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DENISE AVENAS

Trotsky's Marxism PART 2

PATRICK CAMILLER

The Popular Fronts of the 1930s

A REPLY TO
MONTY JOHNSTONE



**Marxists in
the Second
World War**
BRIAN PEARCE

***The Growth and
Role of the
Mass Media***
RAYMOND WILLIAMS

**TASKS IN SPAIN~
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Letter to our readers

AGAINST MONOLITHISM

This issue of International marks the appearance of a new Editor and editorial team. We are confident that it will also mark the regular quarterly appearance of this journal. A few words in relation to how we perceive our tasks are therefore in order.

It is essential to start from an understanding of the situation which we confront in the sphere of ideas. Despite the fact that British social democracy still remains supreme as the unchallenged voice of the British working class in national politics, there have been a number of important developments which have altered the intellectual landscape as compared to the Forties, Fifties and early Sixties. The radicalisation which took place in Britain and the rest of Europe following May 1968 created the basis for a new resurgence of Marxism outside and to a large extent independent of the traditional apparatuses of the working class movement. The ideological weaknesses of British social democracy and its intelligentsia were further reinforced by the combination of a renewed economic recession and the simultaneous existence of a succession of Labour governments. This factor meant that compared to French, Italian or even Spanish communism the recuperative powers of a Labourist ideology are very slight in relation to an intelligentsia increasingly attracted to Marxism.

The concrete result of this can be seen in the continued success of New Left Review and the phenomenal success of the publishing house it has spawned, New Left Books [NLB]; the growth of Pluto Press and the appearance of the History Workshop Journal and the Bulletin of Socialist Economists are further indicators of the fact that in certain fields [History and Economics, to be precise] British Marxism is more developed than its continental counterparts. The laws of uneven development extend also to the field of theory. In the face of these developments the response of the organised far left has been woefully inadequate. The journal Labour Review, which played a useful role in the Fifties, has disappeared; and its sponsoring organisation, now known as the Workers Revolutionary Party, has abandoned even the pretence of developing Marxist theory and is instead engaged in other pursuits which have brought both itself and the revolutionary left as a whole into grave disrepute within the workers movement. Another journal which showed a great deal of promise in the early Sixties, International Socialism, has transformed itself into a monthly party-building magazine for its organisation, now known as the Socialist Workers Party. A group of militants expelled from the latter organisation a couple of years ago produced a journal called Revolutionary Communist, which also, despite our disagreements with some of its content, displayed great potential. Following the recent split in its editorial board we must regard its future, too, as being somewhat problematic.

It is rather ironic that one of the most lively journals of discussion and debate today does not belong to any of the groups of the far left, but to the Communist Party of Great Britain. Marxism Today, has initiated a number of important discussions and

debates. Despite our political and theoretical differences with the tradition which it represents we have to, in all honesty, remark that in recent years this journal has had more public debate than the journals of the Trotskyist organisations. This is a fact that can no longer be brushed aside or patronisingly dismissed by generalised references to the 'superiority of our tradition'. It has to be acknowledged and encountered. The article by Patrick Camiller we print in this issue is a recognition of this reality. Its harsh tone is explained by the provocative character of Monty Johnstone's anti-Trotskyism — a clear sign that even the 'liberal' wing of the CP still retains its Stalinist theoretical heritage on crucial questions.

The recent attacks on Trotskyism by large sections of the capitalist press, aided and abetted by ex-communists such as Mr Max Morris [nostalgic for the 'heroic period' of Stalinism — the Thirties — and desirous of reliving it even for a brief moment before collapsing into oblivion] and by aspiring leaders of the Labour Party such as Shirley Williams, make the task of clarifying our ideas even more vital. We intend to do this in *International* under the banner of 'Against Monolithism'. The future of the international working class movement is far too important to become the monopoly of any one group, however large or small. For us the battle of ideas is a vital part of our tradition. It is our main strength: for what gives us our importance, modest though it is, is not our numerical strength but the ideas for which we fight and which we attempt to put into practice. Monolithism in thought inevitably leads to a monolithism in practice, and organisations basing themselves on the theoretical gains of Trotskyism are not immune to this development. The history of British Trotskyism is a tragic confirmation of this assertion. We therefore intend to avoid vulgar polemics or slanders. Our pages will be open to real debate and we hope that many readers who are not members or even sympathisers of the Fourth International will contribute to this journal.

In this issue we publish the concluding section of

an important text by Denise Avenas. Avenas is a militant of the Ligue Communiste Revolutionnaire [LCR], the French section of the Fourth International, and she writes regularly in both the theoretical journals of the Ligue, *Critique Communiste* and *Critiques De L'Economie Politique*, both of which can be obtained from Red Books, 182 Pentonville Road, London N1. The work of Avenas needs to be studied together with that of another militant of the Fourth International, Norman Geras. His *The Legacy of Rosa Luxemburg* has recently been published by NLB and is vital for understanding the issues involved in the great theoretical debates which preceded the Russian Revolution, and how some of them were resolved. The last chapter in Geras's book, 'Bourgeois Power and Socialist Democracy: On the Relation of Ends and Means', is particularly relevant in the light of recent attacks on Trotskyism.

We are also reviving a section entitled 'From the Archives' which used to appear in the *Journal Fourth International* during the Fifties. The function of this is to reprint old texts from the archives of the workers movement which, in our opinion, are either of pedagogic value or relate to many of the discussions which are taking place today. Brian Pearce's short article on the attitude of Trotskyists during the Second World War belongs to the former category and answers many existing misconceptions. It also enables us to take a self-critical look at our own past in a changed intellectual atmosphere, and we shall not be upset if Pearce's comments inaugurate a new discussion on the theme. In subsequent issues we shall be printing excerpts from a debate between R.P. Dutt and J.T. Murphy on revolutionary strategy in the Twenties, as well as some previously unpublished articles by the old Bolshevik leader Christian Rakovsky. Those of our readers engaged in research of various sorts will probably come across a great deal of interesting material in the course of their work and we hope that they will submit relevant extracts of it for publication in this section.

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The Growth and Role of the Mass Media

RAYMOND WILLIAMS

On 23 January a series of ten open forums on 'Marxism and the Mass Media' started in London. Organised by members of Equity and the National Union of Journalists in the International Marxist Group, they were an attempt to stimulate a discussion on these very neglected questions in the broad revolutionary left. The first, on the development and role of the mass media, was attended by 130 people and introduced by RAYMOND WILLIAMS, author of several books and essays on the subject. We re-print his introductory speech below.

We must start with the common view of the media on the left, which is that they're owned by the capitalist class to indoctrinate popular and working class opinion. This is so often, in effect, true that for many purposes it is not necessary to look further. But once you really begin to apply your mind to the whole range of developing problems of the use of these very different media in this kind of society, you find that you have to make the definitions at almost every point a good deal more precise.

For example, if you compare the organisation of the media as institutions in a capitalist society like Britain, in one like the United States, in one like France or in West Germany, you immediately find significant differences. One difference is that in this country the press is very much more centralised. A national press is predominant in ways that it is not in France or West Germany or the United States. This immediately alters the whole status of the press as an institution.

Second, in this country, although there is now — after the pressure campaign of the Fifties — a commercial television network which resembles that of the United States in its majority services, we have had since the Twenties in Britain a very particular kind of organisation of broadcasting, the public corporation. This is still the majority service and the predominant one in sound. To define this in simple terms in relation to a capitalist economic system is obviously not easy. So the simple proposition that these are capitalist organisations already has to be qualified.

On the first point that I mentioned, the national press, a very specific feature of British capitalism, I think that nobody yet has really found an adequate historical explanation. It obviously has something to do with the earliness of the British Industrial Revolution, the development, at a time when the press itself was developing, of a railway network in a comparatively compact country. This enabled the national press to override the provincial press and the local press in ways that have never been possible in the United States and that were, on the whole, not attempted in France and Germany. But the predominance of the national press in this country affects the content and structure of the press in very specific ways, and there are quite observable political differences between the Fleet Street

papers and the network of local and provincial newspapers which we find. So that's a correction of structures.

The public corporations — this perhaps needs more careful analysis than anything in the whole media range. Because of course it is a familiar liberal tenet, and with some interesting evidence to support it, that the institution of an independent public corporation was a way of taking this most powerful medium out of the market and at the same time out of crude political control. Now again, if you compare an organisation like the BBC with the American networks or with state broadcasting systems in France, Italy, West Germany, you find a significant difference in the existence of that public corporation. At the same time, and this involves a quite complicated theoretical argument, I think, it is impossible to live in this society watching the behaviour of that public corporation and accept the proposition of independence in the terms in which it is offered — an independence at a certain level from competing political parties. But is it really an independence from the state?

The fact is that there is something very specific here about British culture which allows a different kind of organisation. We have an unusually compact ruling class with very deeply shared cultural assumptions and habits, which allows much of the effective state life of this country, things which would in other countries be the province of the state and of official agencies, to be delegated to public appointed authorities which have a certain measure of autonomy. If you look into the real relation of those corporations to the state, then you find of course that they are subject in financial policy finally to the state, that the heads of the organisation are appointed, a characteristic of this method, but are then given the kind of term of service which takes them beyond the patronage of any particular party government, if we look into the structure of say the governors of the BBC, the governors of the IBA, comparable bodies like the Arts Council and so on, we see a very specific feature of British life.

Unless one analyses it carefully, the slogan which we use is rebutted by what is actually no more substantial a slogan — that Britain has solved the problem, has moved between the twin dangers of the state control of the broadcasting service (which in France in the Sixties, for example, was complete)

and the purely market service which is characteristic of the great part of American television. We have to understand the specifics of this peculiar British structure of the autonomous yet always essentially state linked organisation. That it is state linked rather than state directed is a crucial precision.

Now the next thing that we have to say is that there is a very complex relationship between two factors which you can see throughout the development of modern communications systems, which leads us to have to make a much more precise statement than the simple one of indoctrination.

Let me just go back for a moment to the history of the press in this country. Now the press was almost entirely a creation of the bourgeoisie in the 18th century against the remnants of a feudal and post-feudal state. The newspapers in the 18th century won their commercial independence and in the course of it a very important area of freedom of the press including, for example, the right to report parliamentary debates, a battle which lasted a generation. Because the newspapers were linked to a precise commercial function they existed as combined news and advertising sheets — the advertising then, of course, being primarily classified advertising appropriate to that stage of the economy. But that battle against state control, state censorship has remained a permanent memory in the press as an institution and more widely in this society. It is why it is so difficult to talk about alternatives to the present system. That battle, which was real and which was fought over a hundred years, was against a very deliberate state attempt to prevent the emergence of the independent newspaper at all. It wasn't after all until the 1850s that the taxes on knowledge, the stamp duties on the press, the monopoly patent theatre controls about drama, were finally removed when the bourgeois class had finally reached ascendancy in British society. So that fight is real and we must never forget it.

At the same time that was still very much a small press serving local communities or, where it was national, serving to dispense information from London to the provinces in what ultimately was a two way process. In the early 19th century something very interesting happened, which was the emergence of an independent, radical press which preceded the availability of the vote. If you look at that early 19th century press, the *Political Register*, the *Black Dwarf*, and all the others, or if you look at the very important institution of the Sunday paper which preceded the daily paper by a long way in terms of popularity, you will find that this was the first popular press and that in its early stages it was essentially independent. We must distinguish between the radical and the Sunday press, a thing which would take

longer than I have. But just briefly: the radical press was tied to political campaigns, mainly then for the vote but also on direct economic issues; the Sunday press carried on elements of perhaps an older popular culture but certainly the new urban popular culture. It included a lot of reports of crime, a lot of reports of scandal — indeed, the Sunday newspaper as a distinct phenomenon is quite traceable from the 1820s to the present day — but it had a popular readership, often a collective readership when buying it was beyond the powers of individuals. And even those Sunday papers of crime and scandal were linked to radical politics because the audience was of that kind.

There's a very popular myth which you can still find in quite standard history that the popular press only occurred in Britain at the end of the century, in the so-called Northcliffe revolution when people, having been taught to read by the board schools set up under the Education Act of 1870, had this cheap newspaper provided for them. This is totally untrue. At any time in the 19th century there were more than enough people to read, to sustain the modern circulation of the *Daily Mirror*. It was never a case of waiting for literacy, and the error of that history is that they are tracing the daily political newspapers. But what happened in the early 19th century was the emergence first of the radical campaigning newspaper and second of this very specific kind of Sunday paper with this mix of interests.

Now in the second half of the nineteenth century, as this was beginning to expand, there was an incorporation of those interests which effectively leads to the present day. Papers which had been independent until the '80s of the last century — most newspapers were typically owned by one printing family or one printing house — were incorporated in the first versions of the corporate press-houses that we have today. In the 1880s and '90s what happened was the emergence of corporate organisations of great bodies of newspapers and magazines owned by a single owner or firm; and second, and this is crucial, the corporation of advertising money of a new kind as the basis of a cheap paper. It's a fact of 19th century history that however popular the papers were, and however much advertising there was on the streets, there was hardly anything in the press except the classified advertising. Northcliffe's revolution was to bring display advertising into the economic organisation of the press and on that basis sell the paper well below cost. That has been the specific economics of the British press ever since.

As everybody knows, because the crises are recurrent, the British press has since that time never sold on its ordinary



British Leyland factories could pay their way but are failing to do so because of manifestly avoidable stoppages.



British Leyland said tonight they shared Mr Wilson's exasperation at the series of futile strikes within the corporation.

Paul Walton, co-author of the book *Bad News*, spoke about *The Mass Media and the Class Struggle* in the second forum of the *'Marxism and the Mass Media'* series. Among his examples was the above: while Wilson's speech attributed British Leyland's decline to investors and management as well as workers, news bulletins interpreted it solely as an attack on workers.

revenue from readers. It has been essentially dependent on large supplies of advertising revenue of a block kind, to the extent where it accounts for anything between 50 and 56 per cent in the daily and Sunday press. Now this leads to a very important point. In the last 20 years we have seen one national newspaper after the other disappear in financial crises. Some of them one was sorry to see go, others at best indifferent. But it has had a particular political effect—there is no national press that I know of which has as limited a political spectrum as ours. I mean basically as you go left for really distributed papers you stop at the *Guardian*, there is nothing to the left of that. This is very unusual in even quite comparable capitalist societies.

Second, those national papers which closed — the *News Chronicle*, the *Daily Herald*, the old radical Sunday paper *Reynold's News* — all had circulations of a very large size by comparison with those of any other capitalist society. That is to say, they closed with their circulation typically between 1 million and 2 million. The largest circulation of any newspaper in France, a similar sized country with a very similar kind of economic organisation, is today about 650,000. How is it, in this very real case which affects people, the disappearance of papers (on the whole including a much higher than average proportion of papers on the left), that this has happened within this very specific British press structure? It is because the economy since that reorganisation in the 1890s has been based not on how many papers you can sell — because on that criterion papers could survive in this country in the same way that they do in France on circulations much lower than the present level of viability — but on the availability of advertising money. And in this way, in a much more interesting way than simply the fact that the owners of the press are capitalists (which is self-evident), you have a tie between the press and the nature of this specific capitalist economy which directly affects the range of papers that are made available.

The possibility of starting new ones, the possibility of maintaining a full political range, all are determined by this fact. Why did the *News Chronicle* die? Because it had a large proportion of elderly — and in advertising agents' terms Class C, D and E readers. In other words, for an advertiser it was not an important medium. For people reading the newspaper it was still clearly very important, but for advertisers it was not interesting. This is happening and I would like to predict will continue to happen because at the moment not more than two or three of our national newspapers could be guaranteed a life beyond five years. Now this is not just a general feature of capitalism to be resolved into a slogan, it is a very specific feature of British capitalist society and a now very deeply embedded structure of the development of the press economy in Britain.

Now it is at that point that one has to introduce the other complication, which is the contradiction between the bourgeois market and what is a perfectly straightforward, discoverable intention of managing news and opinion. It is not indoctrination. Indoctrination requires a much more controlled, authoritarian situation than this one. You can talk of indoctrination if you like in a school where you have a captive audience. You cannot seriously, I think, talk of indoctrination in a situation where people can choose at least over a limited range and in which they can choose whether to take the thing or not at a quite basic level. What you have is something more interesting and something which explains many of the local contradictions in which people working in the media and people observing it find themselves caught. Because at a certain level, if you look at the economic interests and the political affiliations of the people who own the press, it is not surprising that the press puts the kind of political and social lines it does. The effects of this are very deep. They select the issues, they select ways of treating them, and there is a permanent job of defence and enlightenment against those procedures.

On the other hand, there is all the time another kind of pressure. For example, take the phenomenon of the *Daily Mirror*, which began as a simple picture paper, in a fairly

typical ideology of the early 20th century, for women. Women would not want to read about politics, anyway they didn't have the vote, but they would like to look at pictures, they would like to read some gossip, they would like the events of the day treated in a lively way. This was the ideology of first the *Sketch* and then the *Mirror*. Now take the transformation of the *Mirror* which occurred in the 1940s. Transformation is perhaps a strong word, but in any case a substantial alteration. The *Daily Mirror* campaigned in a radical way, as it said, now on behalf of the men in the army. It campaigned at a certain level against the old ruling class. That adjective 'old' is important, I think, because it is still a way of identifying this kind of radicalism — you campaign against the 'old' ruling class and not the current one. It had a distinct political shift which at a certain level doesn't correspond at all to the political affiliations or the economic interests of its owners.

Now take this problem across for a moment to the case which is exactly comparable, of the content of ITV and BBC, and indeed the basis of some interesting comparisons between them. If the purpose were what we sometimes say it is, in understandable anger when there is some case of blatant political management of the news, that this is simply indoctrination, then there would be certain things which get done on BBC, which get done on ITV, which get reported in the press, which would never be there at all. You've only got to go to a really managed news-system, read a Spanish newspaper for example until a year or so ago, or even go to the fascist press itself or to a good deal of the East European press, to see what a system which is really concerned with excluding other points of view, other kinds of fact, what that's like. Here again, as you compare this system with those systems, a liberal proposition is waiting which says: 'Here after all the press is open to all points of view, it reports the facts as they are, it reports the argument as it runs, with contributions from all points of view'.

Actually something much more interesting is happening. At a certain level the ideological function, which in certain parts and actually on certain issues is very explicit and is often a quite identifiable part of the internal structure of an organisation, is contradicted by the requirements of a bourgeois market of an ordinary kind. I mean these people, precisely because they are of the class that one identifies, are interested in making profit in a competitive market with their particular commodity as against others. What is true at that level of the capitalist market has been true between the major broadcasting corporations since there have been two competing for an audience. At this point something really much more interesting than indoctrination begins to occur. And this is the process which in the end you have to analyse as the attempt to incorporate — which, however, is always likely to fail if it is done in too crude a way, and which typically requires people from outside the old ruling class to do it.

This is the most interesting phenomenon of the last 30 years. To give a brief example from the BBC/ITV competition of the late Fifties and early Sixties — people say now: 'What a breath of life ITV brought to television as against the stuffy old BBC. How they pushed forward the frontiers of television'. And at that level it's true. If you look at what the BBC was like before there was competition it is true, because the BBC was then in its old sound radio position, where the unity of the culture rather than any particular political intention was expressing itself in a particular set of relationships with listeners and viewers. These were always the relations of an educated class to — the usual word was 'uneducated'. This word 'uneducated', which lasted after 80 years of compulsory education — a very interesting commentary on the education system — was the word they used. Or the 'half-educated', which is an equally interesting comment. It's very interesting, if you look at it, that that distinctly identifiable upper class culture (even when they were being entertaining the tone was still there) was bypassed by what? Not by British popular culture — that is the trap that is prepared for one, in the official accounts of



the development of that organisation: that the old stuffy upper class monopoly was swept away by a wave of democratic sentiment, as the first Director-General said. No, but by American imports! The British working class audience, faced by a choice between American imports and what the English upper class was offering it, fairly quickly made its preferences felt.

Now at that point there is a great danger of taking what is the purely market phenomenon, with interesting implications for the state of mind of the society, as if it were a popular phenomenon; and the same thing is true about the *Mirror*. If you look at what the *Mirror* campaigned about, I remember reading it then and reading it on through the elections of the Fifties. In the election of 1955, for example, actually sitting in a polling station at 7 o'clock in the morning, I saw the *Mirror* and there on the front page was a picture of Sir Anthony Eden at Eton (it's been reappearing in the obituaries), and I was sitting to my embarrassment with a working class woman who was the Tory teller, and she said, 'I don't think his lot will get in', although she was telling for his party! One of those complications of British life . . .

The point was, if you look at that situation, the resentment or the contempt or the sense that these are other people was very skilfully incorporated. The whole language of the *Mirror* through that evolution from the Forties to the Fifties was a very skilful miming — it is miming — of colloquial English, to reassure people that these are not the all-too-familiar voices of the established culture but these are people like yourself. You know you couldn't even, as Hoggart said years ago, say 'It's going to rain' — which is colloquial enough. You had to say 'Take a mac, mate', because this sounded folksy. It established the sales, and these were skills that were very highly rewarded. Let's not underestimate them, they took a long time to work out — at a certain level you had to persuade people that you were speaking for them and in their way against this identifiable old culture which was not theirs. Although obviously as an institution, and on every decisive level of political choice and economic affiliation, the very organ doing it was part of the class which it was presumably rejecting. But precisely what it was rejecting was an *old* ruling class, and so it couldn't be identified with something as substantial as IPC, which is a modern ruling class phenomenon.

Now this means that we must be very careful when we talk about indoctrination. On the one hand, what is happening is not as simple as that; and on the other hand, as it is perceived that it is not as simple as that, there is a very simple relapse into a position which I've seen a good many people get into, and which I think is a peculiarly dangerous one. This is that, failing to understand the inwardness of this phenomenon — and it's a very deep phenomenon — people acquire a contempt, which is always possible in the political vanguard, a contempt for the majority of their own fellow countrymen. They say, 'How can they be fooled by that? . . . How can they choose to take in the propaganda, the selection of views and opinion which is so evidently that of another class?'

Now you can only understand this phenomenon — and it's a very complex one in the way it works out — if you put forward the notion of incorporation rather than indoctrination. That is to say, it is crucial for that kind of popular press — as it was for the incorporation of the genuinely

independent popular press of the early 19th century — that the real interests within existing society of the majority of readers be spoken to. You had to include those interests — the crime was there, the scandal was there, because people wanted to read them. The sport was there as organised sport developed. Without these interests the old independent political papers of the first half of the century could not compete, although when it came to political opinion on its own, whenever it could be tested, they still held the majority of the class. But when it came to buying a paper there were all these other interests.

The very fact of a politically campaigning paper, the independent paper, excluding the existing cultural affiliations of the majority of its potential readers, has this self-defeating effect. The commercial popular press, which is a very specific thing, is extremely careful to incorporate, and it learns a language for its political argument. It learns a language for its handling of news which at a very deep level involves the process of the self-identification of the reader with much that is apparently being spoken. This is done, if not in their name, then apparently from their position and with their kind of life-style and interests. And this is often very different from what they will hear if they hear someone actually much closer to them in political interest and in real experience who has become politically committed. This has also happened in commercial advertising on an extreme scale with the careful miming of other people's feelings — for example, taking great care to get an actress to look like a housewife who can't quite say 'biological' without being trained, if she's going to talk about a washing powder. This is the point of people who understand that 'biological' might be a trick word and who therefore get the identification.

Now all of this is of course a trick, but it is the crucial theoretical correction to what is often our simple received notion of indoctrination. Of course that occurs in certain places and at certain times, but it is the incorporation which I think is the true challenge to the left. If you think incorporation only happens to other people, then I just say you're lucky. Because every time I've ever done any analysis of this, I've found how many of my own feelings, responses are triggered. Take one that I'm a sucker for, just to conclude: I'm a Welsh rugby fan, so if somebody wearing a Welsh rugby jersey comes on with a pint of someone's beer and says 'Boyo' (of course he has to say 'Boyo', he doesn't say 'chaps') I have to really work it out.

The point about this is that we are faced undoubtedly with very specific phenomena of late capitalist society, which we are often still describing in the terms of early capitalist society. In terms of their economic structure, the increasing movement towards corporate monopoly ownership, the exclusion of media which do not meet their economic criteria, the steady control (of which we should be increasingly reminded) of the so called independent public corporations, by the very fact of appointment from the state at their controlling levels — all these phenomena require the most detailed investigation. My argument is that if we look at the historical evolution we can find the material for this analysis, so we shall have in many ways to learn a new language for addressing ourselves to the problem of the media in our own times.

William Tyndale and the Crisis in Education

KEN JONES

In the autumn of 1976 the British Government and sections of the educational state apparatus launched a major effort to restructure the existing education system, particularly in its relation to the economic and ideological requirements of industrial capital. This has led it to instigate an attack aimed at the gains made by the working class in education over the last 30 years. But this attack has not taken an explicit form — instead it has seemingly been directed at previous trends in bourgeois educational thought, and their results in practice.

In the post-war period, and especially in the 1960s, discussion of education in relation to the needs of the British economy had in practice been over-shadowed by a persistent emphasis on the educational needs of the individual child. Debate in this style has been definitively ended by the statements of the last few months. The 'Yellow Book', prepared by sections of the national school inspectorate in response to a request from James Callaghan, put the new emphasis very concisely:

'Schools may have overemphasised the importance of preparing boys and girls for their roles in society, compared with the need to prepare them for their economic role.' [1]

In October 1976 Callaghan made a speech in Oxford which, in spite of certain verbal gestures in the opposite direction, was a clear encouragement to the reactionaries: 'He spelt out the goal of education. "It is to equip children to the best of their ability for a lively and constructive place

in society.'" [2] Taking his cue, John Methven, Director-General of the CBI, responded: 'A shift from unrestricted freedom of choice towards a sharper concern for the national interest in the shaping of educational policy is necessary.' [3] By the end of the year, the Department of Education and Science had announced the opening of a 'Great Debate' on (preselected) educational issues, and the chairman of the Schools Council [4], Sir Alex Smith, felt able to denounce the education system in the most vehement terms yet: 'Education... has rejected any serious economic responsibility. From this morally reprehensible stance, the education service has no right, in my judgement, to a larger portion from the resources of our struggling economy.' [5]

What was the reasoning behind this concerted attack on an education system which until recently had enjoyed an inter-class consensus? Primarily, of course, the over-riding motive for the attack lies in the impossible contradiction between the present economic crisis of British capitalism and its previous attempts to expand and modernise the education system. Secondly, the bourgeoisie is acutely aware of a social crisis which, in some areas of society, imperils its ideological legitimacy.

Education is one such area. But the relative success of the initial bourgeois attacks on the education system does not rest upon their ability to spread ideas of necessary sacrifice in the face of economic disaster. No — the fact is that the



William Tyndale headmaster Terry Ellis explains at a press conference why the teachers went on strike

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themes of the attack on education have been able to grip the popular consciousness because they relate simultaneously to a deep crisis in reformist thinking and seem to respond to what is experienced by the masses as a crisis in education. What is new in the present situation is the spectacle of sections of the working class being drawn into a movement whose aims are thoroughly retrogressive.

William Tyndale: The Birth of a Scapegoat

One issue above all has forced open the floodgates of mass consciousness to the new wave of reactionary propaganda: that of William Tyndale, a junior school in Islington, where the bourgeoisie — through the media, through an 'independent' inquiry, and through its local government apparatus — has been able to 'prove' that certain 'progressive' teaching methods, particularly when allied to radical political views, result in the lowering of educational standards. It has been able to fabricate an image of irresponsible teachers, both dilettante and elitist, presiding over an educational chaos in which the life chances of children — particularly of working class children — are seriously damaged. It has been able to 'establish' an equation between certain forms of teaching — democratic collaboration between teachers, a substantial measure of free choice for children — and educational crisis. Moreover, it has been able to do this without any serious counterposition being put by the National Union of Teachers, by any section of the labour movement, or by well-known 'progressive educators.

Why has the ruling class been successful on this issue — so much so that it is applying the rhetoric it learned from the Tyndale case to 'explain' the educational crisis as a whole? [6] Certainly the teachers have made tactical mistakes, but even if these were gigantic, they could not explain the teachers' present isolation. What is revealed is the inability of reformism to provide any explanation for, answers to, or action around the crisis in education. But it is not only the weakness of reformism that has been spotlighted by the Tyndale case and the 'Great Debate' — it is also the fact that no alternative exists to it in the working class at large, and that even within the far left a response to the new educational crisis has been slow and grossly inadequate.

But it is the political spinelessness of reformism that is immediately most evident. *Tribune* drew crumbs of consolation from a sentence in Callaghan's speech which

spoke of 'those who claim to defend standards but who in reality are simply seeking to defend old privileges and inequalities' [7], while ignoring the fact that the speech as a whole was welcomed by Rhodes Boyson, newly appointed Tory spokesman on education. [8]

The Communist Party went even further. It welcomed the Auld Report on Tyndale (which connected what it saw as the teachers' attempts to make 'school a vehicle for social change' with educational inefficiency — and thus provided a basis for the Inner London Education Authority to take action against the teachers), and defended in its teachers' journal not the Tyndale teachers but the state apparatus: 'We want good authorities and a good DES. It is (their) responsibility not to allow any developments which may be to the detriment of children: to... prevent deterioration of educational standards, be it through... staff turnover... or incapability' [9] (my emphasis). The *Morning Star* later commended the Auld Report as 'forthright' and 'patently objective'. [10]

Why is such paralysis and capitulation widespread in the face of the most sweeping attacks on the educational gains of the working class? Obviously everything is overshadowed by the collaboration of the workers' leaderships with the Labour Government's attacks on living standards, and the resulting demoralisation. But the reason lies specifically in the process whereby the reforms fought for by the working class have been 'twisted to fit the logic of capitalist society' (to utilise a phrase of Robin Blackburn's), with a resultant loss of political consciousness on issues such as education; and in the historic inability of the working class leaderships to develop any programme of struggle that would maintain the independence of working class politics from the bourgeois state that tries to incorporate it. In the course of economic struggles this process of incorporation is continually interrupted by the spontaneous and elemental upsurge of the mass movement (for example, the opposition to the Industrial Relations Act, the miners' strikes, etc.). In education, on the other hand, the bourgeoisie has had thirty uninterrupted years to 'twist' the initial democratic reforms forced upon it by working class pressure into measures geared to fit education to the technical and ideological requirements of capitalism, and to depoliticise (at least up until now) much of the education debate.

How exactly has this process occurred? Undoubtedly the 1944 Education Act was passed amid a strong working class desire for educational change. It marked a certain 'democratisation' of the education system — grammar schools were brought into the state system, and working class children were given a greatly increased access to the education system as a whole. GCT Giles, a CP member and President of the NUT in 1944-45, gave an account of the

agitation for a democratic education system: 'For the first time there was real evidence of a popular demand for a democratic system of education... The Council for Educational Advance (was) the first direct and official alliance between the NUT and the working class movement... Education was a live issue in the General Election, and at the municipal elections. The combined result is a lively and sustained interest among parents. Meetings and conferences dealing with the Act are almost invariably well attended.' [11]

But the limits and weaknesses of this movement are also revealed. Giles criticised the existing education system because it was 'inadequate for an epoch of rapid scientific advance, and unsuitable for the age of the common man' [12]. This vulgar stress on social unity rather than class struggle characterised the entire reform movement, and was entirely in keeping with Labour Party social philosophy. In no way could it inspire any programmatic alternative to the '44 Act — nothing related to the content of education, or to its ideological function. Giles conceived of the movement's task only as to add 'punch' to the state proposals.

It was with this ideological equipment that the working class fought in the 1950s for comprehensive education. The Labour Party-inspired London School Plan of 1947, for instance, motivated comprehensive education on the grounds that, 'It was a matter of first rate importance for modern society that life in school should promote a feeling of social unity...' [13] The reformers ultimately received the backing of the Bow Group of the Tory Party and the Gaitskellite right wing of the Labour Party, who found no difficulty in adapting the ideology of the movement to their own ideas of social engineering. Indeed, it came to form a major strand of the Government's own reports. [14]

The working class movement did not challenge this framework. It left others to decide questions of the content and organisation of the curriculum, of the regime in the schools. No tradition of an independent class attitude to education was developed.

But **direct bourgeois control** of education was nevertheless weakened — not by a planned, politicised working class campaign, but in a profoundly unconscious, spontaneous way. This process had several aspects; the most conscious was the determination of the labour movement to continue to extend the availability of education to working class children, and to restrict privilege. This continual demand for equality of educational opportunity **set limits** to the ruling class's ability to determine the structure of the education system. In addition, the general realisation that 'economic development' impelled changes in educational method meant in practice that a 'progressive' wing of the educational state apparatus developed — with the twin aims of gearing education to technical change and increasingly integrating a previously relatively 'unsocialised' layer of working class children into a role as 'citizens' of a skilled, modern society. This, coupled with the pressure of the spontaneous resistance to schooling of working class youth, meant that a flexible and 'child-centred' curriculum developed, together with a certain relaxation in the schools' regime.

Moreover, the existing ethical and humanist bias of English education — dating from Matthew Arnold — has built into it a strong attachment to the development of the 'individual' as well as a general hostility to the sort of utilitarian principles invoked by the 'needs of industry'. The post-war capitalist strategy of expanding and modernising education has thus not only found itself cramped by the pressure of the working class, but filtered through entrenched ideas of a humanist, individual-centred, critical curriculum. Sir Alex Smith signals the bourgeoisie's sour, retrospective perception of this process: 'The Robbins Report contained one big flaw — the assumption that a large stock of well-educated people is unquestionably good for the country. It is an assumption that is wrong — if the process of educating them is such as to create in them a dislike for being involved in the means whereby the country

earns its living among nations.' [15]

These processes, developing relatively autonomously from the main front of class struggle, created a sharper contradiction between what happened in the schools and the direct economic and ideological needs of capitalism. The bourgeoisie is now thoroughly alarmed that 'its' reforms have created in education a major area of social crisis, where its authority is spontaneously challenged by growing numbers of teachers and students. Yet it moves now not just to 'de-autonomise' education but, with characteristic opportunism, to exploit the fact that the crisis in education affects layers of the working class as much as it does the bourgeoisie, and to present itself demagogically as the saviour of the workers from a crisis it explains as progressive-engendered. In this way it hopes not merely to re-stabilise education, but to win support for authoritarian solutions to the crisis in society as a whole. In education, specifically, it aims by its campaign to lead a popular crusade that will brush aside the opposition and ultimately have the effect of displacing the ideology previously dominant in education — which could be termed democratic/humanist — with a new technicist ideology that will have as a major form of social integration a forceful initiation into the role of wage labourer, accompanied by a far more technocratic conception of society.

The main factor which permits this is the historic weakness of the working class on these questions — a weakness that takes the form of a reliance upon the bourgeois democratic state to realise educational reform, and a consequent lack of involvement in the educational debate — so that the bourgeoisie's new demagogy has some plausibility for an unprepared and inexperienced class, which is nevertheless profoundly dissatisfied with education as it is. On top of this, the response of 'progressive' educationalists to the attacks has been a stunned silence. Deprived by the right-wing turn of its base in the state apparatus, historically isolated from the working class movement, into whose ranks their ideas did not penetrate, they are easily browbeaten by the new ranting of the 'Yellow Book' of 'hard and irreducible economic facts' that compel changes. The silence of these figures alone would have a powerful disorienting effect on progressive classroom teachers. But it is not the only hostile circumstance...

The National Union of Teachers: Collaborators with the State

The NUT, despite the wage militancy which pushed it into membership of the TUC in the late 1960s, does not in any sense define its perspective on education from the point of view of the working class. Rather, it rode the tide of social reform to place itself in a good position to determine its outcome — in some cases it entered into the state apparatus to do this (for instance, its preponderance on the Schools Council). The heights of its influence have been gained by political collusion with the state, and by accommodation to the prevailing ideology. As Schools Council publications show [16], the NUT has been practising a 'social compact' in education for a number of years, in which it exchanges an independent voice on education for an agreement to accept the ideological consensus among the dominant class. [17] Thus the NUT leadership's response to the attacks has so far been motivated primarily by its desire to maintain its influence in the state apparatus. It has, for instance, avoided any comment on the content of Callaghan's speech. The basic strategy is not to fight the offensive but to make sure

that the NUT has a part in helping, if need be, to implement its outcome. Hence remarks from the NUT executive such as: 'No reform or development can be achieved without the willing cooperation of the teaching profession.' [18]

Faced only with this response, the state is increasingly confident that — given the continued collaboration of trade union leaders with the Government on the central issues of the day — it can substantially alter the character of education and reverse many of the historic gains of the working class, through a popular and demagogic campaign culminating in a more direct intervention of 'industry' into the schools, and by an alteration of the role of sections of the state apparatus, particularly the inspectorate. [19]

The watchword of this campaign is 'accountability': which signifies an obedience of teachers to the dictates of industry, disguised in many cases as a form of popular control. In this way progressive experiment and teacher autonomy would be curbed. The consequences of excesses in the previous course are dramatically epitomised for the media by the case of Tyndale, whose lesson can be summed up as 'progressive education causes the crisis in the schools'. Anti-democratic, politically motivated teachers are seen as the bringers of disorder: "'Mr. Haddow wanted to destroy this society, didn't he?'" asked barrister John Williams of Ellis during the enquiry.' [20]

Consequently teachers like this are portrayed as the worst enemies of working class children, particularly those children set on using educational quality as a means of individual advance. It is this theme which is at the heart of the anti-Tyndale propaganda. Whereas right-wing opposition to reform in education had in the past been patently elitist in character [21], the Tyndale issue allowed the bourgeoisie to pose as the defenders of a new layer of working class children, underprivileged as a result of progressivism.

What actually happened? The teachers explained their practice in the book they wrote: 'Instead of opting for putting all their efforts into satisfying the group (middle class parents) which could wield the most power, perhaps at the expense of other children, the Tyndale staff concentrated on the

disadvantaged child, and in accordance with their policies of greater involvement of parents were completely open about this. This led to pressure, both from the aspiring working class, who already felt hostility towards this group of families, and the middle class, who wanted the school run exclusively for their children.' [22]

It was this choice that aroused the wrath of the 'middle class' parents — who would have accepted progressive methods alone, but not the corresponding allocation of resources and teaching time that the staff made. [23] It was this real extension of the gains previously made through the relaxation of authoritarianism, the further eroding of competitiveness between children, a flexible and child-centred curriculum, accompanied by an almost unknown practice of collective decision-making, and the allowing to children of a real degree of choice, that made the Tyndale teachers exceptional, and provoked an attack on them; even though it was not proved that the children's standards of educational attainment were falling. For in what they did they implicitly broke the 'social compact' between teachers, the state and the 'community' which normally ensures that teaching takes place within the values and purposes of the 'accepted ideas of society'. As the teachers put it, in the present system, 'Power is granted to the heads only so long as they exercise it in accordance with the wishes of the political masters.' [24]

The political aftermath of the Tyndale affair centres on the realisation by the bourgeoisie that this 'social compact' is far too lax and ill-defined to provide an adequate framework for a project that aims to draw the education system much more closely towards 'the needs of industry'. This was brought out at the ILEA inquiry into Tyndale. Harvey Hinds, the discredited Labour Party head of ILEA, put the conventional view of the relation of teachers to the state apparatus and to the dominant ideology: 'In the English system, the attitude of the education authorities is one of leaving teachers to teach and managers to manage, relying on a mutual confidence which in experience is rarely shown not to exist.' [25]

But this 'mutual confidence', which rested on an ideological consensus, can no longer be said to exist with the developing contradiction between the schools and industry. Therefore a sharper intervention has to be made by the industrial bourgeoisie into the education debate, complemented by decisive steps by the central state apparatus to end the tradition of educational autonomy which had helped to allow similar — though not as thorough-going — practices to those at Tyndale to develop. Two astute bourgeois observers summed up the difference between the old and the new lines like this: 'The main point here is that whereas the Auld view demanded of the inspectorate that it assess, judge, and in the last analysis act as the agents of control of what went on in schools and classrooms, the Hinds view did not.' [26] The writers finish off with a call for action by the Secretary of State and the inspectorate.

Rarely can an imperative have been so rapidly met. The DES has proclaimed the 'Great Debate' on the themes of the content of the curriculum, 'monitoring and assessment of standards', teacher training, and 'the school and working life'. The key element in all this is the last one. It is the 'needs of industry' which are defining themselves more and more vociferously as the touchstone of educational performance. The DES initiative has licensed the crudest outbursts from captains of industry who have suddenly been presented with a platform from which to utter reactionary simplicities: 'Reading, 'riting and 'rithmetic seem to have been dropped. But for what? If the three Rs cannot be replaced by something better very soon, then I maintain that we should return to those basics of education... (schools go) too far towards permissiveness and free choice studies — preferences being for music rather than maths, social studies rather than science.' [27]

The labour movement has remained largely silent. It has confined itself to reiterating the inter-class arguments that were



Photo: LAURENCE SPARHAM (IFL)

Education Minister Shirley Williams made her attitude quite clear at the start of the 'Great Debate': poor schools, she said, were mainly the result of 'weaknesses in staffing'.

a commonplace in the 1960s but are entirely redundant now, when what is required is an intransigent critique of the bourgeois education system and a repudiation of working class responsibility for any aspect of the social crisis. [28] The historic separation of the labour movement from bourgeois progressive educational thought, and its inability to pose any alternative to the incorporation of working class demands into the projects of bourgeois democracy, have prevented the taking of any critical standpoint towards developments in the education system. Now the price is being paid. In the Tyndale case, for instance, the Labour Party school managers and the Labour-controlled ILEA were able to play on this lack of critical intervention, and of the elementary procedures of working class democracy, by a combination of secret manoeuvring and public demagoguery that aimed to capitalise on the insecurity of working class parents. It appeared completely legitimate that the ILEA should 'arbitrate' between the parents and the Tyndale teachers to settle the dispute — that, after all, is the accepted role of the state. It appeared legitimate, also, for the Labour-controlled ILEA to threaten action against the teachers because they went on strike (thus damaging the children's interests) without the teachers receiving any support from other trade unionists. So powerful is the idea of education's 'neutrality'.

