

MARXISM — THE CUTTING EDGE, VOLUME 1

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Beyond
Betrayal

andy blunden

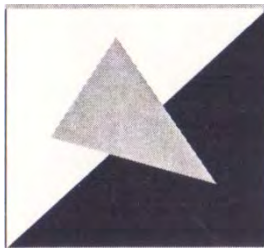
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MARXISM – The Cutting Edge

Volume I

Beyond Betrayal

Andy Blunden



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Preface

The object of this book is to offer the reader an introduction to the whole range of Marxist theory. It is addressed to the serious student who is prepared to work quite hard in coming to grips with new concepts and to follow up this book with a systematic reading of the Marxist classics and relevant historical, philosophical and other material.

It is not intended as an academic work, in the sense that emphasis is given to explaining the points being made, rather than proving them, and other works are cited for the purpose of guiding the reader in their further study rather than in order to give authority. Thus works cited are limited to a definite range of books, the study of which can be guaranteed to be rewarding to the reader.

Further, it is assumed that the reader is either already active in the class struggle in some way, or wishes to be, and is reading this book in order to enhance the practice to which they are already committed. It is not the intention of the wider to convince the reader that they should be fighting against capitalism.

The material is organised into three parts. Part one is classical Marxism, the Marxism of Marx and Engels, and covers the main principles of historical analysis, political economy and philosophy. Part two is modern Marxism, the contributions of Lenin and Trotsky in the course of the Russian Revolution, including its preparation and later defence against Stalinism. Part three is the Marxism of the present period after the second world war and deals with the crisis of the revolutionary movement in the post-World War II period.

This work is the first of three volumes which together present an outline of the Marxism of the present period.

Volume II, *Beyond Sexism*, by Lynn Beaton, is an analysis of women and Marxism. It will examine what Marxism has to tell us about the organisation of women's lives in capitalism. It will present an analysis of the development of the women's liberation struggle and its interweaving with the Marxist movement.

Volume III, *Beyond Capitalism*, written collaboratively by members of Communist Intervention, is an analysis of the world political and economic crisis and its impact in Australia.

Andy Blunden

5th May 1991

Introduction

Marxism is the theory and practice of the struggle for socialism. Like the various branches of science, Marxism is a body of knowledge built up over time by the creative criticism of people applying the theory in practice.

However, Marxism differs from any branch of science, natural or social, for the following reason. Human consciousness is constructed from concepts implicit in social relations. The people of different epochs have differing attitudes towards the nature of truth and the means by which it is arrived at. The concepts with which they think are in general 'inherited' and uncritically applied to each new situation.

Since the object of revolutionary theory is to bring about a new society, Marxism is obliged to ground itself in a criticism of prevailing ways of thinking at the most fundamental level. Consequently, propositions about philosophy and the theory of knowledge are an integral part of Marxist theory.

For instance, in feudal society everyone accepted that knowledge was gained from Scripture and the insights of priests who were 'closer to God'. Obviously, there was no room in such an outlook for ideas of individualism or natural science. The fight against feudalism was prepared with an assault on feudalist thinking. On the one hand this was carried out by Protestant reformers such as Martin Luther (1483-1546), who agitated for the idea of every person having access to God, and in particular, to the 'word of God' in the form of the Bible written in their own language, and on the other hand by materialist¹ philosophers such as Francis Bacon (1561-1626), who popularised the idea of seeking knowledge through observation of nature. (Neither Luther nor Bacon of course saw themselves as fighting against feudalism or in favour of capitalism. This is an insight which has only become possible later).

Without such a fundamental criticism of feudalist ideology, it would not have been possible for Cromwell to execute Charles I or for the French Revolutionaries to guillotine the nobility of France.

¹ By 'materialist' I refer to those philosophers who regard nature as the source of knowledge, and who recognise that nature exists independently of the mind, which is in turn a product and reflection of the material world. This is in contrast to 'idealist', by which I refer to those philosophers who either deny the existence of a world beyond thought, or who see the material world is merely a product of or illusion created by mind.

Bourgeois ideas of individualism – that social position is the outcome of individual ‘endowment’ or ‘enterprise’ as well as more sophisticated versions of the same – are likewise indispensable supports for the rule of capital.

Thus, Marxism is not just the science of revolution, but a whole **world outlook**, and in every branch of science, or culture generally, there is a Marxist view opposing that of the bourgeoisie.

The world cannot be changed, however, by preaching better ideas so that people will behave better. That idea, typical of ‘utopian’ pre-Marx socialism, reformism, and ‘propagandism’, Marxists call **idealism**. It is called idealism because it is premised on the proposition that thought, or ‘spirit’, is **primary** to matter, i.e. material conditions outside of thinking – ‘In the beginning was the Word’. Marxists refer to themselves as materialists because we recognise that ideas are secondary to material conditions, which are **reflected** in thought. Bourgeois ideology originates not in people’s heads, but in the conditions of life under capitalism.

Thus Marxists recognise that in order to overthrow capitalism we have to understand how the thinking of the different strata of society is shaped by their material life and changes in the political and economic relations between them. Our practical activity is directed not so much to propagate our ideas, but to change these material relations in a way which will raise the consciousness and level of activity of the working class and the masses. Propaganda² and agitation³ are an essential part of Marxist practice, but are activities directed towards the achievement of quite specific material objectives. Also, by continually subjecting our activity and that of others to criticism we Marxists seek not to prove that we are right, but to renew the body of Marxist theory with new knowledge.

Marxism differs from the various branches of science in another way, too; for as long as people live in capitalist society, relating to each other via market relations, for so long as the profit motive prevails and the owners of capital remain the most influential pillars of society, the science of the overthrow of capitalism, Marxism, will be **partisan**. Those engaged in the practical activity

2 Propaganda means the presentation of the whole program of the organisation with the specific purpose of expanding and extending the influence of the Party, as part of the long-term project of building an organisation capable of taking revolutionary initiatives and combating the hegemony of the conservative leaders of the working class.

3 Agitation means campaigning around a specific slogan or demand with the aim of achieving a specific short-term goal, as part of a strategic or tactical plan.

of overthrowing capitalism will continually have to defend their theory against open criticism and inner decay. Professionals like Robert Conquest have huge “resources to disseminate their attacks on Marxism; whole academies in the Soviet Union are dedicated to apologetic drivel posing as Marxism; while those actually practically applying Marxism are probably having trouble holding down a job.

Although most sciences have had to fight against the prevailing ideology in their initial days, there is no branch of science which is fundamentally “reconcilable with the society in which it is born and grows. Eventually the new idea is incorporated into the body of bourgeois ideology and its development becomes the activity of academies and institutes, and its status recognised by its ordination as an ‘ology’.

While Marxism is not a dogma, set down once and for all by Marx, for others to follow, to indicate that Marxism is a whole world outlook, and that it is partisan, it remains known by the name of its founder, Karl Marx.

Similarly, the Marxism of the post-World War I period is known as Leninism. By the beginning of this century, the great organisations of the European working class had become corrupted. These were the Labour Parties and Trade Unions, which were founded by Marxists in the latter part of the 19th Century in order to raise the political consciousness and social power of the working class. Their leaders had been bumped into parliament and had grown fat and corrupt and had distorted Marxism into what Lenin called social chauvinism. These organisations all supported the War and sent millions to die in the trenches.

Lenin broke from the Socialist International and led the Russian Revolution on the basis of the slogan of **revolutionary defeatism**. From there it became possible to found a new International, the Communist International, which rejected parliamentary opportunism and national chauvinism.

In turn, the enormous difficulties and isolation which the new Soviet state suffered allowed a new social layer, the bureaucracy of the workers state, to disfigure and abandon Marxism. Stalin, as the representative of this bureaucratic caste, twisted Marxism into a cynical parody of itself. Marxism of the period following the degeneration of the Communist International, i.e. after about 1924, is known as **Trotskyism**. Without Stalinism, there would be no need for ‘Trotskyism’.

Stalin opposed revolution in Europe and Asia in favour of ‘socialism in one country’, and substituted bureaucratic management for workers democracy, hounding the leaders of the Revolution to death. Trotsky had to break from the Communist International in order to be able continue revolutionary

activity and the development of Marxist theory in opposition to Stalinism.

This brings us to a situation which is often so distressing to students of Marxism: in general, Darwinism is accepted as synonymous with modern biology and everyone recognises that it would be impossible to learn science while taking an open position on Darwinism versus Divine creation. However, in the arena of the science of overthrowing capitalism the situation is not so simple.

It is impossible to make socialist revolution while taking an open position on imperialist war versus revolutionary defeatism, parliamentarism versus revolution, bureaucratic privilege versus workers democracy, or the ‘national road to socialism’ versus internationalism. One cannot be a Marxist without taking sides in the dispute between Stalin and Trotsky, and integrating the lessons of the fight against Stalin’s betrayal of the Russian Revolution into daily revolutionary practice. However, the advocates of Stalinism do not gracefully leave the field of revolutionary politics and openly declare their opposition to Marxism. On the contrary.

Every person taking up the study of Marxism has to work over the struggles of previous generations of revolutionaries in order to rediscover the basic principles of revolutionary struggle. And there will never be any shortage of those who will seek to act out the betrayals of previous generations of opportunists, parliamentary idiots, Stalinist bureaucrats and demagogues, and help the young revolutionary to learn the trade.

Many people are moved to fight against oppression and prejudice, many people fight against capitalism in their daily life in trade unions or social movements, but are not Marxists. Why is this? In the first place, people are drawn to Marxism because they are looking for an explanation of the social and political problems they are fighting against, and theoretical knowledge which will allow them to fight more effectively for aims to which they are already dedicated, and Marxism offers the most comprehensive and powerful theoretical explanation of the class struggle.

To put it another way, on a moral⁴ or ethical level, what does it mean to be Marxist? We could say that a Marxist is someone who understands themselves as a part of **history**, and their daily activity as part of an age-old struggle of humanity to overcome class oppression. Thus, an active and lively interest in

4 Trotsky’s pamphlet *Their Morals and Ours* explains the historical basis of socialist ethics, refutes the Stalinist dogma of ‘end justifies the means’, and tin- bourgeois slander of Marxism being ‘amoral’.

history is characteristic of Marxists; the Marxist view of history, called **historical materialism**, is a central part of Marxist theory.

On a personal level, we could say that a Marxist is someone who has come to understand that she or he is changing the world in everything they do. Consequently, a Marxist is someone who is entirely without narrow or personal motivation in their political work, and someone who thinks about what they are doing, whether that be in their personal daily life or in public political work.

Synopsis

The material which shall be covered in this work is as follows:

Sections 1-3: Classical Marxism – The Three Sources and Component Parts of Marxism

Firstly, what could be called ‘classical Marxism’ – the three component parts of Marxism, as Lenin put it in a pamphlet of 1913⁵; namely –

1) **socialism**, first developed in the early 19th Century France and put upon scientific basis by Marx and Engels with the theory known as ‘**historical materialism**’ and their analysis of the class struggle.⁶

2) **political economy**, founded by bourgeois English writers in the 19th Century, but revolutionised by Marx in his opus magnum **Capital**⁷.

3) **philosophy**, particularly the achievements of Hegel and Feuerbach in Germany in the late 18th and early 19th Century. Marxist philosophy is sometimes called dialectical materialism. **Dialectics** is that logic, for which we are indebted to Hegel, which understands concepts through their inner contradictions. **Materialism** is that tradition of philosophy dating back to the Greeks which sees thought as **reflecting** a material world existing independently of thought, and constituting the source of knowledge.⁸

The first three chapters will provide an introduction to these three basic components of Marxist theory, the foundation upon which the revolutionaries

5 Lenin: Three Sources and Components Parts of Marxism, 1913.

6 For a brief exposition of historical materialism see Engels’ Socialism: Utopian mid Scientific, 1877.

7 For a short summary of the main ideas of Capital see Lenin’s pamphlet: Karl Marx (A Brief Biographical Sketch with an Exposition of Marxism), 1914.

8 For a brief explanation of dialectical materialism see Engels’ Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy, 1888

of this century have built.

Sections 4-7: Modern Marxism – The Four Principal Gains of 20th Century Marxism

In its modern form Marxism incorporates the theoretical achievements of those who have followed in Marx's footsteps. Principal among these are –

4) The Leninist theory of organisation, often referred to as **democratic centralism**, developed especially in the course of Lenin's struggle in the last 2 decades of the 19th Century to unite the disparate revolutionary circles in Russia, and in the subsequent struggle to build and shape the Bolshevik Party which led the Russian Revolution of 1917.⁹

5) The Bolshevik methods of political struggle learnt in the period of intense class struggle especially in the first 2 decades of this century and further developed in the first five years of the Communist International (1918- 1923), and succinctly expressed in the **Transitional Program** of 1938, founding document of the Trotskyist movement.¹⁰

6) Trotsky's analysis, made following the failed 1905 revolution in Russia, i of the tasks of the working class in the imperialist epoch, known as the **theory of permanent revolution**, particularly relevant to understanding the role of the working class in the national liberation struggles.¹¹

7) Trotsky's critique and analysis of **Stalinism**, the social strata that grew up within the Soviet state which expressed the pressure of imperialism within the workers' movement.¹²

In these four chapters I seek to re-establish the gains of Marxism first achieved by the leaders of the Russian Revolution. In doing so, we will lay the foundations for an exposition of the tasks confronting revolutionaries today.

Sections 8 – 10: The Marxism of Today, after the end of World War II

Revolutionary theory has developed during the last 50 years, but only under

9 See Two Letters to the Central Committee, October 1923, and The New Course, by Trotsky, all in Challenge of the Left Opposition published by Pathfinder.

10 See Lenin's Left Wing Communism – An Infantile Disorder, 1920, and the Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the 4th International, otherwise known as The Transitional Program, 1938.

11 See Trotsky's Permanent Revolution [1930], Results and Prospects [1906].

12 See Trotsky's Revolution Betrayed [1937] for the most definitive analysis of the degeneration of the Soviet Union and the Communist International during the 1920s and 30s.

conditions of considerable isolation and attrition of the Marxist movement. In this section we will examine the experience of the revolutionary movement of the post-World War Two period, the new aspects of revolutionary theory that have been developed during this period.

8) The Third Congress of the IVth International in 1951 formulated the characterisation of the Stalinist states formed after World War II as ‘deformed workers states’, extending the analysis of the Soviet Union made by Trotsky during the last years of his life.

The collapse of the Stalinist bloc in 1990 marked the end of a whole period in which the world was divided between two blocs – capitalist countries on the one hand and isolated, deformed workers states on the other. The collapse of Stalinism’s social base in deformed workers’ states places new tasks and opportunities before the revolutionaries of today.

Following the degeneration of the Comintern, the Marxist movement was isolated and marginalised by Stalinism which politically dominated the revolutionary stratum of the working class. This was manifested in a whole variety of political ‘diseases’ such as sectarianism, ‘guerilla-ism’¹³ and ‘Pablo-ism’¹⁴.

The collapse of Stalinism opens up the prospect of breaking out of this marginalisation. We shall develop a perspective for transforming Trotskyism into a force capable of leading masses in revolutionary struggles, while dealing with the fact that revolutionary organisations have long been marginalised and the revolutionary stratum of the working class fragmented.

The present volume will be followed by two further volumes which take up the major questions of revolutionary theory today.

13 ‘Guerilla-ism’ was the theory that the only genuinely revolutionary method of struggle was military struggle carried out in isolation from the masses; it asserted that the working class could play no part in the revolutionary struggle; only the peasantry could be relied upon for support.

14 Pablo-ism: after Michel Pablo, a leader of the IVth International after World War II, opposed the building of revolutionary Marxist parties in opposition to the ‘existing’ leadership, believing that the Communist Parties of the world would be ‘forced’ to lead revolution, that the national liberation leaderships would develop into Marxists out of their own experiences. Included would be those who, in the imperialist countries, give precedence to solidarity with the national liberation movements, to the extent of offering uncritical support, and even solidarising in the repression of more revolutionary tendencies within the national liberation movements.

Volume II

The upsurge and progress of the Women's movement of the last 2 decades has focused attention on questions neglected by Marxism and introduced new concepts in its struggle against **patriarchy**.

The lessons of this struggle by women have yet to be integrated into Marxist theory, and this is a pressing problem of today. There can be no question of developing a perspective for socialist revolution today without clarity on the questions raised by the struggle of women for their emancipation from patriarchy.

Volume II has been contributed by Lynn Beaton, and makes an analysis of these problems. It will examine what Marxism has to tell us about the organisation of women's lives in capitalist society. It will also present an analysis of the development of the women's liberation struggle, bringing out the interweaving of this struggle with the development of the Marxist movement.

Volume III

An analysis of the development of the world crisis up to the present moment and its political implications in Australia is the subject of Volume III. The break up of the post-war settlement, with the growth of the debt crisis including the transformation of the US into the world's greatest debtor nation and the use of Japanese capital and the decline of the 'smoke-stack' industries and the growth of the service sector, all form the context of the world economic crisis today.

The political-economic history of Australia and its relation to class forces on the world scene is the necessary material for working out a correct orientation for revolutionaries in Australia today.

There is considerable work to be done in this area, but this volume will make an assessment of the position of Marxism on the major theoretical questions being revolutionaries today.

– Part I –

The first three chapters deal with the development of Marxism by its founders during the nineteenth century.

Karl Marx (1818-1883) and Friedrich Engels (1820-1895) saw themselves as continuing the theoretical work of bourgeois philosophers and social thinkers and of previous generations of revolutionary leaders and theorists. While their work clearly marks a sharp break from everything that had gone before in very many ways, it is important to understand how the foundations of Marxism were prepared by the achievements of the great bourgeois thinkers, which was made possible by the changes being wrought in the world by the bourgeois mode of production.

The theoretical conquests of Marx and Engels form the foundation for modern Marxism and the Marxism of today, in exactly the same way as the conquests of natural science during the nineteenth century form the foundation of the natural science of the twentieth century.

The professional bourgeois writer is more concerned with proving the ‘originality’ of their own work, than with identifying the real source of their ideas. The Marxist however is concerned to know the source of an idea, and to trace the growth of problems leading to development of the idea.

Thus, to the bourgeois writer, it may seem rather odd to keep on repeating the ideas of nineteenth century writers. To the Marxist, that is preferable to endlessly repeating the mistakes of earlier centuries, out of ignorance.

While Marx and Engels stood head and shoulders above their bourgeois contemporaries, in many respects it will be seen that they were also subject to the limitations of their time. For instance, in Section 1 we outline Marx’s theory of the epochs of civilisation by means of extended quotes. Marx and Engels’ work on this subject has been overtaken by 100 years of historical research. To re-write this theory is a specialist task, and this is not the appropriate place for that work.

Nevertheless, Marx’s theory on this subject was revolutionary at the time, and the general outlines are integral to understanding historical materialism as a body of knowledge, theoretical standpoint and method of investigation.

Thus, while a study of the writings of Marx and Engels is essential to becoming a Marxist, they are not to be understood as scripture. A critical reading of Marx and Engels has to be based on the recognition that their work was more one of ‘discovery’ than of ‘invention’.

Those who wish to discredit the work of Marx and Engels might seize upon minor flaws – something which is easy to do with the benefit of 100 years of hindsight. If we wish to use the revolutionary content of Marx's method however, all that is necessary is to grasp the essence of their approach to a question, taking account of the new knowledge which the passage of 100 years has made possible.

This is quite apart from the obvious fact that the Marxist movement has continuously developed its body of theory throughout the past century, confirming and testing the work of Marx and Engels. Familiarity with the work of later Marxists (notably Lenin and Trotsky) is essential to understanding the original work of Marx and Engels.

The first chapter is a rather bare exposition of historical materialism. Without prefiguring the contents of chapters 2 and 3 it is not possible to go further. This defect will be corrected in later sections which demonstrate the application of historical materialism to understanding the changes that have taken place during the twentieth century

1) Historical Materialism

No one can fail to notice that in political life the outcome of people's actions do not coincide with their intentions, just as the people's declared motives do not correspond to the social impact of their actions.

There are countless examples of this, but the decision of Saddam Hussein to annex Kuwait was not intended to provoke an unwinnable war with the US; the decision of the Australian government to celebrate the Bicentenary was not intended to give an unprecedented boost to claims for Aboriginal national self-determination. Likewise a future historian who believed that the Liberal Party was an advocate of liberalism, and the ALP the representative of labour would be seriously misled.

The growth and decline of political movements is not a question of which players are the better leaders or 'tacticians', but of the economic interests which are expressed in political conflicts. All the participants in history are conscious actors, and pursue their own definite aims, but the conditions which are given expression in the heads of these actors, and which determine the outcome of the conflict between 'innumerable individual wills and individual actions'¹⁵ in levers of a different kind – the actual, objective relationship of class forces.

The materialist view is in contrast to the idealist view in which history is understood as the outcome of the battle between ideas, in which the superior Idea triumphs over its opponents. To accept uncritically a person's own conception of what they represent is idealist. People have to be understood politically by seeing the social forces, particularly the class forces, which find expression in that person's politics.

For example, the idealist might explain the longevity of the Hawke government by the skill and foresight of his leadership. A Marxist sees that Hawke is the chosen candidate of U.S. imperialism, and is still seen by the most powerful sections of the Australian bourgeoisie as the most reliable guardian of their interests, principally because both imperialism and the local bourgeoisie still have neither the will nor the means to defeat the trade unions in open conflict. Without this ruling class support, Hawke would be gone in hours.

Idealists might see the Cold War as a struggle between 'democracy' and 'socialism' – while 'democracy' supports not only the Salvadorian

15 Engels: Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy', IV.

dictatorship but Pol Pot who claims himself to be a Marxist; and ‘socialism’ is represented by Byzantine dictatorships such as that of Ceausescu (who incidentally was also acting as an agent for ‘democracy’ in trade in Soviet military secrets).

In order to act effectively within the political world, the issue is to understand the interests of the different classes and social strata, how they are expressed in the various political and social movements, and how they may be affected by social, political and economic changes.

To the idealist history is ‘just one damn thing after another’, but to Marxists, **within the seeming stream of accidents and ironies which make up public life, a law-governed process manifests itself.**

From the early 19th Century, it had become obvious to many writers that in politics there was expressed the clash of economic interests. Thus Marx was not the discoverer of the class struggle. What Marx proved was that the outcome of the class struggle under capitalism must be (in so far as it is not curtailed by a catastrophe such as nuclear war) the **dictatorship of the proletariat**; that the contradictions inherent in capitalism could only be resolved by the expropriation of the capitalist class and the institution of a different system of producing and distributing products, based on collective ownership of the means of production; that, as the **future ruling class** in society, only the **working class** could carry out this task.

To understand this, it is necessary to look at Marx’s conception of the history of civilisation up to the present epoch.

Marx’s characterisation of the Epochs of Civilisation

Before the advent of written history in any particular part of the world people lived by means of a variety of social systems, in which the division of labour and products was governed by traditional law, but in which there did not exist class¹⁶ divisions. In the main, traditional tribal systems of production and distribution were based on the extended family.

In **tribal society**, production was at such a level that no surplus was produced

16 By class divisions, we mean the forms of social division of labour cutting across gender and age divisions of labour which are characterised by relation to the means of production in the labour process, and are maintained and reproduced from one generation to the next. In addition, we recognise as fundamental those class divisions which extend across all branches of production, entering into every act of production and the division of the product, which characterise the mode of production of a given society.

which would allow a parasitic upper class to free itself from the day-to-day struggle for existence.

This absence of a surplus was the economic (material) basis of primitive classless society. (In the latter stages of tribal society, considerable division of labour exercised within the tribe, including gender division, but the productivity of labour is still not sufficient to allow the formation of social classes). When productivity rose to a level whereby a person could produce more than their own needs, tribal law gave way to the system of slavery.

Slave Society

In slave society, the means of production – principally the land, agricultural implements, infrastructure and the herds – remained initially the property of the traditional owners, but since production had reached a level where the labour of each person produced a surplus, the practice of the ownership of slaves emerged. That is, slaves were people who were owned in just the same way as were the farm animals. They had no legal or social rights at all; they were chattels.

In order to illustrate Marx's view of the transition from tribal society to civilisation (i.e. class society), the following extended excerpt from Engels' *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, Chapter IX will suffice:

‘Civilisation opens with a new advance in the division of labour. At the lowest stage of barbarism people produced only directly for their own needs; ... In the middle stage of barbarism we already find among the pastoral peoples a possession in the form of cattle which, once the herd has attained a certain size, regularly produces a surplus over and above the tribe's own requirements, The upper stage of barbarism brings us further division of labour between agriculture and handicrafts ... exchange between individual producers assumes the importance of a vital social function.

‘Civilisation consolidates and intensifies all these existing divisions of labour, It creates a class which no longer concerns itself with production, but only with the exchange of products – the merchants. ... Now for the first time a class appears which, without in any way participating in production, captures the direction of production as a whole and economically subjugates the producers; ... Never again has the power of money shown itself in such primitive brutality and violence as during these early days of its youth.

‘... Alongside wealth in commodities and slaves,... there now appeared wealth in land. The individuals' rights of possession in the pieces of land originally allotted by gens or tribe had now become ... hereditary property. Full, free ownership of the land meant not only power, uncurtailed and unlimited [by

the tribe].. it meant also the power to alienate it. The concentration of wealth in the hands of a small class rapidly advanced, accompanied by an increasing impoverishment of the masses ... The new aristocracy of wealth pushed the old hereditary aristocracy into the background. And simultaneous[ly] ... an enormous increase ... in the number of slaves, whose forced labour was the foundation on which the superstructure of the entire society was reared. ... the gentile (tribal) constitution was helpless ... Every territory now had a heterogeneous population belonging to the most varied tribes; everywhere slaves, and aliens, side by side with citizens. The settled conditions ... were broken up ... under the pressure of trade, alteration of occupation and changes in the ownership of land ... the social structure .. was not only alien to the old gentile order, but ran directly counter to it at every point... the primitive democracy had changed into a malign aristocracy .. The gentile constitution was finished ... It was replaced by the state.'

Feudalism

Likewise the Roman Empire collapsed when the system of slavery and plunder proved incapable of developing the expanses of central Europe.

After the collapse of the Roman Empire, feudalism grew out of the Dark Ages in Europe in a form broadly similar to the feudal systems found in the great centres of culture in Asia. Originally based on agricultural communities grouped together against outside pillaging under the protection of a military prince, a whole system of hierarchical rights and obligations evolved in which the producers, while tied to the land, had inalienable rights to the land and its produce, and the prince exacted privileges in exchange for exercise of his obligations as protector, governor and spiritual leader.

The feudal ruling class allowed the producers to maintain themselves by means of their own labour carried out on their own land, but obliged the peasants to render payment in kind or service to the 'lord of the manor'.

This excerpt from *The Origin of the Family, ... Chapter VIII* summarises the fall of the Roman Empire and the rise of feudalism:

'The enormous mass of humanity ... was held together by one bond only – ill. Roman slave; and the Roman state had become in the course of time their main enemy and oppressor. ... the citizens whom it claimed to protect against the barbarians longed for the barbarians to deliver them.

'The more the empire declined the higher rose the taxes, ... The system of latifundia run by slave labour no longer paid; but at that time no other form of large scale agriculture was possible. Small-scale production had again become the only profitable form. One country estate after another was cut up

into small lots ... Slavery no longer paid; it was for that reason that it died out. But in dying it left its poison sting – the stigma attaching to the productive labour of freemen. ... slavery was economically impossible, the labour of freemen was morally ostracised.

‘... In return for liberating the Romans from their own state, the German barbarians took from them two-thirds of the land and divided it among themselves. The division was made according to the gentile constitution.

‘The German peoples ... had to organise what they had conquered. But they could neither absorb the mass of Romans into the tribal bodies nor govern them through these bodies ... the moment had come to transform the military leadership into kingship.’

This rigid system in which the peasantry were tied to the land, and the land to the peasantry, proved a barrier to the development of industry and the expansion of trade. The wealthy bourgeoisie that grew up within feudal society became immensely powerful, but were frustrated by the vested interests of the parasitic nobility.

The English Revolution of 1640 and the French Revolution of 1789 were the decisive moments when the bourgeois/were able to rally the whole of society against the ruling class and open the way to bourgeois rule.

Capitalism

The following excerpt from the Communist Manifesto gives a brief summary of Marx’s view of the emergence of capitalism from feudalism:

‘The discovery of America, the rounding of the Cape opened fresh ground for the rising bourgeoisie. ... The feudal system of industry, under which industrial production was monopolised by closed guilds, now no longer sufficed for the growing wants of the new markets. The manufacturing system took its place. The guild masters were pushed to one side ... the markets kept ever rising ... even manufacture no longer sufficed. ... the place of manufacture was taken by the giant, modern industry, the place of the industrial middle class by industrial millionaires, ... Modern industry had established the world market... in proportion as industry, commerce, navigation, railways extended, in the same proportion the bourgeoisie developed, increased its capital, and pushed into the background every class handed down from the Middle Ages.

‘... the bourgeoisie has at last, since the establishment of modern industry and of the world market, conquered for itself, in the modern representative state, exclusive political sway. The executive of the modern state is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie.

‘... The bourgeoisie, wherever it has got the upper hand, has put an end to all feudal ... relations ... and has left remaining no other nexus between person and person than naked “cash payment.”’

Capitalism is characterised by the fullest and most pervasive development of the commodity relation, and even the labour power of the producers becomes a commodity which is bought and sold on the labour market. Exploitation takes place by means of this trade in wage labour.

In their writings, Marx and Engels have analysed the development of capitalism, from its emergence from the womb of feudal society up to the end of the nineteenth century. Already clearly perceivable were the tendencies towards stratification of important sectors of the economy, especially infrastructure, and predominance of large trusts, cartels and financial institutions.

Lenin’s first major work was *The Development of Capitalism in Russia*, written between 1896 and 1899, in which he made a comprehensive study of the political economy of Russia. In 1916, in the writing of *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, Lenin made a vital contribution to Marxist political economy. Lenin showed that internationally capitalism had entered a new, higher, but final stage of its development, which he called **imperialism**.

Lenin showed that the concentration of capital had led to the over-riding pre-eminence of finance capital over the industrial bourgeoisie; that the socialisation of production engendered by the forces of production had taken an extremely parasitic and predatory form, taken over and improved from colonialism, which “illuminated enormously powerful contradictions.

The conflict between the form of the nation state and the content of world wide division of labour was now absolute, and had ushered in an epoch of wars and revolutions.

Imperialism divided the world into an ‘advanced’ sector which in reality was in decline and becoming more and more parasitic upon the brutally exploited mass of humanity. On the proceeds of this super-exploitation imperialism had brought off a section of ‘their own’ working class – the **labour aristocracy**.

Along with Trotsky’s 1905 analysis, in *Permanent Revolution*, of the **combined and uneven development** of capitalism, Lenin’s analysis of imperialism showed that the backward countries could not follow the ‘normal’ path of bourgeois development trodden by the old capitalist powers. They would have to make the bourgeois revolution¹⁷ by means of the

17 by ‘bourgeois revolution’ we mean the revolution which establishes the bourgeois

dictatorship of the proletariat. It also provided the basis for a materialist understanding of the problems of revolutionary leadership in the imperialist countries, where the imperialist bourgeoisie had been able to co-opt a section of the workers, and quite deliberately sought to tie the workers to the capitalist state with the aid of opportunist leaders of the trade unions and Labour Parties. Imperialism, combined and uneven development and permanent revolution are the subject of section 6 below.

This view of history, tracing the qualitatively different forms of society and seeking to understand why and how people lived in the way that they did, is in sharp contrast to the idealist view which sees only the surface of things, presented in the form of a succession of Great Men, Kings and Emperors, Generals and Prime Ministers.

Strategies for Socialism

Marx devoted the major part of his life to the writing of **Capital**, in which he sought to understand and explain the fundamental laws of development of capitalism. If you believe that economic interests are at the root of political struggle, then it is obvious that you will need to understand, not just the short term dynamics of economic policy, but above all the long term processes which are continually shifting the ground from underneath political life and determining the ultimate success of this or that political strategy.

For instance, an analysis of the long term prospects for the growth of the world capitalist economy would be necessary to justify the advocacy of one or another of the main strategies for the working class – reformism (gradual improvement of capitalism under the guidance of an enlightened social democratic parliamentary regime, successively eliminating poverty and oppression by consensus with the capitalist class), Stalinism (building of a centralised State-owned economy within the borders of a single country, proving the superiority of ‘socialism’ by means of peaceful competition), or social revolution (seizure of public power by the organised workers placing the most developed productive enterprises under popular democratic control).

One of the most important ideas of Marx in this regard is that it is in a sense capitalism itself which shows the way forward and actually gives birth to all

rights’, freedom of expression, freedom from the hegemony of an oligarchy or nobility, national self-determination, a judicial system, and so mi While it is the historic mission of the bourgeoisie to achieve these gains by the overthrow of feudalism, in countries suffering from ‘belated’ development, the bourgeoisie may prove incapable of carrying out such a task.

the material pre-requisites for the founding of a free society and the abolition of the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie.

In Marx's words:

'humanity thus sets itself only such tasks as it is able to solve, since closer examination will always show that the problem itself arises only when the material conditions for its solution are already present or at least in the process of formation.'¹⁸

Basic Categories of Historical Materialism

What are the material conditions which give rise to the struggle for socialism? First is modern industry itself. Socialism can only be established on the basis of the complete abolition of material scarcity, which is alone possible on the foundations of modern industry and science created by capitalism.

Secondly, the world division of labour (market) which has enmeshed the people of the entire globe in a single web of economic and cultural interchange transcending all national boundaries.

And finally, the working class, created, organised and disciplined by capitalist industry, and with no prospect of individual ownership of the productive enterprises within which it lives.

Modern industry and science, the world division of labour and the working class itself, these are collectively referred to as the **productive forces** of present day society.

The capitalist **mode of production** means not just these productive forces, which are capable of being utilised in different ways, but also the **social relations of production** – the way people relate to each other in order to utilise the productive forces.

The most basic relation of production is the form of ownership of the means of production. The **means of production** are the material things that have been produced in the past, and are used in the course of production. During the whole period from the rupture of tribal society into class society until the overthrow of capitalism, these means of production are the private property of a minority of people.

Since production cannot be carried out without the use of these means of production which are owned by one class of people, this class, the ruling

18 Marx: Preface to the Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy. This preface is generally recognised as containing the most profound and succinct summary of Marx's ideas, which are summed up in one and a half pages.

class, which owns the means of production, has a very powerful position in society.

This power expressed in ownership of the means of production is used by the tilling class to gain hold of the surplus of production. This exploitation takes place in different ways in different epochs, and the means by which this exploitation takes place sets its particular stamp upon each of the main modes of production seen in history.

The social relations of production are a fundamental part of the entirety of social relations, including not just the social relations of production but gender relations, nationality, legal, political relations, ideology or religion etc.

The legal and cultural or political forms which give the most obvious and visible expression to the more fundamental social relations – how people are actually relating to each other – should not be mistaken for these social relations.

History is not made by the acts of Great Men, Important Acts of Parliament and High Court Judgements and so on. Changes in the political and cultural **superstructure** in general reflect the changes already well underway ‘underneath’, in the **base**.

Thus, while idealist history usually concentrates on relating the Far-sighted Acts of Great Men and Evil Deeds of the Villains of History, Marxists want to explore how people lived in each period, detect changes taking place in their lives, new problems and ways of solving them, which later make their way into the framework and structure of official society, and find expression in political movements and struggles.

The forces of production go on developing and changing, within the framework of society, and under conditions determined by the legal and political framework of society, but to a great extent according to objective laws of their own, unconsciously, independently of the collective will and understanding of people.

The relations of production prove their utility or otherwise according to how they facilitate people utilising the forces of production. Thus there is a **continual conflict between the forces of production and the social relations of production**, in which it is the **forces of production** which play a relatively determinant role. This conflict is the motive force of historical change.

Sooner or later, this conflict between the forces of production and the social relations of production reaches a crisis, becomes absolute.

The productive forces which were brought into being and developed by

capitalism – they could never have grown up under the feudal system – come more and more into conflict with capitalist social relations, restricted and confined within the fundamental forms of ownership of capitalism – wage labour and private ownership of the means of production.

The economic needs of capitalism hold back and sabotage the utilisation and development of techniques of production which, instead of enhancing the material living conditions of people, turn them into instruments of mass destruction and pillage the environment to a point threatening the very existence of humanity. The world division of labour is transformed into international trade war and the successive impoverishment of nations. Growing numbers of workers across the world are thrown into unemployment and destitution.

The science and technique developed within the world capitalist economy provide the **potential** for humanity to live in a consciously harmonious relation with nature. Modern means of communication and the co-operative labour of people across the globe makes possible the productive community of all the peoples of the world. The advanced organisation of the great capitalist enterprises holds out the possibility, given the expropriation of a tiny minority of wealthy financiers, of a planned and democratically organised association of the producers of the whole world.

Historical Materialism and Strategies for Socialism

Is such a utopia realisable by the reformist strategy? Is it conceivable that the small minority that wields overwhelming social power under capitalism will abide by the rules of fair play and relinquish their power to popular will? Indeed, is it possible to take even a single step towards the expropriation of capital by means of consensus with the capitalist class itself?

These are of course rhetorical questions. The reformist might answer that the capitalist will be unable to prevent the inexorable march of social democratic reform. A quick review of the track record of the ALP of course must satisfy even the blind that there is no reason to give any credence to such a hope. Reformism has invariably proved a pliant tool in the hands of the bourgeoisie. The reason is that the bureaucracy, which seeks to wield power on behalf of the workers, has no independent social or historical role to play. It balances between the two antagonistic classes, covering over the conflict and stifling the independence and consciousness of the working class.

Also, reformism bases itself on the fraud of parliament. Basking in the pathetic glory of their parliamentary pomp, they are blind to, or refuse to see, the obvious fact that the capitalists hold all the real levers of economic, and

therefore political, power.

The simple fact is that irreconcilable economic and indeed the life interests of the working class and the capitalist class are at stake in the struggle between socialism and capitalism.

The capitalist class and the wage earners are in conflict every day over the division of the product of labour. Every class conscious worker knows that they will increase their share of the product only by their own collective struggle against the employers. Likewise, the abolition of capital and the liberation of the working class can only be the work of the working class itself¹⁹, since it is the working class which must 'run' the new society. Obviously, this liberation will only be secure when the ability of the capitalist class to resist is forcibly eliminated by the destruction of the capitalist state machine²⁰.

What is more, the problem cannot be resolved by replacing conservative bureaucrats with more progressive people, since the hopelessness of the reformist strategy, and the reactionary role of the labour bureaucracy is not a function of the political views of the bureaucrat, but of the social role of the labour bureaucracy within capitalism.

It is the social position of the working class, their relation to the means of production, and consequently their potential as a future ruling class which will be able to eradicate **all** class oppression, whose economic interests are the eradication of exploitation, which is the significance of the working class in capitalist society.

A higher culture cannot arise on the basis of oppression. What we are talking about here is the eradication of the antagonistic contradiction between mental and manual labour, between labour and leisure, industry and government, education and work, legislature and executive, manager and employee, 'man's work' and 'woman's work', town and country, law and social relations, etc.

Each of these contradictions or dichotomies within capitalist society harbours

19 That the liberation of the working class can alone be accomplished by the working class itself is the central and most important thesis of the Communist Manifesto written by Marx and Engels in 1847 for the Communist League.

20 Marx drew the conclusion that the capitalist state had to be smashed, rather than 'taken over', after the experience of the heroic Paris Commune of 1871, and in State and Revolution, written in September 1917, Lenin reestablished this truth in a refutation of the reformist theories of the leaders of the Socialist International, who claimed reformism to be consistent with Marxism.

a particular form of domination and alienation. These forms of oppression exist within a definite system of social production which is capitalism, a system whose potential for resolving such contradictions is becoming exhausted.

Relations between the different social strata are constantly changing in response to the possibilities and pressure of changes in the relations of production. From time to time different contradictions come to the surface and stimulate more “i P thoroughgoing changes in society.

The most persistent and pervasive of all social relations is the relation of exchange. It is under capitalism that this relation reaches its highest development, penetrating every facet of human existence. Even the family of earlier days is today increasingly subject to the relations of exchange, with ‘women’s work’ more and more carried out in the market place, for wages, rather than in the confines of the family home. The germ of all capitalist social relations is contained within the exchange of commodities. The very life interests of the capitalist class, the most powerful and culturally dominant class in modern society, is tied up with the market.

