic ruling class of state capitalists, inevitably a large share of the credit must go to them—in fact it is but a short step to accepting that they have earned, and deserve, the large incomes and extensive privileges which they indeed enjoy. The implication is already there.

Moreover, if the bureaucracy is responsible for these achievements in state capitalist Russia, where it has expropriated the workers and now exploits them, and if in the advanced capitalist countries the working class has not been able to shake off the ruling class and even displays a certain political apathy, well that may mean that capitalism has the upper hand and will itself be freer to move towards the 'state capitalist' model as the result of further defeats of the workers. Such a line of thought can lead, through rejection of the conquests of the Revolution of 1917, and acceptance of the inevitability of the defeat of the Russian working class by the new ruling class, to pessimism towards the whole prospect of socialism—unless some sharp and unexpected turn in the situation comes along, like a severe economic crisis or imminent threat of war. At least in the advanced countries the 'state capitalists' do not see very much hope for independent working class action, although they talk about 'autonomous and conscious action of the working masses' free from control of party organization and discipline. Indeed for some of its adherents all leadership is now rejected in a way which has become a positive

27. *Ibid.*, p. 52.

obsession removed not only from Marxism but from all practical possibility of effective intervention in the labour movement as it is today except as an element of confusion and division. One such 'theoretician', for example, even finds the 'effective essence of class relationship in production (in) the antagonistic division of those participating in production into two fixed and stable categories: those who give the orders and those who execute them'. 'The socialist revolution sets out,' he continues, 'from the very beginning to eliminate the distinction between directors and executors as fixed and stable categories in production as well as in all other fields of collective life; *because it is in this distinction that the division of societies into classes takes concrete form.*' (My emphasis—T.K.)<sup>28</sup> Although even *Socialisme ou Barbarie* has not been able to refrain from some form of organization to propagate its ideas, it emphasizes that 'The organization does not aim to lead the class and to impose itself on it, but will be an *instrument* of its struggle.'<sup>29</sup> Why a presumably spontaneous struggle should require any organization at all is not explained, nor what happens if the struggle employs methods, or seeks ends which are not those of the organization which wishes to be its instrument. But Marxists must seek to win leadership and to wrest it from the hands of the Social Democratic and Stalinist bureaucracies in whose hands it now resides, which can only be effected through organization.

The logic of the state capitalist position is drawn clearly enough by *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, less explicitly, perhaps, by its counterparts in Britain. Amongst other things it must be to oppose those who do seek to lead the working class and to unseat the existing leadership with cries about bureaucracy, substitutionism, dictatorship and so on. Meantime it means in practice knuckling down to the existing leaders, while waiting for the working class to get moving spontaneously, without benefit of organization. Hence the explanation of some of the curious combinations, alliances and manoeuvres which have taken place in recent years inside the Labour Party and the Young Socialists. No doubt many of these people have been acting in good faith: nonetheless they have been following out to its logical and disastrous end a wrong theory which has taken many out of the Labour movement altogether. If for no other reason the theories of 'state capitalism' and 'bureaucratic collectivism' must be understood, combated and exposed.

28. Cardan, P. *Declarations of Principles of Socialisme ou Barbarie* in *The Review of the Imre Nagy Institute*, No. 6.

29. Statement on back cover of *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, No. 33, 1962.

The appearance of varied theories of the Soviet Union as a new form of capitalist, or exploiting, society couched in purportedly Marxist terms represents a running away from the real issues presented by Stalinism and its aftermath, generally under the pressure of public opinion in the capitalist countries. That they can win some support from people who genuinely desire to be Marxists is, at the same time, partly the result of the abysmal theoretical level of Communist Party writing on the Soviet Union and the sheer lack of renewal in Marxist thinking in circles influenced by it. In this and other articles we try to fill this vacuum and contribute to the theoretical arming of the genuine Marxist movement. It would be stupid, however, to adopt a too facile

