

workers' liberty
reason in revolt



1917: revolution for freedom and equality

**The Russian revolution, the
Stalinist counter-revolution
and the working class**

Introduction: What is Trotskyism?

Our fragmented tradition

By John O'Malony

19TH and 20th century socialism is a house of many rooms, cellars, attics, alcoves, and hidden chambers (not to speak of private chapels and "priest-holes".)

There are in it the utopian socialists of our pre-history reformists and revolutionists, parliamentarians and insurrectionists, "direct action" anarchists and union-building syndicalists, council communists and kibbutz-building utopian Zionists.

And then fascists sometimes proclaimed themselves socialists (national-socialists). So did many Third World political formations, often more fascist than socialist, such as the "Ba'ath Arab Socialist Parties" of Iraq and Syria.

And Stalinism. The political reflections and tools in the labour movements of the Russian Stalinist ruling class proclaimed themselves "communists" and "socialists", and for much of the 20th century were accepted as the main force of communism and socialism, in bourgeois propaganda as well as their own.

The great names of real socialism are numerous, and are far from being at one with each other: Gracchus Babeuf, Charles Fourier, Robert Owen, Etienne Cabet, Karl Marx, Frederick Engels, Auguste Blanqui, Mikhail Bakunin, Ferdinand Lassalle, Louis Michel, Wilhelm Liebknecht and his son Karl, August Bebel, George Plekhanov, Vera Zasulich, Jules Guesde, Jean Jaures, Victor Griffuelhes, Paul Lafargue, Laura Lafargue, Eleanor Marx, Pavel Axelrod, Peter Kropotkin, James Connolly, Daniel De Leon, Jim Larkin, Eugene Debs, Christian Rakovsky, Henry Hyndman, Ernest Belfort Bax, William Morris, Keir Hardie, Klara Zetkin, Rosa Luxemburg, Sylvia Pankhurst, Karl Kautsky, Rosa Luxemburg, Vladimir Lenin, Vladimir Shliapnikov, Leon Trotsky, Chen Duxiu, Antonio Gramsci, Leon Sedov, James P Cannon, Leon Lesoil, Pantelis Pouliopoulos, Abram Leon, Ta Thu Thau, Henk Sneevliet, Max Shachtman...

The Communist International picked up and subsumed many of the threads of earlier socialism, and wove them into a more or less coherent strategy of working-class struggle for power — the direct action of the French and American syndicalists, the political "syndicalism" of the De Leonites, the revolutionary parliamentarianism of Liebknecht, the sometimes acute criticism by communist-anarchists of the parliamentarians of the pre-1914 Socialist International, the concern with national liberation of such as James Connolly, and all that was healthy in previous socialist activity and theorising.

They denounced bourgeois democracy and parliamentarianism in the name of the fuller democracy of workers' councils — and their criticism of bourgeois democracy would later, like so much else, be annexed and put to its own pernicious uses by totalitarian Stalinism.

The Russian working class, in their unprecedented creativity — for instance, in creating soviets (workers' councils) — and the Bolsheviks who led them to victory had in life found solutions to many of the problems that had perplexed earlier socialist thinkers.

What had all the different strands of socialism in common? What, with their different methods, tempos, and perspectives, did they seek to achieve?

All of them — the socialist reformists such as Keir Hardie, too — sought to abolish capitalism and the exploitation and wage-slavery on which it rested, and to replace it with a non-exploitative, rational, humane society.

Their ideas of what would replace capitalism differed greatly, for instance between anarchists and Marxists, but all the socialists sought to replace private ownership of the means of production and exchange with collective social ownership by the workers and working farmers.

All of them — in one way or another, with one qualification or another — looked to the working class, the slave-class of the capitalist era, to achieve this great social revolution.

They saw themselves as educators and organisers of the working class for the achievement of its work of social betterment and socialist transformation of society.

For those who publish *Solidarity* and *Workers' Liberty*, the Alliance for Workers' Liberty, the Marxist, communist, socialist tradition runs from Marx; through the fighters of the Paris Commune, the revolutionaries in the German Social Democratic Party and the Socialist International of 1889-1914, the Bolsheviks who led the greatest event in the whole of working-class history, the October 1917 Revolution; to the Communist International and its first four congresses (1919-22), and then the rearguard of Bolshevism and of the Bolshevik Communist International, the Left Oppositionists, the Trotskyists.

Up to Trotsky's death in 1940, it could be asserted without fear of contradiction from anyone who both knew the history of the preceding 20 years and was concerned with truth, that there was a clear line of development that had so far culminated in the movement for the Fourth International led by Trotsky, and the International it founded in September 1938.

That political tendency had led the Russian Revolution and defended it in civil war with the White Guard forces and against

the allies of the Whites, the invading armies of no fewer than 14 countries.

The dying Lenin, in the first place, and then the Left Opposition founded in Moscow in October 1923, whose leaders were Trotsky and Rakovsky, had fought the Stalinist counter-revolution that overthrew the workers' state. Fought it to the death of vast numbers, almost all their number in Stalin's concentration camps, jails, and homicide chambers.

We are not here talking about apostolic succession, of a line of infallible popes culminating in Trotsky. All such notions are alien to this tradition.

Leaders with acquired authority and prestige, yes; Catholic or Stalinist popes, no.

Every member of Lenin's Bolshevik party committee in October 1917 had opposed him at some previous turning point or another, some of them even on the October insurrection. Trotsky too found himself opposed by all his close comrades at one point or another.

This was a living movement of self-respecting, experienced militants, which conducted its affairs according to reason; which took it for granted that honest differences of opinion inevitably arise even among very like-minded people honestly pursuing the same goals, and that they can only be resolved by reason, discussion, and democratic decision-making.

All extant kitsch-left notions of socialist and communist popes possessing infallibility — and the power of coercion to compel compliance — arose in the era of triumphant Stalinist and bourgeois reaction. This is how Lenin, writing in 1907, defined the relationship between party democracy and majority rule in action.

"The principle of democratic centralism and autonomy for local Party organisations implies universal and full freedom to criticise, so long as this does not disturb the unity of a definite action... Criticism within the basis of the principles of the party programme must be quite free... not only at party meetings but also at public meetings."

By the time of Trotsky's death at the hand of Stalin's assassin on 21 August 1940, this great socialist tradition had dwindled down to a few tiny organisations in, perhaps, a couple of dozen countries. It would dwindle further.

The fundamental reason for that was the rise of Stalinism, which for most of the 20th century dwarfed and overshadowed socialism.

A bureaucracy collectively "owning" the state had expropriated the workers in the USSR, depriving them of all rights and using them far worse than the workers in any capitalist countries worse, even than in Nazi Germany. It turned them into slaves or (as Trotsky wrote in 1939) semi-slaves.

The new ruling class continued to call itself communist and Marxist; it defined and camouflaged its own savage rule over the working class as the rule of the working class over society; it presented its anti-socialist and anti-working class revolution as the living continuity of the October revolution.

By repeated purges, ideological bamboozlement, by bribery, and corruption, they took control of the Communist International, the powerful international network of revolutionary working-class organisations made up of people who had rallied to the Russian revolution.

Stalinism, in history, is above all a movement of social and political and sociological misrepresentation and parody.

In the USSR, and later in other Stalinist states, they ran fake trade unions, fake parties, fake elections, fake rule by the working class, fake national autonomies, and fake, utterly fake socialism.

Stalinism was, in its account of itself and in its account of what it was doing, a gigantic, sustained, historical masquerade, sustained over nearly seven decades.

"Communism" changed in the 1920s and 30s from being a genuine revolutionary working-class movement into a series of totalitarian organisations in the capitalist states, working to serve the USSR and its leaders. Their own local leaders aspired to become what in the USSR the "communists", the bureaucratic ruling class, were. They created immense ideological confusions in the working-class movement. They isolated the Left Opposition, and later the Joint Opposition of Trotsky, Zinoviev, Kamenev, and Krupskaya, from the mass army of would-be communists who saw in the Stalinist parties the local battalions of the Russian Revolution.

At first they used subtle political misrepresentation. Then they used violence and repression. It became increasingly reckless and intense, until in the years from 1935 onwards, it culminated in mass murder in the USSR, in Spain, and, on a much smaller scale, in other countries. At the end of World War Two Stalinists in Vietnam and Greece massacred Trotskyists and assassinated individual socialist opponents in France, Belgium, Italy and the USA.

Throughout fascist and then Stalinist-ruled Europe, the cadres of Trotskyism were murdered. They did splendid deeds here and there in that Europe, for example in producing *Arbeiter und Soldat*, an underground paper for the German workers in uniform in the army of occupation in France, (an enterprise which cost the lives of two dozen Trotskyists, most of them German soldiers).

But those were mere episodes only, not a part of, nor the harbingers of, a great socialist movement. At the end of the Second World War Stalinism loomed in the world as a great power.

The USSR in 1939 had made up a sixth of the world. At the end of a big expansion that, though it would not end until the Russian defeat in Afghanistan (1979-89), reached its peak with the proclamation of the Stalinist People's Republic of China in October 1949, Stalinism controlled one-third of the surface of the earth.

It had mass parties, which were the main parties of the working class, in a number of capitalist countries, France, Italy, Indonesia, etc.

For a whole historical epoch, authentic socialism, and the Marxism of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Luxemburg, and Trotsky, were almost everywhere banished to the margins of the working-class movements almost everywhere.

Most "reform socialists" — but now, the socialists who wanted to replace capitalism were not too numerous among reformists — rallied to the anti-Russian side of the two blocs into which the world was divided.

Against that background, the defeated and depleted Trotskyist current, always small, shrank in the 1950s to being very little even miniscule. In its time the gap between its ideological riches and its small forces had been one of its most characteristic features. Now, in terms of its ideas, too, it shrank.

The major surviving Trotskyist current, the so-called "orthodox Trotskyists", organised in the "Fourth International" of James P Cannon, Michel Pablo, and Ernest Mandel and its splinters, sided with the Stalinist camp in the world polarisation into two blocs. They were "critically", but "unconditionally", for the "defence" of the Stalinist bloc against the other bloc and all its full and partial partisans. The expansion of the Stalinist bloc was they insisted the World Revolution advancing, to be sure advancing in unexpected and uncongenial ("deformed") ways.