Socialist Society

The ‘market socialism’ theory propounded by Gorbachev and others, sees the market as an essential part of any developed economy. It denies the contradiction between the market and socialism. However, socialism is precisely that social system by means of which the productive forces may be utilised co-operatively, without the exchange of commodities and the circulation of money that goes with it. Such a goal can only be attained by means of a protracted period of if development, during the course of which the tendency to revert to bourgeois relations will be ever present. Only the working class, organised politically and relating to the other strata of society through its role in production, can take society forward to socialism and repress the efforts of capitalism to restore the rule of the market.

Capitalism prepares the way for communism. The productive forces developed by capitalism can only be utilised within the framework of collective ownership of the means of production. Private ownership, the legal form in which the means of production appears as capital, stands in contradiction to the social character of the means of production. Every act of production combines the products of millions of producers, signifying their co-operative labour.

This contradiction between the social content of the relations of production mid the private form of the ownership of the means of production manifests

itself in wars, social crisis and regression, destruction of Nature, side by side with all the social and technical means for the elimination of these social evils. The system is defended however, by organisations of unprecedented capacity for violence and social control, the capitalist state machines.

Materialism

In the course of working out strategies for political and ideological struggle we shall be obliged to make an estimation of the prospects for different political or ideological trends. This involves also an analysis of how and why different political movements have grown or declined in the past, in order to understand where they are going.

Research into the causes underlying political change will come across the phenomenon that social change (changes in the way people live), takes place side by side with ideological changes – changes in the way people view things, the growth and decline of movements reflecting different views.

Historical materialism directs the attention of the researcher to the fact that ‘It is not the consciousness of people that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness.’

For instance, did the anti-war movement cause the defeat of the US in Vietnam? or was the weakness of imperialism in relation to the national liberation movement the cause of the anti-war movement? Now, obviously in this kind of question it is not simply one or the other. The point is to understand which is primary or fundamental. There has always been an anti-war movement, but many people observed at the time that there was nothing like the flow of body-bags back to the USA to stimulate anti-war feelings; and other aspects of the decline of US imperialism which undermined its ability to make war.

Another example: did the rise of the women’s movement in the 1970s cause changes in the relation of women to the productive forces – increased participation in the labour market, break-up of the nuclear family, socialisation of women’s labour? or did changes and problems in the productive forces in the old capitalist countries give rise to this women’s movement?

Again, obviously the struggle of women to enter the work-force and free themselves from domestic slavery is a necessary condition for these changes, but women have always wanted to work and have always hated domestic slavery. Only at a certain time did this struggle transform itself into a huge social movement.

Historical materialism directs the researcher to first study the changing

relation of women to work within the context of the development of capitalism to identify the unconscious movement which is given expression in the consciousness of the oppression of women and the political and ideological fight against it.

Another example: was the collapse of the political hegemony of Stalinism in Eastern Europe due to people becoming 'fed up', or was the growing crescendo of hatred against Stalinism among the workers the result of the escalating economic crisis in these countries? Again, the growing political hostility of the masses became itself a factor in the crisis, but we could hardly imagine that it was the fundamental cause, nor that Stalinism would have fallen apart if it had been able to deliver a higher level of culture and economy.

Marx makes the point that **'the material transformation of the economic conditions of production ... can be determined with the precision of natural science'**, whereas **'the legal, political, religious, artistic or philosophical in – in short ideological forms in which people become conscious of this conflict and fight it out' 'must be explained from the contradictions of material life,'**

Consequently, since these ideological forms are not so amenable to rigorous explanation but broadly speaking flow out of changes in economic conditions, the understanding of changes in economy provides a key for understanding what is at the root of the growth and decline of a ideological phenomena, and for developing effective political strategies.

For instance, Marxists do not see War as an aspect of 'human nature', a continuation of aggressive behaviour between individuals. War cannot be eliminated either by preaching religion or by substituting soccer matches for wars. War is the product of class society. War, on the vast scale in which manifests itself in the twentieth century is a product of imperialism, and can only be eliminated by eradicating imperialism.

We see fascism not as the result of a 'power-hungry' leader, or as an extension of the personal ignorance and 'prejudice' of ordinary people. Fascism is a phenomenon that arose in Europe at a specific historical juncture as a result of the inability of capitalism to maintain its rule without destroying working class organisation.

The extreme poverty experienced nowadays in many parts of the world that never knew famine before the arrival of colonialism is not a result of overpopulation, poor soil or social backwardness. It is an integral part of the imperialist system.

The Application of Historical Materialism

All the major struggles that Marxists have fought over the past 150 years have been grounded in an historical materialist analysis of the period and class forces involved.

The founding of the Communist League and the writing of the Communist Manifesto was based on Marx's understanding of the role of the proletariat in the overthrow of capitalism and building of socialist society. This conception of history is at the root of Marxism's opposition to utopian socialism and anarchism.

The great attention paid by Marx's early followers to the building of industrial unions and the first mass political parties of the working class, based in these unions, flowed out of an historical materialist understanding of the growth of the working class, and their need for independent means of political and economic expression within capitalist society.

The building of the Bolshevik Party around the turn of the century was grounded on Lenin's analysis of the development of capitalism in Russia, the growth of the working class and the weakness of the Russian bourgeoisie.

Lenin's break from the Second (Socialist) International, the policy of revolutionary defeatism which made possible the October 1917 Russian Revolution, was based on Lenin's analysis of imperialism as a specific historical stage in the development of capitalism.

Trotsky's struggle against Stalinism within the Communist International was based on his analysis of developments in the economy of the Soviet Union, the world economy and relations between the proletariat and peasantry and other classes. The founding of the Fourth International was based on Trotsky's political-economic analysis of social developments within the Soviet Union, as contained in *Revolution Betrayed*.

These major developments in the application of historical materialist analysis will be outlined in the subsequent sections of this work.

Class and History

We have presented the outlines of Marx's theory of history. Historical materialism is not the only view of history. The voluntarist view that we have referred to, that history is determined by the Will of Great Men, is the most reactionary and crassest of bourgeois theories.

Apart from this the main trend in opposition to Marxism is positivism, the most widespread view among professional bourgeois historians, for which any sense that can be made of history is solely 'in the eye of the beholder'.

The positivist, correctly, sees that there are many contradictions within the social relations of a given period, all exerting an influence on events. Positivism asserts that it is completely arbitrary to focus on one contradiction over another, that all are equally determinant.

This trend is to be found even among historians who see themselves as Marxists. Having come to the conclusion that we cannot uncritically accept the view of the actors in history of the significance of their own actions, the positivist concludes that the only significance is solely from the standpoint of the historian. Thus, the positivist rejects the possibility of any objective analysis of history. You can see in history anything you wish to.

It is not possible to deal adequately with positivism without an investigation of bourgeois ideology from the philosophical standpoint, which will be the subject of sections 2 and 3.

The main proposition which Marxists have to justify is that ‘the totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society’. This is the materialist conception of history. The relations of production are chiefly, although not exclusively, class relations. The main proposition is that the production and reproduction of material life is the principal determinant of social and political life.

The relation between class and gender is a question that was never given proper attention by Marx and the other Marxists. It is clear that the oppression of women has continued through the whole period from the beginnings of feudal society in any part of the world up until the present period. Changes have taken place both in the relation between men and women during this period and in the class division of society. Gender relations are a part of the material relations of production and exist side-by-side with class relations.

If we are to make sense of history, we need to look at the question as to which of these two contradictions (gender and class, capitalism and patriarchy) is determinant in relation to the other. This question will be given further consideration later.

Without the elimination of patriarchy it is impossible to achieve socialism, the eradication of class oppression, and the Marxist movement is obliged to give leadership in the struggle of women against patriarchy.

Lynn Beaton will show in Volume II that changes that have been taking place in the social relations and productive forces of capitalism have provided the conditions for the growth of the struggle against patriarchy. In a hundred different ways, the oppression of women underpins and supports the rule of private property.

The struggle of women against their oppression is an important element of the process which leads to the overthrow of capitalism.

In Volume II Lynn Beaton will explore these questions in depth, but if we look changes in the relations of production over the whole period of class society, we shall see that gender relations have changed in a way determined by the changes in class relations. The counter-proposition, that changes in the relation between men and women have determined the course of the class struggle over extended periods of history, has never been convincingly proved.

2) Political Economy

Karl Marx devoted the major part of his life to his critique of bourgeois political economy and the formulation of his own theory of political economy, as contained in **Capital**.

Since the key to understanding political changes lies in understanding changes in the economic conditions of production, an understanding of political economy is essential for all revolutionaries.

In this section we present a short summary of the main ideas of Marx's theory of political economy, and briefly explore some of the implications this theory has for political policies and orientation today.

Marx's *Capital* cannot be understood as simply a theory of economy since it challenges from the start the very concepts by which economics is approached. As such, it is an application of the method of dialectical materialism, which sheds light on how bourgeois ideology mystifies the real relations between people,

The purpose of Marxist political economy is both to understand the dynamics of capitalist society, and to demystify economy so that we can understand how people can live and work in different ways. This also reveals to us the material roots of the capitalist view of the world – 'common sense' is after all what inks in the 'real world', what ultimately makes economic sense.

Thus, Marxist political economy is concerned with the evolution of political and economic relations over the whole sweep of civilisation from tribal society, through capitalism and later socialism.

In tribal society, people do not exchange the products of labour. Production is carried out collectively, and the distribution of products is made according to custom. While tribal societies may produce a limited number of products for exchange with neighbouring people, or travellers, this is quite peripheral and is not essential to the mode of production.

In feudal society exchange of products is more common, but is not the predominant form of distribution. In the feudal system surplus is appropriated by the rendering of service and payment in kind to the landed aristocracy by peasant producers, and most items of manufacture are produced within a limited village economy, with its own characteristic division of labour.

The Commodity Relation

After an extensive investigation of capitalist and pre-capitalist society, and tracing the evolution of forms of the division of labour and the exchange of

products, Marx arrived at the conclusion that capitalism was the social system in which social relations were most fully shaped by the process of exchange, and in which exchange penetrated into every other social relation.

Accordingly, Chapter I of *Capital* is an explanation and exploration of the commodity relation. A commodity is a product which is produced not for its use, but in order to be exchanged. The producer of a commodity satisfies her or his needs by producing a commodity and exchanging it for another.

Anything can be a commodity – an idea (intellectual property), a person (slave), housework (bought from an agency). The very same things can be produced and consumed without ever being a commodity, so long as they are not bought and sold or exchanged.²¹

Marx points out that a commodity has both ‘use-value’ – or utility, corresponding to its concrete qualities, the particular kind of labour embodied in it, and the nature of the want it satisfies – and ‘exchange-value’ – or value²², for short. Exchange-value manifests itself only through the process of exchange, and has no relation to any physical properties of the commodity. In other words it is social measure.

In the course of the exchange of commodities in the market, commodities embodying qualitatively different kinds of labour are exchanged for one another, thus realising social relations between the producers of the different commodities, bringing into a quantitative proportion the qualitatively different labour of the producers.

This commodity-relation is all-pervasive in capitalist society. Money is a commodity whose use is exchange. The owner of a commodity exchanges it for money, and then exchanges the money for the commodity which has the required use value. The money is of use only to the extent that it can be

21 ‘A thing can be useful, and the product of human labour, without being a commodity. Whoever directly satisfies his or her wants with the produce of their own labour, creates, indeed, use-values, but not commodities. In order to produce the latter, they must not only produce use-values, but use-values for others, social use-values. And not only for others, without more. The medieval peasant produced quit-rent corn for the feudal lord and tithe-corn for the parson. But neither... became commodities... To become a commodity a product must be transferred to another, ... by means of an exchange.’ From *Commodities and Money*, Chapter I of *Capital*.

22 Note that ‘value’ is used here in a particular technical sense, denoting the proportion in which a commodity enters into the process of exchange, and is quite distinct from notions of ‘usefulness’, ‘intrinsic worth’ or ‘wealth’. Any object which is not exchangeable cannot have value in this sense.

exchanged for a useful commodity.

Workers are people who have only one commodity to exchange for money – their bodily energies, or **labour power**²³. The worker sells her or his labour power to a capitalist, by working under the capitalist's direction until those energies are exhausted and have to be replenished. Returning home then, the worker produces more labour power for sale the next day. As a producer of labour power, the worker also becomes a 'productive consumer' buying the necessities of life on the commodity market.²⁴

The capitalist, being essentially the owner of money (more exactly, capital), buys the labour power of the worker in order to combine it with other products in the labour process, adding value to these products so that by selling the product the capitalist realises a profit over and above the value of the worker's labour power, in the form of an expanded quantity of capital.

The value of the worker's labour power is called wages – the workers are paid the cost of keeping themselves and their offspring alive and ready to work the next day, and maintain the supply of labour power for future generations. It is important to understand that the worker does not sell labour, which belongs from the moment it begins to the capitalist, but labour-power.²⁵ The daily

23 'By labour power or capacity for labour is to be understood the aggregate of those mental and physical capabilities existing in a human being, which he or she exercises whenever he or she produces a use-value of any description.

'But in order that our owner of money may be able to find labour power offered for sale as a commodity, various conditions must first be fulfilled. ... labour power can appear upon the market as a commodity only if, and so far as, its possessor, the individual whose labour power it is, offers it for sale, or sells it as a commodity. In order that he or she may be able to do this, he/she must have it at his/her disposal, must be the untrammelled owner of his/her capacity for labour, i.e., of his/her person.' From *The Buying and Selling of Labour-Power*, Chapter VI of *Capital*.

24 The production of labour power is itself a productive process which under capitalism has predominantly been carried out within the relations of the 'nuclear family'. In recent decades this has begun to change as all aspects of workers' lives have become more interconnected with the commodity market, and the closed-off nature of the nuclear family broken down. This issue will be given further consideration in Volume II.

25 'That which comes directly face to face with the possessor of money on the market, is in fact not labour, but the labourer. What the latter sells is his or her labour power. As soon as their labour actually begins, it has already ceased to belong to them; it can therefore no longer be sold by them. Labour is the substance, and the immanent measure of value, but has itself no value. 'From *The Transformation of the*

wage is only indirectly related to the length of the working day. Capitalism has invented the wages form of payment, per hour of labour performed, and this serves to disguise the real nature of the exchange.

The central problem of political economy which had racked the brains of philosophers for ages is this: what is the source of value? More particularly, what is the source of profit, or surplus value? Marx made a very comprehensive study of the views of hundreds of thinkers on this subject, and critically analysed every one of their theories.

The merchant for instance frequently believes that it is shrewd purchasing and marketing, buying at less than real value and selling at more than real value that allows a profit to be made. The industrialist might believe that it is their valuable skill in ‘organising’ production that realises a product worth more than its ingredients, while the investor knows that ‘money makes money’. The farmer might believe that the land itself is the source of new value, and that the rest of society lives off the back of the farmer.

The Labour Theory of Value

Before Marx, Ricardo had discovered the simple truth that human labour is the source of value; since labour is measured by time, labour time is the measure of value.

While nature as a whole, including both the natural environment and the products of past labour, is the pre-condition of labour and the source of wealth, virgin nature has no value, or more exactly exchange-value. For instance, a ton of clay in a remote location has very little exchange value. If you owned it, you couldn’t sell it for a penny. Once the labour of mining it, bringing it to the pottery and shaping and firing it is done, the clay has considerable value – much the same value as any useful product which had taken the same amount of labour to bring to the market for exchange.²⁶

A moment’s reflection will show that it is quite wrong to define the value of a commodity as the labour time expended in its production. In the very first instance actual human labour clearly is variable both in its intensity and in its utility, some skills being able to add more value to a product in the same

Value of Labour Power into Wages, Chapter XIX of Capital.

26 ‘the bringing of the product to the market, belongs to the production process itself ... as an external condition for the existence of the economic process of circulation, this moment may also be reckoned as part of the production costs of circulation.’ Marx, Grundrisse, Original Accumulation of Capital.

time.²⁷

But secondly, and more importantly, the labour power bought by the capitalist may not be utilised in the socially average way – using the current technology, or in the production of commodities in socially appropriate quantities, having regard to the demand for the particular commodity.

Thus the labour time expended in producing a commodity is no guide to its value. If the producer devised a way of producing the commodity with twice the labour time, its value would not be affected at all. On the other hand, if new technology allowed the competitors to produce the commodity in half the time, the value of the commodity would clearly drop.

Expressing the fact that it is the social average labour, utilised at average intensity that determines the value of the commodity, Marx refers to the exchange value as being a measure of **abstract labour**, as opposed to **concrete labour** at a particular time and place. Expressing the fact that it is not the labour expended, but the labour which needs to be expended, Marx refers to socially necessary abstract labour time. Thus exchange value is the socially necessary abstract **labour time** embodied in a commodity.

Surplus Value

The simple key to the creation of surplus value is this: in the conditions prevailing in society at a given stage of its development, people are able to produce enough to live at their accustomed standard, or its equivalent in some useful commodity, in a fraction of a working day. If some means can be found to force people to continue working for longer, then the product of that surplus labour time can be appropriated from them. This surplus product can be transformed into a profit by selling it.

In feudal times this was done quite openly – the serfs were compelled to work a given number of days for the lord-of-the-manor, or render un-paid service in other ways.

Under capitalism, this exploitation is disguised by spreading the payment for labour power over the whole working day, thus covering up the fact that the worker has **earned his or her keep** by lunchtime, and works the rest of the

27 This is partially reflected in differential wage-rates, but only partially since wage differentials reflect in the First instance not the ratio of utility of skills or intensity of labour, but the costs of production of different kinds of labour power, a proportion determined through the activity of the labour market. The tension between costs of production and utility determines movements in the supply and demand of labour of different kinds.

day for gratis!

The process is further disguised by the fact that this surplus is distributed among a whole range of parasites – bankers, landlords, government etc. – by means of charges levied on the capitalist employer which figure in the accounts as ‘costs of production’, in the form of interest, rent, taxes etc, alongside genuine costs such as wages and cost of materials, equipment etc.

Surplus value is in fact a concept totally unknown to bourgeois economics, for the category which the capitalist is interested in is **profit**. The difference between profit and surplus (apart from the above-mentioned obliteration of portions of the surplus passed on to fellow capitalists in the form of spurious costs of production) is this: firstly, profit is measured as a proportion of invested capital, while surplus is measured as a proportion of social labour time; secondly, rate of profit is measured **per annum**.

For instance, if the working class spends 5 hours every day producing the equivalent of their own needs, and say 3 hours producing value which is taken by the capitalist class and their hangers-on for other purposes, the rate of surplus value is $3/5$, or 60%.

However, an individual capitalist who may employ 100 workers for say 8 hours, pay wages worth 500 hours’ labour, and sell the product for the equivalent of 800 hours’ labour, will not achieve, in the time required to turn over the capital, a rate of profit of 60%.

The reason is that the capitalist will, for instance, have to spend the equivalent of 1000 hours labour on purchasing from another capitalist the materials which are used in production. Although this value is returned when the product is sold, no new value is created by the material. Thus, the rate of profit is $300/1500$, that is 20%.

Secondly, this 20% rate of profit is realised in the period required to turn over the invested capital, and thus must be multiplied by the rate of circulation of capital. Every increase in the value of materials consumed in production reduces the rate of profit, without increasing its rate of tum-over; on the other hand every increase in the proportion of constant capital which is fixed (i.e. machinery, buildings, and overheads like research & development) reduces the rate of tum-over. Thus every attempt to increase the rate of tum-over of products by increased socialisation of production must reduce the per annum rate of profit.

Now a contradiction arises here. Long ago, political economists had observed the tendency of the rate of profit to equalise between different branches of industry. It was this obvious fact that led Ricardo’s followers into crisis, for

the labour theory of value is in contradiction with the apparent capacity of capital to generate profit, at a more or less uniform rate, irrespective of the nature or quantity of the labour employed.

The explanation for this contradiction could be given as follows: if two branches of industry at one moment had different rates of profit (due to the fact for instance, that different proportions of investment of **constant capital**²⁸ were required to exploit the same amount of labour power), then immediately capital would flow out of the unprofitable industry into the profitable one. The effect of this on the market for the respective products would then be to create a relative shortage of one product, and drive its price above its value, while over-investment in the other branch would tend to create a glut on the market and drive the selling price below value.

Thus, the rate of profit **appears** to be equal in the two branches of industry, by means of the commodities selling at prices above or below their value, which gives effect to a redistribution of surplus value from one branch of industry to another.

Thus, the good capitalist happily adds up the costs of production, adds 10 per cent, or whatever is supposed to be the 'going rate of profit', and fixes the selling price. If the price is not realised, then the capitalist looks for other avenues where a 'killing' can be made and shifts his/her cash elsewhere. This functions passably well for the purposes of individual greed, but of course, totally mystifies the social process and class relations involved in production.

What are the implications of this kind of analysis for revolutionaries?

Marx's method was not primarily intended as a means of determining short-term trends in the economy, or as an aid to business. It's chief aim was to understand long-term trends in the economy and the inter-relation between the economy and the relation between the social classes.

The categories of bourgeois economics are not excluded from Marx's analysis, but arise only at the highest level, as derivatives, much as the concepts used by a first-aider arise only at the highest level in the study of

28 Constant capital is the value of materials consumed in production of the commodity, the proportion of the value of machinery, tools, buildings etc., consumed by wear and tear during production. It is called constant, because its value is derived from labour done prior to the production of the given commodity, and purchased by the producer. The value is passed into the product and realised in the exchange of the product, but does not expand itself. 'Variable capital' is the value of the labour power expended in production of the commodity, i.e. wages. This portion of capital expands itself in the labour process.

medicine, which proceeds from basic principles of anatomy and physiology, pharmacology and pathology.

To demonstrate the implications of Marxist political economy, let us look at just a couple of specific questions.

Is it possible for the working class to win a generalised wage increase, without losing it again through inflation?

The root of the class struggle is the struggle over the division of the product of labour. The fact that the value of money is itself a variable, as is the amount of wealth corresponding to a given quantity of labour, obscures this underlying division. Nevertheless, despite ups and downs reflecting the state of the labour market, the average standard of living of workers clearly reflects the relative success of the working class in clawing back a share of the surplus. In doing so, the working class may consolidate this value won back from the capitalist class into the necessary labour time, which is historically and culturally variable, as regards the material wealth of the workers. Clearly, such gains can and have been made, and it is at the expense of the capitalist class that such gains are made.

The working class is selling a commodity – labour power – and the ups and downs in the selling price will reflect short-term imbalances in supply and demand, just as is the case for the sellers of other commodities.

Equally, if the value of money falls, the price of labour power will tend to rise, just as will the price of other commodities. The bourgeoisie's assertion that it is solely the sellers of labour power that are responsible for price hikes is no more than the response to be expected from the class that lives by means of buying labour power.

However, what everyone knows is that in times of inflation, it is above all a question of the value of money falling, not the value of the commodities measured by money rising, that is the issue.

In the old days (pre-World War II) the great currencies of the world were fixed at a given rate against gold. Under these conditions it was easy to see that the value of money was simply the quantity of labour contained in the gold equivalent of the money which ultimately gave the money value. As soon as the link with gold was broken, the money pretty soon wasn't worth the paper it was written on.

From after the 1929 Wall Street Crash the US dollar was fixed at \$38 per ounce of gold. After 1944, the US dollar replaced gold as the medium of international exchange.

The fixed rate of exchange between gold and the US dollar was maintained up

until 1968. But the US government was printing vast quantities of dollars, and the banks creating even larger quantities of credit, as part of a strategy to ‘stimulate’ the economy and maintain the post-war boom. At a certain point the link was burst, and the value of dollar in terms of gold collapsed to a fraction of the nominal \$38 per ounce, before the demand for payment in gold was stemmed by means of the steady injection of gold into the market, and other fiscal and monetary measures which have plunged the world economy into a long-term recession.

The real cause of endemic inflation is the continued creation of Fictitious capital. By a variety of means the capitalist class and their governments expand the quantity of paper capital in circulation, without actually extracting the corresponding surplus value from the working class. This is a form of political retreat, for at the same time the capitalists are devaluing their own property, but in doing so they avoid the job of a direct attack on wages.

Apart from seeing the value of their wages being continually diluted by this inflation, the workers face another problem. The quantity of capital seeking its share of surplus is continually being expanded and bearing down on the backs of the workers as an ever-growing burden.

What is the explanation for the historic tendency towards stagnation, and the falling rate of profit?

The rate of surplus value reflects both the division of the product of social labour between the classes, and – taking into account also the length of the working day, the average standard of living and relative size of the working class – the overall productivity of labour. For if (say) 2 hours work a day is sufficient for workers to produce the equivalent of their own needs, while the remaining (say) 6 hours is spent producing surplus for the enjoyment of the leisured classes and their parasites and servants, then this indicates progress of a very important kind, even if the workers have yet to reap the benefit of that progress.

However, as explained above, the rate of profit is quite a different measure, for it does not measure the social division of the product between the classes, or the productivity of labour, but the **apparent** ability of capital, in the hands of **an individual** capitalist, to grow and enrich the lucky owner.

It is an essential aspect of social progress, and the progress of the productivity of human labour, that a greater proportion of past labour as against living labour enters into the labour process. Put another way, the labour process becomes continually more elaborated, more social, more expressive of the totality of humanity in every act of individual labour. However, under capitalism, past labour is the property not of the working class, or ‘the people

as a whole', but of the capitalist class.

The result of this is that as capital is circulated in the course of production, an increasing quantity of capital must be retained by the individual capitalist in order to remain in the business of exploiting a given amount of labour power.

Although the workers produce a greater and greater quantity of surplus value (which the capitalist must convert to money by selling the product) the **rate of profit continually declines**, being a proportion of capital invested.

Every measure that a capitalist takes to cut wage costs, and increase the productivity of labour, either by improving techniques, or by using labour-saving machinery, increases her/his rate of profit only temporarily.

Once the competitors are using the improved methods, the rate of profit returns not just to where it was, but to an even lower level.

Thus, in the struggle by each capitalist to increase their rate of profit, with the cutting of wage-costs by means of economies in labour-time, being the most popular of all strategies, the overall rate of profit is actually forced **down**.

The reason for this is that while the surplus gets larger and larger in proportion to the quantity of labour power expended, the surplus becomes smaller and smaller in proportion to the total capital, due to the ever increasing size of the **constant capital** – both the value of materials turned over, which increases in direct proportion to the productivity of labour, and the value of the means of production, which increases in proportion to the degree of socialisation of the labour process.

The falling rate of profit (a direct measure of social progress) is made even more disastrous for the capitalists by the fact that more and more capital must be accumulated in order the stay still, so to speak, since the average level of investment required for profitable operation is continually growing.

This is a boon for the money lender, but a double-edged one, for having enmeshed millions in their web of debt, the banks find that no-one can pay.

Thus is explained the historic tendency of capitalism towards stagnation, compounded with inflation due to the capitalists' retreat before the strength of the working class.

It must be noted however, that this feature which is a lethal disease for capitalism due to the fact that the profit is the motive force for capitalist industry, corresponds to a measure of social progress, once the character of social property as capital is abolished, and is transformed instead into simple measure of the accumulation of social wealth.

Capitalist Crises

During Marx's day the capitalist economies were subject to a business cycle which went from boom to slump and back to boom on a fairly regular 10 year cycle. These cycles were becoming more and more severe with the increased concentration of capital until capitalism entered a new stage of monopoly capitalism or imperialism²⁹. This new stage gave the world the First World War, and then a decade later, the Great Depression. From this time forward the capitalist class used the state not only as a weapon against the working class, against the colonial masses and their imperialist rivals, but as a means of regulating the economy in a more or less planned way.

During the twenty years following the Second World War, bourgeois economists were unanimous in asserting that Keynesianism³⁰ could do away with the destructive effects of the capitalist business cycle.

When the tendency towards slump reasserted itself with a vengeance in the late sixties and early seventies Keynesianism was blamed, and tight-money, anti-inflation, monetarist economics, the opposite of Keynesianism, was embraced, although many reformists still hang on to Keynes, as if these policies could bring back the post-war boom.

Nowadays, the business cycle is still with us, but while somewhat modified by government policies, the business cycle is today an international phenomenon of far greater scope than the policies of any single government. But more important than this periodic crisis is the historic crisis of capitalism.

Unemployment is now endemic in every country in the world, and inexorably increasing. The rate of profit is also inexorably in decline, through every cycle of boom and recession. This is something quite distinct from the cyclical crises of capitalism. No amount of manipulation of money-supply, public spending, interest rates and so forth can conjure away this historic crisis.

Capitalism is inherently a system of crisis. Capitalism cannot function 'in equilibrium'. Capital is capital only so long as it continues to circulate and expand itself. Capital that cannot be invested becomes solely the object of the personal gratification of its owner, and a capitalist who does not re-invest his or her capital, and for that matter in the most profitable way, will fairly soon

29 See section 6 for an explanation of Lenin's theory of imperialism.

30 After John Maynard Keynes (1883-1946). His *General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money*, 1936, asserted that full employment could be maintained by gradual controlled inflation combined with the use of public expenditure as a counter to down-turns in the business cycle.

be separated from that capital by someone who will invest it.

Thus capital ‘seeks’ avenues for investment on a wider and wider scale, penetrating into every part of the world, every aspect of life, creating needs where none previously existed, **commodify-ing** things which not previously subject to being bought and sold. Parts of the economy previously handed over to the state for being too unprofitable are eagerly snatched back by capitalism for exploitation.

Capitalism in the Twentieth Century

In 1916 Lenin analysed the new stage into which the world economy had entered – imperialism. The basic ideas of Lenin’s analysis are briefly summarised at the beginning of section 6 below. The dominance of giant multi-national companies, especially finance capital, wars for the control of raw materials and inter-colonialist conflict – these are the ingredients of what Lenin called an ‘epoch of wars and revolutions’.

Despite enormous resources devoted to the collection of economic data, the study of economic theory, analysis and planning, not to mention great resources for direction of economy, the bourgeoisie is no closer to understanding the basic laws of the historical development of economy than it was 100 years ago.

Marx’s Method

We have given a very schematic explanation of the main features of Marxist political economy so as to familiarise the reader with the most central concepts. It has to be said however that it was not for nothing that Marx himself took a couple of thousand pages to elaborate the ideas sketched above.

It will be observed that the concepts Marx uses are not empirical categories as in bourgeois economics. The working class is not defined as in bourgeois sociology as such and such an income group or employee in such and such category of job, but **abstractly**, as the **living** component of the labour process viewed from a social-historical perspective.

Surplus value is not defined like profit or GDP or ‘value-added’ or any of the categories of bourgeois economics, but again **abstractly** out of a consideration of the labour process as a whole – the surplus labour time as a proportion of the socially necessary labour time – and is impossible to calculate in any particular instance.

Value is not the ‘average price’; nor is it the cost of production or even labour time, but the ‘socially necessary quantity of abstract labour time’, again, a

quantity that is impossible to determine in relation to a given product in any concrete act of production.

The writing of *Capital* was not just an exercise in economic theory, but the most important application of the **dialectical materialist method**. In the writing of *Capital*, Marx was elaborating this method of investigation which would be his most important legacy for the future. Marx in fact wrote very little ‘philosophy’ as such. His philosophical ideas come to us through their demonstration in the writing of *Capital*.

Bourgeois Ideology

An explanation of the Marxist philosophical method, dialectical materialism, is the subject of the next section, but it is appropriate to point out here an important aspect of the significance of Marx’s political economy.

In the previous section it was proposed that it is the social relations of production which are the fundamental determinants of ideology. Marx’s analysis of the essence and nature of capitalist social relations consequently provides the key to understanding the ideological phenomena of capitalist society – **bourgeois ideology**.

Firstly it will be observed that the commodity relation is all-pervasive in capitalist society. Every action a person takes succeeds or fails in achieving the doer’s intent according to how it corresponds with the requirements of the market. Thus people are constantly learning to adapt their ideas to the laws of commodity exchange. Labour is co-operative, but the value of the product is determined not by the logic of co-operation, but by that of commodity exchange. Thus, despite the increasingly co-operative nature of work in modern capitalist society, be that in large corporations or in public enterprises, it is the logic of individualism, the viewpoint of the individual capitalist bringing a product to the market, which predominates.

For the mass of workers, selling their labour power on the market, the individualism of the bourgeoisie is challenged by the logic of the solidarity of the workers which reinforces the virtues of collectivism, but in fact, this ideology cannot rise higher than the concept of the cartel of the sellers of the commodity labour power. Trade union ideology is thus a variant on the theme of bourgeois ideology – albeit an anti-bourgeois variant.

The commodity relation is a relation between people, expressing the division of labour between people through the exchangeability of their labour. However, this social relation is mediated through the product, the commodity. Thus, it appears to the producers that they have a relation to the product, and to the consumer that they have a relation to the object of consumption, but the

relation between the producer-consumer and the consumer-producer is unseen, mystified.

It appears as a relation between things. This appearance of social relations between people as ‘material relations between people and social relations between things’ is called commodity fetishism. Although an illusion, it is an illusion that has a real basis in capitalist society. One example of such fetishism is the idea of a ‘job’ as if it were something to be found, lost, sold or given; another is the so-called ‘power of money’.

Another phenomenon of life under capitalism is that, for the vast majority, the wage-workers, their own labour is the property of another; having sold their labour power, both its application in the labour process, and the product, belong to the employer. This is true not only at the level of the individual, but at the level of social classes. Thus the product of the working class appears before it as the attribute of the capitalist class – ‘the workers make the rod for their own back’. Marx refers to this process as alienation. Although the exclusive producers of social wealth, the workers are alienated from society, just as the products of their labour are alienated from them. It is this alienation which, at the root of the problem of the development of class consciousness amongst the workers.

It is important to note here that it is not sufficient just to show that such-and-such an idea is ‘wrong’. It is necessary to see the real basis of the illusion. Only in this way we can deepen our understanding of social and political phenomena and understand their economic roots.

The Green Critique of Capitalist Economics

In recent years, supporters of the Green movement have made a critique of capitalist economics mainly to the effect that ‘value’, as expressed in various ways in capitalist economics, such as in measurement of the GNP and prices, does not give a valid expression of the real worth of something.

From what has been said above, this criticism is true. Value is not a measure of ‘real worth’. The point is of course not to prove that capitalist economics is wrong or contradictory, but to understand the source of the illusion, that value is a reflection of the actual laws of capitalist economic relations. Capitalist economic theory is a product of capitalist economic relations, not vice versa.

Having observed that the logic of capitalist economic law is the destruction of nature, a critique of capitalism which aimed to reveal the source of this alienation, and reveal how to transform those social relations into social relations not antipathetic to nature would be much more fruitful.

To call upon the Office of Statistics to re-calculate the GNP taking into

account natural resources is barking up the wrong tree, for it wouldn't make a blind bit of difference. On the other hand, the state does have real powers to influence prices and the social division of labour by the use of the tax mechanism, and the nationalisation of natural resources, forcing capitalists to pay for what they use, which could in fact go a considerable way to protecting the environment from the rapaciousness of capitalism, although it wouldn't do a lot for the laissez faire philosophy popular amongst many Greens.

In most cases, while measures to protect the environment harm the interests of specific sections of the capitalist class, they do not fundamentally affect the profitability of capitalism. For example, the patents on CFC substitutes are currently being sold for billions, and the campaign for banning CFCs is supported by the big chemical companies, since large profits can be made through substitution.

What does run counter to capitalism in the Green movement is the fact that 'harmony with nature' is incompatible with capitalist anarchy. A 'Green society' would be a highly organised, highly 'regulated' society; not regulated by bureaucratic command, but regulated nonetheless. Such a society would also require a very high cultural level, inconsistent with any kind of oppression or alienation, but it would be very much an 'information society'.

Finally, we have to answer the question as to why the Stalinist countries are even more destructive of Nature than the capitalist countries. The Green analysis is that both are 'industrial' societies, and that it is the logic of 'industrial society' that is at fault, not class divisions. Now, there is a kernel of truth in this, that to a significant extent the social relations of the Stalinist countries reflect the level of development of the productive forces, and manifest many of the same problems of alienation and 'hierarchy' found in advanced capitalist societies.

In any case, the economics of the Stalinist bloc countries is determined primarily by the dictates of the world market which is dominated by the relations of capitalism. To the extent that any economy is 'developed' it must become an integral part of this world market, and its internal forces shaped accordingly.

The Stalinist bureaucrat is a very similar social type to the capitalist manager. The policy of 'socialism in one country' which has locked the Stalinist bloc into a cultural-historical back water, the resulting tendency towards quantitative as opposed to qualitative development of industry, the stifling of independent opposition, all these have provided the conditions in which abuse of nature has taken on an even grosser form than in the old capitalist

countries. We will return to this subject later.

The Value of the Labour of Women³¹

The Women's movement has made a number of critiques of capitalist economics, quite aside from the very practical critique that women have made of actual capitalist relations.

The oppression of women by men and the exploitation of women's labour pre-dates capitalism, at least as far back as the dawn of civilisation. Thus patriarchy has been an integral part of capitalist society from its inception.

The lower value given to women's labour is an important prop of patriarchy in capitalist society. Many have observed that any means of giving a lower value to the labour of any section of the working class benefits capitalism, any means of dividing the working class strengthens capitalism, any system of dependence disempowers the working class, but in essence, these true statements are beside the point.

What is essential to capitalism is 'cash payment' – the commodity relation. Everywhere capitalism goes, relations inconsistent with 'cash payment', however 'juicy' they may be as potential levers of exploitation, are broken down in favour of the laws of the market, and replaced by the even more brutal relations of bourgeois right.

What strikes the eye, at the economic level, is not that patriarchy is part of capitalism, but that patriarchy actually runs **counter** to capitalism! That the relative exclusion of women from the labour market, the continuation of domestic servitude and bondage in marriage, etc., reflects a **lack of development** in bourgeois relations; that capitalist social relations are **moderated** by co-existence with pre-bourgeois relations of gender oppression.

The tendency in recent decades towards the more complete integration of women's labour into the capitalist labour market – making domestic appliances in factories through sale of their labour power, instead of the former practice of domestic service rendered to husbands – is some evidence that capitalism has reached a point where this belated development can no longer be contained.³²

31 A comprehensive consideration of the socialisation of women's labour, and the changing relation of women to the forces of production and the historical and political implications of these changes will be given in Volume II, by Lynn Beaton.

32 In 1974 Hammersley Iron actively supported changes in legislation to allow

The obvious conclusion is that equal pay, fully and wholly, is a perfectly valid, attainable and progressive goal for women, and by no means must wait ‘till after the revolution’.

The gender division of labour to be found in every society in the world today, capitalist or otherwise, is not inherently part of capitalism. There appears to be no reason why capitalism could not exploit male and female workers equally. Nevertheless, in fighting to establish the equal worth of women’s labour with men’s labour, women draw attention to the contradiction between worth and value, which appear, under capitalism, to be identical.

While, in a sense, the full and equal entry of women into the labour market represents a further development of capitalism, it must be observed that it is precisely the **fullest development** of capitalism that is the source of the possibility of overthrowing capitalism.

The break-up of the family hearth, the full entry of women into the labour force, we have every reason to believe, will **heighten** the contradictions imminent in capitalism, and prepare the way for the transcendence of both capitalism, and patriarchy.

Production and Distribution of Surplus Value

Surplus value is the product of a society over and above what is necessary for people to maintain themselves. There are thus two aspects to the production of surplus value – the productivity of labour and the historically determined standard of living.

The producing class may retain for its own consumption more of the product and raise its standard of living, reducing the rate of surplus value. On the other hand, if the productivity of labour is increased while the quantity of products consumed by the producers remains constant, then the rate of surplus value is increased. The wealth of the class owning the surplus value is determined by the balance between the increase of the productivity of labour and the struggle of the producers to raise their own standard of living.

The production of surplus value is not determined by the form of exploitation or ownership of the means of production. These forms characterise the mode of production and are conditioned by the productivity of labour. The form of ownership of the means of production may therefore facilitate or obstruct the production of surplus value, but they do not in essence determine it.

women to work in mines, following an initiative from the trade unions, because they perceived the obvious economic waste in keeping ‘unemployed’ wives at home in the remote mining towns built around the mine.