attitude to those who are led astray by theories like those of 'state capitalism' or 'bureaucratic collectivism'.<sup>30</sup> Not only do these raise real problems—often echoing bourgeois sociology—which require to be dealt with, but, as Trotsky's lengthy and patient rebuttals of such theories show, doing so is a real political task—a task not simply of hitting out, but of winning over those confused by such ideas. Some discussions of these theories by self-styled Trotskyists or Marxists show a desire to find a simple answer, or are simply unwilling to take up the real points raised by their adherents. We intend, in subsequent articles, to deal more fully with some of the problems involved in the analysis of modern advanced societies which have a bearing on this controversy.

30. For example, the treatment by Mandel, E. in *Traite d'Economie Marxiste*, Vol. 2, Ch. XV would hardly disturb any adherents of these theories. He merely asserts 'Contrary to what is affirmed by numerous sociologists who claim to utilise the Marxist method of analysis, the Soviet economy does not display any of the **fundamental** aspects of capitalist economy.' His main proof rests on the view that the accumulation of means of production is an accumulation of use values, that there is no profit and no anarchy of the market and that there is no bourgeoisie. According to him the adherents of the state capitalist theory are right when they say that the norms of distribution remain bourgeois and the adherents of the bureaucratic collectivist theory are right when they deny the capitalist character of Soviet production. Trying to keep purely within **economic** categories he says, 'In fact, the Soviet economy is characterised by the contradictory

combination of a non-capitalist mode of production and a mode of distribution which is still fundamentally bourgeois.' This is most inadequate and is no real answer to the theories of which he claims to have disposed.

Frank, P., on the other hand, in his preface to the recent reprint of the French translation of *The Revolution Betrayed*, argues that such theories all have their starting point 'in the strengthening of the extraordinary weight of the State in the whole of social life'. He draws attention to the increased importance of the 'new middle classes'. But apart from discussing various hypotheses, it must be said that he does not squarely meet the arguments of those whom he assumes that he has disposed of. See also 'The Soviet Union. What it is, Where it is Going', Edwards, W., *Bulletin of Marxist Studies*, No. 2, 1958.

# THE CLASS, THE PARTY and THE LEADERSHIP

LEON TROTSKY



On the following pages is reprinted an article which was found among Trotsky's papers after he was murdered, and first published in the Fourth International in December, 1940. This printing is taken from a Workers' International Review pamphlet which is long out-of-print and was apparently the only other form in English in which the article appeared. We include the "editorial note" by the pamphlet's publishers, the English Militant group. The article is an invaluable guide for revolutionists today and stands out even among Trotsky's writings as a superb treatment of the question of revolutionary leadership.

# THE CLASS, THE PARTY AND THE LEADERSHIP

## EDITORIAL NOTE

**A**MONGST Trotsky's archives were found a rough draft and fragmentary notes which we are republishing in the form of an unfinished article.

This article assumes great importance in the light of the Hungarian Revolution.

This great event has provided an unanswerable and crushing reply to those within the working class who are mesmerised by the successes of Stalinism and reformism and have lost all confidence in the capacity of the working class to take control of its destiny. In the events of the Revolution, the proletariat was learning very rapidly the need to take complete control of the State and industry into its own hands. But like most of the revolutions in the last few decades what was lacking was a leadership and an organisation to make conscious the aspirations of the working class to take power.

With the crisis in the Communist Party new cadres are coming forward to question the history of the Communist Party in the last decades. In the study of the works of Trotsky and the analysis of the great events of the past by the Fourth International they will find the key to an understanding of the events and thus prepare the future. Only the Fourth International has given the Marxist interpretation of the development in Russia, China, Hungary and Spain.

In the new revolutions that loom in the East against Stalinism and in the West against Capitalism, only if the vanguard assimilates these lessons will they prevent new defeats and catastrophes for the working class. Already in Spain the proletariat is beginning to stir itself and the Franco regime has nearly exhausted its historic possibilities. A new revolution cannot be long delayed.