For the USSR and the East European satellite states they advocated Trotsky's programme of working-class revolution. Following Trotsky, they called what they advocated a "political revolution", but in fact what they advocated was a profound social revolution, the destruction of the Stalinist state power and its replacement by a working-class regime based on workers' councils. That meant a fundamental transformation in property, from ownership by the totalitarian state which owned by the Stalinist autocracy to ownership by a democratic working-class quasi-state.

For the countries in which Stalinist guerrilla armies had won power in civil wars and made their own Stalinist states, the "orthodox Trotskyists" tended to advocate not revolution but reform as the way to working-class democracy.

In this their politics were a hybrid of Trotsky's and those of the pre-war Brandlerite "Right Communists" or "liberal Stalinists". The influential writer Isaac Deutscher, though he had been a Trotskyist from 1932 until 1940, was after that a Brandlerite in his ideas. Brandlerite politics and assessments suffuse his very widely read three-volume biography of Trotsky, and his biography of Stalin.

For the last sixty years of the 20th century, most anti-Stalinists were of this "orthodox Trotskyist" — or better, "orthodox Trotskyist"/Deutscherite — persuasion. In their own inadequate and contradictory way, despite their belief that the advance of Stalinism in the world was the "deformed" advance of the socialist world revolution, they were anti-Stalinist.

Almost everything "Trotskyist" in our early 21st century post-Stalinist world — including AWL — has its roots in that "orthodox Trotskyist" current. Its ambiguities, self-contradictoriness, politically protean character, allowed the current to survive, in many political dialects.

There was another Trotskyist current — that of those who fought Trotsky in 1939-40 because they rejected any sort of "critical support" for the Russian Stalinist army in its war with Finland (from November 1939 to April 1940).

They went on to break, in 1940-1, with the idea that the USSR was any kind or degree of workers' state — the assessment, inherited from Trotsky but erected into a dogma, that trapped the "orthodox Trotskyists" into being reduced often to the role of epiphenomena, mere satellites, of the Stalinist's bloc and its partisans in the capitalist states.

In response to events, they elaborated a distinct strand of Trotskyism.

In the 1940s the "orthodox Trotskyists" floundered politically in face of, first, the unexpected survival of Russian Stalinism, and then the eruption of Stalinist imperialism. They floundered so badly that, reading their magazines and papers now, one is forced to wonder if they read the factual parts of the bourgeois press at the time. They did read newspapers; but they also, like Bible-fetish Christians, read in the Big Book of "Trotskyist" "orthodoxy", where they had written as immutable dogma an unrepresentative selection of Trotsky's works and phrases.

In contrast, the "other Trotskyists" responded to the consolidation of the Stalinist autocracy and the rise of its empire to the

Max Shachtman debates Alexander Kerensky

The October revolution was profoundly democratic!

Max Shachtman debates the Russian Revolution with the leader of the government overthrown by that revolution, Alexander Kerensky.

SELDOM does history record the former head of a government, deposed by social revolution, facing up in an open debate 34 years later to a modern representative of the same ideological current which swept him from power. This was the situation in the February 8 [1951] debate at the University of Chicago where Max Shachtman confronted Alexander Kerensky, the head of the régime which was overthrown by the great Russian Revolution.

To recall to consciousness all the relevant facts of that vast revolution and vindicate its democratic and socialist aims and achievements, Shachtman, national chairman of the Independent Socialist League, brought a clearly defined and thoroughly Marxist appreciation of the meaning of democracy.

Alexander Kerensky, erstwhile president of the short-lived Russian Provisional Government and self-styled "arch-democrat", brought no understanding whatsoever of democracy, substituting for that lack his own garbled version of historical facts and a relentless penchant for reiterating fraudulent quotations from Lenin. Indeed, how could a "democrat" proceed otherwise, who could not even explain publicly that he was not put into office by popular election!

The intervening years since the revolution have witnessed the rise in Russia of the totalitarian bureaucratic oligarchy of Stalinism. Grabbing onto this bare historical fact, Kerensky sought to bury the anti-democratic crimes of his own régime by pointing an accusing finger at Lenin and the Bolsheviks as those responsible for Stalin's monstrous despotism. Shachtman thus faced a double task in this debate, one familiar enough to genuine socialists: that of establishing historical truth against the combined opposition of both capitalist and Stalinist falsifiers of the past 34 years.

This is the reason that Shachtman, in opening the discussion, found it necessary to remark: "The Stalinist régime never slackens in its efforts to portray itself as the legitimate successor of the Bolshevik Revolution. It needs this great authority to help befuddle the thinking of people and to maintain itself in power... It came into power as the result of a counter-revolution which systematically destroyed not only every single one of the great achievements of the Bolshevik Revolution but likewise exterminated all its founders, builders and defenders".

Scouting the idea that the evening's discussion on "Was the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 Democratic?" was of merely historical interest, Shachtman indicated its vital relationship to the most important social and political question of our time, the answer to which will determine conclusively the fate of society. Formulated by Lenin, the leader of Bolshevism, that question is: the working class cannot attain socialism except through the fight for democracy, and democracy cannot be fully realised without the fight for socialism.

Following is a running summary and digest of the presentations and rebuttals of the two speakers. The digest of Shachtman's presentation is based on his written notes.

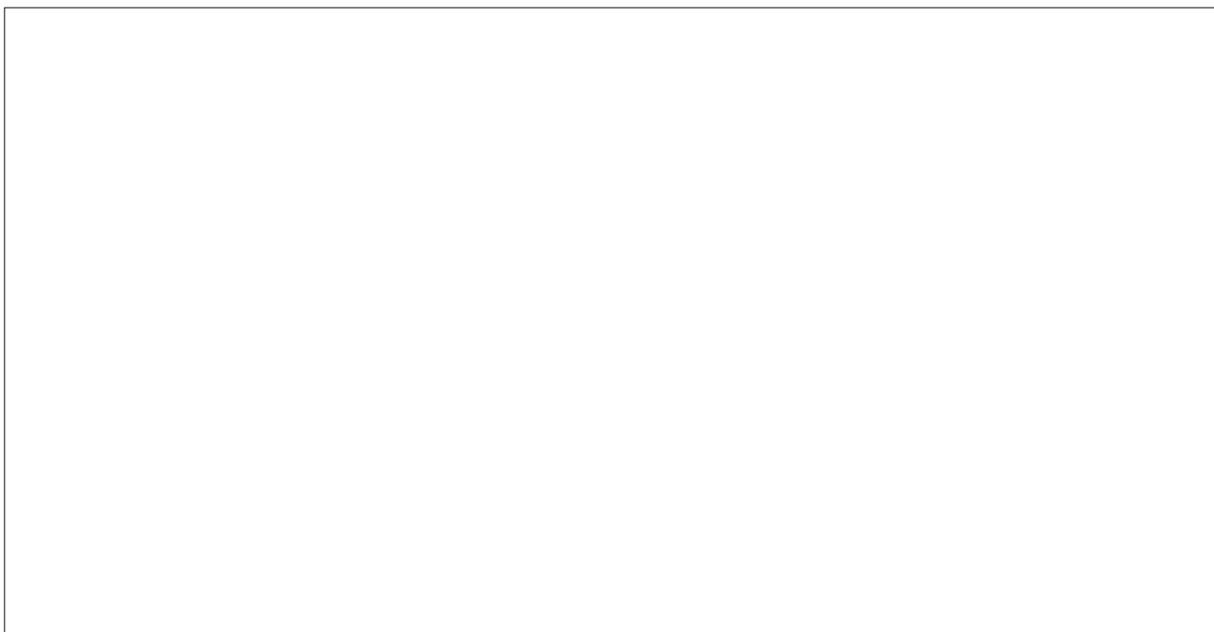
ONE must judge a revolution out of the circumstances from which it sprang. The social structure of Czarism, the most reactionary and outlived in Europe, was in a state of complete collapse. The imperialist war was bleeding the country white; a consciousness of the futility of continuing it deepened not only among the people at home but also among the soldiers at the front. At the top in official and court circles, bigotry, corruption and every conceivable form of social and intellectual leprosy was eating into the régime. At the front, a blood-letting that was as useless as it was incredible; at home a veritable orgy of war-profiteering among the capitalist classes and an unendurable growth of hunger among the working classes.

In February 1917 the Czarist régime appeared to be the most powerful in the world, with the world's biggest army at its disposal, with a subject people at once docile and impotent. Shortly after, the régime was overthrown by the same people and the same army.

It was an imposing example to all statesmen and politicians that the patience of the people is not inexhaustible and that, once they are determined to rise in the struggle for liberty, for their aspirations, they stand on no ceremony, on no formalities. They take action directly and stop waiting for the promises of their well-wishers to be fulfilled in some distant and indefinite future. The example was also instructive to statesmen and politicians capable of learning from the people. As it soon turned out, not many of them are capable of learning very much.

Tonight we are discussing democracy, the rule of the sovereign people.

Democracy does not consist in imposing upon the people what their rulers, by themselves, decide is a good thing for the people. It



Bolsheviks address workers and sailors, Petrograd, 1917

consists in the free expression of the desires of the people and their ability to realize these desires through institutions manned by their freely-chosen representatives. What then did the people who had just put an end to czarist rule want? It would be a bold man who contended that two opinions are possible on this score.

They wanted:

- (1) an end to the imperialist war;
- (2) the convocation of a national, democratically-representative Constituent Assembly;
- (3) an end to the rule of the predatory landlords and a distribution of land among the peasants;
- (4) a radical change in industry, beginning with the 8-hour work day and the assuring of the beginning of the end of completely arbitrary rule of industry by the capitalist class by the establishment of workers' control in industry;
- (5) the right of national self-determination for the nationalities oppressed by czarism.

Not a single one of these desires is, by itself, the equivalent of socialism. Every single one of the demands of the Russian people was democratic through and through. And yet, as we shall see, they required a socialist revolution for their realization.

Virtually from the first day the revolution established what were tantamount to two governments, two powers, contesting with one another for political supremacy.