The teachers faced squarely up to the fact that many working class parents determinedly rejected their aims and methods, supporting reactionary ideas. But ultimately they turned away from resolving the problem: 'It is extremely naive to think that bringing in parents and ancillary workers to run the schools is the answer. It may be a consciousness-raising question to bring them in and let them know what we're doing, but these are the most reactionary forces in education.' [29] This is both a recognition of the size of the problem and a failure to attempt to solve it. It is an approach that can only separate radical teachers from the working class and assist the right wing.

How should revolutionary Marxists approach the problem? First, we must recognise the roots of the problem: the way the bourgeoisie has been able to use the working class movement's commitment to the procedures of bourgeois democracy in the field of education (i.e. its willingness to see it as a matter for the state and the ruling political party), and to use its long separation from the debates which have gone on in the education system about its content and purpose, in order to drum up support for a reactionary solution to the social crisis and to promote splits between teachers and the working class. Rarely, too, has it been more concretely shown that issues having a substantial importance for the overall balance of class forces can be raised in an area apparently peripheral to the central clashes of the class struggle.

At the **Radical Education** conference in November 1976 the IMG put forward the following demands as a tentative attempt to concretise an alternative line to that which the bourgeoisie is employing so successfully:

(a) To explode the demagoguery of the bourgeoisie about community control — likely to be expressed in the Taylor Committee recommendation that 25 per cent of school managers should be nominated by local capitalists — we should explain that we are not against school management boards, but that they should be in their entirety elected by a general vote in the community, that they should be recallable, and that their meetings should be open to all observers.

(b) We should be absolutely against intervention by capitalist interests in the existing school curriculum.

(c) We should demand the withdrawal of the NUT and other trade unions from the Schools Council. Although the Schools Council is coming under attack from the inspectorate, it is nevertheless the place where, through such schemes as the CBI-TUC backed 'Industry Project', a new pattern of education is being developed which, sugared by



Photo: JOHN STURROCK (Report)

such descriptions as 'a partnership between the world of education and the world of work', is drawing education closer to the needs of the CBI. Opposed to this, we should say that the NUT should collaborate locally and nationally in developing a curriculum that is in the interests of working class children, and that defends the existing gains of the curriculum.

(d) Since the inspectorate — local and national — is more and more going to be a leading force in implementing the new campaign on 'standards', and since in the current circumstances to fight them by excluding them from the schools is to provide ammunition for the right wing, we should counter their campaign by demanding that inspections of schools be completely open. The staff at a school should have the right to discuss collectively with the

inspectorate before any report is published, and the right of simultaneous public reply. Delegations of parents and trade unionists should be allowed to see what is going on in the school, and, most important, when any inspection is announced, teachers and other trade unionists should demand the right to open the books of the local authority to see exactly the extent of the cuts, to determine exactly who really is damaging education.

(e) In addition to these general ideas, which we think start to provide a framework for general working class involvement in the fight against the right in education, we think it is absolutely necessary to resist immediately, without any preconditions, each and every victimisation of schools and teachers by the LEAs, the media, the DES. We should demand especially that the NUT organises such a campaign.

NOTES

Many of the points in this article are the result of discussion with members of the Teachers Commission of the IMG.

1. Quoted in the *Times Educational Supplement*, 15 October 1976.
2. *The Times*, 19 October 1976.
3. *TES*, 29 October 1976.
4. The Schools Council is a quasi-independent State body, charged with overseeing the curriculum.
5. *The Times*, 30 December 1976.
6. The Education Minister, Shirley Williams, now feels able to say that: 'Poor schools are more often so because of weaknesses in staffing and lack of leadership from the head, than simply because the building is old or the locality difficult' (*London Evening Standard*, 7 January 1977).
7. *Tribune*, 5 November 1976.
8. *The Times*, 30 December 1976.
9. *Education Today and Tomorrow*, Summer 1976.
10. *Morning Star*, 22 July 1976.
11. G. C. T. Giles, *The New School Tie* (London 1946), pp. 42-43.
12. *Ibid.*, p. vii.
13. Quoted in Rubinstein and Simon, *The Evolution of the Comprehensive School 1926-1972* (London 1973), p. 44.
14. 'There is much unrealised talent especially among boys and girls whose potential is masked by ... the limitations of home background. The country cannot afford this wastage, humanly or economically speaking' (*Half our Future: The Newsom Report 1983*).
15. *TES*, 10 September 1976.
16. E.g. Schools Council Working Paper 53, *The Whole Curriculum 13-16* (London 1975).
17. There are reasons for this which obviously go beyond the political positions taken by the NUT leadership, but there is not room here for a discussion of the class position occupied by teachers.
18. *The Teacher*, 22 October 1976.
19. See the 'leak' from the Taylor Committee on the management of schools, *TES*, 30 July 1976.
20. *William Tyndale: the Teachers' Story*, Terry Ellis et al (London 1976), p. 59.
21. E.g. 'In an influential book (1948) Eric James, High Master of Manchester Grammar School, argued the case for a separate education for the intellectual elite; the common school, he said, would lead to a "narrowing and impoverishment of the whole content of education".' Quoted in Rubinstein and Simon, *op. cit.*, p. 37.
22. Ellis et al, *op. cit.*, p. 71.
23. For this point, and a very good commentary on the issues raised by Tyndale, see an article by Dave Bailey in *Radical Education* 8, Spring 1977.
24. Ellis et al, *op. cit.*, p. 12.
25. *William Tyndale: Collapse of a School — or a System?*, John Grotton & Mark Jackson (London 1976), p. 78.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 79.
27. Sir Arthur Bryan, 'head of the Wedgwood china firm', in *London Evening Standard*, 6 January 1977.
28. See, for instance, the article by Max Morris, NUT Executive member, in *Labour Research*, December 1976.
29. Terry Ellis, interview in *Red Weekly*, 21 October 1976.

PATRICK CAMILLER

The Popular Fronts of the 1930s

A REPLY TO MONTY JOHNSTONE

During the last year *Marxism Today*, the theoretical journal of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB), has published a number of articles that attempt to give a reasoned defence of the Popular Front strategy of the 1930s, and to argue its relevance to the contemporary workers movement. [1] The appearance of this material in 1975-76 can hardly be explained simply by the coincidence of the fortieth anniversary of Popular Front governments in Spain and France. For the first time since 1947, the major Communist Parties of Western Europe are facing the possibility of entering into capitalist coalition governments in countries hit by social, economic and political crises of varying proportions. Indeed, the issue of Communist participation is currently at the centre of political debate in Europe.

We are rather doubtful about the short-term likelihood of this prospect. Nevertheless, it is hardly surprising that the attention of militants of a tiny party like the CPGB should be turned towards the historical actions and compromises of their comrades in Italy, Spain or France. Many a British Communist must look to the rise of a 'respectable' mass governmental party in any of these countries as the key to the development of the movement throughout Western Europe, and above all as the way in which the CPGB itself will reverse the recent decline in electoral support and at last become a significant force in national politics. At the same time, a governmental alliance between the Communist Party and Christian Democracy in Italy would pose serious problems of explanation. Despite the course of the right-wing politicians who stand at its head, the British labour movement has had a long tradition of opposing open coalition with bourgeois parties in peacetime — a tradition that was greatly strengthened by the defection of MacDonald in 1931. The CPGB will require all the unique 'dialectical' talents of its leading theoreticians to elucidate the progressive nature of wage freezes and other traditional austerity measures enforced by a Communist Minister of Labour, serving under a Christian Democratic Prime Minister.

More generally, the prospect of a lengthy period of capitalist instability, combined with and sharpened by the direct entry of the masses onto the political arena, makes necessary a thorough ideological preparation of the Communist Parties for their role in these events. Of major importance in this process is the attempt to consolidate an alternative political tradition to that of the Bolsheviks and

the revolutionary Comintern of the first four congresses. The most obvious choice is at the same time far out of reach — namely, that long opportunist line within classical social democracy running from the French Possibilists through Bernstein to the elder Kautsky. Although the 'Communist' Parties of Western Europe are marked by a similar abandonment of a perspective of revolutionary opposition to capitalist rule, they are still distinguished above all by their historical and present-day links with the bureaucratic apparatus of the Soviet state. Whatever certain individuals or currents may dream of, a straightforward fusion of Stalinism with social democracy may be effectively ruled out in the foreseeable future, if only because of the too great and hazardous disruption to the movement it would involve.

Antonio Gramsci, however, has the unquestionable advantages over Bernstein et al that he was a leader of a genuine workers' uprising, that he was a founder member of the Italian Communist Party; and above all... that he was kept out of directly political activity for the last eight years of his life by Mussolini's police. This is not the place to discuss the important theoretical work of Gramsci. What interests us here is rather the current vogue for his name in Communist Party circles, and the attempt to raise a few phrases about 'hegemony' or 'war of manoeuvre' to the status of magical algebraic formulae, capable of receiving the most crassly opportunist arithmetical content. Monty Johnstone provides a model of this banalisation of Gramsci's thought and of the skilful exploitation of the authority of his name. [2]

In a parallel process, the world Stalinist movement has for a number of years been devoting considerable energy to the canonisation of Georgi Dimitrov as the genuine inspirer of modern 'Communism'. Of course, we would not wish to challenge his credentials as the systematiser of the first, all important step in finding a 'new way' of looking at the bourgeoisie. However, it is ridiculous to assert, as does Monty Johnstone, that the Seventh World Congress of the Comintern (at which Dimitrov gave the main report) 'laid the basis... for the subsequent policies and perspectives of Communist Parties all over the world.' [3] As Johnstone well knows, the abrupt change in Stalin's perspectives at the time of the outbreak of the Second World War provoked considerable (if momentary) confusion in a CPGB trained for four years in the Popular Front perspectives. Thus, on 23

September 1939, John Gollan was still arguing for unity with the 'democratic' British bourgeoisie: 'Poland has fallen victim to Nazi aggression. Nazi aggression must be defeated by all the resources of the British people and the peoples of the British Empire.' [4] But just two weeks later, a hastily rewritten manifesto of the Central Committee argued that 'the reactionary imperialists of Britain and France... are not now fighting, as they maintain, for democracy against fascism or for peace against aggression, but for imperialist aims...' [5] Harry Pollitt found himself in the unenviable position of being the author of a public pamphlet, 'How to Win the War', which was on sale when the Comintern representatives brought news of the change of line; he was thus removed as General Secretary. It hardly needs to be added that, in his function of General Secretary of the Comintern, Dimitrov presided over this unceremonious ditching of the Popular Front, as well as over its revival in 1941.

The continuity of Stalinist politics is thus defined not by any political position taken in 1935, but by the socially privileged position of the Soviet bureaucracy and the subordination of the CPs to its international policies of class collaboration.

Further articles in *International* will examine the post-war ideological and political evolution of the Western Communist Parties, as well as the relationship between their strategies for 'democratic advance' and the Popular Fronts of the Thirties. Although they have in common a profound fear of the revolutionary mobilisation of the masses and a subordination of the workers movement to the bourgeoisie, they may nevertheless be distinguished in terms both of their goals and relation to party programme and of the directness of their correlation with Soviet foreign policy.

Finally, it is no accident that Johnstone's defence of the Popular Front takes the form of a polemic against Trotsky. In several European countries, CP leaders (and court intellectuals like Althusser) [6] are awakening to the terrible realisation that despite the past work of delirious slander and physical liquidation the programme and traditions of Bolshevism remain alive in thousands of fresh militants; that Trotskyism has never been a more powerful force in Western Europe than it is today; and that throughout the coming mass upsurges the Communist Parties will be accompanied every inch of the way by revolutionary Marxist criticism and organisation. The seriousness with which this threat is taken may be gauged by the range of literature that has recently been produced, from the crude diatribes of Basmanov in Moscow to the slightly better attuned and more sophisticated analyses of the British specialist in anti-Trotskyism — Monty Johnstone.

THE GERMAN PRELUDE

Monty Johnstone is quite correct to preface his apology for the Popular Front by a short survey of the Third Period and of the concrete tactics adopted by the German Communist Party. However, we believe that there is a much more intimate link between those heady days of ultra-leftism and later calls for national unity than is suggested by his simplistic notions of a 'correction of sectarian errors'.

Johnstone's presentation may be summarised as follows: Between 1928 and 1934 the Comintern failed to make a proper distinction between fascism and bourgeois democracy and even characterised social democracy as the 'social-fascist' mainstay of bourgeois rule against which the principal blow should be directed; in Germany, it thus counterposed to common defence of democracy the building of a 'united front from below' between the Communist Party and Socialist workers, and mistakenly saw the seizure of power as the immediate task. Trotsky correctly fought against these policies for a united anti-fascist front of the Communist and Socialist parties 'within the framework of

bourgeois democracy'. However, when the Comintern later adopted a defensive strategy 'which flowed from essentially the same premises as' Trotsky's critique, he reversed his own position and ended up advocating a perspective similar to that of the Third Period. [7]

Although Johnstone provides no explanation of the appearance of these sectarian 'mistakes', he describes accurately enough some of the outward features of the Third Period line. On the other hand, the only truthful element in the account of Trotsky's positions is that he consistently combatted the ultra-leftism of the Comintern. Now, we do not underestimate the scholarly effort that Johnstone has put into his articles — judging by the copious footnotes and references, he seems to have paid especial 'attention' to Trotsky's writings on Germany. [8] However, whether consciously or unconsciously, the fruits of his labour are a complete distortion of what Trotsky actually said.

As early as September 1930, Trotsky understood what Monty Johnstone will never grasp — that the position of German capitalism had reached a point where 'there appears to be no way out along the normal road of the bourgeois parliamentary regime'. [9] The crisis of 1929 had unleashed a powerful protectionist dynamic within the world economy that rapidly suffocated the export-oriented core of German industry (industrial production fell by a half between 1929 and 1932, and there were already 3 million unemployed in 1930); international creditors demanded the repayment of loans that had formed the basis of the post-war revival; a chain of banks collapsed, spreading financial chaos. At the political level, the bourgeois democratic institutions of the Weimar Republic, which had never won the undisputed allegiance of the bourgeoisie or the proletariat, were being swiftly eroded by a regime of presidential decree; in the September 1930 elections, the Communist Party of Germany (KPD), the declared enemy of the Weimar Republic, increased its vote by 2.5 per cent; whilst at the opposite pole the Nazi vote leapt to 18.3 per cent from its 1928 level of 2.6 per cent. In this situation, the future of Germany rested above all on the capacity of the working class vanguard to replace a political system that was clearly in its death-agony, and to set about the socialist reorganisation of society in planned cooperation with the Soviet workers. A perspective of 'defence of Weimar' could only have paralysed the will of the proletariat and placed its head in a noose that was being methodically prepared by the Nazis. Such indeed was the road pursued by the social democratic leaders of the SPD, who preferred passively to accept as a 'lesser evil' the Bonapartist regimes of Brüning and von Papen (and even the overthrow of their own Prussian regional government) rather than to hasten the burial of the democratic form of bourgeois rule, of which they were the principal midwives and to which they were attached by every fibre of their being.

As for Trotsky, every word that he wrote on the struggle against fascism was based on the understanding that only socialist revolution could save the workers from economic want and fascist dictatorship. We urge readers who are not convinced of this (or indeed the correctness of his argument) to read for themselves the major articles, particularly 'What Next' and 'The Only Road'. However, in the case of Monty Johnstone, who even after reading them still sees these writings of Trotsky as foreshadowing the Popular Front, it is obviously necessary to place at least a few succinct and unambiguous statements before his eyes. Thus:

'A revolutionary party, at the time of a crisis in the regime, is much stronger in the extra-parliamentary mass struggles than within the framework of parliamentarism. But again on one condition: if it understands the situation correctly and can connect in practice the vital needs of the masses with the task of seizing power. Everything is now reduced to this.' [10]

(26 Sept. 1930)

'The solution is approaching. The moment has come when the prerevolutionary situation must be transformed into the revolutionary — or the counter-revolutionary.' [11]

(26 Nov. 1931)

'A system of joint measures of struggle must be elaborated against the regime of emergency decrees and Bonapartism. This struggle imposed on the proletariat by the whole situation cannot, by its very nature, be conducted within the framework of democracy... (it) lays bare the problem of the state as a problem of power.' [12]

(14 Sept. 1932)

Monty Johnstone comes completely unstuck when he tries to expose a contradiction between Trotsky's 'democratic' positions and Ernest Mandel's argument that in fighting fascism the workers movement should 'define the struggle for the conquest of power as an immediate goal' [13]. In fact, Mandel's point is identical with one made by Trotsky himself: 'Precisely in Germany today we are shown that the proletariat is faced with the task of a direct and immediate struggle for power, long before it has been completely united under the banner of the Communist Party'. [14] It is obvious to anyone who takes the trouble to think that neither Trotsky nor Mandel understood by 'immediate struggle for power' the organisation of an insurrection the next day; they were referring to the seizure of power as the **only** way out of **this** crisis of bourgeois class rule. We shall return later to Johnstone's frequent and worthless attempts to play on the ambiguity of the word 'immediate'.

How is it possible then that Trotsky both saw the urgent necessity of socialist revolution and at the same time argued that the task of the hour was to organise a KPD-SPD united front for the defence of workers rights? Does this not express a basic inconsistency in his thought?

It is indeed difficult to grasp that the struggle for the needs of the working class **within capitalist society** simultaneously poses more and more sharply the task of the destruction of that society. The categories of formal logic, which are continually secreted by the conservative apparatuses of the workers movement, show no solution to the problem: they can structure routine trade union and parliamentary activity in periods of relative social peace, and they can permit any amount of speculation on the beautiful socialist future of humanity; but they are useless in the science of transition — of the development and mobilisation of the energies of the working class for socialist revolution. In their different ways, the ultra-left sectarians and the right-opportunists remain imprisoned within these categories. The former can see only the final revolutionary goal and impatiently demand that the masses free themselves from the control of their leaderships by adhering to the revolutionary organisation and its initiatives. The opportunists, on the other hand, are hypnotised by **what is**, by the might of the reformist apparatuses (and of the bourgeoisie that stands behind them); they believe that any action which jeopardises their control over their members will merely cut the revolutionaries off from the masses. What **both** attitudes reveal is a profound lack of confidence in the ability of revolutionaries to challenge the reformists for leadership within the countless partial struggles that bring the workers into conflict with the capitalist class. It is therefore not surprising that these two opposites are continually changing into each other; the opportunists will resort to fiery left phrases and sharp turns in order to conceal their adaptation to the bourgeoisie both from themselves and from the masses; whilst the ultra-lefts will attempt to overcome their isolation by a sudden panicky capitulation before the apparatus that they never managed to touch with their verbal, or even physical, assaults. It is only possible to escape from this vicious circle by breaking with the formal opposition between **future** socialism and the **present** reality of capitalist society.



The KPD Red Front early in 1933: isolated from the working masses by the bureaucratic-sectarian blustering of Thaelmann (standing on platform) and the Comintern leadership

From 1930 to 1933 the historical necessity of workers power and democracy existed as an explosively concrete presence within the crumbling Weimar Republic; it was there for all to see in the catastrophic decline of the productive forces, in the erosion of bourgeois democratic institutions, and in the deep radicalisation of millions of workers. What did not exist, however, was a political force able to bring this necessity to the highest levels of conscious expression within the workers movement; in other words, a leadership capable of demonstrating the objective need for power to the Social Democratic workers through the development of their struggle to defend their own rights and institutions.

Of course, these SPD workers believed (although perhaps not as firmly as Monty Johnstone) that it was possible to wage this defensive struggle to the end 'within the framework of bourgeois democracy'. It would thus have been the height of madness to propose joint action for the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat: the first burning task facing the whole of the working class — whether KPD, SPD or non-party — was the organisation of a class front against the fascists and the Bonapartist government. And for that they needed the maximum unity in their ranks. However, the united front advocated by Trotsky and earlier by the Leninist Comintern did not imply the slightest renunciation by communists of their revolutionary goals. On the contrary, Trotsky understood that in the course of the struggle for partial and democratic demands (including for the abolition of the regime of presidential decree — a demand that Monty Johnstone would doubtless see as part of his 'bourgeois democracy'), the united workers would be forced to **extend** the class organisations they had built up over the decades **through the formation of soviets** [15]. The united front would reach a point where it would be faced with the choice: **either** to go on fighting for the objective needs of the class even though this conflicts with the structures and repressive apparatuses of bourgeois democracy, **or** to give up the struggle in order to save bourgeois democracy. There could be no question about the preference of the SPD (which moreover did nothing to rescue its beloved Weimar by its refusal to fight). Indeed, the hostility of the SPD leadership to the united front was based on its clear appreciation that any systematic mass mobilisation would put intolerable pressure on the restricting shell of bourgeois democracy and challenge its own influence over the working class.

Does this mean that the united front is merely a 'manoeuvre' engaged in by the communists in order to eliminate their social-democratic rivals? Only bureaucratic careerists committed exclusively to the defence of 'their own' apparatus can pose the question in this way. Standing higher than such concerns are the objective interests of the working class, on which the united front is based and by reference to which the final judgement of history will be passed on all organisations of the workers movement. Those which stand in the way of the revolutionary aspirations of the masses will be swept aside in the course of decisive events that demand a unified and resolute class leadership.

Scattered throughout Trotsky's writings on Germany are warnings against an opportunist conception of the united front that is the traditional hallmark of centrism. [16] Naturally, if it is not intended to go beyond the limits of bourgeois democracy, then the bare principle of unity of all democratic forces will suffice to define party strategy; it will even tend to blur distinctions between political organisations and fuse them into a single 'democratic' morass. However, a **revolutionary** party will maintain an intransigent independence from its reformist allies of today, since it knows that tomorrow or the day after they will become, **and the masses must be brought to see them as**, the dangerous and immediate opponents of a further advance of the class. In other words, its application of the tactic of the united front will be thoroughly subordinated to its **strategic** goal of the seizure of power. [17]

This revolutionary tactic of the united front involves a

particular conception of class alliances that is frequently misunderstood. For instance, Monty Johnstone is perplexed by the fact that in Germany Trotsky was prepared to conclude an alliance with 'the devil and his grandmother', whereas in France he was violently opposed to a pact with the much more attractive figure of the Radical Party. In his polemic against opportunist blocs between workers' and bourgeois parties, Trotsky was not guided by an abstract principle that workers must never contaminate themselves by contact with alien class forces. The starting point, here as elsewhere, was the interests of the working class in the given configuration of forces. Thus in Germany the struggle against the threatening fascist counter-revolution would no doubt have been advanced by **practical agreements** between the KPD and Jewish bourgeois groups to organise common defence of public meetings; or after Hindenburg's replacement of the Catholic Centre Party government in 1932 by von Papen's 'Cabinet of Hitler's barons', it might have been possible to reach similar agreements with sections of that bourgeois party, which had a certain working class base. Of course, we should not ignore the obstacles to such joint action nor, more importantly, their extremely limited scope. Such forces were a factor of tenth-rate significance in the organisation of mass action to combat the growth of Nazism and its Bonapartist protectors and to strengthen the collective power of the working class. Above all, it would have been disastrous if communists had in any way subordinated the fighting unity of the proletarian millions to shabby deals with a handful of bourgeois politicians, who were at least as frightened of the 'Reds' as they were of Hitler's thugs. Just as in the case of alliances with social democratic parties, the cardinal maxim of the 'united front' is: 'March separately, strike together! No mixing of banners and programmes!' The revolutionary policy of utilising practical agreements with bourgeois forces as episodic and instrumental means towards the anti-capitalist unity of a hegemonic proletariat is thus the **polar opposite** of that 'popular unity' under which the power of the working class is chained to a bourgeois programme or leadership.

The above analysis has, we trust, demonstrated the impermissibility of Johnstone's argument that Trotsky's position changed fundamentally after 1933, and that 'the Comintern's subsequent anti-fascist People's Front strategy... flowed from essentially the same premises as those on which his own earlier criticisms were based.' [18]

GERMANY AND STALINISM

Before we go on to look at the Popular Front itself, we must say a few words about the evolution of the Comintern in the 1930-33 period. As we said earlier, the only explanation that Monty Johnstone can offer of the sectarian line of the Third Period is that it was caused by 'sectarian errors'. [19] It does not seem to occur to him, or to the Moscow historian-apologist Sobolev whom he quotes, that there must be a material basis to such wild ravings that appear at the centre of a world party ten years after its foundation. After all, it can hardly be diagnosed as that same infantile disorder which afflicted the fledgling KPD or CPGB in 1919-21.

The decisive process in the life of the Comintern was undoubtedly the consolidation of a powerful and privileged bureaucratic layer within the Soviet party-state apparatus, and the elimination of inner-party democracy within the CPSU and its fraternal sections. By 1930 that bureaucracy was already 'dizzy with the success' of its defeat of the Left and Right oppositions, and was embarking on a campaign to bring the entire peasantry under its administrative control. [20] Everything within the world movement was subordinated to this frenzied and utopian endeavour to establish 'socialism in one country', and thus to annul by fiat the pressures and contradictions of Soviet and world politics and economics. Virtually anything that moved without the

approval of the bureaucratic apparatus was regarded as an 'opportunist' threat to the success of the adventure; and if it could not be stopped in its tracks by repression, then it was driven out of reach of the 'loyal communists' by hysterical denunciation. Thus in Germany not only the SPD but also the Left Opposition, the Brandlerites and the SAP were characterised as agencies of 'social fascism'; the task of patiently winning over the reformist workers through a common experience could not possibly have been conceived of at this time. Of course, this does not mean that Moscow or the KPD were more or less consciously working to sabotage the German revolution; but nor can the leaders be considered as genuinely naive and sincere militants who had been led into error by their own revolutionary zeal. The Stalinist betrayal of the German working class, expressed in its practical opposition to class unity and its capitulation to Nazism without a struggle, was a **direct** result of the drive for power of the nationalist Russian bureaucracy.

We should not underestimate the lasting impact of the Third Period on the consciousness of the cadres of the Communist International. The membership of nearly every section declined between 1929-33 in response to the climate of bureaucratism and sectarian irrationality (Germany was an exception to this trend, but this was owing to the extremely sharp social crisis and polarisation rather than to the popularity of KPD policies, as formal logic would suggest). Those who remained underwent a process of re-education that may aptly be described as the destruction of thought: living roots in the whole class were violently wrenched up and replaced by unquestioning submission to the national and international apparatuses; verbal and physical violence supplanted skilfully pitched propaganda and agitation as the principal weapons of the cadre; dramatic predictions of the imminent collapse of capitalism removed the need for careful study of the mood of the masses and of the political and economic conjuncture; the leading role of the party in the revolutionary process was re-interpreted as the infallibility and untouchability of the party apparatus; and finally the crucial importance of the Soviet Union as a centre of world revolution was turned on its head so that the first duty of all Communists became devotion to the 'socialist' fatherland. It was this dizzying regime of bureaucratic ultimatism that prepared and made possible the renunciation without serious internal crisis of the perspective of world revolution in the turn of 1934-35.

Monty Johnstone neglects to mention that as early as 1930 Trotsky had warned of the ease with which ultra-left sectarianism would pass over into its opposite. [21] Indeed, one of his main criticisms of the centrist opponents of the KPD was that they were unable to see Stalinism as a consistent bureaucratic tendency characterised by empirical **left and right zigzags**. [22] It thus came as no surprise when on 3 March 1933, after a month of total silence on the German events in the Comintern press, the Executive Committee launched a call for a united front with social democracy which for the first time in its history offered to 'refrain from [verbal] attacks on social democratic organisations'. [23] Although the primary function of this appeal was to cover the tracks of the KPD (as if a whole generation of workers could forget such a crime overnight!), its explicit renunciation of the freedom of party criticism and propaganda was a harbinger of that bureaucratic non-aggression pact which the 'united front' was to become in the hands of Dimitrov and Co.

Nevertheless, is it true, as Monty Johnstone argues, that Trotsky's break with the Comintern after the German defeat was 'at best overhasty and based on an impressionistic rather than a fundamental, analytic approach' [24]; or that, at worst, he was simply 'overwhelmed by his hatred of Stalin' [25]? We need not take the first suggestion seriously, since Johnstone has already given us sufficient indication of what he regards as 'fundamental analysis': namely, a combination of half-truths, 'oversights', and circular reasoning. As for Trotsky's pathological 'hatred' of Stalin, one would have

thought that this would have reached a peak by 1930, when Trotsky's own expulsion from the CPSU and USSR was being followed by systematic arrests, deportations and the first executions of Left Oppositionists. However, he understood that the Comintern was still in the middle of the greatest test in its history, and that under the impact of the decisive events in Germany and the struggle of the Left Opposition the world party could still be brought back to revolutionary Marxism. Thus his position was well-defined from at least December 1931 onwards: 'Yes, should the fascists really conquer power, that would mean not only the physical destruction of the Communist Party, but veritable political bankruptcy for it... The seizure of power by the fascists would therefore most probably signify the necessity of creating a new revolutionary party, and in all likelihood a new International. That would be a frightful historical catastrophe. But to assume today that all this is **unavoidable** can be done only by genuine liquidators, those who under the mantle of hollow phrases are really hastening to capitulate like cravens in the face of the struggle and **without a struggle**.' [26] Only the complete prostration of the KPD and the concern of the Comintern bureaucrats solely to save face finally convinced Trotsky that the Comintern had broken its links with the proletarian world revolution. [27]

THE 1934 TURN

Monty Johnstone's account of the 1934 turn to the Popular Front is of the kind that abounds in children's history books. After the crushing defeat in Germany, so the story goes, the sectarian fanatic Stalin was locked in battle with the untarnished hero Georgi Dimitrov, who, hand-in-hand with his staunch comrade Maurice Thorez, managed to get the monster under control and thus to open up a bright new future for the Comintern. [28]

Now, the most cursory examination of the events of 1934 will show that, like most such tales, this one is made up of one part truth, three parts falsehood and six parts omission. The key date, which is barely mentioned in Johnstone's 'concrete analysis of a concrete situation', is 6 February 1934. Encouraged by the success of Hitler in Germany and exploiting the financial scandals which were then rocking the political arena, a mob composed of various fascist groups laid siege to the French Parliament in an attempt to put a clear stamp on events. They were driven back relatively easily by police gunfire, but managed to shift the Government sharply to the right and, most importantly, to arouse a spontaneous mass upsurge against the counter-revolutionary threat. What was the response of the leaderships of the workers movement to this development?

Like their German comrades, the much stronger French Trotskyists had for some time placed the slogan of the united front against the fascists at the centre of their agitation, and thinking workers in the mass organisations were aware at least of the elements of their alternative policy. This unrelenting pressure of Trotskyist ideas must therefore have played a certain role in the development of currents favourable to united action in both major parties. It also explains the vicious physical attack made by Stalinist thugs on a group of Left Oppositionists at a Paris public meeting in July 1932. [29]

At its July 1933 conference, the Socialist Party (SFIO) had split over the question of parliamentary support for the bourgeois Radical Government and over the general ideological basis of the party. The extreme right wing, led by Renaudel and Déat, took nearly a seventh of the membership out into a new populist party and thus left the Blum leadership severely exposed for some time to the left pressure of the rank and file. In particular, the Paris region of the SFIO fell under the control of the Jean Zyromski-



January 1933: SPD mass meeting waits in vain for a fighting lead against Hitler

Marceau Pivert current, which gave a certain expression to the aspirations of the class by its systematic agitation for CP-SFIO united action. On 6 February the SFIO leadership issued a characteristically vague call on the workers to 'prepare to defend their organisations'. However, the Paris region took the initiative of asking the Communist Party (PCF) for discussions on joint action against the fascists; receiving no reply, it sent a delegation to the offices of *L'Humanité* but this met with no more success. On the 8th, *L'Humanité* thundered its reply to these 'social fascists': 'We are prepared to fight with anyone who really wishes to struggle against fascism. But how is joint action possible with people who prop up governments when they cut wages; who sabotage strikes; or who abandon a class position to collaborate with the capitalist regime and thus prepare the ground for fascism?' [30]

In effect, the month of February found the PCF in a state of disorder similar to that of the German KPD... but with the important difference that a sizeable rebellion was breaking out in its ranks. At the December meeting of the Comintern Executive Committee, Maurice Thorez had talked of acts of indiscipline in branches of the PCF and doubts about the correctness of tactics towards the Social Democracy, whilst appearing as the staunchest defender of the Comintern line. 'The Central Committee', he reported, '[had] rejected these opportunist proposals and condemned their adoption'. His colleague, André Marty, was of the same opinion, that 'it remains an essential task to overcome resistance to the Comintern line, for this confuses the party and cripples its action'. [31] However, the next month a leading member of the French Executive, Jacques Doriot, came out openly in favour of CP-SFIO joint action against the growing menace of the fascist leagues; and the PCF and the Comintern were to be preoccupied over the following period with the explosive revolt of a section of its proletarian base led by Doriot, who was the Communist Mayor of St. Denis (which has always been a PCF stronghold in France).

The depth of the confusion within the PCF was clearly revealed on the decisive day of 6 February. That morning, the party daily *L'Humanité* made a call for a demonstration just a few hundred yards from the fascist gathering. Its slogan? '... at one and the same time against the fascist bands, against the Government, and against social democracy'. It was not surprising, therefore, that in the later

fighting at the Place de la Concorde, groups of Communists lost their identity and even joined in the attacks on the police. [32] Of course, there is no truth in certain bourgeois accounts of the events as a joint fascist-communist uprising; what was expressed was the complete disorientation produced by the campaign against 'social-fascism'. Three days later, the PCF attempted to recover ground by the organisation of its own demonstration and the erection of barricades in the workers' districts of East Paris! Despite the courage of the Communist militants (six of whom were killed by the police), this action of 9 February was essentially a sectarian adventure whereby the leadership hoped to 'outdistance' the Socialist workers and insulate itself from the powerful urge to unity.

It was this same mass pressure that forced the CGT and SFIO leaderships, together with nearly every other tendency in the workers movement, to organise a general strike and mass demonstrations on the 12th. As late as the 11th, *L'Humanité* was still denouncing the treachery of the 'social-fascists' who had postponed any action, and predicted that 'the workers will repulse the Socialist leaders in disgust'. However, during the night of 11-12 February, the PCF leadership took a last-minute decision to demonstrate, and the next day the movement for the united front became an unstoppable force through the spontaneous fusion of the two demonstrations and repeated chanting of the slogan 'Unity!' [33] This is not to deny that Thorez and Co continued bravely swimming against the stream for some time to come. The day of unity was immediately followed by a renewal of the campaign against the 'social-fascists' and against the Doriot current within the party. Thus *L'Humanité* of 15 February took up the traditional refrain that the SFIO was 'the chief prop of the bourgeoisie in its efforts to create a fascist regime', whilst at a 'higher' level the Executive Committee of the Comintern reaffirmed on 3 March that 'the only way to form the United Front is by fighting relentlessly to destroy the treacherous Second International'. [34] The whole PCF apparatus was mobilised to isolate the oppositionists within the party, who were beginning to sign local agreements on their own initiative with SFIO branches. Doriot was subjected to a torrent of abuse, and a public meeting in Rouen to which he had been invited to speak was broken up by a squad of Stalinist toughs; if he was not yet expelled, this was only because a little more time was required to isolate him from his base and

to take the wind from his sails. By the end of June the party leadership had taken over virtually the whole of the platform and was thus able to expel him at minimum cost. [35]

The first indication of the turn was provided by a *Pravda* article of 23 May 1934, which stressed that it was permissible to enter into agreements with social-democratic leaderships for joint action. This was reprinted a week later in *L'Humanité* together with an appeal addressed to the SFIO leadership. According to Albert Vassart, who was then in the Soviet Union, this initiative of the PCF was taken following 'imperative directives sent by coded telegram' from Moscow. [36] In any case, between the end of May and the PCF conference of 23-26 June, Thorez does not present the picture of a man altogether in control of the situation. Thus the mid-June issue of the party's theoretical journal carried an article in which he denounced the SFIO in the most violent terms; and right up to 25 June he continued to reserve the right of criticism of other organisations of the united front. It was only at the end of the conference, which had been extended by a day, that Thorez suddenly accepted all the conditions set by the SFIO bureaucracy and declared himself for 'unity at any price': 'neither from the mouth of any of our propagandists, nor from the pen of any of our writers, in *L'Humanité* or even in the *Cahiers du Bolchévisme* [the theoretical journal of the PCF] as in our entire press, will there be the slightest attack against the organisations or the leaders of the Socialist Party'. (*L'Humanité*, 29 June 1934). [37]

What lessons can we draw from this *volte-face*? First, it is clear that the capacity for united action detected by Monty Johnstone in the PCF and Maurice Thorez was in fact the distorted bureaucratic response to the *revolt* of a substantial proletarian element of the party. Of course, if the turn had been founded in revolutionary Marxist principle and accompanied by a democratisation of the party regime and a thorough balance-sheet of past positions, then it might be attributed to the process of internal struggle that is the life-blood of a political organisation. But the explanations of the new course asserted that all that was involved was a tactical readjustment by an infallible leadership to the new (!) conditions of fascist menace; and the figure who had been fighting most vigorously for the turn was expelled at the moment of its implementation. Secondly, there cannot be the slightest doubt that both the decisions of orientation and detailed PCF initiatives were directed by the CPSU/Comintern apparatus in Moscow. This does not contradict the first point since, despite the haemorrhage of members during the Third Period, the PCF was then the largest and most strategically placed party in capitalist Europe and its further isolation from the class and above all internal 'disruption' would have rendered it useless in coming years as an instrument of Stalin's policy. We must now briefly discuss the significance for the French working class movement of the United Action Pact signed by the PCF and the SFIO on 27 July 1934.

In the days following 6 February, the most advanced sections of workers had demonstrated their determination and ability to break down the obstacles to class action erected by the SFIO and CP apparatuses. It is unquestionable, moreover, that the widespread strikes and demonstrations of 12 February brought about an enormous leap forward in the self-confidence and fighting strength of the working class; for the first time, broad masses sensed their tremendous collective power and the *possibility* of unlimited advance on the basis of it. Almost overnight the organised workers movement became the central force in French politics and drove onto the defensive the fascist bands that had seemed on the verge of repeating Hitler's unobstructed march to power. The full extent of the capitulation and treachery of the German Social-Democratic and Stalinist parties became evident in the light of these first mass actions of resistance to fascism.

From February onwards the word 'unity' was on everyone's lips. But if unity is absolutely *necessary* for the

struggle of the working class, it is by no means sufficient to provide a clear direction for the movement. (No-one can imagine, for example, that the German proletariat would have been assured of victory over Nazism if it had been united behind the SPD; indeed, Austrian Social Democracy, which commanded the allegiance of the overwhelming majority of the working class, had put up only token opposition to Dollfuss during his eleven-month consolidation of dictatorial power). On 12 February, the SFIO and PCF leaderships had been united only in their resolve to *limit* the strikes and demonstrations to one-off protest actions and to *prevent* them from developing into an ongoing movement capable of driving the fascist bands off the streets and challenging the newly formed Bonapartist government [38]; and the protracted process that led to the conclusion of the July Pact was marked by the suspicions, manoeuvres and compromises of the two apparatuses, rather than by mass meetings and public debate on the tasks of the workers movement and the political thrust of the united front.

WORKERS UNITY AND CAPITALIST CRISIS

This seems to be the point at which Monty Johnstone's 'Trotsky' abandons his correct positions and goes over to revolutionary phrase-mongering. [39] It is rather curious, then, that Johnstone does not find it necessary to mention any of Trotsky's numerous explanations of the *change in emphasis* of his positions in 1934.

We have already seen in relation to Germany that Trotsky foresaw the time when the task of communists would be to 'move the Social-Democratic workers, after a rapprochement is made with them on the basis of defence, over into a decisive offensive'. [40] In the spring and summer of 1934, the French workers movement had reached precisely that stage where the bureaucratic leaderships were preparing to absorb the powerful movement for united class action and to rob it of its spontaneously anti-capitalist dynamic; repetition of the bare slogan of the 'united front' would *then* have pointed no way forward at all to the working class. The central question became rather the creation of an organisational framework for the actual carrying out of joint action — a framework in which all tendencies within the workers movement would be represented, and which would be committed to energetic struggle against the fascists.