In Spain, France and Italy — no less important for Britain — it is necessary for the advanced elements to assimilate clearly the lesson of the dialectic relationship of class, party and leadership which is sketched by Trotsky in this article.

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**T**HE extent to which the working class movement has been thrown backward may be gauged not only by the condition of the mass organisations but by ideological groupings and those theoretical inquiries in which so many groups are engaged. In Paris there is published a periodical "Que Faire" (What To Do) which for some reason considers itself Marxist but in reality remains completely within the framework of the empiricism of the left bourgeois intellectuals and those isolated workers who have assimilated all the vices of the intellectuals.

Like all groups lacking a scientific foundation, without a programme and without any tradition, this little periodical tried to hang on to the coat-tails of the POUM — which seemed to open the shortest avenue to the masses and to victory. But the result of these ties with the Spanish revolution seems at first entirely unexpected: the periodical did not advance but on the contrary retrogressed. As a matter of fact, this is wholly in the nature of things. The contradictions between the petty bourgeoisie's conservatism and the needs of the proletarian revolution have developed in the extreme. It is only natural that the defenders and interpreters of the policies of the POUM found themselves thrown far back both in political and theoretical fields.

The periodical "Que Faire" is in and of itself of no importance whatever. But it is of symptomatic interest. That is why we think it profitable to dwell upon this periodical's appraisal of the causes for the collapse of the Spanish revolution, inasmuch as this appraisal discloses very graphically the fundamental features now prevailing in the left flank of pseudo-Marxism.

### **"QUE FAIRE" EXPLAINS**

We begin with a verbatim quotation from a review of the pamphlet "Spain Betrayed," by comrade Casanova: "Why was the revolution crushed? Because, replies the author (Casanova), the Communist Party conducted a false policy which was unfortunately followed by the revolutionary masses. But why, in the devil's name, did the revolutionary masses who left their former leaders rally to the banner of the Communist Party? 'Because there was no genuinely revolutionary party.' We are presented with a pure tautology. A false policy of the masses; an immature party either manifests a certain condition of social forces (immaturity of the working class, lack of independence of the peasantry) which must be explained by proceeding from facts, presented among others by Casanova himself; or it is the product of the actions of certain malicious individuals or groups of individuals, actions which do not correspond to the efforts of 'sincere individuals' alone capable of saving the revolution. After groping for the first and Marxist road, Casanova takes the second. We are ushered into the domain of pure demonology; the criminal responsible for the defeat is the chief Devil, Stalin, abetted by the anarchists and all the other little devils; the God of revolutionists unfortunately did not send a Lenin or a Trotsky to Spain as He did in Russia in 1917."

The conclusion then follows: "This is what comes of seeking at any cost to force the ossified orthodoxy of a chapel upon facts." This theoretical haughtiness is made all the more significant by the fact that it is hard to imagine how so great a number of banalities, vulgarisms and mistakes quite specifically of a conservative philistine type could be compressed into so few lines.

The author of the above quotation avoids giving any explanation for the defeat of the Spanish revolution; he only indicates that profound explanations, like the "condition of social forces" are necessary. The evasion of any explanation is not accidental. These critics of

Bolshevism are all theoretical cowards, for the simple reason that they have nothing solid under their feet. In order not to reveal their own bankruptcy they juggle facts and prowl around the opinions of others. They confine themselves to hints and half-thoughts as if they just haven't the time to delineate their full wisdom. As a matter of fact they possess no wisdom at all. Their haughtiness is lined with intellectual charlatanism.

Let us analyse step by step the hints and half-thoughts of our author. According to him a false policy of the masses can be explained only as it "manifests a certain condition of social forces," namely, the immaturity of the working class and the lack of independence of the peasantry. Anyone searching for tautologies couldn't find in general a flatter one. A "false policy of the masses" is explained by the "immaturity" of the masses. But what is "immaturity" of the masses? Obviously, their predisposition to false policies. Of just what the false policy consisted, and who were its initiators: the masses or the leaders — that is passed over in silence by our author. By means of a tautology he unloads the responsibility on the masses. This classical trick of all traitors, deserters and their attorneys is especially revolting in connection with the Spanish proletariat.

