Can socialism be built through tyranny?

Max Shachtman on Isaac Deutscher’s claim that Stalinist “progress” was a sort of vindication of Trotsky
Deutscher and others argued that figures like Mao and Tito, who had led Stalinist revolutions, were the legatees of Stalin's "socialism in one country". But Trotsky, a few days before he died in August 1940, had fin-
ished a long article, The Communist and the C.P.U., in which he de-
fined the leaders of the world's Communist Parties as aspirants to becom-
e in their countries what the Stalinist autocracy was in the USSR.

Much of the politics attributed to Trotsky in the third volume (covering the years 1929-40) was not Trotsky's, but Deutscher's, and that of Trotsky's political enemies, the international current of "right communism" named af-
 ter one of its leaders, Heinrich Brandler.

Deutscher had been a Trotskyist from 1932 to 1940. Given to myth-making about himself as well as about Trotsky, Deutscher put it into circulation that he had bro-
ken with Trotsky in 1938 because he disagreed with the de-
cision to declare the small Trotskyist current to be the Fourth International.

He did disagree, that, but he remained active — jour-
nalistcally active, anyway — in the Trotskyist movement (in Britain) until the fall of France in May 1940, when he disappeared from the Trotskyist press (Workers' Fight).

Deutscher then swung over to support for the anti-Nazi side in the World War, and to increasingly uncritical sup-
port for Russia. He functioned in the bourgeois press (The Economist, The Observer) as an apologist for the Russian

Deutscher, who was of Jewish background, was an anti-
Zionist — one of those Jewish socialists who had, in
Poland and elsewhere, fought the Zionists and their proj-
ect of migrating European Jews to Palestine.

But he was not, as such as Tony Cliff were, an unaccept-
able political sectarian on this question. He looked with
sympathy on the movement in international Jewry, which,
in response to Nazi and other anti-semitism, created Israel.

Deutscher's later views .

Some of Trotsky's writings of the last three and a half years of his life. That Trotsky
considered the Stalinist state terminally unviable, and cer-
tainly to be replaced soon either by a new working-class
revolution, or by the restoration of capitalism.

The real Trotsky had shifted ground enormously in
September 1939, when he had for the first time accepted that the US SR, as it was at the time, might have to be reconceptualised as some new form of exploitative class society. His sole argument against making that revalua-
tion in September 1939 was that it was "too soon". It
would be wrong to make the revaluation, with all its
implications for the Marxist theory of historical develop-
ment, "on the eve of" the decisive test of world war. In
that test, he thought, Stalinism would inevitably go under,
before either a bourgeois onslaught or a new working-
class revolution.

Deutscher and others, in the late 1940s and after, argued
that figures like Mao and Tito, who had led Stalinist revo-
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Can socialism be built through tyranny?

By Max Shachtman

A biography of Leon Trotsky written by an author who understands that his life was nothing more than his political ideas and political activities, is of necessity a political document. The fact that this biography is written by Isaac Deutscher gives it more than ordinary importance. He brings to his work the extensive research and the acquired knowledge of a confident participation in the revolutionary movements with which Trotsky was so closely connected. Of course, he does not even scratch the surface below which lie rich ores of theoretical and historical assayer.

Deutscher has performed a precious service, in general to all those who are interested in historical truth and accuracy in particular to those who are interested in the revolutionary movement. Although this book is actually only the first part of the biography he planned to write to cover the entire life of Trotsky, it is already superseded in respect to documentation on the life of Trotsky, everything else that has been published not even in part on the entire whole.

A political writer does not have to speak in the first person to reveal his views; they appear even when he speaks in the second and third. Deutscher does not announce his conceptions in his own name, as it were, but they are announced nevertheless. It would appear from his writings, then, that he still regards himself as an opponent of capitalism, a supporter of socialism and not of the more conservative school both of the more radical, and, on the whole, a Marxist. But it is precisely in this last respect that the results are nothing less than a disaster.

A hundred years thereafter by all those who professed their orthodoxy. That is evidently the least of his preoccupations.

The results are nothing less than a disaster. Why did Lenin combat Trotsky's theory so persistently, not to say violently? Why did he cling so long and so doggedly to his own formula? Were the differences serious, or primarily the product of a misunderstanding on Lenin's part, or of his failure to read Trotsky's elaborated version of the theory — a possibility suggested by Trotsky at one time and repeated by Deutscher? Deutscher gives his view of Lenin's position and analysis of the dispute in these words: "Lenin's formula of a 'democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry'..." better suited for an association of socialists and agrarian revolutionists..." In the 1917 events in Russia, in Trotsky's view, were to confirm Trotsky's prognostications.