In the Action Programme for France, which was published in June 1934, Trotsky stressed that the purpose of the 'united front from above', for which the Left Opposition had fought for so long, was not to cement a relationship between those standing 'above' the masses, but to open up the possibility of consistent united action of the working class masses themselves. He thus proposed the formation of nation-wide committees of action and the creation of a unified workers' militia, without which the workers would be incapable of defeating the heavily armed fascist bands and the repressive forces of the state. [41]

In 1934 no-one had any doubts that seriously organised committees of action, by drawing millions of workers into day-to-day political activity, would unleash a dynamic that was diametrically opposed to parliamentary reformism. Once the masses sensed the power of their mobilisation, they would seek to use this instrument not only to deal once and for all with the fascists, but to struggle for a whole series of class demands made urgent by the crisis of French capitalism. Moreover, the peasantry would not take long to grasp the potential of concerted action and to set up its own committees in the image of those of the workers.

However, such an orientation was anathema to the SFIO and PCF leaderships, who looked to the capitalist state to fulfil the task of defeating the fascists by means of an (inevitably formal) legal ban. The French Communist Party still occasionally talked of forming committees of action,

and the Third Period slogan 'Soviets everywhere' was still chanted on demonstrations. However, the essence of the PCF's agreement with the SFIO leadership was the **abandonment** of the struggle to build such extra-parliamentary bodies under any circumstances. 'Unity at any price!' meant quite precisely opportunist unity at the price of the renunciation of mass struggle. [42] As Trotsky put it at the time: 'Yesterday the greatest danger was the sabotage of the united front. Today, the greatest danger lies in the **illusions** of the united front, very closely related to the parliamentary illusions: the diplomatic notes, the pathetic speeches, the handshaking, the bloc without revolutionary content — and the betrayal of the masses.' [43]

The fundamental continuity between Trotsky's writings on Germany and those on France is thus the understanding of the need for **united mass action** in pursuit of the goals of the working class. Before 1934 the social democratic and Stalinist apparatuses stood in the way of such action by their refusal to enter into any joint agreement whatsoever; after summer 1934 they remained an obstacle by their **limitation** of any agreement to 'summit' deals, complemented by periodic protest marches and meetings. This continuity of Trotsky's position is, moreover, rooted in the objective world character of capitalist economy and of the catastrophic crisis that was then shaking it. Fascism, war, the instability of bourgeois-democratic institutions and the decline of the productive forces manifested themselves throughout the European continent, and programmes that remained confined to 'immediate demands' and the 'defence of democracy', such as that presented by the French Communist Party, left intact the capitalist organisation of society that was dragging the masses down into disaster. Of course, this crisis first reached breaking-point in the 'weakest link' of the imperialist chain — Weimar Germany; but the same pressures were operating on French capitalism — the proud republican victor of Versailles — and posed with increasing urgency the socialist tasks of the proletariat.

It was precisely because the social democratic bureaucracy understood the explosive dynamic of mass organisation in **this period of capitalist crisis** that it opposed the formation of action committees — followed closely, and more and more consciously, by its 'Communist' partners. And conversely, it was because the French Trotskyists understood this explosive dynamic that they were the most consistent fighters for organised mass action. They knew that their June Action Programme — which mapped out a path of struggle against the dying capitalist regime — was, in its general features, the only way forward for the movement of the working class; that consistent mobilisation **now** on the burning question of the fascist bands would 'naturally' select a leadership of the most energetic, resolute and class-conscious sections of workers, and that such a leadership would be **capable** of moving the united front forward to its 'natural' goal: the conquest of power.

Does this mean, as Monty Johnstone asserts, that Trotsky's programme was 'incompatible . . . with the proletarian united front'? [44] Well, it was clearly incompatible with the desires and aims of the 'Socialist' and 'Communist' gentlemen who then stood at its head, just as in April 1917 Lenin's programme of soviet power was 'incompatible' with the 'united front' of Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries. But to put this forward as the conclusive argument is the unmistakable hallmark of that philistine labour 'realism' which bases itself not on the objective **needs** of the workers and their powerful **urge** towards class action, but on what is 'possible' for the bourgeoisie and its reformist bureaucratic agencies to stomach.

ORIGINS OF THE POPULAR FRONT

One thing was abundantly clear in the autumn of 1934: the new turn in French politics could not stop at a Pact which declared its intention to organise the struggle against fascism, attacks on democratic freedoms, and war preparations solely by means of joint meetings and protest demonstrations. **Either** the unity of the working class would take the form of committees of action uniting the defensive and offensive tasks of class struggle, **or** the pact would become an electoral and parliamentary coalition of workers' and bourgeois parties strengthened by the occasional festive rally. By October the French Communist Party had taken the first step along the path of alliance with the bourgeois Radical Party [45], and during the following years was increasingly to subordinate its own programme, its pact with the SFIO and ultimately the whole of the workers movement to these guardians of 'democratic capitalism'. Perhaps Thorez genuinely thought at first that he would be able to convert this alliance into a 'broad popular movement' based on elected mass committees. But for revolutionary Marxists it was literally inconceivable that the coterie of professional politicians who made up the core of the Radical Party should sacrifice their parliamentary power base to such dangerous plebeian bodies. In fact, contrary to the carefully cultivated Stalinist myths, the Popular Front **never did and never could become a mass movement**. [46] From the moment that Thorez launched his call for a front of 'labour, freedom and peace' with the bourgeois Radicals, every declaration of every Communist leader in favour of popularly elected committees was in effect nothing more than a demagogic screen for the party's policies of class collaboration.

As we said earlier, Marxists are not opposed in principle to agreements with bourgeois leaderships for practical joint action in pursuit of goals that are in the interests of the working class. If the Radicals had been capable of organising their petty bourgeois electoral base into committees of struggle against the fascist leagues, or if they had been prepared to participate in any mass action, then this could only have been welcomed; even at the parliamentary level, a revolutionary deputy would have found no difficulty in voting **from the independent standpoint of his own party** for any resolution abolishing the regime of presidential decree or the Senate that was elected by partial suffrage. However, what was involved in the coalition with the Radicals was not such a concerted action of independent forces, but the entry of the major workers' parties into a long-term **bloc** with a bourgeois party **on the basis of its own programme**.

Monty Johnstone defends the actions of the French Communist Party by reference to a schema that effectively excludes the proletariat from an independent political role in the epoch of capitalist decline. He argues that 'the defence of the bourgeois republic became in the 1930s the next stage for a country like France threatened by fascism', and goes on to explicitly counterpose this conception to the perspective of 'socialist revolution' that 'had for long been seen by Marxists [as] the next stage'. [47] Here Johnstone drops for a moment the pretence of establishing some theoretical continuity between the Popular Front and the revolutionary Comintern; the earth-shattering discovery made by Thorez and Dimitrov is presented in a familiar form comprehensible to everyone: socialism may be the glorious future awaiting humanity, **but** it has nothing to do with the mundane tasks facing the working class today.

Now, although Monty Johnstone is at sufficient 'distance' from Bolshevism to be able to make such a clear assertion, it was by no means as simple for his forerunners, Stalin and Dimitrov. When they were accused (by the Trotskyists) of renouncing socialist revolution in order to strengthen bourgeois democracy, they replied that this was a vile slander manufactured by enemies of the Soviet Union and the working class, and so on. Indeed, at the Seventh World



Georgi Dimitrov, architect of the Popular Front, at the rostrum of the Seventh Comintern Congress in August 1935



Leon Blum (with clenched fist) and Maurice Thorez (with tricolour) at 1936 Popular Front rally

Congress, Dimitrov categorically rejected such a 'stages' view of the tasks of the proletariat and stressed that 'it was necessary to prepare for the socialist revolution' by means of the Popular Front struggle against fascism. 'The Right opportunists', he declared, 'have tried to establish a special "democratic intermediate stage" lying between the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie and the dictatorship of the proletariat, for the purpose of instilling into the workers the illusion of a peaceful, parliamentary passage from the one dictatorship to the other. This fictitious "intermediate stage" they have also called "transitional form" and even quoted Lenin's words! But this piece of swindling was not difficult to expose: for Lenin spoke of the form of transition and approach to the "proletarian revolution", and **not** of some transitional form **between** the bourgeois and the proletarian dictatorship.' [48] Of course, these words express not principled revolutionary politics on Dimitrov's part, but the compulsion on the Stalinist leaders of 1934-5 to reconcile their perspective with the traditions of revolutionary Marxism, to present prostration before the 'anti-fascist bourgeoisie' as a 'transitional approach to socialism'. And there can be no doubt that in the consciousness of the tens of thousands of Communist militants of the period, all the manoeuvres and public concealment of positions were justified by the 'objective' imminence of socialist revolution. Only the Trotskyists were able to see **then** what Monty Johnstone has no compunction in saying today: that the line of the Seventh World Congress was not based on the imminence of revolution but on its renunciation for the 'foreseeable' future. It required the experiences of June 1936 in France and the Spanish revolution to demonstrate in practice that Dimitrov's attacks on right opportunism at the Moscow Congress were merely a bureaucratic cover against revolutionary Marxist criticism, and ultimately against the socialist instincts of the working class itself.

We have already pointed out in the case of Germany the extreme abstractness of Monty Johnstone's picture of the Thirties. He is nowhere concerned with the real material forces that were shaking European bourgeois society to its foundations, but only with the idealist constructions of 'bourgeois democracy' and 'fascism'. The reason for this aloofness is obvious: if Johnstone were to analyse the crisis of the world capitalist economy and the roots of fascism in a

ruined and desperate petty bourgeoisie, he might realise that the 'strengthening' of bourgeois democracy could in no way have removed the breeding-ground of mass impoverishment, imperialist war and the **fragility** of bourgeois democratic institutions. His attachment to 'bourgeois democracy' would then appear as attachment to a rotting social order incapable of satisfying the basic needs of the masses. For if 20 per cent unemployment, widespread hunger and falling living standards, the drift to war and the rise of counter-revolutionary armed bands do not place socialism on the agenda as 'the next stage', then what do they pose? Continuing unemployment and hunger? Or perhaps Johnstone believes that the working masses are rewarded for their devotion to bourgeois democracy by a suspension of the laws of motion of capital? Traditionally, Marxists have seen a crisis of the capitalist order as necessitating the boldest and most resolute struggle by the working class to impose its own revolutionary solutions. For Monty Johnstone, however, the decline and putrefaction of bourgeois society forces the proletariat to become the finest champions of the ideology and political institutions created by the bourgeoisie in the epoch of its ascendancy! Or, as Maurice Thorez proudly claimed: 'The Communists have become in literal truth the trustees of bankrupt capitalist culture.' [49] Yes, 'in literal truth'! And not only of the culture!

Whilst admitting the originality of the 'stages' theory in Comintern history, Monty Johnstone seeks to trace it back to Lenin's 1905 text **Two Tactics of Social Democracy in the Democratic Revolution**. We cannot deal here with Johnstone's peculiar 'anti-Trotskyist' version of Russian history, the essentials of which were developed by Zinoviev and Stalin in 1923-4 as a 'tactical weapon' against the Opposition; in fact, it has been refuted so clearly and so frequently that one can only wonder at Johnstone's ability to continue reproducing it without mention of any of the substantial arguments. [50] We must briefly touch on two points:

(1) It is true that until 1917 Lenin saw the immediate task of the Russian revolution as the creation of a bourgeois democratic republic, and that he regarded the posing of socialist goals as a premature diversion from the struggle against Tsarism. In numerous passages of **Two Tactics** he states quite clearly that the political reforms aimed at by the

Marxists 'will, for the first time make it possible for the bourgeoisie to rule as a class', and that an extensive period of 'the broadest, freest and most rapid development of capitalism' is a precondition of a future socialist revolution. [51] At the same time, however, he repeatedly stressed that the Russian bourgeoisie was interested above all in the maintenance of social peace and would shrink from bold action to carry through the 'bourgeois revolution'. The Bolshevik slogan of 'revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry' expressed clearly the mission of the working class and the need for independence from the bourgeois politicians, but it failed to define the relationship between on the one hand the social and political goals and soviet class organs of the proletariat, and on the other the political aspirations and institutions of the bourgeoisie. Writing shortly after, Trotsky did not deny the central importance in Russia of the classical demands of the bourgeois revolution (in particular, confiscation of the landed estates), but argued that, whatever the wishes of its leadership, the working class in power would not be able to 'limit its mission to the creation of republican-democratic conditions for the social domination of the bourgeoisie'. It would be forced to establish its own dictatorship and introduce socialist measures in combination with democratic ones. [52]

It is incomprehensible how any present-day writer can pretend that Lenin's ambiguous conceptions of 1905 were realised in 1917. From the first moment of the revolutionary upsurge of 1917, Lenin went decisively beyond his previous positions to refuse any support to the bourgeois Provisional Government, to pose the seizure of power by the proletariat as the immediate task of the coming period, and to outline a series of measures that would assert the control of the workers' state over the economy. 'In their entirety and in their development', he wrote in the Fifth 'Letter from Afar', 'these steps will mark the transition to socialism, which cannot be achieved in Russia directly, at one stroke, without transitional measures, but which is quite achievable and urgently necessary as a result of such transitional measures...' [53] Upon his return to Russia, Lenin waged a merciless struggle against all those 'Old Bolsheviks... who now speak only of a "revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry"'; such people he characterised as having 'in effect gone over to the petty bourgeoisie against the proletarian class struggle.' [54] As Trotsky had foreseen, the 1905 formula proved to be 'obsolete, no good at all, dead' [55] in the face of the reality of workers soviets and dual power.

(2) Although the Bolsheviks' earlier notion of the tasks of the revolution were similar to that of the Mensheviks, the two currents were actually separated by an abyss. In *Two Tactics*, Lenin concisely expressed the difference in the following way: 'One side [the Bolsheviks] says: advance the revolution to its consummation despite resistance or passivity on the part of the inconsistent bourgeoisie. The other side [the Mensheviks] says: do not think of independently advancing the revolution to completion, for if you do, the inconsistent bourgeoisie will recoil from it.' [56] It was above all the training of the Bolshevik Party in the spirit of suspicion and class hatred of the bourgeoisie that enabled Lenin to overcome the inadequacies of his positions as soon as the revolution broke out, and to win over the rank-and-file and finally the party leaders in April 1917. But there had never been any question of the formation of a bloc on a common programme between the Bolsheviks and the political groups of the bourgeoisie; not for one moment had Lenin imagined that a major component of the class enemy could be won over to resolute struggle against the autocracy.

Now the most striking aspect of this historical example is certainly not the superficial similarity between Lenin's position of 1905 and that of Monty Johnstone [57]; but rather the extreme closeness of this ultra-modern British Communist's world view to that of the Menshevik and 'Old Bolshevik' opponents of Bolshevism. Lenin warned in 1917

against 'trying to revive' the dead formula of the democratic dictatorship in Russia; and yet we find Monty Johnstone trying with all his might to place it at the centre of the stage in bourgeois France in the 1930s. In 1917, Lenin and Trotsky finally reached agreement on the socialist character of the revolution; but Johnstone continues to contrast Trotsky's theory of the socialist tasks of the proletariat in a backward country with the so-called 'Bolshevik strategy for Tsarist Russia'. [58] Johnstone and Thorez support the idea of a bloc with bourgeois Radicals on a minimalist programme, whereas Lenin fought all his life for the **political independence** of the proletariat!

THE RADICALS AND THE PEASANTRY

Monty Johnstone further motivates the bloc between the French Communist Party and the bourgeois Radicals by the necessity of drawing in the peasantry and the middle classes into an anti-fascist coalition. He argues that the formation of such a bloc was an indispensable step, just as a united front between the KPD and SPD was central to the organisation of mass working class resistance in Germany. Now, Trotsky did not underestimate the importance of an alliance with the peasantry in France and even stated that 'to approach the peasantry and the petty bourgeoisie of the cities, to draw them to our side, is the necessary condition of the success of the struggle against fascism, not to speak of the conquest of power.' [59] However, the bourgeois Radical Party, which traditionally leant on the peasantry for support, was not a mass organisation like the workers parties or even the SRs in Russia; it succeeded in 'organising' little more than the grouping of Paris politicians and circles of provincial dignitaries. To have 'demanded' that a Herriot or a Daladier mobilise the peasant masses in struggle would have made a laughing-stock of the revolutionary who had such illusions. Moreover, all historical accounts agree on the precipitate decline in electoral and other support given to the Radical Party as a result of the bankruptcy of its policies, its cowardly capitulation to the reactionaries on 6 February 1934, and the corruption of its leaders in the context of a global capitalist crisis. It offered nothing to the impoverished peasant masses but repetition of the old demagogic promises, now supported by association with the strength of the workers movement.

For the peasantry, only a struggle to effect a fundamental change in property relations could provide a way out of the crisis and a genuine alternative to fascism. A revolutionary Marxist leadership would have had no hesitation in extending the support of the workers movement not to the Radical exploiters of the peasantry but to any action taken by the organised or unorganised masses against their oppressors; it would have offered the substantial credit of a nationalised banking system; it would have destroyed the power of the fertiliser trusts and placed them at the service of the peasants; it would have fought for confiscation of the landed estates; and finally, it would have proposed joint struggle in order to create a workers' and peasants' state capable of realising these measures. [60] Needless to say, such proposals were completely unacceptable to the 'Radicals', who had retained from the heroic Jacobin tradition only the grubby defence of private property. Endorsement of a common programme with such people could only involve self-limitation of the historical goals of the workers movement and renunciation of the possibility of winning the petty bourgeoisie to the side of the revolution. For the revolutionary festival of the oppressed it substituted jamborees and sentimental holiday speeches; for the fighting unity of the proletariat it substituted a revolting bureaucratic-parliamentary facade of 'popular unity', whereby Thorez and Blum acquired a temporary stake in the round of

illusion and trickery that had long been the staple fare of 'Radicalism'.

THE RADICALS AND THE COMMUNIST PARTY

The extent of the self-effacement of the PCF before the Radicals will become clear if we resume a description of the stages of the alliance. Thorez's call in October 1934 for a popular front of 'labour, freedom and peace' on a programme of charitable aid to 'the poor' and unemployed, dissolution of the fascist leagues, public works and a forty-hour week met with little initial response. The Radical leaders had not yet grasped the extent of the conversion of the Communists to parliamentary politics and the possibility of reviving their own fortunes through such an alliance; whereas the Socialist leaders, still under considerable pressure, feared an erosion of their mass base if they were to accept 'a "common programme" which does not contain a single measure of a socialistic nature'. [61] The break in the situation came only in May 1935 when the signature of a Franco-Soviet Pact of Mutual Assistance announced a new turn in European politics. 'In itself', of course, the pact represented an attempt by Soviet diplomacy, unobjectionable in itself, to utilise inter-imperialist contradictions for its own benefit. However, it was accompanied by a statement that gave for the first time in the history of the Soviet Union explicit political support to the military policies of a capitalist state: 'Stalin fully understands and approves of the policy of national defence pursued by France in order to maintain its armed forces at a level consistent with its security needs.' It was only a matter of time before the French Communist Party was to express its own approval by means of its parliamentary vote, and by the abandonment of its anti-militarist campaigns of recent years. After this the alliance between 'patriotic Communists' and 'democratic imperialists' rapidly took shape and squeezed the social democrats into acceptance of the conditions. By the end of May, Thorez was offering to 'overlook' the bourgeois character of the Radicals and accept it into an amorphous left wing when he declared in parliament his readiness to support a Radical government 'which would readily apply the policies of the Radical Party . . . since (it) is the most important of the left-wing groups in this Chamber.' [62]

The Popular Front finally made its public debut at a mass demonstration on 14 July — the anniversary of the storming of the Bastille. Communist, Socialist and Radical leaders presided at the closing rally over the swearing of an empty oath to 'remain united for the defence of democracy... to give bread to the workers, work to the young, and peace to humanity as a whole'. [63] Although the principal forces among the 500,000 demonstrators were workers, the function of the rally was to show to the bourgeois Radicals that the Communist Party could mobilise and loyally place at its service the enormous strength of the workers movement. So as to leave nothing ambiguous, Maurice Thorez appeared with a huge tricolour draped across his chest; 'from now on', he seemed to be saying, 'we Communists shall be the most devoted French patriots and shall not disrupt the unity of our people with our agitation'. The 14 July was preceded and followed by a wave of chauvinist articles in *L'Humanité* such as had not been seen in the workers movement since the 'national unity' of the imperialist world war.

It seems clear that the July rally and the formation of the Popular Front had at first a contradictory effect on the mass movement by weakening the National Union Government then headed by Pierre Laval. Thus, widespread protests developed the following month against a decree-law that reduced the pay of all state employees by ten per cent; the movement culminated on 6 August in a virtual uprising at the naval bases of Toulon and Brest and bloody street battles with the police. Although the PCF had supported the protests, it recoiled in horror at the sight of independent working class action that went beyond the orderly routine of demonstrations and above all threatened to upset the delicate alliance with the Radicals. Communists, Socialists and trade union leaders united in denunciation of the sailors' actions as the work of *provocateurs*, and on 17 August *L'Humanité* took the unusual step of publishing a Politburo letter to regional Party secretaries drawing their attention 'to the agitation in these two cities whose purpose was to divide the Popular Front and provoke unjust accusations against the workers' organisations'. [64]

The August events brought into the light of day the contradictory pressures operating on the PCF leadership: on the one hand it could increase its influence among the working class only by organising a mass movement; but any significant movement threatened to escape its control and jeopardise the real aim of the party — to strengthen the



Workers' demonstration before parliament, June 1936

coalition with the bourgeois Radicals and its own weight within it. The policy of Thorez aimed at steering a fine middle course and suppressing the mass movement at the decisive conjunctures. Thus the immediate response of the PCF after August was to drop its offensive against Laval and retreat into parliamentary manoeuvres and preparation of a joint programme with the Radicals. In the heat of the struggle it had proved its commitment to law and order and its usefulness as a strike-breaker and a dampener on the masses. By August the whole superstructure of apparatuses, alliances and 'unity' of organisations was in place and ready to assume the task of administration and defence of the bourgeois republic; all that remained was to top it off with a demagogic programme that was finally published in January 1936.

STALIN AND THE RADICALS

One of the most curious aspects of Monty Johnstone's account of the turn to the Popular Front is the lack of attention to the processes taking place within the CPSU. A serious analyst could not have failed to tackle the problem of explaining how the 'basically correct' turn of the world movement was accompanied not by an 'improvement' in the Soviet Union, but by the effective destruction of the Bolshevik Party and the unleashing of a mass terror unprecedented in world history. It is well-known, for example, that of the 139 full and candidate members elected to the Central Committee at the 17th Party Congress in 1934, only 29 emerged alive at the next Congress in 1939; and that 1,108 out of 1,966 delegates to the 17th Congress disappeared during the great purges. [65] For a Marxist, such events of 'domestic policy' are surely not unrelated to the 'world policy' of the Stalin leadership. However, Monty Johnstone cannot escape from a fundamentally eclectic approach to the question: he sees **on the one hand** successes of the Comintern and **on the other hand** certain of the errors and crimes within the Soviet Union — the two could just as well have occurred in separate epochs under separate leaderships!

Now, although the details are still not clear, it is today almost certain that in 1934 secret and muted divisions were breaking out within the central Moscow apparatus. According to Roy Medvedev, 270 delegates had voted against the re-election of Stalin to the Central Committee at the 17th Congress — an unmistakable, if unsystematised, expression of discontent with his leadership. At the same time, Sergei Kirov, the boss of the Leningrad organisation was elected to the highest bodies of the party, and appears to have become the focus of significant forces outside Stalin's *camarilla*. It would, of course, be wrong to imagine that what was involved was a consistent programmatic opposition — people like Kirov had played a leading role in the Twenties in the defeat of the Left and Right Oppositions, and proclaimed themselves in a loud public voice to be firm supporters of Stalin's 'general line'. They expressed rather a certain continuity of cadre and tradition with the party of the October Revolution, and a spontaneous resistance to the concentration of dictatorial powers in the hands of the Bonapartist General Secretary, at a time when the army of disoriented bureaucrats was turning to just such a figure in order to ensure its positions of power and privilege, and beginning to feel as an intolerable restriction the remaining continuity with Lenin. In 1933-4, the Kirov current thus seems to have acted as a brake, both on the most wildly adventurist schemes and on Stalin's early attempts to initiate the physical liquidation of opponents. In response to this constraint on his freedom of movement (or on the 'monolithicity' of the party), Stalin tactically gave up ground, whilst promoting and drawing together an inner circle of 'loyalists' which included such people as Nikita

Khrushchev. Finally, on 1 December 1934, his police agents executed the assassination of Kirov, and he was able to utilise the resultant campaign against 'plotters' and 'spies' to launch a wave of arrests and to silence even the slightly discordant voices within the party. [66]

What is the relevance of these events to discussion of the Popular Front? Monty Johnstone presents the turn as a victory of enlightened forces over the fanatical Stalin, but ignores the fact that the consolidation of the turn in 1934-5 **rested upon the consolidation of absolute power by Stalin**. It had evidently proved impossible to convene the Seventh Congress of the Comintern as planned in summer 1934, given the unresolved situation within the CPSU as well as other sections such as the PCF. Its postponement by a year allowed sufficient time for Stalin's domestic Mafia and his international hatchet-men like Dimitrov and Manuilsky to create the necessary conditions for an 'authoritative' gathering. It is no doubt true that in the absence of clear policy directives from Stalin (who occupied himself little with Comintern affairs in 1934), certain divisions could appear and even endure for a short period within the Comintern apparatus; one can well imagine, for example, the calculations of a Bela Kun that he could read Stalin's mind better than Dimitrov, and that when the General Secretary ended his tactical ploy he would call a halt to the concessions to social democracy and 'unity'. But although these considerations are not unimportant on a secondary level, they do nothing to explain the thoroughness with which the supposed 'dogmatist and sectarian' Stalin embraced and cynically exploited the Popular Front, followed with scarcely a whimper by Kun and his associates. The real reasons for the change of policy have to be sought in the re-examination of the European arena made by the Stalinist apparatus after the rise of Hitler, which reached its first practical realisation in the Stalin-Laval pact of May 1935.

The turn away from the Third Period naturally made it possible for the French Communist Party to overcome its isolation, which, despite the unquestioning obedience of its leaders, must have been a source of constant concern. However, that turn could have become a return to revolutionary Marxism only if Thorez had been capable of a fundamental break with Moscow. The Comintern apparatus no longer viewed the action of its national sections through the prism of a world revolutionary strategy, but judged them by their usefulness to the manoeuvres engaged in by Soviet diplomacy with the imperialist powers. The overriding authority of Moscow during this period is nowhere better expressed than in Manuilsky's speech on the work of the Seventh Congress. His report opens with the statement that 'Our Congress was the Congress of victorious Socialism in the USSR', and goes on to assert that this victory is the factor that will make possible 'victory on a world scale' by causing 'a powerful movement towards Socialism in the capitalist countries... That is why the prospect of the whole development of the world working class movement is inseparable from the further victories of Socialism in the USSR. That is why **all the key problems of this movement, all its tactical problems, revolve around the central axis — the reinforcement of the USSR as the base of the world proletarian revolution.**' [67] Over the years, the language and the underlying political conception have become familiar: instead of the Soviet Union being considered as a responsible fraction of the revolutionary movement of the working class, the international proletariat is itself seen as a subordinate part of the 'socialist fatherland' (or, more precisely, of its controlling bureaucratic summit).

Since the manoeuvres of Soviet diplomacy were thus seen as the basic 'tactical problem' facing the French Communist Party, it was inevitable that what Monty Johnstone terms the 'complementarity' of Soviet and PCF policies should take the form of a 'complementary' reconciliation with French imperialism. [68] At the height of the mass struggle of 1936, Marcel Gitton stated unambiguously in *L'Humanité* (3 June) the guiding principle of the PCF throughout the 'disorders':

'We think it impossible to pursue any policy that would risk endangering the security of France in the face of the Hitlerite threat.' This in itself mirrored the equally clear expression of concern of Stalin's master diplomat, Maxim Litvinov: 'The essential point is that France should not allow her military strength to be weakened. We hope that no international disturbance will favour the designs of the Reich.' [69] A year later the Stalinist propaganda agencies no longer contented themselves with regrets at the revolutionary disturbances in Barcelona, but attributed them directly to fascist agents!

The function of the Popular Front will become clear from an examination of the French and Spanish upsurges of 1936.

JUNE '36

It is not often realised that throughout the period from 1932 to 1936, the parties that formed the Popular Front **already** commanded a parliamentary majority with 322 seats. Thus the real significance of the April-May election results was not so much, as Monty Johnstone suggests, the fact that these parties together received 'an absolute majority in the Chamber of Deputies with 378 seats', but rather the greatly increased representation of the major workers parties and the corresponding defeat of the bourgeois Radicals. If, despite losing nearly half-a-million votes and a quarter of their seats, they 'remained a force to be reckoned with', this was due above all to the second-ballot withdrawal in their favour of lower-placed SFIO and CP candidates. [70] Monty Johnstone professes to understand that election results 'need to be analysed dynamically in their social context to assess trends and revolutionary potential', but, like Thorez before him, he ends up **clinging** to the remaining Radical vote as to a life-jacket against revolution — as if the truly dynamic tendency of the situation were not the evident radicalisation of the popular masses searching for a new leadership but the abiding attachment of the most conservative sections to the sinking ship of Radicalism!

In reality, the outcome of the elections was neither anticipated nor welcomed by Stalin and the leaders of his French followers. The class struggle had succeeded in leaving its mark even on the Popular Front, from which all thought of class struggle had been banished; the timid leadership of the Socialist Party had been impelled into office instead of that stable Radical administration which was the linchpin of Stalinist strategy and for which the PCF had been campaigning during the previous period. 'The voter', Trotsky wrote, 'has expressed his will—so far as he can in the straitjacket of parliamentarianism—not in favour of the People's Front **policy** but against it.' [71] Monty Johnstone demonstratively scratches his head at such an obvious affront to common sense. But if Johnstone himself is so enwrapped in a parliamentary straitjacket that he cannot glimpse the significance of the class polarisation reflected in the May elections, the French workers delivered astonishing proof the following month of their will to struggle and their lack of respect for the Radical policies and friends of their leaders.

The great strike wave that swept France in May-June 1936 brought the masses in their millions to the centre of the arena. [72] Starting on 11-12 May with two successful defensive battles in Le Havre and Toulouse, the movement rapidly assumed the character of a generalised confrontation between the working class and the employers. By the end of the month, virtually all the major engineering factories in the Paris region were out on strike, and in the next few days layer upon layer of textile, distribution, catering, printing and other workers — organised and unorganised; provincial and Parisian — enthusiastically followed the lead of the huge proletarian concentrations of Bloch and Renault. Everywhere economic demands were articulated to a still confused yet profound revolt against the stranglehold of big capital over society; everywhere workers occupied their

factories in direct challenge to the rule of the bosses. The bourgeoisie was seized with panic and could do no more than grant far-reaching concessions on the 'economic' front, whilst trusting to the moderation of Blum and Thorez to maintain its social domination and its ability to launch a counter-attack at the first opportunity.

However, the initial attempt to end the movement — the Matignon agreements of 7 June between the Government, the employers' federation and trade union leaders, including the Communist Benoit Frachon — merely provoked an intensification of the strike wave. Sensing the weakness of the capitalists, the worker militants began to raise fresh demands, in particular for the establishment of a minimum wage over and above the agreed increases and, failing this, for the nationalisation of their factories. In one area of Paris the Hotchkiss workers issued the call for an elected central strike committee, grouping representatives from 34 local factories. On 11 June, when Thorez made his famous speech to a meeting of Paris Communists, the country was at fever pitch and the capital ablaze with rumours that a demonstration to the city centre was under preparation. Now surely this was the time for the PCF to give effect to its talk of popular elected committees and the still current slogan of 'Soviets everywhere!' Had not Dimitrov at the Seventh Congress stated that, 'as the movement grows and the unity of the working class strengthens, we must go further, and prepare the transition from the defensive to the offensive against capital, steering toward the organisation of a mass political strike'? [73] And had not Thorez himself argued that with the formation of a Popular Front government, 'the Popular Front and the Communist Party will occupy new positions, which we shall utilise to prepare the installation of Soviet power and the dictatorship of the proletariat'? [74]

When he was actually faced by a mass strike movement, however, Thorez could see only one way forward: 'we need to know how to end the strike' that was so menacing to 'national security'. In reality, the French Communist Party had throughout the 'disorders' done everything in its power to prevent the movement from finding a political voice. It had refused to participate in the Blum Government, not because it saw it as a bourgeois administration, but because 'the Communists will serve the people's cause better by supporting the Socialist-led Government loyally, uninterruptedly and without reservations, than by their presence in the cabinet — which would give the enemies of the people a pretext to launch campaigns of fright and panic.' [75] Once the spontaneous strike wave had begun, the party could evidently retain its mass base and influence over events only by active participation in the movement. But all its efforts were directed towards limiting the struggle to purely economic demands, and it never ceased to present itself as the party of order and 'national interest'. Thus, on 6 June, Vaillant-Couturier gave in *L'Humanité* the following reason for desiring a speedy end to the conflict: 'The prolonging of the present situation, which is due to the egotism and obstinacy of the employers, cannot but imperil the security of the people of France.' Several months later, when he was no longer under such intense mass pressure, Thorez went so far as to **disavow** what Johnstone refers to as 'the great sit-in strikes, in which the Communist trade unionists played a leading role and the Communist Party gave its full support.' [76] On reflection, the Stalinist 'son of the people' thought 'it is better not to use that form of struggle, given the development of reactionary campaigns that sow trouble and uncertainty among the common people (*les petites gens*)'. [77]

'The Communist Party Means Order!' proclaimed in bold headlines *L'Humanité* of 14 June, and indeed this was no empty boast. Only the party that was still linked in the consciousness of the masses with the October Revolution, that still declared its commitment 'in principle' to soviet power, and that had placed itself at the head of the strike movement — only that party was capable of bringing the workers to heel. Thorez's speech of 11 June, in which he

gave instructions to the Communists to bring the strikes to an end, represented the culmination of a process whereby the Communist Party had been transformed from a revolutionary vanguard into an agency of bourgeois order within the workers movement.

Monty Johnstone attempts to defend Thorez by one of his grotesque historical analogies. 'This was no more a "betrayal"', he says, 'than was the action of Lenin and the Bolsheviks who in June and July "held back and shaped into a peaceful demonstration" the "spontaneous excitement" of the Petrograd masses...' [78] What Johnstone forgets is that the Bolsheviks' action during the July days was guided by the aim of the seizure of power, and by the need to win over broader sections of the masses to that revolutionary goal. It was the Mensheviks and Right SRs who then 'meant order' and who were preparing to liquidate the power of the soviets into the 'Democratic Conference'. And in France it was the Communist Party that was guided by its explicit rejection of revolution as the way out of the crisis of bourgeois society. At the same time, Johnstone's invocation of the example of the Bolsheviks demonstrates 'too much' for his purposes. For even if the May-June strike movement were comparable to the July Days, this would show that what was involved in France was not simply an everyday struggle for economic demands, but a profoundly revolutionary mood amongst the workers, which the PCF for its own reasons felt compelled to dampen.

Monty Johnstone's further thoughts on the subject of revolution (which, it must be remembered, he has already ruled out for that epoch at least) read like a Menshevik litany of cravenness: 'Even assuming... that the Socialists with 16.92 per cent had been prepared to join with the Communists in proceeding "from the very first day of the strike" to establish "a regime of dual power", would they have had a reasonable chance... of carrying the majority with them? Was it not simply wishful thinking to believe that millions who had registered their support for bourgeois parties at the ballot-box one week would have transferred it to the workers parties on the barricades the next? And, indeed, if these millions were really capable of such volatility and illogicality, is it not just as probable that they would have veered back again to the right when things became difficult the week after?... Had the workers' parties as a minority attempted "the conquest of power by the proletariat"... the likelihood is that they would have driven a significant part of the one and a half million Radical voters into the arms of the Right... Across the Rhine stood Nazi Germany allied to Fascist Italy...' and so on. [79] If such wisdom had prevailed in April 1917, when the Bolsheviks still represented a small minority of the proletariat, not to speak of the peasant masses, then the world would have been a very different place indeed — the French workers would have faced in 1936 not just German imperialism (and we should add British imperialism 'just across the Channel'), but Tsarist-bourgeois Russia further to the East!

What is completely absent from Monty Johnstone's thinking is a realisation of the enormous social and political power of the working class when it is united behind a determined revolutionary leadership; he sees the strength of the enemy and the vacillations of the petty bourgeoisie as insuperable barriers to the advance of the working class, rather than as elements of class struggle that confront the proletariat as obstacles to be transformed and overcome. In short, for all his talk of 'hegemony', he sees the working class not as the potential leader of humanity, capable of rousing and directing the broad masses under its banner, but as a shame-faced giant that must hide its power for fear of provoking reaction.

What, then, was possible in June 1936? We have no wish to follow in the footsteps of centrist confusionists like Marceau Pivert, who could excitedly declare in one breath that 'Now everything is possible!', and in the next breath express their unbounded confidence in Léon Blum. If the proletariat had possessed a leadership adequate to its tasks,



Trotsky and Lenin 'held back' the spontaneous demonstrations in July 1917 because broader masses had first to be won to the goal of the seizure of power, successfully accomplished in October; Johnstone attempts a grotesque analogy with Thorez's call to end the strikes in June 1936, whose purpose was precisely the opposite.

it could rapidly have placed itself at the head of the popular masses in the struggle to destroy the power of the capitalists; but the French 'Communists', who cynically exploited their revolutionary past in their claim to leadership, counterposed to Pivert's formula 'the Communist (!) declaration: everything is not possible; the crucial slogan of the Party remains: "Everything for the Popular Front, everything through the Popular Front"'. [80]

Monty Johnstone pretends that the choice in June 1936 was either immediate insurrection or the policy pursued by the Communist Party. In this he is following a long anti-revolutionary tradition that seeks to ridicule the revolutionary perspective by identifying it with the seizure of power tomorrow. Now, amongst Leninists it is of course possible to discuss the precise tactics applicable at every point of a mass upsurge within a shared revolutionary strategic framework. But, as in Russia, what was essentially under debate was not the military-political organisation of insurrection, but the **definition of a revolutionary perspective**, the organisation of the vanguard of advanced workers around it, and the formulation of clear conjunctural slogans responding to the needs of the masses and leading towards that goal. [81] We have already given sufficient evidence to show that the policies of the PCF were aimed at **removing the danger** of revolution.

Nor is it true that the distinction is between the 'wishful thinking' of revolutionary Marxists and the 'sober realism' of the struggle for 'economic demands'. In a period of capitalist crisis the **only** way out for the masses is the **fusion** of the struggle for their material interests (against falling living standards, unemployment, erosion of democratic rights, and the fascist bands) with the political struggle for state power.

Let us take the example of living standards. One of the principal economic gains of the mass strike (which had nothing to do with the Popular Front programme) was across-the-board wage increases of between 7 and 15 per cent. Faced with the threat of revolution, the capitalists were prepared to grant what were then massive rises in the knowledge that they could be recuperated in more peaceful times by mechanisms such as inflation. And indeed, within one or two years all the gains of 1936, except paid holidays, had been liquidated by the capitalist counter-attack. Any genuine socialist could have foreseen this outcome as well as the working class response: the automatic rise of wage levels simultaneously with rises in the cost of living (a 'sliding scale of wages'). However, the French Stalinist, Socialist and trade union leaders well understood that such radical measures to defend the interests of the working class would be completely unacceptable to the capitalists and the 'Radicals', and would quickly bring to the fore the question of where the state power lay. Just as Blum and Thorez held up 'unity' in 1934 as a self-sufficient goal for the masses, so in June 1936 they presented the Matignon agreements as a self-sufficient victory that could be consolidated by a period of 'democratic order'. Thus, far from it being the case that the PCF pointed a 'realistic' way forward, the only way in which the immediate needs of the French masses could have been defended was by **revolutionary-despotic measures enforced by the power of the mobilised masses**.

All the propaganda and agitation of the French Trotskyists centred on these tasks facing the working class and on the need to forge a leadership adequate to them. Although we should not exaggerate the extent of the Trotskyists' influence, the bourgeoisie and the Stalinists certainly did not share Johnstone's view of them as a 'puny band'. *L'Humanité* launched an hysterical attack on Trotskyist 'provocateurs', with whom it identified the revolutionary tendencies of the working class itself; and on 14 June it implicitly associated itself with the Blum Government's confiscation of the Trotskyist paper *La Lutte Ouvrière*. As we shall see more clearly in the case of Spain, the 'defence of democracy' was inextricably bound up with the suppression of workers democracy and the basic democratic rights of

revolutionary opponents of class collaboration.

AFTERMATH

The aim of the French Communist Party in June 1936 was to hinder the movement of mass action from raising any directly political goals. 'Everything for the Popular Front, everything through the Popular Front' involved the characteristically reformist concentration of political activity in the meeting-rooms of parliament and cabinet, and if the demobilisation of the masses was in the end accomplished with relative ease, this was due above all to the illusions in the Blum Government systematically aroused by the professedly 'Marxist' SFIO and 'Bolshevik' PCF.