### **SOPHISTRY OF THE BETRAYERS**

In July 1936 — not to refer to an earlier period — the Spanish workers repelled the assault of the officers who had prepared their conspiracy under the protection of the People's Front. The masses improvised militias and created workers' committees, the strongholds of their future dictatorship. The leading organisations of the proletariat on the other hand helped the bourgeoisie to destroy these committees, to liquidate the assaults of the workers on private property and to subordinate the workers' militias to the command of the bourgeoisie, with the POUM moreover participating in the government and assuming direct responsibility for this work of the counter-revolution. What does "immaturity" of the proletariat signify in this case? Self-evidently only this, that despite the correct political line chosen by the masses, the latter were unable to smash the coalition of socialists, Stalinists, anarchists and the POUM with the bourgeoisie. This piece of sophistry takes as its starting point a concept of some absolute maturity, i.e. a perfect condition of the masses in which they do not require a correct leadership, and, more than that, are capable of conquering against their own leadership. There is not and there cannot be such maturity.

Our sages object: but why should workers who show such correct revolutionary instinct and such superior fighting qualities submit to treacherous leadership? Our answer is: There wasn't even a hint of mere subordination. The workers' line of march at all times cut a certain angle to the line of the leadership. And at the most critical moments this angle became 180 degrees. The leadership then helped directly or indirectly to subdue the workers by armed force.

In May 1937 the workers of Catalonia rose not only without their

own leadership but against it. The anarchist leaders — pathetic and contemptible bourgeois masquerading cheaply as revolutionists — have repeated hundreds of times in their press that had the CNT wanted to take power and set up their dictatorship in May, they could have done so without any difficulty. This time the anarchist leaders speak the unadulterated truth. The POUM leadership actually dragged at the tail of the CNT, only they covered up their policy with a different phraseology. It was thanks to this and this alone that the bourgeoisie succeeded in crushing the May uprising of the “immature” proletariat. One must understand exactly nothing in the sphere of the inter-relationships between the class and the party, between the masses and the leaders in order to repeat the hollow statement that the Spanish masses merely followed their leaders. The only thing that can be said is that the masses who sought at all times to blast their way to the correct road found no new leadership corresponding to the demands of the revolution. Before us is a profoundly dynamic process, with the various stages of the revolution shifting swiftly, with the leadership or various sections of the leadership quickly deserting to the side of the class enemy, and our sages engage in a purely static discussion: why did the working class as a whole follow a bad leadership?

### **THE DIALECTIC APPROACH**

There is an ancient, evolutionary-liberal epigram: every people gets the government it deserves. History, however, shows that one and the same people may in the course of a comparatively brief epoch get very different governments (Russia, Italy, Germany, Spain, etc.) and furthermore that the order of these governments doesn't at all proceed in one and the same direction: from despotism — to freedom, as was imagined by the evolutionist liberals. The secret is this, that a people is comprised of hostile classes, and the classes themselves are comprised of different and in part antagonistic layers which fall under different leadership; furthermore every people falls under the influence of other peoples who are likewise comprised of classes. Governments do not express the systematically growing “maturity” of a “people” but are the product of the struggle between different classes and the different layers within one and the same class, and, finally, the action of external forces — alliances, wars and so on. To this should be added that a government, once it has established itself, may endure much longer than the relationship of forces which produced it. It is precisely out of this historical contradiction that revolutions, coup d'états, counter-revolutions, etc., arise.