One was the soviets; in 1917, as in 1905 they were spontaneously established. More democratic institutions it would be hard to imagine. They were directly and freely elected and sat in permanent session as direct representatives of the workers, peasants and soldiers. They were not the creation or invention of the Bolsheviks. While they were spontaneously formed without waiting for instructions from anybody, they were dominated by the right-wing socialists and the Socialist-Revolutionists. The Bolsheviks started as a tiny minority in the soviets.

While the soviets were the only elected body on a nation-wide basis in the land, and only they could thus speak authoritatively for the people, being referred to even by Kerensky as the "revolutionary democracy," they did not seek to become the government of Russia under their compromising leadership.

But they were the real power, recognized by all: by the czarist generals who wanted to crush them and restore reaction; by all the provisional governments; by the Bolsheviks who wanted them to take all governmental power; and above all by the people. Not a single significant political or military step could be taken by the official government without their support.

Appearing to stand above the soviets were the various provisional governments. These were not democratic, if by that term is understood a government elected by popular suffrage in regularly fixed elections and submitting its conduct to the control of any popularly elected democratic body.

The provisional government was constructed exclusively from the top, bureaucratically, by agreements among party leaders, self-constituting and self-perpetuating. Unstable by its very nature, it had no independent power of its own. It depended for its existence on the unpreparedness, and therefore the tolerance, of the reactionary forces on the one side and the revolutionary forces on the other.

While the soviets mistakenly thought the government could be

the vehicle for the advancement of the revolution, they watched its every step, particularly its reactionary wing and allies, and tried to control each step, reflecting the attitude of the whole people. The provisional government tried to maintain itself by satisfying both the real social and political forces, the reaction and the revolution.

This aim was utopian; the two forces could not be reconciled. Both forces realized their life and future depended on the other's destruction. The governments became more and more governments of chaos, sure to produce nothing but that.

The 8 months' record of provisional governments in this stormy period when the desires of the people were urgent and manifest consisted of the following:

(1) The main body of the czarist officialdom remained intact, only few changes being made at the top. Czarist officers primarily remained at the head of the army, doing everything to undermine the soldiers' soviets, soldiers' rights, and even keeping enough power to threaten this same government. Cossack regiments, symbol of the czarist knout, were kept intact.

(2) The Constituent Assembly was not convened, on the basis of all kinds of pretexts. The real reason for this, as the bourgeoisie openly declared, was that the election results would not be acceptable to them and would mean that the régime might refuse to continue the imperialist war.

(3) While the people wanted peace, the provisional government, in obedience to Czarist commitments made to the Anglo-French allies, drove the army into the June offensive at a horrible cost in lives and against conservative military opinion that it would be doomed. The people did not want to fight for the Czar's secret treaties, authentic agreements made among imperialist pirates. While Kerensky had been told by Miliukov about them, he never repudiated them and refused to publish them, since such would be a "discourtesy to the Allies".

(4) While the rule of the landlords continued, the peasants who wanted the land received promises. But they were taking the land, carrying out the revolution themselves in the traditional style of every great agrarian revolution. The provisional government forbade them to act, instead of carrying out its own reforms. It sent Cossacks against the peasants, who had never seen a Bolshevik in their lives but who were taking things into their own hands.

(5) No changes in industry. While the capitalists sabotaged production by locking out workers, the government failed to intervene. The 8-hour work day decreed by the government was not enforced. Everything was promised for after the "Constituent Assembly" met, but its convocation was constantly delayed. Workers saw that their soviets' influence in the government declined as that of the capitalists and Czarists grew.

(6) The treatment of oppressed nationalities represents the "acid test" for a democrat. The Finnish social-democrats obtained a majority in early June and declared for their autonomy, enjoyed previously under the Czars. The provisional government dissolved the Finnish parliament, barring its doors with Russian soldiers... In June Kerensky prohibited the holding of the Ukrainian Soldiers Congress called by the nationalist Rada. Vinnichenko, head of that body and an anti-Bolshevik, attacked the provisional government for being "imbued with the imperialist tendencies of the Russian bourgeoisie". In October Kerensky demanded an explanation of alleged criminal agitation started there for a Ukrainian Constituent

Assembly and an investigation of the Rada was ordered.

On the basis of this record of failing to meet the continuing demands of the revolution, the provisional government of Kerensky fell. It also explains why the power of the compromiser Menshevik-SR leadership in the Soviets likewise fell. They had urged confidence in the provisional government, which showed it did not deserve the masses' confidence.

After the Kornilov affair, the Bolsheviks won uninterrupted victories in the soviets, while the Mensheviks and SRs split up and declined. Bolshevik influence was won fairly, openly, democratically, in spite of huge handicaps. Their leaders were arrested or driven underground, presses and headquarters smashed, press outlawed, forbidden entry to the garrisons and a lynch spirit aroused against them as German agents.

On November 7 the soviet congress, whose convocation had been delayed by its compromising leadership, was called together by that same leadership. The Bolsheviks had a clear majority. The congress endorsed the uprising led by the Military Revolutionary Committee of the Petrograd Soviet under Trotsky by electing a new government of Bolsheviks holding soviet power. Two weeks later the Peasant Soviet Congress, called by the compromisers, gave a majority to the Left SRs and the Bolsheviks, and the Left SRs entered the new soviet government.

In a few days the soviet government did all the things the provisional government had failed to do:

- (1) gave the land to the peasants;
- (2) offered peace by broadcast to all governments and peoples, starting with proposals for a 3 months' armistice;
- (3) inaugurated workers' control of production to stop bourgeois sabotage of industry;
- (4) decreed freedom for all nationalities, beginning with Finland and the Ukraine;

How not to quote Lenin

As noted in the accompanying summary of the debate, Kerensky spent much of his time working over scraps of quotations from Lenin — from different periods, contexts, and articles indiscriminately, — la Boris Shub — under the heading of a discussion of the Russian Revolution and democracy.

While it takes at least ten times longer to nail one of these forgeries than it takes to reel off the distorted quotation, Shachtman was able to take them up effectively.

Here is one of the "quotations" which Kerensky tossed off, for example. Quite often it was impossible for the audience to determine from his speech where his alleged quotation ended and his own commentary on it began, and his confused quote-mongering was further complicated (still from the audience's angle) by the fact that it was not always possible to clearly distinguish the words.

Thus, at one point, he quoted Lenin as writing (as far as this reporter heard it): "Human nature cannot do without subordination", plus something which sounded like this: "This is not a free state and must be overthrown at all costs".

Assuming that the latter part was supposed to be a quotation from Lenin, we have no knowledge at the moment where it is supposed to be from; but we can say unequivocally, with Shachtman, that the first part is one of the standard forgeries, quite probably lifted from Shub's biographical hatchet-job on Lenin, and in any case completely unrelated to the second sentence with which it was coupled by Kerensky.

In Shub's Lenin, the author set out to show that in Lenin's philosophy it was the nature of people to want to be ruled. In his review of Shub's book in *The New International*, Shachtman showed how Shub quoted Lenin to make it look as though Lenin set out to satisfy this alleged craving of the masses by ruling them with an iron hand.

What Lenin actually wrote — in the passage where the phrase quoted by Kerensky crops up — conveys a diametrically opposite thought.

"We are not utopians, we do not 'dream' of dispensing at once with all administration, with all subordination. These anarchist dreams, based upon incomprehension of the tasks of the proletarian dictatorship, are totally alien to Marxism, and, as a matter of fact, serve only to postpone the socialist revolution until people are different. No, we want the socialist revolution with people as they are now, with people who cannot dispense with subordination, control, and 'foremen and accountants'.

The subordination, however, must be to the armed vanguard of all the exploited and working people, i.e., to the proletariat. A beginning can and must be made at once, overnight, to replace the specific 'bossing' of state officials by the simple functions of 'foremen and accountants', functions which are already fully within the ability of the average town dweller and can well be performed for "workmen's wages".

One of Kerensky's associates in the provisional government, the bourgeois politician Miliukov, was also a historian of the revolution.

He wrote of Kerensky's bearing and attitude at the state conference in Moscow before his downfall:

"This man seemed to be trying to frighten somebody and create upon all an impression of power and force of will in the old style. In reality, he evoked only a feeling of pity".

In the breast of a fellow bourgeois politician, it could be pity...

(5) denounced and published all secret treaties and Czarist rights in China and Persia;

(6) wiped out all Czarist power in the army and began creation of new workers' and peasants' army;

(7) abolished special Cossack privileges and caste position;

(8) inaugurated the new soviet régime of direct representation, with full right of recall.

The Constituent Assembly finally met in January; and because of its then unrepresentative character, big changes having occurred in mass thinking since its lists were drawn and the election held, and its refusal to recognize that the revolution had conferred full power on the soviets, it was dissolved.

No champions could be found among the people for it — only reaction supported it. The country rallied to the soviet power as the only guarantee of the great democratic achievements consolidated by the Bolshevik Revolution.

The future proved to be a difficult one. The country was plunged into civil war by the dispossessed classes, landlords, bankers, bondholders, monarchist and reactionary scum in general who sought to arouse the wealthier peasants against the régime, and by all the imperialist powers who forgot their differences in the face of the socialist enemy.

This civil war brought devastation to the country from which it took years to emerge. It forced upon the soviets a harsh régime, and laid the basis for the eventual rise and triumph of a counter-revolutionary bureaucracy which is in power today.

But in spite of that these achievements are immortal; nothing that happened afterwards can eradicate that from history or from the thoughts of mankind. They are a monument and a guidepost.

The road out of the blind alley into which society is being driven more and more, lies in the struggle for democracy. The struggle for democracy receives its clarity, purpose and guarantee in the struggle for socialism; the struggle for socialism lies in the hands of the working class — the beast of burden, the despised of the earth — whose will to victory was forever underlined by their first great revolution, the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia.

KERENSKY'S presentation followed Shachtman, who had devoted his time to developing the whole picture of the unfolding revolution in Russia, in its historical context and in a rounded interpretation. Kerensky devoted his time to picking holes in this interpretation, from the viewpoint of a government official of narrow social vision.