To reduce the dispute to these terms is an all but incredible feat. We are here altogether interested in the monstrous inventions and falsifications concocted by the Stalinists. Nevertheless, the fact remains that the dispute has been fought on two radically and incomparably different views about the character of the Russian revolution and the nature and prospects of socialism in Russia least of all on whether Trotsky would "prejudice [the] potentialities" of the peasantry and Lenin "would not," and not at all on whether one view was "broader and more cautious" and the other narrower and more reckless. It is hard to believe that an ex-socialist like Bertram Wolfe (in his Three Men Who Made a Revolution) presents a far more comprehensive and well-documented picture of the conflict as seen by the two protagonists (regardless of Wolfe's own arbitrary conclusions from the conflict) and even grates it better than Deutscher does.

Deutscher does as far as the material argument — about the confirmation of Trotsky's views in 1917 — that is good enough for an article or a popular pamphlet, or it is good enough "on the whole". An ex-socialist who was a Trotskyist in 1897 from one who proclaims himself "free from ideologies" to any cult, but it does not even seem possible to imagine what would be the result in the theoretical or historical assessment.

What makes matters worse, is that he does not anywhere even directly touch upon the one thing that is most important — what relation did Lenin's conception or slogan of "revolutionary defeatism" and Trotsky's conception that "the revolution is not interested in any further accumulation of defeats," have to the actual defeats at the end of the war, if not in general than at least in Russia? What relation did they have to the actual revolutions at the end of the war, of March and November?

Deutscher does not even attempt to give a fifth-carbon copy of Trotsky himself, uninfected by any sort of systematic theory. One might say that he is under no obligation to the reader to do so, that he is satisfied to lead the reader draw his own conclusions from objectively presented facts of history. Whatever may be said about such an assertion — and we regard it as absurd — the fact nevertheless remains that in one way or another, Deutscher does draw conclusions of his own along the lines of his own theoretical and political views. If one is to express an opinion about those conclusions and views, it is necessary first of all to do what Deutscher fails to do, that is, to bring them together from the various parts of his work in which they are loosely scattered and give them the maximum coherences that they allow for, to make them consistent and explicable to the reader. It is possible that this is made possible by the diffuseness, ambiguous inanemnesia and the even irresponsible way in which they are often stated.

BOLSHEVISM AND STALIN

To Deutscher, the Russia of Lenin and Trotsky, the Russia of the Bolshevik revolution, is organically continued in the Russia of Stalin (and his recent successors). Although generally sympathetic to Trotsky's point of view and full of praise for his theory of the permanent revolution in particular, he points out that there was indeed one aspect of the theory that was a "miscalculation".

Not for a moment did Trotsky imagine, however, that the Russian Revolution would survive in isolation for decades. It may therefore be said as Stalin was to say twenty years later, that "he underrated the internal resources and vitality of revolutionary Russia. This miscalculation, obvious in retrospect, is less surprising when one considers that the view expressed by Trotsky in 1906 was to become the common property of all Bolshevik leaders, including Stalin..."

The important thing in this passage is not that the author is merely severe toward the criticism of Trotsky's "miscalculation" but that toward Trotsky himself, but that he holds that "Soviet" Russia is still in existence despite its long isolation and the triumph of the Stalinist regime in the country. What there is about the regime that warrants calling if a "Soviet" regime today, when there is not a microscopic trace left of Soviet power or even of a Soviet institution, is nowhere discussed or even so much as mentioned by Deutscher. That is evidently the least of his preoccupations.
Stalinism “NECESSARY”?

W hy was the evolution of Stalinist totalitarianism nec-

essary? It was not the result of an act of will, but of a long historical process.

Stalinism was not a conscious decision on the part of Stalin; it was the result of the historical development of the Soviet Union. Stalinism was not a deliberate plan, but a necessary consequence of the historical circumstances.

The evolution of Stalinism was a process of accumulation and concentration of power in the hands of the state. It was a process of the consolidation of the state apparatus, the growth of bureaucracy, and the suppression of all opposition.

The evolution of Stalinism was a process of the development of mass mobilization and the use of mass violence for the purposes of maintaining the regime.

The evolution of Stalinism was a process of the development of a cult of personality, which allowed Stalin to maintain his power and to legitimize his decisions.

The evolution of Stalinism was a process of the development of a system of terror, which allowed Stalin to maintain his control over the population.