What, then, were the fruits of moderation? A year later Blum withdrew from the centre of the stage having achieved nothing but the consolidation of bourgeois rule and the demoralisation of the mass movement. 'What went wrong?', asks Monty Johnstone, and with a show of 'fairness' he admits that of course 'the Communists... did make certain mistakes in applying their new line in novel and complex circumstances'; however, his balance sheet is limited to a quotation from Thorez's own statement in 1947 (which, as we have seen, responded to the polemical needs of the hour): 'We did suggest the creation of People's Front Committees democratically elected in the factories and localities. We suggested the holding of a National Congress, composed of delegates elected by popular assemblies at the base... but we did not succeed in breaking the opposition of the Socialists and of our partners to the holding of a sovereign congress.' [82] The bureaucratic deceit underlying this assessment is quite transparent. At the **highpoint** of mass activity in May-June 1936, the Communist Party did not even raise the slogan of committees, still less engage in a systematic fight for them; it supported the Blum Government and its Radical successors even during its own campaign for aid to the Spanish Republic; and, most significantly, it attempted to broaden the Popular Front not by mass mobilisation and organisation but by **raising the slogan of the 'French Front'**! This innovation, which is not mentioned by Monty Johnstone, was to be based on 'respect for the law, defence of the national economy and of the freedom and independence of our country' — in other words, on a programme that could be (and was intended to be) acceptable to the most conservative bourgeois politicians. [83] In the end, the PCF leadership declared its willingness in March 1938 to form a straightforward government of national union that would include such reactionary Catholic diehards as Louis Martin. So much for Monty Johnstone's argument that the Communist Party's policy of alliance prevented the Radicals from being driven into the arms of the Right. [84]

Finally, we should look at the positive achievements attributed by Johnstone to the Popular Front. [85]

1. 'The People's Front did succeed in its first aim which was to stem the growth of the French Fascist movement'.

It is certainly true that the powerful mobilisations of the working class movement in February 1934 had demonstrated that the fascists would not march to power with the same ease as in Germany. One of the reasons why the German bourgeoisie had backed Hitler after 1930 was its growing conviction that he would not meet with any effective resistance from the SPD and KPD — resistance that would have unleashed the spectre of proletarian revolution. In the face of the capacity for **spontaneous** working class action (vividly reaffirmed in May-June 1936), the French capitalists could no longer be so confident. Thus, although they doubtless considered contingency plans for a military coup backed by a fascist movement, they hesitated to turn to the leagues as a political solution. We cannot of course assert categorically the way in which the petty bourgeoisie and fascism would have developed, 'if' the inter-imperialist contradictions had not become so closely intertwined with the national class struggle after 1939. What we can say,

however — and in this sense Trotsky was perfectly correct — is that the Popular Front, by leading the mass movement into the dead-end of bourgeois coalitionism and consequent rapid demoralisation, prepared the most fertile ground possible for an anti-working class dictatorship of one kind or another. Despite the evident dissimilarity between the Pétain regime and traditional fascism, it is nevertheless true that it was the Hitler-Pétain dictatorship that succeeded in the task of the destruction of the organised workers movement.

Johnstone further points to the dissolution by Blum of the fascist leagues and attacks Trotsky for describing this as 'a lie and deception'. Blum did indeed issue an order on 18 June 1936 dissolving the *Croix du Feu*. But Johnstone does not mention that the very next day its leader, Colonel de la Rocque, founded an ideologically identical *Parti Social Français*, which was allowed to function throughout the following period. Nothing in the history of France or Spain has challenged Trotsky's position, which had previously been that of the Comintern, that 'only the armed workers can resist fascism'. [86]

2. 'The Popular Front period was also one of trade union unification and growth from one to five million members'.

Again, this contains an element of truth, but no more. The enormous growth of the CGT occurred in the wave of enthusiasm that accompanied and briefly succeeded the spontaneous strike wave of 1936 and the temporary conquests. However, by 1938 hundreds of thousands of workers were already leaving the CGT, which on the eve of the war stood at the same level as in January 1936 (i.e. approximately one million members). [87] There could be no clearer indication of the lack of perspective for the workers movement provided by the Popular Front and its Stalinist, Socialist and syndicalist guardians of social peace.

It is naturally impossible to discuss here fully the course of the revolution and civil war in Spain. [88] However, it is in the policies pursued by Stalin and the Spanish Communist Party (PCE) that we can see most clearly the anti-revolutionary character of Monty Johnstone's positions, as well as the difference between revolutionary Marxism and the Popular Front.

THE SPANISH REVOLUTION

Between February and July 1936, as Johnstone recognises, 'a great explosion of militancy and initiative among the working people' swept Spain. 'Workers occupied factories and peasants and agricultural workers took land from the big landowners' [89] in a movement strikingly familiar to, yet going considerably beyond, the May-June events in France. The major difference was that the Spanish Communist leaders, who knew as well as Thorez 'how to end a strike', did not have sufficient prestige and influence among the masses to bury the upsurge in an equivalent of the Matignon agreements. Despite the efforts of the Popular Front, which had won the February parliamentary elections, this instinctive revolt posed more and more sharply the question of power. And yet Monty Johnstone claims that these actions were in accordance with the perspective of the Popular Front!?

The bourgeoisie rapidly understood the depth of the upsurge and the lack of room for compromise: it could place no confidence in the ability of the Spanish Blums, Thorezes and Jouhaux to carry out their policing role within the workers movement. In June-July 1936 the capital was filled with rumours of an imminent military *putsch*, which the Republican Popular Front Government of Cesares Quiroga awaited as it would a natural disaster. The 'Communist' Republicans, drawing greater energy from their Bolshevik past, called on the Prime Minister to take 'firm action' against the plotters, as if a lifeless mummy in a Madrid office could utilise any section of the forces of 'order' to combat

the rebellion of virtually the entire state apparatus! Only the arming of the masses and the ruthless dispersal of the 'Republican' army and the police could have spared the Spanish masses from the coming civil war. But, as Monty Johnstone will learnedly point out, the slogan of 'workers and peasants' militias' would have been 'highly provocative' under the prevailing circumstances: it would have mixed up 'the defensive' and 'the offensive'; it would have separated the workers from their 'middle class allies'; it would have ignored the sacred distinction between bourgeois-democratic and socialist stages; it would have suggested that state action against the fascists was indeed 'a lie and a deception'; in short, it would have blown to pieces the whole criminal policy of cowardice and class collaboration that went by the name of the Popular Front. Therefore, the Communist Party did not agitate for militias in the critical days before the 18 July.

Even after the launching of the military rebellion, the Government continued in the words of Trotsky so resented by Monty Johnstone, 'to lull the workers and peasants with parliamentary illusions' by its broadcast appeal: 'The Government has noted the offers of aid it has received and, while offering its gratitude, states that the best way to help us is to carry on normally with everyday life, in order to set an example of calm and trust in the military forces of the state.' [90] Faced with such paralysis, the Communist Party and the right-wing Socialists issued a treacherous communiqué of their own: 'It is a difficult, not a desperate time. The Government is sure that it has adequate means to crush this criminal move. Should its means prove inadequate, the Republic has the Popular Front's [i.e. of the CP and SP] solemn promise. It is ready to intervene in the struggle as soon as it is asked for help. The Government commands and the Popular Front obeys.' [91]

Fortunately the Spanish masses paid little heed to such advice and, following the initiative of the CNT and UGT in calling a general strike, began to arm themselves and crush the rebellion in the major centres, dragging along behind them the Comintern 'leadership'. It is ironic that the historically doomed forces of anarchism and left-socialism proved more adequate guides for workers action than the leaders of the Communist International (although in the months to come, of course, their inability to engage in the struggle for power was to prove fatal for the revolution). Twenty years after October, the full extent of the degeneration of the Comintern was strikingly revealed.

In the days following 18 July, as Dolores Ibarruri and Monty Johnstone are forced to admit, 'the whole state apparatus was destroyed and state power lay in the street.' [92] Not just in the street, we may add, but in the countless revolutionary committees which rapidly covered the unoccupied part of the country. However, Johnstone's trust in parliament and the Popular Front is not so easily shaken, for on the same page he argues that 'to have overthrown the parliament just elected by the people by a revolution for the establishment of soviet power' would have played into the hands of Franco! Thus, even when 'the whole state apparatus (which for Marxists includes parliament) is destroyed and state power lies in the street', even when he is faced by the most gigantic revolutionary upsurge in the history of at least Western Europe, Johnstone repeats the old refrain that revolution is 'highly provocative'. To the power of the armed people of July 1936 he prefers the atomised voters of February; to the 'ultra-leftism' of the masses he prefers the sobriety of impotent Republican gentlemen and their Stalinist and social democratic hangers-on. Even six months later, by the way, the prime minister of Spain, Largo Caballero, could reply to Stalin's praise of parliament with the observation that 'there are no enthusiastic defenders of parliament to be found here, even among the Republicans'. [93]

If in July the bourgeois state was smashed to pieces, and if parliament lay and continued to lie suspended in mid-air above the masses, nevertheless none of their leaders had the



Arming of Barcelona workers' militias in July 1936

will to administer the *coup de grace*. The Caballero Socialists were swept along by events, whilst continuing to mouth phrases about the 'dictatorship of the proletariat'; the Anarchists recoiled in horror from the idea of a workers state, whilst entering the bourgeois government 'just for the moment'; and the POUM, dreading above all 'sectarian isolation', fell into line at the decisive conjunctures. Again the parallel with the situation of the Russian workers movement is evident. But whereas from April onwards the Bolshevik Party gradually won decisive leadership of the masses in the struggle for workers' power, the Spanish Stalinists — who were alone among the major currents in having a precise goal — set about the **reconstruction of the demolished bourgeois state** with tremendous energy and determination. In this they were greatly assisted by the military support and growing political control of Moscow over the actions of the Republican Government. Their authority was nonetheless also based on a single argument that has for millenia been the stock-in-trade of the deceivers of the masses, namely, 'first we must win the war, then we shall see about liberty, equality, fraternity, who knows, perhaps even socialism'. The speech of Dolores Ibarruri quoted by Johnstone gives a flavour of the demagoguery of the period: '.... this miners' wife and daughter made it clear that the struggle was "not for the Spain which is dying together with the enemy, but for the Spain we want to have — a democratic Spain which will give the peasants land, which will socialise industry under the control of the workers" and "will completely and comprehensively, and in a revolutionary spirit, solve the economic problems that lie at the foundation of all revolutions."' [94]

In July 1936 there were just two strategic roads open, and indeed two ways of combatting the military uprising: **either** the centralisation of the existing revolutionary committees and militias into a powerful workers state and army, **or** the destruction of the committees and militias and their replacement by a strong bourgeois state apparatus, largely bypassing or abolishing the institutions of bourgeois democracy. In his writings, Trotsky repeatedly argued that the key to victory lay not in a handful of bourgeois Republicans and their friends in London and Paris, but in the mobilisation of all the energies of the masses behind **their own state and their own army**; any other course would lead to the demoralisation of the masses and inevitable bourgeois repression against their militant vanguard.

By depriving the masses of their most important weapon — their revolutionary organs of struggle — the Popular Front coalition **broke** the fighting unity of the workers and peasants. It was only a matter of time before this was consummated in the physical suppression of those workers' organisations that responded, however ineffectively, to the revolutionary aspirations of the masses. Already on 17 December 1936 *Pravda* gave the cue to its GPU agents and their native associates in Spain: 'In Catalonia the elimination of Trotskyists and Anarcho-Syndicalists has already begun; it will be carried out with the same energy as in the USSR.' After the first Moscow trial and the shooting of innumerable 'mad dogs', 'spies' and 'wreckers', the implication of the threat was unmistakable. Thus, whereas for Trotsky it was the revolutionary unity of the working masses that was essential for victory, to the Executive Committee of the Communist International it was 'the complete extermination of the Trotskyist POUM gang' that constituted 'one of the most important prerequisites for victory over the fascist murderers and vandals'. [95] Beginning with the exclusion of the POUM from the Madrid Defence Junta in November 1936 [96], and culminating in the arrests and murders of POUM and Anarchist militants in 1937, the counter-revolutionary Stalinist-Republican repression was one of the principal factors of demoralisation and demobilisation. It should also be realised that the Negrin Government, which followed the removal of Largo Caballero in May 1937, was a bourgeois-democratic regime that had 'important elements' not of socialism but of military dictatorship: it was based on a widely employed censorship, suppression of 'anti-Republican' organisations, 'catch-all' definitions of capital offences (such as 'acts or demonstrations **tending to weaken** public morale, demoralise the Army, or diminish collective discipline'), a powerful secret police, and so on. By late 1937 no less a figure than Winston Churchill could write approvingly of the dramatic changes: 'When in any country the whole structure of civilised and social life is destroyed by atavistic hatreds, the State can only be reconstituted upon a military framework In its new army the Spanish Republic has an instrument not only of military but of political significance.' [97]

It is in this light that we should view the events of May 1937 in Barcelona. Despite the formation of a regional bourgeois government, the growing control exercised by Negrin, and the dismantling of the power of the committees, Catalonia had remained a stronghold of the CNT and

POUM. On 3 May, as the climax to a campaign against these two organisations, the Stalinist leader Rodriguez Sala led a detachment of armed police to occupy the central telephone exchange, which had been administered by a joint CNT-UGT committee since the previous July. Fighting broke out almost immediately and by evening a spontaneous workers' insurrection had placed Barcelona in the hands of the masses. CNT leaders were later to repeat ceaselessly that, had they wished, they could have taken power with the minimum of effort. The problem was that they did not wish, and all their efforts were directed instead to securing the dismantling of the barricades and a return to work. The punishment for their betrayal was swift indeed: utilising the results of their own provocation, the Stalinists depicted the uprising of the Barcelona proletariat as a plot by Trotskyist fifth-columnists, and in the ensuing witch-hunt they succeeded in beheading the POUM and isolating Caballero Socialists and Anarchists within the Government.

What is Monty Johnstone's account of these events? He ignores the attempted occupation of the telephone exchange, which triggered the explosion. Instead he portrays the left-Anarchists, POUMists and ultimately the Barcelona proletariat itself as playthings of a handful of Franco agents, thus implicitly excusing the brutal repression of the workers' leaders by the GPU and its Spanish accomplices. [98] In support of his bureaucratic-police conception of history, all he can do is quote the boast of Franco's brother to the German ambassador that his thirteen agents in Barcelona had 'succeeded in having the shooting started in the streets, which then led to the desired results'. It is obvious that Franco, whose brother was a master of black propaganda, had a vested interest in thus describing to his Nazi allies the miraculous feats of his agents. In any case, Franco does not mention where his agents were placed: it would seem more logical that they had been behind the initial act of provocation — the Stalinist occupation of the telephone exchange.

Ultimately, of course, all this talk of provocation is beside the point. In the spring of 1936, two powers and two tendencies faced each other in Catalonia. One of these was revolutionary and, whatever the desires of its leaders, associated with the CNT and the POUM; the other was bourgeois Republican and consciously identified with Stalinists and right-wing social democrats. A clash between them was inevitable — the GPU and Stalinists had long been meticulously preparing for the final confrontation with the revolution. If it had not been fully clear whether this would meet with resistance or capitulation on the part of the CNT and POUM leaders, after the surrender in Barcelona there could no longer be any serious doubt about the outcome.

CONCLUSION

Throughout Monty Johnstone's articles, one feels the author straining at the leash of 'scrupulous analysis' to which he has supposedly committed himself. At the end, however, he finally breaks loose and feels free to heap on Trotsky one of those epithets coined in the high Stalin period. It now seems that in 1933 (i.e., at the height of his struggle against the petty-bourgeois hysteria of the 'Third Period') Trotsky had all the features of what one 'Ralph Fox aptly described ... as "the petty bourgeois in a hurry"'. [99] What then, we may well ask, does this Monty Johnstone represent?

We have seen enough examples of the handiwork of this amateur forger: how he systematically distorts Trotsky's positions on the German revolution; how he ignores Trotsky's real views on the united front in France; how he covers up the role of the Comintern at the decisive conjunctures and falls into the most blatant self-contradiction when he tries to justify it. Devoid himself of the slightest trace of dialectical thinking, he can only try to bury the revolutionary continuity of Trotskyism in that stagnant swamp of eclecticism and zig-zag that has characterised



Stalinism throughout its history. It is true that he no longer considers Trotsky to have been in the pay of the imperialist secret services in October 1917; but in his 'research' he has done little more than sift through the stale left-overs of the Stalin school of falsification and warm them up for a new public.

It is no accident that the CPGB (not to speak of the CPSU) is still incapable of honestly facing up to its own history, passing off such scurrilous intellectual swindlers as 'objective critical analysts'. For the whole existence of Monty Johnstone's political stage-managers is based on a deception that inevitably breeds the method of eclecticism and distortion. What else can be expected of people who talk occasionally of revolution only to conceal their fear of it from advanced workers; who, in the manner of the most despicable labour bureaucrats, equate the prostration of the Italian Communist Party before Christian Democracy with the strength of the workers movement; and who, when they are faced in Spain or Chile by the revolutionary aspirations of the exploited and oppressed masses, can recognise only 'petty bourgeois haste', 'threats to national unity' and 'provocation of the bourgeoisie'? Truly, they show no limits to their 'petty bourgeois haste' to assist the bourgeoisie in the exorcism of the spectre of communism!

Nevertheless, these cynical manipulators will in future have to call on the services of rather more capable scribes than Monty Johnstone. The recent revival of Marxist theory and of informed interest in Trotsky's historical struggle has left little room for such shady characters, whose intellectual prostitution is clearly discernible beneath even the most highly polished surface. And in the vital, frank debate that is now developing amongst revolutionaries on the central questions of revolutionary strategy and tactics, Marxists will treat with the contempt it deserves the debilitating stew of historical falsification and class capitulation that has long been the staple fare of the Johnstone kitchen.

NOTES

1. Monty Johnstone, 'Trotsky and the Popular Front', in *Marxism Today*, October and November 1975; Eric Hobsbawm, 'Forty Years of Popular Front Governments', in *Marxism Today*, July 1976; see also Johnstone, 'Trotsky and World Revolution', *Cogito* pamphlet, 1976.
2. Johnstone, *op. cit.* (1975), p. 351.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 308.
4. *Challenge*, 23 September 1939.
5. *World News and Views*, 7 October 1939.
6. See, for example, Althusser, *Essays in Self-Criticism*, London 1976, p. 83.
7. Johnstone, *op. cit.* (1975), pp. 308-10; see also Johnstone, 'Trotsky and World Revolution', pp. 9-10.
8. Trotsky, *The Struggle Against Fascism in Germany*, New York, 1971.
9. 'The Turn in the Communist International' (September 1930), in *ibid.*, p. 85.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 69. Our emphasis.
11. 'Germany, The Key to the International Situation', in *ibid.*, p.

121.

12. 'The Only Road', in *ibid.*, pp. 321-2.13. Quoted in Johnstone, *op. cit.* (1975), p. 309n.14. 'What Next?', in Trotsky, *op. cit.*, p. 194.

15. 'The logic of events is such that the struggle for "parliament" and for "democracy" becomes for every Social Democratic worker a question of power. Therein lies the main content of the whole conflict from the standpoint of the revolution. The question of power is the question of the revolutionary unity of the proletariat in action. A united-front policy with respect to the Social Democracy must be pursued in the very near future to render possible, on the basis of proletarian democratic representation, the creation of class organs of struggle, i.e., of workers' soviets.' 'The Only Road', in *ibid.*, p. 328. See also the section of 'What Next?' entitled 'Through the United Front — to Soviets as the Highest Organs of the United Front', in *ibid.*, pp. 193-9.

16. See *ibid.*, esp. pp. 201, 295, 307, 380, 393.

17. It is this 'active, revolutionary attacking element in the policy' that Monty Johnstone cannot tolerate or even 'see'. He thus hints that Trotsky's criticisms of the Comintern were essentially the same as those of the centrist Brandlerites and Sozialistisches Arbeiterpartei (*op. cit.* (1975), p. 309); a more aggressive assertion of the same point — intended no doubt to 'harden out' YCL readers — may be found in 'Trotsky and World Revolution', p. 10. The following is a typical assessment by Trotsky of the Brandlerites: 'The Brandlerites are one of the mouthpieces of Social Democracy... The moment the relationship of forces changes radically to the advantage of the proletarian revolution, the Brandlerites will again turn out to be... a brake on the revolution' (*op. cit.*, p. 73).

18. Johnstone, *op. cit.* (1975), p. 309. It is true that Johnstone states that Trotsky's writings on Germany should be read 'critically'. However, it is clear from his single example that this refers not to Trotsky's revolutionary perspective (which he prefers not to read at all), but to relatively minor points such as Trotsky's 'argument in 1931 that "the attempt of the fascists to seize power in Germany must lead to the mobilisation of the Red Army" as "the arm of the proletarian revolution"'. Of course, Johnstone denounces this as 'of an adventurist character', but what he does not bother to mention is Trotsky's assessment of such a call in 1933 as... 'sheer adventurism'! (Trotsky, *op. cit.*, p. 387). In reality, such an aggressive internationalist response to the rise of Hitler was ruled out not by questions of principle but by the absence of any workers' resistance in Germany in 1933, and above all by the extreme instability of the Soviet Union itself, following Stalin's policies of previous years.

19. The similarity is striking between this and Khrushchev's 'analysis' of the autocratic features of the Stalin period in terms of 'the personality cult'.

20. The disastrous consequences of the policy of forced collectivization are well-known and are one of the main causes of the phenomenally low productivity of Soviet agriculture today. See, for example, Isaac Deutscher, *Stalin*.

21. '[The Stalinists] will undoubtedly raise the cry that the Left Opposition stands for a bloc with the Second International. These cries, as soon as the real leftward swing of the working class takes the bureaucrats unawares, will not prevent the announcement of a fourth period, or a second stage of the third, and all the Molotovs will enter... into a period of opportunist experiments like the Anglo-Russian Committee and the workers' and peasants' Kuomintang.' (Writings 1930, pp. 61-2).

22. See, for example, *The Struggle Against Fascism in Germany*, p. 227.

23. *The Communist International: Documents*, (Ed. Jane Degras), Oxford 1965, pp. 253-4.

24. Johnstone, *op. cit.* (1975), p. 310.

25. *ibid.*, p. 350.

26. *The Struggle Against Fascism*, p. 134.

27. See *ibid.*, pp. 419-34.

28. See Johnstone, *op. cit.* (1975), p. 310.

29. See Trotsky, *Writings 1932*, pp. 166-8.

30. Quoted in Danos & Gibelin, *Juin '36*, I, Paris 1972, p. 15.

31. Degras (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 291-2.

32. The March edition of *Communist International* admitted the character of the disorder, whilst asserting that 'leadership by the Communist Party over the workers' demonstrations that spontaneously (!) took place was not in evidence on that day'. (Degras, *op. cit.*, p. 315).

33. According to Albert Vassart, who was shortly to become the PCF representative on the Comintern Executive, the decision to authorize participation was taken by the Comintern plenipotentiary in Paris, Eugen Fried. (Vassart, 'Compte-rendu d'une conférence', *La Révolution Proletarienne*, No. 414, p. 23 — cited in Daniel R. Brower, *The New Jacobins*, New York 1968, p. 36). Uppermost in the mind of Fried was doubtless the fact that the Comintern and the PCF were threatened by an original kind of 'united front from below': local PCF branches had begun to break orders by joining ad-hoc committees for the 12th, and it could not be anticipated how many would take part willy nilly in the united actions.

34. *Rundschau*, 8 March 1934 (quoted in Julius Braunthal, *History of the International*, vol. 2, London 1967, p. 424).

35. Although Doriot's struggle momentarily coincided with the dynamic towards the united front, his opposition to the Comintern

expressed many of the opportunist features of the later policies of Thorez and was certainly not grounded in a revolutionary Marxist perspective. After his expulsion, he moved fairly rapidly in the direction of fascism.

36. Vassart, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

37. Again this seems to have followed telegraphic instructions from the Comintern Regional Secretariat. See Brower, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

38. The 'Radical' Premier, Daladier, capitulated to the pressure of the fascist bands outside the gates and made way for a regime of 'national union', headed by the right-wing politician Gaston Doumergue. This government, like its immediate successors, ruled by a system of presidential decree that largely bypassed parliament.

39. Johnstone, *op. cit.* (1975), pp. 313-4. In his eagerness to exploit every available authority, Johnstone falls into the most blatant self-contradiction. Thus, he quotes with glowing approval Isaac Deutscher's critical judgement that Trotsky 'viewed the French scene through the same prism through which he had viewed the German scene' (*ibid.*, p. 349). Could Johnstone really have forgotten that his own argument is the direct opposite of Deutscher's?

40. *The Struggle Against Fascism*, p. 73.

41. 'A Programme of Action for France', *Writings 1934-5*, p. 32.

42. Thorez's opportunist slogan, 'Unity at any price!', represented a clear break not just with the 'Third Period' but with the elementary principles on which the Comintern and its united front policy had been based. See, for example, the 1921 ECCI directives on the united front: 'The principal conditions which are equally categorical for communist parties in all countries are, in the view of the ECCI... the absolute independence of every communist party which enters into an agreement with the parties of the Second and the Two-and-a-Half Internationals, its complete freedom to put forward its own views and to criticise the opponents of communism. Whilst accepting a basis for action, communists must retain the unconditional right and the possibility of expressing their opinion of the policy of all working-class organisations without exception, not only before and after action has been taken but also, if necessary, during its course. In no circumstances can these rights be surrendered.' (*The Communist International: Documents* (Ed. Jane Degras), vol. 1, London 1971, p. 313).

43. Trotsky, *Writings 1934-5*, p. 35.

44. Johnstone, *op. cit.* (1975), p. 314.

45. Monty Johnstone asserts that this was an initiative taken by Thorez. We have no firm evidence to confirm or refute this, but, given his behaviour earlier in the year, the close supervision exercised over him by Comintern representatives, and his reputation throughout his life as the most supple and unquestioning follower of the twists and turns of Moscow's policy, it seems highly unlikely that such a radically new departure would have been decided upon by the French Party without the prior approval of powerful figures within the CPSU and Comintern apparatus.

46. Johnstone quotes Thorez's regrets ten years later that 'the People's Front... became a simple agreement of leaderships' and that the Communists did not succeed in establishing 'democratically elected People's Front Committees in the factories and localities' (*op. cit.* (1975), p. 348). However, we should bear in mind that these remarks were made in 1947 at a time when the PCF was responding to its expulsion from government and to the imperialist intensification of the cold war by a ferocious attack on the social democrats. We cannot accept that this is an honest assessment, since the policies of the PCF made inevitable the form that the People's Front actually took. Moreover, Thorez's judgements had no bearing on future party strategy: where was the call for mass committees in 1968? where does it appear in the perspective of the Union of the Left?

47. Johnstone, *op. cit.* (1975), p. 313.

48. Dimitrov, *Selected Speeches and Articles*, London 1951, pp. 97-8.

49. Thorez, *France Today and the People's Front*, London 1936, p. 180.

50. M. Johnstone, 'Trotsky — His Ideas', in *Cogito* No. 5, 1969. The best answer to virtually all Johnstone's arguments is Trotsky's real ideas, contained in *Lessons of October, The History of the Russian Revolution, The Stalin School of Falsification, and Permanent Revolution*. For recent relevant expositions, see D. Avenas, 'Trotsky's Marxism', *International*, Vol. 3, Nos 2 and 3; N. Geras, *The Legacy of Rosa Luxemburg*, London 1976; and the reply to Johnstone's article by Alan Woods and Ted Grant, *Lenin and Trotsky*, Colombo 1972.

51. See Lenin, *Collected Works*, vol. 9, pp. 48-50.

52. Trotsky, *Results and Prospects*, London 1971, pp. 233-4.

53. *Collected Works*, vol. 23, p. 340.

54. *Collected Works*, vol. 24, p. 45.

55. *ibid.*, p. 50.

56. *Collected Works*, vol. 9, p. 103.

57. We are here leaving aside the not unimportant point that Lenin's writings referred to backward, semi-feudal Russia where the proletariat constituted a tiny (although strategically crucial) minority of the people. It never entered the head of Lenin or of the German socialist leaders of the time to advocate a 'stages' strategy in Imperial Germany, any more than it would occur to a British Marxist to put off the struggle for socialist revolution until 'the people united' had replaced the monarchy by a bourgeois republic.

58. Johnstone, *op. cit.* (1975), p. 313.
59. Trotsky, *Whither France?*, New York 1968, p. 15. Trotsky's supposed 'underestimation of the peasantry' was of course a constant propaganda refrain in the Twenties — at least until the Stalinist apparatus went over to forced collectivisation of the peasant masses and 'liquidation of the kulaks as a class'. For Trotsky's reply, see *Permanent Revolution*, London 1971, esp. chs. 2 & 3.
60. See *Whither France?*, pp. 99-100.
61. Quoted in Brower, *op. cit.*, p. 78. For a long time, the SFIO leaders were able to present themselves as left critics of the PCF's adaptation to Radicalism.
62. *Débats parlementaires*, 1934, p. 1545. Quoted in Brower, *op. cit.*, p. 95.
63. Thorez, *op. cit.*, p. 187.
64. For Trotsky's comments on the events, see *Writings 1935-6*, pp. 48-50.
65. Cf. Roy Medvedev, *Let History Judge*, ch. 6.
66. Stalin's responsibility for the murder of Kirov is now almost universally accepted by non-Stalinist historians of the period. See, for example, Medvedev, *op. cit.*; S.F. Cohen, *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution*, London 1974, p. 345.
67. D.Z. Manuilsky, *Speech on the Work of the Seventh Congress*, London n.d. (1935?), pp. 8-10. Emphasis added. Cf. Dimitrov's 1937 article on 'The Soviet Union and the Working Classes of the Capitalist Countries': 'The historical dividing line between the forces of fascism, war and capitalism, on the one hand, and the forces of peace, democracy and socialism on the other hand, is in fact becoming the attitude towards the Soviet Union, and not the formal attitude toward Soviet power and socialism in general...' (Dimitrov, *op. cit.*, p. 185).
68. Johnstone argues that the 'complementarity' of policy is 'no proof of the usual Trotskyist contention that the Popular Front was dictated by Stalin to promote the foreign policy "needs of the Soviet bureaucracy" to which the Communist Parties were allegedly forced to subordinate the class struggle in their countries'. In support of this argument, he quotes Trotsky's 'admission' in a 1939 private conversation that 'you cannot think of the Comintern as being merely an instrument of Stalin's foreign policy' and that 'the French Communist Party is not only an agency of Moscow, but a national organisation with members of parliament, etc.'. For Monty Johnstone, who seems to have mentally replaced 'not only' by a much simpler 'not', 'such statements... completely contradict (Trotsky's) public pronouncements that the Popular Front was a "criminal policy dictated by Moscow"...' (Johnstone, *op. cit.* (1975), pp. 310-311). However, the contradiction 'completely' disappears once it is realised that the PCF's need for a new policy in 1934-5, after the disaster of the 'Third Period', was concretely filled by the Popular Front policy of alliance with 'democratic' imperialism, which was rooted in the Soviet bureaucracy's fear of revolutionary mobilisation of the European working class, combined with fear of an attack by German imperialism and an understanding of the usefulness of the PCF as living proof of Moscow's renunciation of world revolution and as a cement of a Franco-Soviet alliance.
69. In an interview with Georges Luciani, *Le Petit Parisien*, 16 June 1936. Quoted in G. Lefranc, *Le Front Populaire*, Paris 1974, p. 59.
70. The principal historian of the period, Georges Lefranc, gives a total of 370 seats for the Popular Front parties. These were divided as follows:
- | | 1932 | 1936 |
|-------------------------------|------|------|
| SFIO | 97 | 146 |
| PCF | 10 | 72 |
| Union Socialiste Republicaine | 45 | 26 |
| Parti d'Unité Proletarienne | 11 | 10 |
| Radical Party | 159 | 118 |
- Lefranc, *op. cit.*, p. 58
71. The word 'policy' is curiously omitted without indication in Johnstone's use of the quotation. See *Whither France?*, p. 142. Quoted in Johnstone, *op. cit.* (1975), p. 347.
72. It is of course impossible here to give more than a general impression of the strike movement. The most exhaustive account is that contained in Danos & Gibelin, *op. cit.* For a condensed version in English of this description see R. Kirkwood, 'The Fire Last Time: France 1936', in *International Socialism*, March 1973.
73. Dimitrov, *op. cit.*, p. 63.
74. Quoted in F. Claudin, *The Communist Movement*, Harmondsworth 1975, p. 200.
75. Letter of 14 May from Politbureau of PCF to SFIO. Quoted in Danos & Gibelin, *op. cit.*, p. 35.
76. Johnstone, *op. cit.* (1975), p. 315.
77. Report to Paris Region of PCF, 30 October 1936. Quoted in Danos & Gibelin, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 81.
78. Johnstone, *op. cit.* (1975), p. 316.
79. *Ibid.*, p. 347.
80. Quoted in Danos & Gibelin, *op. cit.*, p. 117.
81. Johnstone is fond of dismissing transitional slogans as a Trotskyist quirk, but the following passage from Dimitrov's report to the Seventh Congress shows how deeply rooted was the conception in the traditions of the Comintern. Only the final liquidation of that tradition in the great purges made it possible for future theoreticians to heap ridicule on the notion. 'We demand from any

- united front government... that it should carry out definite and fundamental revolutionary demands required by the situation. For instance, control of production; control of the banks; disbanding of the police and its replacement by an armed workers' militia. Fifteen years ago Lenin called upon us to focus all our attention on "searching out forms of transition or approach to the proletarian revolution"... To help the millions to master as rapidly as possible, through their own experience, what they have to do, where to find a radical solution... — these among others are the purposes for which both transitional slogans and special "forms of transition or approach to the proletarian revolution" are necessary.' (Dimitrov, *op. cit.*, pp. 97-8).
82. See Johnstone, *op. cit.* (1975), pp. 349 and 348. The coy term 'our other partners' refers of course to the Radicals.
83. Thorez, 'Report to Arles Congress of the PCF'; quoted in Danos & Gibelin, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 59.
84. Johnstone, *op. cit.* (1975), pp. 315, 347.
85. *Ibid.*, p. 349.
86. 'The New Revolutionary Upsurge and the Tasks of the Fourth International', *Writings 1935-6*, p. 35.
87. Lefranc, *op. cit.*, 111-12. The decline of the DGT was greatly accelerated by the bureaucratic and unconstitutional expulsion of leading PCF members after the outbreak of the war.
88. See, *Inter alia*, P. Broué & E. Témime, *The Revolution and the Civil War in Spain*, London 1972; F. Morrow, *Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Spain*, New York 1937.
89. See Johnstone, *op. cit.* [Cogito], p. 11.
90. Quoted in Broué & Témime, *op. cit.*, p. 100.
91. *Loc. cit.*, emphasis added.
92. D. Ibaruri, *Speeches and Articles, 1936-38*, Moscow 1938, p. 6. Quoted in Johnstone, *op. cit.* [Cogito], p. 11.
93. Quoted in Claudin, *op. cit.*, p. 708.
94. Johnstone, *loc. cit.*, emphasis added. Elsewhere, Johnstone curiously admits that 'in practice [i.e. in the actions of the masses — P.C.], this popular revolution... contained within it important elements of a Socialist revolution, though not a Soviet one, overstepping the bounds of a bourgeois-democratic revolution' (p. 12). 'In practice', and at the time also in theory, the Spanish Stalinists did everything in their power to force those 'elements' back into the bounds of bourgeois democracy. See, for example, the declaration of José Díaz, Secretary-General of the PCE: 'We wish to fight only for a democratic republic with a broad social content. There can be no question at present of a dictatorship of the proletariat or of Socialism, but only of the struggle of democracy against Fascism.' (Quoted in Broué & Témime, *op. cit.*, p. 195). Moreover, as is indicated in Ibaruri's speech, even the completion of the bourgeois-democratic reforms was to await the end of the war. Thus the confiscation of land, which Johnstone points to as an example of the resolution of the Popular Front Government, was sanctioned only in relation to landowners who had gone over to Franco, and it was in any case merely a formal recognition of a situation brought about by extra-parliamentary action at least three months previously. It requires an astonishing degree of polemical blindness to endorse the legalistic cretinism of Professor Hugh Thomas, for whom the measure of October 1936 'legalising the expropriation of land owned by nationalists revolutionised the life of Spain' (quoted in Johnstone, *op. cit.* [Cogito], p. 12). As if the life of Spain had not already been 'revolutionised' by the revolutionary expropriation of the land!
- Since Johnstone has such evident respect for the esteemed professor, it is perhaps worth quoting his description of PCE strategy: 'Social and other reforms, Azana and the Communists could now agree, should await victory. And it was the adoption of this policy which gave the Communist Party much of its power.... Their moderation gave them the friendship not only of the Republicans but also of the many regular officers in the Army who thought the Communists sane and well organised. The Anarchists seemed genuinely puzzled by the Communists' close alignment with bourgeois democracy. At a National Youth Congress in Valencia in January, the Secretary-General of the Socialist-Communist Youth, Santiago Carrillo... said "We are not Marxist Youth. We fight for a democratic parliamentary republic." *Solidaridad Obrera* named this "Reformist Quackery" "If the United Socialist Youth are neither Socialist, Communist, nor Marxist, what are they?"' (Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War*, p. 461.).
95. Degras (ed.), *op. cit.*, vol. III, p. 424.
96. 'Enrique Rodríguez, POUM leader in Madrid, was informed of this decision by the Socialist Aibar, who told him: "[Soviet] Ambassador Rosenberg has vetoed your presence. It is unfair of course, but try to understand us: the USSR is powerful; we have chosen between depriving ourselves of the POUM nominee and depriving ourselves of the help of the USSR. We prefer to give in and reject the POUM".' (Broué & Témime, *op. cit.*, pp. 239-40).
97. Quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 314.
98. Forty years later, it is possible for Johnstone to express his regrets at this repression. However, he immediately nuances it by the statement that 'far from being linked to the Popular Front conception, such action worked in precisely the opposite direction'. (*op. cit.*, [Cogito] p. 12). In reality, the murder of Andres Nin, like the liquidation of the Russian Bolsheviks, was an integral part of Stalin's renunciation of world revolution and its replacement by 'the strengthening of bourgeois democracy'. In a revolutionary period, bourgeois democracy needs to be strengthened above all against the vanguard of class-conscious workers. The Popular Front willingly assisted (and in Republican Spain, where only 'the bourgeoisie's shadow' sided with the Government, it took over entirely) these tasks of bourgeois state repression.
99. *Ibid.*, p. 16.

Trotsky's Marxism

PART 2

Denise Avenas

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PROLOGUE

'Trotsky came to Lenin as to a teacher whose power and significance he understood later than many others, but perhaps more fully than they.'

Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution*, p. 814

'Lenin unstintingly paid tribute to Trotsky, saying that since he had broken with the Mensheviks there was no better Bolshevik.'

Deutscher, *The Prophet Armed*, p. 259

It took the October Revolution to iron out all the ambiguities in Lenin's and Trotsky's theories, and to show that there was no basic contradiction between Trotsky's perspectives for revolution and the strategic line of Bolshevism. Mandel, polemicising with Nicolas Krasso on the subject of 'Trotsky's Marxism' in *New Left Review* 47, has summed up this meeting of the ways, in theory and practice, as follows: 'The victory of the October Revolution resulted from a historical combination of Lenin's theory and practice of the revolutionary vanguard party and Trotsky's theory and practice of the permanent revolution.' This does not mean that the revolution magically resolved the problems, but it did require Lenin to make a basic review of his theories and Trotsky to revise his organisational practice. It is with this in mind that we now turn to examine the body of Trotsky's theory and practice after 1917 in the light of the advance of the revolution.

Krasso shows that Trotsky's Marxism 'forms a consistent and characteristic unity, from his early youth to his old age.' But his conclusion, like that of the worst period of Stalinist falsification, is that Trotsky's early errors determined those he made later, and that the cardinal sin of his youth, his failure to understand the Leninist theory of organisation, was the basic weakness of his struggle against Stalinism, and of his analysis of the new period opened up by October. I intend to show that, on the contrary, Leninism and Trotskyism were fused in Bolshevism after October on the theoretical basis of the theory of permanent revolution and the relationship between economics and politics underlying it. It was precisely with the ideas first set out in *Results and Prospects* that Trotsky was able to grasp the dialectics of world revolution and the objective and subjective reasons for its setbacks and, what is more, to grasp the basic ideas of Leninism. I do not wish to underestimate the political mistakes he made after Lenin's death; but I shall show that what some people are pleased to call 'the course of history' in no way invalidated his theories. Rather, for a whole

period they have been tragically proved correct; and today the revolutionary processes in the third world and the advanced countries, the dialectical relationship between them, and the repercussions they have on the 'socialist' countries can only be understood in terms of the shattering of Stalinist hegemony.

The basic unity of Trotsky's theoretical and political thought before and after October can thus in no way be adduced as proof that he never 'corrected his mistakes', or that an inability to re-evaluate general perspectives led him into political fantasy, into insoluble contradictions between reality and what might have been, or in Deutscher's words, between 'the power and the dream'. I shall attempt to show that, once Trotsky had understood the correctness of Lenin's theory of organisation, he was the most important exponent of Marxism in our time.