Surplus value relates to the division of the social product between the main classes in society. How that surplus value is distributed is another question. Distribution of surplus value between different sections of the ruling classes is the basis of internal conflicts within the ruling class.

For instance, the landowners lay hold of a portion of the surplus value by means of charging rent. Rent is not a form of creation of surplus value, but a form of its distribution from its source in the labour process.

The depressed wage rates in labour intensive industries, the higher rates of profit in newer, expanding branches of industry, the equalisation of the rate of profit between industries with differing organic composition of capital (the proportion of the constant and variable components of the capital), all these are forms of redistribution of surplus between different sections of the ruling class which flow out of the operation of the law of value in a heterogeneous, changing economy.

The maintenance of a state machine is in essence a part of the surplus labour of a society, since it belongs to the efforts of the ruling class to maintain the conditions of exploitation, not exploitation as such. Surplus value is created in production; exchange of the product realises the surplus in money; part of this money is paid to the state in the form of taxes; these taxes pay for purchase of products including labour power in order to allow a section of the people to engage in the functioning of the state – an activity which in its concrete form is indistinguishable from any type of production.

This labour power purchased by the capitalist state is no different from any other labour power, and is paid for at its value (in general). But it is not used for production of new value. The same is true of the labour power of workers whose labours are directed at satisfying the wants of capitalist loafers. The same is also true of workers who are engaged in work that is **intended** by the employer to be profitable, but turns out to be wasted, for instance in the production of a commodity the market for which is already glutted.³³

33 'The pay of the common soldier is reduced to a minimum, determined purely by the production costs necessary to procure him/her. ... In bourgeois society itself, all exchange of personal services for revenue – including labour for personal consumption, cooking, sewing etc, garden work etc, up to and including all the unproductive classes, civil servants, physicians, lawyers, scholars etc – belongs under this rubric, ... all these workers, from the least to the highest, obtain for themselves a share of the surplus product, of the capitalists' revenue ... [who] thereby spend the fruits of their capital. It does not change the nature of the relation that the proportions in which revenue is exchanged for this kind of living labour are themselves

Unproductive labour may take various forms and appear by a variety of means. It's concrete form is absolutely indistinguishable from that of productive labour. Indeed if 1000 workers produce too much of a commodity by a factor of two, it is absolutely impossible to say which 500 workers was unproductive and which not. And this is equally true even if the product is immensely useful, but rots in the warehouse because no one can buy it.

Thus it is important to understand the concept of surplus value as fundamentally a concept describing the relation between classes. It is not appropriate to see surplus as produced by worker A but not by worker B, insofar as A and B labour within the same set of class relations, in the same market, and their labour is essentially collective social labour.

The labour of state school teachers and public hospital nurses must today be considered, in general as part of the necessary labour of the working class, labour which is part of its necessary labour time, necessary as part of the historically determined standard of living, and necessary also as part of the historically developed labour process.

Historically, this is part of surplus which has been clawed back by the producers. During the post World War Two period, it has been in large measure taken out of the economy in which value is accumulated by capitalists. The ruling class has also understood that such conditions are necessary components of the productivity of labour. The privatisation of such services however means the return of these services to the bourgeois economy proper.

It is not appropriate to refer to such socially necessary labour which does not directly produce value as **unproductive**, although it is unproductive in the sense that it does not create value which may enter into the accumulation of capital. Within this class relation, the relations of private property determine that labour power is owned and sold by individual workers, qualified only by the practice of trade unionism in the labour market.

It is not sensible to ask the question as to whether school teachers, or other state employees working in obviously socially useful functions, but not producing commodities, produce a surplus. Their labour is a part of the social labour of the working class, and is a component of the surplus extracted from the healthy educated workers when they sell the labour power they have acquired in a factory or office. The surplus can only be transformed into value

determined by the general laws of production.' Marx, Grundrisse, Original Accumulation of Capital.

at the point at which it enters into the production of a **commodity**. That education may be a saleable commodity is demonstrated by the profitability, actual or potential, of private schools and colleges. But education is not a commodity where it is offered free of charge.

The growth of the Service Sector and the Decline of Manufacturing

This phenomenon which is recognised by everyone has not up until now been given a satisfactory analysis by Marxists. It shall be necessary to make an investigation into the data that is available before a definitive explanation of its significance can be given. Nevertheless, it is possible at this point to clarify some points of Marxist theory that will clarify the terms for such an investigation.

– extended development of labour process

It was mentioned above that social progress is reflected in the declining rate of profit, because every concrete act of production uses the products of past labour, and this tendency becomes more and more developed as the productive process develops.

A further manifestation of this same process of the social development of production is that every concrete act of production combines the labour of more and more people, not only in the form of material products – tools, machinery, components and materials – but also in the form of ‘services’. To the extent that they are not carried out within a single capitalist enterprise, such services will appear as the product of a distinct sector of the economy, and enter into manufacturing as such either as service-commodities purchased by a manufacturing enterprise or as public services paid for out of taxes.

The labour of an agency worker supplied from the service sector, enters fully into the value of the product, although the surpluses extracted by the service sector, not the manufacturer who buys the service.

The labour of teachers and nurses is contained in the productive activity of the healthy educated worker and contributes to the surplus extracted from the working class at the point of production, just as it contributed to the necessary labour of the working class, as part of the workers’ historically determined standard of living. Only a part of this labour becomes transformed into value however. If the state did not provide an adequate service out of taxes, the capitalist would have to buy health and training services for the workforce, and allow a surplus to be extracted by the supplier, or supply the service in-house.

A typical manufacturing firm today purchases all kinds of services from other capitalists, funds all kinds of social activity via its taxes, and pays to the workers a portion of their wages which are spent in purchase of other services. The labour of all workers providing services are a part of the production of necessary and surplus value.

It would be wrong to see manufacturing as having a special or privileged position in relation to the production of value. Services and manufactured goods are all commodities if they are produced for sale. Consumption of a service is not essentially any different from the consumption of a thing.³⁴

– attraction of capital to labour-intensive branches of industry

Wherever changes in the productive forces make it possible to produce a given value with less capital expenditure, then such an activity will attract investment. The resulting starvation of capital affecting the ‘smoke stack’ industries requiring heavy capital investment will be counteracted by the tendency for the equalisation of the rate of profit. Capital glut depressing the rate of profit here, capital scarcity lifting it there. But this may occur only under the pressure of manifest decline affecting those industries requiring heavy capital investment. Conversely, the intense competition of the crowded service sector forces down the rate of profit to the social average, by means of a depressed productivity of labour.

Fewer and fewer people work on the land, in the USA about 3 per cent, and US agriculture could feed the world. Agriculture consumes vast quantities of the products of manufacture, and indeed the secret of a productive agricultural sector is a large and efficient manufacturing sector. It would be inappropriate to simply characterise this process as “the decline of agriculture”, since in a sense it is also the “perfection of agriculture”.

Similarly, to some degree, the decline of the manufacturing is an illusion. We are manufacturing more than ever before, as regards the quantity of goods. But we don’t all manufacture [produce goods for sale] directly; many participate in manufacturing by providing services.

I could buy a take-away meal, or pay for the services of a cafe. I could buy a car, or hire it. It is a mark of social progress that increasingly the ‘service’

34 ‘If A exchanges a value or money, i.e. objectified labour, in order to obtain a service from B, i.e. living labour, then this can belong ... within the relation of simple circulation. Both in fact exchange only use-values with one another. ... The difference ... appears as a merely formal difference.’ Marx, Grundrisse, Original Accumulation of Capital.

option is more rational economically than the 'goods' option. The exchange of product in the form of services rather than goods is a change in the social relations of production, but not in the productive processes such.

– the increasing commodification of social relations

Nowadays we increasingly hear of a hospital choosing to contract-out its cleaning and sack its permanently employed cleaners, or a brewery selling off its fleet of cars and trucks, sacking its mechanics and drivers, and contracting-out its delivery side.

Here the capitalist transforms even the management function into a commodity. Privatisation is the usual context for this practice. Union busting by capitalist enterprises is another. But in any case, this commodification is the capitalist way of doing things.

I could buy a ready-made meal, or buy food and cook it. I could repair my own car, or have it repaired by a garage. The choice of the service option here is different since it is the choice of purchase of a commodity rather than immediate production for need. Such immediate satisfaction of need lies outside capitalist economy, outside the production, exchange and accumulation of value.

The non-capitalist economy which produces its products but does not distribute them by means of exchange will have (according to the categories of bourgeois economics) a very small GNP. Much wealth, but little value. In the most undeveloped economy, only the surplus of production is exchanged, in external trade, and takes on a value-form at all. In a socialist society of the future, likewise, no value is produced, although wealth would be great.

In either case, the further penetration of the commodity relation into production, replacing the immediate satisfaction of a need with the purchase of a service is the same. Domestic manufacture has long ago been almost totally eliminated; the further room for the expansion of the capitalist market, and extraction of surplus value, lies in the commodification of domestic labour.

– limitation of productivity of service-labour

Over and above these tendencies there is also a tendency towards a greater proportion of social labour being expended in the provision of commodities consumed in the form of services. And this is true even if we confine ourselves to commodities of 'final consumption'.

With the increasing productivity of labour, a given quantity of any good can be produced with a lesser and lesser quantity of human labour. Even the

productivity of service-workers becomes more and more intense. Nevertheless, one teacher today teaches fewer pupils than did their predecessors 50 years ago, and there are more pupils; on the other hand, while there are more goods in use in the education sector, they are manufactured with the expenditure of less human labour.

The same quantity of value is contained in a day's labour provided by a service worker, but less value in any given good which is the produce of the labour of a manufacturing worker. A loaf of bread has the same usefulness (wealth) today as it did 50 years ago, but there is less labour by bakers expended to create that (smaller) value.

Thus there are different processes all contained in this shift in the mode of production from exchange-of-goods to exchange-of-services.

Privatisation and the Falling Rate of Profit

One of the most striking aspects of economic change right across the world today is the spread of privatisation. Even the crisis of the Stalinist economies is a form of privatisation. It would be quite inadequate to explain this simply as a policy choice. Private enterprise has always been the preferred option for capitalism.

Firstly, the concentration and accumulation of capital has given the world vast capitalist enterprises, the largest of which dwarf the economic weight of states even with the considerable social expenditure states have been involved in. This means that there are plenty of capitalist firms capable of carrying out any function normally seen as the preserve of the state.

Secondly and most significantly, with the declining average rate of profit, industries which were previously unable to attract capital are now attractive propositions for capitalist investment. The same point was made above in relation to the socialisation of women's labour.

When is an economy capitalist and when is it not?

A subject of some controversy over the past 60 years has been whether the economy of the USSR or the Eastern European 'People's Democracies' should be characterised as capitalist. To put it differently, what is the essential characteristic of an economy by which we characterise it as feudal, capitalist, socialist or whatever?

As we have said above, capitalism is essentially a mode of production in which the exchange of commodities, the market, reaches its fullest, most complete and all pervasive development.

The transformation of labour power into a commodity leads to the exploitation of wage labour, the characteristic form of exploitation under capitalism. The wage form of payment is not genuine unless there is a genuine **labour market**, into which the labourer enters as a **seller of labour power**, labour power of which the labourer is the ‘untrammelled owner’.

The growth of the ‘black market’ in the Stalinist countries represents the creeping growth of commodity production, i.e. capitalism, within the stratified economy. However, for a long period of time the ‘black market’ was marginal in relation to the great majority of the economy which was stratified and lacked a market for goods, services or labour power. Even the private ownership predominant in the agricultural sector of Eastern Europe was not really subject to market relations.

Thus, the economies of Eastern Europe and the USSR were not capitalist, although they were unable to transcend capitalism, due to the domination of capitalism in the world market, and the backwardness of their own productive forces. The class nature of the state is a distinct question from that of the nature of the economy. These questions are dealt with in sections 8 and 9.

Marxism, Planned Economy and Workers Control

It is not possible to give a sound analysis of the economic crisis of the Stalinist bloc without an analysis of the whole history of the USSR, as presented in the later chapters of this work. However, it is self-evident that what collapsed recently in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union was not socialism or planned economy or Marxism, but bureaucratic centralism – command economy and Stalinism.

There is nothing in common between Marxism and Stalinism. Bureaucratic-centralist command economy was imposed upon the Russian Revolution only by means of the political and physical obliteration of Marxism.

The fraudulent equation of Marxism and Stalinism is nowadays conventional wisdom, not only in the domain of the capitalist TV networks, but among the people of Eastern Europe who have had this abomination stuffed down their throats by the bureaucracy for decades.

However, when we say that the Marxist view of economic planning and control, under socialism or during the transitional period under the dictatorship of the proletariat, is not command economy, ‘statism’ and bureaucratism, then we have to recognise that **there is currently no Marxist theory of proletarian economic management.**

Lenin’s *State and Revolution*, a defence of Marx’s views against reformist misrepresentation, like the originals written in the nineteenth century by Marx

and Engels, is extremely abstract and indicates only the broadest outlines and principles, and does not touch upon the problems that have arisen since 1917. Economy during the period from the insurrection in 1917 until the institution of the New Economic Policy in 1923 was totally subordinated to the requirements of Civil War. The end of the Civil War and the collapse of 'military communism' meant that the issues of economy under the dictatorship of the proletariat were to be confronted for the first time. The first result was the NEP.

Even before the inception of the NEP, all the conditions which led to the growth of bureaucratism and the degeneration of the revolution were already fully developed.

Trotsky's writings over the next decade criticising the policies of the Soviet regime under Stalin are an important contribution towards a Marxist theory of economy in a workers state, but do not go further than criticisms and proposals in relation to various problems, and are all confined to the problems of developing an enormously backward and war-devastated economy.

In *Revolution Betrayed*, Trotsky makes a finished analysis of the social basis of the Stalinist regime and exposes the fraudulent nature of Stalinist economic theory. Again, however, this does not, and could not go so far as an actual Marxist theory of proletarian economy.

The Marxist theory of economy under dictatorship of the proletariat cannot be developed except in connection with the relevant practice of building a healthy workers state and it would be false to propose that we develop such a theory.

However, it would be equally false to suppose that we cannot go further than the abstract propositions of for instance, Engels' *Socialism Utopian & Scientific* written in 1877, or Lenin's *State and Revolution* written in 1917. The experience of 70 years of bureaucratized workers states, and the experience and theoretical gains of capitalist economics, and the struggle of the organised working class in the capitalist countries over the past 70 years offers us considerable scope for the development of such a theory.

The collapse of Stalinism is premised above all on the economic crisis which led ultimately to a state of economic senile dementia. It is impossible to understand or analyse this crisis, far less transcend it with a new social revolution without a counter-theory to those of Stalinism and bourgeois economic theory. To counter the restorationism of Yeltsin or Welesla or 'market socialism' of Gorbachev with well-known truisms from the nineteenth century would be puerile in the extreme and the shortest route to

oblivion for Marxism.

Equally, it would be foolhardy to work towards the seizure of power by the working class in the advanced capitalist countries, in the hope of improvising something on the day, without a critique of all existing economic theory which will prepare the basis for a system of society more advanced than what has gone before.

We need to look closely at some of the concepts we use and some of the positions that the Trotskyist movement has adopted in the struggle in the workers' movement in the past, which may have been affected by the marginalisation of Trotskyism by Stalinism.

Planned Economy

What is the essence of the concept of planned economy as it exists in Marxist theory?

It is certainly not state or bureaucratic regulation or command economy as found in the Stalinist and capitalist economies.

'Planned' economy is often contrasted with the 'anarchy' of capitalist production, and this tends to imply that the conception of socialist economy as equal to command economy is valid. For instance, in *Socialism Utopian & Scientific*: 'Socialised production upon a predetermined plan becomes henceforth possible ... as anarchy in social production vanishes, the political authority of the state dies out.'

In Lenin's *State and Revolution*, the following description of the first phase of communist society gives a picture of Lenin's conception:

'Accounting and control – that is mainly what is needed for the “smooth working”, for the proper functioning, of the first phase of communist society. All citizens are transformed into hired employees of the state, which consists of the armed workers. All citizens have become employees and workers of a single country-wide “syndicate”. All that is required is that they should work equally, do their proper share of work, and get equal pay. The accounting and control necessary for this have been simplified by capitalism to the utmost and reduced to the extraordinarily simple operations – which any literate person can perform – of supervising and recording, knowledge of the four rules of arithmetic, and issuing appropriate receipts.

'When the majority of people begin independently and everywhere to keep such accounts and exercise such control over the capitalists (now converted into employees) and over the intellectual gentry who preserve their capitalist habits, this control will really become universal, general and popular; and

there will be no getting away from it, there will be “nowhere to go”.

‘The whole of society will have become a single office and a single factory, will equality of labour and pay.’

The above excerpt is in fact not at all compatible with Stalinist command economy, and has the advantage of pointing towards transitional forms by which (the) working class can open the way to the overthrow of capitalism.

The essence of the idea of planned economy is contained in the collective struggle of the working class to exercise its control over the capitalists.

Owing to its social position and the nature of the productive forces, there is an inherent tendency for the working class to strive towards collective action at the widest possible level. Such a struggle inevitably leads to the expropriation of the capitalists and the abolition of capital as such, and has as its inherent aim production for need as opposed to production for profit.

Under conditions when the working class has been excluded from political power by its own state machine, the ideas expressed as in the above quote from Lenin, have been replaced with conceptions of an economy based on bureaucratic administration and regulation.

In this same chapter Lenin emphasises that it is not a question of ‘defining’ socialism, or of ‘introducing’ socialism, but of giving an analysis of the stages through which society must pass, stages of ‘the economic maturity of socialism’, ‘economically and politically inevitable in a society emerging out of the womb of capitalism’. The passing of state power to the working class marks a discontinuity in that process.

Capitalism has evolved a system of economy – the anarchy of the market, within social and political conditions guaranteed by the capitalist state, accumulation of capital, money, credit, etc. This system is the fundamental basis of the maintenance of rule by the capitalist class, and the oppression of the working class; liberation of the working class and the achievement of socialism is synonymous with the abolition of this system.

However, the seizure of state power by the organised working class by no means guarantees a successful transition to socialism, which cannot be facilitated by the ‘abolition’ of the market, and the ‘introduction’ of planned economy. The experience of the last 70 years must now be utilised to further develop our understanding of the stages through which bourgeois relations can be transcended.

‘If really all take part in the administration of the state, capitalism cannot retain its hold. The development of capitalism, in turn, creates the preconditions that enable really “all” to take part ...’

The greatest single barrier to the transition to socialism is the counter-revolutionary struggle of the capitalist class carried out on an international arena, isolating, blockading and in every way undermining conditions for social progress. There is absolutely no possibility of progress towards socialism without the major part of the world's productive forces united in a single socialist economic bloc, and our strategy must be based on this fact.

Workers' Control

There are a number of different ideas contained within the concept of workers control – workers co-operatives, as have existed in occupied factories for instance in Italy or Britain, where employees effectively act collectively as a capitalist; state control or regulation, with universal adult franchise or some other means of the population expressing its control over the state apparatus; interest group, employee or other representation on management bodies.

Once the fetishistic idea of the exclusive right of the owners of capital to exercise control over the means of production is set aside, the concept of workers' control may extend over the whole range of social activity. Initially, it must express the struggle of the producers to wrest control of production away from the capitalists.

The control exercised by capitalism over production comes chiefly from two different directions – from the top-down diktat of the owner or whoever holds the purse strings; and from the outside-in, via the constraints of the market, with or without the active intervention of the capitalists.

Workers control over production pre-supposes the ability of the working class to overcome the pressure of the bourgeoisie from these two directions, and deal effectively with social and political problems arising from the mediation of workers control by representative or other organisations.

There is clearly no socialism without overall workers control, and workers' control can only be ephemeral, partial and unstable under capitalism. Nevertheless, the struggle to establish, extend and make more effective forms of workers' control under capitalism, is a necessary step towards the overthrow of capitalism and the preparation of the pre-conditions for socialism.

Consequently, there is reason for us to re-look at the tendency of many of the Trotskyists to look askance at the struggle for workers' control under capitalism.

It seems that if we cannot expose and wage a fight against spurious forms of workers control under capitalism in favour of more thorough-going workers'

control, then we have no hope of progressing towards genuine workers' control in the event of a seizure of state power by the organised working class – nor for that matter of explaining to the workers why they should seize power.

We need to look at some of the issues raised in the debate around 'workers self-management', and different demands that have been raised in the past both in Eastern Europe and countries gaining their liberation from imperialism, and seeking more democratic forms of economic control at some point in their development.

How is rule by the organised working class reconciled with the need for large scale economic planning and co-ordination, if we accept that mediation of this process by a state bureaucracy can be problematic? Here we have the intersection of the political and economic problems at its sharpest.

We must pre-suppose a conflict between any local or sectional grouping of the working class, with the workers state, and that we have to think in terms of democratic forms of struggle within the class, which are as applicable to straight economic questions as they are to political questions of less obvious economic content.

The Market

The market, i.e. the exchange of commodities between independent producers, cannot be abolished by a political act. Transcendence of market relations will take a comparatively long drawn out historical period. During this time, the market plays a vital role, not least of which is its role as a mechanism of democratic control by the mass of consumers over the minority of producers. At the same time, as the transmission medium of bourgeois social relations and thus of bourgeois ideology, it is the ever-fertile breeding ground of counterrevolution.

Gorbachev, in typical Stalinist fashion seeks to simply abolish the bourgeois nature of the market with words. Needing a market, the Stalinists only discuss how to create a new bourgeoisie, or whether imperialism can do it for them.

We need to find how the market can be overcome by workers control if the workers hold state power. We have the benefit of many decades of the negative experience of price fixing, the monetary and fiscal policy of various reformist and other capitalist governments as well as the corrupt methods of self-deception usually practiced in the deformed workers states.

A social revolution makes possible an explosion of initiative and enterprise unknown to capitalism, which must be made the foundation of an economy controlled by the working class. Why is 'public enterprise' so conservative in

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the current world situation, as opposed to ‘private enterprise’? We need to think about economic forms which can give expression to the creative capacity we see in the organised working class when it mobilises, and maintaining that creative energy indefinitely.

3) Dialectical Materialism

In this section shall present an introduction to the philosophical basis of Marxism. I shall approach the subject from the history of philosophy, showing how Marxism arose out of the past development of philosophy. In this way it is intended to demonstrate a central part of the dialectical materialist method, namely, its historical approach to understanding things. The history presented is somewhat schematic, since the object is to bring out only the main lines of development. The real history is of course always more complex, more ‘illogical’ and devious, than any telling of the story.

Commenting on the history of philosophy Hegel said³⁵: ‘The refutation of a philosophy, therefore, only means that its barriers are crossed, and its special principle reduced to a factor in the completer principle that follows. Thus the history of philosophy, in its true meaning, deals not with a past, but with an eternal and veritable present; and in its results, resembles not a museum of the aberrations of the human intellect, but a Pantheon of godlike figures.’

In the spirit of this idea of the great idealist philosopher, Hegel, the philosophy of Marxism must be seen, not as some brilliant ‘revelation’, but as a continuation of bourgeois and pre-bourgeois philosophy. In fact, the history of philosophy provides a valuable reference for understanding how human knowledge and theory develops. The real history of the development of thought is expressed most graphically in the ideas of those who throughout history have expressed the essence of the various ‘ways of thinking’, and grappled with new problems and the contradictions within existing theory. In a sense, every time an individual is confronted with a theoretical problem, she or he must partially recapitulate the history of philosophy.

Marxist philosophy is a creative theory which is concerned with understanding how human concepts form a more and more adequate image of the external world. Ideas are understood as moving forms, changing in response to the continual changes in the world outside thought, manifested in the internal contradictions within every concept.

Materialism and Idealism

‘We simply cannot get away from the fact that everything that sets people acting must find its way through their brain – even eating and drinking, which begin as a consequence of the sensation of hunger or thirst transmitted

35 Hegel: (Shorter) Logic (1816) section 86.

through the brain ...³⁶

The fact of consciousness creates the illusion that human activity begins with thought, that changes in the material world are the result of thought³⁷. A moment's reflection will show that every thought is a reflection of things that already exist in the world outside thought.

The human condition is a continual movement between thoughts reflecting changes in the world, and changes in the world resulting from conscious actions. (Thoughts are not identical to things, that is why refer to them as images reflecting things, just as the image in a mirror is qualitatively different from the thing reflected).

In trying to understand this process, philosophy has developed two great camps – idealism and materialism, according to whether the idea is viewed as primary to matter, or the material world primary to thought. The proposition that the material world either does not exist at all, is unknowable, or exists as a result, product or form of thought may appear to be an absurdity, but it is a proposition that has been embraced by the majority of the great thinkers of history.

Rene Descartes (1596 – 1650) for instance, in saying i think therefore I am' expressed the fact that while he knew he existed (because he was conscious), he could be mistaken about the nature of anything outside of that; he might be dreaming, for instance.

Many scientists during this century have drawn the conclusion, from problems in quantum theory, that matter cannot exist independently of its observation by people, Christians believe that the material world was created by an act of god.

When confronted with a dichotomy like this – materialism vs. idealism – it is tempting to try to find a 'middle road' – 'the truth is always in the middle' it is often said. Marxism does not seek a middle road on this basic question of philosophy³⁸ – the material world of nature existed for thousands of millions

36 Engels: Ludwig Feuerbach ...II.

37 We are talking of 'naive idealism', the common conception of Ego as separate and autonomous in relation to Nature. 'Naive materialism', on the other hand, takes for granted the independent, prior and autonomous existence of Nature. As a philosophical system, idealism has its roots in the primitive social division of labour between mental and manual labour, and the ascription of all creation and progress, not to labour but to Mind, in various guises.

38 See Lenin's Materialism and Empirio-criticism 1908.

of years before a single thought entered the head of single human.

Similarly, in trying to understand history we seek to understand the conditions which led to a particular thought arising, and gaining currency, and ultimately triumphing, rather than seeing history as a result of the decisions or preachings of great leaders.

In history however, idealism has proved a very powerful force indeed. All the great religions of the world begin with the ‘Word’, and not only believe that the world is the product of God, but actively set out to bring the world into line with God.

On the other hand, the materialists in history have had a problem: Democritus (460 – 370 BC) proposed that the world was composed of atoms, and that all the phenomena of life and society had arisen naturally out of the movement of these atoms. But it was one thing to believe this, and another to prove it, and actually trace the laws of transition from one form of motion of matter to another. It would take thousands of years of development of theoretical knowledge to arrive at a point where human society could be rationally understood as a part of nature.

Materialism can only explain the world to the extent that positive knowledge of the world provides the basis for a materialist explanation. In the meantime, side by side with the expansion of the breadth of human practice, painstaking observation and experiment, collection of data, working over and testing out of ideas in practice, only ‘inspired guesses’ may be made about the real nature of the world.

Empiricism and Rationalism

The materialism of modern European history³⁹ began in the 16th Century as a school of ‘observers’ – naturalists who collected butterflies and bones, stargazers and alchemists who observed and recorded their observations. This passive observation of the world was carried out side by side with the unconscious development of technique and industry, which was providing

39. Most expositions of Marxist philosophy trace the development of dialectics and materialism from the ancients. While this is a fascinating study, the relevance of an analysis of the ancient philosophers is mainly related to the fact that these works have formed over many centuries a common body of philosophical literature with which all educated people were familiar. The tradition of classical education is not today what it used to be, and thus the educative function of a critique of the ancients is no longer valid. Accordingly, we have begun our main exposition of the history of philosophy from the beginnings of bourgeois philosophy in Renaissance Europe.

more and more material for observation. Francis Bacon⁴⁰ was the leading theorist of this movement.

The importance of this view was that it directed attention towards Nature as the source of knowledge, rather than Scripture or conventional wisdom. While these early materialists were persecuted by the Church for their 'profanity', they in turn had a derisory attitude towards the wisdom of the past, and it is typical of this **primitive** materialism to pour scorn upon 'theory', and the accumulated knowledge of past generations.

These early materialists were **empiricists**. They said that sense perception was the only source of knowledge, that the brain was a 'blank page' upon which the image of the world was imprinted by the senses. They saw cognition as a passive process. Not only did they call into question the wisdom of the ancients, they also regarded Reason as suspect. No knowledge was possible except 'seeing it with your own eyes'. The objects that they observed were sorted and categorised according to how they appeared to the senses – the sciences were divided into optics, chemistry, astronomy, etc, the species of nature were divided according to their number of legs, skin type etc, and sorted into groups and sub-groups.

Also characteristic of all materialism of this period (Hobbes, Diderot) is that it was mechanical. Mechanical materialism takes the laws of mechanics, already fully developed by the time of Newton (1642 – 1727), as a model for all scientific knowledge, which made it incapable of developing a rational theory of the higher forms of motion including even chemistry, let alone society.

At about the same time, an opposite tendency also developed a critique of the **scholastics** of the Church. Descartes proposed that Reason was the only reliable source of knowledge, and this type of philosophy is called **rationalism**.

40 Regarded as the founder of experimental science, Bacon declared the object of science was to give people power over Nature by revealing the 'true causes' of things and vigorously opposed the and 'scholasticism' of his contemporaries. He declared that in order to learn the mind must be cleansed of all preconceptions so that a rational interpretation of experience could be made. The conclusions would be the generalisation of facts, or 'induction'. Bacon opposed 'empiricism', which he defined as the mere enumeration of facts without any analysis or generalisation, but Bacon's following was not so sophisticated, and Bacon is seen as the initiator of the trend known today as 'empiricism'.

Descartes⁴¹ was a dualist – he saw mind and matter as two parallel worlds, and demonstrated that Reason was capable, not just of observing things (in fact he was ruthlessly sceptical of observation), but of understanding **law**.

Descartes was profoundly influenced by Galileo, who did not just categorise his observations, but abstracted from them laws which expressed the essence of a process. They could not be derived from observation of the real, complex processes in nature by ‘induction’ as understood by empiricism. These laws actually contradicted observation!

Rationalism is not inconsistent with materialism, and indeed, materialism could not have developed beyond its primitive beginnings without the contribution of rationalism. In the history of philosophy, empiricism took a very contradictory course in fact, which wound up with the opposite of its starting point.⁴²

If sense perception is the only source of knowledge, how do we know what lies ‘behind’ sense perception? David Hume⁴³ (1711 – 1776), the proponent of scepticism, asserted that it was not possible to know anything beyond what was given in experience, that there was no such thing as cause and effect, that just because the sun had always risen in the East up till now, there was no way of knowing that it might not rise in the West tomorrow, etc., etc. For through the senses alone it is of course impossible to know anything ‘beyond’ sensation.

41 Descartes (1596-1650) mathematician and physicist, founder of analytical geometry, was the first to postulate the natural evolution of the solar system. Descartes confronted the problem of how thought could form an image of the material world without any apparent causal connection between the two. He postulated a dualist world, in which thought and matter interacted in a hypothetical organ in the head. Descartes, founder of rationalism, sought to elaborate a method for the establishment of certain knowledge through Reason. He believed that consciousness apprehended certain truths innately, and truth could be attained by reasoning rigorously from these axioms.

42 Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) and John Locke (1632-1704) are the main figures in this development, who under the influence of rationalist criticism, tried to reconcile the proposition that experience was the source of knowledge with the relativity of sensuous perception, before arriving at the scepticism of Hume.

43 Hume said that knowledge could be no more than a guide to practical life, since reality was no more than a stream of ‘impressions’ whose causes were unknowable. The existence of the external world he asserted was unprovable. Hume founded ‘utilitarianism’ in opposition to conventional morality.

Thus, the great tradition which had made scientific knowledge possible, had now arrived at a point where it seemed to prove that scientific knowledge was in fact impossible!⁴⁴ And yet, it was obvious that people did in fact have scientific knowledge, and that knowledge was in fact continually growing more and more powerful in its ability not only to describe and predict the behaviour of Nature, but also to change it.

Immanuel Kant⁴⁵ (1724 – 1804), probably the most influential of all bourgeois philosophers, addressed this contradiction. Kant's philosophy is extremely contradictory, and rich, and almost all the bourgeois philosophers who have contributed anything worthwhile this century belong broadly to the camp of 'Kantianism'.

Kant observed that **phenomena** – things as given to the senses – were knowable, and consequently could be subject to Reason. At the same time, he accepted that Hume had proved that the 'thing-in-itself was unknowable through experience, (but according to Kant could be known through 'faith'). The innate capacity of people to reason allowed adequate knowledge to be gained of **phenomena**. On the other hand, 'beauty is in the eye of the beholder' – Kant asserted that all form ascribed to Nature existed not in Nature, but was 'imposed' by Reason upon Nature, in the sense that phenomena was the 'thing-for-us', and the 'thing-in-itself remained unknowable. Thus Kant remained both an agnostic and also a **dualist** in this sense.

In the course of elaborating his theory Kant proved how contradictory theses about the nature of the world could be equally proved. With this he sought to cast doubt upon the possibility of ascribing these contradictory theses to things-in-themselves, and prove the relativity of human knowledge.

44 This extreme position is known as 'subjective idealism', rejecting the existence of anything outside the consciousness of the T. The most famous proponent of this position would be Bishop Berkeley (1685-1753).

45 Kant was the founder of classical German (transcendental) idealism. His main contribution was to insist upon the necessity of a critical theory of the forms of knowledge. He distinguished between the 'thing-in-itself which was beyond perception, and the 'phenomena' or 'thing-for-us'; he showed that opposite theses were equally demonstrable, but he ascribed this contradictoriness to 'appearance', believing that Nature 'in-itself must be free of contradiction. While he affirmed that the external world existed, and was the source of knowledge, the 'thing-in-itself could be known only through faith, not perception.

Hegel

It was G. W. F. Hegel (1770- 1831) who subjected Kant to withering criticism by insisting that contradiction was not the product of the relativity of human knowledge, that contradiction was not a ‘defect’, but that it was Nature itself (The Absolute Idea, in Hegel’s idealist jargon) which was contradictory; that the thing-for-us and the thing-in-itself were but ‘moments’, or aspects, of one and the same subject-object.

To do this Hegel did not just amend Kant’s theory, but went to the very roots of the problem and subjected to criticism the very basis of all philosophy hitherto – the formal logic of Aristotle, re-vitalising the **dialectics**⁴⁶ of Heraclitus and Zeno. Hegel tackled the issue at the level of criticising such basic ‘laws of logic’ as the law of the excluded middle – that a proposition must either be true or not true, and the law of contradiction – that a proposition cannot be both true and not true at the same time. Hegel constructed a whole system of logic, in which concepts were not fixed immutable categories, but moving things, that out of contradictions within them changed over into other concepts. Thus, Hegel’s philosophy was not only ‘logic’ in the sense of a means of ‘checking’ the validity of a line of reasoning, but a creative logic, which pointed to how a proposition led to its own negation in a new, opposite, but more developed proposition.

Hegel’s dialectics was the highest achievement of bourgeois and idealist philosophy. Hegel’s ideas stimulated great excitement in the early 19th century. His followers were divided into two camps – the Young Hegelians who focused on the revolutionary method of his philosophy, and the Prussian state, which appreciated Hegel’s system.⁴⁷

The young revolutionaries focused on Hegel’s maxim: ‘all that exists deserves to perish’, and the Prussian establishment preferred: ‘All that is rational is real; all that is real is rational’⁴⁸. There is nothing inherently ‘revolutionary’ in Hegel, who was himself a pillar of the establishment,

46 Dialectical ideas become increasingly evident throughout the period preceding Hegel, but with Hegel there came a quite definite qualitative step in counter-posing against the laws of formal logic, a definite, worked-out system and method of reasoning, of which the former was but a special, limiting case.

47 See Engels: Ludwig Feuerbach ..., I.

48 In Hegel’s social philosophy the state is an expression of the ‘essence’ of a society; but this maxim of Hegel’s is not as conservative as it seems. Eastern Europe of the 1980’s would be in Hegel’s logic ‘unreal’.

especially in later life. As a means of describing what is, it is just as powerful in the service of conservatism, as it is as a weapon of criticism, in the hands of revolutionaries. History however has on the whole left Hegel's system behind, but his method remains as powerful as ever.

In Marx's writings, very little will be found about Kant, for Marx believed that Hegel had said what needed to be said of Kant; however, Marx's earliest writings were concerned with a criticism of Hegel's objective idealism.

Hegel was one of the last encyclopaedic thinkers, who was familiar with almost everything that was going on in every field of human knowledge. However, when Hegel abolished the dualism and scepticism of Kant, by ascribing objectivity to the categories of thought, it was not the material world which was the source of ideas in Hegel's philosophy, but on the contrary, matter was but a 'lowly' form of The Absolute Idea, of which human consciousness was a higher form, and Hegel's system the highest of all.

Hegel's idealism is called objective because Hegel did not see thought forms as the subjective products of the brain, but rather that people had a capacity to think dialectically, to live out the same laws as existed before and outside of people in Nature – or rather, the Absolute Idea, not Nature! That is, thought had objective content. **By eradicating the barrier between appearance and essence, subject and object, Hegel laid the basis for an understanding of how knowledge of the world could be gained.** The innate qualities of Reason postulated by Kant were not necessary; Hegel's dialectics opened the possibility of understanding how concepts evolved, a possibility excluded for all varieties of dualism, or for vulgar materialism which abolishes the dualism simply by denying it.

However, Hegel was an idealist. Like any idealist philosophy, despite the enormously revolutionary potential of Hegel's philosophy, it developed into a sterile, rigid system.

Among the Young Hegelians, one Ludwig Feuerbach⁴⁹ broke from Hegel, and declared that thought was a product and reflection of the material world, that people were products of their environment, that ideology and religion were nothing but 'heavenly' reflections of how people actually lived. "One

⁴⁹ Ludwig Feuerbach (1804-1872). German materialist philosopher who played a progressive role, particularly in the struggle against religion, and its analysis. In 1870 he joined the Marxist Social Democratic Party. His philosophy is described as 'contemplative materialism'. While showing that ideology reflected social conditions, he failed to understand the 'active side', how people also create social conditions through their social activity.

must oneself have experienced the liberating effect” wrote Engels of this moment in 1843, “We all became at once Feuerbachians”⁵⁰. It was soon after this that Engels and Marx met in Paris and their life-long collaboration began. Feuerbach’s criticism of Hegel was ruthless. Hegel’s idealism could not be defended. European society was heading for the political explosion of 1848 and the young intellectuals of the time were looking for a theory which would be a guide to action and an explanation of the crying social contradictions of the time.

Marx

Marx and Engels however believed Feuerbach had ‘thrown the dialectical baby out with the idealist bathwater’, and began a critique of Feuerbach’s materialism to retain what was positive and revolutionary in Hegel’s work. Feuerbach had proved the material basis of thought, but his materialism was passive or contemplative, and **mechanical**; in other words it was not **dialectical**.

Knowledge of the world, both natural and social, was building up to a point where the connections between different things could be understood, where the transition between things was becoming known, such as in Darwin’s theory of the Origin of Species. The issue now was to **re-work Hegel’s dialectics, not as a mystical system of the Absolute Idea, but as a generalisation of the laws of movement of the material world and its reflection in human concepts**. As Engels put it – ‘the dialectic of Hegel was turned upon its head; or rather, turned off its head, on which it was standing, and placed upon its feet’.⁵¹

In the famous Theses on Feuerbach⁵² Marx says that Feuerbach, like all previous materialism, had neglected the ‘active side’ of reality. Marx would show how knowledge came not by passive contemplation of nature, but through the active practice of changing it! Furthermore, Feuerbach’s materialism neglected that human activity was objective, was itself a part of and expression of the material world. As Marx said ‘The materialist doctrine that people are products of circumstances and changed upbringing, forgets that it is people that change circumstances and that the educators themselves

50 See Lenin’s Brief Biographical Sketch ...

51 see Engels: Ludwig Feuerbach ... IV.