The evolution of Stalinism was a process of the development of a system of propaganda and manipulation, which allowed Stalin to maintain his control over the population.

The evolution of Stalinism was a process of the development of a system of patronage and nepotism, which allowed Stalin to maintain his control over the population.

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Revolutionary "ILUSION?"

P reviously, no one else had taken a soberer view of the interna-
tional revolution than Lenin. He foresaw that in the course of decades their example would not be imitated in any country… History produced [sic] the great illusion and planted and cultivated it in the brains of the most soberly rational produc-
tive power. It was a new and not shameful epoch of civilization. Stalin's industrial revolution can claim the same.

It is not necessary for us to emphasise that Deutscher applies this conception — the new tyranny against the peo-
ple nevertheless does, “on the whole,” use its power to strengthen the conquests of the revolution — to the revolu-
tion that established capitalism and to the revolution that is to establish (and according to him, has already estab-
lished in Russia) socialism. The analogies between the industrial revolutions that consolidated the social revolu-
tion and the two Stalinist revolutions is not without striking resemblance. He summarises the “primitive accumulation of capital” that marked the bourgeois revolution in England as “the most violent process by which one social class accu-
dred the working class, and dirt from every pore, the achievements of their revolu-
tion and conquest to the revolutions contrived by Stalin the conqueror. A similar subtle thread connects Trotsky's domestic policy of these times from which it is contemp oraneously deduced.

It is a relief to know it.

Forced labour

The world revolution, the extension of the revolution westward which was to save Russia from the disintegra-
tion into a despotism not only because circumstances then

Forced labour

which was an illusion), it was, among other reasons, because of

Suppes: Liberty, Equality, Power (Mason Crest, 2006)
or hostile forces it soon delivered itself up to the new Levinian social-revolutionary state. If so, the basis of the new Levinian society is assured and with it the class dominance of its bourgeoisie...
bureaucratic revolution and the upholders of the new order regardless of who they were, what they thought, what their motives were.

But this is a situation which only reflects one of the basic contradictions not only of the bureaucratic revolution but also of the movement itself, as a whole. It is rooted not in the conflict between easily tired masses and unfamiliar leaders, but in the fact that the whole century, was not ripe for the domination of the class which had proved itself incapable of exercising its social functions, this disorganizing tendency cannot exist without class exploitation, and that cannot be achieved... whoever puts himself in this awkward position is irrevocably lost.

The worst thing that can befall a leader of an extreme party is to be compelled to take over a government in an epoch when the movement is not yet ripe for the domination of the class which he represents, for this means he necessarily finds himself in a dilemma. All he can do is to contrast all his previous actions, to all his principles and the revolutionary programme conceived before his whole construction, root and branch; and, thirdly, because everything which Engels wrote to lead up to the sections quoted might, so far as Deutscher himself has been written in untranslatable Aramische. The whole of his Peasant War in Germany is devoted by Engels to this problem as it manifested itself in 18th century Germany, and his forewords are as it written to illuminate the present debate. In writing about the plebeian revolutionary government over which the peasant leader, Thomas Munzer, presided in Thuringia in 1525, Engels deals with a dilemma facing a revolutionary leader who comes before his time, as it were.

The ideas for which he himself had only begun to grope. The class which he represented not only was not developed enough and devoidable of sabotaging and transforming the whole society, but it was just beginning to come into existence. The social transformation that he pictured in his fantasy was so little more than a dream than the implications that the latter were a preparation for a social system diametrically opposed to that of which he dreamt. (The Peasant War in Germany)

Engels at a length not because a quotation from Engels automatically settles all problems, and not because Engels could only help establish the social rule of a new exploiting class. Engels’ commentary on Munzer is no more isolated or accidental in the works of the two great Marxists, than is the work of those who “come before their time” as exemplified by the Levellers of the English Revolution, the Levellers of the American Revolution, the Muenzer’s position at the head of the “eternal council” of the Peasants War in Germany.

And further:

It is exceedingly interesting to note what Engels says in the Peasant War in Germany. Engels at a length not because the quotation from Engels automatically settles all problems, and not because Engels could only help establish the social rule of a new exploiting class. Engels’ commentary on Munzer is no more isolated or accidental in the works of the two great Marxists, than is the work of those who “come before their time” as exemplified by the Levellers of the English Revolution, the Levellers of the American Revolution, the Muenzer’s position at the head of the “eternal council” of the Peasants War in Germany.