He based himself on the necessity for the provisional government to "defend Russia" during the war, opposing the elements of extreme monarchist reaction who favoured a separate peace with Germany and likewise opposing the desire of the people to get out of the disastrous war.

He took the stand that the social reforms demanded by the people must be postponed until the war was over. The government could legitimately adopt measures such as its land reforms, the 8-hour day, the need for a Constituent Assembly, the right of self-determination for oppressed nationalities — but (and it was a very big but) nothing could really be done until the Constituent Assembly met, and it would be better for that body to meet only after the conclusion of the war.

After all, the organization of a Constituent Assembly is a "big job". The Germans were advancing, and the "Lenin crisis in the rear" forced the Constituent Assembly commission to cease its never-ending labour after only three weeks. The provisional government was "in direct contact with all forces — exception: the Bolsheviks".

This section of Kerensky's presentation had already been anticipated in Shachtman's speech, which had made clear in advance the garbled version of history which Kerensky was presenting. Nor did Kerensky even try to meet Shachtman on the ground of the meaning of democracy and the role of the masses.

Instead he spent the major part of his time plucking out and attacking quotations from Lenin's writing, with a view to proving their conspiratorial, treasonous and totalitarian nature.

According to Kerensky's story, Lenin foresaw that Kerensky's proposals would win the support of the peasantry — after the victory of Russia's noble but crumbling armies. Therefore Lenin had to act fast, before this happened.

He had to marshal his Bolsheviks to organise army deserters in the countryside and to steer a course toward armed insurrection, before the provisional government had a sporting chance to show its sterling mettle to the peasants on some indeterminate future date after the equally indeterminate conclusion of hostilities.

The aim of Bolshevism, according to Kerensky, was to exploit the country in totalitarian fashion. The real question here, he announced, is what happened after the revolution — but he abruptly stopped at this point, apparently remembering that the subject of the discussion was the revolution itself; however, he picked up this theme from time to time later.

Lenin, Trotsky and Stalin, he said, were playing a double game of trickery on the country and the government. Lenin sent various "secret instructions" to his central committee. (Kerensky, without pointing it out, was referring to the period when his own government had jailed Trotsky and other Bolsheviks and had forced Lenin to go into hiding!)

In one of those "instructions" Lenin committed the heinous crime of saying that the soviets would be of value to the people only if they carried through the needs of the revolution.

Another aim of Bolshevism, Kerensky charged, was "to distract the freest country in the world from preparing a base for the future world socialist movement." So, Lenin concluded, the provisional government had to be stopped.

"For this they ruined Russian democracy," he cried, after having made clear that he understood nothing about the urgent desire of the Russian masses for the democratic and socialist reforms which only the Bolsheviks were fighting for.

Striking a personal note, Kerensky drew some applause when he cried: "Maybe my government was unpopular but I needed no bodyguards. In Kiev when I took a walk the people liked to gather

around me and speak to me". Kerensky was presumably referring to Stalin's secluded and guarded living habits (and it is a safe bet that he was not referring to [US President] Truman's bodyguard; but while he was supposed to be discussing Lenin and the days of the Russian Revolution, he made no mention of the fact that Lenin and the other Bolshevik leaders continually mingled with the workers at all kinds of meetings and elsewhere, guarded at other times as the crisis neared only against the police vengeance of Kerensky himself.

He concluded his presentation by quoting an attack by Proudhon on... Marx. The French petty bourgeois radical had denounced Marx's Communist Manifesto with the cry that "Communism is nothing more than inequality, subjugation, and slavery".

The fight in 1917, said Kerensky, was "not a fight between capitalism and socialism, but between freedom and slavery." And "Stalin is the most faithful, most able, most talented disciple of Lenin."

Shachtman opened his rebuttal with a reminder to the audience that he had initially stated that the Stalinists have the biggest lie factory against the Bolshevik Revolution, but they by no means have a monopoly on the business.

He proceeded to discuss Kerensky's garbled quotations — that is, forgeries — purporting to prove that Lenin favoured "treason", discussing in particular Lenin's opposition to the czar's war and the world-wide imperialist war and his views on the so-called "revolutionary defeatism".

The ISL chairman demanded to know "who elected" the supposedly "democratic" provisional government — which, of course, had been put into power by no popular vote of any kind. In contrast, he pointed out, the Bolshevik government took power with the support of a free vote of the broadest and most representative body ever assembled in Russia or for that matter in the world — the soviets (councils) of the workers, peasants, and soldiers of the country — in a congress organized and prepared by enemies of the Bolsheviks.

It will be a curious spectacle for future historians to picture the president of a government whom no people had elected contesting the democratic character of the only revolutionary regime in the history of the world's revolutions which did come to power with the recorded, freely voted support of the broad masses!

Shachtman presented the documentation of the recent book on *The Election to the Russian Constituent Assembly of 1917* by O H Radkey as even more conclusive proof that the compromising leadership of the Mensheviks and SRs "no longer commanded the allegiance" of the masses.

He stressed the absurdity, not to speak of the slanderousness, of Kerensky's claim that the Bolsheviks were able to lead a vast, tumultuous, surging mass revolution of the people through "trickeries."

How many insurrections, he asked, had Kerensky ever organised in which he gave public instructions (not "secret instructions") so that the reaction would know the time, place, and forces at his disposal?

"Whom did the Bolsheviks suppress during the civil war? White guards, czarists and Mensheviks who had taken up arms against the government and the revolution... Did that 'maniac' Lincoln ever permit the Confederate States in the US Civil War to open up a recruiting station in Chicago?"

Kerensky had referred in rapturous terms to the president of the first provisional government in 1917, Prince Lvov, one of the biggest landowners in Russia, as "one of the most extraordinary democrats in the world". Shachtman stated his regret that he had no time to take up this democratic idol of Kerensky's properly, but it is worthwhile to mention Kerensky's estimate for the light it casts on his own conceptions of democracy.

Kerensky had argued that while his provisional government had denied self-determination to Finland and the Ukraine, it had granted immediate freedom to Poland. Shachtman had only to point out that this was done when (and because) Poland was under the German sword at the time!

Kerensky was magnanimously giving freedom to a people whom he no longer controlled, while ruthlessly maintaining Russian control over the Finns and Ukrainians whom the Germans did not have in their power.

As reported above, Kerensky had also waved the flag of the Kronstadt revolt against the Bolsheviks, which took place in 1921 during the civil war of the White Guards and foreign armies against the revolution.

It was "ill-advised" for Kerensky to mention the word Kronstadt on his lips, Shachtman said. The provisional government — in 1917 — had "merely" ordered submarines to blow up the ships of the pro-Bolshevik Kronstadt sailors to compel their submission to the government!

In his rebuttal, Kerensky differentiated his own attack on Lenin as a "German agent" (one of the crudest of all the slanders against Lenin) from that of others in that he did not accuse Lenin of being a vulgar agent for German gold. It was "Lenin's point of view", he said, that coincided with German interests.

Taking up the question of why he had denied self-determination to the Ukrainians, he gave as his excuse the Ukrainians' "excessive" territorial demands, which for him could be solved only by the same Constituent Assembly which he was continually postponing.

His main appeal was "Why was it necessary to organise the uprising?", implying that it is "always possible" for things to be worked out.

As is also reported elsewhere, Shachtman, by the terms of the debate, was then supposed to have a surrebuttal, but he did not get the opportunity since the chairman adjourned the meeting due to the lateness of the hour. But even without this last word, there is little doubt that the solid, fact-buttressed, cogent picture of the Russian Revolution that he had presented clearly lighted up the socialist inspiration and democratic heritage of the great revolutionary struggle.

From *Labor Action*, 19 February 1951

The Stalinist social system

By Max Shachtman

IT is impossible to discuss any important political problem of our time, let alone take a part in resolving it, without a clear understanding of what Stalinism really signifies.

It is just as impossible to get such an understanding from the writings and speeches of capitalists, their statesmen, politicians, hangers-on, apologists, or any other beneficiaries of their rule. They are quite capable of describing the notorious vices of Stalinism. Its true social significance, however, escapes them, and so also therefore does the simple secret of combating it effectively.

For the very first task to perform is to ascertain the relations between capitalism and Stalinism, and that is precisely what they are prevented from doing by their own social interests and prejudices.

You can write it down as an iron law of politics today: Whoever does not know what are the real relationships between the social system of capitalism and the social system of Stalinism, may be ever so intelligent in fields like physics or art or investment banking or logistics, but in the most important field of social knowledge, he is helpless. Whoever knows something about these relationships, but refuses to make them the rock foundation on which to base and build his political ideas and actions, may be ever so fine a family man, so tender a poet, so graceful a writer and so eloquent an orator, but in this field of politics he is either a convinced muddlehead, a phrase-drunken emotionalist or a plain demagogue.

The first thing to grasp about Stalinism is that world capitalism is at the end of its rope. It shows all the classical signs of decay and disintegration in addition to those special signs which are its own distinctive contribution.

With the hugest productive machine ever imagined for the creation of social wealth, it has nevertheless instilled in the entire population over which it holds sway a profound and amply warranted sense of insecurity. Everybody realises that whatever economic prosperity there is, or seems to be, is based upon the unparalleled economic destruction produced by the wars of today or by the organised economic waste of the periods of war preparations. The very preparation for war requires that a crushing economic burden be kept upon the shoulders of society, above all on those shoulders least able to carry the burden. Yet practically everybody realises that if world capitalising were to disarm on Monday (assuming the possibility of such a utopia), or even to reduce its armaments drastically it would be done for on Tuesday.

Drowning men fight for survival, dangerously diseased and weakened men fight for survival; imminently bankrupt firms fight for survival. So it is with social systems

An even worse showing is made by capitalism in the actual wars themselves. When it was going through its rising phase, wars had a distinctly positive meaning for capitalism. Now, its wars are economically pointless, politically pointless; they do not solve a single important problem and they cannot solve any.

The Second World War showed that ten times more clearly than did the First World War. The war in Korea only underscored the same point. The war of French imperialism in Indochina is the latest underscoring of the point. Capitalism, in general and in its national-state form, cannot have any encouraging perspective in wars; and yet it cannot avoid preparing for them and precipitating them.