We have examined Lenin's and Trotsky's theories as they were formed in the struggle over the theoretical and practical problems facing Russian Marxists in a situation whose essentials were not foreseen by Marx and Engels: the preparation of proletarian revolution in a country still not completely subjected to the capitalist mode of production, before it had taken place in the most advanced capitalist countries. Only in this way can we understand the extent of their differences, and show that Stalin's revival of their polemics lacked objective foundation. Everything Trotsky says in *Permanent Revolution* about his relations with Lenin before 1917 tends to confirm that the basic reason for their long-standing variance was their difference in perspectives. Each betrayed theoretical or political weak points or unclarity, stemming from two forms of thought which tended to converge but were not identical; as expressed in the sphere of political struggle and theoretical development, they were structured differently according to their understanding of Marxist methodology.

Lenin and Trotsky faced the same reality and shared the same perspective of the actuality of proletarian revolution. Once this revolution was carried out, therefore, their antagonism faded before a basic unity of perspective. Lenin saw, in Lukacs's words, that 'the real revolution is the dialectical transformation of the bourgeois revolution into the proletarian revolution... in other words, the remaining relevant demands of the bourgeois revolution can only be realised within the framework of the proletarian revolution, and the consistent realisation of these demands leads necessarily to a proletarian revolution.' [27] From that moment there was no unbridgeable gulf between Trotskyism and Leninism.

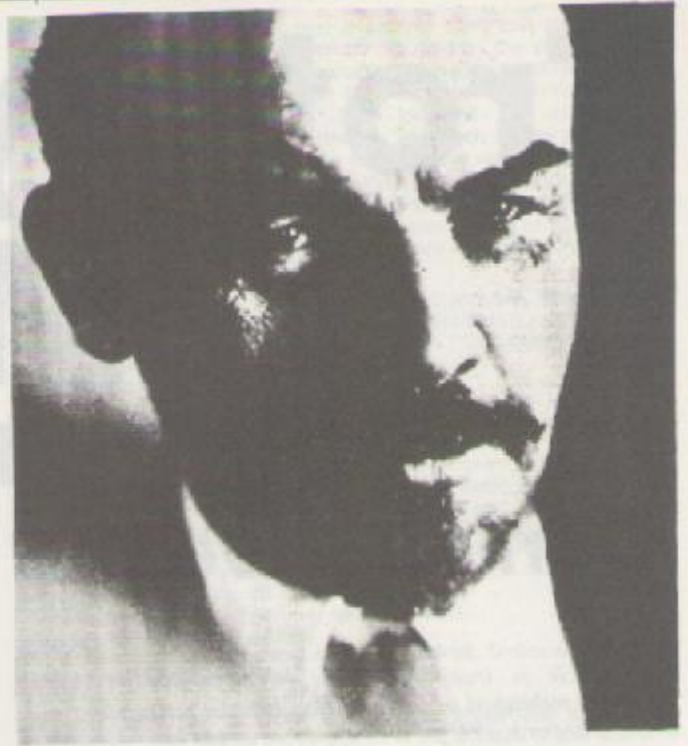
It was, in the last analysis, what Trotsky had always said. When he argued that it was necessary to prepare directly for the dictatorship of the proletariat, he did not, as Lenin

thought, mean that the revolution would be socialist at the outset. Trotsky was not unmindful of the importance of the agrarian question, which would have to be resolved before proceeding to 'purely' socialist tasks; he simply argued that this could only be done in the first stage of the proletarian revolution. Hence Lenin's theory of revolution by stages fused with Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution without Lenin at first being aware of it. The step Trotsky had to take was bigger and more difficult. But it should not be forgotten that he had never rejected the principles of democratic centralism and the selection of members; and we may therefore say that he joined the Bolsheviks not simply over the political questions on which he split with the Mensheviks, but on the basis of a full assimilation of Lenin's theory of the building of the party and the role it had to play.

In analysing imperialism Lenin came to ground his internationalism, which had until then been of an abstract character, on the objective world situation. The unleashing of imperialist war was producing a revolutionary situation on an international scale, and the Russian revolutionary process could no longer be viewed in isolation from the revolutionary perspectives for the Western countries. Lenin argued that the imperialist war must be transformed into an international civil war, and saw the Russian proletariat only as a fraction of the world proletariat which had everywhere to enter into struggle against the world bourgeoisie. The perspective of proletarian revolution in the West cast more doubt on the need for a democratic stage in Russia. At least it would more quickly grow over into the dictatorship of the proletariat. Lenin was gradually growing closer to Trotsky's point of view.

But only the October Revolution united them in struggle. Trotsky saw the April Theses as a recognition by Lenin of his own views. But he also saw that the Mensheviks had gone too far down the road of opportunism, and that it would endanger the future of the revolutionary struggle to retain any connection with them. Contrary to what Nicolas Krasso claims, it was precisely this that convinced him that only Bolshevism could, by the firmness of its principles, rally all the really revolutionary elements among the old intellectuals and the advanced sections of the working class; and that only because it had been able to build a compact revolutionary organisation could it advance at once from the position of democratic revolution to the perspective of socialist revolution. 'Trotskyism', then, was developing into a rigorous system of theory. Trotsky had understood that only an organisation of the Leninist type could both lead the fight of the revolutionary masses and ensure that the proletariat would remain in power after victory, the point at which all previous revolutions had failed. Lenin awakened the old Bolsheviks living in Russia from their slumber of dogmatism, and Trotsky joined the Bolshevik Party; and the misunderstanding which had divided their forces for so long was at an end. Later there were many points at which friction arose between them — for example, over the Brest Litovsk treaty and the trade union question — but never on the scale of their previous polemics; for what mattered now was the solution of concrete problems within the same theoretical and political perspective, based on the theoretical fusion of Leninism and Trotskyism.

The paradox of the February revolution, the compromise between the Petersburg Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, which held power *de facto*, and the bourgeoisie, which formally held power, convinced Lenin that the democratic stage was over in Russia. The proletariat would have to pursue its struggle directly if it was not once more to be crushed by reaction. The analysis he made in the course of these events is less decisive than Trotsky's *post facto* account in *History of the Russian Revolution*. He still located the revolutionary process unfolding in Russia after the February revolution within the theoretical framework of revolution by stages; but the speed with which the situation was changing persuaded him that a revolutionary dictatorship of the



proletariat and peasantry such as he had foreseen was impossible. He could still grasp the unfolding of the revolution by means of the theory of the direct growing over of the bourgeois stage into the proletarian revolution, but the theory of permanent revolution made it possible for Trotsky to understand the mechanism much more clearly.

From his exile, Lenin urged the Petersburg Soviet and the Bolsheviks not to allow any compromise with Kerensky, who proposed to put the monarchy back in control and continue the imperialist war, as a bourgeois state in alliance with French and British capitalism. 'The proletariat', he wrote, 'utilising the peculiarities of the present transition situation, can and will proceed first to the achievement of a democratic republic and complete victory of the peasantry over the landlords, instead of the Guchkov-Milyukov semi-monarchy, and then to Socialism, which alone can give the war-weary people peace, bread and freedom.' He was to go further still. In April he showed the Bolsheviks, who were still thinking in terms of the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry, that this already existed, in a form he had not foreseen, and that the formula was now irrelevant or at least did not correspond to the real perspective of struggle. It had been achieved in the Petersburg Soviet, whose executive committee had given up power to the bourgeoisie. He went on to say that the watchwords of the Bolsheviks as a whole had been entirely confirmed by history, but that in their actual carrying out things had developed differently from what he or anyone else had anticipated.

The ambiguities in Lenin's view of the revolution are here expressed for the last time; he still did not accept the need to reject the theory which had guided him in struggle, although his perspectives had proved inadequate to the course of the revolution. He had defined theory as an *idea approximating* to the complexities of life, and he was thus able to say that the democratic perspective had not been completely wrong, only carried out in other forms. In fact, from 1905 Trotsky had 'foreseen' that the peasantry, under the leadership of the Social Revolutionaries, could only take the side of the bourgeoisie. But by preparing the party and the proletariat for taking on the dictatorship, Lenin showed in practice that his prognosis had been wrong. He stressed that contrary to the ideas of the old Bolsheviks, who had been unable to discard previous theories to the museum of history, the preparation of the proletarian revolution did not mean 'skipping over' an unachieved democratic stage; and at the

same time he implicitly acknowledged that February showed the impossibility of either a bourgeois revolution proper or a democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry. It was necessary to break with the Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries who had taken over the Soviets and were being forced by their class positions to liquidate the embryo of the democratic stage, to stop it being used as a springboard to the dictatorship of the proletariat.

The nature of the October Revolution was the final confirmation of Trotsky's theories. At the first congress of the Third International in March 1919, Lenin declared that 'when, in capitalist society, the class struggle on which it rests becomes more acute, there is nothing between the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie and the dictatorship of the proletariat.' Only the dictatorship of the proletariat could ensure real democracy, in both advanced and backward countries. In Russia the slogan of the Constituent Assembly had been abandoned because it was no longer relevant to the needs of the moment. Only the dictatorship of the proletariat could resolve the agrarian question, but in this respect it was in the initial stages a bourgeois revolution. At the same Congress, Lenin said: 'In October 1917 we seized power **together with the peasantry as a whole**. This was a bourgeois revolution...' Trotsky, explaining this position in **Permanent Revolution**, goes on: 'Lenin himself estimated the October Revolution — its first stage — as the true realisation of the democratic revolution, and by that also as the true, even if changed, embodiment of the strategic slogan of the Bolsheviks.' The 'bourgeois' revolution of October was only transformed into a socialist revolution once the class struggle was taken into the villages. Once the immediate tasks of a bourgeois revolution — the agrarian programme of the Social Revolutionaries, corresponding to the needs of the peasant struggle — had been carried out, the dictatorship of the proletariat was transformed into the socialist revolution, with a complete reorganisation of the economic structure. The growing over of which Lenin had written was not the dialectical transformation of the democratic stage into a bourgeois stage, but — more precisely this transformation **within the dictatorship of the proletariat itself**.

From then on any discussion of Leninism had to take the revolutionary process in Russia in 1917 as its point of reference. Trotsky strongly denounced the Stalinist method of approaching new historical problems not in the light of the revolutions which had been achieved, but in terms of quotations to show how the revolutions had been envisaged beforehand. Stalin and his 'theoreticians' forgot on the one hand that for Lenin theory was only a guide to action, and there should be no hesitation about changing it according to need, and on the other hand that Leninism was clarified retrospectively by the experience of the October Revolution. Trotsky, who embraced Leninism through the theory of permanent revolution, and separated it from the national standpoint which had led Lenin to impose democratic limitations on the struggle of the proletariat, in a sense gave Leninism its most complete theoretical expression. Lukacs achieves something similar in **Lenin**: by retrospectively grasping Leninism in terms of the perspective of the actuality of the revolution he leaves the ambiguities aside and takes up the basic ideas, and in doing so makes a synthetic interpretation which confirms that correctly formulated by Trotsky after October.

This is the starting point for our analysis of the underlying unity of Trotsky's thought in his analysis of the period opened up by the Russian revolution. In the 1929 preface to **The Third International After Lenin**, he wrote that he had not for a moment let slip the threads of the ideological heritage of communism. This was not simply a 'moral' stance: it meant that 'objective conditions' on a national and international scale made it possible in practice to carry out the Bolshevik programme. 'Trotskyism' was neither a 'romantic myth' nor a 'symbol' as Nicolas Krasso writes. Still less was it the expression of a 'rosy optimism', but rather the true understanding of the nature of the historical epoch opened

on a world scale by October, the only possible perspective for the struggle to overthrow imperialism.

II. THE AGE OF PERMANENT REVOLUTION

'The present epoch is the epoch of the disintegration and collapse of the entire capitalist world system, which will drag the whole of European civilisation down with it if capitalism with its insoluble contradictions is not destroyed.'
[28]

This was the objective basis for the foundation of the Third International. It was not simply a conjunctural analysis, the political expression of the ruin of the capitalist economy brought about by the war, but the theoretical framework within which to view the new historical epoch beginning with the October Revolution. 'Socialism or barbarism' was not a catastrophist perspective, but the fundamental tendency of the epoch, signifying that the most urgent task of the period was the preparation of the revolutionary forces and their vanguard for the resolution of the contradictions in which capitalism was rotting. It did not mean, as Lukacs explains, that capitalism could no longer find any 'purely economic' way out: 'For capitalism, then, expedients can certainly be thought of in and for themselves. Whether they can be put into practice **depends however on the proletariat**... Admittedly, the fact that the proletariat obtains power **at that moment** is due to the "natural laws" governing the economic process. But these "natural laws" only determine the crisis itself, giving it dimensions which frustrate the "peaceful" advance of capitalism. However, if left to develop (along capitalist lines) they would not lead to the simple downfall of capitalism or to a smooth transition to socialism. They would lead over a long period of crises, civil wars and imperialist wars on an ever-increasing scale to the "mutual destruction of the opposing classes" and to a new barbarism.' [29]

The International called on the world proletariat to take on the decisive struggle against the imperialist conspiracy of capital, for the International Republic of Workers' Soviets. This was no voluntarist slogan: even though the capitalist system had obtained a respite following the failure of the European insurrections, the struggle for world socialist revolution was still the only correct political perspective, as the contradictions of capitalism were bound to grow more acute. The October Revolution was only meaningful and legitimate in the context of the general failure of the capitalist system, and represented the first victorious attempt to subvert it. The building of socialism in Russia could only be undertaken once the enemy had been beaten and the first objective, the overthrow of capitalism, reached — at least in the most advanced countries. It was Pyatakov who declared, at the end of 1917, that the fate of the Russian proletariat depended completely on the advance of revolution in the West, and that the phase of **permanent revolution** had now begun. The revolution was permanent because the international development of the productive forces was 'ripe', and it was permanent in Russia because the building of socialism there depended on the course of world revolution. **The world party of the proletariat was now the decisive element of the epoch.**

The self-development of the productive forces had led to the October Revolution and the general crisis of the capitalist system. There was no longer any such thing as absolute economic determinism: mankind was moving from the realm of necessity to the realm of freedom. As Lukacs wrote:

'What is novel in the present situation is merely — merely!! — that the blind forces of capitalist economics are driving society towards the abyss. The bourgeoisie no longer has the power to help society, after a few false starts, to break the "deadlock" brought about by its economic laws. And the proletariat has the opportunity to turn events in another direction by the conscious exploitation of existing trends. To desire this consciously is to desire the "realm of freedom" and to take the first conscious step towards its realisation.' [30] It was now possible to overthrow the capitalist relationship of politics to economics on an international scale. The October Revolution only began the concrete realisation of this task, and for the first time signalled the leap from pre-history to a history made by humanity. It was the first concretisation of Engels' formula in *Anti-Duhring* whereby: 'The laws of his own social activity which have hitherto confronted him as external, dominating laws of nature, will then be applied by man with complete understanding, and hence will be dominated by man.' But in Russia itself, until the revolution was carried throughout the world, this task could only be begun. The basic task was that of stimulating the world revolution and only with that perspective of 'holding on' in Russia.

Capitalism had reached the stage of embarking on a phase of long term stagnation; which is not to say that there was absolutely no possibility of development of the productive forces within it. It meant that relative to the possibilities of rational development into a planned economy, the forces of production had stopped growing. This was the theoretical framework of Trotsky's tireless struggle against Stalinism; and even after the failure of the struggles of the European proletariat in 1919-1920, there was never any ground for doubting it.



1. Holding on until the appearance of generalised socialist revolution.

'The question at stake is not whether Russia is able, with her own resources, to build socialism. For Marxism there is no such question.' So Trotsky wrote in 1929. But the war had not resulted in the victory of the revolutionary forces in



the West; in particular the German revolution, in which the Bolsheviks had placed all their hopes, was defeated. The European proletariat was driven into a retreat of indeterminate duration, leaving Soviet Russia to her own devices. The problem was now that of maintaining proletarian power in an isolated country; and most of the old Bolsheviks proved unable to accept that without a revolution in the advanced countries, the first dictatorship of the proletariat was doomed. The theory of socialism in one country appeared to be the answer to an actual situation, while the failure of revolution in Europe was similarly taken as evidence that it was impossible.

Yet they had all accepted that capitalism itself had broken national frontiers, which were now incompatible with the development of the productive forces. A national economy would therefore be a step backwards relative to the development of the international division of labour within capitalism. Moreover a proletarian revolution had come about in Russia not because the economy was ripe for socialism, but because it could no longer develop along capitalist lines in the same way as the economies of the advanced countries. An essentially peasant country, Russia in isolation did not possess the material prerequisites of socialism. It could even be said that Russia was the least suitable country for building socialism, with a rate of growth incomparably lower than that of the European countries, let alone the United States. In *The Third International after Lenin*, Trotsky wrote that because the Russian proletariat had been the first to seize power it would not necessarily be the first to reach socialism; and he added that in the last analysis the limits of the socialist transformation were determined by economic and political conditions at a world level. However great the enthusiasm of a country, it was not possible to overtake the whole globe. As Lenin said, the complete victory of the socialist revolution required at least the collaboration of several of the advanced countries, together with Russia.

The need for a strong injection of capitalism, which became apparent towards the end of 1920, was the first solid evidence that the dictatorship of the proletariat would have to accept major retreats in order to survive in a capitalist

environment. This did not mean throwing away the basis of a socialist society, only that such a state of society could not be attained as long as the proletarian revolution was not extended into the advanced capitalist countries.

In his work on the Russian peasantry during the great left turn of 1928-1930, Moshe Lewin explains that the New Economic Policy was the first result of the incompatibility of the interests of the two allies of the revolution. October had combined the democratic agrarian and proletarian socialist revolutions, the peasantry following the Bolsheviks as their liberators. Their only interest, however, was to complete the destruction of serfdom; but isolation and the civil war forced the Bolsheviks to take the class struggle into the village too soon, and immediately take radical measures. The alliance was heavily compromised, and there was a separation of the two sides of the revolution which threw the regime into a crisis situation. The worsening standard of living of the peasantry convinced them that the disadvantages of a revolution outweighed the gains. After the seizure of power it was necessary for the Bolsheviks, while they still hoped for the imminent victory of the European proletariat, to undertake the reorganisation of the country. But they soon had to give up the attempt to introduce a socialist economy by degrees, initially through workers control of production. Lenin wrote that it was hunger that obliged them to take a 'purely communist' action, establishing straightforwardly communist relations of production, requisitioning agricultural produce and taking steps against the kulaks. But the Bolsheviks allowed themselves to go too far in this; while the appalling difficulties and hardships of the war left the military course as the only possible solution to economic problems, Lenin noted that they went further than was theoretically or politically desirable.

The political error of thinking that socialism could at once be built in Russia was to be explained by the fact that the European insurrections had not yet been crushed; the Bolsheviks still counted on the forthcoming support of the Western proletariat. Their failure was the first concrete confirmation of the impossibility of building socialism in one country, as the Bolsheviks were forced to do in the extremely critical situations thrust upon them.

It had been necessary to sign the Brest-Litovsk treaty in order to maintain Soviet power. Now that the world revolution had been set back, the demands of the internal ally of the dictatorship had to be satisfied, to avoid at any cost a break with the countryside which would be the death-knell of the regime. But re-establishing a free market for the surplus production of the peasantry meant reviving capitalist social differentiation, and even raised the spectre of dual power. Lenin argued that without satisfying the economic needs of the middle peasants and allowing free exchange, it would be economically impossible to maintain proletarian power in Russia; the problem was whether the peasantry would accept the lead of the proletariat in its endeavour to build socialism, or that of the capitalists calling on them to turn back from the dangers of socialism. While Russia remained isolated, the most that could be achieved through political power was somehow to prevent the transition towards socialism — cut short by war communism — from being turned back along the capitalist road. The economic policy of the early years of the revolution had failed to stimulate the development of the productive forces which was its most urgent task. The measures the Bolsheviks had been forced to take, the sacrifices they had been obliged to exact from the workers, had cut them off from the social base of 'their' power. The 'immediate construction of socialism' had to be abandoned in favour of the **primitive accumulation** Russia required as the material basis for socialism. They had to provide the prerequisites elsewhere supplied by capitalism itself — on their own and in the most difficult conditions; and they had to avoid a break with the peasantry, now the obsession of the regime.

For the first time the class holding political power was the producing class, and the workings of the economy were in

principle no longer independent of the will of social classes as in the capitalist mode of production. The class in power became the conscious instigator of economic development. In *The New Economics*, Preobrazhensky wrote, 'as, in the sphere of economic reality, the commodity of the capitalist mode of production is replaced in the planned economy by the product, value by the measurement of labour time, the market (in its capacity as the sphere in which the law of value manifests itself) by the book-keeping of planned economy, surplus value by surplus product, so in the sphere of science, **political economy gives place to social technology, that is, the science of socially organised production.**' What characterised the phase of transition which began in Russia with the NEP was the conflict between the law of value and the planning principle within a single economic organism, in the form which Preobrazhensky put forward as a new law of economics, **the law of primitive socialist accumulation.** From Russia's need to go through a phase of primitive accumulation similar in principle if not in form to that of the capitalist mode of production, he once more drew economic determinist conclusions of the kind developed by Marx, and did so moreover on a national level. The implication of his book was that such a task could be carried out by an isolated workers state, and in this respect he did not have such great differences with the theory of socialism in one country. His support for Stalin, whom he saw as the instrument of new economic needs, was therefore implicit in his work on the new economics. His position on economics led him to conceive of state policy as nothing but the **result** of the struggle between the two economic systems coexisting in NEP, a dangerously mechanistic way of viewing the problem.

Economic constraints would of course only disappear in classless society, with the withering away of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Trotsky was well aware that Russia had a combined economy, which placed certain limits on political power; but this was in no sense the kind of economic determinism operating in the capitalist mode of production. Once again, it seems that it was no accident that Trotsky did not write economic theory. Even during the transitional period, economic problems were directly **political.** Preobrazhensky's 'error' was perhaps that he tried to do for this new period of history what Marx had done for capitalism. There was of course an economic struggle in Russia, and one of the two sectors would have to triumph, but the final victory would in the last analysis depend on the strategy of the ruling power. The greatest possible development of the state sector must be ensured, so that the national capitalist sector, at whose expense primitive accumulation was to take place, could be rapidly re-absorbed. Trotsky therefore supported Preobrazhensky against Bukharin's unconditional peasant policy. Although he tended to let the costs of primitive accumulation fall much more heavily on the working class than did Preobrazhensky, he understood that they must so far as possible be able to appropriate the surplus of the private sector, in other words of the peasantry. But he refused to accept all the implications of Preobrazhensky's problematic, to imagine that Russia's economic problems could be solved by autarchy, and above all to restrict theory to the alternative of isolation. Preobrazhensky, viewing the development of the productive forces in a national perspective, was repeating Lenin's mistake of 1898.

In 1929 Trotsky wrote that the economic problems of the Soviet republic more than ever called for a political solution. This was the basis of the struggle he conducted in the Left Opposition from 1923 onwards. His economic strategy is summed up in the three basic themes of industrialisation, the gradual collectivisation of the rural economy, and a single plan for the whole economy. He was conscious that the economic problems expressed in conflicts of varying intensity between the proletariat and peasantry had serious repercussions on the social composition of the party and on its policy. But until the Opposition was completely decimated, he refused to regard this as the inevitable

corollary of 'objective conditions'. He always stressed that the Stalinists had a share in the political responsibility for the 'stabilisation' of Western capitalism, which intensified still further the internal contradictions of the Soviet regime. He wrote on the twelfth anniversary of the October Revolution that the basic causes of the contradictions within Russia stemmed from the objective situation of an economically backward country forced to be the first to undertake the dictatorship of the proletariat and the building of socialism, and above all from the fact that Russia was cut off from the international division of labour; though it was nonetheless true that the secondary causes included the incorrect policies of a leadership under the influence of the petty bourgeoisie, incapable of taking the situation in hand and making use of the economic and political resources of the dictatorship.

Trotsky's economic strategy was not in the least idealist, nor as Nicolas Krasso asserts, a 'purely theoretical' solution. Still less was it demagogic, as Trotsky's economic perspectives required much greater effort from the working masses than Stalin's before 1927. Had they been applied in time they would undoubtedly have prevented many mistakes, especially the brutal liquidation of the NEP carried out by Stalin in 1928.

In 1923, faced with the acute problem of the 'scissors' between agricultural and industrial prices, Trotsky wrote that the only solution to the danger of a rupture with the peasantry was to speed up industrialisation: a turn to the countryside did not mean turning one's back on industry, but **turning industry to the countryside**, for the peasants had little to hope for from a state deprived of industry. Only industrialisation, and a single plan for the whole economy, would make it possible to replace NEP by a new, socialist economic policy. Bukharin, in encouraging peasant prosperity, blinded himself to the fact that his policy went against his avowed intention of preserving the alliance at all costs. Finding that the State, as a client, was not responsive to their immediate interests, the peasantry stored up their corn or got rid of it on the open market. Bukharin's policy only aggravated the problem of preserving the alliance. This was the real meaning of the need for a fair economic policy, which could be adapted to the economic process as a whole without being at its mercy. Instead of adopting a general economic plan which would not impose absolute constraints but would harmonise production and allow for necessary corrective measures, Stalin and his allies of the moment chose the perspective of building socialism in one country, at a snail's pace if necessary, though time was of the essence. Isolation reduced the combined character of the October Revolution to the problematic of the socialist or the capitalist road. Trotsky and Bukharin were at either political extreme emerging from the October Revolution, Trotsky struggling to maintain and consolidate the position of the proletariat, Bukharin becoming the spokesman within the party for the reactionary forces produced by NEP, despite his avowed intention of leading the peasantry gradually towards socialism.

It was in 1925 that Trotsky posed the question of the socialist or capitalist road, in a response to the bourgeois writers and politicians who saw NEP as proof of the impossibility of a socialist type of economy. He showed that the economic results demonstrated the superiority of the state sector over the private sector, while pointing out the political measures which would be necessary to maintain such a balance. He did not consider it theoretically excluded that capitalism might be restored, but this could only be as the result of cumulative mistakes by the party, leading to a greater development in agriculture than in state industry. Bukharin had unilaterally declared for the peasantry, saying that the kulaks themselves must be involved in the socialist reorganisation of the economy through economic competition between the state and private sectors. He denounced Trotsky as a 'super-industrialiser', who scorned the demands and interests of the peasantry — surely a constant element of 'Trotskyism', as his polemics with Lenin before the

revolution showed? — and who wanted to liquidate the NEP. Trotsky in fact never opposed the NEP, and saw the need for it long before it was initiated as he patrolled the front in the civil war; he was simply concerned not to open the door to the economic and political hegemony of the peasantry over the proletariat.

Bukharin aimed, by gaining an exact knowledge of market conditions and by taking the correct economic measures, to bring state industry into harmony with agriculture in line with a prepared plan. He failed. The peasantry had only profound distrust for a regime which could not provide the goods they needed. The party, whose rural units they had taken over for their own ends, and which had unwittingly become the agent of their economic development, proved incapable of fully satisfying them, and was soon faced with the major crisis of 1928.

Radical measures were required against the peasantry's 'spontaneous Bukharinism', which had the support of the right wing of the party. The economic measures advocated by the Left Opposition were taken over in their entirety. Without any political preparation, and without the necessary material basis, the collectivisation of all the means of production was imposed on the peasantry, together with forced industrialisation on the working class. The result was an enormous wastage of the productive forces. From being a 'Menshevik in economics', Stalin took an abrupt ultra-left course, aiming to 'catch up with and overtake' the advanced capitalist countries in a very short space of time on the basis of a completely unachievable maximalist programme. The situation was certainly saved, but if Trotsky saw Stalin's new economic policy as the confirmation of the positions of the Left Opposition in that respect, he refused to follow many of his supporters in capitulating to it. The party had been confronted with a **fait accompli**, and the campaign against 'Trotskyism' became all the more virulent the more Stalin adopted its economic theses. There had to be an understanding of the change in which Stalin, controlling as he did the party and state apparatus, was able simply to throw over the previous perspective of building socialism at a snail's pace. There had to be a denunciation of the incorrect theory of the liquidation of the private sector as crossing the threshold to socialism.

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Lessons of the General Strike

Denise Avenas
**Trotsky's
 Marxism**
 PART 1



**NATIONAL
 QUESTION
 IN SPAIN**

**REVOLT IN
 SOUTHERN
 AFRICA**

'THE PROGRAMME WE NEED'
 - IMG CONFERENCE DOCUMENT

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The Platform of the Left Opposition had never advocated the brutal elimination of NEP, but its gradual disappearance and the extension of the state sector. Above all, economic measures were not distinct from political measures, and 'Trotskyist' economic policy was based on the restoration of proletarian democracy. The Left Opposition argued that only the co-ordination of the three axes of state planning, the market, and soviet democracy could ensure that the economy would be properly run during the transitional period. While it would be utopian to imagine that imbalances could be rectified within a few years, they would be diminished and the bases of the dictatorship of the proletariat simplified until the time when new revolutionary victories would widen the arena of socialist planning and reconstruct the system.

This is why Trotsky did not recognise his own work in the distorting mirror of the new Stalinist policy. He looked for the basic causes of it and found them in the nature of the party. The co-existence on a world scale of the capitalist mode of production and an embryonic socialist economy was reproduced within Russia in the fact that the law of value governing the capitalist system had still not been replaced by the planned production of use values, and Trotsky and the Left Opposition were engaged in a struggle to prevent the autonomy of politics from being too drastically curtailed by it. Stalin, having subordinated his policy to capitalist development in agriculture, then violated the course of economic development with political measures directly opposed to those he had previously taken in line with Bukharin's thinking. He never really understood the relationship between politics and 'objective conditions', and therefore always swung between opportunism and adventurism in national and international politics. The degeneration of the party and the state apparatus gave the Stalinist faction absolute power, and political power was completely separated from the base of the dictatorship. Passing out of the control of the working class, it became exposed to the influence of the petty bourgeoisie and at the mercy of their ambitions. At the same time, as the aspirations of the petty bourgeoisie came to be incompatible with the interests of the ruling caste, this caste was obliged to turn against its previous base. The relationship between economics and politics established by Stalinism was not dialectical but mechanical, and it is for this reason that Stalin was able simply to take over the economic positions of the Left Opposition wholesale, without also taking the concomitant political measures or seeing that they were themselves political.

The problem which remains is to establish why the Opposition was defeated. Trotsky's explanation of the 1928 left turn was the only valid one, and it made it impossible for him to support Stalin. The party apparatus, becoming more and more bureaucratic, had been substituted for the party; and the bureaucracy, divorced from proletarian control, had turned for support to the kulaks who in the early period ensured the development of the productive forces necessary to the survival of the regime. It had turned the party into the unconscious agent of the capitalist development of the peasantry, which had turned the Communist units in the countryside to their own use. But the deepest roots and interests of the bureaucracy lay in the state sector, and therefore with the working class. The ambitions of the kulaks, driving the regime to make more and more concessions, therefore had to be curbed. Bukharin had even begun to speak of a neo-NEP. Hence Stalin's left turn, which ensured that at the cost of innumerable unnecessary sacrifices, as Trotsky said, the basic gains of October were after all preserved.

The phenomenon of the bureaucracy is the key element in Trotsky's understanding of the nature and direction of Stalinist policy. It enabled him further to understand why the Opposition was defeated. A new problem then arose: why had the wheel turned so far in favour of the bureaucracy that Stalin was able to take over the economic positions of

the Left Opposition without restoring party democracy? This reveals the basic weakness of Trotsky's political practice in the years 1923-1930. It is easy to declare after the event that Trotsky's programme was unrealistic, since it was never realised. It is incorrect to counterpose Stalin's 'realism', as Krasso does, to Trotsky's utopianism; it is in any case no argument against his positions to say that he 'paid dearly' for his views. He made certain political mistakes, but in a sense these tend rather to prove that his programme could have been carried out. The basis of Trotsky's political practice was that he never separated political and economic problems, hence his position that in the last analysis everything depended on having the **right political line**. It was not that Stalin, as some say, made a few 'mistakes' of varying enormity; his whole political line was wrong. It was because Trotsky always approached Russian problems as an **internationalist** that he alone was able to analyse the basis of the 'objective conditions' impeding the socialist transformation of the USSR. We now turn to analyse the development of Trotsky's problematic of the bureaucracy in this light.

2. Trotsky and the 'course of history'

The proletariat, Engels said, takes state power and makes the means of production state property. But by that very act it ceases to be a proletariat, and suppresses all class differences, all conflicts between classes, and therefore by the same token does away with the State as such. As the transition towards socialism and classless society, the dictatorship of the proletariat is no more than a state form whose nature is to perish or wither away.

But just as the reorganisation of the economy and the building of socialist society can only be **completed** on an international basis, the State could only wither away when the Western bourgeoisie was defeated. The perpetuation of the isolation of Soviet Russia had created a new situation for which the Bolsheviks were unprepared. The dictatorship had to be strengthened in order to preserve the regime against the assault of imperialism. But must it become the 'unprecedented instrument of coercion' which Stalin made it? Twenty years after the October Revolution, Trotsky wrote that even in the loftiest flights of fancy it would be difficult to find a more striking contrast than that between Marx, Engels and Lenin's concept of a workers state and that of which Stalin was the head. What part did 'objective conditions' play in this degeneration, and how much was due to political mistakes? Was Trotsky doomed by the 'course of history' to be no more than a 'prophet unarmed', tending to put forward abstract perspectives, unable to influence the course of events — and more importantly still, was the rise of Stalinism proof of the error of his theories?

In 1936, Trotsky wrote in *The Revolution Betrayed* that 'during the first ten years of its struggle, the Left Opposition did not abandon the programme of ideological conquest of the party for that of conquest of power against the party. Its slogan was: **reform not revolution**. The bureaucracy, however, even in those times, was ready for any revolution in order to defend itself against a democratic reform. In 1927, when the struggle reached an especially bitter stage, Stalin declared at a session of the Central Committee, addressing himself to the Opposition: "Those cadres can be removed only by civil war!" What was a threat in Stalin's words became, thanks to a series of defeats of the European proletariat, a historic fact. The road of reform was turned into a road of revolution.'

Such was Trotsky's view of the evolution of the dictatorship of the proletariat under Stalin's leadership. He

came to believe that the struggle of the Opposition had been a hopeless one, since if the revolution was not extended into the world arena on a proletarian basis, it would inevitably begin to retreat behind national boundaries on a bureaucratic basis. In determining whether such a view contradicted what he had at first thought, the fact that the Opposition failed is in the last analysis secondary. The question here is whether that failure stemmed from a **theoretical** error, and whether it casts doubt on the principles underlying his analysis of the inter-war period.

Deutscher and Moshe Lewin, who differ in their analysis of the possibilities facing the Soviet regime after 1923, reach similar conclusions about the possibilities for Trotsky. According to Deutscher, the Bolsheviks were caught during Lenin's illness in a contradiction which even he would have found insoluble. The revolution in the West had failed, and the old Bolsheviks refused to accept that this might mean the condemnation of their own revolution. Retreating into its national shell, the Soviet Union would have had to establish an 'iron dictatorship' in order to survive, the more so because the proletariat had been decimated by the war and the building of the state and party apparatus. Theoretically, it might as Trotsky claimed have been possible to restore the democratic source of the dictatorship without endangering the regime, but in fact the tendency to make the party substitute for the proletariat proved irreversible. Lenin struggled to maintain the balance between democracy and dictatorship, but, as Deutscher puts it, the tendency was too strong for him, and could not be reversed, let alone eliminated. Had Lenin lived longer, he would have had to choose; but the working class could not provide sufficient democratic support to enable the party to undertake the restoration of proletarian democracy. Lenin would himself have become an autocrat; and after his death Stalin was the man of the hour.

Moshe Lewin's conclusion is more subtle: more correctly, he stresses that the choice was not between democracy and dictatorship but between the type of dictatorship Lenin might have been able to establish and that which Stalin actually installed. But in the last analysis he agrees with Deutscher. Had Lenin lived, he writes in *Lenin's Last Struggle*, he would have been able to establish 'a rational dictatorial regime, with men of integrity at its head and efficient institutions working consciously to go beyond both underdevelopment and dictatorship' — by no means a utopian goal in itself. He would not have won at one blow, but 'what may be said with certainty is that he would have done his utmost to combat the processes that were to make the Stalinist period what it was'. He would have struggled tirelessly against 'administrative methods', and the insufficiency of the bureaucracy, and against Russian nationalism', which had combined in the Georgian affair to show him the extent of the infirmity of party and State. Trotsky on

his own could not carry on this struggle; says Lewin: 'He succumbed to a fetishisation of the party, to a certain legalism and to scruples that paralysed him and prevented him from reacting unhesitatingly, as Lenin would have done, to what his enemies were doing against him.' With Lenin dead, Stalin's victory was assured.

It is true that Trotsky was silent at the decisive moment. He did not wish to endanger party unity by provoking a split which would have been catastrophic for the future of the regime, given the difficulties of the period. Lenin, on the other hand, would not have hesitated to unleash the thunderbolt he had prepared against Stalin, which could have changed the course of history. Trotsky accepted that in the last analysis the party was always right, being the only instrument the working class had to carry out its historic tasks, and he bowed to the verdict of the Stalinists, who took advantage of the respite he gave them by declaring that he would not demand Stalin's dismissal if he changed his policy. The question is whether this constitutes proof that he slid back into the same view of party unity that made him, prior to the revolution, the objective ally of the Mensheviks; that he had not understood the Leninist theory of organisation.

'Subjective' problems aside (Trotsky did not have Lenin's prestige with the Old Guard, who still regarded him as an upstart in the Bolshevik Party; and he refused to have anything to do with Stalin's intrigues), Trotsky does seem to have made some mistakes in **tactics** and **assessment**; but they do not lead to the conclusion that he had failed to assimilate Lenin's organisational principles. In the 'obscure turn' (to use Victor Serge's expression) which was to decide the fate of the dictatorship, it was necessary to see beyond the internecine party struggle to the social forces it reflected, and it was in this respect that Trotsky was weak. He had still not assessed Stalin's importance, nor gone to the roots of the bureaucratisation of the party and State he was carrying out. This is not to say that objective conditions inevitably dragged the regime down into Stalinism; but without measuring the deep-rooted nature of the phenomenon of bureaucracy — which Lenin himself said he had not had enough time to study — Trotsky could not develop a policy to reverse the process which was to drive him out.

Trotsky, like Lenin, thought it possible to reorganise the party from within; but they only saw the external manifestations of the bureaucratisation of State and party, and therefore thought energetic measures would be sufficient. The reorganisation had to go much deeper. The setback to the revolution made this an extremely difficult task, but it was not impossible. At the end of his life Lenin understood that Trotsky was right over economic strategy, and that the single plan he had at first rejected as utopian and unnecessary would in the present situation be an indispensable means of struggling against the degeneration of the



regime, as the strengthening of industry and control over capitalist development would make it possible to **strengthen the position of the proletariat in the economy and in the party**. In this sense political and economic measures were as one to Trotsky. The regenerated dictatorship of the proletariat alone could carry out the economic tasks, and this would be the best guarantee of the possibility of restoring proletarian democracy.

Trotsky's policy after the death of Lenin was not then a 'moral' one intended only to preserve the theoretical gains of Bolshevism. Trotsky's proposals were part of a **strategy applied to Russian conditions, and theoretically justified as such**. Trotsky struggled untiringly against Stalin, although he let slip the moment at which a correction of the political line could have led to a more rational construction of the foundations of socialism. Trotsky's analyses of the Soviet state between 1923 and 1936 may seem contradictory: for example, in elaborating a new strategy (that of the Fourth International) for the world revolution and the Soviet Union, he seemed to discount the previous struggle of the Opposition, not because of its tactical errors, but because the objective conditions allowed the bureaucracy to take power. He blamed the international situation and the actions of the bureaucracy for this defeat. In explaining Stalin's victory in **The Revolution Betrayed** he wrote: 'A political struggle is in its essence a struggle of interests and forces, not of arguments. The quality of the leadership is, of course, far from a matter of indifference for the outcome of the conflict, but it is not the only factor, and in the last analysis is not decisive.' In the battle of 1923-1928 the Opposition, which 'more truly foresaw' the processes taking place, was defeated by a less clear-sighted faction, Stalin being only the spokesman for the all-powerful interests of the bureaucracy. 'It would be naive to imagine that Stalin, previously unknown to the masses, suddenly issued from the wings fully armed with a complete strategical plan. No indeed. Before he felt out his own course, the bureaucracy felt out Stalin himself.' Trotsky adds: 'The new ruling caste soon revealed its own ideas, feelings and, more important, its interests.' Had Lenin lived longer, he could only have contained the tide of bureaucracy, but it is doubtful whether he could long have withstood the current of history. Trotsky here seems to be putting forward Deutscher's position; but what was 'the course of history' in his view?

The defeat of the Left Opposition and the constant deterioration of the Stalinist regime in Russia induced Trotsky to go back to the basis of his analysis of the Soviet state. The ambiguity in his thinking lies in the fact that he had no evaluation of his own share in the responsibility for the evolution of the regime. Nonetheless, it was true that the process of degeneration of the State and the party had gone too far to be corrected from within. Trotsky's analysis of the historical origins of what he perhaps misleadingly called the 'Soviet Thermidor' shows an understanding that 'objective conditions' had been much more decisive in framing Stalinist policy than he had thought up to 1927. He considered that the social process the Opposition had tried to fight had been much too strong for them to succeed. But nonetheless there was a political solution to the Soviet problem, and therefore the **general theoretical framework of his approach to the domestic situation in Russia and the international situation was not in question**. What had to be analysed was the nature and basis of the 'objective conditions' which had in the end determined his failure. He could not simply proceed on the same lines of analysis, but was forced to re-examine the basis of the problem and make a more thorough study of the bureaucratic phenomenon. Constantly developing his analysis of the internal and the international situation, he came to change the orientation of his political perspectives, though only after weighing their implications for a long time.