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of them dares to present these ideas directly, candidly and like to attend a working-class meeting at which any of the Utopians who were your idealistic but quixotic leaders language: multititude of Deutschers of all varieties would say in plain

Eisenberg's: the organized state power, the army, and the bourgeois, elementar power of the popular masses. The bourgeoisie had to have a loyal army, but it is in his interest to show them more than absolutism. The army, however, was in no wise at its disposal. But it was at the disposal of Eisenberg. 

In a letter to Marx (April 13, 1866), dealing with Bismarck's proposal for a "universal suffrage" law which stepped over to the side of reaction, and allied itself with the very absolutist bureaucrats, feudalists and priests whom it had deprived the bourgeoisie of this ownership, and it becomes a nothing, no matter who or what the political power. What "social power" might. Deprive the bourgeoisie of this ownership, and it leaves it no share of the domination itself. On the contrary, is such a class that if it retains mastery of the ownership of capital which is the fundamental basis for the power of the bourgeoisie over society in general and over the threatening proletariat in particular. But once the proletariat is deprived — and what's, more deprived com-

robust and society in the interests of the bourgeoisie, a Bonapartist power, not an as a nothing, no matter who or what the political power. Economic power, perhaps? But the only way of exercising economic power (in Russia (or China, Poland and Albania) is through the political power which has been so utterly excluded by the total-

We know how the bourgeoisie, be it under a democracy or an autocracy, is able to "determine the conditions of production" which in turn enable us to determine who is the ruling class in society. But under Stalinism, the work-

as a subordinate class that if it retains ownership of the economy, the bourgeoisie has not the stuff in it for ruling directly itself, and that its present leaders, in Engels' phrase, "left the world to take over, in exchange for good pay, the management of state and society in the interests of the bourgeoisie, a Bonapartist semi-directorship, through the needle, hands on the material interests of the bourgeoisie, even if against the bour-

For them is the inescapable task of wiping out all the Utopians who were your idealistic but quixotic leaders

The question itself is unanswerable. The revolution has just abolished ownership of the means of production. The bourgeoisie has been expropriated (i.e., deprived of its absolute ownership of means of production). Yet the bourgeoisie exists, and it is more active than ever. It is true that it is very nature it cannot and it never will. Until it is communi-

'workers' liberty

The whole of Bonapartism implies the existence of a monarchies, even in France, that were incompatible with the existence of the bourgeoisie, but it leaves it no share of the domination itself. On the contrary, is such a class that if it retains ownership of the ownership of capital which is the fundamental basis for the power of the bourgeoisie over society in general and over the threatening proletariat in particular. But once the proletariat is deprived — and what's, more deprived com-

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has to be discussed with a “Marxist,” and such an urbanite and not a blood-and-bone working-class activist. We must know our times, and know therefore that what Deutscher has the shamelessness to say with such above-the-common-denier candour is what has so long, poisoned the minds of we-don’t-know-how-many cynics, parasites, exploiters, slaveholders and lawyers for slaveholders in and around the working-class movement. So it must after all be dealt with, but briefly.

Bourgeois Bonapartism (the only Bonapartism that ever existed or ever can exist) can carry out the will of the ruling bourgeoisie against its will, and do it without consultation of any kind. The political ambitions, even the personal ambitions, the “imperialist ambitions of the Bonapartist regime coincide completely with the self-expansion of capital, as Marx liked to call it. Each sustains the other. In the course of it the will of the bourgeoisie, which is nothing more than the expansion of capital—the lifeblood of its existence and growth—is done.

Even where the Bonaparte represents, originally, another class, as Bismarck represented the Prussian Junkers, the economic interests of that class, as it is by that time developing in the conditions of expanding capitalist production, are increasingly reconciled with the capitalist mode of production and exchange. (The same fundamental process takes place as noted by Marx in the English revolution, when the bourgeoisie unites with the landowners who no longer represented feudal land but bourgeois landed property.) But where the state owns the property, the “socialist” Bonaparte who has established a political regime of totalitarian terror has completely deprived the so-called ruling class, the proletariat, of any means where-by its will can even be expressed, let alone asserted. Indeed, the totalitarian regime was established to suppress the will of the proletariat and to deprive it of all social power, political or economic.

If Deutscher is trying to say — as Trotsky so often and so wrongly said — that by “preserving state property” the Stalinist Bonapartes are, in their own way, preserving the class rule or defending the class interests of the proletariat, as the bourgeois Bonapartes did for the bourgeoisie in preserving private property, this comparison is not better but worse than the others. By defending private property, the Bonaparte-Bismarck-Hitlers made it possible for the bourgeoisie to exploit the working class more freely, a favour for which the bourgeoisie paid off the regime as richly as it deserved. But by defending and indeed vastly expanding state property in Russia, the Stalinist bureaucracy acquires a political and economic power to subject the working class to a far more intensive exploitation and oppression than it ever before suffered. If it protects the coat-in-a-box from the “foreign bourgeoisie” (as at that, but we exploiting class does), it is solely because it does not intend to yield all or even part of its exclusive right to the exploitation of the Russian people.