52 Thesis III.

need educating. Hence, this doctrine necessarily arrives at dividing society into two parts, of which one is superior to society.⁵³

‘Feuerbach’s ... work consists in the dissolution of the religious world into its secular basis, [but] he overlooks the fact that.. the chief thing still remains to be done the self-cleavage and self-contradictoriness of this secular base ... must be ... understood in its contradiction, and then, by removal of the contradiction, revolutionised in practice. .. Once the earthly family is discovered to be the secret of the holy family, the former must then itself be criticised in theory and revolutionised in practice.,⁵⁴ Or in the words engraved on Marx’s tombstone: ‘The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to change it.’⁵⁵

Marx did not create a dogma or system as had previous philosophers. The study of Marx’s philosophy, dialectical materialism, cannot take the form of learning a few maxims to be applied willy-nilly as a ‘magic formula’. Marx’s method is very much a critical method, in that it understands that knowledge is a social, not an individual process; the contributions of all those that have gone before have to be worked over critically, and understood as part of a process of cognition.

Bourgeois Philosophy in the Twentieth Century

Marx’s application of Hegel’s dialectical method to the social and political theory of the day was immensely creative; his criticism of bourgeois ideology devastating. In *Capital* Marx shows repeatedly not just why this or that theory is ‘wrong’, but shows exactly what the basis of this or that theory is, and thus demonstrates the conditions of its validity, and its limits.

Since Hegel, bourgeois philosophy has never gone beyond Hegel’s achievement, and in the overwhelming majority, falls well short of Hegel. And for good reason: the further development of human culture is in conflict with the maintenance of capitalism; the maintenance of the oppression of the vast mass of people by a small minority is an obstacle to the development of human culture. In a sense, bourgeois culture has had to ‘mark time’.

Confronted with various ideological problems, not threatening to the

53 Thesis IV.

54 These eleven short theses were jotted down by Marx in 1845, but not published until 1888, after Marx’s death. They are usually published along with Engels’ *Ludwig Feuerbach ...*

55 Thesis XI.

existence of capitalism, bourgeois philosophy has made progress: positivism⁵⁶, operationalism⁵⁷, functionalism⁵⁸, structuralism⁵⁹, etc represent insights which were engendered by specific ideological problems, but which were developed in a one-sided exaggerated way. Marxism has to understand such trends as ‘moments’ or aspects of the dialectic, which can only be

56 Founded by Auguste Comte (1798-1857), and popular among those who drew sceptical conclusions from the crisis of natural science around the turn of the century and among many social scientists and historians. Positivism asserted, after Kant, that science could describe only the outward appearance of things, and no ‘meaning’ or ‘law’ could be ascribed to nature or history. Its positive contribution is that it’s scepticism militates against simplistic, mechanical explanations, and forces the critical appraisal not only of facts, but also the concepts by which facts are grasped. Failure to grasp the weakness of formal, ‘Aristotlean’ logic, led positivism to reject materialism, since the only materialism it knows is ‘mechanical materialism’. Without a concept of materiality, it is impossible to establish the interconnection and transition between concepts which would allow the contradictions confronted by mechanical materialism to be overcome. Typical of its negative results is the assertion by physicists that ‘matter does not exist’ except when it is observed ; history is reduced by positivism to mere enumeration of events, lacking any meaning.

57 Founded by Percy Bridgman (1882-1961) operationalism asserts that the meaning of any concept is the operations required to test it. While drawing attention to the ‘practical’ aspect of knowledge, the objective content of knowledge is rejected, and it leads to subjective idealism. Concepts such as ‘class’ or ‘value’ are inadmissible to operationalism since they are not immediately given in experience and thus cannot be ‘tested’.

58 This method of investigation, popular among sociologists and anthropologists, seeks the meaning of something by revealing the ‘function’ it performs within a complex, independent of its outward appearance, but it is unable to determine what is essential in the complex, and is essentially ‘static’ in its analysis, since it does not enquire into the origin and internal contradictoriness of the complex or its functional components. The explanation of the ‘role’ of this or that force within a society is an aspect of Marxist analysis, but must be based on an understanding of historical development and the essential nature of the whole, within which the components may play different roles under different circumstances.

59 Popular during the first half of this century, structuralism is a method of investigation which reveals the structure of a complex, abstracted from its phenomenal form. Like functionalism, its main weakness is its a-historical view, and while focusing attention on structural similarities between qualitatively different phenomena, by abstracting structure from materiality, it leads to an idealist and contemplative view. Being essentially descriptive in character, structuralism cannot overcome the limitations of Kantianism.

rationally developed as part of a whole critique of human society, on the basis of the essential achievements of Marxism.

Many trends in bourgeois ideology could not be described as charitably as above, but represent an apology, or step backwards, rather than a contribution which could be evaluated as positive in even a limited way. Pragmatism⁶⁰ for instance would have to be rated this way, and positivism possibly. When translated into politics, even trends with some genuine contribution can become transformed into reactionary ‘monsters’ as their limitation or one-sidedness predominates over the positive kernel that it may contain, such as the voluntarism of Nietzsche⁶¹.

While capable of learning from every new discovery, Marxism is obliged to investigate the implications of every new turn in events for the whole. Marxism is thus a continual movement between analysis and synthesis. Each new turn in events is **interpreted** by means of concepts based on an analysis of the nature of the epoch, but, in turn, each new turn in events is used to make more exact our understanding of that **whole** – the current stage of development of the crisis of capitalism.

Thus thought⁶² begins its work already armed with concrete concepts, which are the synthesis of a whole process of development, and are the pre-condition for the analysis of perception.

Bourgeois science purports to start with ‘concrete facts’, and by sorting and comparing facts, arrive at categories and concepts, which become ever and ever thinner, and more divorced from reality, and then proceeds to an ‘explanation’ of things. What is overlooked here is that perception begins with **the abstract** whether we like it or not. We perceive the world through

60 Pragmatism, founded by William James (1842-1910) is the characteristic ideology of the American bourgeoisie. ‘If it works, then it’s valid, never mind what you say!’ An extension of empiricism, pragmatism regards experience only as valid, and rejects the possibility of a rational understanding of experience. In this sense it is a decisive step back from Kant. Pragmatism reflects the American bourgeoisie’s contempt for theory and their history of ‘transplanting’ the achievements of Europe to a land where European methods ‘worked’ better than they did in Europe.

61 Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900). Nietzsche’s philosophy is irrationalist, individualist in the extreme, reflecting the fear and contempt of the bourgeoisie in relation to the emerging working class and the impending disintegration of the ‘old order’ in Europe.

62 See the section ‘The Method of Political Economy’ contained either within ‘Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy’ or in ‘The Grundrisse’.

concepts, and these concepts prejudice the supposed outcome of our analysis. At crucial crises in the development of a science, the concepts which are taken as fundamental may be completely overthrown and replaced by others⁶³.

Thus, in the writing of *Capital*, Marx begins not with the abstract concepts of common everyday experience – price, profit, money, etc – but with the commodity relation, a concept derived from a thoroughgoing analysis of the whole of human history; but quite a different starting point from the popular contemporary starting point of ‘Robinson Crusoe’⁶⁴. Political economists of Marx’s day were fond of beginning their analysis with the hypothetical male, bourgeois individual entering into voluntary, rational relation with another individual. They made this analysis blissfully unaware that the whole of the results of their analysis were determined by this starting point, and that this starting point was itself the product and reflection of capitalist social relations.

This did not alter the fact that the bourgeois political economists derived many important results from their investigations. But their analysis was fundamentally incapable of understanding the real dynamic of capitalism.

Thus at the very centre of Marxism is the understanding that social and political theory is not the function of the inspired thinker, but is itself a social product. Consequently, the practice of Marxism is not the propagation of an idea, nor simply passive commentary, but a definite unity of theory and practice.

The working class was only in its infancy in Marx’s lifetime. Nevertheless, Marx was an active participant in the struggle of the nascent class. Together with Engels, Marx was responsible for the formation of the industrial trade unions and the great Socialist Parties of Europe, as well as the education of circles of revolutionaries in almost every corner of the globe. However, Marx’s opportunities for the practical application of his ideas in the actual overthrow of capitalism were limited by the times. It fell to Lenin to develop the theory of the application of Marxist theory to the practice of social revolution.

I have attempted to demonstrate the Marxist method by means of a brief exposition of the history of philosophy. Let us now spend a moment to look at the basic concepts of Hegel’s logic, as they appear in Marx’s materialist method.

63 Thomas Kuhn would say ‘a new paradigm takes the place of the former’.

64 See Section 4 of Chapter I of *Capital* for an analysis of this ideology.

Dialectical Logic⁶⁵

Once ‘turned on its feet’, Hegel’s logic can be seen as an idealised history of philosophy, in much the same way as Galileo’s mechanics is an idealisation of real movement. Equally, Hegel’s logic is an idealised schema for the process of human cognition.

Put another way, Hegel’s logic provides concepts adequate to understand processes in the world of nature and society, in their full concreteness, whereas formal logic provides concepts only adequate to understand static mechanical or abstract categories. With the advent of relativistic and quantum mechanics, formal logic is no longer adequate even for mechanics⁶⁶.

Through familiarity with the concepts of dialectics, the Marxist moves consciously through the moments of cognition, endeavouring to get the maximum value out of each moment, and never to get fixated on one moment, but tries to carry through the process of cognition fully and completely in a continuous all-sided unity of theory and practice, of synthesis and analysis, subjectivity and objectivity, ... Movement through these moments is determined by the unfolding of the whole political/social process and our practice within it.

65 The creative study of Hegel has been sorely neglected in recent decades. It was only the International Committee of G. Healy who revived this study, and here it became horribly distorted as a result of the sectarian degeneration of that movement. Nevertheless, it remains that Hegelian dialectics is an indispensable part of Marxism. The only source material for this subject comes from the Soviet Academies. Authors such as Ilyenkov have published valuable expositions of dialectics, despite limitations which are obvious enough to the non-Stalinist reader. Apart from these, Hegel’s ‘Shorter Logic’ is quite readable, if you don’t try to take too much in one bite.

66 The ‘dialectics of nature’, the title of an 1876 book by Engels, has been an issue of some controversy. The concepts of dialectics are applicable to human cognition because they are applicable to nature. The processes, or ‘moments’, described by the concepts of dialectics are natural, objective things. Human society is a part of the material world, and thought is a reflection of the material world, so the same general concepts apply. The same is true of formal logic, but the scope of formal logic is more limited.

The Three ‘Laws’⁶⁷ of Dialectics

One avenue to understanding dialectics is through the famous ‘three laws of dialectics’ popularised by Engels:

1) **Transformation of quantity into quality:** Change always takes the form of quantitative variations, which build up to a point where a new quality is present – ‘the straw that broke the camel’s back’, ‘enough is enough!’.

2) **Interpenetration of opposites:** or Unity (or identity), interpenetration and transformation of opposites. One way of approaching dialectics, in fact, is through the study of various antitheses, learning to apply this law:

Relative and Absolute: There is a relative within the absolute and an absolute within the relative, i.e. thought is relative to material conditions, but it does reflect material conditions, even erroneous thought; material conditions are also determined by consciousness, (material conditions, absolute, is primary, but not absolutely).

Part and Whole: The whole is greater than the sum of the parts, but the whole has no existence other than its parts. The whole is reflected in every part, but the part is a part of the whole, (whole is primary, but not absolutely).

Concrete and Abstract:⁶⁸ the concrete is a synthesis of many abstractions, the abstract the intersection of many concrete determinations. The abstract is also concrete (law is ‘real’), the concrete is also abstract (‘facts’ are abstractions).

Subject and Object: the subject is part of the object, the object is also subject, (the **agent** is a social being; our program is ‘what has to be done’, i.e. given, objective. But the object is primary to the subject.)

Etc., etc., etc.

3) **Negation of the negation:** The return to the old, which is the same, but not the same. For example, primitive communism is negated by the birth of class society, which we call civilisation, which is turn negated by the overthrow of class society and the ultimate establishment of Communism – from unconscious harmony with nature, to alienation from nature, to conscious harmony with nature.

67 Elsewhere I avoid use of the term ‘law’, as in ‘laws of dialectics’, which is used as an extension of ‘laws of logic’ in formal logic, and ‘laws of nature’ in natural science. Although this extension is valid, I believe use of ‘law’ tends to mislead the reader in the direction of the common idealist conception of law. Both Marx and Hegel make an extensive analysis of ‘law’, in the context of which use of the term is valid. See Engels’ Dialectics of Nature, section entitled Dialectics.

68 See Ilyenkov, The Dialectics of the Abstract and the Concrete in Marx’s Capital.

‘Sub-Divisions’ of Hegel’s Logic

A reading of Hegel, especially the Science of Logic, is the only way of learning to use Hegel’s logic. Below is a very brief summary of the dialectical logic in terms of the ‘moments’ or stages through which understanding passes from the first dim glimmerings of an idea to practical familiarity and scientific knowledge.

Being⁶⁹ is the beginning of perception. It lacks any determination. This refers to totally unreflective sensuous existence, being. Especially in a new situation it is vital to have no pre-conceptions, to fix your gaze upon nothing in particular, to be in a sense ‘unaware’. Otherwise, your pre-conceptions will prevent you from seeing what is. (All the elements of a process are present, but is as yet ‘unseen’).

Awareness of Being is Nothing⁷⁰. We have a body of knowledge, and we are able to determine what is, but it is Nothing, it is just what we already knew, in so far as it is not given any determination. As soon as we confront the indeterminate Being with Nothing we begin to determine and as Hegel says ‘The one is not what the other is, ... it is something unutterable, which we merely mean’. The unity of Being and Nothing is called by Hegel Becoming – this is the philosophy that everything is coming into and out of existence, continual change, the recognition of is and is not in every moment, the process has no meaning.⁷¹ (The elements of the process are ‘visible’ but it is not yet in existence).

This first triad (thesis-antithesis-synthesis) is about the first moments of perception, before you have begun to analyse. If these moments are cut short, not allowed to fully develop, theory becomes sterile and self-fulfilling, for you will miss what is new, and impose your pre-conceptions on what actually happened. Of course, without concepts to interpret sense perception you could never get beyond Being, you would remain forever a child.

The second division of Hegel’s Logic is Essence⁷² ‘The point of view given by the Essence is in general the standpoint of “Reflection.” ... for here we

69 Hegel, (Shorter) Logic, section 86. Note that we follow the Hegelian tradition in denoting the ‘moments’ with upper case letters. This is useful to emphasise that the terms are used in a very special meaning in Hegel.

70 op. cit. section 87.

71 Hegel says that Heraclitus was the philosopher of Becoming.

72 Hegel op. cit. section 112.

want to know the object, not in its immediacy, but as derivative or mediated. ‘

This is the moment when, using our body of knowledge we reflect on what we have seen, and determine what it is. (In social processes, self-consciousness develops in this stage; at first it identifies itself, then differentiates itself from others, before actually counterposing itself to others).

The first moment of Essence (Reflection) is Identity. Like the early empiricists, we see the qualities and quantities within Being, and we identify it, from what we already know.

The next moment then (unless we are totally ‘uninterested’ in life) is Difference – we see that what is happening is different in some way from anything else we have seen.

The unity of Identity and Difference is Opposition – that this thing is not what it was last time, what it looked like at first, what could have been, ..., and the unity of Identity and Opposition leads to Contradiction (the unity, conflict and transformation of opposites). By this is meant that we are driven to seek the Ground of this identity and difference, to seek actively into the other thing to find the ground of the thing itself, to transcend itself, which Hegel calls Existence.

The next stage of Reflection Hegel calls Appearance⁷³, where we begin to interconnect our perception of the object with the whole of our knowledge of the world (Where a process in the world ‘makes an appearance’; a social process gains ‘self-consciousness’) and this is called Actuality. The thing becomes actual, with all the inter-relations, exceptions, oddities, chance and accident, personalities and peculiarities of time and place, which may or may not be related, or essential.

Here we contrast Form (the outer or old) and Content (the inner or new); we seek to deepen our understanding of the thing by determining the difference between what is form and what is content. (As the thing develops, the content emerges from what was incidental, or belonging to the ground or past

73 Hegel associates Kant with this stage: ‘In the history of modern philosophy, Kant has the merit of first rehabilitating this distinction between the common and the philosophic modes of thought. He stopped half-way, however, when he attached to Appearance a subjective meaning only, and put the abstract essence immovable outside it as the thing-in-itself beyond the reach of our cognition. For it is the nature of the world of immediate objects to be appearance only. Knowing it to be so, we know at the same time the essence, which, far from staying behind or beyond the appearance, rather manifests its own essentiality by deposing the world to mere appearance.’ Logic, section 131.

conditions, a social process becomes self-conscious to the point of pursuing its own program). Thus leading to an understanding of Freedom and Necessity, ...

Until the point arrives where choice is no longer the issue. We understand what is necessary, and our Freedom is knowing what we must do.

This leads us to the third division of logic – the Notion, which Hegel calls the principle of Freedom. In Marxism we would understand this as theoretical understanding actively guiding practice, or ‘practical theory’, which can only return to where it began in practice, as a (conscious) part, or expression, of the world, and a part of the world, and consequently, immediately the beginning of new perception, where the opposition between subject and object is again abolished.

The reader will observe that in reading Hegel there are a number of ‘sub-texts’. There is no substitute for reading Hegel in the original, but he must be read materialistically.

For example: the Marxist who learns ‘to think on his/her feet’ in meetings knows how not to impose pre-conceptions on what is happening until the ‘qualities and quantities’ have built up to a point where the ‘essence appears’. Rapidly, the appearance of what is happening has to be interconnected with a whole analysis of the period. When we speak, it is not just to utter something that is true, but to do what we ‘have to do’ on the basis of a whole historical perspective. We have to go through this process in a single comment in a routine meeting.

Or, consider the recent history of Russia and Eastern Europe: pre-1980 = Being (change is not manifest, but the elements are building up). 1980s = Nothing (the opposition has a voice, but no program or influence); post 1989 = Becoming (the future of Eastern Europe is in the process of birth).

Self-consciousness appears, the sub-division of Essence, 1990 – ?. Still the form predominates over the content, the reaction of the rest of the world is still to come, the economic and cultural effects of the change are still to be felt; return to the old, but with entirely different content. During the early part of 1990 intellectuals are elected to leadership with no particular program. Form (the parties of the 1930s or those imported from the West) still predominates over content (a new world situation in 1990); chance still predominates over necessity (the historical accident of Catholicism in Poland, Ceausescu in Rumania, ...).

Simultaneously, on a longer time scale, the ‘chance’ of Red Army invasion of East Europe in 1945 is stripped away to reveal the ‘real’ state of affairs; the

opposites of ‘workers state’ and ‘bourgeois society’ interpenetrate and are transformed. 1990 Poland ‘returns’ to 19th Century England as ‘Adam Smith’ capitalism is imposed, but the situation is quite opposite, the unresolved questions of 1923, 1939, 1945 are thrown up again, ...

The Elements of Dialectics

Lenin wrote his summary of the ‘elements of dialectics’, in his Philosophical Notebooks, p. 221 of Volume 38:

- ‘1) The determination of the concept our of itself [the thing itself must be considered in its relations and in its development];
- 2) the contradictory nature of the thing itself (the other of itself), the contradictory forces and tendencies in each phenomena;
- 3) the union of analysis and synthesis.’

Lenin expands these to:

- ‘1) the objectivity of consideration (not examples, but the Thing-in-itself).
- 2) the entire totality of the manifold relations of this thing to others.
- 3) the development of this thing, its own movement, its own life.
- 4) the internally contradictory tendencies (and sides) in this thing.
- 5) the thing (phenomenon etc) as the sum and unity of opposites.
- 6) the struggle, respectively unfolding, of the opposites, contradictory strivings.
- 7) the union of analysis and synthesis – the break-down of the separate parts and the totality, the summation of these parts.
- 8) the relations of each thing are not only manifold, but general, universal. Each thing (phenomenon, process etc) is connected with every other.
- 9) not only the unity of opposites, but the transitions of every determination, quality, feature, side, property into every other [into its opposite?].
- 10) the endless process of the discovery of new sides, relations, etc.
- 11) the endless process of the deepening of humanity’s knowledge of the thing, of phenomena, processes, etc from appearance to essence and from less profound to more profound essence.
- 12) from co-existence to causality and from one form of connection and reciprocal dependence to another deeper, more general form.
- 13) the repetition at a higher stage of certain features, properties etc of the lower, and
- 14) the apparent return to the old (negation of the negation).

15) the struggle of content with form and conversely. The throwing off of the form, the transformation of the content.

16) the transition of quantity into quality and vice versa.'

Dialectical logic does not provide any kind of formula for understanding of these processes; but consider how hopelessly inadequate is formal logic: Hungary is/is not a workers' state. Lech Walesa does/does not represent the working class /big business. The revolution is for restoration of capitalism/overthrow of Stalinism, ...

Dialectical logic must never be understood as a schema or template into which the world must be fitted.

Dialectical logic is a more developed, flexible method of handling concepts.

Dialectics is for understanding things in their concreteness and inter-connectedness rather than in static abstraction.

Only dialectical logic is adequate to the task of understanding the complex, contradictory processes of social change.

– Part II –

The next four chapters deal with the development of Marxism which took place in connection with the Russian Revolution of October 1917. From its founding in 1889 to the outbreak of World War One, the Socialist International had built mass working class parties. However, these parties had become corrupted and were so tied up with the bourgeoisie that when war broke out, they supported their own bourgeois governments, and sent the workers off to die in their millions in the trenches.

Only the Russian Section – the Bolsheviks led by Vladimir Ilyich Lenin – and minority sections in the German and other parties, took a principled position and opposed the war.

Lenin had in fact already built in Russia quite a different kind of party from the parliamentary type of parties found in the European countries. In the space of three decades Russia had been dragged from feudalism to modern capitalism, while still labouring under a mediaeval autocracy. The tumultuous conditions of bitter class struggle and upheaval had thrown up a whole generation of revolutionaries who, under Lenin's leadership, had been organised into a powerful revolutionary party.

The success of the revolution in a backward country like Russia, while capitalism still ruled in the advanced industrialised countries of Europe and America, required a new development of Marxist theory. Even Marx and Engels had assumed that the revolution would be led by the workers of the advanced countries. Many Russian Marxists actually opposed the perspective of making social revolution in Russia, until the bourgeoisie had built a modern bourgeois parliamentary democracy.

The understanding that the revolution would be made first in a backward country was made possible by Trotsky's theory known as **Permanent Revolution**, which took account of the real, concrete development of capitalism on the international arena, expressed in the combined and uneven development of the world economy.

However, while it was easier to make the revolution in Russia – the weak link in the capitalist chain – it was incomparably more difficult to build socialism in Russia, than in the advanced countries of Europe.

The success of the Bolsheviks was not matched by the revolutionaries of Europe. The Russian revolution survived, but was left isolated in a hostile imperialist world. Under the enormous weight of holding revolutionary

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power in a backward peasant country already devastated by War and Civil War, the Bolshevik regime began to degenerate. Lenin died and Trotsky was exiled and later assassinated, all the leaders of the 1917 revolution were eventually killed, as Josef Stalin snuffed out the gains of the Revolution.

Leon Trotsky's analysis of the degeneration of the Soviet Union under Stalin and his defence of the original perspectives of the Revolution was the most advanced application of Marxism up to this time. Trotsky's analysis of Stalinism is the vital pre-requisite to the formulation of revolutionary perspectives today.

The next four sections deal with these developments of Marxism which we owe mainly to Lenin and Trotsky. Together with the three component parts of classical Marxism, these constitute the foundations of modern Marxism.

4) Democratic Centralism

By **democratic centralism** we refer to the Leninist (i.e. Marxist) theory of organisation. That is, we do not refer to any particular pattern or model of organisation as applicable to any one place or time in the history of revolutionary organisation, but the whole of Marxist organisational practice.

By way of introduction, the following excerpt from Zinoviev's History of the Bolshevik Party⁷⁴ is useful:

Neither the working class nor a workers' party is born all at once. The working class takes shape over decades: ... only gradually when history raises all ... those basic questions which separate people into different sides, make enemies of friends and place them on different sides of the barricades and produce civil war – only then does stratification, crystallisation, splitting and re-unification begin and only then does a definite party finally take shape. And this process which is closely tied up with people's lives will terminate in a complete form only with the era of the complete victory of socialism, that is when classes and parties disappear. ... one has to learn how to generalise and probe into events and facts which embrace in their radius of action millions and tens of millions of people.⁷

The background to the above explanation by Zinoviev is the following thesis which follows in broad terms from the historical materialist conception of history: political parties express the interests of definite social strata, and in particular, definite classes.⁷⁵ The central program of Communists is the building of a **political party** giving expression to the class interests of the working class as the necessary condition for the emancipation of the working class and the abolition of class society.

The history of the emergence and triumph of the bourgeoisie is a long drawn out process in which a variety of different forms of organisation figure – the

74 Zinoviev was President of the Communist International in 1923, at the time of writing of the History. The book has considerable weaknesses reflecting Zinoviev's vacillation in the struggle between Stalin and Trotsky, which was very intense at this time, but is very valuable all the same.

75 This appears to be a contradiction in terms, and indeed it is. It is the tension between the social base of a political party, and the social interests expressed in its politics which determines its 'dynamics' – the social base changes in response to social and political changes, and in turn changes the internal balance of political forces. In the 'struggle' between subjective and objective, the objective is, in general but not absolutely, primary.

University, the Christian sect, the New Model Army, the Corporation, Parliament as well as political party. However, what distinguishes the working class from all previous classes charged by history with the mission of overthrowing the ruling class and establishing a new society is this: the working class is the exploited class under capitalism. Under feudalism the bourgeoisie were not the ruling class; they were excluded from the State and political power as such, but they wielded considerable economic power, and over a protracted period of time had independent bases of economic, cultural and economic activity around which they were able to conduct the preparatory ideological and economic struggle, both internally and at large.

As an exploited class, whose labour is alienated from it at the point of production, the working class has no such base for the development of its own culture within the structure of the class society in which it is exploited.

Furthermore, all previous revolutions were carried out by classes who while they sought to represent the **whole people** in the struggle against the old society, in reality sought to replace one form of exploitation with another; consequently, there is a core of **false consciousness** or deception in the ideology of these classes.

The socialist revolution however, if it is to triumph, **must** empower the mass of producers; it **cannot afford** false consciousness. The working class must consciously articulate and act upon a true conception of its class interests.⁷⁶ But the very conditions of bourgeois society (alienation, commodity relations, oppression and exploitation) militate against such class self-consciousness.

This is the meaning of the following declaration against 'unsolicited teachers of morals' in the Transitional Program⁷⁷:

In a society based upon exploitation, the highest moral is that of the socialist revolution. All methods are good which raise the class-consciousness of the workers, their trust in their own forces, their readiness for self-sacrifice in (lie

76 It will be observed that 'class consciousness' is the union of a social and a psychological concept. It must be understood dialectically, not as the 'average' consciousness of a certain category of individuals, but as a dialectical union of opposites. On the one hand the consciousness of individuals, on the other the social relations between the individuals. Thus class consciousness is expressed through political parties and their relation to the class, their ability to mobilise the class, and the whole intricate network of social relations which characterises the political dynamics of the class struggle.

77 Transitional Program, 1938, section Against Opportunism.

struggle. The impermissible methods are those which implant fear and submissiveness in the oppressed before their oppressors, which crush the spirit of protest and indignation or substitute for the will of the masses, the will of the leaders; for conviction, compulsion; for an analysis of reality, demagoguery and frame-up. ...

‘To face reality squarely; not to seek the line of least resistance; to call things by their right name; to speak the truth to the masses, no matter how bitter it might be; not to fear obstacles; to be true in little things as in big one’s; to base one’s programme on the logic of the class struggle; to be bold when the hour for action arrives ...’.

All the organisational work of Marxists is the preparation of the working class for world socialist revolution, the abolition of class divisions, the withering away of the State and socialist society.

Lenin’s Struggle to Found the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party

During the 1880s and 1890s the Russian working class was born. This was a traumatic and tempestuous period; modern industry was introduced into a backward and feudal country. Millions of peasants were driven from the land and forged into a modern working class in vast urban industrial cities, under the rule of a cruel autocracy.

Young intelligentsia, factory-disciplined workers and rebellious peasants were thrown into struggle under conditions of unspeakable repression and yawning social contradictions. Out of this period was born a generation of revolutionaries – Anabaptists, Terrorists, Populists, Anarchists and Socialists. The prisons were the principle venues for political discussion; revolutionary cells were formed, and broken up by police, and reformed in a new combination in the space of weeks.

During Marx’s lifetime the first Marxist circles were formed. The North Russian Workers League was formed in Petrograd by G. V. Plekhanov – the father of

Russian Marxism – and led by two workers, Khalturin and Obnorsky. The first draft program of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party was put forward by the Emancipation of Labour Group founded in 1883 by Plekhanov, in opposition to populism.

The League for the Struggle for the Emancipation of the Working Class was founded by Lenin in 1895 and united all the various Marxist workers’ circles in Petrograd and was the first organisation to combine struggle for socialist

ideas with the workers' struggle, and it became a powerful influence throughout Russia.

During this period two great political questions were being fought out side-by-side. The first was the question of **What is to be done?** – What is the correct program for working class against the autocracy in a country such as Russia? The second was the question of What is the correct form of tactics and organisation for the working class and its organisations?

The first four sections of Left Wing Communism – An Infantile Disorder (Lenin 1920) and Zinoviev's History quoted above give summaries of the political differences fought out among the revolutionaries of this period, and give a good picture of the conditions out of which the Bolshevik Party was formed.

From the 1860s, the Narodniks (Populists) believed that Tsarism must be overthrown by the peasantry and that the village commune would form the embryos of a socialist society. They believed that capitalism would not develop in Russia, and consequently saw no revolutionary role for the working class. From 'going amongst the people' this trend developed into the terrorism of small groups, and later gave rise, in 1902, to the Socialist Revolutionary party, the main petit-bourgeois party of the period.

Around the turn of the century a tendency grew up amongst the Social Democrats called **economism**. This tendency made a mechanical interpretation of Marx's view of history, believing that Russia had to follow the path of development of Europe, and that only the bourgeoisie could overthrow Tsarism, and through the establishment of capitalism, carry through the democratic or bourgeois revolution, and create conditions for the growth of a modern working class and the conditions for socialism.

Consequently, they rejected the possibility of the working class taking a leading role in the political struggle against Tsarism, and believed that the working class should confine itself to the 'economic struggle', i.e. trade unionism, and leave political struggle to the liberal bourgeoisie. Consequently, they were opposed to the struggle for working-class consciousness, and laid great emphasis on 'spontaneity'.

In this situation the Marxists fought for a socialist perspective and sought not only to organise within the proletariat, then in the process of its birth, but carried out political struggle over the whole range of political issues of the day and sought to educate a whole layer of leaders, particularly amongst the workers.

The predominant form of revolutionary organisation during the last two

decades of the nineteenth century in Russia was the revolutionary circle. These were groups of people who came together, discussed and argued, carried on agitational work, issued leaflets, organised strikes and demonstrations around the various movements against the autocracy, and usually disappeared again, probably as a result of police repression, after a short time.

Convinced that it was necessary for the working class to gain self-consciousness, and to fight for its own interests independently of the bourgeoisie, Lenin set out to weld the disparate Marxist groups into a single whole, capable of giving expression to that self-consciousness. This organisational strategy was inseparable from the historical perspective – socialist revolution by the working class.

In 1898 the First Congress of the RSDLP was held with 8 members representing the various ‘Leagues of Struggle’. The organ of the RSDLP, *Iskra* (The Spark), began in 1900 with Lenin as editor. *Iskra* was published in various European cities, and smuggled into Russia. Through the pages of *Iskra* Lenin conducted a struggle against Economism, and in 1902, the editorial board, in exile, wrote the draft program of the RSDLP, which was the preparation for the Second Congress of the RSDLP, at which it was founded as a revolutionary party.

Lenin’s book *What is to be Done?*, written in late 1901, sets out Lenin’s perspectives for the new organisation, in opposition to Economism.

First of all Lenin fought for professionalism, against the tendency to idolise the spontaneous amateurism of the revolutionary movement, and the policy of the economists to reinforce that amateurism, by making a virtue of it.

Secondly, Lenin said that the revolutionaries had to introduce socialist theory into the working class; socialist theory could not arise out of the experience of their own lives. Socialist theory was a development arising out of the whole sweep of human society, and was carried forward by definite organisations established for the purpose, or by the intelligentsia.

This famous quote from Karl Kautsky⁷⁸ is used by Lenin⁷⁹ to express this very important idea:

‘Many of our revisionist critics believe that Marx asserted that economic

78 Austrian Marxist who was Marx’s brilliant young pupil and propagandist, but who later became a reformist and ‘social chauvinist’.

79 *What is to Be Done?* section II B.

development and the class struggle create, not only the conditions for socialist production, but also, and directly, the consciousness of its necessity. ... But this is absolutely untrue. Of course, socialism, as a doctrine, has its roots in modern economic relationships, just as the class struggle of the proletariat has, and, like the latter, emerges from the struggle against the capitalist-created poverty and misery of the masses. But socialism and the class struggle arise side by side and not one out of the other: each arises under different conditions. Modern socialist consciousness can arise only on the basis of profound scientific knowledge. Indeed, modern economic science is as much a condition for socialist production as, say, modern technology, and the proletariat can create neither the one nor the other, no matter how much it may desire to do so; both arise out of the modern social process. The vehicle of science is not the proletariat, but the **bourgeois intelligentsia**: it was in the minds of individual members of this stratum that modern socialism originated, and it was they who communicated it to the more intellectually developed proletarians who, in their turn, introduce it into the proletarian class struggle where conditions allow that to be done. Thus, socialist consciousness is something introduced into the proletarian class struggle from without and not something that arose within it spontaneously.’ [our underlining]

and Lenin adds in a footnote,

‘This does not mean of course, that the workers have no part in creating such an ideology. They take part, however, not as workers, but as socialist theoreticians, ... to the extent that they are able to acquire the knowledge of their age, develop that knowledge ...’.

Having emphasised above, that knowledge does not arise immediately, out of experience, as the empiricists of the 17th Century believed, it is now necessary to make the opposite thesis, that knowledge can arise only in connection with practice.

‘Working class consciousness cannot be genuine political consciousness unless the workers are trained to respond to all cases of tyranny, oppression, violence, and abuse, no matter what class is affected – unless they are trained, moreover, to respond from a Social-Democratic (i.e. ‘revolutionary socialist’) point of view and no other. The consciousness of the working masses cannot be genuine class-consciousness unless the workers learn, from concrete, and above all from topical, political facts and events to observe every other social class in all the manifestations of its intellectual, ethical, and political life; unless they learn to apply in practice the materialist analysis of all classes, strata, and groups of the population. Those who concentrate the attention,

observation, and consciousness of the working class exclusively, or even mainly, upon itself alone are not Social-Democrats; for the self-knowledge of the working class is indissolubly bound up, ... with the practical understanding of the relationships between all the various classes of modern society, acquired through the experience of political life. For this reason the conception of the economic struggle as the most widely applicable means of drawing the masses into the political movement ... is so extremely harmful and reactionary in its practical significance. In order to become a Social-Democrat, the worker must have a clear picture of the economic nature and social and political features of the landlord and the priest, the high state official and the peasant, ... But this clear picture cannot be obtained from any book. It can be obtained only from living examples and from exposures ...'⁸⁰

and Lenin goes on to describe how the daily activity of the revolutionaries 'among all classes of the population' is directed towards bringing political consciousness 'from outside the economic struggle'.

Lenin understood that 'Social life is essentially practical. All mysteries ... find their rational solution in human practice and in the comprehension of this practice,'⁸¹ and 'The character of any organisation is naturally and inevitable determined by the content of its activity.'⁸²

In other words, the basic materialist understanding that knowledge is 'the comprehension of human practice' has to be applied to the issue of self-consciousness of the workers and their understanding of the whole of the political life of society.

In the conditions of the time, the organisational practice that Lenin advocated was based around the production and distribution of *Iskra*. In exile, the editorial board was able to enjoy the fullest, most comprehensive open discussion and investigation, which would have been impossible within the country.

Distribution of the paper, and political struggle around the content of the paper, provided a vehicle for building a political network covering the whole of Russia, which brought common debates, news and campaigns to communities that would otherwise have been isolated from each other. While 'free and open debate' of the sort possible in democratic countries remained impossible, millions of Russian workers not only read of the debate in the

80 Lenin: *What is to be Done?* (1901), section III C.

81 Marx: *Theses on Feuerbach* VIII.

82 *What is to be Done?* IV.

pages of Iskra, but participated in it, and at the same time participated in a diversity of political campaigns affecting different sections of the people.

The use of a newspaper as a means of organisation is now of course the norm among the whole range of socialist tendencies. What is important is to understand how this practice originated in turn-of-the-century Russia. Also, how the unqualified right of the editorial board to formulate policy, even to the point of writing the draft program for the founding Congress of the RSDLP, allowed the major theoretical debate of the time to rage across the whole movement, even under conditions of extreme repression.

Here was contained in extreme and embryonic form⁸³ the idea that is at the root of Marxist organisational practice – democratic centralism, the dialectical materialist theory of knowledge applied to class-consciousness.

The **ideal** of democratic centralism is often expressed as ‘**full freedom in discussion, complete unity in action.**’⁸⁴ It has to be understood however that these two opposite poles – democracy and centralism – cannot be mechanically combined, but are in fact in a continual **struggle**, interpenetrating one another, and transforming one in to the other; the **balance** between democracy and centralism will have to tip to one side or the other, depending on conditions.

Further, the internal regime of an organisation is inseparable from, interconnected with, and in a sense **identical with**, its relation to the class of

83 As early as 1908 Lenin had to fight against those who took the positions defended in *What Is To Be Done?* out of their historical context. In the Preface to Lenin’s selected works, *Twelve Years*, published in 1908, Lenin says: ‘The basic mistake made by those who now criticise *What Is To Be Done?* is to treat the pamphlet apart from its connection with the concrete historical situation of a definite, and now long past, period in the development of the party, ... who do not realise that today the idea of an organisation of professional revolutionaries has **already** scored a complete victory. That victory would have been impossible if that idea had not been pushed to the forefront at the time, if we had not “exaggerated” ...’. Lenin further says: ‘the organisation [the book] advocates has no meaning apart from its connection with the “genuine revolutionary class that is spontaneously rising to struggle”. But the objective maximum ability of the proletariat to unite in a class is realised through living people, and only through definite forms of organisation. In the historical conditions that prevailed in Russia in 1900-05, no organisation other than Iskra could have created the RSDLP we now have.’

84 Transitional Program, last section.

which it is part.

In the first place, the opportunities for democratic discussion provided by external conditions must be utilised to the fullest possible extent, but these opportunities clearly vary from time to time and place to place with the prevailing degree of repression and the standing of the party amongst the masses.

Equally, the possibility and necessity for unity in action varies from time to time and place to place: facing the possibility of considerable political gain at one time, facing impending split over disagreement on what to do, at another.

Thus, we say that the democratic and centralist poles are **dialectical**. Democracy is the means of building centralism; centralism is the means of achieving democracy.

Without thoroughgoing discussion leading to full support for a correct policy and leadership, centralised action around the policy, placing trust in the leadership is impossible. Without conscious direction and leadership, open discussion will quickly degenerate into aimless chaos.

When engaged in any given practice, the members of an organisation, or part thereof, need to attain the highest possible unity in action, not only in order to gain the greatest effect in implementing a correct policy, but also to learn as well and as rapidly as possible the negative lessons from a mistaken policy.

In both instances, the fullest democratic discussion is needed to ‘get it right’ in the first place, to achieve real conviction if that is possible, to achieve the fullest preparedness for the conceivable negative lessons, and to recognise as rapidly as possible when something has gone wrong. If necessary, decisions will be taken deliberately to **test** a disputed point, in order to achieve unity at a higher level next time.

An organisation that lacked this **cognitive** structure and a relation to some periphery **entirely** is inconceivable. The issue is to **understand** how to consciously organise and vary this structure in the most **flexible**, practical way, in relation to both external conditions, internal development, and the objects of the organisation and its perspectives at the time.

The difference between democratic centralism and **federalism** for instance is that federalists have become **fixated** at a certain stage of development, and fearing the consequences of trying to achieve a higher degree of centralism, and consequently a more thoroughgoing democracy, ‘make a virtue’ of what they perceive as necessity.

Let us look at how the democratic centralist structure of the Bolshevik Party varied over 20 years from the first publication of *What is to be Done?* in 1901.