The Platform of the Left Opposition had drawn up in a political programme the ideas advanced by Trotsky in 1923 about the need for a new party orientation. With the end of the civil war, the party embarked on a new historical period

which made the old party methods obsolete, for it had come of necessity to substitute itself for the proletariat, and establish what Moshe Lewin calls a 'dictatorship in the void'. In peacetime, measures which were indispensable to war communism could be harmful; and the basic sources of bureaucratisation were the authority the Old Guard wished to preserve unchallenged, the infiltration of the administrative methods of the state apparatus into the party, and its unfavourable social composition. The 'Bolshevik tradition' did not arm the Old Guard against deviations and conservatism; and the only guarantee against both bureaucracy and factionalism, as well as the only way of avoiding deviations in a party forced to monopolise political life, was the gradual restoration of inner-party democracy, for the party had come to be divided in two between those who decided and those who carried out decisions.

This was all the more necessary when the reintroduction of capitalism revived social differentiation and gave rise to social interests which were not easily reconciled. In 1927 the deformation of the party was much worse, but the Opposition was still confident that it could be combated without endangering party unity. It was however too late to restore the party from within, either from above as Lenin intended, by purging and reorganising the apparatus, or from below, by proletarianising the party and its leading bodies. The working class remained indifferent to the storms shaking the party, and the grip of bureaucracy was too tight. The strategy had to be changed, and the Opposition had to find a way out of the impasse in which it had become the prisoner of party discipline. A new course had to be found, but for Trotsky there were certain theoretical prerequisites. The problem was no longer whether it was possible to struggle against the bureaucracy by vigorous inner-party measures, but the **class nature of the Soviet state**, and what that implied for the kind of fight to be waged.

Trotsky set himself to discover the basic reason for the disjuncture between principles and reality, for the bureaucracy's triumph not just over the Opposition but over Lenin's programme and party; and how the 'tail of the revolution' had proved more weighty than its head.

The Soviet state, as a bridge between capitalism and socialism, was of a dual nature: 'socialist' in so far as it defended the collective appropriation of the means of production, and 'bourgeois' in so far as the distribution of goods was organised according to capitalist standards of value, with all the consequences that entailed. Such a 'bourgeois state without a bourgeoisie' proved incompatible with authentic soviet democracy. It was able to defend socialist ownership against the attacks by the counter-revolutionary forces, but failed to resolve the problem of inequality in consumption. If the State, instead of withering away, became more and more despotic, and the representatives of the working class more and more bureaucratic, it was, said Trotsky, because of the unflinching need to maintain a privileged minority so long as real equality could not be secured. The more backward the society, the more inevitable the process. Marx himself had written that without the development of the productive forces, the indispensable base of communism, there would only be socialisation of want, and the old evils would reappear. Purely political inner-party measures against 'bureaucratic deformations', advocated first by Lenin and then by the Left Opposition, could only have been carried out in the context of international revolution; in isolation, the main problem was the backwardness of the country. The truce social democracy had granted the bourgeoisie, together with the policy of the Stalinist International, had created a new historical period, and the State was strengthened to guarantee the privileges of the ruling social caste. 'The bureaucracy struck while the iron was hot, exploiting the bewilderment and passivity of the workers, setting their more backward strata against the advanced, and relying more and more boldly upon the kulak and the petty bourgeois ally in general. In the course of a few years, the bureaucracy thus shattered the revolutionary vanguard of the proletariat.'

The basic historical reason for the failure of the Opposition and the aggravation of the contradiction between the spheres of production and distribution was therefore the setback of the world revolution. Because Trotsky never abandoned internationalism, he did not fall into either the positions of those who turned their backs on the Soviet Union when it fell short of their 'norms', to become the disenchanted peddlars of bourgeois 'pessimism' about the impossibility of socialism; or the positions of those who abstained from all sacrilegious criticism or ended by supporting Stalin, on the grounds that the Soviet state was the product of the October Revolution. He was able to attack Stalin's political line without erring on the side of fatalism, or revisionism, which produced the deviant theory of socialism in one country. His writings are the only Marxist interpretation of the process which took Soviet Russia so far from the 'ideal' of classless society: the Stalinist theoreticians, for their part, slid into deeper and deeper contradictions.

In 1926, the Smirnov group took the position that the Soviet Thermidor was complete: industrial backwardness, the rise of the kulaks and the Nepmen, and their links with those in power, together with the degeneration of the party, had gone so far that after the crushing of the Opposition there was no possibility of returning to a socialist course without a new revolution. In 1926 Trotsky rejected this: Thermidor was a threat, a possibility, but had not yet arrived. In the 1930s, he said that Thermidor had begun in 1924, and a new kind of bonapartism was now emerging. This was not in fact so contradictory as it seems: what the Smirnov group meant was a return to capitalism, which they said was well underway with Bukharin's right course. Trotsky never abandoned the position that there was no more possibility of a peaceful return to capitalism than there was of a peaceful road to socialism: bureaucratic power would not 'grow over' into bourgeois power without violent counter-revolution, and to say that the Soviet state had gradually turned into a bourgeois state was simply winding the film of reformism backwards.

In what sense was there then a Thermidor? In the historical analogy of France in 1794, the power emerging from the revolution shifted to the right; but it was not a counter-revolution, as the development of the productive forces within capitalism was only just beginning, and it was necessary for the bourgeoisie to consolidate political power. Thermidor was an advance in the dictatorship of capital, not a return to feudalism. It was a mistake to see the right turn of 1924-1926 as a counter-revolution. But the 'Soviet Thermidor' was a highly ambiguous term. The reaction which began with the rise to power of the bureaucracy was not simply a shift to the right; the economic and social base was quite different, and Trotsky realised that the analogy had only obscured the debate. The Soviet Thermidor only represented reaction within the economic and social framework produced by the revolution. If there had not been a return to capitalism — and Stalin's left turn confirmed that there had not — what was the nature of the political and social regime of the USSR?

Despite a monstrous bureaucratic degeneration, Trotsky argued, the Soviet state was still the historical instrument of the working class, as it ensured that the economy and culture would develop on the basis of the nationalisation of the means of production, and prepared the conditions for a real emancipation of the workers by the liquidation of the bureaucracy and of social inequality. By developing the productive forces on the basis of the collective appropriation of the means of production, and so strengthening the proletariat, the bureaucracy was digging its own grave. The revolution which was now inevitable in the USSR would therefore be a **political** and not a social revolution, as socialist relations of production were already in existence. The bureaucracy was based on the backwardness and isolation of the country, the product of the social contradictions between the town and countryside, between

proletariat and peasantry, Soviet economy and the capitalist environment; it had overcome these contradictions by climbing up on the backs of the masses to ensure its own political domination, but its very power was based on the relations of production resulting from October. Stalin had been able to exploit the internal divisions of the bureaucracy and make himself dictator, but his dictatorship did not negate the dictatorship of the proletariat. In spite of the economic success of the state sector, the bureaucracy remained the product of contradictions peculiar to the transitional period in an isolated, backward state. To the extent that the basic gains of October had after all been preserved it could not be said that the dictatorship of the proletariat was moribund. The bureaucracy had expropriated the proletariat politically, but without attacking the basis of proletarian power, which was the key point.

The dictatorship of the proletariat therefore found a distorted but undeniable reflection in the dictatorship of the bureaucracy. This was only one of the manifestations of the law of the uneven development of history. The dictatorship of the proletariat should have secured the real political rule of that class, by effecting as much participation as possible in the affairs of state. Unforeseen historical circumstances had given it a new, equally unforeseen form. There was no call for 'Kantianism' or holding that the dictatorship of the proletariat had only existed in its 'purest form' in the Paris Commune and in Russia before Brest-Litovsk. The bourgeois tasks had to be faced even more than in the early years of the revolution. The dictatorship of the proletariat could not be examined through the lens of idealism. The facts had to be correctly interpreted: to say that the restoration of capitalism had begun in the USSR would mean that the bureaucracy was a new incarnation of the bourgeoisie. A class is defined in relation to the means of production; and the economic regime of the USSR was not state capitalism, since the forces of production in Russia had been developed by socialist means. Classes are defined not only by the distribution of the national income, but by their independent role in the general structure of the economy. The bureaucracy did not own the means of production: indissolubly bound up with the economically dominant class, it endured or fell with it.

Only with the correct theoretical understanding of the situation was it possible to advance a correct political line. Bureaucratic rule was contradictory, creating the conditions for its own overthrow. Two kinds of outcome were possible: a return to capitalism by violent counter-revolution, or the restoration of the dictatorship of the proletariat in the fullest sense. In either case there would be an end to the bureaucracy as a privileged caste wielding political power. Stalin's policy clearly aided the possibility of a victory for the forces of capitalism, but the situation was not yet desperate. The issue must be argued in terms of historical perspectives, not catastrophism. Above all the international situation had to be taken into account in the working out of a theoretically and politically correct strategy. The removal of the monstrous excrescence of the bureaucracy involved a dual task: the creation of a revolutionary Marxist party in the USSR, since the Russian CP had become a police organisation in the pay of Stalin and was now an impediment to the struggle; and above all, the creation of a new International, the fluctuations of the Soviet regime having always been a part of the international development of the revolution. The best guarantee of the re-awakening of the Russian working class, since the grip of Stalinism had stifled its revolutionary instincts, was the victorious development of the world revolution.

In 1933, Trotsky defined the essential tasks as merciless criticism of the Stalinist bureaucracy; the education of the cadre of the new International; and the regeneration of the capacity for struggle of the world proletarian vanguard. Is this further proof of Trotsky's 'sociologism', resulting in 'voluntarism' because the 'subjective' conditions of advanced political consciousness of the world proletariat were not

ripe any more than they were during Trotsky's struggle in the Left Opposition? Did he not under-estimate the objective basis for the stabilisation of capitalism, the apathy of the working class in Russia and throughout the world? Trotsky, like Marx before him, was wrong about the duration of the delay, but the question is whether it was for the same reasons, and whether it proves the incorrectness of his theories. It is my belief that with such arguments it is impossible to understand Stalinism and the inter-war period and, above all, the current resurgence of 'Trotskyism'.

Trotsky and the Left Opposition were crushed by the political and economic dynamic which brought the Stalinist faction to power. The sombre warning against the degeneration of the party in the 1904 pamphlet had been fulfilled in a way neither Trotsky nor Stalin himself could have imagined. But the cause did not lie in either the Leninist type of organisation or the Bolshevik programme. With his understanding of that, Trotsky could offer a correct perspective even at the very height of Stalinist reaction. Above all he understood that in the last analysis the deterioration in the 'objective conditions' was rooted in the basically incorrect policy of the Stalinist International; and he therefore always refused to take the 'historical tendency' manifest in the appearance of Stalinism as inevitable, or to bow down to it.

3. Why the Fourth International?

'The historical crisis of mankind is reduced to the crisis of revolutionary leadership.' Nicolas Krasso takes this formulation from the Transitional Programme as flagrant proof of Trotsky's idealism and his refusal to take into account the

economic, social and political problems of the 1930s. I shall endeavour to show that in fact Trotsky was well aware of these, and that the measures he advocated for re-building the vanguard did not go beyond the bounds of objective conditions. His struggle in the Fourth International does in retrospect seem as vain as the struggle of the Left Opposition in the 1920s. But it seems strange that Krasso could conclude that the struggle for a new International had no results in the Western countries, whereas Lenin's party had secured the victory of the Russian Revolution, and that Trotsky had never fully assimilated the Leninist theory of organisation. Surely it is Krasso who is forgetting 'objective conditions', which he scarcely brings into the picture here. This chapter will analyse the basic reasons for the building of a new world party of the proletariat, and show more fully Trotsky's political thought as a totality in some ways on a higher level even than Lenin's. The building of the Fourth International is the highest expression of the 'overdetermination' of politics characteristic of Trotsky's thought, from beginning to end of his writings.

The Third International had been built under the banner of the revolutionary offensive. The dissolution of the capitalist economy produced by the war had to be exploited to the hilt, and the European proletariat urgently prepared for the struggle for power by the development of revolutionary leaderships which had broken from social democratic ideology, so treacherous to the workers movement during the war. The struggle for international revolution was the most important task of the first dictatorship of the proletariat, and this was the only basis for 'holding on' in Russia, since only the victory of the European proletariat would make it possible to build socialism in Soviet Russia. The International took as its task to generalise the revolutionary experience of the working class, to rid the movement of the impurities of opportunism and social patriotism, to unite the forces of all the genuinely revolutionary parties of the world proletariat, and by that



very means to aid and hasten the triumph of communist revolution throughout the world. The only parties which could be admitted as sections of this world party, the international expression of Lenin's organisational principles, were workers parties which had purged their ranks of all reformists and opportunists who thought it possible to reach socialism via the parliamentary road.

The first two congresses took place in an atmosphere of expectation of the imminent triumph of the revolution. This did not mean that such a triumph was guaranteed, but that intensive work of **organisation** and **education** had to be carried out to create a strong enough vanguard to lead the revolutionary struggle and ensure the seizure of power. This had to include a constant denunciation of the reactionary illusions propagated by the social democrats, showing that there was no middle way between the dictatorship of the proletariat and bourgeois democracy, which had revealed its real nature with the assassination of Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg.

The Third Congress, however, had to take note of a turn in the revolutionary struggle: the first insurrections had been defeated, and the bourgeoisie had sufficiently recovered from the great fear to fortify itself. A new strategy was called for, but first there was a theoretical problem to be solved: did this failure mean that the programme of the International was wrong, and was there now a new period of organic development of capital? In other words, was the defeat of the European proletariat economically determined as in 1848? If capitalism had not yet run its course, and there was room for a new growth of the productive forces, the October Revolution would in the short term be doomed by economic necessity because it had taken place in advance of the decisive decline of the capitalist system of production. But if in the last analysis the reason for the crushing of the European insurrections was political, the direct attack on imperialism would have to be abandoned in favour of the preparation of future struggles, though without it being necessary to revise the basic premises of the activity of the International. Such was the choice. Lenin never saw it as the 'building of socialism in one country' in a capitalist environment. It was within this theoretical framework that Trotsky undertook the construction of the Fourth International: the capitalist system was in its death agony, and it was up to the proletariat to put an end to it under penalty of disappearing with it in an unprecedented world cataclysm. The basic task was therefore the education of the working masses and the construction of the vanguard.

At the Third Congress of the International in 1921, Lenin and Trotsky were accused of pursuing a right-wing policy, of conciliation, and of sacrificing the revolutionary struggle to the same considerations that lay behind the NEP. In fact, what they had learned was that heroic struggle was not enough, it was necessary to win, and that the new offensive must therefore be carefully prepared. This involved the denunciation of social democratic illusions, winning the majority of the proletariat to Bolshevik ideas with a new strategy in the trade unions for transforming economic struggles into political struggles. The Third Congress became a 'school of revolutionary strategy'. The material prerequisites of revolution were there: but it was necessary to learn the lessons of the defeats of 1919-1920, due largely to the fact that the Communist Parties were at that time more like tendencies than formed, recognised vanguards; and to learn the art of struggle. The working class could only conquer if it was headed by an organisation representing its living historical experience, generalised in theory, and giving practical leadership in every struggle. Trotsky's only 'error' was that he never went back on these principles, which he worked out together with Lenin in the first four years of the Communist International.

Conditions had of course changed by 1938 when Trotsky, after much hesitation, embarked on the building of the new International. I intend to demonstrate the theoretical justification of this new orientation, even though for a long time it was a 'labour of Sisyphus', to use Deutscher's

expression.

In the Transitional Programme, Trotsky wrote that the objective prerequisites for socialism were not only ripe, they were rotten ripe. In 1921, after the defeat of the European proletariat, the Bolsheviks had demonstrated that the immediate post-war recovery of the capitalist economy was artificial, as the 1920 crisis had shown, affecting even the USA which had taken advantage of the war to assume a key position in the world capitalist economy. The stock exchange crisis of 1929, and the approaching Second World War, confirmed that capitalism was far from having overcome its contradictions — crises now immediately assumed international proportions, the basic contradictions were growing sharper, and the political solutions advanced by the bourgeoisie could achieve nothing. Neither the New Deal nor the Popular Front offered a way out of the economic impasse: still less did fascism, the bourgeoisie's last card, which in fact drove it nearer to catastrophe. The Stalinist International, not understanding this, led the world proletariat into defeat after defeat. This did not mean that world capitalism had no immediate way out. It meant that the system as a whole could not advance. In 1929 Trotsky had written in *The Third International After Lenin* that 'the role of the subjective factor in a period of slow, organic development can remain quite a subordinate one', while there can be no 'leaping over stages'; 'but as soon as the objective prerequisites have matured, the key to the whole historical process passes into the hands of the subjective factor, that is, the party.' Since 1923 the situation had radically changed: it was no longer just the proletariat but the whole Communist International which had suffered defeats, for its policy had come to dominate all other questions. He demonstrated that this was so in the case of all the abortive revolutionary crises (Germany, China, Spain, France). Was this imposing an arbitrary schema on very varied situations, or denying the 'objective conditions' peculiar to each case?

The second basic element in Trotsky's policy during the 1930s was therefore the close connection he demonstrated between the stabilisation of imperialism and the policy of the International. Every position lost for the proletariat was a foothold gained by the bourgeoisie. 'Politics considered as a mass historical force always lags behind economics.' [31] The realisation of the basic economic conditions for revolution did not mean that the bourgeoisie would abdicate power. On the contrary, it strengthened its powers of repression at any cost, in the military, ideological and political fields, in order to ward off the proletarian threat first concretised in the USSR. The subjective conditions did not directly follow economic conditions: the different aspects of the historical process — economics, politics, the State, the struggle of the working class — did not advance simultaneously. The consciousness of the working class did not grow parallel with the productive forces, the bourgeoisie did not decline as the proletariat advanced. The different aspects were linked not schematically or simplistically but dialectically: the scholastics could not recognise that between mechanical determinism and arbitrary subjectiveness there lay the materialist dialectic. Stalin's domestic and international policy constantly oscillated between the two. If Trotsky's prognoses were often wrong, he was nonetheless able to give the clearest illustration of the interaction of economics and politics in a period in which the subjective factor was decisive.

A good example is his analysis of China after the tragedy of 1927. As long as capitalism remained undefeated, it would go on developing as well as it could, the most important conclusion being the clarification of the political consequences of the law of uneven and combined development. China was a much more backward peasant country than Russia: but the law of combined development crushed even the embryo of a democratic stage which Russia had experienced. To be more precise, the **only** possible democratic dictatorship was that of the Kuomintang which had hastened to

liquidate the communist forces, subordinated to it on the pretext of the need for a stage of the 'bloc of four classes'. Trotsky wrote, 'those objective socio-historical causes which pre-determined the "October" outcome of the Russian revolution rise before us in China in still more accentuated form.' The opportunist policy was rooted in a failure to understand 'economic determinism' and its relationship to politics; but also in left adventurism. The Canton insurrection, which was drowned in blood, was the corollary of the previous policy of alliance with the Kuomintang, which had been given every opportunity to strengthen itself at the expense of the revolutionary forces supposed to be marching with it to 'democracy'. With China, as with Russia before 1917, the problem was not whether the country was ripe for socialism (it was clearly no more so than backward Russia) but whether it was ripe for the dictatorship of the proletariat. Stalin's basic error was to confuse national economic considerations with political considerations. The law of combined and uneven development had 'overdetermined' the relationship between politics and economics which was the necessary starting point. This relationship was only meaningful on an international scale, the scale of the struggle of the world proletariat against imperialism. At this level, the defeat of the Chinese revolution under the directives of the International was a tragic confirmation of the Bolshevik position.



Only an internationalist understanding of the relationship of objective and subjective conditions made it possible to understand the dialectic of periods of rise and ebb of the world revolution. The fact that the age of world revolution had begun did not mean that subjective conditions were automatically ripe for it. The Stalinists' basic failure to grasp this relationship made them unable to decide on the moment for insurrection. In Germany in 1923 the defeat was due to the party's hesitation at the decisive moment. By the time insurrection was decided on the masses were no longer ready for it. A similar process produced the defeat of Canton. A sudden turn was imposed on the Chinese masses without preparing them for it or giving them a real revolutionary leadership. A revolutionary leadership could only be formed on the basis of an understanding of the epoch and its sudden turns. No-one understood this better than Lenin, as he showed in July during the Russian Revolution, and even more at the Third Congress of the International, when he did not hesitate to take a 'rightist' position, arguing that subjective conditions were not yet ripe for an all-out attack on capitalism. But should a real revolutionary situation develop, the opportunity would have to be seized.

Lenin's flexibility over tactics was evidence of an ability to formulate strategy for a specific situation without losing sight of the final goal of proletarian revolution. His 'realpolitik' had nothing in common with Stalin's so-called

'realism', which led logically to 'peaceful coexistence' after the Second World War when the stabilisation of capitalism seemed to be confirmed. Lenin and Trotsky acted on the basis of a correct theoretical understanding of the basic tendency of the epoch. Reality is hard on theoretical mistakes, and without the guidance of strict proletarian principles Stalin veered from left to right according to circumstances. For him theory was not a 'guide to action' but a means of justifying a particular political orientation. 'At the present time', wrote Trotsky in 1929, 'the ideology of the Comintern is not guided but manufactured to order. Theory, ceasing to become an instrument of knowledge and foresight, has become an administrative technical tool.'

This was how the theory of 'socialism in one country' and the stages theory were used whenever the opportunist course of Comintern policy had to be justified. Empiricism in theory only reflected the internal contradictions of the isolated Soviet regime. But the grip of the bureaucracy over the Communist Parties everywhere made it also the most suitable ideological weapon for weaning the masses from revolutionary struggle. An International at the service of 'socialism in one country' was a contradiction in terms. No longer a revolutionary force, it was the most powerful guarantee of the impasse in which the Russian Communist Party was locked. By serving that party's immediate interests it undermined its base in the long run, as the Soviet state could only emerge from its contradictions when the socialist camp was extended.

The Comintern became the direct political agent of the stabilisation of capitalism. The United States had gained a hegemonic position within world imperialism. But the stabilisation was only on the surface, and was the result not of economic necessity but of political error. It was therefore not in the least 'idealist' to define the crisis of mankind as the crisis of revolutionary leadership. The building of a new International was theoretically justified. In 1929 Trotsky still refused to begin this task. He was well aware that a new banner and new slogans were not all that were needed to create a revolutionary pole of attraction, and that the world proletariat still recognised the International founded by Lenin, even if it had turned away from its goals. The decisive historical event which led him to proclaim the idea of the Fourth International was Hitler's accession to power in 1933. In 1928 the Comintern had decreed a new revolutionary period, with the crisis of capitalism sounding the death-knell of 'stabilisation'. The Communist Parties were ordered to return to the offensive, and in Germany that meant the denunciation of social democracy as the main enemy. The rise of Nazism, which Trotsky called the expression of 'counter-revolutionary despair', was from then on assured. The Comintern did not recover from its amazing blindness even after the defeat of 1933. Trotsky issued warning upon warning. When the Comintern declared Hitler's electoral victory meaningless, and refused to recognise that this strategic defeat would leave the German working class prostrate and paralysed for many years, Trotsky decided that in the face of such a betrayal of the revolution the time had come to rebuild the International on a new basis. After the event, it was too late to talk of a united front. The new International would have to be built in the most difficult conditions, but it was the only way forward.

There was nothing voluntarist about this decision of Trotsky's. The analysis he developed in the 1930s was extremely complex. He was able to show that the failure of Stalin's International did not mean that the USSR had ceased to be a workers state which had to be unconditionally defended against attacks by the counter-revolution. It was the social basis of October, not the bureaucracy, which was to be defended. He never departed from this position. His situation was extremely difficult. On the one hand, the combined influence of Stalinism and reformism had turned the masses away from their goal. On the other, his position had been considerably weakened when most of the Oppositionists went over to supporting Stalin. The Stalinist

bureaucracy had been able to present itself as the faithful heir of Marxism-Leninism, and it took a thoroughly dialectical grasp of the situation to follow all the subtleties of Trotsky's analysis and break with the existing CPs and the Comintern in such a complex period: the more so since Trotskyism was portrayed as the enemy of the USSR and therefore of communism.

Trotsky experienced the separation of the vanguard from the masses much more intensely than Lenin. When Lenin was fighting to build the Bolshevik Party he had to free the working class of Russia from petty bourgeois influences and turn its spontaneous class consciousness into political consciousness. When, after dwelling on every aspect of the problem at length, Trotsky embarked on the building of the Fourth International, the masses were steeped in Stalinist ideology, which was much more difficult to struggle against than direct bourgeois ideology. The bureaucracy, divorced from the control of the base, had developed an objectively counter-revolutionary ideology, but played on its position as the guardian of the social heritage of October and on the ignorance of the masses to maintain its own position, subjecting them completely to its domination. The new vanguard had a dual role: to struggle against the influence of social democracy, whose reformism made it the guarantor of bourgeois rule; and to fight Stalinist ideology, which appeared as the bearer of a canonised version of Leninism. The consequences of the successive defeats of the working class in Germany, Spain and France made it still more difficult for the exhausted masses to understand the need for a basic revision of all the 'theories' with which they were lulled. The evaluation of the nature and policies of the USSR was what made it difficult to build a strong revolutionary pole. Trotsky did not want to rally the disillusioned, but people capable of understanding the contradictions of the epoch without schematism. The Fourth International had no mass audience, and this was the basic reason for its weakness, for the moment of separation, if prolonged, would become a source of conservatism. But this in no way proves Trotsky's alleged 'sociologism': he more than anyone clarified the dialectical process of the emergence and disappearance of the 'subjective conditions' for insurrection.

The aim of the Fourth International was not the immediate subversion of the existing order but the preparation of a vanguard capable of winning the masses to the international revolution against the directives issuing from Moscow. The new organisation had to join in the daily struggle of the masses while preparing them at the same time for a revolution urgently called for by 'objective conditions'. This is why Trotsky put forward a programme of transitional demands with the objective of preparing the proletariat for political struggle through trade union demands. Lukacs had written that the marked organisational preparation of the conscious vanguard and the broad masses is only a moment in the united, dialectical process of evolution of the whole class and its consciousness. The objective basis of the Fourth International was the failure of the Stalinist International which had led the proletariat into defeat after defeat. It was not an artificial creation. But the bureaucratic and ideological hold of Stalinism was so strong that it was even more difficult than Trotsky had thought to take the new organisation into the working class. Recent events nonetheless tend to show that if Trotsky's precise prognosis was wrong, his historical, theoretical perspective was basically correct.

Internationalism was, as Deutscher said, the very stuff of Trotsky's thought: it was the basis of his conception of the new organisation, which he struggled to build from the outset on an international scale. The internal relationship of forces, in the economic and political fields, changed as a result of the failure of Stalinist policy, itself the product of the contradictions which rose up to confront the proletariat in a backward country which was the first to achieve a proletarian revolution. The weakness of the working class and its revolutionary leadership was in the last analysis

responsible for Russia's continued isolation. Nonetheless, if the USSR survived the inter-war period, it was because the capitalist system staggered from crisis to crisis. The situation was still objectively revolutionary. The only way out of the impasse was therefore the development of a strategy to take account of the new international situation, and a new world organisation to carry it out. The fact that this organisation remained weak for a long time is secondary relative to the theoretical analysis on which its creation was based. As Trotsky wrote in 1929, stabilisation had not fallen from the sky, nor was it the result of an automatic change in the conditions of the world capitalist economy, but the fruit of an unfavourable change in the political relationship of forces between the classes.

The building of the Fourth International was the direct political corollary of this basic thesis.

CONCLUSION: The theoretical advance of 'Trotskyism'

'The category of the totality, the all-pervasive supremacy of the whole over the parts, is the essence of the method which Marx took over from Hegel and brilliantly transformed into the foundations of a whole new science.' [32] What distinguishes Trotsky from all the Marxists of his time, including Lenin, is that he directly expressed international reality through this category. The concept of the totality structures the whole viewpoint of Trotsky's theory, much more than it does in Marx or Lenin. He produced theories with which the actuality of the world revolution can be understood much more concretely than Marx or even Lenin were able to do. 'Linking up countries and continents that stand on different levels of development into a system of mutual dependence and antagonism, levelling out the various stages of their development and at the same time immediately enhancing the differences between them, and ruthlessly counterposing one country to another, world economy has become a mighty reality which holds sway over the economic life of individual countries and continents.' [33]

It is in Trotsky's writings that we find the clearest theoretical expression of imperialism as the organic international reality of the capitalist mode of production, as a totality in which the whole conditions the parts. It appears in the law of combined development. The basis of the international policies of the Stalinist school was a fetishisation of the law of uneven development, both in the theory of socialism in one country and in the stages theory of revolution. It was claimed that Trotsky held the position that because conditions were everywhere 'ripe' there had to be simultaneous revolution in every country, which was clearly impossible. The dialectical armoury of Trotsky's thought is revealed in all its complexity precisely in the theory of permanent revolution. 'The entire formulation of the questions as outlined above flows from the dynamics of the revolutionary process taken as a whole. The international revolution is regarded as an interconnected process which cannot be predicted in all its concreteness, and, so to speak, its order of occurrence, but which is absolutely clearcut in its general historical outline. Unless the latter is understood, a correct political orientation is entirely out of the question.' [34]

The capitalist mode of production, going beyond the framework of national boundaries, had spread the various forms of its basic contradictions throughout the world. Trotsky understood this process of economic unification and



so became the theorist of world revolution. The world revolution was dialectical in time and space, for an advance or a revolution in any sector took the whole system forward. Similarly any error in revolutionary strategy had implications for the whole world.

With the whole imperialist system entering the stage of its death agony and decline, and with the vital interdependence it had created among all countries — though by such a contradictory process that the unification and levelling out of the world economy was proceeding with more violence and convulsions than in any previous epoch — the age of world revolution had begun. Trotskyist theory therefore became an overall political position. In the imperialist stage the dialectics of economics were directly expressed in the dialectics of politics. It was because he viewed world reality from the standpoint of the totality that Trotsky was able to demonstrate the primacy of politics in the new historical era which had begun for mankind. This was why he was able to disentangle the body of Marxist theory from all the gradualist, positivist and mechanistic deviations which had gathered around it — and to which even Lenin still subscribed in *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*. Trotsky's conception of combined development made it possible for him to explain the relationship of objective and subjective conditions as being mediated through the interaction of the different sectors of the capitalist mode of production, and what is more through the revolutionary process itself. His understanding of the dialectical movement of history over time and space enabled him to write that 'history does not repeat itself'. Each new historical event was conditioned by the totality of previous history and by circumstances. There could no longer be a democratic stage, both because world economic development made it redundant, and because the bourgeoisie knew that it would be historical suicide to form an alliance with the revolutionary proletariat and peasantry, should they be hegemonic.

Trotsky's political theory forms the living body of the revolutionary theory and practice of the period which began with October. There is still nothing to challenge it. It is no longer possible to base a political perspective on a *priori* positions on economics. Politics is the direct expression of international economic and social contradictions. Trotsky's greatness was that he developed and gave theoretical expression to the principles of Marxism and Leninism. It was because of this that he could write in his *Diary in Exile* in 1935 that it was then, at the height of Stalinist degeneration, that he was indispensable. 'Had I not been present in Petersburg, the October Revolution would still have taken place — on the condition that Lenin was present and in command.' The same was true for the difficult period of 1917-21. But after Lenin's death, only he could 'carry out the mission of arming a new generation with the revolutionary methods over the heads of the leaders of the Second and Third Internationals'. He added: 'I need at least about five more years of uninterrupted work to ensure the succession.' It appears, then, that Trotsky was under no illusions about the difficulties awaiting him in his new undertaking. The persecution against him made it impossible to dedicate himself to the task as fully as he would have liked. But despite the difficulties of his situation he not only upheld the gains of Bolshevism but even developed them in the light of new situations, and began the work of putting them into practice. He survived the objective and subjective conditions which had defeated him without negating his principles; on the contrary he used them to explain his experience, whereas much less dangerous situations had been the undoing of such eminent theoreticians as Bernstein, Kautsky and Plekhanov.

With the exceptions of Lukacs and Gramsci, Trotsky made the last decisive contribution to Marxist theory, and it has not progressed since his time. Trotsky developed the elements which offer a way out of this poverty of theory. It is extremely interesting that the 'theoreticians' who have been

unable to detach themselves from Stalin's revisionism have abandoned low slanders for the higher ground of 'theoretical polemics. Leo Figueres' work on 'Trotskyism, the anti-Leninism' has nothing much new to say. It remains at the level of the old accusations about 'skipping over a stage, underestimating the peasantry...' But if they attempt to set Lenin and Trotsky into conflict over principles, the epigones of the decline of Stalinism will find themselves in trouble. The resurgence of basic 'Trotskyist' ideas is no accident. If the new vanguard recognises Trotsky as its mentor, it is because only his problematic offers an explanation for the violent death agony of imperialism, the rise of the 'Third World' revolutions, the delay of revolution in the advanced countries, and Stalinism itself. The historical failure of the Stalinist experience has affected the whole of the workers movement. Theory did not escape the debacle: Stalinism turned Leninism into obscurantism, replacing it with a grossly distorted, schematised body of theory, so that the professional intellectuals employed to raise it to the level of eternal truths now have their work cut out to explain the basic tendency of our epoch. Stalinist theory, built on infallible dogmas and abstract references taken out of context, boils down to vulgar, mechanistic Marxism, usurping the name of dialectics and resting on the weakest texts in Marxist theory: for example, the thread which runs through Engels' *Dialectics of Nature* and Lenin's *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, culminating in *Dialectical Materialism and Historical Materialism* by Stalin and Chairman Mao's *Philosophical Essays*.

On a world scale, the social and political relationship of forces has turned again in favour of revolution; in terms of economic necessity it always was. But with the dissolution of the political and theoretical edifice of Stalinism, 'subjective conditions' can potentially be transformed into revolutionary forces. All revolutions since the Second World War have

taken place against the directives of Stalin and his successors: the Chinese revolution for one. The Cuban revolution and the struggle in Latin America have also defied the policies of the CPSU on a basis closer to ours. Conditions are therefore right for the theoretical as well as the historical 'rehabilitation' of Trotsky. More than ever, the theory of permanent revolution is the necessary theoretical framework for understanding the dialectical complexity of the period. Trotsky's work was not an illusion or a symbol, and was not carried out in vain. The rise of the revolutionary forces throughout the world is the most dramatic confirmation of his positions. Those who would denigrate Trotskyism as an old theory, an ideology belonging to the past, as much as those who think it wrong, are unable to understand the meaning of a theoretical tradition and its relationship to history. They forget that, like revolution, theory must sometimes burrow underground for a long time. **But theory too is like our old friend the mole.**

FOOTNOTES

27. Georg Lukacs, *Lenin*, London 1970.
28. Degras, *Documents of the Communist International*, Vol. 1, p. 1.
29. George Lukacs, *History and Class Consciousness*, London (Merlin) 1968, p. 306.
30. *Ibid.*, pp. 313-4.
31. *The Third International After Lenin*, New York (Pioneer) 1957, p. 80.
32. Lukacs, *History and Class Consciousness*, p. 27.
33. *The Third International After Lenin*, p. 5.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 16.

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FROM THE ARCHIVES

**TWO ARTICLES BY
BRIAN PEARCE**

INTRODUCTION

One of the less satisfactory features of John Mahon's recently published biography of Harry Pollitt [Lawrence & Wishart, £6] is the very slight treatment of a major event in his subject's career, namely, his accession to the post of General Secretary of the Communist Party of Great Britain. Yet Mahon fully appreciated the importance and interest of that event.

In 1949 I wrote an article [the first text reprinted below] commemorating the 20th anniversary of Pollitt as party leader, and circulated copies to a select list of friends and acquaintances in the party. One of these — I think it was Jack Woddis, now head of the International Department — saw fit to hand his copy to John Mahon, who was then in charge of the party's London District. Mahon sent for me and told me that it was an offence against party discipline to circulate documents like this. It was not, he said, that there was anything incorrect in what I had written: on the contrary, he had been there at the time and knew that things had happened just as I described. But the story could be misunderstood and be used against the party. In fact, a copy of my little piece had gone astray and was being used by 'enemies' in Lambeth...

As I am sure Mahon well appreciated, I had not written my article on the change of party leadership in 1929 just out of an itch to celebrate jubilees. After a period immediately after the Second World War when the CPGB had followed an extreme right-wing course, signs appeared in 1948-49 of a possible turn to the left. This was very welcome to party members of a certain type, to which I belonged — what were sometimes called 'Sixth Congress Communists', meaning comrades who had joined the party before the Seventh

Comintern Congress [1935], in the 'Third Period' of ultra-leftism, and had never shaken off nostalgia for the slogans and style of work of their political youth. In those circles the criticism 'from the left' of the British party's post-1945 policy which had been made by the Australian CP was well-received: on this episode, see Edward Upward's novel set in this period, *The Rotten Elements* [Penguin, 35p]. At the same time there was marked resistance to any 'left turn' on the part of important sections of the party who were quite happy with the right-wing line. It was as an attack on these people that I wrote my article on the party struggle of 1929, seeing in that a kind of precedent for the conflict of 1949.

Eight years later I wrote another study of the same events, this time set in a broader context, entitled 'The Communist Party and the Labour Left, 1925-29', and this was published by John Saville as one of the *Reasoner* pamphlets. The point of view was quite different, and a number of new facts were mentioned. The text of this pamphlet [which originally appeared with the writer's name given as 'Joseph Redman'] is included in *Essays on the History of Communism in Britain*, by Michael Woodhouse and Brian Pearce [New Park, £1.50]. This also contains five other contributions by me to the history of the British Communist Party, all originally published in *Labour Review* in 1957-59. It does not include, however, the second text reprinted below, 'Marxists in the Second World War', written by me under the pseudonym 'B. Farnborough', which appeared in the *Labour Review* of April-May 1959.

BRIAN PEARCE
16 October 1976

For the 20th anniversary of comrade Harry Pollitt as General Secretary of the Communist Party (1949)

Introduction

Comrade Harry Pollitt's report to the extended Executive meeting last February included an important section on 'Criticism and Self-Criticism' in which he reviewed 'opportunist mistakes' made by our Party in recent years and stressed the importance of driving 'Social-Democratic illusions and Social-Democratic methods from our own ranks'.

August 1949 is the 20th anniversary of sweeping changes in the policy and leadership of the British Communist Party which rescued the Party from an opportunist course which was leading it towards political nullity as a mere left extension of Social-Democracy. These changes, which were the outcome of a prolonged and severe inner-Party struggle, included the appointment of Comrade Pollitt as General Secretary. It may be useful to recall now the events of that period, the greatest crisis in the history of the Party to date. Although the situation, both national and international, is different today in many important respects from what it was in the late 1920s (most of all, perhaps, in the vastly greater strength of the USSR), we can nevertheless draw some lessons from what happened then in the working class movement generally and in the Communist Party in particular. The record is especially relevant to the current struggle against Social-Democracy and opportunist tendencies in the Party.

From the General Strike to the 9th Party Congress

The General Strike of May 1926 was betrayed by the leaders of the TUC and the Labour Party at the moment when the workers' solidarity and fighting spirit were at their highest. This betrayal represented a choice by the then leaders of the labour movement — against working class struggle which must lead to a showdown with the capitalist state, for co-operation with the capitalist state to make capitalism work at the expense of the workers. Especially significant was the participation in the betrayal of a number of trade union leaders, such as Purcell and Hicks, who had masqueraded as left-wingers, largely on the basis of their speeches on overseas affairs.

The effect of the betrayal upon the workers was to disillusion great numbers of them with their old leaders and the political conceptions associated with those leaders. A marked turn of former Labour Party stalwarts towards the Communist Party took place; in the five months after the betrayal of the General Strike the membership of the Party doubled. These workers admired the Party's fight for 'preparedness' in the period leading up to the strike and its staunch and bold leadership during the strike, and now looked to it to lead the struggle forward in the new situation created by the betrayal of the strike. It was a great opportunity, the greatest that had ever been presented to the Communist Party in Britain.

In those days there existed the Communist International, through which the CPSU (B) and other Communist Parties were able to pool their experience in order to advise each individual Communist Party. In June 1926 the Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI) held a meeting at which it reviewed the General Strike and drew up a series of recommendations to the British Party for policy in the new situation. The Party, which hitherto had

functioned largely as a 'ginger group' bringing pressure to bear from the left on the leaders of the Labour Party and TUC and supporting the 'Lefts' among these leaders against the 'Rights', was urged to move in the direction of independent leadership of the workers. There should now be undertaken 'ruthless denunciation' of the so-called Lefts in the General Council of the TUC. The Party should finally break with its traditions as a propagandist sect and take organisational steps to root itself in the factories. With the least possible delay, a Communist daily paper should be launched, to counter the Social-Democratic *Daily Herald*.