And finally, if Deutscher is trying to say that socialism has to be imposed upon the working class against its will, if need be, or even that socialism (a “brand of socialism”) can be imposed upon the working class against its will, he is only emphasizing that he has drawn a cross over himself and over socialism too. You might as well try to make sense out of the statement that there are two brands of freedom, one in which you are free and the other in which you are imprisoned.

The proof of the pudding is before us. If a vast accumulation of factories were not merely a prerequisite for socialism (and that it is, certainly) but a “brand of socialism,” then we have had socialism under Hirohito, Hitler, Roosevelt and Adenauer.

Under capitalism, the working class has been economically expropriated (it does not own the means with which it produces), but, generally, it is left some political rights and in some instances some political power. Under feudalism, the landed working classes were deprived of all political power and all political rights, but some of them at least retained the economic power that comes with the ownership or semi-ownership of little bits of land. It is only under conditions of ancient slavery and in some recent times of plantation slavery, that the slaves — the labouring class — were deprived of all economic power and all political power. Those who most closely resemble that ancient class are the working class under Stalinism. They are the modern slaves, deprived of any political power whatever and therefore of all economic power.

"BRAND OF SOCIALISM"

If this is the product of a “brand of socialism,” necessitating because the working class did not will socialism (why should it?), then the whole of Marxism, which stands or falls with the conception of the revolutionary self-emancipation of the proletariat, has been an illusion, at best, and a criminal lie at worst. But even that would not be as great an illusion and a lie as the claim that Stalinism will yield its totalitarian power as the bureaucracy gradually comes to see that its benevolent despotism is no longer needed in the interests of social progress.

What Engels wrote to the German party leaders in September, 1879, in Marx’s name and in his own, is worth recalling:

“For about forty years we have stroved the class struggle as the immediate driving force of history, and in particular the class struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat as the great lever of the modern social revolution; it is therefore impossible for us to cooperate with people who wish to expunge this class struggle from the movement. When the International was formed we expressly formulated the battle-cry: the emancipation of the working class must be achieved by the working class itself. We cannot therefore cooperate with people who say that the workers are too uneducated to emancipate themselves and must first be freed from above by philanthropic bourgeois and petty bourgeois.”

That remains our view, except that to “philanthropic bourgeois and petty bourgeois,” we must now add: or by totalitarian despots who promise freedom as the inevitable culmination of the worst exploitation and human degradation known, with the possible exception of Hitler’s horrors, in modern times. That view Deutscher has discarded. On what ground he continues to proclaim himself a Marxist passes understanding.

There remains Deutscher’s justification of Stalinism “in the name of Russia’s backwardness, and the responsibilities for Stalinism which he has ascribed to Lenin and Trotsky. It is one of the favourite themes of the apologists, but it has the right to be dealt with.

Drive the apologists for Stalinism out of all their other terrors and they will take tenacious refuge in the last one. It is their deepest one and affords them the most obdurate hold on their defences. It is buttressed with solid learning direct from Marx, has historical breadth, roots in economics, and the sociological sweep that lifts it above the transient trivia of journalistic polemics. It is the trench, one might almost say, of the Old Crap “die ganze alte Schiesse,” as it is written in the original Marx.

In brief: socialism (or the most eminently desirable brand of socialism) presupposes a most advanced stage of the development of the productive forces which alone can assure abundance for all and therewith freedom; but for forcibly-isolated and exceedingly poor Russia to be brought to such a stage required the crude, violent, at times unnecessarily expensive but basically unavoidable excesses (alte Schiesse) of the practical realists. The proof of the pudding lies in the statistics and who is so quixotic as to argue with statistics?

Under socialism

a) Production — enormous increase
b) Capitalists — enormous liquidation
c) Bureaucratism — enormous, but:
  1. inevitable, or
  2. necessary, or
  3. exaggerated, or
  4. declining, or
  5. self-reforming.

Net, after all deductions: an understandably inferior brand of socialism, but socialism just the same.

On this score, as on so many others, Deutscher feels, like scores of contemporaries, that his demoralisation invests him with a special right or obligation to cruise freely, with accelerator lashed to the floor and steering gear disconnected, from imprecision to imprecision and muddle to muddle.