The growth and expansion which younger capitalism experienced in the rise of its imperialist power has not only come to an end but is actually going through a reversed process. A hundred years ago and even fifty years ago, world capitalism was adding tremendous new natural resources and vast hordes of new slaves to its domain in the conquest of countries in the so-called colonial world. It batted and fattened on these grisly conquests. The tide is running the other way now.

The old imperialist world of capitalism is shrinking and it will never again be expanded — never. One part of it has fallen under the dominion of Stalinism. Another part of it has won its way to political independence and the end of its colonial status. The remaining part is in a state of permanent warfare against the old imperialist powers which drains them heavily without the old compensations of colonial rule. The capitalist world has shrunk drastically and its prospects have shrunk even more.

All this is reflected both in the thinking of the capitalist class

and that of the working classes. In the decline of the old self-confidence. In the United States, one political or intellectual leader after another now repeats, as if it were an incontestable truth, that they face a "fight for survival"; and not a soul has yet been found to reject that ominous formula.

Drowning men fight for survival, dangerously diseased and weakened men fight for survival; imminently bankrupt firms fight for survival. So it is with social systems. The phrase is the panic-stricken, desperate outcry of a social order on the brink of disaster, and it is not by chance that it is so widely and unquestioningly accepted.

And if that is the unwittingly revealed state of mind of the ruling classes of the United States, where capitalism still has some appearance of strength and good health, it requires no great effort to judge the state of mind of the ruling classes in the older, frankly decrepit countries of capitalism which could not exist for five minutes without the financial and military upshoring provided by Washington.

In the working classes, there is a corresponding and much more conscious loss of confidence in capitalism and capitalist imperialism. With the exception of the United States, there is not a single popular movement anywhere in the world that proclaims its allegiance to capitalism or imperialism. The most that capitalism in general — and its last bastion, the United States, in particular — can expect from the masses nowadays is not support but irritated tolerance, as a lesser evil compared with the otherwise universal anger, disillusionment, bitterness, hostility and open warfare directed against it on every continent of the globe.

To say that capitalism is at the end of its rope is only another way of saying that it is more and more incapable of solving the important problems of society especially as these problems reach the stage of acute crisis. It is well to emphasise here: when we speak of capitalism solving a social problem it should be self-evident that we mean solving the problem on a capitalistic basis. Capitalism was never able to solve a social problem on any other basis. But the point is that where it was able to solve such problems on that basis in the past, it is less and less capable of solving them even on that basis today.

It is precisely such a decay of capitalism that was not only foreseen by the founders of modern socialism but was regarded by them as the precondition and the eve of the socialist reorganisation of society by the working-class movement. They did not and could not foretell all the forms and manifestations of this inevitable disintegration of capitalism, and they did not try to; but they did indicate the main lines along which it would develop, and in doing so they amply forewarned and forearmed us.

The first great world-wide crisis of capitalism broke out toward the end of the First World War. The masses throughout Europe rebelled against the futile imperialist slaughter and their fists hammered at every wall of European capitalism. The wall fell only in Russia, and only in Russia did the socialist working class take power and start to lay the foundations of a new, rational, brotherly social order. In the rest of Europe the walls of capitalism held, mainly thanks to the sturdy and criminal support which the besieged ruling classes received from the conservative Social-Democratic Party leaderships. They saved capitalism; they prevented the working class from carrying out its great

revolutionary mission in good time. In addition the victorious Russian Revolution: was allowed to suffocate to death for lack of the oxygen of the revolution in the advanced Western countries which was indispensable to its life and growth.

The effect which the victorious lifting of the revolutionary siege in the West had upon the Russian Revolution, in dooming it to isolation and therefore to death, was not the one which was generally expected. And it is right here that we are able to take a second big step toward an understanding of Stalinism.

It was assumed by everybody — not only by the Bolsheviks of those days but by all their critics and enemies — that if the socialist Soviet regime were to fall (for one reason or another), it would be replaced by a capitalist regime. Whether it would be a democratic capitalism or a despotic-militarist capitalism was widely argued; but that only a capitalist regime would succeed to a fallen Soviet regime was agreed upon by everybody.

Everybody turned out to be wrong. The socialist Soviet state was undermined and destroyed, root and branch; but it was not replaced by capitalism. What had happened?

That which was assumed by everybody implied — took for granted without more penetrating thought — the existence of a viable capitalist class inside Russia which could replace the Russian working class at the head of the nation and which could proceed to a solution of the nation's problems on a capitalist basis; or it implied, at least, the existence of a capitalist class outside of Russia strong enough, single-willed enough and otherwise sufficiently able, to take the place of the Russian proletariat. The assumption was an abstraction; in real life it proved false and disorienting.

It turned out that inside of Russia there simply was no capitalist class in existence and outside of Russia a Russian capitalist class existed only as a joke. It turned out that inside of Russia there were only capitalist middle-class elements in town and country, strong enough to exact concessions from the Soviet state, strong enough to harass and threaten it, strong enough to be of tremendous help in finally destroying it, but by no means strong enough to take power in the country.

Outside of Russia, it turned out the foreign capitalist classes which had at one time unsuccessfully tried by force and arms and corruption to overturn the young Soviet government, could never thereafter manage to get together enough unity of purpose among themselves, unity of military effort, and freedom from working-class and liberal opposition and restraints in their own countries, to try to impose their own capitalist rule over Russia. (In fact, as we saw in 1941, even when Hitlerite Germany made such an attempt, not against a Soviet regime but against a Stalinist regime in Russia, the rest of the capitalist world not only did not come to his aid but helped decisively, as a Russian ally, to fight him off. And as we see today, even with its powerful financial lash, the United States is unable to overcome the mutual antagonisms in the capitalist world to the point where it can be effectively united against the Stalinists.)

The capitalist solution to the social problems of Russia was thereby rendered practically impossible, despite the theory which assumed its inevitability.

With that, the sector of world society known as Russia stood before an apparently insoluble dilemma.

The united efforts of the world proletariat would have been more than enough to solve the social problems of Russia on a socialist basis; indeed, the united efforts of the proletariat of a few advanced countries of Europe would have sufficed for that; Lenin used to go so far as to say, compactly, that "Russia plus Germany equals socialism." But since Germany and Western Europe in general were prevented from becoming the industrially-advanced "plus", the Russian proletariat was left to its own resources. And they were not enough to provide a socialist solution.

The result was at first a sort of chaotic stagnation in Russia. Capitalism could not be restored; but neither could socialism be established. By stagnation we mean the condition where Russia could not go forward to socialism nor yet backward to capitalism. By chaos we mean the consequent dissatisfaction, resentment, uncertainty, helplessness of all the traditional classes, the repeated but unavailing efforts of each to impose its historic program upon the other.

Such a situation is unendurable to society, especially in modern times when the simplest aspects of life are so intricately

To say that capitalism is at the end of its rope is only another way of saying that it is more and more incapable of solving the important problems of society especially as these problems reach the stage of acute crisis

and extensively dependent upon the most complex aspects, and all of them are inescapably and often decisively influenced by state policy. When a social crisis develops, it must be resolved by radical means, in one sense or another, by one social force or another.

And where such a social force does not exist, society does not long brook the vacuum: it brings into being the social force that is capable of ending the social crisis in its own way.

The social force that brought the crisis of the Russian Revolution to an end (even though, in the very course of doing so, it sowed the seeds of another crisis of a different type) was the new Stalinist bureaucracy, which has ruled Russia for about a quarter of a century.

If the crisis in Russia had to be summed up in a single word, the best one that could probably be found would be: modernisation. Russia could not be modernised on a capitalist basis and in a capitalist way for the good and simple reason that there was no capitalist class in existence to do that job. The reason why it could not be modernised in a socialist way and on a socialist basis has already been indicated — the enforced isolation of the revolution.

Russia was modernised nevertheless, and built into the second power in the world today, without going back to capitalism or going ahead to socialism. The new Stalinist bureaucracy developed into a new ruling class and the social regime it established became a new society of class exploitation and oppression.

Out of what has the new ruling class come? Out of remnants and segments of older classes: bureaucrats who had risen out of the working class or out of the peasantry without rising (or being able to rise) into the capitalist class; technical and professional personnel whose privileged position is imperilled by a revolutionary and therefore equalitarian working class but which at the same time cannot be assured by the capitalist class or its contemporary property relations. They constitute a distinctive ruling class in every important sense of the term.

They have a common mode of life that distinguishes them from the working classes; they constitute a basic element in the Stalinist mode of production, that is, they organise and maintain the process of production; they determine, as Marx would put it, the conditions of production; they are, as a distinctive social grouping, the first and the principal beneficiaries of the process of production since their social position enables them to deter-

The fight against Stalinism is not a fight against socialism in any sense of the word, since Stalinism is one of the cruellest punishments that could be visited upon a people that has failed to fight for socialism

mine the distribution of the surplus product with far fewer restraints than the ruling class suffers under capitalism; they are the exclusive owners of the full machinery of the state, which exists solely for the purpose of preserving their monopolistic social power; and since the state, under Stalinism, owns all the means of production and distribution, the Stalinist ruling class, by virtue of its exclusive possession of this state power, enjoys a general and super-concentrated social power over the population such as no ruling class has ever had in the last thousand years.

Socialists have often thought in terms of the need to centralise all the means of production and exchange into the state's hands. They still think so and rightly. But they think of this centralisation not for the sake of centralisation, this nationalisation not for the sake of nationalisation, but because it puts into the hands of the new democratic regime the vast and mighty economic instrument which is indispensable to carrying out the task of fusing political democracy with economic democracy into the new concept of social democracy. The performance of that task is the next great step in mankind's progress to emancipation.

But, where all the economic power is centralised in the hands of the state, and the state is monopolised by a despotic self-perpetuating minority, it therewith acquires an unprecedented power of oppression and exploitation. This new ruler has no private property in the sense of the capitalist, the feudal lord or the slave-owner. His "private property" exists in a new form — the state. He owns it collectively, along with the other privileged members of his social grouping. But because it places in his hands all the economic as well as the political power in the country, at one and the same time, and because he is forced to direct this power against the masses, against their interests, and against their aspirations — otherwise his privileges would not last one minute — we have, not socialism and not even a "socialist type of state", but, as we call it, totalitarian or bureaucratic collectivism, a regime of modern barbarism, modern slavery, permanent police terror and super-exploitation, the regime of the permanent denial of all democratic rights and institutions to the masses, a regime in which all political and economic rights are openly and exclusively in the hands of the ruling class, which is the distinctive hallmark of Stalinism.