At the founding conference a furious debate broke out over the definition of membership in the constitution, and the RSDLP split into Bolsheviks ('majorityists') and Mensheviks ('minorityists'). The Bolsheviks' definition was stricter in granting membership, and the right to participate in decision-making, only to those who actually participated in the organisation, while the Mensheviks had a broader definition, allowing 'fellow-travellers' to exercise membership rights.

For the next twelve years a single organisation continued to exist in tenuous internal struggle, coming together under mass-pressure for the last time, at the Unity Conference in 1912. In 1917, the Mensheviks fought against the Revolution.

While engaging in the most bitter public polemic against the Mensheviks, the Bolsheviks continued to act towards the Mensheviks as towards comrades to whatever extent the bitter political struggle, and eventually civil war, allowed, until such time as the **whole working class understood** the difference between tin- Bolsheviks and Mensheviks and the life-and-death significance of this difference.

In the aftermath of the defeat of the 1905 revolution, the Bolshevik Party was n I most shattered by repression on one side and the retreat of the masses on the other.

Apart from a period of reconciliation with the Mensheviks, the Bolsheviks were also forced to tolerate a whole diversity of practices being carried out in their name. They could not afford to pass up any opportunity for public activity that the conditions of great repression did allow; at the same time they had to regain some semblance of unity. Failing to adapt to the new conditions, some comrades rejected legal forms of struggle.

At the same time, Bolshevik members of the Duma (parliament) were subject to severe class pressures, and made errors. A tendency, which did exist, to lay down 'ultimatums' to comrades and supporters, would have shattered the Party forever under these conditions.

Tensions within the Bolshevik leadership reached breaking point in the period leading up to the October Revolution.

On the eve of the insurrection, Zinoviev and Kamenev, two senior Central Committee members, gave the capitalist press details of the planned insurrection in an effort to forestall what they saw as a disastrous mistake.⁸⁵

Meanwhile Lenin was threatening the Central Committee that he would

⁸⁵ See Lessons of October, Trotsky 1924.

resign and go directly to the masses to summon the insurrection, if the CC did not agree to proceed with all haste to seize the opportunity which might never come again.

In the event, the crisis was resolved by revolutionary action: the majority of the CC launched the insurrection.

Kamenev and Zinoviev far from being expelled for breach of Party discipline, remained CC members and helped to lead the Revolution, mobilising a vast mass of non-members through the Military Revolutionary Committee headed by Trotsky.⁸⁶

During the Civil War, the 'Military Opposition' faction led by Smirnov maintained its opposition to Trotsky's policy as leader of Red Army over a long period of time.

Despite the conditions of civil war this faction suffered no repression, for in time experience showed the correctness of Trotsky's policy, and the Military Opposition gradually came over to agreement, and took up responsible military positions.

The Party Regime

In 1921, facing imminent extinction, the Tenth Congress of the Communist Party banned factions. But even then, subsequent factional disputes were settled not by expulsions, but through correct leadership and 'diplomacy'.

As soon as the Civil War was over and the revolution secured, Lenin and Trotsky sought to open up the factional struggle in order to educate the new politically inexperienced membership of the Party. However, Stalin sought (successfully) to retain the ban on factions at pain of expulsion, and stifle debate. At the same time, Stalin opened the doors of the Party, and allowed millions of loyal, but politically uneducated workers to join, and used them to swamp the voices of the Opposition against his bureaucratic regime.

This defeat, the triumph of Stalinist organisational methods, which was the precursor to Stalin's political victory within the Communist Party, the subject of section 7 below, was possible and possibly even unavoidable, due to the external social conditions in which the Party found itself.

Within the country – which had suffered enormously in war and civil war – so many of the most militant workers who had led the revolution had died, and

86 For a detailed explanation of this crisis and others such as those mentioned below, and the methods of their resolution, see Trotsky's *The New Course*, 1923. This short book is the clearest explanation of 'factions' in a revolutionary party.

the rest were exhausted and war-weary. The economy had been devastated and Soviet Russia faced famine. Internationally, huge defeats had been inflicted on the revolution. A series of uprisings had been crushed or betrayed and the Soviet Union isolated.

Ultimately, a healthy regime is impossible without a correct policy. And vice versa, a correct political policy cannot be developed outside of a healthy internal party regime.

One of the things to be understood in organisational practice is this: the Party is a part of the class. All the social problems, contradictions and changes affecting (the class will come into) the Party (to the extent that the Party does not succeed in isolating itself from the class, in which case all manner of monstrous phenomena may manifest themselves in place of the real-life problems of the class).

For example, in the 1970s there was an upsurge in the workers movement and the revolutionary movement generally, and many Marxist, or hopefully-Marxist, organisations either grew or sprang into existence. At the same time, the contradiction between the continued oppression of women by patriarchy on the one hand, and the possibility and necessity for the liberation of women, coming out of developments in the forces of production, on the other, reached bursting point. Millions of women rebelled against this repression, and patriarchy resisted.

The Marxist movement however failed to recognise or understand this, in the main.⁸⁷ The failure to develop organisational theory and practice in response to this social change had a disastrous impact on the majority of revolutionary tendencies.

The treatment of women as ‘domestic servants’ was carried over into political organisations; even the most backward attitudes were aped by those who thought that such backwardness brought them closer to working class. While fighting for a class view of society, many would-be Marxists wrongly saw the liberation of women as a ‘diversion’, opportunistically placing the interests of the more privileged male workers over those of working class women, who correctly saw that they were doubly oppressed.

This error was allowed to continue by the pretence that the social analysis women were making of society at large was ‘inapplicable’ to the

87 Of all the political parties active at that time, the Trotskyist American SWP probably made the most progress in developing theory and practice appropriate to this movement.

‘revolutionary party’ In reality of course it applied, and with a vengeance. As a result, large numbers of women, who had developed their critique of patriarchy as **revolutionaries** preferred to work in women’s organisations, and many became hostile to Marxism, and a split opened up which has had far reaching damaging effects both on the workers’ movement and on the women’s movement.

Similarly, the whole range of cultural problems have to be understood. For instance, in the early 70s the American SWP and their Australian counterpart, made a ‘turn to industry’. This meant large numbers of professional people uprooting themselves and taking factory jobs. The effect was disastrous. The political problem of winning workers to the Party was avoided by simply making ‘workers’ out of existing party members. In most cases these members did not of course ‘become workers’, they just worked in environments to which they were ill-adapted, and became less, not more effective politically.

We have to understand that people are not counters to be moved around like pieces in a chess game: the political work of individuals must be a continuation of the social relations which made revolutionaries of them in the first place.

Contrariwise, the party needs to establish ‘its own society’, in the sense that it has to be able to resist social pressures that come upon members during periods of retreat or reaction. At all times, the greatest flexibility and acutest perception of changes in society outside, and the internal life of the party, is necessary to retain healthy growth of the Party’s organism.

Factions and Groupings

One other consideration which follows is this. The aim of democratic centralist organisation is to achieve a situation where every single individual member participates immediately and fully in every decision. Clearly however, this is an ideal which can only be approached. In any organisation with more than a handful of members no discussion is possible without some kind of structure, and all but the most trivial of decisions will entail differences of opinion which will take some time to resolve to everyone’s satisfaction.

In any revolutionary party, temporary and permanent groupings will occur around various issues of concern; sometimes a whole range of issues produce differences of opinion along similar lines; these groupings often harden into quite stable factions. If this were not so, then we would be entitled to presume that either people were not applying their minds to things, or the

disagreements were being kept quiet for some reason. But if the growth of factional differences goes too far, before long a split may occur.

Consider the following comments from Trotsky's *The New Course*, supporting the 1923 CC resolution against bureaucratism:

It is in contradictions and differences of opinion that the working out of the party's public opinion inevitably takes place. To localise the process only within the apparatus which is then charged to furnish the party with the fruit of its labour in the form of slogans, orders etc., is to sterilise the party ideologically mid politically. To have the party as a whole participate in the working out mid adoption of the resolutions is to promote temporary ideological groupings that risk transformation into durable groupings and even into factions. What to do? Is it possible there is no way out? Is it possible that there is no immediate line between the regime of 'calm' and that of crumbling into factions? No, there is one, and the whole task of the leadership consists, each time that it is necessary and especially at turning points, in finding this line corresponding to the real situation of the moment.'

While it follows from the historical materialist study of politics that political differences ultimately reflect class antagonisms,

'those comrades who assert most flatly, with the greatest insistence and sometimes most brutally, that every difference of opinion, every grouping of opinion, however temporary, is an expression of the interests of classes opposed to the proletariat, do not want to apply this criterion to bureaucratism.' And 'there should be no over-simplification and vulgarisation in the understanding of the thought that party differences, and this holds all the more for groupings, are nothing but a struggle for influence of antagonistic classes. ... the party is able to resolve a problem by different means, and differences arise as to which of these means is the better ... but that does not necessarily mean that you have there two class positions.'⁸⁸

Nevertheless, in the course of the development of a political party, problems reflecting deep social crises outside the control of the party itself may lead to such differences as can never be contained within an organisation, at its particular stage of development.

Such a situation arose when the Socialist International supported the First World War. A Conference of the Socialist International was held in Zimmerwald, Switzerland, in September 1915. At this Conference a majority led by Kautsky refused to oppose their own governments, and supported the

88 *The New Course*, Chapter III.

War. Only the Bolsheviks and minority groups from four other countries adopted the policy of revolutionary defeatism and refused to condone the slaughter. Lenin had no choice but to split and begin the struggle for a new, genuinely revolutionary International.

Such a situation also arose when the Communist International had degenerated to a point where it not only organised the defeat of the German working class at the hands of Hitler, but actually re-affirmed the correctness of its policy after Hitler had come to power with the blood of the German working class on his hands.

In “Left Wing Communism” – An Infantile Disorder, Lenin asks the question of ‘why the Bolsheviks have been able to build up the discipline needed by the revolutionary proletariat?’. Introducing the review of the history of the Party referred to above, he says:

‘First, by the class-consciousness of the proletarian vanguard, by its tenacity, self-sacrifice and heroism. Second, by its ability to link up, maintain the closest contact, and – if you wish – merge, in a certain measure, with the broadest masses of the working people – primarily with the proletariat, but also with the non-proletarian masses of the working people. Third, by the correctness of the political leadership exercised by this vanguard, by the correctness of its political strategy and tactics, provided the broad masses have seen, from their own experience, that they are correct. ... The creation [of these conditions] is facilitated by a correct revolutionary theory, which, in its turn, is not a dogma, but assumes final shape only in close connection with the practical activity of a truly mass and truly revolutionary movement.’

While the development and problems of the revolutionary movement since 1924 will be discussed in later sections, giving due consideration to the whole of the social and political crises of the last 70 years, it will be clear that the conditions cited above by Lenin have, on the whole, not applied during this period, at least not on sufficiently broad a level for a ‘truly mass and truly revolutionary’ International to be successfully built.

During the period following World War II there is no doubt that objective conditions were ripe for such an International, and it was with this prospect in mind that the Trotskyists had founded the Fourth International in 1938. Stalin’s victory within the Communist International, the murderous activity of fascism and Stalinism before, during, and after the War had left Marxism in a very weak position. This, combined with the strong position that Stalinism had found itself in, in occupation of half of Europe, and the common front of the democratic imperialist powers with Stalinism, meant that capitalism and Stalinism were able to re-stabilise.

The Trotskyist movement emerged from the War weak in numbers and isolated from the mass revolutionary movement sweeping the world. This movement remained broadly under the control of Stalinism. The USSR and the deformed workers' states set up in the late 1940s formed the social base of Stalinism. Isolated from their natural political base in the revolutionary stratum of the working class, the Trotskyist movement suffered great attrition, and is today totally fragmented and in the main marginalised.

Democratic Centralism Today

The question for today is this: what is the appropriate organisational practice in this period, which is consistent with the Leninist theory of organisation, democratic centralism?

In particular, where our numbers are very small, and the influence of Marxism very limited, where state repression is not evident, and social contradictions extremely blurred, what does this mean for Leninist organisational practice?

In the first place, since conditions allow (repression is not evident), and since the low state of the development of revolutionary theory and practice requires it, democratic centralism leans heavily towards the democratic pole in relation to practice (intervention, agitation and propaganda) with the maximum of open discussion.

To enforce the centralist pole in this situation is either bureaucratism pure and simple, or the symptom of an organisation that is merely endeavouring to forestall its own disintegration. [Under conditions of severe repression, for instance, it is necessary to operate with a 'command structure'; open discussion is impossible, or more exactly, suicidal].

In the second place, so long as a 'truly mass and truly revolutionary movement' is wanting, the ranks of the group cannot be swelled beyond the capacity of the group to maintain a sufficient level of consciousness amongst its members.

Thirdly, desirous of testing the correctness of the group's orientation at any given time, the practical activity of the group will also enter into the democratic pole, while the discussion of that activity, and the development of theory will move towards the centralist pole, in the sense of working towards the highest possible degree of agreement and commonality of analysis, which would be neither possible nor necessary in a 'truly mass and truly revolutionary movement'.

But here I am talking of a small revolutionary group, which will today exist within a "swamp" of innumerable sects, factions, cliques, sympathisers of overseas groups, 'refugees' from organisations – such is the stage of political

organisation of the revolutionary stratum of the working class today, after 70 years of Stalinism. And this is not to mention larger reformist formations entirely corrupted, but entrenched within the bureaucracy of the workers' organisations.

Does democratic centralism, the Leninist theory of organisation, apply to practices in relation to other groups and parties? Undoubtedly. Within the workers movement, there is no hard and fast line between comrade and political opponent.

Under certain conditions a revolutionary grouping or party must even merge with a non-Marxist organisation; all sorts of pacts and temporary alliances and blocs are necessary and fruitful at different times, sometimes leading in the end to renewed conflict, other times to unification. The establishment of a party representing the revolutionary stratum of the working class is today an urgent, but extremely complex task which requires the most flexible and conscious organisational practices.

The experience of the Trotskyist movement, particularly the salutary examples of the Left Opposition and the Fourth International in its earliest formative years, is a rich source of knowledge here.

Particularly important is the experience of the 1930s in Germany where Trotsky worked as part of a very small minority within the Comintern, in order to overcome the split in the working class between the reformist Socialist Party of Germany, and the Stalinist Communist Party of Germany.

These questions will be discussed later in the following section, which deals with the whole range of political tactics and strategy built up and tested by the Bolshevik Party from 1903 to 1917, the Communist International in the first five years of its life, from 1919 to 1924, and in the Trotskyist movement, particularly from 1929 to 1938.

In section 101 will look more closely at the tasks and problems of revolutionary organisation at the current juncture.

5) The Transitional Program

In this section I shall discuss the practice of a revolutionary party and its members. It should be remembered however that there is no sharp line between theory and practice – theory is only more or less closely connected to practice. Our practice is how we learn about the changes taking place in society, about the response of people to different questions and so on. Only in the course of practice is theory fully actualised and concretised.

Equally, there is no sharp line between the ideas of democratic centralism discussed in the previous section, and the methods of work in society as a whole; in the beginning we are a small faction within the masses; in the end, the working class is one organised body wielding public political power.

The methods and principles of practical work are of course dependent on the circumstances of the time. Every new period brings with it new lessons, new problems, new methods of struggle. Only a thorough grasp of the dialectical materialist outlook can make it possible to work out the correct approach in each new situation.

History provides a rich source of material which we all have to study so as to build up a familiarity with a whole range of practical problems, and the way in which revolutionaries of the past have dealt with them. In this section I shall deal only with the principles of work applying in the developed capitalist countries during the **transitional epoch**, and I shall place the greatest emphasis on those principles that are relevant to situations where the revolutionaries are in a minority.

By transitional epoch we refer to the present period, transitional between the epoch of capitalism and the epoch of socialism, in which ‘the objective pre-requisites for socialist revolution have not only “ripened”; they have begun to get somewhat rotten. Without a socialist revolution, ... a catastrophe threatens the whole culture of humanity. ‘ and ‘The chief obstacle ... is the opportunist character of the proletarian leadership.’⁸⁹

The main sources for an explanation of Marxist political practice are:

Lenin’s pamphlet, **“Left Wing” Communism – An Infantile Disorder**, which Lenin wrote in 1920 to explain to those groups who had rallied to the newly- formed Communist International how the Bolsheviks had won power, and is mainly directed against the immature sectarian or syndicalist approaches of those who wanted to emulate the Bolsheviks, but took no

89 Transitional Program, first section.

account of the thirty years of preparatory work that had been carried out in Russia before the Bolsheviks were able to make the Revolution;

The Transitional Program, the founding document of the Fourth International, written in 1938, in which the important concept of the **transitional demand**⁹⁰ is explained and developed;

Trotsky's writings on Germany⁹¹ during the fight against fascism, where the tactic of united front was developed – a specific tactic aimed at achieving the maximum unity of the working class in action, at the same time as creating conditions where the workers come into conflict with their opportunist leaders.

The principle components of political activity are propaganda, agitation and organisation.

Propaganda

Marxists do not use the word 'propaganda' as a term of derision. It is simply a question of calling things by their name. Propaganda means the presentation of our whole program. Obviously, at any given time only a small number of people will want to listen. Nevertheless, the party can only grow and extend its influence to the extent that it is able to convince people of its whole program and recruit some into its ranks.

This is not the only function of propaganda however. Qualitative leaps in the influence and strength of the party must be prepared over a long period of time. Only by such work can our whole line of approach and critique of existing society become comprehensible. This function takes on particular importance in times of crisis, when a particular social or political question becomes the subject of very widespread argument and discussion or at election time, when for a brief period masses of people weigh up the pros and cons of different political programs. Along with everyone else, Marxists will put their views into the debate.

The art of propaganda is a technical question and does not belong here. The only issue is to be clear on the place and purpose of propaganda. In particular, when a group is very small, lacking significant influence in the prevailing conditions, then its propaganda activity occupies a greater specific weight.

90 Note that the word 'transitional' is used here in a different but related meaning: transitional between the minimum program of the daily struggle, and maximum program of socialist revolution.

91 Germany: What Next? and Germany: The Key to the International Situation, Trotsky 1931.

Agitation

Agitation means utilising the party's resources to promote a single proposal, possibly on a very broad level. For instance, we might work very hard to defend a particular strike, or to oppose a particular change in the law, or a reactionary act by the government. The specific purpose of agitation is to achieve the particular objective. There is no inviolable boundary between propaganda and agitation. However if we wish to see a victory in such and such a strike which will weaken the government's centralised wage fixing policy for instance, then there would be no particular agitational value in combining promotion of the party's whole program in the same action. Such a combination would not be excluded on principle, but we need to be clear on what we are doing.

Propaganda and agitation are dialectical opposites; they cannot be mechanically combined, but must be identified in a manner which is consciously worked out in relation to the stage of politicisation of the masses, the maturity of the party, and the relation between the two, in each specific case.

Organisation

The party is a part of the class; its normal condition and that of its members is participation in the class struggle. The principle and over-riding means of conducting the proletarian class struggle is organisation.

The art of organisation, acquired through practice and critical analysis of practice, is again not something by any means unique to Marxists, but, like propaganda and agitation, the common stuff of political life. To understand specifically Marxist political practice I shall consider from the standpoint of dialectical materialism some of the one-sided, exaggerated methods which have affected the revolutionary movement.

'Dialectical materialist practice' means 'To be able to seek, and correctly determine the specific path or the particular turn of events that will lead the masses to the real, decisive and final revolutionary struggle'⁹²... 'to help the masses in the process of the daily struggle to find the bridge between the present demands and the socialist program of the revolution.'⁹³ We err to the left when we isolate ourselves from people by counterposing our socialist program to the present demands of the mass movement; we err to the right

92 "Left Wing" Communism, section X.

93 Transitional Program, second section.

when we abandon our program in favour of the spontaneous movement of the masses. Marxist practice is a continual struggle to be right on that point of contradiction.

Sectarianism

Sectarianism is the left deviation from Marxism. In its pure form sectarianism is characteristic of a revolutionary movement which is either completely immature from the historical perspective and has not yet learnt how to find a road to the masses, or of an organisation in its death agony which has withdrawn from the struggle and decided to isolate itself from the people in order to defend its own peculiar interests.

While sectarianism is by no means the exclusive attribute of small groups, it is the small group which is most vulnerable. Examples of sectarianism range from groups like the Socialist Labour League to Pol Pot (although we would probably reserve stronger language in this instance) to the Communist International in the late 1920s and early 1930s when it advocated the policy of labelling the Socialist Parties as ‘social fascists’ and ‘worse than Hitler’.

Let us consider one classical variety of sectarianism to illustrate this.

Ultimatism

The term **ultimatism** originates from a tendency also known as the otzovists (literally ‘up-and-out-ers’) that arose in the ranks of the Bolsheviks in 1908.⁹⁴ Following the defeat of the 1905 uprising, this was a period of reaction and repression. Most of the Party’s work was carried out illegally, apart from very broad agitational work. One of the avenues for propaganda and agitation was the Bolshevik group of deputies in the Duma (parliament). Isolated from their comrades, in a most reactionary and intimidating milieu, these deputies made many mistakes and frequently failed to take the kind of stand that their comrades expected of them.

The otzovists insisted that the Duma group ‘break through the police barriers that separate the deputies from the masses ... come out more sharply and strikingly, in a word, fuse its work with the life of the proletariat, and then the workers perhaps will see some value in it. But... all dreams of expanding and deepening the work of the group must be abandoned.’ Speaking of the nature of the period and the possibility of a new upsurge, the otzovists said ‘To what should our Party adapt itself? To years of stagnation, or to a new social

⁹⁴ See Two Letters, Lenin November 1908 for a discussion of the otzovists’ position.

upsurge?’ and declared that ‘the masses are completely indifferent to all that goes on within the walls of the Tauride Palace’.

Insisting that the Party should not adapt itself to the nature of that current period, they placed an ultimatum before the Duma group – either openly rally the masses for revolution or get out!

Lenin answered the otzovists by saying that adapting to the current situation was obligatory, that the only way to prepare for the next upsurge was to work in the way which was most appropriate to the current situation, to make use of every legal and illegal opportunity to explain to people what had to be done and to begin to re-organise and prepare their forces. Further, people were not indifferent to what went on in the Duma; that despite many errors, the Duma group had also done very valuable work which could not have been done by anyone else; that the Duma group should be publicly criticised, so that pressure from the masses would help them resist the pressure of reaction; but when they took correct stands, then that should be publicised.

This is the historical origin of the concept in 1908, but it will be seen that ultimatism is quite a common phenomenon. Two forms will be recognised:

Firstly, we have the practice of placing demands upon the leaders of trade unions or the ALP that they carry out such and such a policy – a policy which is tantamount to resignation, since the caller knows that there is no support in the ranks for this policy. I am not talking of placing quite correct demands upon right-wing leaders with the very practical aim of exposing them and n placing them with more militant leaders who will carry out the policy. The SI I. demand that the ALP expel the Centre Unity faction is an example – a rail which could expose no one except the SLL.

Secondly, we have the practice of proposing, for instance in a mass meeting, that people adopt such and such a ‘pure’ policy, that the proposer knows will be rejected. Defeat of their motion is then the occasion for a walk-out or denunciation, intended to absolve the speaker of all further responsibility for what follows.

The issue is to be able to judge precisely what will take people one step along the road which ultimately leads to revolution, from where they are at the moment. This is not a simple a priori task. What might appear to the impressionist to be an ultimatum may frequently turn out to be dramatically effective.

The methodological basis of sectarianism is subjective idealism – beginning from one’s self, one’s own view of the world, and imposing that on to the world; appearance is rejected as illusory.

It would be a mistake however to think that sectarianism is something like a venereal disease with which the ‘pure’ cannot be affected. The persistent and manic denunciation of sectarianism is often the shortest route to the opposite error – opportunism. Marxists have to wage an unrelenting struggle to raise the class-consciousness of people, their awareness of the injustices of capitalism and their consciousness of the historical tasks before them. It would be easy to avoid the danger of falling into sectarianism if we were to abandon this struggle.

At the same time, if we are constantly trying to link up with the mass movement, joining with people in their day-to-day struggle for meagre and partial demands and maintaining the closest links with them, then the pressure to bow to spontaneity, to put in to the background the fact that we have a different agenda, to hesitate in raising unpopular demands, to adopt the popular modes of speech even where issues of principle are compromised, ... these pressures can be severe, and it is by no means always easy to determine the line dividing sectarianism from opportunism. But such precisely is the task of Marxism.

Opportunism

Opportunism is the rightwards error, complementary to sectarianism. In its extreme form we have the right-wing leaders of the ALP, as well as those small groups who adopt reactionary policies in relation to nationalism, denouncing ‘foreign monopoly capitalism’ while remaining silent about the Australian bourgeoisie, or burying themselves in trade union work to the point where they are indistinguishable from the reformists themselves.

Opportunism means avoiding the more oppressed layers of the working class and preferring the more privileged layers that are receptive to political ideas; keeping silent when a ‘difficult’ question comes up or allowing a reactionary or sexist comment to pass, rather than ‘alienate’ a worker; placing priority on short-term gains over the long-term interests of the working class; promoting the interests of one section of the working class, with whom we may be closely associated at a given moment, while allowing the interests of other sections, such as workers in other countries, other unions, unemployed workers, or whatever, to be ignored.

Opportunism means capitulating before what is, or more exactly, what appears to be. The methodological basis of opportunism is impressionism, or empiricism – taking appearances at face value. Consequently, the opportunist is driven hither and thither by every new turn in events, and is incapable of taking a stand against appearances and creating a change.

Economism

One of the varieties of opportunism is economism, which is the subject of Lenin's book *What Is To Be Done?* referred to earlier. The economists do not recognise the historic mission of the proletariat to lead the whole people and make the socialist revolution. Instead it is said that the working class is capable of participating only in the economic (trade union) struggle. It is 'hoped' that the workers will learn better out of their own experiences in the economic struggle, thus absolving the 'revolutionary' of any responsibility for working out practices to lead the workers in the direction of socialist revolution. The resulting fetishism with trade unionism is to be found among left groups in countries like Australia with a strong trade union tradition.

Up till now I have dealt fairly randomly with the problems of revolutionary political practice in this period. I shall now consider the principle formulated by Trotsky in 1938 which sums up the experiences of a whole period of revolutionary struggle from the 1880s.

Transitional Demands

In the Transitional Program Trotsky contrasts the **minimum program** – the demands which arise spontaneously out of the existing situation, those demands which are perceived by people as both necessary and possible, within the framework of existing society – and the **maximum program** – socialist revolution on a world scale.

'Classical Social Democracy, functioning in an epoch of progressive capitalism, divided its programme into two parts independent of each other: the minimum programme which limited itself to reforms within the framework of bourgeois society, and the maximum programme which promised substitution of socialism for capitalism in the indefinite future. Between the two no bridge existed. And indeed Social Democracy has no need of such a bridge, since the word "socialism" is used only for holiday speechifying.'⁹⁵

The Program says 'The present epoch is distinguished not for the fact that it frees the revolutionary party from day-to-day work but because it permits this work to be carried on indissolubly with the actual tasks of the revolution. '

'Indefatigably, it defends the democratic rights and social conquests of the workers. But it carries on this day-to-day work within the framework of the correct actual, that is, revolutionary perspective.' But within the struggle for

95 Transitional Program, third section.

this minimum program, a system of transitional demands are introduced.

These demands, although deliberately promoted by revolutionaries, are such that they address themselves to immediate apparent injustices, pressing economic needs of people, and so on; while not necessarily subjects for impressive and inspiring speeches, they are the sort of demands around which people can be mobilised; however, instead of being designed simply to be 'winnable', 'ever more openly and decisively they will be directed against the very bases of the bourgeois regime.'

Directly or indirectly, the struggle for such demands either focuses attention upon the fact that bourgeois relations threaten the vital interests of the working class, or succeeds in weakening those relations in such a way that success, instead of de-mobilising the mass movement, pacifying it, actually leads to a deeper understanding of what has to be done.

In the Program, a range of demands are put forward. While much of the Program will never be out of date so long as capitalism exists, the essence of the demands is to make a connection between the issues of the day and the maximum program of socialism. Consequently, by its very nature, the Transitional Program has to be continually updated so that it retains its connection with the problems currently facing people. What is important is the method of the Program.

The demand for indexation of wages is a transitional demand, since capitalism cannot guarantee the maintenance of real wages, even if wage rises are possible at certain times; reduction of the working week without loss of pay, especially during periods of recession is transitional since this strikes directly at the rate of surplus value; all kinds of Freedom of Information, especially for the disclosure of business secrets when employers are attempting to justify attacks on the working class, help the mass of people understand the real state of affairs; for the nationalisation without compensation, but guaranteeing the savings of depositors, of banks and building societies that have closed their doors.

Demands of the transitional kind provide the link between the spontaneous striving of the most class-conscious sections of the people and the struggle for socialism. They meet the immediate grievance, but on reflection, it appears that a whole range of other questions are involved; the need for a comprehensive program begins to be seen.

Transitional demands also make the link between agitation and propaganda.

Every effort must be made to popularise the transitional demand. If we are deeply involved in the wages struggle we are in a position to raise the demand

for wage indexation. If we are successful, millions join in supporting the demand. The bourgeoisie is forced to explain why this demand is 'unreasonable', people listen, but are searching for an explanation and a counter. We do not belittle the problems of the bourgeoisie but bring forward other demands, such as nationalisation of the banks to 'help the government resolve the problem'.

Thus, the opportunity to patiently explain the source of the crisis, and put forward a real, comprehensive program to resolve the crisis, is provided. Our agitational work is supplemented by our propaganda. In turn, the increasing ability of numbers of workers to see that vested interests are blocking the resolution of the crisis is made possible by consideration of such well thought-out and sound proposals for resolution of the crisis.

Thus, the gulf between the minimum program and the maximum program may be bridged. Our agitation becomes more effective and threatening to the bourgeoisie, and closely connected with our propaganda, which more and more links in with the consciousness of the masses.

This is the idea of the **transitional demand**.

Again, one can illustrate the Marxist approach by contrast with the various opportunist and sectarian methods with which we are all familiar.

The demand to reduce taxes is one that is bound to find a response from people but, correctly, it is rarely raised by the left. There are a number of reasons for this: firstly, it works directly counter to ideas of collective ownership in favour of individualism; second, while appealing to private sector workers, it threatens the livelihood of public sector workers and is thus divisive; third, it draws attention away from the site of exploitation, at the work place, thus mystifying the nature of capitalist exploitation; fourthly, it is disadvantageous to low paid or unemployed workers, even if popular amongst the more privileged workers. Thus it is easy to see why 'Cut taxes' is not a transitional demand!

The demand for protectionism and tariff barriers to protect jobs is one sometimes raised by supposed-Marxists however. This is an opportunist demand, since it proposes to solve the problems of the workers of this country by exporting unemployment to the workers of another country; secondly, it fosters commonality of interest between capitalist and worker; thirdly, it locates the source of the problem outside of the country; finally, it disempowers the workers by relying on the state machine to protect their interests.

Demands of this kind – which are easy to popularise among people because,

in general they harmonise well with the prevailing bourgeois consciousness, but far from providing a bridge, erect barriers to socialist consciousness – are opportunist and Marxists must oppose them.

The defence that ‘the end justifies the means’ could be raised to justify putting forward a demand which, although contrary to socialist principles, meets a response in the mass movement. This line is reactionary through and through.

‘A means can be justified only by its end. But the end in its turn needs to be justified. From the Marxist point of view, which expresses the historical interests of the proletariat, the end is justified if it leads to increasing the power of humanity over nature and to the abolition of the power of one person over another.’⁹⁶

“‘We are to understand then that in achieving this end anything is permissible?’ demand the philistines sarcastically, demonstrating that they understood nothing. I hat is permissible, we answer, which really leads to the liberation of humanity. Since this end can be achieved only through revolution, the liberating morality of the proletariat is of necessity endowed with a revolutionary character. ... It deduces a law for conduct from the laws of development of society, ...

“‘Just the same’” the moralists continue to insist, “does it mean that in the class struggle against capitalism all means are permissible: lying, frame-up, betrayal, murder, and so on?” Permissible and obligatory are those and only those means, we answer, which unite the revolutionary proletariat, fill their hearts with irreconcilable hostility to oppression, teach them contempt for official morality and its democratic echoers, imbue them with consciousness of their own historic mission, raise their courage and spirit of self-sacrifice in the struggle. Precisely from this it flows that not all means are permissible. When we say that the end justifies the means, then for us the conclusion

⁹⁶ Phrases such as ‘power over nature’ which appear frequently in the Marxist classics are inappropriate, especially since the idea of humanity living in consciousness harmony with nature has entered popular consciousness, while a dialectical criticism of the natural scientific ideology popular in earlier days has not. Consider this excerpt from Engels’ famous pamphlet *The Part Played by Labour in the Transition from Ape to Human*:

‘In short the animal merely uses its environment, and brings about changes in it simply by its presence; humanity by its changes makes it served its ends, ‘masters’ it. This is the final, essential distinction between human and other animals, and once again it is labour that brings this distinction.

follows that the great revolutionary end spurns those base means and ways which set one part of the working class against other parts, or attempt to make the masses happy without their participation; or lower the faith of the masses in themselves and their organisation, replacing it with worship for the “leaders” .⁹⁷

So much for the opportunist method. Conversely, if we are concerned solely to be ‘true to our ideals’, and pay no attention to the possibility of taking a small step forward by seriously addressing the problems to which people are demanding an answer, then we shall not fall into the opportunist error. This simple remedy is worse than the disease however.

For instance, at the present juncture, to respond to an upsurge of anger against the latest police killing by calling for law and order to be kept by workers’ militia and for the disbandment of the police and army, would sow confusion, discredit a proposal which later on might be quite appropriate, and even provide a platform for the police spokespeople to justify their readiness for violence ‘while such terrorists are at work’.

In a different situation, when people are beginning to find the behaviour of the police intolerable, this demand becomes entirely relevant. In the current situation it is more useful to put forward proposals for enquiries, and enquiries which will be as open and accountable as possible, to demand real measures to prevent recurrences, and demand that the culprits be punished with the utmost severity. This may be very frustrating for the socialist who ‘knows’ that the police are the class enemy, that every enquiry will probably be turned into a whitewash etc., but until people have begun to draw the same conclusion, we have to go through this process, without making any concessions to reactionary support for the police. The same comments apply to those who always and everywhere call for indefinite strike action, even a general strike.

‘Let us not however, flatter ourselves overmuch on account of our human victories over nature. For each such victory nature takes its revenge on us. Each victory, it is true, in the first place brings about the results we expected, but in the second and third places it has quite different, unforeseen effects which only too often cancel the first. ... Thus at every step we are reminded that we by no means rule over nature like a conqueror over a foreign people, like someone standing outside nature – but that we, with flesh, blood and brain, belong to nature, and exist in its midst, and that all our dominance of it consists in the fact that we have the advantage over all other creatures of being able to learn its laws, and apply them correctly.’

Their Morals and Ours, Trotsky 1938, last section.

This kind of ultra-left ultimatum is usually associated with abstention from the class struggle. Even a perfectly legitimate demand, which would otherwise be characterised as transitional, can be reduced to hot air, if it is introduced from outside. The opportunity to raise a transitional demand from within the existing struggle is not always available. We cannot be everywhere at one time, especially when the forces of Marxism are small and isolated.

However, transitional demands can only take root, and find a response, to the extent that we succeed in introducing them into the actual struggle, and succeed at least in producing the initial mobilisation required to put them on the agenda. Understanding this, Marxists make every effort to be in the front ranks of the day-to-day struggle, and to find concretely how to make this bridge between the consciousness of the day-to-day struggle and the struggle for the real, only correct, revolutionary socialist program.

Marxism and the Trade Unions

The following excerpt from Trotsky's article Trade Unions in the Transitional Epoch written in April 1938, sums up the attitude of Marxism towards the trade unions in this period:

The Bolshevik-Leninist stands in the front line of all kinds of struggles, even when they involve only the most modest material interests or democratic rights of the working class. They take active part in mass trade unions for the purpose of strengthening them and raising their spirit of militancy. They fight uncompromisingly against any attempt to subordinate the unions to the bourgeois state and bind the proletariat to "compulsory arbitration"... Only on the basis of such work within the trade unions is successful work within the trade unions possible against the reformists ...

'Trade unions do not offer and, in line with their task, composition and manner of recruiting membership, cannot offer a finished revolutionary program: in consequence, they cannot replace the party. ...

'Trade unions, even the most powerful, embrace no more than 20 to 25 percent⁹⁸ of the working class, and at that, predominantly the more skilled and better-paid layers. The more oppressed majority of the working class is drawn only episodically into the struggle, during a period of exceptional upsurges in the labour movement. During such moments it is necessary to create organisations ad hoc, embracing the whole fighting mass: strike committees,

98 In Australia today 40 percent of the labour force are members of trade unions.

factory committees, and finally, soviets.⁹⁹

‘As organisations expressive of the top layers of the proletariat, trade unions ... have developed powerful tendencies toward compromise with the bourgeois democratic regime. In periods of acute class struggle, the leading bodies of the trade unions aim to become masters of the mass movement in order to render it harmless. ...

‘Therefore, the sections of the Fourth International should always strive not only to renew the top layers of the trade unions, boldly and resolutely in critical moments advancing new militant leaders in place of routine functionaries and careerists, but also to create in all possible instances independent militant organisations corresponding more closely to the tasks of mass struggle against bourgeois society; and if necessary not flinching even in the face of a direct break with the conservative apparatus of the trade unions. If it be criminal to turn one’s back on mass organisations for the sake of fostering sectarian fictions¹⁰⁰, it is no less so to passively tolerate subordination of the revolutionary mass movement to the control of openly reactionary or disguised conservative bureaucratic cliques. Trade unions are not ends in themselves; they are means along the road to proletarian revolution.’

The following excerpt from the article *Communism and Syndicalism*, written by Trotsky in 1929, sums up the relation between the Party and its members working in the trade unions:

‘In the trade unions, the Communists, of course, submit to the discipline of the party, no matter what posts they occupy. This does not exclude but presupposes their submission to trade union discipline. In other words, the party does not impose upon them any line of conduct that contradicts the state of mind or the opinion of the majority of the members of the trade unions. In entirely exceptional cases, when the party considers impossible the submission of its members to some reactionary decision of the trade union, it points out openly to its members the consequences that flow from it, that is, removal from trade union posts, expulsions, and so forth. ...

‘In times of “peace”, ... the direct role of the party in trade union action falls back to second place. ... It serves the strike with its agitation etc. First place in

99 ‘soviet’ is the Russian word for council, and refers to the workers’ councils created by the 1905 revolution, which constituted the basis for an alternative state structure, based on the working class.

100 i.e. the ‘Red unions’ created by the Stalinists in the late 20s/early 30s.

the strike belongs to the trade union.

‘The situation changes radically when the movement rises to the general strike and still more to the direct struggle for power. In these conditions, the leading role of the party becomes entirely direct, open, and immediate. The trade unions – naturally not those that pass over to the other side of the barricades – become the organisational apparatus of the party which, in the presence of the whole class, stands forth as the leader of the revolution, bearing the full responsibility.

‘In the field extending between the partial economic strike and the revolutionary class insurrection are placed all possible forms of reciprocal relations between the party and the trade unions, ... But under all conditions, the party seeks to win general leadership by relying upon the real autonomy of the trade unions which, as organisations – it goes without saying – are not “submitted” to it.’

Syndicalism

Syndicalism is the political tendency which elevates the trade union to be the sole legitimate organisation of the working class. Syndicalism rejects the struggle for state power by disdaining all ‘politics’; it regards any state as essentially inimical to the working class, it is hostile to all ‘politicians’ and (in words) rejects party organisation.

Syndicalists, like any political tendency, have their own parties. Because of their professed opposition to ‘parties’ and ‘politicians’ however, they often operate by means of trade union factions or cliques, which differ from parties only in that they do not openly declare themselves, and lack the kind of internal structure that is necessary to guarantee internal democracy and open discussion.

Syndicalists will, at least in certain periods, fight along with communists against the reformists and bureaucrats. The Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) played a progressive role in the early part of this century, and some of its leaders subsequently became communists. The crisis for syndicalism comes when the working class is faced with passing from the economic struggle to the struggle for political, i.e. state power.