The very same dialectic approach is necessary in dealing with the question of the leadership of a class. Imitating the liberals our sages tacitly accept the axiom that every class gets the leadership it deserves. In reality leadership is not at all a mere “reflection” of a class or the product of its own free creativeness. A leadership is shaped in the process of clashes between the different classes or the friction between the different layers within a given class. Having once arisen, the leadership invariably rises above its class and thereby becomes pre-

disposed to the pressure and influence of other classes. The proletariat may "tolerate" for a long time a leadership that has already suffered a complete inner degeneration but has not as yet had the opportunity to express this degeneration amid great events. A great historic shock is necessary to reveal sharply the contradiction between the leadership and the class. The mightiest historical shocks are wars and revolutions. Precisely for this reason the working class is often caught unawares by war and revolution. But even in cases where the old leadership has revealed its internal corruption, the class cannot improvise immediately a new leadership, especially if it has not inherited from the previous period strong revolutionary cadres capable of utilising the collapse of the old leading party. The Marxist, i.e. dialectic and not scholastic interpretation of the inter-relationship between a class and its leadership does not leave a single stone unturned of our author's legalistic sophistry.

### HOW THE RUSSIAN WORKERS MATURED

He conceives of the proletariat's maturity as something purely static. Yet during a revolution the consciousness of a class is the most dynamic process directly determining the course of the revolution. Was it possible in January 1917 or even in March, after the overthrow of Czarism, to give an answer to the question whether the Russian proletariat had sufficiently "matured" for the conquest of power in eight to nine months? The working class was at that time extremely heterogeneous socially and politically. During the years of the war it had been renewed by 30-40 per cent from the ranks of the petty bourgeoisie, often reactionary, at the expense of backward peasants, at the expense of women and youth. The Bolshevik party in March 1917 was followed by an insignificant minority of the working class and furthermore there was discord within the party itself. The overwhelming majority of the workers supported the Mensheviks and the "Socialist-Revolutionists" i.e. conservative social-patriots. The situation was even less favourable with regard to the army and the peasantry. We must add to this: the general low level of culture in the country, the lack of political experience among the broadest layers of the proletariat, especially in the provinces, let alone the peasants and soldiers.

What was the "active"\* of Bolshevism? A clear and thoroughly thought out revolutionary conception at the beginning of the revolution was held only by Lenin. The Russian cadres of the party were scattered and to a considerable degree bewildered. But the party had authority among the advanced workers. Lenin had great authority with the party cadres. Lenin's political conception corresponded to the actual development of the revolution and was reinforced by each new event. These elements of the "active" worked wonders in a revolutionary situation, that is, in conditions of bitter class struggle. The party quickly aligned its policy to correspond with Lenin's conception, to correspond that is with the actual course of the revolution.

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\* Untranslatable term, which means in part "liquid assets." — Trans.

Thanks to this it met with firm support among tens of thousands of advanced workers. Within a few months, by basing itself upon the development of the revolution the party was able to convince the majority of the workers of the correctness of its slogans. This majority organised into Soviets was able in its turn to attract the soldiers and peasants. How can this dynamic, dialectic process be exhausted by a formula of the maturity or immaturity of the proletariat? A colossal factor in the maturity of the Russian proletariat in February or March 1917 was Lenin. He did not fall from the skies. He personified the revolutionary tradition of the working class. For Lenin's slogans to find their way to the masses there had to exist cadres, even though numerically small at the beginning; there had to exist the confidence of the cadres in the leadership, a confidence based on the entire experience of the past. To cancel these elements from one's calculations is simply to ignore the living revolution, to substitute for it an abstraction, the "relationship of forces," because the development of the revolution precisely consists of this, that the relationship of forces keeps incessantly and rapidly changing under the impact of the changes in the consciousness of the proletariat, the attraction of backward layers to the advanced, the growing assurance of the class in its own strength. The vital mainspring in this process is the party, just as the vital mainspring in the mechanism of the party is its leadership. The role and the responsibility of the leadership in a revolutionary epoch is colossal.