This new social force reduced a great nation — and more than one nation — to slavery; its destruction and waste of productive

forces, of the precious creative forces of society, have been colossal and not one whit less than capitalism in its worst abominations; it represents a social order which is in a state of permanent crisis; and, as the most relentless, conscious, consistent, thoroughgoing repressor of the working class and revolutionary movements, it constitutes the mightiest and most effective force for reaction in the world today.

All this is true and true twice over. But it should not blind us to the fact that Stalinism rose to solve a social crisis, in its own way, which other existing social forces could not or would not solve in the way that is appropriate to them.

This basic interpretation of its character is corroborated by the development of Stalinism outside of Russia. The cause was the isolation of the Russian Revolution; the effect was the victory of Stalinism. But effect in turn becomes a cause, and this has certainly been the case with Stalinism.

Its victory has weakened world capitalism, but at the same time it has brought such demoralisation and disorientation and paralysis into the working-class movement all over the world as to weaken and undermine its socialist struggle against capitalism.

The power of Stalinism has consequently been extended beyond anything that anyone may have dreamed twenty-five years ago. And wherever this has happened, the tell-tale relationship between capitalism and Stalinism has been revealed again and underlined again.

Most revealing and emphatic in recent times has been the development in China.

There are now all sorts of confusionists, romanticists and even theoreticians who argue that the Chinese Stalinists are not really Stalinists, that they really did carry out a sort of socialist and democratic revolution, and that in any case they are developing away from "typical Stalinism" and toward genuine socialism. The truth is that the Chinese Stalinists are, if anything, the most chemically pure example of the basic social type, and not at all a welcome deviation from it.

Mao, Chou and Co. did not even pretend to be a proletarian socialist party, as Stalin and Co. did. Mao's movement did not even arise out of the industrial — that is, the proletarian — centres of China. The working class never played any role, either in Mao's party or in Mao's military exploits against Chiang Kai-shek's regime. While the Stalinists were making their successful march southward to complete victory over China, there was not a single industrial centre where the working class rose in revolution to "supplement" Mao's triumph.

The Chinese Stalinists — unlike the Russian or, let us say, the Czech Stalinists — at no time really based themselves on working-class organisations, and the "trade unions" they now have are as worthy of that name as are the speed-up machines that go by that name in Russia or the late Hitlerite Labour Front. The Stalinists won their domination of China without the working class of that country, against that working class and behind its back. A fine "socialist" revolution! A fine socialism that will lead to!

As for the other point of the confusionists, who are little more than independent apologists for Stalinism, they forget that if the Russian Stalinist bureaucracy rose as the police-oppressor of the nation because of the economic backwardness of the country (as they say, and rightly), how can they expect the Chinese Stalinist bureaucracy to develop as anything but a trebly-brutal police-oppressor of a nation that suffers from twenty times the economic backwardness of Russia?

But the fact of the matter here is that the Stalinists did triumph in China and thereby opened up a new page of cardinal importance in world politics.

A proletarian socialist movement did not exist in China, except in the form of tiny, uninfluential groups (whose existence the Stalinists have been cutting down with the same animal savagery displayed by the GPU) which were not in a position to provide a democratic and socialist solution to the problems of China.

The bourgeoisie? Both the Chinese and the international bourgeoisie proved incapable of solving the Chinese problems on a capitalist or imperialist basis. They supported the

arch-corrupt, arch-impotent regime of Chiang Kai-shek. What other regime was there for them to support or even to encourage? (People who refuse to learn that capitalism and capitalist imperialism are in their death agony are still looking for another alternative to Chiang whom the Chinese or at least the American bourgeoisie can support. They will for sure wear themselves to death without finding one.)

The Stalinists triumphed in China not because the Russian army intervened to put them in power, and not because Chiang was "betrayed" by Roosevelt, Truman, Acheson, Marshall or anyone else, but because they filled the vacuum created by the inability of capitalism to solve the protracted crisis in China and the absence of a working-class movement armed with a socialist programme for solving the crisis.

It should be clearer now why the professional supporters

The real race is for the society that is to succeed capitalism: the fall into a new barbarism which Stalinism stands for, or the rise to socialist freedom.

of capitalism are incapable of analysing and understanding Stalinism. Such an understanding implies a thoroughgoing indictment of capitalism which is unacceptable to those who are wedded economically or intellectually to this moribund social order.

Such an understanding implies that the fight against Stalinism is not a fight against socialism in any sense of the word, since Stalinism is one of the cruellest punishments that could be visited upon a people that has failed to fight for socialism.

Such an understanding implies that precisely because Stalinism has expanded its power over the world the fight against it must be redoubled; but that the fight against it cannot be conducted in alliance with — let alone in support of — the very capitalist order whose decay produces it.

It implies that the fight against Stalinism can be effective and consonant with the interests of progressing mankind only if it is at the same time a fight against capitalism.

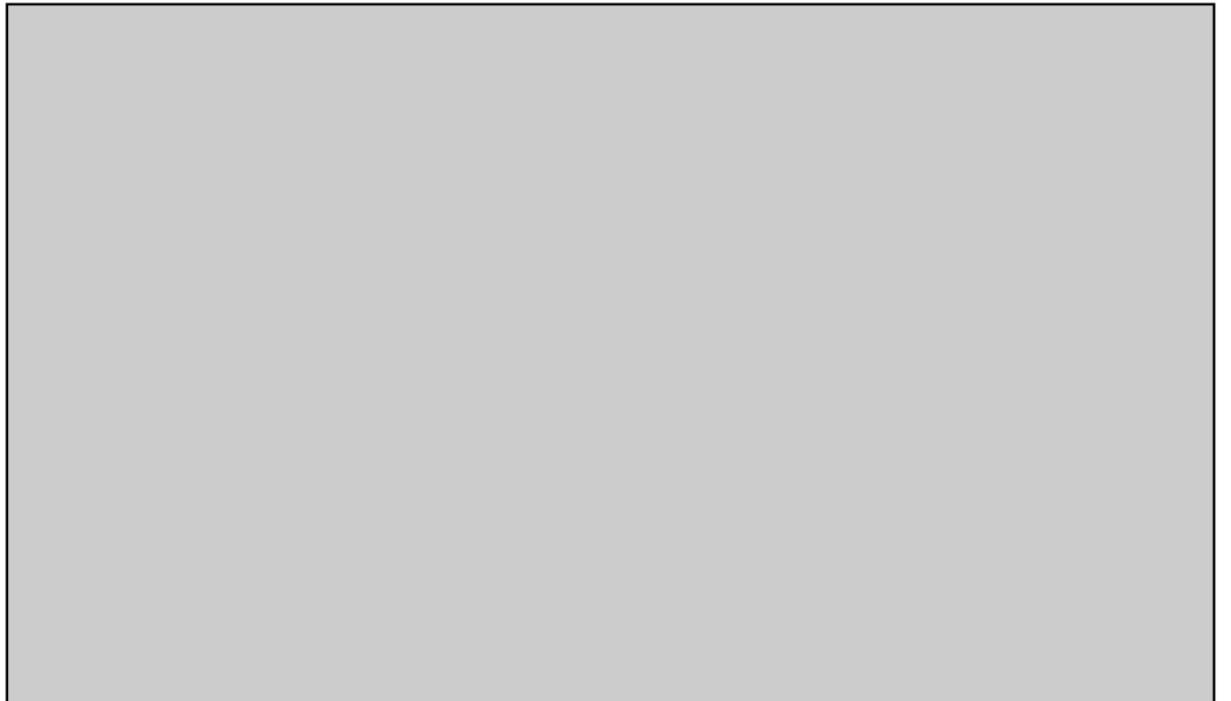
It is only in this sense that both the durability and the nature of Stalinism will eventually receive its final determination. And in this sense — it is the only fundamental one — the race is not between capitalism and Stalinism, as seems so overwhelmingly to be the case at the moment. If it is understood that Stalinism has risen because of the failure of socialism to replace the dying capitalist order, the real race is for the society that is to succeed capitalism: the fall into a new barbarism which Stalinism stands for, or the rise to socialist freedom.

In that race, the real one of our epoch, our basic confidence has never been changed: not all those who are repelled by Stalinism are passing into the camp of capitalism; not all those who turn away from capitalism become the victims of Stalinism.

In hundreds of ways, obscure to the superficial eye, unseen by the panic-stricken and the fatalistically resigned, but evident to those who always seek to probe beneath the surface of events, the idea of independence from capitalism as well as from Stalinism and of struggle against both, asserts itself among the toiling masses, those natural bearers of democracy and socialism.

To make this idea the conscious, directly-expressed and deliberately-acted-upon program of the masses, is the only worthwhile task of socialism and the advanced section of the labour movement today.

From *Labor Action*, 10 May 1954.



Stalinist imperialism

By Hal Draper

THERE is a paradox - only an apparent one - in the development of Stalinist imperialism. Stalinism arose out of the counter-revolution in Russia under the slogan of building "socialism in one country" as against the perspective of "world revolution" represented by the Bolshevik left wing under Trotsky. An historic internal struggle took place within the party under these different banners, in which, as everybody knows, the Stalinist wing won out.

To the Stalinists, the theory of "socialism in one country" which they put forward meant: Let's keep our eyes fixed on our problems at home; let's not worry about extending our influence or winning support abroad; that is a will o' the wisp; we want only to build our economic and social strength within our own borders and to hell with conditions outside of it. As Stalin put it later: We don't want an inch of anyone else's territory but let the capitalists be sure to keep their noses out of ours.

The fierce drive of Stalinist expansionism, especially after the Second World War seemed like a sharp reversal of this home-bound ideology. To many of the latter-day "Russian experts (the numbers of whom also blossomed after the war) this new policy seemed like the adoption by Stalin of the Trotskyist "world-revolutionary" perspective.