The comrades who at that time were the leaders of the Communist Party did very little to implement these proposals, or to make any assessment of the new features of the situation following the General Strike. They continued to issue the slogan 'More Power to the General Council' (of the TUC, in relation to individual unions). They protested to the Soviet trade unions against the sharply critical message which the latter had sent to the General Council after the betrayal of the General Strike.

The ECCI discussed British affairs again at its meeting in November 1926. It noted the growth of class consciousness among the workers and declared that conditions for the development of 'a mass Communist Party', rivalling the Labour Party, were now present. At the same time, it warned the British Communists about their continued attitude of uncritical tolerance towards the 'Lefts' among the Labour and trade union leaders, including the miners' leader A.J. Cook who, although he had stood boldly and alone against the betrayal of the General Strike, was now showing signs of vacillation.

During the year 1927 the capitalists took steps to consolidate their victory over the workers won in the previous year with the help of Social-Democracy. Speed-up and 'rationalisation' were accompanied by the persecuting and victimising of militant workers. The Tory Government of Baldwin brought in a Trades Dispute Bill which was aimed to make some types of strike illegal and to restrict severely the rights of trade unionists in such strikes as remained legal; the workers nicknamed it the 'Blacklegs Charter'. The working class reacted vigorously against these attacks and threats of further attacks. The May Day demonstration of 1927 was the largest and most militant for many years. The ECCI, again reviewing the British situation, urged the Party leadership to rise to the occasion by setting up local Councils of Action for struggle against the Trades Disputes Bill and leading the workers in the direction of a second General Strike, this time to be led by the Communists.

The Party leadership did not do this, however, but instead entered upon a political flirtation with a new movement, led by A.J. Cook and James Maxton of the ILP, which was to 'ginger up' the Labour Party from within. Considerable publicity and prestige were given to these adventurers by the Party speakers and press. This caused a good deal of confusion amongst the leftward-moving workers, who saw 'Cook-Maxton' as a sort of alternative to the Communist Party which was being recommended to them by the Party itself. (Comrade Arnot wrote two years later about this episode: 'It was perhaps more the comic opera futility of Maxton than the policy of the Party which prevented the effective growth of a third party standing between the Labour Party and the Communists.') At the municipal



elections of 1927 the Party ran candidates only where this would not involve a conflict with the Labour Party, which meant that they made a very poor showing.

The workers who had flocked into the Party began to trickle out again, disappointed at the absence of a clear fighting lead. The failure of the Party to take over the leadership of the class struggle which had been renounced and abandoned by the Social-Democrats led to the spreading of a mood of depression and cynicism amongst sections of the workers who had been eager to go forward to battle. The working class movement as a whole fell into discredit amongst the workers; the Labour Party vote declined at by-elections and membership of the trade unions fell off. Taking advantage of the Party's hesitancy and feebleness and the resultant confusion amongst the militant workers, the trade union bureaucracy put through measures to exclude members of the Communist Party or of the Communist-led 'National Minority Movement' of militants in the trade unions from holding any official positions in Trades Councils.

When the 9th Congress of the Party met in Salford in October 1927, it had before it a letter from the ECCI calling for 'most bitter struggle' against the Labour leaders. 'Fresh class battles confront the British workers', it declared, 'and the task of the Party Congress is to prepare the Communist Party for leadership in these forthcoming conflicts.' In spite of this appeal, the resolutions put before the Congress by the Party leadership were substantially the mixture as before; except that now, instead of just 'a Labour Government', the demand was for 'a Labour Government controlled by the Executive Committee of the Labour Party' — MacDonald controlled by MacDonald.

From the 9th to the 10th Party Congress

A number of leading Party members were extremely worried by the complacency of the majority of the Central Committee and alarmed by the latter's ability to prevent any criticism or serious discussion of Party policy from arising, at Congress or at any other time. Outstanding amongst these comrades was Harry Pollitt, one of the Party leaders who was closest to the working class, being leader of the Party fraction in the National Minority Movement. Associated with him was R.P. Dutt. They saw that the attack of the capitalists and the Labour leaders against the working class, which was now entering the phase of Mondism, was going from victory to victory (the Trades Disputes Act had been passed into law) without any serious counter-offensive by the Communist Party, which was not fulfilling its duty to the workers. They decided that the situation was so desperate as to justify the taking of special measures to break through the well-organised resistance of the majority of the Central Committee. They went to Moscow soon after the end of the 9th Party Congress and raised the question of the situation in Britain very sharply with the ECCI. The latter communicated with the CC of the British Party and as a result the decisions of the 9th Party Congress were brought up for reconsideration (only three months after they had been adopted) and a really free and open discussion on policy was inaugurated for the first time. The majority of the CC set forth a statement of their views on relations with the Labour Party for the membership to study and discuss alongside a counter-statement, which comrades Dutt and Pollitt were allowed to publish, setting forth the views of

the minority.

The 'majority' statement claimed that if Lenin's advice of 1920 (see **Left Wing Communism**) was valid when it was given, then it must be more valid in 1928, since the situation in the latter year was 'not so revolutionary as in 1920'. The workers still had faith in the Labour leaders in spite of the Labour Government of 1924 and the betrayal of the General Strike; therefore the Communist Party must again help to 'push a Henderson-Snowden Government into office' as the only way whereby the workers might, through their own experience, learn the folly of reformism. In no circumstances must the Communists put up candidates against Labour Party men in any election where a possibility existed that to do so would let the Tory in.

Comrades Pollitt and Dutt, in their counter-statement, pointed out that Lenin's advice of 1920 was given before there had been a Labour Government. How many Labour Governments had there to be before the Party appreciated that a new situation had come into being in which Lenin's advice was no longer 100 per cent valid? In any event, 'the view that we must wait for the conviction and disillusionment of the majority of the working class before the Communist Party can begin its direct fight against the Labour Party leadership leads to a dangerously passive, defeatist view of our role'. The existing policy towards the Labour Party ('support with criticism') was 'a patchwork of confusion, endeavouring to combine virtually inconsistent policies. The disadvantages of two policies are combined without the advantages of either.' The fall in the Labour vote noticed at by-elections in 1927 revealed the danger of apathy spreading in the working class movement if a new, Communist leadership did not come to the front. Still more serious was the decline in Communist Party membership after the remarkable growth in 1926. It could not be explained, as spokesmen of the majority had tried to explain it, as due to 'persecutions'; 'where political interest and consciousness are strong, persecution can lead to increased strength and not to decline'. The majority were too fond of attributing setbacks due to their own mistakes to what they called 'objective circumstances'. (For instance, they depicted 'psychological depression' as the inevitable and unalterable result of the betrayal of the General Strike; this was a libel on the workers and an alibi for the Party leadership.) 'It is a serious fact that, at the same time as the leftward advance in the working class is visibly going forward in 1927, the Communist Party membership should be declining. We believe that an important part of the cause of this lies in the fact that the independent fighting leadership of the Communist Party, which was so strongly visible in the conditions of struggle in 1926, has not been able to be so visible in 1927... The solution of this lies in the independent political leadership of the Communist Party directly leading the fight against the official Labour Party leadership.' As regards election tactics, the Communist Party should everywhere appeal to the Labour candidate to subscribe to a set of 'united front demands' based on the immediate needs of the workers; where he accepted, the Party should work for him, but where he refused, 'we should call on the workers to give him no support and to refuse to vote, explaining fully our reasons and making clear that as soon as we are strong enough we shall bring forward a real workers' candidate.'

Representatives of the majority and the minority in the CC appeared before the ECCI in February 1928 and argued their respective cases. The spokesmen of the majority claimed that the Communist Party must call on the workers

to vote Labour 'as against the candidate of the open capitalist parties' because the Communist Party was not yet in a position 'to be the national alternative to the Baldwin Government on the one hand or the Labour Government on the other'. Communist candidates should be put up only in constituencies where the Party was already strong. If the minority claimed that this meant choosing one's constituencies on 'empirical' rather than on 'political' grounds — so that, for example, a notorious right wing Labour leader might go unfought by a Party candidate because the Communists happened at the moment to be weak in his constituency — well, 'if empiricism consists in facing hard facts, I plead guilty to being an empiricist... Unfortunately a political situation is built up of details.' As the majority saw it, the minority were advocating that 'the Communist Party is to go to the workers and say, we are so weak we cannot put up candidates; please wait until we are strong enough and we will put up candidates for you to vote for.' On the other hand, 'if the Party puts up candidates and as a result of putting them up the Labour leaders should get 20,000 votes and the Party representative gets 1,000 votes, you are not demonstrating strength and you are demonstrating weakness'. The Party must not call upon the workers to spoil their ballot papers in any constituency, because this is what the Socialist Party of Great Britain advocates, and 'we do not want to be forced into the position of making a united front with the SPGB.' Above all, the minority, in their anxiety to sharpen the fight against Social Democracy, were forgetting the main enemy, the Tories: 'Comrades, in all these discussions and all the statements made here, the Baldwin Government is entirely left out of the picture.' One of the majority spokesmen put forward a proposal to transform a number of local Labour Parties which had been disaffiliated for their left-wing activity and were already linked together as the National Left Wing Movement into a new left Labour Party, to be set up against the old Labour Party led by MacDonald.

The spokesmen of the minority accused the majority of taking too narrow and short-term a view of the problem of Communist election tactics. The Party must not, of course, 'forget the morning after the election'; but it must 'remember still more the question of the future of the working class — not simply the morning after the election, but the next day, the next year, the next two years.' The arguments advanced by the majority against doing anything that might 'let the capitalist candidate in' had been hurled by the Lib-Labs against the ILP when it began the fight for independent working class representation in the 1890s. The proposal to set up a new 'left' Labour Party would 'merely create a barrier between the Communist Party and the workers'; there should be 'no intermediary party, no mediator between the Communist Party and the working class'.

A number of contributions were made to the discussion by representatives of brother Communist Parties. One of these offered this observation: 'It is a fact that the British comrades are inclined to base their tactics more on their opinions of what the workers think of the situation in the country rather than on the opinions of our own comrades on the actual situation.' Another defined the question which underlay the whole controversy as: 'To what extent can one take into consideration the Labour illusions which exist among the working masses without running the danger of strengthening these illusions by the policy of our Party.'

After this thrashing-out of the issues, the ECCI resolved that in view of the great changes since 1920, especially the experience of the Labour Government and the General Strike, and the constitutional and disciplinary changes inside the Labour Party which meant that it was 'becoming to an increasing degree an ordinary Social-Democratic Party', the Communist Party must change its relationship and attitude to the Labour Party. The Communist Party should come out consistently as the independent leader of the working class in its struggle against the capitalists. The Party's aim should no longer be a Labour Government but a Revolutionary Workers Government. Communist candidates should be put up against the top leaders of the Labour Party regardless of the existing strength of the Party in their constituencies, and elsewhere, wherever the local strength of the Party warranted it, to the maximum number possible. The Party should support candidates of disaffiliated Labour Parties who put up against official Labour and also other Labour candidates who pledged themselves to support 'the

elementary demands of the working class'. 'Voting for Labour candidates in the remaining districts must definitely be decided upon only after all possible preliminary work is done in the matter of putting up our own and Left worker candidates.'

The resolution of the ECCI, embodying as it did substantial endorsement of the minority's criticisms, was accepted formally but without conviction by the majority of the CC of the British Party. No real self-critical discussion of the 'New Line' was organised in the Party, but only a series of 'enlightenment conferences' at which the differences between the old line and the new were slurred over as much as possible. The Party weekly, *Workers Life*, even described the new line as a 'continuation' of the old! Confused behaviour in the by-elections which took place soon after the ECCI meeting reflected the continuance of divided counsels in the leadership. For example, at Liniithgow a Communist candidate was first put up, then withdrawn in favour of the Labour candidate, and finally advice was given to abstain from voting. The Party continued to foster the development of the National Left Wing Movement in the direction of a reformed Labour Party, with the declared aim of 'a Left Labour Government' and a complete programme of the Centrist type, i.e. for socialism but without the dictatorship of the proletariat. Comrade R.P. Dutt wrote in the *Communist Review* of January 1929: 'The old line can still go merrily on and find a home in the National Left Wing... If it is argued that it is necessary for the Communist Party to organise this tendency as a bridge to itself, then it becomes in the end equivalent to arguing that it is the task of the Communist Party to organise Centrism... It is urged that it is necessary for the Communist Party to assist the left-wing workers and those moving to the left. This is correct, but it is not assisting them to encourage them in their illusions and appear to give to these the authority of the Communist Party.'

Meanwhile, the year 1928 saw the triumph of Mondism in the leading circles of the labour movement and the beginning of large-scale unemployment due to some extent to the 'rationalisation' of industry which was carried through under the banner of Mondism.

At the 10th Party Congress, held at Bermondsey in January 1929, the delegates showed themselves enthusiastic for the new line recommended by the ECCI and highly critical of the majority of the CC for having applied it hesitantly and inconsistently and without making a bonfire of remnants of the old line. They expressed discontent with the failure to take steps towards the launching of a daily paper and towards basing the Party on the factories, both of which had been urged by the ECCI so long before as June 1926. One of the Congress resolutions warned against 'conciliation towards the old line' which 'tended to reduce the Party to the level of a left wing of the Labour Party' and led towards 'political extinction'. Comrade Tapsell, an active fighter for the ECCI line who was later killed in Spain, noted in an article about the 10th Party Congress that it was free from 'the traditional meek following of the platform'; at the same time, however, he noted that, while the platform adapted itself to the mood of the delegates, 'if ever there was a Party leadership obstinately determined not to be self-critical it was the Party leadership at the 10th Congress'.

From the 10th to the 11th Party Congress

The early months of 1929 saw the final stages in the passing over of A.J. Cook, who ended his period of left masquerade by declaring for a Labour Government and 'ordered progress' and calling for an end to recriminations about 'what happened in 1926'. When, belatedly, the Party leadership now criticised this 'Left' Labour leader whom it had done much to build up in the eyes of the militant workers, he savagely attacked it. So ended the disastrous cult of A.J. Cook, which had led many workers to think that 'Communism and Cookism', as Comrade R.P. Arnot expressed it, 'are just as good as one another' and that 'there is a "true socialist" standpoint intermediate between the Labour Party and the Communist Party'.

The General Election of May 1929 found the Party leadership still facing both ways. Five members of the CC were still, almost on the very eve of the election, in favour of

automatically supporting the Labour candidate in every constituency where the Party was not running its own candidate. There had been since the end of 1928 a growth in anti-Tory bitterness amongst sections of the workers previously not politically conscious, largely owing to the rise in unemployment; because of the weakness and ambiguity of the Party's stand, this feeling expressed itself in a big vote for Labour, while the Communist candidates did poorly. During the election campaign, Labour candidates quoted Party documents of 1927-28 with telling effect.

The General Election results, which were accompanied by a sharp decline in Party membership, caused a sharpening of the political conflict within the Party. On the one hand some of the majority of the CC insinuated that it was the new line of the ECCI that was leading the Party to disaster. In this spirit, the Political Bureau was reorganised shortly after the election in such a way as to strengthen the opportunist element. Comrade Dutt, however, writing for Comrade Pollitt and the other comrades of the minority as well as for himself in the Moscow magazine **The Communist International**, declared that by fighting the election as an Independent Party the Communist Party had shown itself to the workers as the alternative to the Labour Party, whether or not they agreed with it at the moment, and that was the main thing. It marked 'the historical starting point of a new advance'. The small size of the vote obtained was a result of the delay and weakness in the application of the new line.

A regular 'revolt' of the Party membership against the opportunist majority at the Centre now developed. The London, Manchester and Newcastle District Party Committees and the National Conference of the Young Communist League declared their lack of confidence in the majority of the CC and demanded that drastic action should be taken to save the Party (whose membership had now dwindled to 2,500 as against 10,000 at the end of 1926) from literal extinction. They called for the summoning before 1929 was out of a special Party Congress to make a clean break with the old line and its devotees; otherwise they would appeal to the Communist International. The Party Centre, dominated by the opportunists, denounced all concerned in this movement as guilty of factionalism and

violation of Party discipline.

At this critical juncture (August 1929) the ECCI held a meeting at which it again reviewed the British situation and gave full support to the revolt of the membership led by the minority of the CC with Comrades Pollitt and Dutt at their head. It condemned the strengthening of the opportunists in the Political Bureau and called for a change of leadership and a special Congress. Assessing the causes responsible for the drift of the British Party into its desperate condition at this time, it noted that 'the British Party is a society of great friends', in which deviations from Leninism are never seriously discussed for fear of giving offence to the individuals concerned; 'good relations between persons' being placed above 'good relations to principles'.

Supported on the one hand by the revolt of the membership and on the other by the ECCI, the minority were now at last able to overcome the resistance of the majority and turn the tables in the CC. Three members were removed from the Political Bureau as the most obdurate opportunists, and the General Secretary himself was replaced by Comrade Harry Pollitt. The new leadership arranged a special Party Congress to be held in November. At this Congress a genuine and thorough turn would be made in the whole life and work of the Party. Commenting at this stage on the ECCI decisions, Comrade Pollitt stressed the obligations of the British Party to the world working class movement and said that its failure to meet these obligations must be ended at once, whatever the difficulties in the way of doing this which had accumulated as a result of past errors. Even 'defeats in concrete actions and campaigns are better than passivity, inactivity and lagging behind the masses'. Comrade Dutt (closest to Comrade Pollitt in the great fight of the minority now nearing its triumph) observed that 'the mistakes of the past two years have already cost us too much. The easygoing attitude which is satisfied to "recognise" mistakes and pass on, without deeper analysis or drawing of lessons for the future, and with the inevitable consequences of repeating these mistakes in new forms must end... It is no longer sufficient merely to "recognise" a mistake after it is pointed out, and pass on. It is necessary to draw out by the roots the tendency revealed by the mistake and brand it.' If a

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particular kind of mistake was repeated, the Party must be 'prepared to draw the necessary conclusions, including those with regard to changes of leadership'. Especially there must be an end to the procedure, at which the old Political Bureau had shown itself adept, of accepting the ECCI's line in words but not carrying it out in action, "'interpreting" it instead 'in such a way as to conceal its difference from incorrect lines'.

When the 11th Congress of the Party met at Leeds in November 1929, it had before it a letter from the ECCI which warned that any further delay in resolute application of the new line, any further 'pandering to right opportunist deviations, passivity, lack of resolution and initiative and following in the wake of events' would threaten 'the very existence of the Party'.

The Congress confirmed the changes in leading personnel made in August, including the appointment of Comrade Harry Pollitt as General Secretary. It congratulated the membership on its struggle for the ECCI line against the old opportunist leadership. As against the charges of factionalism, it blamed the leaders of the minority for not having done more to draw the rank-and-file into their fight against the majority of the CC. Surveying the methods of resistance used by the opportunists in their effort to hold up recognition of the need for change, the Congress noted that they had tried 'to magnify the seriousness of "Left" and sectarian errors in order to cover up Right mistakes'. The principal decisions of the Congress included:

1. To reorganise the Party on the basis of factory cells as basic Party units.
2. To reorganise the Party leadership so as to bring to the forefront working class comrades having close ties with the factories and experience in strikes. Only 12 members of the old CC were re-elected and 23 new comrades were brought in.)
3. To launch immediately the Communist daily paper, the political need for which had been pointed out by the ECCI over three years earlier. (The *Daily Worker* began publica-

tion, under the editorship of the late Comrade Rust, on 1 January 1930, less than a month after the conclusion of the Congress.)

4. To make self-criticism and broad political discussion thenceforth a regular feature of Party life at all levels.

Conclusion

The decisions of the Leeds Congress (called by Comrade Pollitt 'the most important in the history of the Party') restored the Party to vigorous life when it was on the point of death. They enabled the Party to keep the Red Flag flying in Britain when there was a real danger that it would go under. They came too late (after the dwindling of Party membership to a tiny figure, after the loss of footholds in the labour movement which the Party had won in 1926, after the election of the second Labour Government, and after the beginning of the great slump with the mass unemployment which it brought in its train) to save the British working class movement from traversing an extremely difficult period in 1930-31. Thanks to the resolute leadership of Comrade Pollitt and the new CC, sustained and helped by the ECCI, the Party carried on through these dark years, keeping alive the spirit of the class struggle when the most ruthless efforts were being made to kill it, and maintaining both in propaganda and in action on immediate demands an alternative leadership to that of MacDonald and Co. When the crash of the second Labour Government and the installation of the National Government of Baldwin and MacDonald, 'the Government of Hunger and War', towards the end of 1931, taught the labour movement a fundamental lesson 'the hard way', a new period opened in which the Communist Party, preserved for the working class by the changes made in August and November-December 1929, was able to go forward to new battles at the head of considerable masses of workers. The Party emerged from the isolation and small membership into which it had fallen in 1927-29 and which had continued through 1930-31 and entered a new period of growth and extended influence which brought both new opportunities and new problems.

Marxists in the Second World War

William Hunter's article in the December *Labour Review* is a most valuable contribution to the literature of his subject. Nevertheless I think it needs to be supplemented if the reader is to understand clearly the difference between the Marxist line and that of the Communist Party in the period before 22 June 1941, when Hitler attacked Russia; and between the Marxist line, and the line of, say, the Independent Labour Party in the period after that historic date. It is also important to show that the Marxists did not mechanically repeat Lenin's slogans of 1914-17 in the war of 1939-45.

The British Stalinists, after their initial blunder of proclaiming support for the war (and calling for an allied offensive from the Maginot Line into Germany), turned not to Lenin's line of 'turn the imperialist war into civil war', but to demanding that peace be made on the basis of the Soviet-German declaration of 28 September 1939 ('Poland's done for, so what is there to fight about?'). The pamphlet 'Why This War?', by R.P. Dutt, issued at the beginning of November, stated: 'The Government must be compelled to make peace. We demand an immediate Armistice and the calling of a peace Conference' (p. 18), and did not shrink from changing the wording of Karl Liebknecht's slogan from 'the main enemy is at home' into 'the enemy is at home' (p. 23). During the entire period up to the fall of France, the British Communist Party functioned as a propaganda agency for Hitler. Typical was the editorial in the *Daily Worker* of 1 February 1940, commenting on a speech by the Führer: 'Hitler repeated once again his claim that the war was thrust upon him by Britain. Against this historic fact there is no reply. Britain declared war, not Germany. Attempts were made to end this war, but the Soviet-German

peace overtures were rejected by Britain.' Already in this period the Marxists had to differentiate their approach from that of the Stalinists: 'The *Militant* wants peace, but it does not want an imperialist peace... The peace which the *Daily Worker* now demands on behalf of Hitler and Stalin is an imperialist peace', declared the London *Militant* in its issue of October 1939.

Hitler's onslaught on the Low Countries and France, the sell-out by the French ruling class headed by Pétain, the immediate menace of invasion of Britain, and the repercussions of all this among the capitalists and the workers of this country respectively, drew from the British Communist Party a remarkable manifesto, published on 22 June 1940. This warned against the Churchill government, which not only contained 'men of Munich' but also compromised the defence of the people by identifying it with 'the maintenance of Empire possessions and the dominance of the ruling class.' If the workers were to 'defeat all their enemies within and without Britain', a new government must come to power, 'really representative of the working people, a government in which there shall be no representative of imperialism or friend of fascism.' All responsible for the situation must be cleared out of commanding positions, in the services and in the economy; the key industries nationalised; workers control committees take over in the enterprises; the workers armed on a factory basis; the class system in the appointment of officers broken down; complete freedom for the working class movement ensured; the subject peoples of the Empire liberated.

What is particularly interesting about this manifesto is that it substantially coincides with the line indicated by

Trotsky in his last writings (he was murdered in August 1940). Thus in his reply to some questions from American friends he wrote:

'The American workers do not want to be conquered by Hitler, and to those who say "Let us have a peace programme", the workers will reply, "But Hitler does not want a peace programme". Therefore we say: We will defend the United States with a workers army, with workers officers, with a workers government, etc... It would be doubly stupid to present a purely abstract pacifist position today: the feeling the masses have is that it is necessary to defend themselves. We must say: "Roosevelt (or Wilkie) says it is necessary to defend the country, good! Only it must be *our* country, not that of the Sixty Families and their Wall Street. The army must be under our own command; we must have our own officers, who will be loyal to us." In this way we can find an approach to the masses that will not push them away from us, and thus prepare them for the second step — a more revolutionary one. We must use the example of France to the very end...'

Again, in a memorandum commenting on a 'very pretentious, very muddled and stupid article' in the *Partisan Review* for July-August 1940, Trotsky warned against a mechanical resuscitation of Lenin's slogans:

'The present war, as we have stated on more than one occasion, is a continuation of the last war. But a continuation does not signify a repetition. As a general rule, a continuation signifies a development, a deepening, a sharpening. Our policy, the policy of the revolutionary proletariat, towards the second imperialist war is a continuation of the policy elaborated during the last imperialist war, primarily under Lenin's leadership. But a continuation does not signify a repetition... In 1915 Lenin referred in his writings to revolutionary wars which the victorious proletariat would have to wage. But it was a question of an indefinite historical prospect, and not of the task for the next day... The second world war poses the question of change of regimes more imperiously, more urgently, than did the first world war. It is first and foremost a question of the political regime. The workers are aware that democracy is suffering shipwreck everywhere, and that they are threatened by fascism even in those countries where fascism is as yet non-existent...'

The implications of Trotsky's ideas were fully worked out after his death, at a special conference of the Socialist Workers Party of the USA held at Chicago in September 1940, which adopted what was called 'the military policy', a policy for proletarianising the armed forces. Speaking on this occasion, James P. Cannon said:

'Our fight against war under conditions of peace was correct as far as it went. But it was not adequate. It must be extended. The old principles, which remain unchanged, must be applied concretely to the new conditions of permanent war and universal militarism.. We didn't visualise a world situation in which whole countries would be conquered by fascist armies. The workers don't want to be conquered by foreign invaders, above all by fascists. They require a programme of military struggle against foreign invaders which assures their class independence. That is the gist of the problem.'

'Many times in the past we were put to a certain disadvantage: the demagoguery of the social democrats against us was effective to a certain extent. They said: "You have no answer to the question of how to fight against Hitler, how to prevent Hitler from conquering France, Belgium, etc." (Of course their programme was very simple — the suspension of the class struggle and complete subordination of the workers to the bourgeoisie. We have seen the results of this treacherous policy.) Well, we answered in a general way, the workers will first overthrow the bourgeoisie at home, and then they will take care of invaders. That was a good programme, but the workers did not make the revolution in time. Now the two tasks must be telescoped and carried out simultaneously...'

'We are willing to fight Hitler. No worker wants to see that gang of fascist barbarians overrun this country or any country. But we want to fight fascism under a leadership we can trust... We will never let anything happen as it did in France... The workers themselves must take charge of this fight against Hitler, and anybody else who invades their rights...'

'The contradiction between the patriotism of the bour-

geoisie and that of the masses must be the point of departure of our revolutionary activity... We must base ourselves on the reality of war and upon the reaction of the masses towards the events of the war...'

This policy became the policy of the Marxists in Britain in the months following the fall of France. Thus, for example, in the December 1940 issue of *Youth for Socialism*, an article 'The War Extends' concluded:

'No worker in this country wants to come under the bloody tyranny of Hitler. On the contrary he will fight against this with all his strength. But he cannot do this while Britain is capitalist; while India is in bondage; while the capitalist class controls the Army and the workers are unarmed. The defeat of Hitler, the defence of Britain, the ending of the war — these are not simply a matter of superior arms or more numerous arms. More important is — who wields the arms and for what? If it is exploited workers fighting for capitalism, their "victory" will not be so very different from "defeat". But if it is militant workers fighting for socialism they will, besides the weapons they take out of the hands of the capitalists, have one supreme weapon against which Hitler cannot fight — the fact that the German worker can now join them in the fight against Hitler, free from the fear of British capitalism waiting to pounce on them.'

A policy decision of the Marxist 'Workers International League' pointed out that it would be wrong to lump the 'defencist' feeling of the masses with that of the capitalist class or the Labour leadership. 'The defensism of the masses stems largely from entirely progressive motives of preserving their own class organisations and democratic rights from destruction at the hands of fascism and from a foreign invader'; and it was accompanied by 'a deep-seated suspicion of the aims and slogans of the ruling class'. The Marxists' task was to find ways of separating the workers from the capitalists and their lackeys, following out the indication given by Trotsky, in the *Transitional Programme* (1938), that in the patriotism of the masses there are 'elements which we must know how to seize upon in order to draw the requisite conclusions'. *Youth for Socialism* of February 1941 carried an article on the approach once more of the campaigning season, under the headlines: 'Arm the Workers: The Only Guarantee against Hitler's Invasion' ('Not by curtailing the power of the workers in the factory and the Army — but by organising workers control of industry and arms can there be a guarantee of victory not only over Hitler but over the Fifth Column gang of capitalists at home.')

Now this policy, which the British Communist Party had in essence proclaimed as its own in the manifesto of 22 June 1940, was abandoned by that party within a few weeks. Ivor Montagu's book *The Traitor Class*, an expansion of the manifesto's central idea, was formally repudiated by William Rust in a review in the *Labour Monthly* of November 1940. The Stalinists had embarked in August — following the dispatch by the Churchill government of the Cripps mission to Moscow — on a new line which concentrated on calling for a 'People's Government' which should strengthen 'friendship with the USSR'. At the People's Convention assembled in January 1941 under Stalinist guidance, the following five amendments moved by the Southall branch of the National Union of Railwaymen on Marxist inspiration were all turned down by the Standing Orders Committee: 'The arming of the working class under the control of the trade unions and workers committees; nationalisation of the banks, land, transport and large industries without compensation; unconditional defence of the USSR against capitalist attack; the immediate ending of the party truce with the insistence on a campaign for Labour to take full power on the basis of this programme as the first step to the overthrow of the capitalist system and the seizure of power by the working class; a socialist appeal to the German and European workers for the overthrow of their own capitalist class simultaneously with the struggle against British capitalism and the establishment of a United States of Socialist Europe.'

The Marxist line in this period was succinctly put by the *New York Militant*: 'The real solution is to transform the imperialist war into a war against fascism' (15 March 1941).

When the attack on the Soviet Union took place, the immediate response of the British Communist Party was to call for a new government and a purge of reactionary

elements in controlling positions, as the only guarantee of a genuine alliance with Russia. But after diplomatic talks in Moscow had convinced the panic-stricken Soviet bureaucracy that the British imperialists were now their good friends, the line changed abruptly — as may be seen by comparing *World News and Views* of 28 June with the same paper of 12 July. From then on till 1945 the British Stalinists were for full support to the Churchill Government and the war which it was conducting. Suggestions that aid to the Soviet Union was not incompatible with, and even perhaps required, a fight against Churchill were denounced as 'treachery' — this in spite of the view expressed by J.R. Campbell in his 'recantation' statement published in *World News and Views*, 2 December 1939, that 'the policy of the fight on two fronts ... would have been a correct policy (in peace or in war) with regard to an imperialist government in alliance with the Soviet Union.'

Similarly rebuffed as 'criminal nonsense' were suggestions that because the Red Army was fighting a just war that did not necessarily and automatically change the character of the war being waged by British imperialism. War was 'indivisible', it was proclaimed; like peace in Litvinov's day. Conveniently forgotten was the document circulated within the party, under date 24 April 1941, on 'The Situation in the Balkans', at the time when Stalin was flirting with Yugoslav and Greek resistance to Hitler's aggression (in May he dropped the countries in question like hot bricks, expelling their ambassadors from Moscow, in frantic appeasement of his Nazi ally). In this document, it had been affirmed that 'the fact that British forces, fighting for the aims of British imperialism, were fighting alongside Greek forces does not alter the main character of the Greek struggle, any more than the supply of arms and munitions by the United States (in pursuit of the aims of American imperialism) alters the main character of the Chinese war of defence against conquest and enslavement by Japan.'

In the new phase of the war the Marxists continued the main trend of their policy unchanged. Thus the *Socialist Appeal* for April 1942 published an open letter to the national conference of the ILP, whose attitude was abstractly 'anti-war'. In which the Workers International League declared: 'We cannot merely denounce the war as an imperialist war and say, as the pacifists do, that we shall have nothing to do with this foul thing... Only a working class policy for war which would separate the workers from the capitalists and at the same time guarantee success against all foreign capitalist aggression could mobilise the masses for the struggle for power.'

A new feature in the Marxist policy, however, was the call for sending all possible aid to the Soviet Union in the form of arms supplies, *under supervision by the trade unions*. The significance of this demand will be appreciated by readers of Evelyn Waugh's novel *Officers and Gentlemen* (1955) in which a couple of reactionaries discuss tank production and one of them remarks that the workers are allowed to chalk 'Greetings to Uncle Joe' and so forth on the tanks they turn out as this encourages them to work hard and produce tanks faster — but the tanks are sent where they will be

most useful from the British imperialist standpoint...

When the campaign for the Second Front began, the *Socialist Appeal* pointed out (November 1941) that the Stalinists were cynically exploiting the earnest desire of the workers to help Russia. Following the fall of France the British Communist Party had correctly hammered away at the unreliability of the officer caste as anti-fascists — yet now they were demanding an invasion of the Continent under the leadership of those same officers. The workers must take control of industry and of the armed forces. The effect of this on the Continent, including Germany, would be revolutionary; and then a British expeditionary force, if needed, would be welcomed by the European workers. Only workers' power could transform the imperialist war into a genuine war in defence of the Soviet Union and against fascism. Trafalgar Square demonstrations notwithstanding, unless and until the effective control of the armed forces was taken out of their hands, the British ruling class would not open a second front except for their own purposes.

'It will not be a front to aid Russia, but a front to take advantage of Russian resistance. It will not be a front to smash fascism, but only to establish the domination of "democratic" imperialism. It will liberate Europe from its present tyranny but will only establish a new tyranny' (*Socialist Appeal*, June 1942).

The truth of this estimation of what an imperialist 'second front' would mean had been seen clearly enough by R.P. Dutt when he wrote, in the *Labour Monthly* of February 1941, about the role for which the British Army was already then being prepared:

'In such a situation of general disorder (following a hypothetical breakdown of the Nazi regime), with spreading civil war, and with the popular forces still poorly armed and only partially organised, a trained and disciplined army of one million in the field could do a great deal to take over from Hitler the task of holding down the peoples of Europe and strangling the socialist revolution — just as the British forces in 1918 took over directly from the waning German imperialist forces in the Baltic states.'

And it had been equally clearly explained to Franco's Foreign Minister, frightened about the approaching defeat of Hitler by the Red Army, when British ambassador Sir Samuel Hoare talked to him in Madrid in February 1943: 'There will then undoubtedly be great British and American armies on the Continent. These armies will be equipped with the finest modern munitions. They will be composed of fresh-line troops, whose ranks have not been previously devastated by years of exhausting war on the Russian front' (quoted in *Spain*, 22 March 1948).

The outcome of the second world war and the history of the subsequent period eloquently condemn the misleadership of the workers by the Stalinists in those critical years, guided by a disastrously false conception of the interests of the Soviet Union. And they justify those who carried the banner of Marxism, amid conditions of extraordinary difficulty, avoiding both the Scylla of opportunism and the Charybdis of sectarianism.



1942: Soviet trade union delegation visits British war factory, accompanied by TUC General Secretary Walter Citrine (right). The British Government used pro-Soviet feeling among workers to further its imperialist aims—revolutionary Marxists called for all possible military aid to the Soviet Union under supervision by the trade unions.

TASKS IN SPAIN -

Extracts from

LCR-ETA (VI)

Resolution

THE COMMUNIST LEADERSHIP

The fundamental characteristic of the working class vanguard is its empirical, experimental consciousness and its desire to provide solutions to the concrete problems which face the class at present. Consequently the revolutionary party can attract the best vanguard militants only insofar as it is able to give answers to these problems in the day-to-day activity of the masses.

Therefore the revolutionary party does not establish its relations with the workers vanguard either through ideological and propaganda activity or through activity separate from the actions of the mass movement, but only through concrete intervention which poses and builds the revolutionary leadership within the mass movement.

The fundamental orientation for the intervention of communists in the class struggle is synthesised in a formula from the Transitional Programme: **It is necessary to help the masses in the process of daily struggle to find the bridge between the present demands and the programme of the socialist revolution. This bridge should include a system of transitional demands, stemming from today's conditions and today's consciousness of wide layers of the proletariat and unalterably leading to one final conclusion: the conquest of power by the proletariat.**

Having established this starting point, communist leadership consists in concretely determining what is the next practical step forward in each struggle of the masses in order to advance the line of class independence and develop experiences which will increase the confidence of the movement in its own strength, organisation and consciousness. This must always take account of the discontinuous, uneven way in which the activity of the masses develops. This practical next step forward encapsulates the whole art of communist leadership.

We must avoid the sterile propagandism of the ultra-left, constantly out of step with reality. But that is not to say that we limit our intervention among the vanguard and the masses simply to positions on tactical and immediate questions. The communist leadership, the communist militants, must know how to develop and apply a mass pedagogy which can firmly link concrete daily problems to the programmatic lessons which flow from them.

THE OVERTHROW OF THE FRANCOIST MONARCHY

Unlike the reformists, revolutionary Marxists do not consider that there is any identification between the development and consolidation of democratic freedoms on the one hand and the development of bourgeois democracy

through its institutions on the other. Even the most democratic bourgeois state presupposes the existence of a state machinery, a repressive apparatus and a series of political institutions which limit the free activity of the masses. As against the reformists, we believe that the struggle for the defence and consolidation of these liberties involves the rejection of the legitimacy of the bourgeois democratic institutions. But the legitimacy of the bourgeois democratic institutions cannot be put into question solely by propaganda in favour of the dictatorship of the proletariat; this rejection can only come if the mass movement gains practical experience of the limits of bourgeois democracy and the superiority of workers democracy. To achieve this — that is, to achieve the emergence of the masses onto the political scene — it is necessary that they begin to develop more advanced structures of self-organisation (workers councils, neighbourhood commissions, etc.). In this way they can understand how such structures of direct representation, allowing the fullest exercise of their liberty and the direct participation of the broadest number of workers and oppressed in political life and in control over their own destinies, can ultimately lead to the defence and achievement of their own demands.

The clear central axis of revolutionary activity is the leadership of the masses both to achieve the transformation of their representative organs into structures of workers power and to fight for their coordination and centralisation.

At the present moment the perspective and slogan of the general strike encapsulates the key task which faces the mass movement: the overthrow of the dictatorship. Oriented to this precise objective, the line of the general strike involves:

- * A line of class independence, designed to make the movement trust only in its own strength, reflected in its autonomous organisation.
- * A line which poses the need for the broadest coordination and centralisation of the various organisations of the masses in struggle.
- * An orientation of mass mobilisation centred on the working class, whose fundamental aim is the complete overthrow of the dictatorship, directing this mobilisation towards the full conquest of the political, economic and social demands to which it aspires.

Throughout the present period this line will be concretised in various different forms: from general movements developing out of an economic or solidarity struggle to responses to the attacks of the dictatorship; from general strikes in a locality to those which take in a whole region. Without implying that the general strike is the only perspective for any mobilisation, such occasions allow this slogan to occupy the centre of our agitation.

The answer to this complex of problems demands:

- * Tying the battle for the general strike to intransigent defence of the unity of the movement through a correct application of the policy of the united front.

- * Introducing into each struggle, and closely linking to the general strike, the fight for democratic demands which allow the mass movement to understand in practice the necessity to do away with the Francoist monarchy.



The full Spanish text of the LCR-ETA(VI) conference resolution, together with an introductory section, is available price £1 (inc. p&p) from: International Dept., IMG, 97 Caledonian Road, London N1 9BT.

* Consistent propaganda for anti-capitalist slogans which develop an understanding in the vanguard of the tasks posed by the beginning of the third Spanish revolution and the necessity to introduce these slogans into the action of the masses.

THE 'MAXIMUM' DEMOCRACY

The desire of the mass movement for the full exercise of democratic freedoms, without restrictions, is enormous. Revolutionary Marxists deny that these freedoms can be fully exercised under capitalism. But so long as the masses have not discovered from their own experience the need to destroy the bourgeois state and to build a workers democracy, we fight resolutely for the maximum democracy possible under the bourgeois state.

The demand for the immediate calling of elections for a Constituent Assembly, with the right to vote by free and direct universal suffrage from the age of 16, and on the basis of the full establishment of liberties, is directed towards this maximum democracy. We will need to fight every manoeuvre of the bourgeoisie and the reformists (provisional coalition governments without election by the masses, designated parliaments, etc.) which tend to reduce mass participation.

At the same time we seek to reverse the relationship of forces existing at the time of the overthrow of the dictatorship. This will be expressed, albeit in a deformed way, through immediate elections. In the fight against the bourgeoisie's project of the strong state, this slogan is central. Today it stands in opposition to the promise of a referendum and elections to a non-constituent legislative Cortes which would retain a substantial part of the Francoist apparatus; tomorrow in opposition to new projects to restrict liberties for the election of a Constituent Assembly. Revolutionary Marxists highlight the need for its immediate convocation and demand the full exercise of democratic freedoms.

In the framework of the fight for elections to the Constituent Assembly, the demand for free municipal elections, based on the full exercise of liberties, on the right to free propaganda for the different programmes, on full legality for all the workers parties and organisations, must also constitute an axis of revolutionary activity and

mobilisation of the masses for the maximum unlimited use of bourgeois democracy.