### **RELATIVITY OF "MATURITY"**

The October victory is a serious testimonial of the "maturity" of the proletariat. But this maturity is relative. A few years later the very same proletariat permitted the revolution to be strangled by a bureaucracy which rose from its ranks. Victory is not at all the ripe fruit of the proletariat's "maturity." Victory is a strategical task. It is necessary to utilise in order to mobilise the masses; taking as a starting point the given level of their "maturity" it is necessary to propel them forward, teach them to understand that the enemy is by no means omnipotent, that it is torn asunder with contradictions, that behind the imposing facade panic prevails. Had the Bolshevik party failed to carry out this work, there couldn't even be talk of the victory of the proletarian revolution. The Soviets would have been crushed by the counter-revolution, and the little sages of all countries would have written articles and books on the keynote that only uprooted visionaries could dream in Russia of the dictatorship of the proletariat, so small numerically and so immature.

### **AUXILIARY ROLE OF PEASANTS**

Equally abstract, pedantic and false is the reference to the "lack of independence" of the peasantry. When and where did our sage ever observe in capitalist society a peasantry with an independent revolutionary programme or a capacity for independent revolutionary

initiative? The peasantry can play a very great role in the revolution, but only an auxiliary role.

In many instances the Spanish peasants acted boldly and fought courageously. But to rouse the entire mass of the peasantry, the proletariat had to set an example of a decisive uprising against the bourgeoisie and inspire the peasants with faith in the possibility of victory. In the meantime the revolutionary initiative of the proletariat itself was paralysed at every step by its own organisations.

The "immaturity" of the proletariat, the "lack of independence" of the peasantry are neither final nor basic factors in historical events. Underlying the consciousness of the classes are the classes themselves, their numerical strength, their role in economic life. Underlying the classes is a specific system of production which is determined in its turn by the level of the development of productive forces. Why not then say that the defeat of the Spanish proletariat was determined by the low level of technology?

### **THE ROLE OF PERSONALITY**

Our author substitutes mechanistic determinism for the dialectic conditioning of the historical process. Hence the cheap jibes about the role of individuals, good and bad. History is a process of the class struggle. But classes do not bring their full weight to bear automatically and simultaneously. In the process of struggle the classes create various organs which play an important and independent role and are subject to deformations. This also provides the basis for the role of personalities in history. There are naturally great objective causes which created the autocratic rule of Hitler but only dull-witted pedants of "determinism" could deny today the enormous historic role of Hitler. The arrival of Lenin in Petrograd on April 3, 1917, turned the Bolshevik party in time and enabled the party to lead the revolution to victory. Our sages might say that had Lenin died abroad at the beginning of 1917, the October revolution would have taken place "just the same." But that is not so. Lenin represented one of the living elements of the historical process. He personified the experience and the perspicacity of the most active section of the proletariat. His timely appearance on the arena of the revolution was necessary in order to mobilise the vanguard and provide it with an opportunity to rally the working class and the peasant masses. Political leadership in the crucial moments of historical turns can become just as decisive a factor as is the role of the chief command during the critical moments of war. History is not an automatic process. Otherwise, why leaders? Why parties? Why programmes? Why theoretical struggles?

### **STALINISM IN SPAIN**

"But why, in the devil's name," asks the author as we have already heard, "did the revolutionary masses who left their former leaders, rally to the banner of the Communist Party?" The question is falsely posed. It is not true that the revolutionary masses left all

of their former leaders. The workers who were previously connected with specific organisations continued to cling to them, while they observed and checked. Workers in general do not easily break with the party that awakens them to conscious life. Moreover the existence of mutual protection within the People's Front lulled them: since everybody agreed, everything must be all right. The new and fresh masses naturally turned to the Comintern as the party which had accomplished the only victorious proletarian revolution and which, it was hoped, was capable of assuring arms to Spain. Furthermore the Comintern was the most zealous champion of the idea of the People's Front; this inspired confidence among the inexperienced layers of workers. Within the People's Front the Comintern was the most zealous champion of the bourgeois character of the revolution; this inspired the confidence of the petty and in part the middle bourgeoisie. That is why the masses "rallied to the banner of the Communist Party."