For were they not militantly pressing their power beyond their own borders? Weren't they doing what Trotsky had demanded, only in their own way and so much more effectively? So it was said not only by the "authoritative" bourgeois commentators but even by the disoriented "official-Trotskyists" of the Fourth International, who have drifted in the direction of pro-Stalinism.

But the new postwar Stalinist imperialist expansionism was not a break with, but a logical development and continuation out of the theory of "socialism in one country": and by the same token it was still the antithesis of a working-class revolutionary policy.

For that famous dispute of the Stalin-Trotsky struggle was never really based on the mostly-academic question of whether it was actually possible to "build socialism" within the borders of a single country (and a backward one at that). This was mainly the ideological form that the clash took between the social forces of the counter-revolution and the movement which stood for the liberating ideas of the 1917 revolution.

Behind it was a tendency much easier to understand: it represented the turn-away of Stalinism from internationalism to a Russian national-chauvinist outlook. Russia-First, they said, and the usefulness of the Communist Parties and pro-Soviet sympathizers abroad was to be gauged by the extent to which their activities contributed to strengthening Russia; for since this Russia was "socialist," strengthening Russia meant strengthening this "socialism." Thus the interests of the world's workers were to be subordinated to the national interests of the "one country" where socialism was being "built."

It is this conception which is the fundamental link between the early Stalinism of the counter-revolution and the Stalinist imperialism of the present day. We have seen in the course of our generation two related truths exemplified: that in trying to build something called "socialism" on the ruins of workers' democracy and all democracy, the Stalinists in actuality built a new system of exploitation which is the enemy of socialism, and in trying to build "socialism" on a national chauvinist basis, they likewise built a new exploitative system which today has all the features of a virulent imperialism.

In its internal aspects, the crushing of democracy in order to build "socialism in one county" led to a process of bureaucratization which has flowered in totalitarianism. In its external aspects, the national-chauvinist ideology of the Stalinists led to imperialism, once this reactionary regime was strong enough to assert itself as a competitor for world power.

Imperialism? There is a point here which has to be cleared up for many people. For this new oppressive and exploitative class society which developed in Stalinist Russia is not based on a capitalist form of exploitation, as another part of this issue explains. Well then, isn't it true that modern imperialism is an outgrowth of the drives of capitalism? Wasn't it Lenin who defined imperialism as a stage of capitalism? Isn't one of the fundamental drives of modern imperialism, for example, the need of capitalist economies to export their surplus capital; and where do you see this as an economic basis of what we call Russian imperialism?

If it were not for the widespread character of this "deduction" from a formal acquaintance with Marxist writings on imperialism, it would not even be worthwhile mentioning. For it is a useless play on words. For people who need quotations, the same Lenin who spoke of imperialism as a stage of capitalism also time and again referred (like all other educated people) to the imperialism of the pre-capitalist societies, the Roman empire for instance. Capitalism is not the only form of society which has given birth to its peculiar form of imperialism; on the contrary, there was such a thing as imperialism based on the ancient slave states, as well as the type of imperialism which developed under feudalism. Lenin was analysing the specific imperialism of the then-dominant social system, capitalism, and laying bare how it generated its own need to mobilise the nation-state for the conquest and domination and exploitation of peoples abroad.

The imperialism of Stalinist Russia is not the capitalist imperialism which Lenin brilliantly analysed in a famous work; but that

is simply saying that Stalinist Russia is not capitalist, and that we already know.

But in many cases, when an objection is made to even using the term "imperialism" in connection with Stalinism (by Fritz Sternberg, for example, and others), there is more than word-juggling or ignorance behind it. There is a political idea involved which suggests to them their otherwise sterile play on words. They are often willing to speak of Russian "expansionism," but "imperialism" no. The thought that is often behind this fine distinction is the following: Moscow may indeed be following an expansionist-adventurist policy, deplorably, and this is a bad thing: but this policy which is being followed by the men in the Kremlin is simply a policy of bad or mistaken men, and is not rooted in the "Soviet" social system; it is not inherent in the economy, which must be considered "progressive" because it is not capitalist; it is simply a more-or-less accidental excrescence of the system, or a very temporary and dispensable stage of it or the fortuitous result of Stalin the man's personal predilections, etc. It is only under capitalism that imperialism is rooted in the social system as such: under Stalinism it is something that wiser rulers will dispense with, especially if capitalism ceases to threaten the country....

This notion of such an important difference between capitalist imperialism on the one hand and of Russian imperialism on the other is a notable stock-in-trade of Stalinoids the world over, but not only of Stalinoids! All of the powerful "neutralist" currents of Europe and Asia - anti-Stalinist elements included - are shot through with it, including even the Bevanites of England. It represents a very dangerous illusion about Stalinism even among many of its would-be opponents, who succumb to its lies.

Well then, how is Stalinist imperialism rooted in its exploitative social system?

FIRST of all, there is an important though simple generalisation to be made about the connection between imperialism and a social system, any social system. It is true, as we said, that each class society (ancient slavery, feudalism, capitalism) has had its specific drives to imperialism; but there is obviously something common to all of these imperialisms too, with regard to societal origin.

That which is common to the root of all imperialism, in spite of

vast differences in the social system, is this: The ruling class is driven by inexorable necessity to foreign conquest, exploitation and looting in one form or another in order to make up for the inevitable deficiencies of its social system itself, rent-through as that system is by its gangrenous contradictions; exploiters of the society are pushed in this direction as a matter of life-and-death for their system because of their inability to create a harmonious economy capable of satisfying the needs of the people and, most especially, capable of solving the fatal diseases which arise out of the system of exploitation itself. For every class society generates its own self-poisons, which, as they accumulate, threaten to bring down the whole economic structure, unless a transfusion of fresh blood is obtained; and it is in the cards that a ruling class will be impelled to seek this new supply of economic blood in the squeezing of wider and wider circles of people, first inside its own borders (where the process is perhaps easiest or the victims at least more accessible) and then outside.

Now, designedly this presents very generally the economic root of imperialism in all class societies which have been known, but it is enough to raise the basic question about the roots of Stalinist imperialism.

Only those can see Stalinist imperialism as merely a regrettable excrescence, which is not inherent in the system, which is unrooted, who can see in the Stalinist system itself the basis for (at least an eventual) harmonious and progressive development of the forces of production and social relations: that is, who see no inherent deficiencies and contradictions which imperialism has to compensate for; that is, who look on the Stalinist system as being genuinely on the road to socialism in some real sense; that is, in short, who regard the Stalinist system as genuinely socialist in nature, even if still pockmarked with defects.

This view of Stalinist imperialism as a dispensable policy of bad men in the Kremlin is tied up with a basic illusion about the whole nature of the Stalinist economy. Since the economy is state-owned and planned, there are no limits to its possible increase in productive level.... Since it is not rent by the contradictions of capitalism which Karl Marx expounded in *Capital*, there is no inherent bar to the attainment of such a level of wealth that plenty-for-all becomes possible at last.... Since here is a society, whatever its other distasteful features, which is not held back from economic advance by [capitalist-type] crises, it is possible for

increasing productiveness to lead to the abolition of the bureaucratic dictatorship which was necessary for a time in order to attain this wonderful aim; the bureaucratic distortions of this "socialism" will be able to disappear, etc... Such is the illusion.

It is bound up with the rosy view that this Stalinist regime will be - indeed must be - reformed from above, democratised from above, if only the present rulers are not kept scared to death by outside opponents. This is the basis for the pro-Stalinism of a man like Isaac Deutscher, on the theoretical side, and of anti-Stalinists like Aneurin Bevan, on the less-than-theoretical side.

Capitalism cannot unleash the revolutionary energies of the people behind the Iron Curtain any more than it can do so with the colonial masses of Asia

This whole structure very largely depends on the overwhelming demonstration that this Stalinist system is not beset by the contradictions that bedevil capitalism - and sure enough that is true, just as capitalism is not being strangled by the poisons: which put the Roman Empire to death. The contradictions of Stalinism are of its own kind.

At bottom what the Stalinist illusion ignores is the fundamental contradiction peculiar to a completely statified economy under the rule of an uncontrolled bureaucratic master class: the contradiction between (1) the absolute need of the economy to be planned, since in a statified economy only the Plan can perform the role in the society which under capitalism is the function of the market and market relations; and (2) the impossibility of workably planning a modern complex society from the top down under conditions of bureaucratic totalitarianism.

It is this contradiction between Planning and Totalitarianism which is the most basic factor in making for chaos and anarchy in the Russian economy, enormous inherent wastes and inefficiencies, which are in part compensated for by the gigantic expenditure of human labour in the slave camps as well as in the mercilessly driven factories - and which was also in part compensated for by the wholesale looting of the conquered territories of East Europe after the war, a looting which still goes on in forms of exploitation subtler than open rapine.

This opens a much broader subject than the limited topic of this article: but enough has been said to indicate the line of analysis which we propose for one's thinking on this matter. When one asks the question, "What are the roots of imperialism in the Stalinist social system?" one is really asking the question: "What are the inherent contradictions of Stalinist bureaucratic collectivism which lead to its downfall?"

In a more immediate way, then, the motive drives of Stalinist imperialism stem from the need of this fiercely exploitative system, which drives its own workers like cattle, to plug the gaping holes in its economic and social armour

Of course, certain drives it shares with its rival imperialisms on the capitalist side: the impulsion to corner raw materials, especially raw materials for war industry; the usual imperialist need to grab "buffer" lands and military-strategic points of vantage; the need to grab territories if only to prevent others from grabbing them first, to use against oneself. All these come into play once an imperialist tug-of-war is under way, and in turn they intensify and sharpen the struggle.

One other drive is held in common in a sense: the Russian rulers inherent inability to indefinitely continue to live in coexistence with a system where, in any way at all, a free labour movement exists just across a border. This is a permanent political danger to them. It cannot go on forever. As long as free labour exists in the world, there is a dynamite fuse extending from the outside to inside the Iron Curtain. But an analogous need exists also for the capitalist world: to get rid of this rival upstart system, which, in its own way, is a living threat to capitalism; which shows a whole social world living without capitalism - contrary to the professors who have conclusively proved time and again that capitalism is so rooted in human nature that even the pre-Neanderthal ape-ancestors of man lived under capitalism...