At this time, the independence of the trade unions from the bourgeois state can only be defended by counterposing to the power of the bourgeois state that of a proletarian state, to capitalist police and capitalist economic organisation, proletarian political organisation and a socialist economic strategy. For these tasks, the trade union is entirely inadequate. In opposing the right of a party to organise independently of the trade union and to

exercise influence within a trade union, and in attempting to confine the arena of political activity to the trade unions alone, syndicalism can become very reactionary.

United Front and Popular Front

When communists are the sole or predominant political influence within the working class things are relatively straight forward. This is however an entirely exceptional situation.

‘The progress of a class toward class consciousness, that is, the building of a revolutionary party which leads the proletariat, is a complex and contradictory process. The class itself is not homogeneous. Its different sections arrive at class consciousness by different paths and at different times. The bourgeoisie participates actively in this process. Within the working class, it creates its own institutions, or utilises those already existing, in order to oppose certain strata of workers to others. Within the proletariat several parties are active at the same time. Therefore, for the greater part of its historical journey, it remains split politically. The problem of the united front – which arises during certain periods very sharply – originates thereby.

‘The historical interests of the proletariat find their expression in the Communist Party – when its policies are correct. The task of the Communist Party¹⁰¹ consists in winning over the majority of the proletariat; and only thus is the socialist revolution made possible. The Communist Party cannot fulfil its mission except by preserving, completely and unconditionally, its political and organisational independence apart from all other parties and organisations within and without the working class. To transgress this basic principle of Marxist policy is to commit the most heinous of crimes against the interests of the proletariat as a class.’

‘... But the proletariat moves toward revolutionary consciousness not by passing grades in school but by passing through the class struggle, which abhors interruptions. To fight, the proletariat must have unity in its ranks. This holds true for partial economic conflicts, within the walls of a small factory, as well as for such ‘national’ political battles as the one to repel fascism.’¹⁰²

101 At the time of writing, September 1932, Trotsky, as a member of the International Left Opposition, expelled from the Communist Party, still acted as a faction of the Communist International.

102 Germany: What Next? Chapter III.

The theory of uniting the class struggle against the bourgeoisie with the struggle between different political tendencies within the working class was formulated by Trotsky in the early 1930s in the fight against fascism in Germany. The basic principles had already been worked out in the course of the Russian revolution, but it was as a leader of the International Left Opposition, that Trotsky was able to formulate these principles in a definite and comprehensive way.

In November 1929, with the Soviet state threatened by the rise of the rich peasantry (kulaks), Stalin abandoned his policy of supporting the enrichment of the kulaks and went over to the policy of enforced collectivisation and 'liquidation of the kulaks as a class'. At same time, from 1928 to 1933, the Soviet economy was gripped by runaway inflation as Stalin attempted to impose a centralised planned economy using completely idealistic forms of economic management. This was a period of ultra-leftism in the zig-zag history of Stalinism. In the late 1920s, around the world, the various sections of the Comintern (Communist International) launched insurrections, regardless of the political conditions in each country.

In the 1920s in Germany, the working class was split¹⁰³ between the Socialist Party (SPD) and the Communist Party (KPD), with the SPD receiving the majority support of the better-off and unionised workers, and the KPD receiving more support from the poorer layers and unemployed.

The political differentiation of the working class during the imperialist epoch had led to this split between a reformist and a revolutionary stratum, and these strata were represented and organised by two different mass political parties.

Together, the SPD and KPD had more mass support than the Nazis. Both the KPD and SPD were highly organised and had their own powerful militias. The economy was racked with enormous crisis.

As a leader of the Revolution and founder of the Red Army Trotsky still had considerable prestige, but the Left Opposition had been driven underground and politically isolated. They still worked as a faction of the Communist International, with the aim of winning the Comintern back to Marxism while maintaining the maximum possible unity in action against the bourgeoisie.

Up until July 1933 this perspective was maintained – an application of

103 The Socialist Party leaders had murdered the great Communist leaders Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht in 1919 and with the assistance of the German military betrayed the revolutionary upsurge that followed in the wake of Germany's defeat in the Great War.

democratic centralism under conditions of unprecedented repression on the part of the leadership of the International.

Accordingly, Trotsky's writings of this period were addressed primarily to the members of the KPD, urging upon them a policy which would allow the organised workers of Germany to unite against the fascists despite the split between the two great working class parties, and at the same time, create conditions for people to test out their own leaders.

Only the most extreme conditions of repression, disorganisation and betrayal led Trotsky to abandon this perspective of working within the Comintern with the aim of overthrowing its leaders and changing its political direction.

The 'Red United Front'

The policy of the KPD was for a 'Red United Front'. This policy set out from the thesis that it was impossible defeat the fascists without first defeating the Socialist Party; that the SPD, since it supported parliamentarism (one form of the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie), was 'no different from the fascists' (who advocated another form of the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie), and in fact the SPD was labelled 'social fascist', a 'wing of fascism'; that as 'the enemy within' the SPD was 'worse than the fascists'; that after fascism had come to power the workers would turn to the Communist Party as the only means of fighting Hitler, and thus 'after Hitler, us'. The KPD declared that any united front that did not place itself under their leadership was 'counterrevolutionary', but on this basis appealed, over the heads of the SPD leaders, to the membership of the SPD to 'Cast your leaders aside and join our "non-party" "Red United Front"', saying that 'We make no demands that you accept our communist views', but we do demand that you join our front, while we characterise your organisations as 'social fascist'.

In this way the KPD leaders placed an ultimatum before the Socialist Party masses – either join us, or be damned.

The United Front

While the mass of social democratic workers wanted to fight fascism, and wanted to fight side-by-side with Communist workers, the overwhelming majority wished to do so only together with their own organisations. Under these conditions it was essential to convince and demonstrate in practice that the Communist Party was completely ready to make a bloc with the SPD against the fascists. To appeal to them over the heads of their own leaders was nothing more than a charade.

In order to force the SPD into an effective bloc against the Nazis, the SPD

workers had to see that their own leaders were dragging their feet. In that case SPD members would demand that their leaders change their policy, match their words with deeds and join such a bloc. If the SPD leadership refused, either they would be removed, or the best SPD members would rally to the Communists. But this opportunity to test out the value of their own organisations could not be by-passed.

However, it would be disastrous if such an appeal to the SPD leadership were to in any way lead to a softening or belittling of criticism of their reactionary policies (such as their support for the ‘moderate’ Brüning as the ‘lesser evil’ to Hitler). In fact it was essential that the workers clearly perceive the two distinct and opposite lines – reform or revolution – being proposed, and that the Communist Party continue to explain the necessity for the working class to take power.

Thus what was required was a quite definite and simple agreement which would allow common actions to be taken against the fascists, while political argument continued over the whole of the program for the working class.

Trotsky expressed it thus:

‘No common platform with Social Democracy, or with the leaders of the German trade unions, no common publications, banners, placards! March separately, but strike together! Agree only on how to strike, whom to strike, and when to strike! ... On one condition, not to tie one’s own hands.’

Such an agreement would be made as a result of a public campaign; it would utilise dialogue between members of the two parties to secure a strictly practical agreement; there would be under no circumstances any ‘secret negotiations’. The bloc would be achieved simply because of the pressing and obvious need for such a bloc for the purpose of fighting the class enemy.

Contrary to the Stalinists’ belief that a victory for Hitler would be the impulse for the rapid growth of the Communist Party, it meant the annihilation of both the KPD and the SPD. The defeat of the Nazis was an essential precondition for the victory of the working class; revolutionary policies could not triumph over reformism, except through the defeat of fascism.

On the historical scale, it is true that reformism and fascism are props for one another; but in the short-term, and in relation to tactics, it works out quite differently.

Thus the Marxist tactic of the united front: complete independence politically and organisationally from all other parties and organisations; unity in action with the reformists and other tendencies in the working class by means of clear, practical and public agreements, without any limitation of the right to

criticise.

Popular Front

When Hitler came to power and smashed up all the organisations of the working class, the Communist International made no self-criticism. They simply changed their line. From the ultra-left policy of denouncing the SPD and the majority of the German workers as ‘social fascists’, they went over to the policy known as popular front.

The main characteristic of this policy, implemented with murderous effect in Spain¹⁰⁴, is that the Communist Party makes an alliance, not with other tendencies in the working class, but with sections of the bourgeoisie.

Running the line that only with the support of ‘progressive sections of the bourgeoisie’¹⁰⁵ can the working class defeat the common enemy fascism, the popular front goes on to conclude that in the interests of maintaining this alliance the working class must desist from making attacks on capitalist property and at least temporarily abandon its program of socialist revolution, and in fact all public criticism of their allies in the popular front, since this would ‘alienate’ their valuable supporters among the industrialists and financiers, etc, etc.

In Spain this meant handing back factories that had been occupied, disbanding Soviets that already had control of cities, and, turning their guns upon those such as the POUM who did not agree. It meant secret deals made behind the backs of the workers.

On the international arena, the diplomatic manoeuvres of the Soviet government are translated by popular front politics into Communist Parties supporting bourgeois and even right-wing governments, such as when the Maoists in Australia supported the Liberal Party government (‘national bourgeoisie’) against supposed ‘soviet social-imperialism’!

Under certain conditions, the argument that the working class needs to win the support of other social classes in order to defeat fascism, is very compelling.

I will discuss more fully below, in the section on Permanent Revolution, tactical and strategical questions relating to the relation between the working

104 see Felix Morrow’s *Revolution and Counter-revolution in Spain*.

105 The reader may recall the use of the phrase ‘all progressive forces’ in the agitational material of various groups. This phrase is a reference to popular front tactics.

class and other classes among the people.

The working class cannot possibly become strong unless it pursues its own (class interests, and those interests are fundamentally antagonistic to those of the capitalist class. A working class that refuses to take power for itself, must inevitably hand power to another class.

Fascism arises under certain historical conditions, when the 'democratic' method of rule has led to an impasse, when capital can no longer rule by resting upon the organisations of the working class. The mission of fascism is to smash up all organisation independent of the fascist state machine. Under such circumstances, the 'liberal bourgeoisie' is totally incapable of defeating fascism.

What is more, faced with a choice between socialist revolution and fascism, big capital will opt for fascism. Faced with a choice between fascism on the one hand, and paralysis, vacillation, weakness and chaos on the other, the petit bourgeoisie may also opt for fascism. Only a choice between socialism and fascism can win over the petit bourgeoisie, and only a strong, independent working class can offer the petit bourgeoisie that alternative.

Summing up, it can be seen firstly that the class content of any proposed bloc has to be determined in order to make an assessment of it. This has to be entirely free of demagogic and simplistic labelling of the tendencies involved, but assessed in relation to the whole of the political and social conditions pertaining.

Secondly, any such bloc or alliance should be on the basis of quite clear and public principles directed towards identified mutually agreed goals, and we should treat with the utmost suspicion any secret negotiations which may entail unstated pay-backs.

Thirdly, no agreement should be entered into with a party having a distinctly different program which entails limitation of our right to explain and propagate our own views, or places any restriction upon our organisational independence, or that of the working class.

The principles applied by Trotsky to the struggle in Germany in the 1930s should not be mechanically transplanted. Particularly, when we are dealing with political parties and groups in Australia today, we have to understand that the relation of these groups to the masses cannot, in the vast majority of cases, be compared to that of the Nazis, the KPD or the SPD which were mass parties.

Such rules can only offer some guidance in the ever changing world of political struggle. The main thing is to be able to identify the left and right

Modern Marxism

errors given such classic form by the Stalinists of the 1930s, which secured the victory of first Hitler, and then Franco.

6) Imperialism and Permanent Revolution

Imperialism

In 1916 Lenin published his important book, *Imperialism, The Highest Stage of Capitalism*, in which he established that capitalism had entered a new stage of its historical development, which he referred to as imperialism, but which can also be called monopoly capitalism.

In summarising his analysis Lenin points to four principal aspects of the emergence of imperialism:

Firstly, imperialism arises out of the concentration of capital which takes place on the basis of ‘free competition’, with larger companies taking over their weaker rivals, monopolising whole branches of production, forming trusts and cartels, and also gaining control of a whole range of industries.

Secondly, the monopolies strive to secure their control over the sources of raw materials in every corner of the world, and access to markets in every country.

Thirdly, financial institutions, and principally the banks, have gained pre-eminence over industrial capital, thus accentuating the concentration of capital and its ability to move from country to country and industry to industry, with finance capital exercising a highly centralised control over whole economies.

Fourthly, imperialism has arisen as a continuation of colonialism, when by the end of the 19th century, there remained no new territories into which colonialism could ‘freely’ expand and the struggle for monopolisation and re-division of spheres of influence, sources of raw materials etc., began in earnest.

Lenin describes imperialism specifically as the highest, or last, stage of capitalism, because on the one hand it has ushered in all the pre-requisites of socialism – world market, world-wide division of labour, the possibility of centralised planning, the transcendence of the nation-state – and on the other it has taken humanity into an epoch of decay and destruction, because of the absolute contradiction between the private ownership of the means of production, now concentrated in the hands of a few families, and the socialised character of the forces of production developed on a world scale.

The predatory wars of conquest waged by colonialism, forcibly dragging the peoples of all continents into the system of capitalist production and distribution, based on the most modern forces of production built up in the ‘home’ country, now give way to the decline of the imperialist states into

rentier states, living of the proceeds of exported capital, used in turn to buy off a section of 'their own' working class to secure peace at home, while plundering with extreme brutality abroad. While continuing to grow, this growth is uneven, with the wealthiest countries becoming parasites off the poorer countries, where backwardness and high-technology exist side-by-side.

Both 'free competition' and the national market have given way to integrated systems of production and distribution, planned and directed on an international scale, but not for the 'good of humanity', but to satisfy the private greed of a few. The extremity of this contradiction which has completely outgrown the confines of the nation-state, lends to the epoch of imperialism its character as an epoch of wars and revolutions. Inter-imperialist rivalry leads repeatedly to wars which are fought out on the international arena. The advanced social developments in the brutally exploited colonies give rise to sweeping and powerful movements for national liberation. Sharp social crises in the metropolitan centres periodically break out into revolutionary confrontations.

Permanent Revolution

If there were only two social classes in the world, workers and capitalists, life would be simple indeed. In reality there are a variety of social classes in any society, each having a different relation to the means of production, a different role in the social relations of production, and different social and economic interests, not to mention innumerable intermediate strata.

In Australia nowadays the proletariat is the vast majority, with considerable differentiation within it. The capitalist class is a small minority, and is differentiated between various layers, notably the financial and industrial bourgeoisie. There is a large petit bourgeoisie including small business people and farmers, merging imperceptibly into the upper ranks of the proletariat at one end, and the lower ranks of the capitalist class at the other. There is a small but growing section of declassed people, excluded from any role in production and distribution of wealth, and an oppressed nation – the Aborigines. Most important of all, there is imperialism – American, British, European and Japanese – which while not 'personally' resident in Australia are a powerful social, political and economic force within and upon society in Australia.

No sense can be made of social and political events in the country without understanding the inter-relationships between these classes. Social revolution is possible only if the working class is able to lead the majority of the people

behind it in the overthrow of capitalism.

The theory known as **Permanent Revolution** deals with this fact – the proletariat is only a part, even a minority, of the oppressed people.

In a country like Australia, and in fact any country, it is questionable whether it is sensible to talk of a ‘national economy’, so intertwined and dependent is the economic life of a country on the world economy, dominated as it is by imperialism. This interdependence between the politics and economics of every country with the world economy is also one of the premises of the theory of permanent revolution.

While we understand the history of recent centuries as being characterised by feudalism being supplanted by capitalism, in turn engendering the conditions for socialism, it would be absurd to imagine that each individual country can make this transition on its own, at its own pace. The opposite is the case – imperialism has penetrated every corner of the globe; the wealth of one country is built on the poverty of another. As a result, in every country we find, side-by-side with each other, relics of feudalism, and even pre-feudal society, capitalism, both early manufacturing and modern industry, and even distorted, stunted forms of socialist development.

This **combined and uneven development** is also a basic premise of the theory of permanent revolution.

Finally, we should observe that while capitalism grew up in the nation-state structure created by feudalism, it long ago outgrew that form. The First World War was a symptom of this fact. Nowadays all the major players in the world economic scene are completely transnational. The largest investors in the US foreign debt are the Japanese banks for instance. Thus the national road of development, trodden by the old European powers, and the USA, is completely blocked to any newcomers.¹⁰⁶ The only possible road of capitalist development is as an integral part of a world division of labour and world market already ruthlessly controlled by imperialism.

Socialism however presupposes a further development of the forces of production beyond what capitalism is capable of providing. Consequently, if capitalism cannot develop within the confines of the nation state, even less possible is it for socialism. For socialism however, participation in a world economy dominated by imperialism is excluded; the more so since socialism

¹⁰⁶ Japan could be considered a ‘new-comer’ in this league with no more justification than Germany. Since 1905 Japan has to be considered as an imperialist country.

presupposes the withering away of the state, the elimination of oppression and a rational division of labour premised not on the laws of commodity exchange but upon the need of human beings to live in harmony with one another and the natural environment. It is abundantly clear then that while the proletariat can seize power in a country, it cannot build a socialist society without the freeing of the whole world economy from the domination of imperialism.

What is the situation then in a country which is struggling to free itself from the parasitic domination of foreign imperialist powers? Their economies are component parts of the economy of the imperialist country – like one workshop in a factory; their population is distorted by the presence of strata directly dependent upon the imperialist. Their own bourgeoisie is small, corrupt and dependent. The working class is strong and combative, but a minority, among the remnants of the old society in the form of a large peasant mass, which desires national independence, freedom, land, peace, but has no desire for socialism, which aspires in fact to petty proprietorship.

With this preamble let us introduce the historical origin of the theory of permanent revolution.

Imperialism had begun to penetrate Russia in the latter part of the 19th century; huge industrial complexes, like those today in the Newly Industrialised Countries of the Pacific Rim, had been created; while suffering under a mediaeval autocracy, a modern proletariat had been hauled into existence within a single generation. Caught between the Tsarist nobility and imperialism, the Russian bourgeoisie was weak and immature, incapable of leading a bourgeois revolution in the manner of the European bourgeoisie. The great mass of the population was still the peasantry, some labouring on the large estates owned by the nobility, some relatively well-off, employing wage workers.

Prior to the 1917 revolution, the two wings of the RSDLP, Mensheviks and Bolsheviks, held two different perspectives for the progress of Russia. The Mensheviks believed that Russia must follow the path of the old capitalist countries, with the bourgeoisie overthrowing Tsarism and establishing parliamentary democracy and capitalism. The Bolsheviks believed that the proletariat would lead the revolution, but the revolution would establish a ‘democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry’.

Trotsky summed up his position at that time thus¹⁰⁷: ‘the revolution, having begun as a bourgeois revolution as regards its first tasks, will soon call forth

107 From the 1919 Preface to Results and Prospects, first published in 1906.

powerful class conflicts and will gain final victory only by transferring power to the only class capable of standing at the head of the oppressed masses, namely, to the proletariat. Once in power, the proletariat not only will not want, but will not be able to limit itself to a bourgeois democratic programme. It will be able to carry through the revolution to the end only in the event of the Russian Revolution being converted into a Revolution of the European proletariat. The bourgeois-democratic programme of the revolution will then be superseded, together with its national limitations, and the temporary political domination of the Russian working class will develop into a prolonged Socialist dictatorship. But should Europe remain inert the bourgeois counter-revolution will not tolerate the government of the toiling masses in Russia and will throw the country back – far back from a democratic workers and peasants republic. Therefore, once having won power, the proletariat cannot keep within the limits of bourgeois democracy. It must adopt the tactics of permanent revolution, i.e., must destroy the barriers between the minimum and maximum programme of Social Democracy, go over to more and more radical social reforms and seek direct and immediate support in revolution in Western Europe.’

This line, advocated by Trotsky since 1905, is the programme with which the Russian Revolution was made. Before April 1917 Trotsky joined neither Bolsheviks nor Mensheviks, believing that the differences between the two factions on the formulation of the revolution as a bourgeois revolution did not warrant a split. On returning from exile in May 1917, he found that these differences had polarised completely, with the Mensheviks foisting their programme onto the revolution and actively supporting the bourgeoisie against the workers, while the Bolsheviks had organised all the best elements of the working class and intelligentsia and had openly adopted the policy of socialist revolution. For a short time after returning Trotsky belonged to a small group of close supporters, but in June 1917 joined the Bolsheviks. It should be remembered however that, from the standpoint of programme, it was the Bolsheviks that joined Trotsky, not the other way round.

A brief clarification – bourgeois revolution and socialist revolution.

By **bourgeois revolution** we mean the revolution that breaks up feudal relations opening the way to capitalist development, by establishing such rights as equality before the law, freedom of speech and belief, separation of Church and State, unrestricted freedom of trade and commerce and so on. The bourgeois revolution may take many forms: the English Revolution of 1640, the French Revolution of 1789 are the classics. The bourgeois revolution however may or may not be led by the bourgeoisie and may or may not lead to

a democratic parliamentary- type regime.

By **socialist (or proletarian) revolution** we mean the revolution which takes state power away from the capitalists and, at the least, places state power and the commanding heights of industry in the hands of the organised working class. Such a revolution may or may not open the way to socialist development, depending chiefly upon the world situation, and may or may not take the form of thorough-going democracy, depending on the circumstances.

A further clarification – dictatorship of the bourgeoisie and dictatorship of the proletariat.

By dictatorship of the bourgeoisie we mean that regime where the bourgeoisie wields the predominance of political and social power. Such a regime may, and frequently does, take the form of universal suffrage and parliamentary government, for all real power rests first and foremost in the boardrooms of the largest companies, and also in the state machine, the military and the police, where the bourgeoisie always ensures it has firm control. Political power under capitalism is inherited and concentrated in the form of capital. The dictatorship of the bourgeoisie may take the form of a fascist or a parliamentary regime, but its dictatorship is in general most secure under the parliamentary system.

By **dictatorship of the proletariat** we mean that state power is wielded by the working class, and the capitalist class is excluded from power. Fully consistent and unrestricted democracy is the best means of excluding the bourgeoisie from power, for it is but a tiny majority, and can never out-vote the working class. However, life is never so simple. Just as the bourgeoisie may resort to a fascist party in order to smash the working class, and thus have to suffer also under the same brutal and unstable regime, so also the proletarian dictatorship may take distorted forms, in which capital is abolished, but the vast mass of the working class is also excluded from political life.

Can there be such a thing as a ‘two-class’ state, a workers’ and farmers’ government for instance? In general, while such an alliance cannot be excluded in principle, it would of necessity be highly unstable since conflicting class interests are involved.

Could the petit-bourgeoisie take state power in its own right? In general, No. The petit-bourgeoisie and the peasantry must either support the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie or the dictatorship of the proletariat. But their support or (lie lack of it is often the decisive factor in the success or failure of a regime.

‘With regard to countries with a belated bourgeois development, especially the colonial and semi-colonial countries, ... complete and genuine solution of their tasks of achieving democracy and national emancipation is conceivable only through the dictatorship of proletariat as the leader of the subjugated nation and above all its peasant masses.

‘Not only the agrarian, but also the national question assigns to the peasantry – the overwhelming majority of the population in backward countries – an exceptional place in the democratic revolution¹⁰⁸. Without an alliance of the proletariat with the peasantry the tasks of the democratic revolution cannot be solved, nor even seriously posed. But the alliance of these two classes can be realised in no other way than through an irreconcilable struggle against the influence of the national-liberal bourgeoisie.’

This alliance can only be ‘... a dictatorship of the proletariat which bases itself upon the alliance with the peasantry and solves first of all the tasks of the democratic revolution.’

In this same summary of the Theory of Permanent Revolution, Trotsky explains Lenin’s position in the period before the 1917 revolution:

‘... Lenin’s old formula did not settle in advance the problem of what the reciprocal relations would be between the proletariat and the peasantry. ... The peasant follows either the worker or the bourgeois. This means that the “democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry” is only conceivable as a **dictatorship of the proletariat that leads the peasant masses behind it.**’

It is easy to see how disastrous was Stalin’s policy, in 1927, of instructing the Chinese Communist Party to politically subordinate itself to the bourgeois nationalist Kuo Min Tang.¹⁰⁹ Chiang Kai Shek turned on the Communists and

108 Democratic revolution: i.e. the revolution which achieves the tasks of democracy and national emancipation achieved in the ‘normal’ course of development by the bourgeois revolution. This excerpt, and the quotations following, are from a fourteen point summary of the theory, What is Permanent Revolution, Chapter 10 of Permanent Revolution written by Trotsky in 1930.

109 The Declaration of the Eighty-four published in May 1927 expressed Stalin’s policy in these words: ‘We must not arm the workers, or organise revolutionary strikes, or incite the peasants against the landowners, or publish a Communist daily paper, or criticise the bourgeois gentlemen of the right wing of the Kuo Min Tang, and the petit-bourgeois of the “left” Kuo Min Tang, or build Communist cells in Chiang Kai Shek’s army, or call for the formation of soviets, so as not to “drive off” the bourgeoisie or “scare off” the petit bourgeoisie, or disturb the government of the

massacred them, and many thousands of workers. The Chinese Communist Party continued to pursue the programme of ‘democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry’, placing its cadre at the head of a peasant army, and returning in 1949 to the cities, not to liberate, but to subjugate the urban working class. The 1989 massacre of urban Chinese at the hands of a peasant army is the continued legacy of this reactionary perspective.

Although most of the Chinese Trotskyists were murdered in the 1920s, the remainder were rounded up in 1951-2 when the Stalinist government was instituting a programme of restoring capital to the big bourgeoisie. This policy was in line with their mechanical interpretation of bourgeois revolution – the same line supported by the Mensheviks in Russia¹¹⁰.

Very soon after, the Chinese government had to turn about-face, and the ultra-left policy of forced collectivisation was implemented.

Understanding that the proletariat is the only class capable of solving the national problem and carrying through the democratic revolution, Marxists base themselves upon the proletariat of the oppressed nation. The revolutionaries aim to win the leadership of the peasantry through the working class.

‘The dictatorship of the proletariat which has risen to power as the leader of the democratic revolution is inevitably and very quickly confronted with tasks, the fulfilment of which is bound up with deep inroads into the rights of bourgeois property. The democratic revolution grows over directly into the socialist revolution and thereby becomes a permanent revolution.

The conquest of power by the proletariat does not complete the revolution, but only opens it. Socialist construction is conceivable only on the foundation of the class struggle, on a national and international scale. This struggle, under the conditions of an overwhelming predominance of capitalist relationships on the world arena, must inevitably lead to explosion, that is, internally to civil wars and externally to revolutionary wars. Therein lies the permanent character of the socialist revolution as such, regardless of whether it is a backward country that is involved, or an old capitalist country which already has behind it a long epoch of democracy and parliamentarism.

“bloc of four classes”.’

110 The policy of the ‘bloc of four classes’ was formulated by A Martinov a well-known leader of the Mensheviks, who joined the Bolsheviks in 1923 to assist in the campaign against Trotsky, and was made editor of the journal of the Communist International.

‘The completion of the socialist revolution within national limits is unthinkable. One of the basic reasons for the crisis in bourgeois society is the fact that the productive forces created by it can no longer be reconciled with the national framework of the national state. From this follow, on the one hand, imperialist wars, on the other, the utopia of a bourgeois United States of Europe. The socialist revolution begins on the national arena, and is completed on the world arena. Thus, the socialist revolution becomes a permanent revolution in a newer and broader sense of the word; it attains completion only in the final victory of the new society on our entire planet.’¹¹¹

The ‘combined and uneven development’ of capitalism on a world scale means that although the productive forces as a whole are ripe for socialism, it may be the proletariat of backward countries that are the first to overthrow the bourgeoisie. It remains the case however, that it will be these backward countries that will be the last to achieve socialism.

‘... in a country where the proletariat has power in its hands as a result of the democratic revolution, the subsequent fate of the dictatorship and socialism depends in the last analysis not only and not so much upon the national productive forces as upon the development of the international socialist revolution.’

Socialism in one country is an **unrealisable fiction**. And this has been proved by the recent developments in Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union, Nicaragua and China.

War and Socialism

The transitional epoch, the epoch of imperialism, was characterised by Lenin as an ‘epoch of wars and revolutions’¹¹² Since the end of the First World War there has never been a time when there was not a war or revolution in progress, usually many at once.

These conflicts have been of different kinds: imperialist wars, fought by rival imperialist powers in order to redistribute territory, such as the two World Wars; wars of national liberation, fought by a people against either imperialism, or against any other oppressing nation, such as the war the Tamil people against the Sinhali government of Sri Lanka, or the Vietnamese wars against French and later American imperialism; wars launched by imperialism to subjugate, or hold in subjugation the people of an oppressed or

111 Points 8, 9 and 10 from What is Permanent Revolution?

112 Lenin: Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism, 1916.

less developed country such as the war launched by Britain against Argentina; and many other kinds.

It is essential to be able to characterise what kind of war it is, before we can understand what position the working class should take in relation to the warring parties.

In a speech Lenin gave in April 1917¹¹³ to explain how and why the Bolsheviks would be able to put an end to the participation of ‘democratic’ Russia in the War, Lenin began by emphasising the importance of Clausewitz’s famous maxim ‘War is the continuation of policy by other means.’

It is impossible to understand what a war is about by looking at just the war itself and the nature of the participants, or by examining this or that act leading up to the war, such as acts of aggression or provocation. It is necessary to look at the whole world situation, the position and interests of each participant, and their relation to the other nations and classes in the world, to make an assessment of the policy being pursued by each of the nations or classes involved in the period leading up to the war. Only in this way, understanding what policy it is that is being continued by means of war, can the nature of the war, and the possibilities within it, be understood.

Inseparable from understanding the policies being pursued in the war, and in understanding the world situation that has given rise to the war, is the characterisation of the classes, nations and states involved.

In any war there is some element of civil war; every civil war will have a greater or lesser element of inter-national war. Equally, there can be no sharp division between war and revolution. To the extent that a war can be seen more or less predominantly as a class war, what has been said already should suffice, with some qualification which I will consider later.¹¹⁴

It is necessary to clarify what is meant by ‘nation’. In the first instance, nations are social formations derived historically from the merging of tribal societies (not necessarily by ‘voluntary association’!) into broader communities sharing a common culture and common territory. The reality of history is of course not so simple. Many nations have come into being in the very midst of the struggle to defend national rights against a foreign power,

113 Lenin: War and Revolution, 1917

114 Where Stalinism is leading one or more of the states involved in the conflict, it will not be possible to fully elucidate the problems involved until we have considered the nature and historical role of Stalinism, which is the subject of the next section.

despite the fact that they did not exist as a nation previously. Such is the case for instance with the Australian Aboriginal nation. In some cases, nationhood is foisted on to a tribal people by a ‘forced march’ by imperialism. In some cases, a nation has lived since time immemorial without recognition of their nationhood, suffering ‘diaspora’ or total cultural repression. Some nations are ancient, some recent.

It is characteristic of a nation that its people aspire to determine their history autonomously, and Marxists hold that all nations have the right¹¹⁵ to such self-determination. This obviously does not extend to the right to oppress other nations, nor give any kind of legitimacy to reactionary policies being pursued by ruling classes within a nation under the banner of nationalism. Nor does it exclude the right of the oppressed people of one nation to extend support to the oppressed people of another nation in their class struggle against the oppressing class. Far from it. But that does not extend to the right of any class or group within one nation to ‘export’ their own social values or structure. There is a line between lending support to a progressive social force within another nation, and usurping the right of a nation to self-determination, and it has to be determined in each specific case, having regard, as explained above, to the **whole** of the inter-relationships between the social forces involved.

In regard to imperialist war, or wars waged by imperialism against oppressed nations, the workers interests are best served by the defeat of imperialism. The workers of an imperialist country must actively seek the defeat of ‘their own’ bourgeoisie. Imperialism can be defeated in war (by its imperialist rival or by the uprising of the oppressed masses of the other country) or it can be defeated in civil war. While defeat in war will obviously weaken the imperialist power, and enhance the possibility of its subsequent overthrow by the workers, the defeat of imperialism on the ‘home front’ is qualitatively more progressive, for here the workers liberate themselves, and actively and arms-in-hand make a bond with the people of the oppressed nation. Not to mention the suffering and misery entailed for the people of an oppressed nation to defeat an imperialist power, very often leaving it a legacy of crippling effect.

There can be no question of a choice of the ‘lesser evil’ in an imperialist war. It was arguments of the ‘lesser evil’ variety that served to justify all the Social

¹¹⁵ The concept of ‘right’ is used here in a sense similar to that discussed above in relation to morals, within the context of an understanding of the laws of social development.

Democratic parties of Europe supporting the First World War. The responsibility to defeat a particularly vicious and reactionary ruling class cannot be handed to a 'democratic imperialist'. The workers of Japan were never 'liberated' by US imperialism. Only the defeat of Japanese imperialism by the Japanese workers could do that. While the American workers were unable to overthrow their own imperialist power, it is no wonder that Japanese capitalism, and the Emperor, were defended by the occupation.

Thus the slogan of **revolutionary defeatism** which Lenin raised in 1914 is applicable to the tasks of the workers of any imperialist nation in any war. There can be no more progressive or less bloody outcome of an imperialist war, except the ending of the war by revolutionary overthrow at home. Such a revolutionary overthrow can only be prepared by the complete and unconditional hostility of the working class to its 'own' bourgeoisie.

Revolutionary defencism was the policy adopted by the bourgeois Kerensky government that took power in February 1917 on the backs of a workers uprising in Russia. 'Now we are a democratic country, we must defend our revolution against the Hun. We must not betray the workers of Britain and France who are fighting for democracy. ... etc'. This is a completely reactionary policy, for its real content was the desire to retain the territories annexed by Czarism and inherit its Empire, and participate in the carve up of the world with the 'democratic powers'.

In the speech referred to above, Lenin explained that the Bolsheviks could not guarantee that the war would be ended by a Bolshevik revolution. That could be finally decided only upon on the world scene; the workers of Europe would also have to have their say. The historical record shows however, that the Bolsheviks negotiated a peace with imperialist Germany within two months of seizing power, despite having to give up vast tracts of territory and pay reparations of enormous magnitude, and that territories, such as Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, that had never known independence, were granted independence by the Bolshevik government once these territories had been rid of the White Armies that occupied them.

Pacifism, since it makes a category of 'violence', grouping imperialist war and counter-revolution together with the fight against that by the masses, and forswears all 'violence' is little more than a back-handed support for imperialist violence.

Little better is the 'third camp' position, such as the 'Neither Washington nor Hanoi' slogan raised by anarchists during the Vietnam War and a similar position adopted by the International Socialist Group during the Korean War. Here Lenin's policy of revolutionary defeatism is transposed from a war

between rival imperialist powers to war waged by imperialism against an oppressed nation. In making this transposition, third camp-ism is a completely reactionary line. By pointing to the reactionary nature of the ruling caste or class in the oppressed country, the third camp washes its hands of its responsibility to, not only work for the defeat of its 'own' bourgeoisie (and not just in words) but also its responsibility to **defend** the right of the people of the oppressed nation to determine their own destiny, without the 'help' of imperialism.

Sometimes it is a quite reactionary, or brutal and despotic act of the ruling class of an oppressed nation which triggers (or threatens to trigger) imperialist intervention. Consider for instance the Indonesian invasion of East Timor which followed the long-overdue collapse of Portuguese colonialism.

East Timor

Dutch, Portuguese, Japanese and British colonialism brought into being Indonesian nationalism, as well as the division of the archipelago into a group of nations reflecting the influence of the different colonial powers in past times. The fact that this nationhood is the product of colonialism does not obliterate the fact. The people of East Timor or West Irian have genuine national rights and aspirations. (Unlike the British colonists of the Malvinas).

The Suharto regime was a reactionary bourgeois nationalist regime which sought and received support from imperialism to drown the Indonesian workers movement in blood. When East Timor was invaded, followed by the brutal suppression of its national movement, which continues to this day, the imperialist powers including the Whitlam government in Australia, gave tacit approval.

Would it be right in this situation to call upon the navy of an imperialist power such as Australia (with its 'socialist' government) to come to the aid of the East Timor?

While the workers of Australia would (and do) give all possible aid to the people of East Timor to free themselves from national oppression at the hands of Indonesia (itself an oppressed nation), it could not do so by means of a bourgeois government and the imperialist armed forces commanded (supposedly¹¹⁶) by that government. In giving aid to the people of another

116 The betrayal of the people of East Timor was one of the last acts of the Whitlam Labour government before imperialism unceremoniously booted it out of office in the 1975 'Canberra coup', possibly because American imperialism regarded the Whitlam government as a threat to its military bases at Pine Gap. While there was the

nation, the workers must do so by their own means. The fallacy of trying to use the ‘socialist’ government of an imperialist country to assist the workers of an oppressed nation is demonstrated graphically by the history of Ireland, and in particular the Six Counties occupied by Britain. The British Army currently occupying the Six Counties was sent in by a Labour government, ostensibly to protect the Catholic minority there!

This subject will be pursued further in the next section.

possibility of breaking some illusions that workers had in Whitlam by pointing to his unwillingness to do anything to assist the East Timorese, the more critical illusion was the belief in the ‘neutrality’ of the state.

7) Stalinism

The Russian Revolution of October 1917 is the only proletarian social revolution to succeed in overthrowing capitalism and retaining power.¹¹⁷ This historical experience is the basic model for all the Marxists of this century. The art of proletarian insurrection will not be given any special consideration in this article, since what has been said already is in general terms sufficient, and any party that finds itself posed with the tasks of insurrection and at the head of the working masses, will be better placed than the writer of these lines to solve the relevant theoretical problems. Trotsky's History of the Russian Revolution, written in 1930, is the single authoritative history of this revolution.

What concerns us here is the program upon which the revolution was made, and how, why and with what effect this program was subsequently abandoned.

The program of the revolution was presented by Lenin the day after he returned from exile, on April 4 1917¹¹⁸:

‘1) In our attitude to the war ... not the slightest concession to “revolutionary defencism” is permissible. The class conscious proletariat can give its consent to a revolutionary war, which would really justify defencism, only on condition: (a) that power pass to the proletariat and the poorest sections of the peasantry aligned with the proletariat; (b) that all annexations be renounced in deed and not in word; (c) that a complete break be effected with all capitalist interests.

‘... it is necessary to patiently explain... that without overthrowing capitalism it is impossible to end the war by a truly democratic peace, a peace not imposed by violence. ...

‘2) ... the country is passing from the first stage of the revolution – which, owing to the insufficient class-consciousness and organisation of the proletariat, placed power in the hands of the bourgeoisie – to its second stage, which must place power in the hands of the proletariat and the poorest sections of the peasants. ...

‘3) No support for the Provisional Government. ...

117 We leave of account those states which are essentially extensions of the Soviet state, created under Red Army occupation, or those states created by peasant armies, independently of the working class.

118 Known as the April Theses, Lenin sums up his program for revolution in 3 pages.

‘4) Recognition of the fact that in most of the Soviets of Workers’ Deputies our Party is in a minority, so far a small minority, as against a bloc of all the petit-bourgeois opportunist elements, ...

‘The masses must be made to see that the Soviets’⁹ are the only possible form of revolutionary government, and that therefore our task is, as long as this government yields to the influence of the bourgeoisie, to present a patient, systematic, and persistent explanation of the errors of their tactics, ... so that people may overcome their mistakes by experience.

‘5) Not a parliamentary republic ... but a republic of Soviets of Workers’, Agricultural Labourers’ and Peasants’ Deputies throughout the country, from top to bottom.

‘Abolition of the police, the army and the bureaucracy.

‘The salaries of all officials, all of whom are elective and displaceable at any time, not to exceed the average wage of a competent worker.

‘6) ... Confiscation of all landed estates [by the Soviets of Agricultural Labourers]. Nationalisation of all lands in the country, the land to be disposed of by the local Soviets ...

‘7) The immediate amalgamation of all banks ... and the institution of workers control over it ...

‘8) It is not our immediate task to “introduce” socialism, but only to bring social production and the distribution of products at once under the control ¹¹⁹ of the Soviets.

‘9) ... immediate convocation of a Party congress ...

‘10) A new International. We must take the initiative in creating a revolutionary International, an International against the social chauvinists ...’