Our author depicts the matter as if the proletariat were in a well-stocked shoe store, selecting a new pair of boots. Even this simple operation, as is well known, does not always prove successful. As regards new leadership, the choice is very limited. Only gradually, only on the basis of their own experience through several stages can the broad layers of the masses become convinced that a new leadership is firmer, more reliable, more loyal than the old. To be sure, during a revolution, i.e., when events move swiftly, a weak party can quickly grow into a mighty one provided it lucidly understands the course of the revolution and possesses staunch cadres that do not become intoxicated with phrases and are not terrorised by persecution. But such a party must be available prior to the revolution inasmuch as the process of educating the cadres requires a considerable period of time and the revolution does not afford this time.

### **TREACHERY OF THE POUM**

To the left of all the other parties in Spain stood the POUM, which undoubtedly embraced revolutionary proletarian elements not previously firmly tied to anarchism. But it was precisely this party that played a fatal role in the development of the Spanish revolution. It could not become a mass party because in order to do so it was first necessary to overthrow the old parties and it was possible to overthrow them only by an irreconcilable struggle, by a merciless exposure of their bourgeois character. Yet the POUM while criticising the old parties subordinated itself to them on all fundamental questions. It participated in the "People's" election bloc; entered the government which liquidated workers' committees; engaged in a struggle to reconstitute this governmental coalition; capitulated time and again to the anarchist leadership; conducted, in connection with this, a false trade union policy; took a vacillating and non-revolutionary attitude toward the May 1937 uprising. From the standpoint of determinism in general it is possible of course to recognise that the policy of the POUM was not accidental. Everything in this world has its cause. However, the series of causes engendering the centrism of the POUM

are by no means a mere reflection of condition of the Spanish or Catalanian proletariat. Two causalities moved toward each other at an angle and at a certain moment they came into hostile conflict. It is possible by taking into account previous international experience, Moscow's influence, the influence of a number of defeats, etc., to explain politically and psychologically why the POUM unfolded as a centrist party. But this does not alter its centrist character, nor does it alter the fact that a centrist party invariably acts as a brake upon the revolution, must each time smash its own head, and may bring about the collapse of the revolution. It does not alter the fact that the Catalanian masses were far more revolutionary than the POUM, which in turn was more revolutionary than its leadership. In these conditions to unload the responsibility for false policies on the "immaturity" of the masses is to engage in sheer charlatanism frequently resorted to by political bankrupts.

### **RESPONSIBILITY OF LEADERSHIP**

The historical falsification consists in this, that the responsibility for the defeat of the Spanish masses is unloaded on the working masses and not those parties which paralysed or simply crushed the revolutionary movement of the masses. The attorneys of the POUM simply deny the responsibility of the leaders, in order thus to escape shouldering their own responsibility. This impotent philosophy, which seeks to reconcile defeats as a necessary link in the chain of cosmic developments, is completely incapable of posing and refuses to pose the question of such concrete factors as programmes, parties, personalities that were the organisers of defeat. This philosophy of fatalism and prostration is diametrically opposed to Marxism as the theory of revolutionary action.

Civil war is a process wherein political tasks are solved by military means. Were the outcome of this war determined by the "condition of class forces," the war itself would not be necessary. War has its own organisation, its own policies, its own methods, its own leadership by which its fate is directly determined. Naturally, the "condition of class forces" supplies the foundation for all other political factors; but just as the foundation of a building does not reduce the importance of walls, windows, doors, roofs, so the "condition of classes" does not invalidate the importance of parties, their strategy, their leadership. By dissolving the concrete in the abstract, our sages really halted midway. The most "profound" solution of the problem would have been to declare the defeat of the Spanish proletariat as due to the inadequate development of productive forces. Such a key is accessible to any fool.