But of the drives more particular to the Stalinist system itself, the basic one is the need to exploit more and more labour on an ever-widening scale. The needs of this system have driven its ruling class into methods and forms of exploitation of the workers at home which are matched in brutality and violence by few pages in the history even of capitalism: and this same ravaging need drives it to the exploitation of peoples abroad. Just as within its own state, the ruling bureaucracy sucks its class privileges and revenue out of the surplus labour which it extracts from its slaves and semi-slaves so also it needs more human labourers to milk; the more workers controlled, the more the surplus labour extracted, and the greater the wealth available both for the ruling class and for the state-girding-for-war.

Moreover, precisely because it is not a capitalist-type exploiting system, it has available a method of foreign exploitation which is excluded for capitalist imperialism: direct looting of goods and products. This phenomenon took place on a very large scale for a whole period in all the lands overrun by the Russian army after the Second World War: whole factories and their machinery were dismantled and moved bodily to Russia, etc.

This would not make economic sense for the capitalist economies of the West, the US for example: their chronic problem, under normal circumstances, is how to deal with the overproduction which gluts the market if not disposable through the purchasing power of the masses. The chronic problem of capitalism is not how to get production up, but what to do with the products it gets too high up! - and Stalinist bureaucratic collectivism suffers from no such embarrassment. Therefore, its capacity for direct looting and robbery of production wholesale.

THIRDLY, it is worth mentioning also that, in a social system which dispenses bureaucratic privileges as the reward for its ruling class and aspirants thereto, imperialism creates a wider base for bureaucratic posts, an extension of the numerical basis of the "atoms" of the ruling class through the bureaucratic structures in far-flung stations of an empire.

And so this Stalinist world confronts its rival in the world, capitalism, not merely as a contender in an imperialist struggle but as a contender in a struggle of rival systems over which, if either, shall exploit the earth.

This is a distinctive feature of the present-day war crisis and its cold war which is decisively new, as compared with the First and Second World Wars which were fought primarily between imperialist rivals within the capitalist camp. An analogous situation has not obtained since the days long ago when the armies of Napoleon, born out of the Great French (bourgeois) Revolution swept over Europe in combat with a feudal continent. But two great differences exist today as against that historic conjuncture:

(1) In those days one of the camps objectively represented the interests of a new and rising class, the bourgeoisie, which was then progressive, standing for the needs of society as a whole to throw off the shackles of serfdom in favour of the social system which was destined to raise the productive forces to the level required for further progress, for the development of the technological forces that could finally provide plenty for all and lay the economic groundwork for the classless socialist society.

This has now been done. The economic prerequisites for socialism exist.

Modern industry has reached the point where it is entirely feasible to put an end to all systems - based on enforced scarcity, where man can produce an abundance of goods if industry is run for use and not for profit. The Stalinist tyranny is not a progressive alternative to the moribund system of capitalism, but a neo-barbaric relapse which feeds on the decay of capitalism as long as the working class has not unleashed its own forces to abolish it in favour of a real workers' democracy.

(2) In those days when the rising bourgeoisie stood arrayed against the old order, there was not yet any other social class fully developed which offered a force for effective social leadership as against the two locked in conflict. Today the working class offers the social alternative, the third corner of the triangle of forces that the picture presents. It has the need and the power to build its own world, and it faces only intensified oppression and misery from the continuation of either the Stalinist or capitalist orders.

In this struggle of the two war blocs today, we socialists are enemies of both camps of exploiters and imperialists. That is the basic fact about our "Third Camp" policy.

In a previous special pamphlet-issue on *Socialism and War*, we have analysed in some detail the bases of our opposition to capitalist war and its policies today. But our opposition to capitalism does not drive us into support of the monstrous alternative represented by Stalinist totalitarianism or into illusions about it. That way lies no exit, no hope, no liveable future.

We say that Stalinism must be crushed, defeated, overthrown everywhere before the working class can achieve its democratic socialist future. We are not for conciliation with it, or appeasement of it. We do not share in one iota the common "neutralist" notion that the interests of peace and democracy can be served by trying to convince the rival camps to live in "harmony"; we know that "peaceful coexistence" of these dog-eating exploiters is a mirage; we do not take a stand that is "in-between" them.

Stalinism must be crushed! But it is an integral part of our indictment of capitalism that this cannot be done by the capitalist world in any progressive way or with any progressive consequences. The Western bloc can possibly defeat the Russian power in a military Armageddon, if indeed victory and defeat will retain any meaning in World War 3 even for the imperialists, but this can be done only at the expense of the downslide of a militarised, bureaucratized capitalism itself toward the same type of tyranny of which Moscow represents the acme today.

This degenerate capitalism of our world today is the very ground on which Stalinism feeds. If Stalinism is a dynamic force in much of the world, it is because - and only insofar as - it can take advantage of the justified hatred which millions masses feel for the system which has exploited them so long, and which they refuse to support against a demagogic Stalinist appeal which at least seems to offer something different.

As long as, and in proportion that, the enemies of Stalinism base themselves on support of the capitalist alternative, Stalinism is bound to grow strong and stronger.

Wherever Stalinism can pose as primarily the enemy of capitalism (which it is in truth, in its own interests), and not as an equal and even more deadly enemy of the working class and the masses who aspire to freedom, it can ride the revolutionary energies that capitalism's crimes have unleashed in the world. This is the "secret" of its strength and its dynamic appeal.

This is why it still can count on the active or apathetic support of millions in France and Italy and other West European countries; on millions among the colonial masses of Asia; on strategic points of support in US imperialism's backyard, Latin America. This is why the Western capitalist statesmen are at the end of their rope in Indochina, where they are fighting in the name of French colonialism against a Stalinist controlled Vietnam which is able to clothe itself in the garb of a national-liberation movement. This is why Korea was a trap for thousands of American dead.

Being anti-capitalist in reality, in the sense that it stands for a rival system of oppression and exploitation, Stalinism can hope to and seek to use a disoriented working class wherever it finds one, as its battering ram against the old system. Where the US can find only the most discredited of reactionaries and tyrants to be its semi-reliable allies - a butcher like Chiang Kai-shek or Syngman Rhee, fascists like Hitler's friend Franco or the neo-Nazis who flood the administration of its pet German, Chancellor Adenauer - the Stalinists are not tied to the old discredited classes and cliques in the countries of the Near or Far East, or in Europe. They can stage the act of offering a fundamental social transformation to throw out the landlords who oppress the peasant masses, whereas the US, bound by its capitalist status quo ideology, cannot even find a demagogic word to say.

No one who stands for, or who is suspected of standing for, the retention of mastery by the capitalist imperialism - even if he apologetically explains that he supports the capitalist bloc only because it is a "lesser evil" - can hope to stem the expansionist dynamic of Stalinism.

That is why we look to the gathering of the forces of the "Third Camp" - those who wish to fight in the name of an independent struggle against both camps of exploiters - as the only road to defeat both war and Stalinism, both the old and the new imperialism.

BUT that works the other way too. Wherever it is Stalinism that has established itself as the master, where it has already overthrown capitalism and had time to show its own hand, its own cloven foot, there the revolt against the bureaucratic-collectivist despotism grows fast. But the masses who turn against Stalinist power in disillusionment do not want to go back; they want to go forward. The most dramatic proof of this was given in the great June 1953 revolt of the East German workers, in their heroic first assault against the Eastern conqueror. No pro-West or pro-US or even pro-Adenauer slogans appeared among them, that on the one hand; and on the other, the representatives of the Western camp in Berlin showed themselves as leery of the aroused workers in revolt as the Stalinist masters.

Within the Stalinist empire, where it has consolidated itself, disaffection grows. Only a primitive stage was represented by "Titoism," where a satellite regime turned national-Stalinist - that is, rebelled against Moscow domination as foreign oppression while retaining the forms and social content of the same system, totalitarian bureaucratic collectivism. "Titoism" in various forms shook the Russian empire, and we naturally cheer it on to do so; but it is not this nationalist (anti-Moscow) version of the same system which represents the future.

The next stage of the revolt within the Stalinist empire is augured by the masses' aspiration for freedom against their new bureaucratic magnates who have replaced the capitalists as rulers, the revolt prefigured by the East German rising.

It is the revolt of the workers in the name of a democratic government which will overthrow the Stalinist horror. Revolt for democracy under Stalinism - what does it mean? In a completely statified society, where the means of production are already in the hands of the state (while the state is in the hands of a tyrannical bureaucratic class), the road to genuine socialism lies in winning the state power for the democratic rule of the people. In this kind of society, democracy is not merely a political form (as it is under capitalism at the best); it is the sole instrument whereby the workers can really build their own society, and convert the statified economy from the preserve of a privileged class to the foundations of socialism. Democracy is a revolutionary goal.

Capitalism cannot unleash the revolutionary energies of the people behind the Iron Curtain any more than it can do so with the colonial masses of Asia. That will take a struggle which offers an anti-capitalist alternative to these people who have had their

Democracy is not merely a political form (as it is under capitalism at the best); it is the sole instrument whereby the workers can really build their own society

bellyful of both the old system and the now tyranny, and this is a struggle which can blow the Stalinist power up from within.

This is the "secret weapon" which can defeat Stalinism without plunging the world into a world slaughter to a bitter atomic end, to the greater glory of capitalism

This is the political weapon which the Stalinists fear. It can be swung into action only by a consistent and fearless democratic foreign policy which has broken with the limitations imposed by capitalist class interests and alliances.

We are for the war against Stalinism to the death - not appeasement, deals, compromise or partitions of the world with it - but we are not for capitalism's war against Stalinism. Our allies are not Franco and Bao Dai, but our comrade-workers of the British Labour Party who are trying to find an independent road for their movement that stands against both war camps, and who are therefore smeared as "anti-American". Our allies are not Rhee or Chiang, but the lion-hearted East German workers in revolt. Our political blood-brothers are not the Stalinoid neutralists who want to appease Stalinism but the workers who want to find the way to fight both bloc. Our aim is not the peaceful co-existence of two varieties of exploiters but a socialist world where all people can be free.

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