The Bolsheviks made the insurrection on November 5 1917 and won a majority in the Soviets to form a Soviet government. By the time peace was negotiated at Brest-Litovsk on 3 March 1918, Russia was a country on the brink of social collapse. Very soon Russia was invaded by the armies of

119 The Workers’ Councils (Soviets) were created by the 1905 revolution, and had continued in existence ever since. They were composed of delegates elected in the workers’ districts and major factories, and formed a structure by delegation of representatives from the lower to the higher body. An Executive Committee of the Soviets formed in the February revolution held de facto political power at that time, but handed power over to a Provisional Committee of the Duma (parliament), because of the perspectives of the Menshevik majority of the Soviets, which believed a bourgeois government to be the only possible outcome of the revolution.

fourteen countries supported by Tsarist officer forces and various nationalist armies. In October 1920 the Revolution was driven back to the suburbs of Petrograd (Leningrad); at its low-point in 1921 what remained of the Soviet economy was run along military lines ('military communism') and was operating at about 20% of the pre-war level. The country was not freed from foreign occupation until November 1922.

Having overcome its enemies and rallied millions to defend the revolution, the cream of the Russian working class had either been killed or were exhausted; those that remained in the struggle had had to become administrators; the economy was in ruins, the people war-weary; following the defeat or betrayal of the workers in Europe, the country was isolated and blockaded; looting and banditry were rife, millions faced starvation; dissent and disillusionment were everywhere.

The Revolution faced a crisis. The principal cause of this crisis was the delay in the revolution in Europe. Out of this crisis came a split between two opposite perspectives, supported by two different political tendencies within the Bolshevik Party, which in turn rested upon different social strata and opposite class interests expressed in the leadership of the Soviet republic.

In *Revolution Betrayed*, Trotsky outlines the phases through which the Soviet Union passed as it attempted to rebuild its economy and confront the new situation in which it found itself.

“Military Communism”, 1918 – 1921

Fighting for its very life, the Soviet regime during this period of Civil War consisted of a military organisation in which everything was subordinated to the needs of the front, grain was requisitioned from the peasantry by force, the factories were run by workers under military regimentation, food was distributed by strict rationing; party activists were military commanders, not only at the front, but in the economy.

“‘Military Communism’ was, in essence, the systematic regimentation of consumption in a besieged fortress’.

The First Congress of the Communist International was held in March 1919 with delegates representing 33 countries; the Second Congress in July 1920, with 218 delegates from 37 countries; the Third Congress in June 1921 with 509 delegates from 48 countries.

During this period Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxembour, founders of the German Communist Party were murdered after the crushing of the wave of occupations in Berlin in January 1919. In September 1919 there was a widespread uprising of workers in Italy which was betrayed by the Italian

Socialist Party, and crushed by the bourgeois-liberal government of Giolitti. A Soviet Republic assumed power in Hungary in March 1919, but was drowned in blood by ‘Allied’ intervention after the withdrawal of the social-democrats. With Soviet support Ataturk founded a republic in Turkey. Insurrections were sweeping Egypt, India, Persia, ... and meeting brutal imperialist repression. Huge movements of the workers of Britain, France and other European countries were contained by the reformist parties of the Second International.

The end of the period of “Military Communism” is marked by the Tenth Congress of the Bolshevik Party, March 1921, which agreed the New Economic Policy (NEP). While this Congress was meeting, the Kronstadt uprising broke out and was crushed.

During this period Lenin and Trotsky were undisputed leaders of the revolution. No-one foresaw what later became known as Stalinism. During this period, the Bolshevik party transformed itself into the leadership of a multi-million strong international revolutionary movement, but at the same time the revolutionary wave that followed the October Revolution had ebbed.

The responsibility of averting famine and social disintegration on a huge scale fell upon the shoulders of a few revolutionaries. These revolutionaries were becoming accustomed to the methods of command. The Soviet Union was totally polarised – for or against the Bolsheviks.¹²⁰

The Cheka, (Extraordinary Commission for Repression) a secret police organisation set up in 1918 to defend the revolution against covert counter-revolution, had during this period gained almost total independence from control of the Party and was wielding great power.

Mistakenly, the Bolshevik leaders in this period hoped to develop “military

120 Victor Serge, an anarchist who sympathised with the aims of the Kronstadt rebellion, wrote of this time: After many hesitations, and with considerable anguish, my Communist friends and I finally declared ourselves on the side of the Party. ... The country was absolutely exhausted, and production practically at a standstill; there were no reserves of any kind, not even reserves of stamina in the hearts of the masses. The working class elite that had been moulded in the struggle against the old regime was literally decimated. ... If the Bolshevik dictatorship fell, it was only a short step to chaos, and through chaos to a peasant rising, the massacre of the Communists, the return of the emigrés, and in the end, through the sheer force of events, another dictatorship, this time anti-proletarian. ... the emigrés had these very perspectives in mind; ... in European Russia alone there were at least fifty centres of peasant insurrection. ‘ From *Memoirs of a Revolutionary*, Victor Serge, 1943.

communism” ‘directly into a system of planned economy ... gradually, but without destroying the system, to arrive at genuine communism’¹²¹

‘Reality, however, came into increasing conflict with the program of “military communism”. Production continually declined, and not only because of the destructive action of the war, but also because of the quenching of the stimulus of personal interest among the producers. The city demanded grain and raw materials from the rural districts, giving nothing in exchange except varicoloured pieces of paper, named, according to ancient memory, money. And the muzhik (farmer) buried his stores in the ground. ... The collapse of the productive forces surpassed anything of the kind that history had ever seen. The country, and the government with it, were at the edge of the abyss.

‘The utopian hopes of the epoch of military communism came in later for a cruel, and in many respects just, criticism. The theoretical mistake of the ruling party remains inexplicable, however, only if you leave out of account the fact that all calculations at that time were based on the hope of an early victory of the revolution in the West.’

Even had the reformists not succeeded in betraying the revolution in Europe, ‘it would still have been necessary to renounce the direct state distribution of products in favour of methods of commerce.’

The New Economic Policy, 1921 – 1928

Beginning in 1921 the market was legalised and the capitalist mechanism of supply and demand was utilised to regenerate the economy, not only in the agricultural sector, where the millions of small peasant proprietors could be motivated to produce in no other way, but in small-scale industry as well. The major industries, banks and utilities remained in the hands of the State. A stable gold-based currency was created as the foundation for the market economy.

Production revived quickly, and by 1926 industrial production had reached the pre-war level, and although more slowly, agricultural production was growing.

At the same time ‘differentiation among the peasant mass began to grow. This development fell into the old well-trodden ruts. The growth of the kulak¹²²

121 Revolution Betrayed Chapter II. The following quotations also come from the same chapter.

122 well-off peasant, employing labour.

far outstripped the general growth of agriculture. The policy of the government under the slogan “face to the country” was actually a turning of its face to the kulak ... the enrichment of the minority at the expense of the overwhelming majority.’¹²³

‘Captive to its own policy, the government was compelled to retreat step by step before the demands of a rural petit bourgeoisie. In 1925 the hiring of labour power and the renting of land were legalised, ... The rising tide of capitalism was visible everywhere. ... Retarding industrialisation and striking a blow at the general mass of the peasants, this policy of banking on the well-to-do farmer revealed unequivocally inside of two years, 1924-1926, its political consequences. It brought about an extraordinary increase of self-consciousness in the petit- bourgeoisie of both city and village, a capture by them of the lower soviets, an increase of the power and self-confidence of the bureaucracy, a growing pressure upon the workers, and the complete suppression of party and Soviet democracy.’

The split in the Bolshevik Party and the Communist International began from October 1923¹²⁴ initially with a sharp divergence over policy in relation to the appropriate pace and direction of growth of the economy.

Trotsky argued that it was urgently necessary, and possible, to rapidly expand industrial production, in order to provide a flow of cheap industrial products to the peasantry, the only means of maintaining the connection between city and countryside, and stimulating the growth of agriculture. The Central Committee majority argued instead for ‘socialism at a snail’s pace’, gradual industrialisation, and the policy of “Get rich!”, for the kulaks, relying on the better-off peasants to revive agriculture.

The situation was building up to a crisis, but the ‘triumvirate’ (Stalin-Zinoviev- Kamenev) poured scorn on the policy of industrialisation, vilified Trotsky, and praised the kulaks.

In December 1923 the Politburo unanimously adopted the resolution ‘The New Course’. The resolution had been written by Trotsky and was aimed at stemming the growth of bureaucratism and had been vigorously opposed by the majority on the Politburo, but a rising tide of public opinion forced them to adopt the resolution. In fact only Trotsky fought for the implementation of the policy, and the bureaucracy, recruited from the ranks of the former Tsarist

123 Revolution Betrayed, Chapter II.

124 See the Two Letters to the Central Committee from Trotsky, October 8 and 23 1923.

civil service and the petit-bourgeoisie, the ‘NEP-men’ – the entrepreneurs growing wealthy on the expanding legalised market, and the kulaks, tightened their grip both on the Soviet state apparatus and the lower ranks of the party, and in reality, the leadership of the Party.

In July – September 1923 the German Communist Party was in a position to make a successful revolution, but failed to recognise the situation, and did not begin to organise an insurrection until after the revolutionary tide had already begun to ebb, and was defeated.

Early in 1924 Trotsky began to criticise the policy of the Comintern which had allowed this revolutionary opportunity to be missed. His book, *Lessons of October*, in the form of a review of the October 1917 revolution, draws the lesson of the mistaken policies in Germany.

Lenin was paralysed and too ill to work from May 1922, and died in January 1924. By this time a sustained and vitriolic campaign of political vilification was being waged by Stalin, Zinoviev, Kamenev and others against Trotsky and his supporters.

The Triumvirate initiated the ‘Lenin levy’: between February and May 1924 the doors of the Party were opened and 250,000 people, not only politically uneducated workers, but petty officials, careerists and all kinds of opportunists were admitted to membership, to be used as a battering ram against the Left Opposition.

The Civil War had been decisively won and the Bolsheviks were now the ruling party. With Russia just beginning to haul itself out of famine, following the disappointment of the defeat of the German workers, the revolutionary tide was ebbing. While millions of workers and peasants loyally supported the Bolsheviks, conditions inside the Party began to degenerate.

Early in 1926, Zinoviev and Kamenev joined the Left Opposition and supported Trotsky’s call for rapid industrialisation, which the leading position of the urban working class made possible. Only by the provision of good, cheap industrial products could the workers win the support of the peasantry. Once the pre-war stock of machinery was exhausted, the slow pace of industrialisation would tell. Stalin and Bukharin continued to advocate ‘socialism at a snail’s pace’ and collectivisation of agriculture was halted by the end of 1927.

The defeat of the German revolution marked a turning point. ‘The internal discussions in the Russian Communist Party did not lead to a system of groups until the events in Germany in Autumn 1923. ... it was on that basis that the Left Opposition was formed’ wrote Trotsky later.

After 1921, the revolutionary tide in Europe began to ebb. In a mere 2 years the Comintern had established itself as a formidable force, and the European workers would soon recover from the defeats and disappointments of this period. However, the ebb tide had a powerful effect on the Russian workers and upon the internal struggles within the International.

The Fifth Congress of Comintern, in June 1924, was dedicated to a sustained attack on Trotsky.

In April 1924 the first edition of Stalin's *Problems of Leninism* included the lines: 'To overthrow the power of the bourgeoisie and establish the power of the working class in one country does not mean to guarantee the complete victory of socialism. The chief task of socialism, the organisation of socialist production, still lies ahead.

Is it possible to attain the final victory of socialism in one country, without the combined efforts of the proletarians of several advanced countries? No, it is not. The efforts of one country are enough for the overthrow of the bourgeoisie. This is what the history of our revolution tells us. For the final victory of socialism, for the organisation of socialist production, the efforts of one country, especially a peasant country like ours, are not enough. For this we must have the efforts of the proletariat of several advanced countries'.

In August 1924, a second edition was published, which included an unannounced revision to the above paragraph: 'Having consolidated its power, and taking the lead of the peasantry, the proletariat of the victorious country can and must build a socialist society'.¹²⁵

Thus, the entire foundation of Communism was turned on its head, without so much as an acknowledgment! To reverse a theoretical position without understanding and explaining the source of the change has nothing in common with Marxism. This conviction, that it was OK just to do what you could in your own country, was the outlook of the bureaucracy. Stalin gave voice to this outlook in the jargon of Marxist theory.

The role of the Comintern was then reduced to opposing foreign intervention, ultimately to act as arms of Soviet diplomacy. This meant that the CPs in various countries had to seek friendly relations with whatever influential sections of society they could, in the interests of 'friendship with the Soviet Union', irrespective of the interests and perceptions of the workers in the country.

In Britain, Stalin placed great store in the Anglo-Russian Trade Union Unity

125 Quoted by Trotsky in Appendix II of his *History of the Russian Revolution*.

Committee. In order to curry favour with the right wing leaders of the British TUC, the Communist Party put forward the slogan ‘All power to the General Council of the TUC’ leaving the TUC General Council in control of the general strike in May 1926. The TUC called off the strike after 10 days and the Communist Party was caught completely off balance. An historic defeat resulted, from which the British working class did not recover for 20 years.

Stalin’s policy of conciliation with the Kuo Min Tang in China was also leading to defeats./As a result of the policy of conciliation of the rich peasants ‘In January 192sthe working class stood face to face with the shadow of an advancing famine. ... In that very month, the representatives of the Left Opposition were thrown into prison ... for their “panic” before the spectre of the kulak.’¹²⁶

The ‘Third Period’ and forced collectivisation, 1929 – 1933

Having brought the Soviet Union once again to the edge of an abyss, this time from a rising counter-revolution led by the rich peasants and petit-bourgeoisie, from late 1928 Stalin launched an attack on the Right (Rykhov, Bukharin and Tomsky), borrowing his rhetoric from the Platform of the Left Opposition; the target for the rate of growth of industry was upped to 20 and then 30 per cent, without any regard to the relations between the different branches of industry; the problems resulting from this chaotic growth were solved by printing money, with the predictable runaway inflation; a scare campaign against the kulaks was launched; forced grain seizures led to sowing strikes by the kulaks.

Stalin answered with the policy of “liquidating the kulaks as a class”, the abolition of individual farming, announced in November 1929, and forced collectivisation which brought two-thirds of agriculture under collectivisation by 1932. Ration cards were introduced instead of money, of which Stalin declared “socialism” had no need. Farm machinery and animals were destroyed by the farmers rather than hand them over to the state. The collective farms were placed under the control of party hacks lacking knowledge of agronomy, or any of the necessary materials or equipment, and facing the hostility of the peasants. Agricultural production plumbed new depths.

Outside of Russia this period corresponds to a period of unparalleled crisis for capitalism. The Wall Street crash of October 1929 was followed by the Depression and widespread paralysis. Europe was racked by crisis with

126 Revolution Betrayed, Chapter II, part 2.

revolutionary upsurges in Spain, France and Germany. The Soviet regime survived due partly to the still deep loyalty of the majority of the people for the Revolution, and partly due to the paralysis gripping the capitalist world, preventing it from utilising the opportunity to attack the Soviet Union during its moment of greatest weakness.

This period was dubbed by Stalin the “third period” – the “final” period for capitalism – in which the world situation was again ripe for revolutionary offensive. This characterisation suited the requirements of domestic politics an attack on the right and war against the kulaks.

China: in December 1927, following the massacres in Shanghai and Wuhan which had resulted from the Communist Party’s capitulation to the Kuo Min Tang, the Communists led an insurrection in Canton. The uprising was cruelly defeated, but the Comintern characterised the situation as ‘revolutionary’ throughout the whole of China, despite the demonstrable ebbing of the revolutionary tide, and carried out a disastrous policy of putschism.

In Europe the Comintern adopted ultra-left positions, branding the reformist parties as ‘social fascists’, setting up ‘Red unions’ in opposition to the mass trade unions and under the slogan of ‘class against class’ engaged in all kinds of adventurist activities which only served to sow further confusion, as the revolutionary tide that had risen in the late twenties, began to ebb under the impact of the Depression.

In Germany this policy was fatal. The powerful German working class was split by the policy of ‘social fascism’ and eventually allowed Hitler to come to power in January 1933, following which the Communist Party, and all the working class organisations in Germany, were smashed.

Under the policy of “liquidation of the kulaks as a class” and forced collectivisation, agricultural production fell drastically, and famine gripped the land. Only slowly, after several years did agricultural production begin to slowly improve, but it still remained at near-famine level.

The ‘years of retreat’ 1933 – 1936

The next period of Soviet history is characterised by consolidation and retreat. Inflation was halted from 1934; bread-cards were abolished in 1935; Stalin initiated the Stakhanovite movement, an extreme form of what became a widespread practice of piece work payment; on 20 August 1935, Stalin declared the “final and irrevocable triumph of socialism” in the Soviet Union. In Germany, following the victory of Hitler and the smashing of the German

working class, the Comintern went over to the policy of the ‘popular front’, without the slightest analysis or recognition of how the policies of the Comintern had ensured Hitler’s triumph. The new policy was adopted as if nothing had changed at all.

The popular front meant forming a bloc between the working class and the ‘progressive bourgeoisie’. This bloc was based on agreements and diplomatic pacts between the leaders, in secret, behind the backs of the masses. The basis of the pact was mutual support in the face of the ‘common enemy’, fascism. Individual bourgeois politicians were lauded in exchange for their support for ‘progressive’ policies; but in exchange the working class had to abandon all socialist demands – no seizure of factories, no Soviets, no public attacks on capitalism.

The policy of popular front was adopted in France, with the effect of disarming the French working class in the face of a revolutionary crisis which could have turned the tide against fascism if a correct, revolutionary policy had been followed.

In Spain, the Comintern acted purely and simply as executioners of the Spanish revolution. Factory committees and soviets were disbanded and occupied property handed back to its capitalist owners; those who opposed this policy such as the POUM (Partido Obrero de Unificacion Marxista) and the anarchists, were gunned down by GPU assassins – indeed the Stalinist agents never fought Franco, spending all their energies murdering opponents of the Comintern line. Reduced to the role of supporters for a powerless ‘progressive bourgeoisie’, the Spanish working class was paralysed in the face of Franco.

The ‘popular front’ policy was based on the thesis that it was above all necessary to ensure the defeat of fascism in order to avoid the danger of a fascist attack on the Soviet Union. Similarly, a revolution in Europe, or at least the support of the Soviet Union for such a revolution, would place the Soviet Union in danger of an imperialist attack. Consequently, following the victory of Hitler, the Comintern went from advocating revolution, but incompetently, to actively **opposing** revolution, in the interests of ‘peace and stability’.

After 1933, the ‘Red unions’ set up by the Stalinists were abandoned, and thereafter Communist Party members participated in the mainstream trade unions along with the reformists.

From the Moscow Trials to the Stalin-Hitler Pact, 1936 – 1941

The assassination of Sergei Kirov in December 1934, as part of a GPU plan to

frame Trotsky, formed the pretext for a series of purges that eventually led to the execution of all the surviving leaders of the October Revolution. The centre-pieces of this bizarre holocaust were the three Moscow show-trials: In August 1936 the principal accused were Zinoviev and Kamenev, who had supported Stalin against Trotsky in 1923 – 1927, then joined the Left Opposition,

Inter returning to Stalin during the “third period”; in January 1937, the principal accused were Piatakov and Radek; in March 1938 Bukharin and Rykhov. All the accused ‘confessed’ – ‘for the good of the Party’ – and all were executed.

Trotsky was among the accused in each case, but while volunteering to appear and defend himself, was condemned in his absence.

In the Third trial, all the leaders of the Red Army were implicated in absurd accusations of treason and conspiracy, leading to the execution of virtually the whole of the leadership of the Red Army – the army that had defended the revolution against imperialist invasion, the sole real guarantee against imperialist attack, the army built by Trotsky, and the last remaining threat to Stalin’s hegemony.

following the defeat of the Spanish revolution in March 1939, Stalin actively sought an agreement with fascism, and on August 23 1939, Stalin and Hitler signed a non-aggression pact, and within a week Hitler invaded Poland. Correspondingly, the sections of the Comintern during this period campaigned against the imperialist war, and actually gained considerable support from the more politically advanced sections of the working class.

KGB agents all over the world conducted a campaign of assassination against the Left Opposition; Trotsky’s son, Leon Sedov was murdered, as were a number of his closest collaborators. On 20 August 1940 Trotsky was assassinated by the Stalinist agent Ramon Mercador in Coyoacan, Mexico. (Mercador was later awarded the Order of Lenin when released from prison 40 years later, and returned to the Soviet Union, still in the service of the Soviet secret police).

The ‘Great Patriotic War’ and ‘Peaceful Co-existence’

On 22 June 1941, Nazi Germany invaded the Soviet Union. The sections of the Comintern duly changed course abruptly, and supported the ‘war against fascism’. An anecdote by the Australian Stalinist Nancy Wills ¹²⁷ vividly

127 In *Shades of Red*, quoted in *Betrayal: A History of the Communist Party of*

conveys the stunned reaction of an audience when the CPA speaker at a public meeting announced the 180 degree change in the policy on the war from 'imperialist war' to 'people's war' – overnight. Stalinist shop stewards became the leading strike breakers, CP members the vilest patriots. All defence of the independence of the working class was abandoned in pursuit of productivity and the 'war effort'.

In 1943, the Comintern was disbanded. From here on, till 1990, the policy of the Soviet bureaucracy relies on the military strength of the Soviet state, up to and including the 'nuclear deterrent'. This military might forms the basis for 'peaceful co-existence' with US imperialism – the division of the world into 'spheres of influence' in which each power may ruthlessly plunder for the benefit of their own national self-interest.

Why did Stalin Triumph?

The struggle between Stalin and Trotsky began in 1923, after the tide of revolution which had swept across Europe had ebbed, leaving a war-weary and devastated Soviet republic isolated in a hostile capitalist world. The struggle began with the difference over the need for rapid industrialisation and relations with the peasantry and with the formation of the Stalin-Zinoviev-Kamenev bloc against Trotsky and against democratisation of the Bolshevik Party.

From July 1933, the struggle passed from a struggle within the Communist International, to a struggle to build a new, Fourth International against the Stalinist Third (Communist) International.

Drawing out the analogy between this reaction which triumphed in the wake of the First proletarian revolution, and the corresponding phenomenon which afflicted the bourgeois revolution, Trotsky used the term 'Thermidor'. After the French Revolution of 1789 the calendar was changed; Thermidor was the month in this new calendar associated with the reaction in which all the leaders of the Revolution followed the aristocracy to the guillotine. A new, bourgeois aristocracy wiped out the boldest gains of the Revolution and instituted the Empire. The restoration of the monarchy in Britain after the Cromwellian revolution of 1640 is another analogy.

The startling transformation of politics during the year 1923 is explicable only on the basis of the delay in the European revolution. It cannot be seen simply as a struggle between two individuals, or even between two factions within the Bolshevik Party. Stalin was a non-entity before 1923; the record of

the following decades proved only that Stalin lacked all those qualities of leadership which could explain his victory over Trotsky – co-leader with Lenin of the Revolution, Chairperson of the Military Revolutionary Committee which organised the insurrection, Commissar for War during the Civil War and undisputed builder and leader of the Red Army, a talented, cultured and indomitable political leader.

Stalin was the chosen representative of the Russian petit-bourgeoisie – the state bureaucracy, NEP-men and better-off peasants. The struggle between these classes was such that while the petit-bourgeoisie could not destroy the workers' state, they were able to usurp political power from the workers within that state. It was primarily the dominance of imperialism on the international arena which determined this balance of power.

No-one in the Bolshevik Party anticipated the building of socialism, or even the survival of the revolution, without the active military, financial, technical, political and cultural support of the workers in Europe.

The strength of the revolution was such that it did survive; despite everything. But the isolation of the revolution within a backward, agricultural country tipped the social balance against the working class and in favour of the petit-bourgeoisie; not sufficiently to bring about the overthrow of the revolution, but sufficiently to corrupt the revolution beyond recognition. Stalin was the representative of these social forces within the Bolshevik Party. Without first conquering the Bolshevik Party, the reaction could not finally conquer the State. But the social position of the reaction in the state apparatus and in the economy gave it the predominant sway over the exhausted working class, and in the absence of aid from the West, the Party was conquered.

Internally and externally, all the conditions for this conquest were prepared before the battle began in 1923. Nevertheless, Trotsky correctly continued to struggle for the political defeat of the Stalin faction up until 1933. A victory in another revolution could have turned the tide against the reaction within the Soviet Union.

It is a great irony of history that precisely the dull-wittedness of the Stalin faction, their incompetence as revolutionary leaders, was the essential reason for their triumph. Every time they attempted to bring about a step forward for the revolution, whether in the Comintern, or in the internal development of the USSR, they failed. Every new turn in events caught them off-balance. But every failure of the revolution, every blow against the Soviet economy, **strengthened the hand of the bureaucracy and the reaction, and weakened the hand of the working class and the revolutionaries.**

Anyone who has participated in a long and arduous strike will know how,

once the strike is over, especially if it ends in defeat and isolation, the strikers are gripped by pessimism and despair. The bureaucrat who sells us out usually does not have long to wait before his or her own low estimation of the possibilities for further struggle, of the readiness of the members to struggle, etc., is proved correct (or so it seems). Anger at the betrayal often gives way quickly to the desire to get 'back to normal' as soon as possible.

Why did the revolution in Europe fail? In the main, because of the treachery (in the case of the reformists), immaturity (as regards the new leaders who came forward to emulate the Bolsheviks) and weakness of the proletarian leadership. The exceptional conditions in Russia during the 30 years leading up to the October Revolution had given birth to a working class and a generation of revolutionaries which made the first proletarian revolution. In Europe, the development of imperialism had led to the corruption of the parties of the Second (Socialist) International into social chauvinist parties, and corrupted a whole layer of the working class – the 'aristocracy of labour' bought off on the proceeds of imperialism.

The strategy of the Bolsheviks for dealing with this problem was the founding of the Communist International. This strategy was however overtaken by the degeneration of the Soviet Union itself. While the Comintern did succeed in placing itself at the head of a multi-million strong revolutionary movement, its leaders outside of the Russian Bolshevik Party were quite incapable of overcoming the degeneration suffered by the Bolshevik Party itself. Where they were not pliant tools in the hands of Stalin, they were liquidated. And indeed, in many instances whole national leaderships were murdered by Stalin, before the Communist International was finally transformed into a conservative apparatus of time-serving party hacks.

The outcome of the struggle from 1923 to 1933 to renew the Communist International was not inevitable. The outcome had to be decided in struggle. During the early 1930s, while Stalin was leading the working class into the abyss of fascism, the struggle of the Left Opposition could have succeeded in leading a break from Stalin's line and mobilising the strength of the working class against fascism. No-one could have predicted the outcome of this struggle in advance.

After the defeat of the German working class in 1933, the Comintern made no self-criticism. It congratulated itself. Any internal opposition there may have been to this criminal policy failed to manifest itself. From this time on Trotsky considered the Comintern as lost for the purposes of revolution, and began the struggle for a new International.

It is widely believed that Trotsky could have successfully staged a coup d'état

up until the time of the third Moscow Trial. He declined to take this course, since such a coup d'état would have been a pyrrhic victory. It would not have resolved the political and social problems which had led to Stalin's victory in the First place.

In the zig-zags of the period from 1923 to 1941 there is hardly a single policy n| the Left Opposition that was not, in however a stunted and distorted form, subsequently adopted by the Stalinists, usually too late. Consequently, the only c i insistent method available for Stalinism to defend its record during this period is the rewriting of history. And of this art it is a past-master. The sole essential political common thread of Stalin's line as opposed to Trotsky is the theory ill 'socialism in one country'.

Some would argue that after all, once the revolution in Europe had been defeated and the Soviet Union isolated, wasn't Stalin simply being 'realistic'. All this talk of 'permanent revolution' was ultra-leftist. The Soviet Union faced the danger of renewed imperialist attack, and any means was justified to prevent the loss of the Soviet workers' republic. To have supported revolution in Spain would have provoked the 'democratic imperialists' into joining Hitler in attacking Russia. The pact with Hitler was necessary to gain time to rebuild the Red Army. If the communists in Britain and America had not collaborated with their own bourgeoisie during the Great Patriotic War, wouldn't they have been 'objectively' aiding Hitler and working against the Soviet Union?

The best answer to these questions is currently (1990) being given by the people of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, who in the overwhelming majority, have decided after 50 or 60 years of experience of 'socialism' à-la-Stalin, that they prefer capitalism, even in the form of a monopoly capitalism in which they have no domestic representation.

The reliance on military might and 'peaceful co-existence' has now dissolved into nought as the Soviet bureaucracy stands almost helpless before the dissolution of its 'Empire'. No number of SS20s have been able to stem the disintegration of the Stalinist regime.

In any case, the sections of the Communist International which embraced the policy of socialism in one country, as genuine internationalists in the first place, soon arrived at the conclusion that if socialism could be built in one country (Russia) could it not be built in one country China, Italy, France, Cambodia, Cuba, Nicaragua or Albania? The French Communist Party supports the French nuclear deterrent aimed, of course, at the Soviet Union; the Chinese Communist Party launches war against Vietnam. Having found new clothes, chauvinism is proud to show itself in public. Stalinism has

proved no more effective in preventing war than did the social-chauvinism of the Second International.

After the defeat of the German revolution in 1933 Stalinism has followed a more or less consistent course in opposition to socialist revolution, and of seeking accommodation with the bourgeoisie. Leaders of the national liberation movement were recruited to the Communist International in the early years of the International, and many of these sections went on to lead successful national liberation struggles in China, Vietnam and elsewhere. The Comintern supported these struggles in so far as, and so long as, they were consistent with the foreign policy requirements of the Stalinist bureaucracy. When they did not, back-stabbing was the order of the day; at Yalta in February 1945 Stalin gladly handed Yugoslavia back to the monarchy, Greece back to the British and Vietnam back to the French. The national liberation movements had independent sources of vitality in the indigenous masses of those countries which in the end allowed the national liberation struggles to overcome the treachery and cowardice of Stalinism, though often with unspeakable cost in human suffering.

The proclamation of the “final and irrevocable triumph of socialism” in the Soviet Union on 20 August 1935 must be interpreted as the final and irrevocable abandonment of the struggle for socialism by Stalinism. No other interpretation is possible for the dubbing of near-famine, social backwardness and despotism as “socialism”.

What is Stalinism?

From what has been said above it will be observed that a very diverse range of politics is subsumed under the heading of ‘Stalinism’:

‘socialism at a snail’s pace’, “enrich the peasants”, adulation of the peasant; ‘liquidation of the kulaks as a class’, ‘red unions’, ‘reformism = fascism’; praise of loyalty to the party leadership, intellectual idiocy and pandering to ignorance; utopian projects of abolition of money, forced collectivisation; Stakhanovism, piece work payment dubbed the ‘socialist wages system’; assassination of political opponents on the left and right; conclusion of agreements with fascism; opposition, and support, for imperialist war.

And one could go on and on and on – from the bourgeois Italian or French parliamentary deputies and Mayors, who belong to the Communist Party but are indistinguishable from any other ‘respectable citizen’; Laurie Carmichael, Assistant Secretary of the ACTU, architect of the Accord and other union-busting right-wing policies, or Norm Gallagher, alternately ultra-left

provocateur or right-wing opportunist operator; Pol Pot, for whom the 'road to socialism' is paved with the tortured corpses of the entire working class, intelligentsia and petit-bourgeoisie, ...

What we are talking about is not so much a political tendency but a social stratum, together with those who are tied politically to that social stratum. This stratum is the bureaucracy of the workers' state.

An individual member of the apparatus of a workers' state may or not express the specific social interests of that apparatus. Trotsky, for instance, from 1917 to 1927, was a senior official of the Soviet state. But he was, all his life, a political leader of the working class, and an implacable opponent of the bureaucracy. Being an official in a working class organisation is by definition to be a bureaucrat. But just as Engels was a capitalist, an industrialist to be exact, in his economic existence, but a Communist politically, it is possible to be both a member of the workers' bureaucracy and a leader of the working class and opponent of the bureaucracy.

Nevertheless, it can be seen that the **apparatus** has social interests that are distinct from those of the social class it serves. Consequently, to live in such a bureaucracy implies social pressures which act upon every individual. All social classes endeavour to influence the state apparatus in the direction of their own interests, and find within the state apparatus individuals, groups and factions which express their social interests.

Thus, two issues have to be considered: what is the social nature of the state itself? and what is the social nature and composition and political profile of the officials holding office within the state?

During the latter part of his life Trotsky fought many political battles against those who characterised the Soviet state as a **capitalist** state. This issue will be given a full consideration in the next section, but the issue for here is to understand that the Soviet state was an apparatus of violence and social control specifically put together by the working class as an instrument for the repression of the capitalist class. Lenin clearly and unambiguously explained this in *State and Revolution*, written in September-October 1917. Political relations within (the working class are another question.

The ability to effectively restrict the independent aspirations of the bureaucracy of any state depend upon the strength of the ruling¹²⁸ class and

128 By 'ruling class' we mean simply the class which rules, the class which holds public political power. From 1917 in Russia the ruling class was the proletariat, and the capitalist class became an 'oppressed class', in the sense that the capitalists were forcibly prevented from exercising their social role as owners of capital and buyers of

the balance of forces between the ruling class and other classes.

Now it is clear that the state bureaucracy does not have unqualified freedom of action. Its power derives from holding office within a state, a particular state. The bureaucracy is obliged, while pursuing its own 'agenda', to make sure not to bring about the actual overthrow of the state, since in this instance, they would lose the very basis of their own social power.¹²⁹

It is this contradiction between social interests affecting the bureaucracy which is responsible for the zig-zagging of the Soviet bureaucracy. It is often referred to as the 'dual nature' of the workers' state.

The Russian Revolution was the first to give birth to a proletarian state that survived to live within the imperialist world. Thus it gave the world not only the original 'model' for socialist revolution, but a new social strata, the workers' state bureaucracy, and the politics of that stratum, Stalinism.

Some would argue that it would be better for the working class to decline to have a state apparatus; that since the state bureaucracy is inherently hostile to the working class, the working class should not have a state apparatus at all. This is the argument of anarchism and syndicalism. However, the state is nothing more than the means of repressing the struggle of the opposite class (the capitalists, in this case) from gaining political power and instituting their own form of political power (capitalism, and the means of maintaining the rule of capital, the capitalist state).

For sure, the working class requires a **different kind of state**. The program put forward in Lenin's April Theses, and explained in detail in *State and Revolution*, clearly envisages thoroughgoing democracy, defence by means of arming the working class, not by means of 'special bodies of armed men', no privileges for bureaucrats, total openness and accountability, etc etc.

The period of civil war, "military communism", left Russia in 1923 with only two choices – a Bolshevik dictatorship or a fascist dictatorship. Trotsky put forward the necessary political program to go forward from the victory of the revolution (in terms of securing state power) to the raising of the working masses to actual participation in political power. The counter-revolution, internally and internationally, however, had already (as we might say in retrospect) blocked this path in the form of the crushing of the European

labour power.

129 That is true to the extent that they are not able to secure the passage of power to an opposite class, and at the same time reserve a suitably remunerative post in the new social system.

revolution and the stranglehold of the Russian petit-bourgeoisie upon economic and social life within Russia.

I could sum up this analysis by saying that Stalinism is the expression of the pressure of imperialism within the workers' state. The Stalinist bureaucracy is the representative of imperialism within the workers' state, but not to be understood in the 'conspiratorial' sense, but in the social sense.

Thus, Stalinism is generically similar to reformism.

Reformism is the politics of the trade union bureaucracy and their parliamentary off-shoots, the Labor Party bureaucracy. By the time of the First World War it had become evident that the reformist bureaucracy was lost for the purposes of revolution. The trade unions of the capitalist world exist as the representatives of the economic interests of the sellers of labour power within the capitalist system. By the early part of this century, many workers had observed that (the trade union bureaucrats, having elevated themselves to dignified positions, sharing the life-style, standard of living and opportunities of the bourgeoisie, had become 'bourgeoisified'. Trade union officials, as a social stratum (not necessarily every single individual) were 'a part of the system'. Their politics was the politics of compromise, gradualism, elitism, chauvinism, 'economic realism', 'you scratch my back, I'll scratch yours', etc, in short bourgeois politics.

The difference between Stalinism and reformism is the difference between a workers state within a world dominated by capitalism, and a trade union within a capitalist country. Different, but in many ways similar.

In recent decades it has become increasingly difficult to draw any consistent political distinction between Stalinism and reformism in the political life of the workers movement within the capitalist countries. The only distinction might be the even greater propensity for cynicism and cowardice characteristic of Stalinism.

It is important to recognise however that no matter how reactionary Stalinism may become, it remains a **tendency within the working class**. It was this recognition which underlay the policy of united front which Trotsky advocated in Germany in 1931-33.

The struggle against Stalinism had to be carried out in such a way that would enhance the unity and class consciousness of the working class. This strategy remains equally applicable even after the Left Opposition ceased to identify itself as a part of the Communist International and after the struggle to reform the Comintern was abandoned in favour of the building of the Fourth International.

In a discussion with leaders of the American section of the Fourth International, the Socialist Workers Party, in June 1940¹³⁰, Trotsky argues that the SWP should pay more attention to the Stalinist workers, rather than the ‘progressives’ who were generally Roosevelt voters:

‘Of course the Stalinists are a legitimate part of the workers’ movement. That it is abused by its leaders for specific GPU ends is one thing, for Kremlin ends another. It is not at all different from other opposition labour bureaucracies. The powerful interests of Moscow influence the Third International, but it is not different in principle.

‘Of course we consider the terror of the GPU control differently; we fight with all means, even bourgeois police. But the political current of Stalinism is a current in the workers’ movement. If it differs, it differs advantageously.

‘In France the Stalinists show courage against the government. They are still inspired by October. ... They are a very contradictory phenomenon. They began with October as the base, they have become deformed, but they have great courage.

‘We can’t let the antipathies of our moral feelings sway us. Even the assailants on Trotsky’s house¹³¹ had great courage. I think that we can hope to win these workers who began as a crystallisation of October. We see them negatively; how to break through this obstacle. We must set the base against the top. ...’

Perspectives of the Fourth International

After 1933 Trotsky no longer sought to ‘renew’ the Communist International or the Soviet Communist Party. The perspective was to build a new party in opposition to Stalinism to lead the socialist revolution in the capitalist world and to overthrow the Stalinist bureaucracy in the Soviet Union.

The revolution against the Stalinist bureaucracy Trotsky referred to as the ‘political revolution’. Political, rather than social, because the object of such a revolution would be to regain political control over the state machine, while the socialisation of the means of production was a task which had already been achieved by the October Revolution.

130 Discussions with Trotsky, in Writings of Leon Trotsky, 1939-1940. The discussion also contains an important discussion of policy in relation to the military as the US prepared to enter the Second World War.

131 On May 24 Mexican Stalinists raided Trotsky’s house, spraying his room with machine gun fire, and kidnapping and murdering one of his guards.

Trotsky characterised the Soviet Union as a degenerated workers state: ‘either the bureaucracy, becoming ever more the organ of the world bourgeoisie in the workers’ state, will overthrow the new forms of property and plunge the country back to capitalism or the working class will crush the bureaucracy and open the way to socialism’.¹³²

‘...the chief strength of the bureaucracy lies not in itself but in the disillusionment of the masses, in their lack of a new perspective. ... the impetus to the Soviet workers’ revolutionary upsurge will probably be given by events outside the country. The struggle against the Comintern on the world arena is the most important part today of the struggle against the Stalinist dictatorship. ...

‘ A fresh upsurge of the revolution in the USSR will undoubtedly begin under the banner of the struggle against social inequality and political oppression. Down with the privileges of the bureaucracy! Down with Stakhanovism! Down with the Soviet aristocracy and its ranks and orders! Greater equality of wages for all forms of labour!

‘The struggle for the freedom of the trade unions and the factory committees, for the right of assembly and freedom of the press, will unfold in the struggle for the regeneration and development of Soviet democracy.

‘... drive the bureaucracy and the new aristocracy out of the Soviets’

‘... democratically organised consumers’ co-operative should control the quality and price of products.

‘Reorganisation of the collective farms in accordance with the will and in the interests of the workers there engaged.