By reducing to zero the significance of the party and of the leadership these sages deny in general the possibility of revolutionary victory. Because there are not the least grounds for expecting conditions more favourable. Capitalism has ceased to advance, the proletariat does not grow numerically, on the contrary it is the army of unemployed that grows, which does not increase but reduces the fighting force of the proletariat and has a negative effect also upon its consciousness.

There are similarly no grounds for believing that under the regime of capitalism the peasantry is capable of attaining a higher revolutionary consciousness. The conclusion from the analysis of our author is thus complete pessimism, a sliding away from revolutionary perspectives. It must be said — to do them justice — that they do not themselves understand what they say.

As a matter of fact, the demands they make upon the consciousness of the masses are utterly fantastic. The Spanish workers, as well as the Spanish peasants, gave the maximum of what these classes are able to give in a revolutionary situation. We have in mind precisely the class of millions and tens of millions.

“Que Faire” represents merely one of these little schools, or churches or chapels who, frightened by the course of the struggle and the onset of reaction publish their little journals and their theoretical etudes in a corner, on the sidelines away from the actual developments of revolutionary thought, let alone the movement of the masses.

### **REPRESSION OF SPANISH REVOLUTION**

The Spanish proletariat fell the victim of a coalition composed of imperialists, Spanish republicans, socialists, anarchists, Stalinists and on the left flank, the POUM. They all paralysed the socialist revolution which the Spanish proletariat had actually begun to realise. It is not easy to dispose of the socialist revolution. No one has yet devised other methods than ruthless repressions, massacre of the vanguard, execution of the leaders, etc. The POUM of course did not want this. It wanted on the one hand to participate in the Republican government and to enter as a loyal peace-loving opposition into the general bloc of ruling parties ; and on the other hand to achieve peaceful comradely relations at a time when it was a question of implacable civil war. For this very reason the POUM fell victim to the contradictions of its own policy. The most consistent policy in the ruling bloc was pursued by the Stalinists. They were the fighting vanguard of the bourgeois-republican counter-revolution. They wanted to eliminate the need of Fascism by proving to the Spanish and world bourgeoisie that they were themselves capable of strangling the proletarian revolution under the banner of “democracy.” This was the gist of their policies. The bankrupts of the Spanish People’s Front are today trying to unload the blame on the GPU. I trust that we cannot be suspected of leniency toward the crimes of the GPU. But we see clearly and we tell the workers that the GPU acted in this instance only as the most resolute detachment in the service of the People’s Front. Therein was the strength of the GPU, therein was the historic role of Stalin. Only ignorant philistines can wave this aside with stupid little jokes about the Chief Devil.

These gentlemen do not even bother with the question of the social character of the revolution. Moscow’s lackeys, for the benefit of England and France, proclaimed the Spanish revolution as bourgeois. Upon this fraud were erected the perfidious policies of the People’s Front, policies which would have been completely false even if the

Spanish revolution had really been bourgeois. But from the very beginning the revolution expressed much more graphically its proletarian character than did the revolution of 1917 in Russia. In the leadership of the POUM, gentlemen sit today who consider that the policy of Andres Nin was too "leftist," that the really correct thing was to have remained the left flank of the People's Front. Victor Serge, who is in a hurry to compromise himself by a frivolous attitude toward serious questions, writes that Nin did not wish to submit to commands from Oslo or Coyoacan. Can a serious man really be capable of reducing to petty gossip the problem of the class content of a revolution? The sages of "Que Faire" have no answer whatever to this question. They do not understand the question itself. Of what significance indeed is the fact that the "immature" proletariat founded its own organs of power, seized enterprises, sought to regulate production, while the POUM tried with all its might to keep from breaking with bourgeois anarchists who, in an alliance with the bourgeois republicans and the no less less bourgeois socialists and Stalinists, assaulted and strangled the proletarian revolution! Such "trifles" are obviously of interest only to representatives of "ossified orthodoxy." The sages of "Que Faire" possess instead a special apparatus which measures the maturity of the proletariat and the relationship of forces independently of all questions of revolutionary class strategy.

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