Against a monarchy whose only legitimacy comes from a bloody dictatorship, and equally, in opposition to the conciliatory attitude of the bourgeois democrats and the reformist parties of the working class for a peaceful transition under the monarchy, we demand that a central task of the Constituent Assembly is the proclamation of the Republic. This fight also constitutes an important polemical axis against the Democratic Coordination.

Similarly, in the struggle against national oppression, aggravated by the dictatorship, we fight resolutely for the right to self-determination of the oppressed nationalities, with no limitations, dependence or compromise with the central state. The demand for immediate elections to national assemblies in order to exercise this right has the effect of demanding the complete sovereignty of each nationality to define its own relationship with the Spanish state from the very moment of the overthrow of the dictatorship. This must include separation and the formation of an independent state if that is what is desired. Precisely for this reason the slogan of the national assembly implies going much further than a simple restoration of the statutes of the 1930s. These were compromises with the central bourgeoisie which did not recognise the right to self-determination. This slogan also rejects any provisional coalition government which attempts to set itself up as the representative of the various oppressed nationalities.

In the framework of these elections in each nationality, revolutionary Marxists will advance that solution to the national problem which best favours an alliance between the various national movements and the proletariat of the state as a whole. In present circumstances, we believe that this formula must be for the formation of a Federal Republic agreed by the free union of the different nationalities. This implies being able to exercise the right to separation. This Federal Republic must be able to respond to the growing internationalism of the productive forces on the one hand, and the free development of each nationality and region on the other.

All these slogans would lose their radical democratic content if they were not tied to the need for the full exercise of the freedom of association, demonstration, strike and information. The very essence of the bourgeois project of the democratic state is a serious rejection of these rights. This is aimed at impeding the free activity of the masses in order to guarantee the bourgeoisie's social peace and allow the stabilisation of the strong state. Permanent agitation for these demands must occupy a central place; today against the continuation of the dictatorship of the monarchy, tomorrow against the bourgeois manoeuvres. At any time we emphasise the most serious threats to these freedoms by the authorities. In particular, amnesty and the dissolution of the repressive bodies of Francoism are at present two slogans of essential political value, two objectives which are deeply felt by the mass movement, on which it is necessary to insist unconditionally.

THE SELF-ORGANISATION OF THE MASSES

The fall of the dictatorship will pose before the masses — even more than is posed at the moment — the need to utilise the organs at their disposal, to create new ones, to look for the instruments which they best see as serving the various forms of political and social organisation in their own interests: trade unions, factory committees, neighbourhood assemblies, control commissions for the liquidation of the remnants of Francoism, committees of soldiers, teachers, etc. At the same time comes the task of finding the most adequate forms of coordination and centralisation. Revolutionary Marxists do not fetishise any particular form of organisation of the masses, in the name of 'pure' models of workers councils. We take part in the concrete expressions of the self-organisation of the movement towards a clear objective: the progressive transformation of the existing bodies of the movement into structures of

self-organisation with increased coordination and centralisation.

As the class struggle sharpens, the process of the construction of the class union will develop. Within the workers movement a clear relationship can be seen between this and the development of unitary representative structures at the factory level. These have begun to emerge as the product of a whole series of demands which begin to question the authority of the capitalist in the factory.

Unlike the reformists, we do not believe that the tasks of the unions should be limited to the 'socio-economic' struggle and to support of the parliamentary tactic applied by the majority parties of the working class. Neither do we think that union structures, however broad, can substitute for the creation of superior organs of workers democracy capable of grouping the entire working class.

We fight for a Constituent Union Congress, with delegates elected from assemblies of all those workers who wish to participate, the objective of which is the single class union. This is the formula which allows us on the one hand to fight the policy of trade union plurality, openly encouraged by imperialism and the bourgeoisie and more or less defended by various working class currents, and on the other hand to encourage the broadest possible self-organisation and workers democracy in the process of building the union.

On the one hand there is the divisive attitude of sections of the UGT, which under the leadership of the social democratic PSOE tends towards using any advantages given it by the manoeuvre of the Francoist reform. At the same time, it sharpens its attacks on the Workers Commissions and silences the tendencies which took up a unitary position at its Congress. On the other hand it is the attitude of USO, which has abandoned its initially more unitary positions and now gives objective support to the manoeuvres of the UGT leadership. Finally there is the position of the PCE (Communist Party of Spain) fraction within the Workers Commissions, which attempts to preserve its absolute leadership through bureaucratic methods, subordinating the Workers Commissions to its treacherous objectives. At the same time it utilises the legitimate reaction of the base of the Workers Commissions against the attacks of the UGT and USO to reinforce the monolithism of the leadership and in particular to isolate the most radical sections of the vanguard and the far left organisations.

We attempt to develop agreements on unity from all currents in the factories, seeking the formation of united organisations which can overcome the present divisions and using assemblies to launch representative united structures: single factory unions. We extend this orientation to sectors of industry, zones and localities. We try to get the fullest unity with the participation of the representative bodies and the different currents, to arrive at agreement on the process of building the single class union within the framework of fighting for the Constituent Union Congress.

In the neighbourhoods, towns and cities, we defend the most progressive forms of coordination of the different sectors in struggle, under the leadership of the working class. We always fight for their transformation into organs of the broadest self-organisation and democracy to take up the distinct tasks which are raised by the conquest of the demands of the population.

In the women's movement, among the youth and in all sectors, we fight for the creation of united, autonomous and democratic organisations of the masses, with a line of class independence which allows an alliance in struggle with the working class.

The semi-spontaneous character of the upsurge of embryonic organs of workers power and the extraordinary diversity of forms adopted poses decisively the need for their centralisation. Without this the best network of organs of this type cannot appear before the masses as an alternative power to the bourgeois state. The experience of all revolutions shows the enormous obstacles to this centralisation occurring spontaneously; in this respect Portugal is the closest example. Without a substantial part of the vanguard understanding the need for this centralisation and struggling to bring it about — and this presupposes that the revolutionary Marxists have progressed in winning clear leadership within it — it will be

impossible to achieve in practice. This is the fundamental terrain on which converge the building of the revolutionary party and the conquest of power by the workers.

THE UNITED FRONT AND WORKERS GOVERNMENT

The principal theme of our united front tactic is, clearly, the political unity of the working class and its class independence in relation to the bourgeoisie. In this respect we advance and popularise those experiences which bring about the unity of the proletarian organisations and parties. Without excluding the possibility of support from bourgeois parties of a certain type on particular issues, especially against repression, we fight to ensure that these conjunctural coincidences of our positions do not mean the slightest sacrifice of the political and organisational independence of the workers movement. We wage an intransigent fight against the inter-class pacts, centring today on the theme of breaking the workers parties from pacts with the bourgeoisie. We demonstrate this in concrete experiences of the demobilising and treacherous character of these alliances. We accept and fight for partial unity in action within the movement, without excluding on principle the participation of any working class current.

The reformist workers parties actively collaborate in an effort to establish a bourgeois democratic state in Spain. They use the formula of the Broad Coalition Government, through which they offer their services to the bourgeoisie and show themselves ready to assist in resolving its crisis of power. The Broad Coalition Government, then, constitutes the political culmination of class collaboration.

Today this form of government appears to broad sections of the masses as, to use an expression of Lenin, the least costly solution — that is, as an instrument to guarantee their demands at the cost of the least possible suffering, thus the influence of the reformist leaderships is reflected in the consciousness of the masses.

But this does not mean that the workers reduce their demands, limit their desire for self-organisation or cease their combativity, least of all when they actually win their freedom. The masses will judge Broad Coalition Governments by what they do in practice. Their loss of confidence in any inter-class government is the test of their open political break with the bourgeoisie.

The preparation, within present struggles, for this break basically consists of the line of class independence and the policy of the united front, whose programmatic culmination lies in the slogan of the Workers Government.

The political function of this slogan is to pose the question of power in a form which is accessible to the masses. It establishes a link between the parliamentary beginnings of the socialist revolution and the popular formation of the dictatorship of the proletariat. We define the Workers Government not only by its political composition but also by its programme and by the bodies to which it is responsible. On these three levels, we establish the class and revolutionary character of the Workers Government slogan — whether it has a general propagandistic content or a concrete and agitational character — by an assessment of objective and subjective political conditions.

In the present situation, the level of development of the class struggle and the activity and consciousness of the masses do not allow a concretisation of the formula of the Workers Government which can directly relate to the consciousness of the masses. It does not have the immediate mobilising power which characterises agitational slogans. Agitation for the Workers Government would inevitably take on an abstract character, with the evident risks of reducing the Workers Government to the question of a parliamentary majority or a simple instrument to denounce the reformist leaderships. Each of these cases is an incorrect use of the slogan of the Workers Government.

For revolutionary Marxists the Workers Government can today play an educative and propagandistic role as the Workers Government responsible to the representative organs of the masses. This involves popularisation of the

tasks and central organisational forms needed for the assault on bourgeois power. It can also be used in relation to the formulas for national workers self government, elaborated in each concrete situation of national oppression.

As the pre-revolutionary process accelerates, the Workers Government becomes a current slogan and must be formulated concretely. This is based on an assessment of the new relationship of forces between the classes and between reformists and revolutionaries. The existing organisations of the masses must also be taken into account. At present the slogan we use to express agitationally the rejection of any provisional coalition government is the demand for the immediate calling of elections to the Constituent and national assemblies. Combined with this, flowing from successive concrete experiences of the demobilising and capitulationist character of the inter-class pacts, we systematically pose the need for the workers united front and for the parties and organisations of the working class to break from the inter-class alliances. These are nothing but embryos of the future provisional coalition governments and would-be guardians of the constituent process for big capital.

THE INSURRECTIONAL SEIZURE OF POWER

The emergence of a situation of dual power would open the possibility, at least embryonically, of armed bodies tied to the new workers power. Given the characteristics of the pre-revolutionary process in our country, the tasks which are today posed in the context of the overthrow of the dictatorship — purging, anti-fascist vigilance, punishment of the Francoist criminals, protection of demonstrations and of the localities — are going to demand the development of committees, pickets and specialised bodies. It will be through these bodies, tied to the process of self-organisation of the masses, that the basis of a future qualitative growth will be consolidated.

But the overthrow of the dictatorship and the emergence of a situation of dual power will also have its effects in the ranks of the bourgeois army, deepening its internal contradictions. The extension of basic democratic freedoms and basic economic demands for the troops, the purging of the old civil war officer caste and the denunciation of the different forms of the intervention of the army into struggles (Councils of War, militarisation of

the public services, threats of direct confrontation ...) will contribute to the development of the autonomous organisation of soldiers and to solidarity between them and the working class and its allies, particularly the youth.

The closest coordination between the organisation of the self-defence of the masses and revolutionary anti-militarist activity, inside and outside the barracks, is the way to prepare the mass movement specifically for the inevitable violent confrontation with the apparatus of the bourgeois state. This is a pre-condition for the conquest of power. Within these tasks a central place must be occupied by the education of the movement in the need for a united and immediate response to any attempt at a coup by sections of the bourgeoisie and army. The lessons of Chile and Portugal demonstrate the disastrous consequences of creating any illusions in 'democratic' officers. Only the democratic mobilisation of the masses, as happened on 11 March 1975 in Portugal, is capable of nipping the reactionary plans in the bud and advancing towards the socialist revolution.

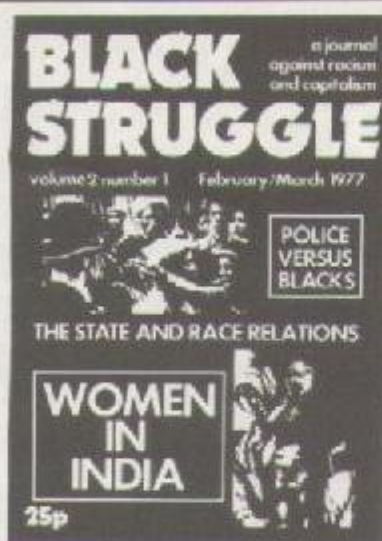
FOR THE UNIFICATION OF THE REVOLUTIONARY MARXISTS

The fundamental road towards the building of the revolutionary party is certainly through the development of our intervention into struggles, in line with the strategy and political coordinates which we have already established. But, besides our specific orientation, it is necessary to intervene in the process of differentiation and political recomposition which is accelerating among the workers organisations. The objective priority in this respect is the reunification of the revolutionary Marxists, the construction of a single organisation, the section of the Fourth International in the Spanish state.

The split in the LCR in December 1972 was the product of the political immaturity of the revolutionary Marxists in our country. Without doubt it could have been avoided and should have been, given that it lacked any political justification and was absolutely not understood by the vanguard. The split cut short the growth of the Fourth International in the Spanish state, a growth which has only recently been renewed. Revolutionary Marxists have paid a high price for their incapacity to maintain organisational unity, based upon permanent political debate and respect for democratic centralism.

Today it seems necessary and possible decisively to overcome this situation, though we are aware of the very serious difficulties involved in this. The common position of the LCR-ETA (VI) and the Liga Comunista (LC) in supporting the same basic programme and the same International is the basis on which we can achieve reunification. Sadly, deep differences do exist and are growing in relation to concrete interventions and the class struggle. These constitute a serious obstacle to this objective. Despite this, and because of the primary need to achieve the organic unity of the revolutionary Marxists, we are prepared to run the risks which these obstacles create. We think that both organisations should define their positions in relation to one question: Are the present differences too great to allow the common political activity of revolutionary Marxists in a single organisation in the Spanish state, respecting democratic centralism? Our answer is NO. We hope that the LC's will be the same. If that is the case we think that a concrete plan should be drawn up as soon as possible for a reunification congress.

The expulsion of the Revolutionary Socialist Tendency of the LC and its transformation into the Revolutionary Socialist League (LSR) seems to us a serious political error which is unjustified from any point of view. We are obliged to have the same orientation to the LSR which we have previously had to the LC. We are convinced that the reunification of the revolutionary Marxists in the Spanish state will be an attractive stimulus to draw to the Fourth International a series of anti-Stalinist groups and many valuable revolutionary militants.



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review article

Towards a Marxist Literary Culture

Criticism and Ideology is the most consistent and articulate attempt to develop an explicitly Marxist discourse appropriate to literature that has appeared in England since 1937. British Marxism has traditionally rested on Caudwell's laurels when it approached literature, and the poverty of most efforts in this direction is all the more startling by contrast with the relatively rich Marxist or proto-Marxist tradition in British historiography represented by Hill, Hobsbawm, Thompson and Stedman-Jones. The explanation for this imbalance is paradoxically to be found in the very importance of literary culture in Britain, as the 'displaced site of totalising theory', in Perry Anderson's words. [1] The characteristic modern representatives of the British critical tradition have been T.S. Eliot, I.A. Richards and F.R. Leavis, with Leavis as its most effective and dominating exponent.

Eagleton's book is unusual and difficult because at the level of literary theory a virulent resistance to conceptualisation, a minatory rejection of the 'abstract' fluently enforced by Leavis and his journal *Scrutiny*, have become rooted and hegemonic. A classic instance of this intransigent empiricism is the dispute between Leavis and Rene Wellek in 1936, in which Wellek attempted to force Leavis 'to define the underlying principles of his practice', which led Leavis to convict Wellek for 'philosophising': 'Words in poetry invite us not to "think about" and "judge" but to "feel into" or "become"'. [2] This rigorous dichotomy between 'abstraction' and 'concretion' is reinforced by an unembarrassed logical circularity in formulations like 'the ideal critic is the ideal reader' [3] and an equally irreducible circularity in the obsession with organic form—'what the prompted words in association portend gets its definition as the creative work builds up'. [4]

Such a crude summary of the position of Leavis and *Scrutiny* hardly explains the extraordinary potency it has exercised in British culture, but at least allows us to identify Eagleton's predecessors, with whom he attempts to break decisively. *Criticism and Ideology* falls into three main parts: a critical account of the work of Raymond Williams, the most significant cultural critic on the left in post-war Britain; a discussion of the literary text comprising a classification of the constituent levels whose mutual articulation produces the text, a discussion of the relation between ideology and literary form, and a demonstration of that relation in English literature in the period 1850-1939; and an attempt to grapple with the problem of evaluation in materialist criticism.

Eagleton's critique of Williams develops from an awareness of the obvious and awkward complicity of the socialist critic and the organicist aesthetician in the same oeuvre. What Eagleton calls a 'Left-Leavisism', with its emphasis on the 'lived' and the 'knowable community', results in a theory vitiated by three main flaws:

1. An idealist epistemology, stemming from a conflation of productive modes so that different levels of the social formation are collapsed into the 'empty anthropological abstraction of culture' (p.26). This subjectivising of the social formation, reducing it to the categories of the lived, carries with it an implicit conception of historical structures as self-contemporaneous rather than as dislocated and articulated together into a totality.

2. An organicist aesthetics appropriating and evaluating the literary text in terms of wholeness, integration and spontaneity and refusing a knowledge of the text other than as a communion between reader and text in an organic, non-contradictory unity. In addition, such an aesthetics involves a crippling historical relativism because

NEIL BELTON discusses some of the questions raised by Terry Eagleton's recently published book, *Criticism and Ideology* (New Left Books, £9.95)

the critic is always in place as continuous with the culture which he is studying, measuring the authenticity of his own experience as an experience of the culture, measuring the authenticity of the culture on his own pulses in a balanced rhythm which denies literature's historical specificity. Although Williams has never been guilty of the emptied gestures of which such an aesthetics is capable (canonising Dickens by allusions to Shakespeare, for example), a further consequence in his case of reducing history to a continuum is a highly selective, occasionally documentary approach to the literary text, concentrating on those passages in, say, Hardy or Dickens which best 'express' characteristic tensions in both our culture and theirs.

3. A corporatist sociology in which the concept of class is subordinated to that of a 'whole way of life', a culture potentially extensible to the whole human community.

These three major faults are traceable, in Eagleton's view, to Williams's fundamental 'Romantic populism': 'Williams's political gradualism rested on a deep-seated trust in the capacity of individuals to create new meanings and values now — meanings and values which will extend (at some infinite point in the future?) to socialism. The creation of new values which is in fact only enabled by revolutionary rupture was read back by him as a description of the present' (p.27). As a consequence, 'Williams often manoeuvred himself into the contradictory position of opposing a crippling hegemony whose power he had simultaneously to deny, because not to do so would have suggested that "ordinary people" were not, after all, the true creators of meanings and values' (p.28). Coupled with this political ambiguity, Eagleton notes his 'reticent and ambiguous' stance on 'insurrectionary organisation' (p.39), and chides him for his outraged denunciation of the first Wilson Government for having 'taken (our) values and changed them' (p.35).

Eagleton has performed a valuable service in treating the 'Culture and Society' tradition to an openly materialist analysis. Yet Eagleton's reevaluation contains a disturbing political pessimism which masquerades as a militant optimism. The gesture of revolutionary deferment, postponing the creation of 'new value' to some post-revolutionary reconstruction, is a drastic elision of the passage between the present situation and such a conjuncture. Eagleton speaks as though a revolutionary assault were on the order of the day, while condemning British social democracy — the only mass movement of workers on the horizon — as uniformly inert. Of course, there is structural complicity between the values of the 'Culture and Society' tradition — suasion, connection, extension — and the reformism of social democracy, but the blunt dismissiveness of one side of Eagleton's equation (the prospects for revolutionary organisation in Britain) seriously unbalances the other side (the deferment of alternative value to a revolutionary crisis).

There is a serious over-estimation of the achievements of Marxist politics at work here. Eagleton's analysis employs Althusserian categories fluently and well, but in this case the failure to relocate Williams and the political effects of his work — more precisely in the history of post-war Britain results in a kind of formalism, a 'theoreticist' evaluation of the structure of the work. A brief biographical juxtaposition of Eagleton and Williams illuminates the kind of role a more sympathetic analysis might assign to Williams in the period 1945-68 while nevertheless acknowledging Eagleton's measurement of his distance from Marxism. Eagleton mentions his previous close involvement with Williams, but the eristic mode of argument he employs does not do full justice to the nature of his own development as a critic. His first book, *Shakespeare and Society* (1967), dedicated to Williams, is concerned with an abstract conflict between spontaneous self and social responsibility in the interactions of textual characters and uses a methodology of unadulterated 'practical criticism'. His study of the determinations of the Bronte sisters' fiction, *Myths of Power* (1975), is an examination of the novels in terms of their immediate historical, biographical and sexual movements and, while being a historicist work, it is definitely Marxist. That he could make such a transition in his third book, in the space of less than a decade, is indicative of the extent to which Marxism had become available, almost respectable, as a result of the 1968 events and the resurgence of interest in neglected Marxist writers. This is in stark contrast to the situation of Williams in 1946, enclosed by the Cold War and isolated as an intellectual from any Marxism but the lucid schemes of dogma.

Eagleton's 'deferment' of any development of revolutionary values until, precisely, a revolutionary situation, has important aesthetic consequences which will be mentioned briefly later. First it is necessary to approach the problem of the relation between ideology and literary text, a subject which occupies the central portion of *Criticism and Ideology*. While remaining indebted to Althusser for his conceptual apparatus, Eagleton rejects the formulation of this relation which Althusser offered in *Lenin and Philosophy*, where it is claimed that real art gives us a 'view' of the ideology to which it alludes, so that Balzac and Solzhenitsyn provide a 'view which presupposes a "retreat", an "internal distancing" from the very ideology from which their novels emerge. They make us "perceive" (but not know) in some sense from the inside the very ideology in which they are held'. Eagleton's objection to this position is that it begs the question as to how the aesthetic is constituted by a prior exclusion of un-'real' or inferior art, and thus evades the problem of value. He holds that the text is characterised rather by its production, its putting-to-work of ideology in such a way that the ideology is not transcended nor merely reproduced as a 'world view' but enacted in a way analogous to a dramatic performance, a production which is ordered with a certain textual logic but is in no sense reducible to its founding text.

Yet although the text 'establishes a relation with ideology by means of its forms' (p.84), this textual logic, 'the logic of the text's content' (p.85), circumscribes that formal operation so that it takes place according to 'the form of the problematic which the text operates' (p.84). The literary text is thus a compacting, intensifying production of its general ideological matrix, it is ideology raised 'to the second power' (p.85). The function of a materialist criticism is to examine 'two mutually constitutive formations: the nature of the ideology worked by the text and the aesthetic modes of that working' (p.85). Against Pierre Macherey (to whose 'Pour une théorie de la production littéraire' he is heavily indebted), who envisages literature opening the 'unsaid', the symptomatic absences of ideological discourse by its internal distancing of ideology, Eagleton posits a 'differential relation' between text and ideology. An implicit typology of texts, some radically contesting the dominant ideological discourse in which they are inserted, others merely recasting their ideology in more or less reflexive though specifically aesthetic ways (as in Stalinist 'socialist realism') is set against Macherey's concept of the text illuminating its distortions and absences the peculiarities of ideology's relationship with history. In the course of his discussion of Macherey's theory, Eagleton objects to the notion of contradiction being produced in the literary text as an effect of the form bestowed by the text on ideology. He suggests that contradiction in the text is more characteristically an effect of the encounter within the text of antagonistic ideologies, a clash which he describes as 'the genesis of much major literature' (p.95), so that we get a production of 'an ideological formation characterised by a high degree of "dissolution"' (p.95).

In abandoning Macherey's concept of the internal, distortive distancing of ideology in the literary text for one which regards the text as a 'process whereby ideology enters into a mode of relation with itself peculiarly enabling of its self-reproduction' (p.98), Eagleton is attempting to develop a more nuanced theory of form which accounts for the variant and complex relations that may be established within the text. This potent 'self-reproduction' of ideology is of course not a reflection of a given text's surrounding ideology, but occurs 'athwart' that ideology, so that the greater the degree of 'decentredness' and contradiction in the text, the more effective and valuable the textual production of ideology becomes. Eagleton is arguing, essentially, for a theory of the text as typically a peculiarly effective production of a dominant ideology in crisis. In this sense, Eagleton's concept of 'text' is restored to a certain original innocence of the ideological by inhabiting it so vigorously, because in practice the theory produces an appearance in the text of a given ideology in more or less conflictual form. Before dealing with particular examples of this process provided by the chapter on 'Ideology and Literary Form', it is worth noting one aspect of Eagleton's discussion of 'Categories for a Materialist Criticism' which is relevant to his rejection of Macherey.

The section on the constituent elements of the literary text is perhaps the most satisfactory in the entire essay, devoted to a brilliant exposition of the relations between general mode of production, literary mode of production, general ideology, authorial ideology and aesthetic ideology, whose conjuncture produces the text which in turn 'actively determines its own determinants' (p.63). It is impossible to do justice here to the skill with which Eagleton demonstrates the articulation of the five levels of textual production

he has isolated, and a couple of examples must suffice in what is inevitably a concentration on the crucial weakness in the text as a whole. Showing that the literary mode of production is rarely a homogeneous, symmetrical reflection of the general mode of economic production, but can bear the existence of 'structurally conflictual' modes of literary production, Eagleton points to the co-existence of historically distinct modes, as in the interaction of 'oral' and 'written' literary modes in sixth century Ireland (the oral mode representing a significant historical 'survival') and in the case of a literary form which anticipates altered social relations and so enters into contradiction with the dominant literary mode of production (a historical 'prefiguration'). Distinct LMPs (to employ the shorthand which Eagleton adopts in this section) 'constitute an "asymmetrical" totality' (p.45).

In a discussion of the relationship between GMP and LMP, he emphasises the social relations of literary consumption as a powerful determinant of the LMP, producing in capitalist society (in which the LMP is a specific branch of general commodity production) the development of 'borrowing' as an important relation between consumer and LMP. In the specific context of Victorian England, the circulating library functions as an element in the field of aesthetic ideology, intervening directly to create the fashion for novels in three volumes or of equivalent length, and thereby reinforcing certain formal tendencies of classical realism, such as the elaborate foreclosure of any hesitation about the meaning of what is represented that we know as the realist plot.

These are merely brief examples from a condensed and powerful analysis, but it is possible to say that perhaps because he is discussing the determinations of the text in general terms, the tendency of Eagleton's remarks in this section is to emphasise the historically limited aspect of textual production. He objects to Macherey's theory of the text forcing ideology 'up against the wall of history' because ideology *per se* cannot contradict itself, ideological space being 'curved like space itself' and having no 'outside' (p.95). Therefore, Eagleton concludes, it is only as a conflictual production of ideology to the second power, such that the text produces, resolves and reproduces ideological conflicts (cf. p.101), that the real relation between ideology and text can be understood. But it can be objected that a foreclosure of this protean ideological conflict *does* operate in the text, particularly in realist forms, where the text clearly effects a formal resolution of contradiction. Put as baldly as that, such an emphasis is dangerously 'formalist', but needs to be made against Eagleton's ambiguous structuralism.

Such an emphasis is also provoked by the schematic survey of 'some relations between a sector of the major literature of the last century and the ideological formations in which it is set' (p.104). The starting point of this analysis is a certain over-view of English bourgeois ideology which uses Gramsci's distinction between 'organic' and 'traditional' intellectuals — corresponding to those of an emergent social class and those whose intellectual categories are survivals of previous social conditions — to express what Eagleton sees as the crucial problem facing that ideology: how 'to produce a set of potently affective mythologies which might permeate the texture of lived experience of English society' (p.102). The solution for what is described as 'Utilitarianism' ('an impoverished empiricism unable to rise to the level of an ideology proper', p.103) was to turn to the heritage of organicist, Romantic humanism. The difficulty here is that what Gramsci, following Marx, noted about the relation between 'organic' and 'traditional' castes in 19th century England was a description of an already highly developed symbiosis. It is doubtful whether one can speak of a utilitarian mode of thought and view of life as being at any stage the most important defining ideology for the British bourgeoisie, never forced to reject aristocratic mediation of its political power and apparently solidly entrenched behind the mythology of the Constitution.

Eagleton's formulation posits an original moment of ideological crisis, inscribing a tension in the ideological matrix of literature and thus enabling a rich conflictual presence of ideology to come into play, and this arbitrary split between Romantic organicism and utilitarian empiricism tends to undermine the historical foundation of the entire survey. A further effect of this split is an ambiguity about the precise status of 'organicism' in the social formation. Is it a general ideology, as Eagleton initially seems to suggest, or is it held in constant tension with the values of industrial capitalism in general (a contrast implied in his remarks on D.H. Lawrence) in which case the classic opposition of the 'Culture and Society' tradition is reinstated? It should be said in fairness to Eagleton that the extreme condensation necessary for a consideration of the entire output of nine or ten writers in sixty pages inevitably produces a certain historical tenuousness, and indeed the sheer courage of the attempt means one is reduced to arguing over the general lines of interpretation. Nevertheless, the continual reappearance of a conflict

between organicism and utilitarianism, or corporatism and individualism, in the analysis of widely differing texts (those of George Eliot and Joseph Conrad, for example) deprives the concept of organicism of much of its precision.

Coupled with this imprecision is a tendency to reduce these texts to a mediated expression of their authors' class position, and to impose on that mediation a schema of ideological conflict at the level of form. George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* is seen as the site of a clash between 'tradition' and 'progress' which her work more generally tries to resolve, a conflict embodied in this case in the tension between 'a kind of descriptive pastoral' and the 'complex psychological drama' of Maggie Tulliver's development (p.113). 'Pastoral' and 'psychological' are immediately hypostatized as distinct literary discourses (elsewhere he describes Dickens's early fiction as a 'traffic-jam of competing fictional modes — Gothic, Romance, moral fable, "social problem" novel, popular theatre, short story, journalism, episodic "entertainment"', p.126), when the point is to analyse the specific aesthetic effects of the text. The validity of these categories remains unquestioned, thereby obtruding on a materialist aesthetics the dubious baggage of 'genre' and 'convention'. Again, in discussing Eliot's characteristic omniscient irony, Eagleton states that this 'bleed of genial patronage and tentative irony focuses an ideological conflict. It exposes the contradiction between a rationalist critique of rural philistinism and a deep-seated imperative to celebrate the value of such bigoted, inert traditionalism, as the humble yet nourishing soil which feeds the flower of higher individual achievement' (p.115). It is difficult to agree with this assessment of Eliot's narrative irony. In the 'classic' realist text irony is, rather, the assured instrument for sealing off the possibility of such conflict under the sign of reason, placing the ideologically critical in a secure framework of balanced destinies.

This tendency to see form as the site of acute ideological conflict in the social situation of its producer conceals, ultimately, a form of historicism. This is occasionally expressed directly: George Eliot, we are told, 'as the daughter of a farm agent' (p.112) naturally found her locus of value in rural society; Dickens, as a petty bourgeois writer, was 'able to encompass a richer, more significant range of experience than those writers securely lodged within a single class' (p.125) — precisely the point which the mechanical determinist George Gissing made in his *Charles Dickens: a critical study* (1898). One must oppose this with Eagleton's own analysis of the specificity of the literary mode of production under capitalism: 'although the literary social relations in general reproduce the social relations of the general mode of production, they do not necessarily reproduce those social relations as they hold between the particular individual agents of the literary reproductive process' (p.53). Eagleton by no means downgrades the texts he discusses to expressions of class interest, but locates an initial ideological conflict in his authors' class positions which dramatises the ongoing historical quarrel between 'organicism' and 'empiricism'. This in turn produces a tendency to see each writer's development as a life-work miming a developing acuteness in the social contradictions upon which it is articulated, moving through varieties of contradiction between 'corporatism' and 'individualism' to a final, inadequate resolution of that contradiction — he sees *Finnegan's Wake* as a result of the novel's 'struggle to escape the degradation of becoming a commodity'; as a consequence, 'its author becomes a producer without consumers' (p.157). Each set of texts enacts the same failure of the ideology of liberal humanism, in crisis, to find a viable alternative. The exceptions are the novels of Dickens, Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*, and Lawrence's *Women in Love*, all of which are 'decentred' in relation to the tradition of organicism. This chapter, 'Ideology and Literary Form', deserves a much more extended review to account adequately for the questions it raises, and the necessary concentration

on general weaknesses in this discussion should not be allowed to obscure the fact that a vast sweep of literary material has been compressed into it. (For an analysis of a version of this chapter published in *New Left Review*, see Francis Mulhern, 'Ideology and Literary Form: a comment', *NLR* 91.)

Finally it is necessary to describe the consequences of the foregoing for Eagleton's treatment of evaluation, which as he rightly states has been downplayed in favour of a neutral relativism in recent criticism. Literary values for Eagleton part and parcel of his view of the relation between ideology and literary form: value is a 'function of a particular process of textual production which is itself a sustained relation to an ideological formation' (p.185). The 'valuable' text is 'a theatre which doubles, prolongs, compacts and variegates its signs, shaking them free from single determinants, merging and eliding them with a freedom unknown to history, in order to draw the reader into deeper experiential entry into the space thereby created' (p.185). Eagleton notes that Marxists have hesitated to speak about aesthetic value, just as they have hesitated to speak about morality: as long as both are merely ways of defining the constriction consequent on the limitation of productive forces by the relations of production, Marxists must anticipate the 'measureless' development of all capacities by the revolution, a thesis based on the famous comparison of the bourgeois and 'modern' revolutions in *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*: 'there the phrase went beyond the content; here the content goes beyond the phrase'.

The concept of form as 'the structure of a ceaseless self-production' (p.184) which can be grasped here and now in materialist analysis of the literary text, in the text as typically literary — neither 'a random splay of pluralist sense' (p.168) nor a merely superficial recasting of ideology — has two important related consequences. The first is a strange academicism already apparent in the choice of texts realised as decentred in relation to the organicist tradition (Dickens, Hardy, Lawrence), accompanied by an implicit rejection of the modernist tradition epitomised by Joyce ('splay of pluralist sense') and also, effectively, of Brecht, whose concern was not with the 'flexing' and 'compacting' of the already-written. Eagleton has a contradictory attitude towards this tradition, admiring its achievements but, via his theory of aesthetic value, remaining outside it. Secondly, cultural struggle, as an intervention in aesthetic practice to create a revolutionary art, is effectively negated, postponed to a post-revolutionary boundlessness — as we have already seen in his discussion of Raymond Williams. This neglect of materialist aesthetic practice has been a tragic weakness on the left as a whole: within Trotskyism, perhaps as an unfortunate consequence of Trotsky's own highly cultivated, perceptive but aesthetically conservative view of literary culture. The art of the Revolution, wrote Trotsky, 'is not behind us, but ahead of us' (*Literature and Revolution*, p.111, Ann Arbor edn.). It is a tribute to the seminal nature of Eagleton's text that at least now discussions on this and many other cultural questions in Britain must be grounded in more precise and avowed Marxist terms.

FOOTNOTES

1. *New Left Review* 50 (July-August 1968): 'Components of the national culture'.
2. Quoted by Wellek in *Modern Language Review*, vol.69 (1974), p. xxx.
3. F. R. Leavis, *The Common Pursuit* (Penguin), p. 216.
4. F. R. Leavis, *Dickens the Novelist* (Penguin 1972), p. 297.

review

Trotsky and Fatalistic Marxism

Trotsky and Fatalistic Marxism, by Geoff Hodgson (Spokesman Books 1975, 95p)

There is undoubtedly a need for the Trotskyist movement to review its history and seriously debate its fundamental ideas. It is, therefore, a useful thing for Spokesman Books to put out Hodgson's polemic. Unfortunately, however, this polemic mistakes its object at two crucial points, and thus is not very helpful in setting the terms for such a reappraisal.

To begin with, the very title 'Fatalistic Marxism' is very odd. I myself would argue that Trotskyism has been characterised by an excessive **voluntarism**. It is, of course, true that fatalism in theory is often a cover for an active will and provides a psychological mechanism supportive of continued struggle. Nonetheless, Trotskyism tends to voluntarism even in its theory, in that it commonly derives from its conception of the epoch the thesis that, since objective conditions are rotten ripe for capitalist collapse, the revolution requires merely the intervention of the 'subjective factor', and political activity is therefore devoted to solving the 'crisis of leadership'. This is absolutely incompatible with fatalistic perspectives, because for fatalists **there can be no problem with the subjective factor** — purely objective determinations **guarantee** change automatically.

If one examines Hodgson's analysis of Trotsky's theories, one discovers that this charge of fatalism is based upon a rejection of Trotsky's economic analysis, starting with Trotsky's thesis of 1921 that the future of capitalist development would be marked by a downward curve subject to short term oscillations, and ending with the allegation that in the last years of his life he abandoned all caution and adopted a perspective of imminent catastrophe. Now I do not want to enter here on the substantial economic analysis. What I would say is that even if the economic perspective was wrong **empirically** this does not in the least show that **philosophically** Trotsky was a fatalist.

Hodgson thinks that he has done more than contest Trotsky's analysis empirically because he objects at the level of **method** to Trotsky's attempts to delineate an economic perspective. It is at this point that another confusion in Hodgson's polemic enters in. With the best will in the world I cannot but

see his efforts in this direction as an attack on Trotsky for using Marx's method. The book is presented as an attack on a **deviation** from Marxism, but it turns out that Marx himself was the original deviant! It would have been less confusing to have started out from the beginning with the object of refuting Marx rather than one of his followers.

This anti-Marxism of Hodgson becomes clear when we notice that time and time again he denies the validity of **any** attempt to theorise the course of capitalist development, on the ground that government intervention into the economy can reverse any such trend. Consider this extraordinary speculation about the inter-war period: 'It would have been **feasible** for the bourgeois democracies to have adopted Keynesian style economic measures of state intervention, and without necessarily extending their imperialist control of other territories or markets... An upward trend in capitalist development could have occurred after the First World War, and a slump of the severity of the 1930s was not inevitable' (p. 24). Similarly the recent long boom is traced to a **decision** of governments to maintain full employment (p. 56).

Hodgson objects to Trotsky's 'determinist understanding of the movement of the capitalist economy... as being subject to laws of development, of a necessary rather than a contingent nature' (p. 25). What is this but an objection to Marxism itself? Of course one must admit that the laws of capitalist development are **modified** in their expression by contingencies, and Trotsky himself was well aware of this, as is shown by his objection to Kondratiev, which is quoted by Hodgson without seeming fully to take account of it (p. 20).

Eventually Hodgson almost comes clean, by denouncing Marx's famous **Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy**, and characterising the base-superstructure model, etc., as 'mechanistic and vulgar conceptions' (p. 30). He also argues in more detail against Marx's thesis on the falling rate of profit.

Complementary to Hodgson's characterisation of Trotsky's economic perspectives as fatalistic is his assertion that revolution is **independent** of the course of economic development. The major sin in Trotsky is this: 'It is the **problematic which insists that the soul of revolutionary Marxism must**

depend on the prognosis of the ultimate stagnation of the system, as an automatic consequence of its own in-built laws of development' (p. 35). Once again most people would judge that this is Marx's own position, not some foible of Trotsky's.

For Hodgson, on the contrary, capitalism will be overthrown as a result of a 'crisis of legitimation'. Would it be terribly 'mechanistic and vulgar' to inquire how a crisis might occur if capitalism continues successfully delivering the goods?

Of course, a revolutionary crisis is more than an economic event, and may not coincide with a recession for example. But Trotsky, above all others, had the deepest understanding of the process of revolution, as his leadership of the Russian Revolution and his **History** of that event show. Trotsky was no specialist in economics, and banal on philosophy, but he was a genius at understanding the social psychology of classes. Yet Hodgson almost fails to mention that Trotsky alone understood the phenomenon of fascism, for example.

Hodgson calls for the concrete analysis of concrete conditions. Yet that is just where Trotsky excels, where he should be studied, and where he should be emulated. (The 'timeless' analyses of some Trotskyist sects are something else, of course). Hodgson cannot deny that on crucial questions such as the Vietnam war and the 1968 events the intervention of the Fourth International was soundly based, and its appreciation of the conjuncture infinitely more scientific as well as infinitely more revolutionary than that of the reformist or Stalinist parties.

It is true that in the past the Trotskyist movement has underestimated capitalism's capacity for recuperation, and talk of a 'crisis of leadership' needs to be abandoned insofar as it encourages illusions in short cuts which have no objective reality. Some Trotskyists were idiots but many were brilliant and devoted revolutionaries. If they attracted only a handful of followers and lost most of these by the mid-fifties, this was not due to this or that wrong 'conception'; it was primarily due to the recalcitrance of objective conditions, and, in turn, the negative effects of this resulted in the degeneration of individuals and whole groups.

A new leadership comes in to being as a result of large-scale social upheavals — that much should be obvious. On the other hand, a dialectical appreciation of the unity of objective and subjective (not their mechanical addition as in so many schemas) is not the same thing as fatalism. No one can deny that, at least in the imperialist countries, the social democratic and 'communist' parties are played out, and that therefore a new leadership will be at the head of future revolutionary developments. In this respect the efforts of the Trotskyist movement to keep the Marxist programme alive and up to date, together with its practical experience of intervention, within its powers, in the life of the class, will surely make a contribution. What needs to be avoided is that misplaced concreteness which translates the revolutionary conception of the epoch into imminent catastrophism and the idea that one has to merely proclaim the party for the class to fall behind.

Incidentally, when Hodgson comforts himself at the end by reflecting on the resurgence of Marxist analysis in Britain, what objective conditions does he suppose produced it?

CJA

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