The conception was first elaborated by Trotsky, who while not himself an apostle for Stalinism but a most implacable critic, nevertheless provided the apologists with far more weapons than they deserved. In Trotsky’s idea was developed much more persuasively and round-edly than in Deutscher. Above all, the former was free of
The play part by poverty in the transformation of the Bolshevik revolution is too well known to require elaboration here. Poverty which is induced by a low level of industrial development never has and never will be the foundation on which to build the new social order. That was known in Russia in 1917, as well as before and after. Without exception or hesitation, every Bolshevik repeated the idea publically a thousands times: “For the establishement of socialism, we ourselves are too backward, poor and weak, and we can achieve it only in class collaboration with the coming proletarian powers of the more advanced western countries. Our strategical objective, therefore, requires laying priority upon the advance of the world revolution and, under its victory, working for the maximum socialist accumulation which is possible in a backward, isolated workers’ state.” In these thoughts the science of Marxism was combined with the virtues of political honesty and forthrightness, sagacity and practicality.

The big difficulties manifested themselves, it is worth noting, in thus the more the victory of the world revolution was delayed (and contrary to Deutcher’s hindsight, it was delayed primarily by the course and power of the newly-rising leadership of the revolutionary state), the more restricted became the possibilities of any socialist accumulation. It is not a matter of accumulation “in general,” it is always possible, but socialist accumulation. That signifies a harmonious social expansion resulting from such cooperation in the productive process as requires less and less on the body, nerves and time of the labourer and less and less public coercion, on the one hand, and on the other, affords more abundance and the possibility for unhampered intellectual development to everybody, increasingly free from inherited class divisions and antagonisms of all kinds.

From 1918, when Lenin first outlined the masterful and brilliant conception that later got the name of NEP (New Economic Policy), through the NEP itself, through the struggle of the Trotskyist Opposition, through the rise of the Stalinist bureaucracy, and down to the days of the “self-reforming” bureaucracy that has followed Stalin, all important questions, conflicts and developments that have appeared in Russia were related to or depended upon the problem of accumulation.

The LEFT OPPOSITION

The fight of the Russian Opposition coincided with the end of the possibilities of a socialist accumulation in Russia given the continued repression (or undermining, or suspension) of the NEP. The fight of the Opposition was no longer fore as significant as it was fitting that the Opposition intertwined its program for a socialist accumulation inside Russia with that stiff-necked fight against the theory of “socialism of one country” which was the obverse of its fight for the world revolution. In this sense, the defeat of the Opposition put an end to the socialist revolution in Russia as decisively as it put an end to the industrial development of the country. But it did not put an end to accumulation of any kind, any more than it eliminated political power of any kind. The defeat merely changed the form and content of both. It had to. No society with class divisions, and therefore class conflict, can hold together for a day without a political power, that is, a state power. And no society, least of all in modern times, can live without accumulation. There was accumulation under the Tsar, under a “bourgeois” kind under Lenin, and accumulation of still another kind under Stalin. The whole question revolves around the “Trotsky” noted that “the resources of the country were so scant that there was no opportunity to separate out from the masses of the population the very broad privileged strata. At the same time the “equalizing” character of wages, destroying personal interestedness, became a feature of the development of the proletariat, whose need in the early days of its existence had to lift itself from its poverty to a somewhat higher (but still a very low) level of development (primarily consumerist).”

There isn’t a line in all of Deutcher’s analysis even which approaches this in the clarity with which it points to the bottom of the “ridiculous” Stalinism. Yet for all its compact clarity, it requires modification and some close study.

One should start with the premise that the “equalizing” character of wages “became a brake upon the development of the productive forces.” The idea is absolutely correct, in our opinion. It remains correct if it is expressed in a broader and more general way, always remembering that we are speaking of an isolated, backward Russia: The political power of the workers, represented and symbolized, among other things, by the equalizing character of wages, became a brake upon the development of the productive forces. Does that mean that with a proletarian power the productive forces could no longer accumulate? The term “brake” is not a metaphor but a cold, hard, simple and so absolute a sense. It merely (and “merely” here is enough) meant that such a political power did not allow the productive forces to develop as required by the concrete social needs of the time. This for more precise thoughts related to more precise realities in

The proletarian in power could not produce an industrialisation of the country rapid enough to overcome the bourgeois tendencies surging up with such unexpected speed and strength from its primitive agricultural existence and it was not strong enough to assure a socialist development in both spheres of economic activity. To do that, it would have had to subject itself to such an intensity of exploitation as produced the surpluses that made the capitalist classes, in their heyday, the beneficiaries of all, and privilege and at the same time the superintendents of the miraculous economic achievements that have at last made it possible for them to rise from its knees. The trouble, as it were, was this: others can exploit the working class, but it cannot exploit itself. So long as it has the political power, it will not exploit itself not even out of necessity. It will allow others to do so. That is why the workers’ state, the workers’ power, the workers’ productivity, the revolution turned out, in its enforced isolation, to be a brake on the development of the productive forces at a pace required by the relation of class forces in Russia in the Twenties. And that is why, again in its enforced isolation, the workers’ power met the three play to the development of productive forces in Russia.

By whom? What force would take over the power in order to carry out this exploitation, this demonstration of Russia’s industrialisation under the extraordinary concrete conditions of the time? Trotsky says that “the resources of the country were so scant that there was no opportunity to separate out from the masses of the population strata with privileges and especially with political power.” But this is patently wrong. On the basis of the same or even less easily available or more poorly managed resources, Tsarist society had “separated out” and main-
tion and management of Russian society and the exploitation of its resources (the proletariat included) implied by its class relations, to which it was returning, and as it turned out, none in sight capable of such a task.

The native bourgeoisie? In agriculture, it did not exist at all. There existed only the feudalist aristocracy. In the bourgeo- isme which needed an urban bourgeoisie to organize, learn, and lead the workers in the peripheral network of the production and the field of trade. If the compar- atively potent bourgeoisie of pre-Bolshevik Russia never managed to build a revolution or to transform itself either before or after the or Dar was overturned, the ludi- crous remnants of it, even if supplemented by the neo- bourgeoisie, would have remained powerless to achieve the same position “except as tools or vassals of the proletariat.”


Such was the unseen and unforeseen concatenation of social forces that had been set into motion. It was doomed to completely fail in its ultimate resolve in a resolution absolute inevitable revolution in agriculture, subor- dinately directed terror against the people it exploited now Stalinized Russia, that more than half the world’s popula- tion by 1930 was “as characteristic of capitalism as of all class reproductions.”

It makes a revolution against it inasmuch as it faces them with the contradiction between their own propertyless- ness and the social organization of the class culture, both of which presuppose a great increase in productive power – a high degree of its development.” Such a development “is in contradiction with the interests of the bourgeoisie,” because without the old capital, the bourgeoisie’s “only claim is, in order only want is generalized, and with want the fight over necessi- ty becomes decisive. When the manor has to choose between all and the old capitalist would respond.”

It is a thought scattered and repeated through hundreds of pages of his book, a thought that is true, by the way, of Ulupans and “pure-and-simple” anti-capitalists. The thought is as clear as day: the “old crap” is not a deformed and disfigured state, but a brand of socialism (in all revolutions) which is as characteristic of capitalism as of all class reproductions. History, with virtually no century of struggle and opposition to the other and vice versa. “Down with capitalism!” was the battle cry of the workers’ state. But for a moment that is beside the point.

That is how the “old crap” revived and that is what its revival meant. To Trotsky, the “old crap,” meant as an individual, as a member of the working class of the socialist revolutionaries who had the “right” to reject the things that they had to reject, to have a new idea, to have a new magnetism to attract from the nethermost regions of society, to have a new magnetic power to attract from the nethermost regions of society, to have a new power so intolerable that the mass bour-geoisie rose to take command of the Russian revolution for the world bourgeoisie. It must beome a power so intolerable that the mass bour-geoisie rose to take command of the Russian revolution for the world bourgeoisie. It must beome a power so intolerable that the mass bour-geoisie rose to take command of the Russian revolution for the world bourgeoisie.

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new exploitation.

To 1928, after eleven years of the Bolshevick Revolution, and with God knows what unspoken thought roaming about in the back of his mind, the same Bukharin had occasion to return to the same subject from a somewhat different angle, in the course of a speech delivered to the Program Commission of the Sixth Congress of the Communist International. In discussing, from the purely theoretical standpoint, the possibility of classical capitalist economic crisis in a society in which all the means of production are owned by the state (naturally, not by a proletariat state), he points out that in such a society “only in economic crisis in a society in which all the means of production have disappeared (more or less) and the ruling class has concentrated all ownership and control into one hand, the state’s, perfectly applicable to socialism, for the power of one class over the other most remarkable theoretical extrapolation: This would be capitalism no more, for the slave market is absent. The Stalinist state did not, of course, arise out of capitalism and the development of a state capitalist economy, but out of an economy that was socialist in type. But it is not the definition of a new exploitive class society, where commodity production has disappeared (more or less) and the ruling class has concentrated all ownership and control into one hand, the state’s, perfectly applicable to the slave-state of Stalinism?

NEW EXPLOITATION.

Let us say that we close our mind to Deutscher’s utterly wretched apology for the Stalinist dictatorship, his pseudo-historical justification for the massacre of the “Utopians” by the regime of the new Russian slave owners, his simplistic theories about revolutions in general, his logical preposterousness which would be derided by anyone accustomed to think with his mind instead of with his pyloric valve. To forget all these things is next to impossible but let us try it is done. Then we would have to return to what we set out to consider, the basic tenet of socialism — the self-emancipatory role which is exclusively assigned to the revolutionary proletariat to a case of the opinion that capitalism can give way only to socialism. The opinion is as erroneous as it is common. Understandable fifty years ago, for adequate reasons rightly so, it is inexcusable today, in the light of the Stalinist experience. The common notion has to be revised for accuracy, and the revision, far from upsetting the pro-vision of Marxism, amplifies and above all concretizes them:

Capitalism, nearing the end of its historical rope, is decreasingly able to solve the problems of society on a capitalist basis. The problems will nevertheless be solved anyhow and are already being solved. Where the proletariat takes command of the nation, the social problems will be solved progressively, and mankind will move toward the freedom of a socialist world. Where the proletariat fails for the time to discharge its task, the social problems will be solved nevertheless, but they will be solved in a revolutionary way, solved at the cost of a dozen new social problems, solved by degrading and enslaving the bulk of mankind. That is the meaning today of the conflict between capitalism and socialism, socialism and Stalinism, and capitalism.

That is the meaning that can and must now be read into the historical warnings of the great founders of scientific socialism and the proletarian socialist movements. They did not and could not hold that the decay of capitalism, which is a spontaneous and automatic process, would just as spontaneously and automatically assure the victory of socialism — of any brand. In the most mature and instructive of his works, the Anti-Dühring, Engels clarifies the standpoint of Marxism on this score, not once but repeatedly:

“... by more and more transforming the great majority of the population into proletarians, the capitalist mode of production brings into being the force which, under penalty of its own destruction, is compelled to carry out this revolution... modern large-scale industry has called into being on the one hand a proletariat, a class which for the first time in history can demand the abolition, not of one particular class organization or another, or of one particular class privilege or another, but of classes themselves, and which is in such a position that it must carry through this demand or sink to the level of the Chinese coolie... if the whole of modern society is not to perish, the revolution of the mode of production and distribution must take place, a revolution which will put an end to all class divisions...” [The bourgeoisie’s] own productive powers have grown beyond its control and its own, with the face of a Nihilist, are driving the whole of bourgeois society forward to ruin or realisation. (My emphasis — MS.)

Those do not have their value in determining if Engels was grieved with apocalyptic vision — that has no importance. But they reveal how Engels judged the relationship between the disintegration of capitalist society and the part of the proletariat in the process — victim of the outcome or master of a regeneration. The failure up to now of the proletariat to play the latter part successfully is not our subject here. Except to say that ninety-five per cent of those “socialists” who have in effect capitulated either to the American bourgeoisie or the Stalinist bureaucracy are possessed in common by a thoroughly going disbelief in the capacity of the proletariat to play that role, we leave the subject for another occasion. But it is incontestable that up to now it has not played the role triumphantly.

1. One of the outstanding, curious of political terminology today is the persistent and anachronistic reference to “Soviet Russia” in place of the word “Russia” and its various derivatives. That “Socialist Russia” that too is wrong, but it is understandable. But there is plainly less Socialism in Soviet Russia than in Germany, France, England or the United States.

2. It is from the chapter on Feuerbach in the Marx-Engels, Anti-Dühring, Vorlesungen. The caption set down in The Revolutions of 1848 does not have its value in determining if Engels was grieved with apocalyptic vision — that has no importance. But they reveal how Engels judged the relationship between the disintegration of capitalist society and the part of the proletariat in the process — victim of the outcome or master of a regeneration. The failure up to now of the proletariat to play the latter part successfully is not our subject here. Except to say that ninety-five per cent of those “socialists” who have in effect capitulated either to the American bourgeoisie or the Stalinist bureaucracy are possessed in common by a thoroughly going disbelief in the capacity of the proletariat to play that role, we leave the subject for another occasion. But it is incontestable that up to now it has not played the role triumphantly.

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March, 1954