‘... proletarian internationalism. ... Down with secret diplomacy’¹³³.

At the present juncture, 1990, this program has been overtaken by events. But for a whole period, the tasks of the working class have had two arms – ‘political revolution’ in the degenerated and deformed workers states, and socialist revolution in the capitalist world.

War and the Workers’ State

Trotsky was murdered before the Nazi invasion of the USSR. The period of the Stalin-Hitler pact was the darkest hour for revolution during the twentieth century. During this period Trotsky fought his last struggle principally over

132 Transitional Program, The USSR and problems of the Transitional Epoch.

133 This is a brief excerpted summary of the program in relation to the USSR.

the class nature of the Soviet Union.

The Stalin-Hitler pact was followed by the Nazi invasion of Poland and the Stalinist invasion of Western Ukraine and the Baltic states. From November 1939 Russia fought a three months war with pro-fascist Finland. These conflicts sharpened the conflict over the stance of revolutionaries to the Soviet Union.

Where should revolutionaries stand in relation to Ukrainian nationalism under attack from Stalin to the East and Hitler to the West? Where should revolutionaries stand in relation to a possible invasion of Finland by Stalin? Where should revolutionaries stand in relation to a war between Stalin's USSR and imperialism?

In The Manifesto of the Fourth International, published in May 1940, the section entitled Defence of the USSR begins:

‘Stalin's alliance with Hitler, which raised the curtain on the world war and led directly to the enslavement of the Polish people, resulted from the weakness of the USSR and the Kremlin's panic in face of Germany. Responsibility for this weakness rests with no one but this same Kremlin; its internal policy, which opened an abyss between the ruling caste and the people; its foreign policy, which sacrificed the interests of the world revolution to the interests of the Stalinist clique.

‘The seizure of Eastern Poland – a pledge of the alliance with Hitler and a guarantee against Hitler – was accompanied by the nationalisation of semi-feudal and capitalist property in western Ukraine and western White Russia. Without Ibis the Kremlin could not have incorporated the occupied territory into the USSR. The strangled and desecrated October Revolution served notice that it was still alive.

‘In Finland the Kremlin did not succeed in accomplishing a similar social overturn. The imperialist mobilisation of world public opinion “in defence of Finland”; the threat of direct intervention by England and France; the impatience of Hitler, who had to seize Denmark and Norway before French and British troops appeared on Scandinavian soil – all this compelled the Kremlin to renounce sovietisation of Finland and to limit itself to the seizure of the indispensable strategic positions.

‘The invasion of Finland unquestionably aroused on the part of the Soviet populace profound condemnation. However, the advanced workers understood that the crimes of the Kremlin oligarchy do not strike off the agenda the question of the existence of the USSR. Its defeat in the world war would signify not merely the overthrow of the totalitarian bureaucracy but the

liquidation of the new forms of property, the collapse of the first experiment in planned economy, and the transformation of the entire country into a colony; that is, the handing over to imperialism of colossal natural resources which would give it a respite until the third world war. Neither the peoples of the USSR nor the world working class as a whole care for such an outcome.’

This section concludes, speaking against those who equated the USSR with imperialism:

‘There is a difference. The bourgeoisie appraises this social difference better and more profoundly than do the radical windbags. To be sure, the nationalisation of the means of production in one country, and a backward one at that, still does not ensure the building of socialism. But it is capable of furthering the primary pre-requisite of socialism, namely, the planned development of the productive forces. To turn one’s back on the nationalisation of the means of production on the ground that in and of itself it does not create the well-being of the masses is tantamount to sentencing a granite foundation to destruction on the ground that it is impossible to live without walls and a roof. The class conscious worker knows that a successful struggle for complete emancipation is unthinkable without the defence of conquests already gained, however modest these may be. All the more obligatory therefore is the defence of so colossal a conquest as planned economy against the restoration of capitalist relations.

Those who cannot defend old positions will never conquer new ones.

‘The Fourth International can defend the USSR only by the methods of revolutionary class struggle. To teach the workers correctly to understand the class character of the state – imperialist, colonial, workers’ – and the reciprocal relations between them, as well as the inner contradictions in each of them, enables the workers to draw correct practical conclusions in every given situation. While engaging in tireless struggle against the Moscow oligarchy, the Fourth International decisively rejects any policy that would aid imperialism against the USSR.

‘The defence of the USSR coincides in principle with the preparation of the world proletarian revolution. We flatly reject the theory of socialism in one country, that brain child of ignorant and reactionary Stalinism. Only the world revolution can save the USSR for socialism. But the world revolution carries with it the inescapable blotting out of the Kremlin oligarchy.’

In order to make this latter point quite clear, the following excerpt from the

article, *The USSR in War*, written in 1939¹³⁴:

‘We defend the USSR as we defend the colonies, as we solve all our problems, not by supporting some imperialist governments against others, but by the method of international class struggle in the colonies as well as in the metropolitan centres.

‘We are not a bourgeois party; we are the party of irreconcilable opposition, not only in capitalist countries, but also in the USSR. Our tasks, among them the “defence of the USSR”, we realise not through the medium of bourgeois governments and not even through the government of the USSR, but exclusively through the education of the masses through agitation, through explaining to the workers what they should defend and what they should overthrow. ...

‘The defence of the USSR coincides for us with the preparation of world revolution. Only those methods are permissible which do not conflict with the interests of the revolution. The defence of the USSR is related to the world socialist revolution as a tactical task is related to a strategic one. A tactic is subordinated to a strategic goal and in no case can be in contradiction to the latter ...

Referring to the statification of means of production in territories occupied by the Red Army in Poland, the Ukraine and the Baltic states, by military-bureaucratic means, Trotsky continues,

‘The primary criterion for us is not the transformation of property relations in this or another area, however important these may be in themselves, but rather the change in the consciousness and organisation of the world proletariat, the raising of their capacity for defending former conquests and accomplishing new ones. From this one, and the only decisive standpoint, the politics of Moscow, taken as a whole, completely retains its reactionary character and remains the chief obstacle on the road to the world revolution.

‘Our general appraisal of the Kremlin and the Comintern does not, however, alter the particular fact that the statification of property in the occupied territories is in itself a progressive measure. ...

‘The statification of the means of production is, as we said, a progressive measure. But its progressiveness is relative; its specific weight depends on the sum-total of all the other factors. Thus, we must first and foremost establish

134 Contained in *In Defence of Marxism*, a collection of letters and articles written during the last year of Trotsky’s life, relating to the nature of the Soviet Union, and the struggle around that question in the American SWP.

that the extension of the territory dominated by bureaucratic autocracy and parasitism, cloaked by ‘socialist’ measures, can augment the prestige of the Kremlin, engender illusions concerning the possibility of replacing the proletarian revolution by bureaucratic manoeuvres, and so on. This evil by far outweighs the progressive content of Stalinist reforms in Poland. In order that nationalised property in the occupied territories, as well as in the USSR, become a basis for genuinely progressive, that is to say, socialist development, it is necessary to overthrow the Moscow bureaucracy. ... It is necessary to understand clearly that sharp contradictions are contained in the character of the USSR and in her international position. It is impossible to free oneself from those contradictions with the help of terminological sleight-of-hand (‘workers’ state’ – ‘not workers’ state’). We must take the facts as they are. We must build our policy by taking as our starting point the real relations and contradictions.

‘We do not entrust the Kremlin with any historic mission whatsoever. We were and remain against seizures of new territories by the Kremlin. We are for the independence of Soviet Ukraine, and if the Byelo-Russians themselves wish of Soviet Byelo-Russia. At the same time in the sections of Poland occupied by the Red Army, partisans of the Fourth International must play the most decisive part in expropriating the landlords and capitalists, in dividing the land among the peasants, in creating soviets and workers’ committees, etc. While doing so, they must preserve their political independence, they must fight during elections to the soviets and factory committees for the complete independence of the latter from the bureaucracy, and they must conduct revolutionary propaganda in the spirit of distrust toward the Kremlin and its local agencies.

‘But let us suppose that Hitler turns his weapons against the east and invades territories occupied by the Red Army. Under these conditions, partisans of the Fourth International, without changing in any way their attitude toward the Kremlin oligarchy, will advance to the forefront, as the most urgent task of the hour, the military resistance against Hitler. The workers will say: ‘We cannot cede to Hitler the overthrowing of Stalin; that is our own task. ‘During the military struggle against Hitler, the revolutionary workers will strive to enter into the closest possible comradely relations with the rank-and-file fighters of the Red Army. While arms in hand they deal blows to Hitler, the Bolshevik-Leninists will at the same time conduct revolutionary propaganda against Stalin preparing his overthrow at the next and perhaps very near stage.

...

‘We must not lose sight for a single moment of the fact that the question of

overthrowing the Soviet bureaucracy is for us subordinate to the question of preserving state property in the means of production in the USSR; that the question of preserving state property in the means of production in the USSR is subordinate for us to the question of the world proletarian revolution.’

These are the perspectives with which the Trotskyist movement entered the period of the Second World War. The War brought an entirely new situation and new problems for revolutionaries. This new period is the subject of the next section.

– Part III –

The last sixty years have been dominated by the effects of the isolation and subsequent degeneration of the first workers state in the USSR, and the consequent degeneration of the Communist International. The leadership of the Revolution was almost exterminated. It was continued in the Left Opposition and later the Fourth International.

The triumph of fascism in the 1930s, prepared a situation where a Stalinised Red Army found itself in control of half of Europe. All independent political leadership had been liquidated before, during and after World War II, both genuine bourgeois leadership and genuine proletarian leadership. Deformed workers states, politically and economically dependent upon the degenerated Soviet State, were established in Eastern Europe.

Following the murder of the Chinese Left Opposition in Russia in the early 1930s and the massacre of the Vietnamese Trotskyists in 1945, the national liberation movement sweeping across the world was left also firmly in the control of Stalinism.

By the mid-1950s a political revolution against Stalinism had grown up in Europe. However, with the consent of imperialism, the workers of Eastern Europe were crushed and sealed off from the workers of the West. Economically, politically and culturally Stalinism was leading the working class into a blind alley.

Within the Stalinist bloc, decline and demoralisation gradually transformed the political revolution into a return to capitalism. In the capitalist world, the dominance of reactionary Stalinism led to the marginalisation of revolutionary politics.

A powerful women's movement emerged in the late 60s and early 70s, initially linked to the upsurge of the national liberation movements and Black civil rights movement in the USA. The changes in the relation of women to the productive forces led to this movement swelling into an irrepressible force that has made, and continues to make sweeping and lasting social changes in almost every country in the world. It has made a major contribution to the conditions for socialist revolution.

The Marxist movement failed however to offer leadership to the women's movement, and Marxism suffered further degeneration and isolation as a result.

The following chapters deal with the problems that have confronted

revolutionaries during this post-War period, and offer a perspective for responding to the current collapse of Stalinism and overcoming the ideological fragmentation that has affected the revolutionary stratum of the working class over the past 50 years, and laying the foundations for a revolutionary party.

I have concentrated attention on an analysis of the decline of Stalinism, and organisational perspectives necessary to respond to the new opportunities opened up by this. The other main theoretical question of this period is that raised by the women's movement. This will be taken up in a separate volume to follow, which will examine these questions in the context of the changes that have taken place in the productive forces.

The third Volume will give a comprehensive treatment of the crisis of the world capitalist economy and its impact in Australia, and the chapters following will deal with the decline of Stalinism without entering into what is more properly the subject matter of Volume III.

8) The Rise & Fall of ‘People’s Democracy’

Introduction

For a whole period, from the 1930s to the 1980s, the perspectives of revolutionaries were divided into two arms – social revolution in the capitalist countries, and political revolution in the USSR and the deformed workers states of Eastern Europe, China, etc. The breaking down of national borders was envisaged as following upon successful revolutions in each sector of the world.

The distinction between social revolution and political revolution is that in the capitalist countries the capitalist class has to be expropriated, whereas, in the deformed workers states, this task has already been accomplished – not accomplished by revolutionary methods, but accomplished nevertheless.

It followed from this that in relation to the deformed workers states revolutionaries had defensive tasks; that is, we had to defend the USSR and the deformed workers states against attempts to restore capitalist property, and in particular, against attack from imperialism. This was true so long as anything remained to be defended, in however a disfigured form.

From the standpoint of national political life in the Stalinist bloc, the distinction between the tasks of political revolution and socialist revolution in relation to the state are not at all clear; destruction of the political hegemony of the bureaucracy, and establishment of the most thoroughgoing workers democracy implies little short of smashing the state machine.

From the standpoint of international relations however, this taking of political power by the workers has in a certain sense the character of a ‘reform’, whereas, in relation to the capitalist states, there is no such aspect.

However, the events of the past decade have completely changed this situation. Not only is the capitalist class gaining for itself a social base in the relations of production within the former Stalinist bloc, but the class nature of the state machines themselves is undergoing change.

Further, the national question has developed in a way that excludes the perspective of parallel revolutions preceding the resolution of the national problem. In short, the tasks of political revolution and social revolution have merged. I express this by characterising the tasks of revolutionaries in these states currently in transition as ‘social-political revolution’.

Background

At the beginning of the Second World War, Europe was dominated by

fascism; the workers' movements in Britain and the US had been crushed and demoralised during the depression; the USSR was held in the iron grip of Stalin, who had murdered all the leaders of the Russian Revolution; the national liberation movements in the Far East had been brutally suppressed.

The revolutionaries of the time anticipated that the end of the Second World War would unleash an unprecedented upsurge of revolutionary struggle which would stretch across the whole globe and open up a new epoch.

However, by the end of the War, the combined repression of Stalinism and fascism had virtually eliminated revolutionary Marxism in the USSR and Europe, and it remained marginalised in Britain, the Americas and most of Asia.

The European war was to the extent of 95 % a war between Soviet Russia and fascist Germany. Only the mighty Red Army and the strength of the Soviet working class saved Europe from fascism.

Once Hitler had tom up the non-aggression pact with Stalin and invaded the USSR, Stalin was committed to a policy of combining military might with seeking collaboration and peaceful coexistence with 'democratic imperialism' as the only means of guaranteeing the survival of the Soviet Union. The essential pre-requisite for this policy was the decapitation of the Red Army which had been built by Trotsky. This Stalin had carried through in the period immediately before the War.

Despite these catastrophic policies of Stalin in the period leading up to the War, the enormous strength of the Soviet state and the willingness of the Russian masses to endure any hardship to defend it against fascism proved superior to the fascist war machine.

At the end of the war, with half of Europe occupied by the Red Army, with the economies of the entire capitalist world, outside of the USA, in a state of total disintegration, with the masses of Europe and the whole colonial world in rebellion, and with insatiable aspirations, the Stalinists were in a position to strike a bargain with imperialism!

From the time the Soviet Union had entered the war against Germany, the Communist Parties in the democratic imperialist countries became respectable.

The alliance between the capitalist governments and their domesticated Communist Parties was extended after the war into a strategic alliance cemented at the Potsdam and Yalta Conferences in which the world was divided into two domains, in which the USA and the USSR each agreed not to interfere in the other's 'legitimate affairs'.

It was on the basis of this agreement and the pre-eminent position of the USA, that the post-war revolutionary upsurge was contained.

It was not the perspective of Stalinism at the beginning of this period to impose ‘socialism’ on the countries under its control.

Nor was it the perspective of the Communist Parties in countries such as China and Vietnam where the Communist Parties held the leading position in the national liberation movements, or in the old capitalist countries, to make socialist revolution.

Stalin’s perspective was the Menshevik one of forming a bloc with ‘all progressive forces’ for a peaceful transition through capitalism – ‘People’s Democracy’.

The Trotskyist perspective of a post-war revolutionary upsurge was confirmed, but in a perverse way, for all the experience of this century had shown that socialist revolution is impossible without a Marxist party capable of leading the revolution.

The Aftermath of World War II

In Vietnam in August 1945 the surrender of the Japanese sparked a general revolutionary uprising with widespread confiscation of landed property by the peasant masses and the establishment of Soviets all across the country. The Vietnamese Trotskyists held the leading position in this process.

The policy of the CP was to facilitate the re-establishment of French colonial power, to be followed by a negotiated transition to independence, in which landowners and colonial capitalists would be protected. When the British and French forces arrived, the Stalinists collaborated and the revolution was suppressed with the massacre of the entire Vietnamese Trotskyist movement, which had the leadership of the Saigon working class. Promises given to Ho Chi Minh by US President Truman that Vietnam would be granted independence were, of course, betrayed, and the 20 year war against French imperialism began.¹³⁴

In November 1945, the Yugoslavian partisan army, under the leadership of Tito’s Communist Party, declared a People’s Republic. But this declaration was in defiance of an agreement by Stalin that the King would be restored in Yugoslavia.

During the War, Stalin had instructed Tito to form a Popular Front with bourgeois parties. Tito found this instruction simply impossible to carry out, for the partisan army led by the Yugoslavian CP was waging a civil war against not only the German army, but the bourgeois organisations who were collaborating with the Nazis! The ‘progressive sections of the bourgeoisie’

with whom Tito was supposed to be forming a Popular Front did not exist – or rather they were supporting the Nazis!

By the end of the war People's Committees were in control of the country. After a short-lived attempt to form a coalition government with bourgeois elements fell apart, a rapid process of nationalisation and collectivisation was implemented. Tito's reluctant defiance of Stalin was forced upon him by the People's Committee movement which had won the overwhelming support of the masses in the fight against fascism. For this 'crime', Tito was threatened and slandered by Stalin and eventually, in June 1948, the Yugoslav CP expelled from the Cominform.

In **Greece**, the resistance army led by the CP, the ELAS, controlled the majority of the country by October 1946. Stalin, however, agreed to cede Greece to the West. Lacking support from the USSR or neighbouring Yugoslavia, with the intervention of British troops and American support for the Greek royalists, ELAS was eventually defeated in a prolonged and bloody civil war.

In May 1946 the Communist Party of **Czechoslovakia**, which had led the antifascist resistance, won a commanding position in parliamentary elections. The perspective of the Stalinist government was to keep Stalin's promise that capitalism would not be overthrown in Eastern Europe. A sharp polarisation of classes followed with the formation of workers' militias demanding far-reaching changes, and the government responded by instituting a Stalinist regime and the economy was rapidly integrated into that of the Soviet Union. Using¹³⁵ racist invective, the property of the German and Hungarian national minorities was made the initial target for nationalisation. The Stalinist cynically used chauvinism and the oppression of national minorities to bolster their position.

In December 1947 King Michael of **Rumania** abdicated in the face of rising proletarian rebellion. King Michael had taken the throne in August 1944 as the Red Army reached the frontier, and was retained in power by the Stalinists with the promise of a continuation of capitalism.

For three years after the entry of the Red Army, Rumania was ruled by a coalition between the Stalinists and extreme right-wing elements led by Vice-Premier Georges Tartaescu, who had formerly belonged to the pro-Hitler National Liberal Party and who had been mainly responsible for securing Rumania for the 'Axis'. The Prime Minister, Groza, was a wealthy banker

135 See Vietnam & Trotskyism, 1987, available from Intervention Press.

and industrialist.

As late as January 1947, Groza was calling for foreign capitalist investment. Nazi collaborators were usually able to keep their old jobs. There was very little change in the composition of the state bureaucracy or judiciary from those who had served under the Nazis. Rising anti-fascist and anti-monarchist sentiments eventually brought the situation to a crisis. The King decided to flee, the C.P. edged out its coalition partners, and in June 1948 a 'People's Republic' was formed, controlled by the Communist Party, and the economy moved towards a state-owned system.

Likewise in **Bulgaria** and Hungary, as Germany fell, the masses rose up in advance of the liberating Soviet armies and began to sweep aside their discredited collaborationist governments. The Red Army filled the political vacuum. It suppressed and disarmed these mass movements, and took over administration of the country.

At the end of 1944 in **Bulgaria**, soldiers set up soldiers' soviets, refused to recognise rank, dismissed officers who opposed them, removed local government officials and raised red flags everywhere. The Russians insisted that the removed officers and officials be reinstated and that the soldiers recognise the authority of The Fatherland Front Government being set up by the Russians as a popular front between themselves and Bulgarian bourgeois elements. For its part, the Bulgarian Communist Party solemnly declared that there would be a return to the status quo, and no nationalisation. In March 1945 Stalin declared 'We are building a democratic country based on private property and private initiative'. The head of the Fatherland Front Government from September 1944 to October 1946 was the right-wing militarist General Kimon Georgiev.¹³⁶

The **Baltic states** had been annexed by the Soviet Union. In Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria and the area of Germany under Soviet occupation, the Stalinist armies of occupation facilitated the reconstruction of capitalist economies despite the total collapse of the social power of capitalist classes which, as in Poland, had been physically obliterated by the Nazis, or, as in Hungary or Rumania, had, in the main, collaborated with the Nazis and now faced the vengeance of masses. While continuing to suppress any independent political or social organisation, the 'liberators' were systematically milking these countries for their own needs – initially often in the form of 'reparations', later simply by means of unequal contracts – tying them increasingly into the

136 See On the Class Nature of the "People's Democracies" by Tony Cliff (July 1950) in *Origins of the International Socialists*, Pluto Press 1971.

Soviet economy.

In **Poland**, all the genuine leaders of the Polish workers had been murdered by Stalin before the War. Hitler had murdered all potential political leaders in Poland during the Nazi occupation. Those that survived were brutally dealt with by the Stalinists as they took over control of the country in 1945. Despite everything, the political resistance of the Polish working class remained undaunted.

While the majority of agriculture remained in the hands of private proprietors, industry was 'nationalised', and the Polish economy run along bureaucratic centralised lines, closely tied into the Soviet economy. A 'People's Republic' was established in December 1948, with a Russian General becoming Minister of Defence!

A Provisional government had been set up in **Hungary** in December 1944 by the Soviet occupation, although full control of the country was not achieved until January 1945. With massive uprisings against the capitalists and landowners throughout the country, sweeping land reforms were carried out by the Provisional government under Imre Nagy.

The conception behind the land reforms was the abolition of feudalism. There was no intention to carry forward towards nationalisation of industry.

The land reforms gave an enormous boost to the Smallholders' Party, which won a majority over the Hungarian United Workers Party in elections held in November 1945. A sharp polarisation of class forces followed which was resolved under the pressure of the Soviet occupation, with the institution of a Stalinist regime under M. Rakosi. Political opposition, both inside and outside the Party was rapidly suppressed. On Easter Monday 1948 while workers were on holiday state officials moved into the major factories and declared them state property. A bureaucratic centralist regime was imposed, economically and politically controlled by the USSR. Hungary was declared a 'People's Republic' in August 1949.

The DDR was declared in the Soviet-occupied sector of Germany in October 1949. Some small-scale ownership of industry was tolerated and agriculture remained chiefly in the hands of small farmers. However, the great majority of the economy was administered by the Soviet occupation by way of a Stalinist regime, under Walter Ulbricht, who had lived in the USSR since 1933.

It should be noted that the designation of these states as 'People's Democracies' was in no way hypocritical or tongue-in-cheek! The Stalinists fully intended that Popular Front-type governments would be established in

which capitalist property would be protected. Since 1933 'socialism in one country' had meant active and ruthless opposition to socialist revolution outside of the Soviet Union. Popular Front-ism and peaceful co-existence entailed suppression of the independent mobilisation of the working masses.

The combination of the pressure of the working class and peasantry in favour of expropriation of the capitalists and landowners, and the inability of the Soviet bureaucracy to manage a capitalist economy, forced them into a policy that they never anticipated.

The Reaction of Marxists to the Overturns

The Second World Congress of the Fourth International met in France in April and May 1948, with delegates from nineteen countries.¹³⁷ The Congress was a model of political discussion, in which delegates, separated from each other for so long, came together for the purpose of gaining theoretical clarification of an entirely unprecedented, contradictory and momentous sequence of events.

What was the nature of these new states that were coining into being?

Were they capitalist states or workers states?

If they were workers states, how could they have come into being mostly without the revolutionary action of the masses? If they were still capitalist states, how could this be reconciled with the abolition of private property in the means of production, nationalisation of banks and rule by People's Committee?

If social revolutions had occurred, how could they be led by the Stalinists who were counter-revolutionary by their very nature? How was it possible for social revolutions to occur without revolutionary leadership?

Were we witnessing the opening of a new stage in history in which capitalism would be overturned by such military-bureaucratic measures? Or was this a passing phase? If this was but a passing phase, in which direction was it to change?

Should revolutionaries support the process that was taking place? Or oppose it? If it was progressive, should they be members of the Stalinist Parties that were organising the transformations?

How could they call for the overthrow of regimes that were abolishing

137 See *Towards a History of the Fourth International*, Part I, part of the series *Education for Socialists*, published by the Socialist Workers Party of the USA. (1973)

capitalist property relations?

A number of very important ideas were put forward in the debate, and in the numerous meetings at different levels that took place in the period following the Congress. People changed sides in the debate and developed different positions as the discussion proceeded, and as events outside continued to offer further clarification.

Initially the majority in Europe agreed with Ernest Mandel's position that the new states were capitalist states. Michel Pablo agreed, but asserted that in Yugoslavia the active participation of the organised working class had created a workers state. In the US, the majority of the SWP agreed with Mandel, but a minority, including Joseph Hansen, argued that all the states were workers states, despite being saddled with a Stalinist bureaucracy, since their economic foundations were generically similar to those of the USSR.

Having regard to the role of the Eastern European states in relation to the Soviet Union's military perspectives, the Congress referred to them as 'buffer states'.

The resolution passed by the Congress characterised all the states concerned as capitalist states, but also introduced the important concept of 'structural assimilation' to account for the apparent socialisation of the economies of countries which, the Congress held, had not had revolutions, and therefore remained capitalist states.

Central to the idea of structural assimilation was the tendency towards abolition of national borders. This idea was based upon the summary annexation of the Baltic states, and subsequently this idea came to be seen as erroneous. Nevertheless, the idea of structural assimilation was an important landmark. The fact that the Soviet state could not control the areas occupied in the course of a war against fascism, except by integration of the economies into its own, statified, economy; and consequently, the inherent political and economic tendency of Soviet occupation to set off transformation of the economic base, of introducing elements of their own economic forms into the occupied territories.

Clearly, the idea of structural assimilation contradicted the thesis that a workers state could not come into being without a social revolution.

Apart from Yugoslavia, where the power of the bourgeoisie had been destroyed by civil war, the bourgeoisie had been destroyed either by German or by Russian invasion. They had not been destroyed by social revolution, but destroyed they had been. Clearly, while destruction of the social power of the capitalist ruling class is a pre-condition for establishing a workers state,

unless the capitalist state is destroyed, and appropriate social measures carried out, then capitalist property relations will regrow, and the capitalist class, and their social power, will be regenerated.

The program of Stalin was **not** for the creation of workers states. Since the advent of the Popular Front policy, the Stalinists' policy went no further than 'People's Democracies' in which the capitalist class would not be expropriated. Despite the fact that the state power in these countries was the army of a workers state, the Red Army, there was no guarantee that this army would not **defend** capitalist property. Indeed, this is exactly what it did in the first period after the end of the War.

The question of the class character of the state was distinct from the characterisation of economic relations within the country.

The characterisation of these states as workers states did not at all presume that these countries had begun along the road to socialism, and certainly did not imply that they had achieved socialism. It was simply a recognition of the class nature of the state power. Events would show what course the social, economic and political transformation would take.

As usual, the unfolding of events ran directly counter to Stalin's perspective of 'People's Democracy'. In the interval between the Second World Congress in April 1948 and the Third World Congress in August 1951, the abolition of capitalist property relations in those countries which remained under Stalinist control was virtually completed, at least in the main industries.

In most of the countries of the Stalinist bloc agriculture remained predominantly in the hands of small private proprietors. This policy was a pragmatic adaptation to social and economic pressures. The rural proprietors provided a relatively conservative counter to the urban working class, so long as the basic needs of the farmers could be met, and the development of a wealthy land-owning class could be prevented.

Some argued that the capitalist character of the rural sector required the economies to be regarded as capitalist, since in all the countries concerned agriculture formed a large sector of total production. However, the truth that relations in the countryside cannot be regarded as decisive gradually asserted itself, as the non-capitalist character of the economies became more and more obvious.

The Third Congress of the Fourth International

The Third Congress of the Fourth International met in August 1951. This Congress brought the discussion of the previous period to a successful conclusion, passing a resolution in which the newly formed states were

described as ‘deformed workers states’.

The Congress also passed a separate resolution acknowledging that in Yugoslavia something qualitatively different had occurred; a revolution had established the Yugoslav workers state, which had been carried out independently of the Soviet State.

All the leading figures of the Fourth International – Mandel, Hansen, Moreno, Pablo, Frank – supported the resolutions. This agreement masked, however, fundamental differences which had already emerged with the splitting of the International Socialists and the Congress was over-shadowed by a crisis of perspective which blew up in the period following.

For a time, Tito took up a position to the left of Stalin, and sought support within Communist Parties in different countries. The Fourth International for a period of time formed a kind of united front with Tito, and made important gains from the Stalinists as a result. During this period there was a tendency to see that perhaps Tito should not be characterised as ‘Stalinist’. Indeed an anti-Stalin Stalinist was a novel concept at the time. When Tito supported the U.N. invasion of Korea, it became quite clear that Tito had to be characterised as a Stalinist – albeit, as a national variety.

This meant that the Fourth International had to grapple with the fact that Stalinism was capable, not only of bureaucratic overturns, as had occurred in Eastern Europe, but it was possible for Stalinism also to be at the head of successful revolutionary struggles, leading to the establishment of a workers state.

The civil war in China had ended in victory for the Communist Party’s forces in October 1949. It was still not clear at the time of the Third Congress what direction would be taken in China, since Stalin’s policy had been for a Popular Front type government, and steps towards institution of a planned economy were not taken till 1952. Nevertheless, subsequent events proved that the theoretical conclusions drawn from what had taken place in Europe provided a sufficient basis for understanding of the Chinese Revolution as well.

Deformed Workers States

These states were referred to as ‘deformed’ workers states because they were born disfigured, distorted, in contrast to the Soviet Union, which was born of socialist revolution, although it had later degenerated.

They were called ‘workers states’ because a state is the instrument of one or another social class. The state is a phenomenon of class society. Before class society, there was no state. Classless society has no need of a state. There

cannot, in general be a non-class, above-class, or two-class state. These states had to be characterised either as workers states or capitalist states. Such a characterisation by no means exhausts the question of their class nature, but it cannot be avoided or fudged over.

The State

A state is a body of armed people capable of exercising public power over society. A body of armed people that does not or cannot exercise its power in this way is not a state. The Mafia might have the potential to become a state, but is not yet; the factional armies in Lebanon could be described as embryonic states, while the 'official' Lebanese government is but the shadow of a state, since the economic and political life of each community is governed by one or another militia, not the 'government'.

The essence of the state is its instrument of force. The economic, legal, spiritual, legislative, bureaucratic, welfare, etc, arms are part of the state, but not its essence, since in the last instance, in the arena of government, force decides.

While pre-class society contained division of labour, and oppression and exploitation in the broadest sense, it had no need of a state. Tribes organised themselves into armed bodies, but for collective defence against foreigners, not for the moderation of internal contradictions, which were dealt with by other means. Special bodies of armed people were not required to enforce the kind of inequality of living standards and division of labour they had. Normal social pressures exercised by people upon one another within the social structure were sufficient.

It is quite normal for a state to gain relative independence from the class whose interests it defends. It normally takes on a life of its own. The ruling class has its social roots in its relation to the means of production, and devotes only a portion of its collective effort towards affairs of state.

Soldiers and bureaucrats are the professionals who carry on the business of the state, and each ruling class has its own means of controlling its instrument of violence, by means of which it ensures that the class enemy cannot overthrow the social relations of production in which the ruling class lives.

There is no doubt that in Eastern Europe, except Yugoslavia, at the end of the Second World War, the State was the Red Army. If the Red Army had taken no part in the political and social life of the countries in which it was billeted, then that would be a different question.

But they did not. They intervened totally in the political and social life of the countries they occupied. The fact that the Red Army attempted to establish

two-class governments and to guarantee capitalist property relations is beside the point. If, as in Austria in 1955, the Red Army simply withdrew leaving class relations more or less intact, then that would be something else. The fact is that the Soviet State established through its military power state machines that extended its own power over the countries concerned.

The Social Relations of Production

Class characterisation of the relations of production is another question, independent of characterisation of the state. Seizure of public political power can happen overnight. Transformation of the social relations of production takes time. Capitalist social relations, equally as socialist relations, cannot be created overnight as the Germans are finding out [1990].

The relations of production are by their very nature 'impure', hybrid; the economy is a 'field of struggle' between the classes. While in a typical capitalist country we characterise the relations of production as capitalist, this by no means excludes significant elements of planning, social welfare, nationalised property, etc, or for that matter, feudal social relations.

In general, the state determines the essential character of the social relations of production, or rather, the direction of their development. The elements of planning and statification found in very many capitalist countries by no means weaken the capitalist character of the economy, for these features are regulated by the capitalists' state, which ensures that these enterprises serve and reinforce capitalism. Equally, a healthy workers state invariably tolerates significant elements of bourgeois relations appropriate to the stage of development of the productive forces.

Consequently, although a government of socialists will be obliged to organise relations of production which are bourgeois, they must do so understanding the political and social implications of this situation. As much as gravity is a law of nature, it is a law of the same order that capitalist relations of production spawn bourgeois political forces.

Consequently, in so far as market relations exist within a workers state, there is an inherent tendency towards the growth of the counter-revolution. At the same time a state which cannot develop the productivity of labour cannot in the last analysis survive.

That is, it is not possible to 'abolish' bourgeois relations of production under conditions where the cultural level of the society, and its relations to the rest of the world, make such bourgeois relations obligatory. To attempt such an 'abolition' means either to engage in massive self-deception, or to throw society back to more backward relations, or both. These were the lessons of

the first two decades of the USSR.

Why not ‘People’s Democracy’

The Stalinists’ perspective was to retain capitalism and the rule of the ‘progressive bourgeoisie’ within the countries they occupied. In the first place, they sought to satisfy their own economic needs, both by outright theft (primitive accumulation?) and by continuing unequal trade.

Secondly, they were at great pains to ensure the military security of the ‘buffer states’ in relation to their own military perspectives, and could not tolerate capitalist states as such which would threaten the Soviet Union.

Thirdly, they could not tolerate the independent mobilisation of the working class, which threatened political revolution, and was contrary to the policy of Stalinism to oppose socialist revolution in the interests of peaceful co-existence.

Fourthly, the Stalinists possessed no means of economic management other than their own, if they could not tolerate proletarian revolution or capitalist restoration.

All things together, the perspective of a two-class state, in which the Stalinists would share power with the domestic capitalists was a utopia. It was one thing to co-opt individual capitalists into governments controlled by the Red Army, or local clones of the Red Army, but ‘People’s Democracy’ is a utopia. It will inevitably lead either to the dictatorship of the proletariat or capitalist counterrevolution within a very short period of time. This truth has been confirmed time and again by all those who have attempted to implement this strategy of Stalinism.

Is the bureaucracy a new class?

In the deformed workers states, the state not only guarantees the social relations of production, but by means of the state bureaucracy, actually **organises** production, thus supplanting the managerial stratum of capitalist countries, **as** well as performing the functions of the state bureaucracy found in any developed country up to this time.

It could be argued that the bureaucracy therefore is a new, distinct social class in its own right. The bureaucracy certainly monopolises social and political power, retains for itself the surplus of production and ‘exploits’ and oppresses the working class, just as do the ruling classes of other societies. But this is false. The bureaucracy rests not on its own relation to the forces of production, but on the conflict between social classes.

Every state has its bureaucracy. In fascist Germany, for instance, the Nazi Party took over the state and treated many of the capitalists brutally. Nevertheless they defended capitalist property relations in the only way they could have been defended at the time, and the capitalist class gained considerable wealth from the system, even if they were fewer in number.

To characterise the bureaucracy as a social class in its own right implies an independent role for the bureaucracy in the historical development of the forces of production. It is tantamount to the insertion of a new, distinct epoch between capitalism and socialism.

The present period is the **transitional epoch**, a period transitional between capitalism and socialism, a period of hybrids and contradictions, wars and revolutions. If the bureaucracy has managed to gain its independence from the other social classes absolutely, then this implies a perspective of a whole historical epoch of bureaucratic centralist states.

The Marxists of the late 1940s correctly analysed that this was not the case! For those who have lived most of our lives between 1945 and 1990 that period of deformed workers states ruling half the population of the world seems for sure no blink of the eye. But the reality is, after a mere 40 years these states are collapsing! In historical terms 40 years is a trifle. In the face of the forces of disintegration gripping the Stalinist bloc at the moment, the bureaucracy has proved to be powerless.

Can a Workers State be formed without the participation of the Working Class?

In short, in 'exceptional circumstances', Yes. The conditions prevailing at the end of World War II in the areas occupied by the Red Army can aptly be described as exceptional.

The bureaucratic-military overturns essentially flowed out of the position of the USSR as a degenerated workers state, unable to go forward to socialism, but which capitalism could not destroy; isolated, saddled with a reactionary bureaucracy, but in military control of half a continent. If the same phenomenon had occurred in the victorious USA, then that would be something different!

Can a workers state established by the armed working class be 'deformed' at birth?

Why not? At a certain stage in its development, taking into consideration the political development of the working class at an international level and its relation to other classes, the working class goes into battle under a given kind

of leadership. What follows may be victory or defeat or whatever. Successful seizure of state power in a single country does not, as we well know, lead automatically, let alone immediately, to socialism. As in understanding the fate of the October Revolution, we have to understand the prospects for any revolution within the context of the relation between the classes and the development of the productive forces on the world arena. Up to very recent times, Stalinism has dominated the workers movement, and consequently has left its stamp upon all those parties and leaders, trained in the ranks of the Third International, who have led 'successful' revolutionary struggles.

The Chinese Revolution will be dealt with at more length below in order to illustrate this case. Yugoslavia was the first instance of Stalinism leading a revolution, and establishing a bureaucratic-centralist regime, a 'deformed workers state'. The Fourth International, by 1951, was unanimous in characterising Yugoslavia as a deformed workers state.

The apparent stability of the deformed workers states masked inner contradictions which exploded with irresistible force at the end of the eighties. The characterisation of the deformed workers states as transient, hybrid phenomena has been confirmed. They must develop either in the direction of socialism, by way of the overthrow of the bureaucracy by the working class; or towards capitalism by the destruction of the state. It was not excluded that the bureaucracy could lead the way back to capitalism. The Trotskyist movement did not anticipate that the return to capitalism could occur without a fight. It remains to be seen what kind of social struggles will emerge out of the collapse of the bureaucratic-centralist command economies. But the situation is anything but stable.

The main thing, in understanding why the workers of Eastern Europe were unable to go forward to socialism, is that the situation in Eastern Europe was dominated by a world situation in which the overwhelming balance of economic, financial, military and technical power in the world was held by the USA, balanced only by the Soviet Union.

The only possibility of transforming this situation into socialist revolution lay in the global spontaneous uprising of the masses which came in the aftermath of the War. But without an international revolutionary leadership capable of organising this movement, the masses were incapable of overcoming the collaboration of Stalinism and imperialism.

The characterisation of 'deformed and degenerated workers states' encapsulated the perspectives of revolutionaries in relation to these states – political revolution against the bureaucracy, and defence of the nationalised property relations against imperialism and domestic

reaction.

The question of Eastern Europe was essentially the same as in the Soviet Union, but with important differences. On the whole, Eastern Europe never made their own revolution. The ‘revolution’ was imported from outside, and imposed upon them without their consent. Many welcomed the Red Army and supported the statification of the economy which ultimately followed, and the social benefits which came with state ownership. But these people never made the revolution, and discovered within the forces of their own nations the resources for making socialist revolution and building a workers state.

Consequently, in Eastern Europe there was a national question, the question of exploited and divided nations. The national question exerts powerful forces. There can be no question of a progress towards socialism without national self-determination.

National self-determination is incompatible with Stalinist rule, except by means of good old fashioned conflict between nation-states.

On the contrary side, the generally higher cultural level of Europe compared with Russia created the potential for overtaking the Soviet Union. However, until the national question is resolved, the question of ridding the country of the Russians will tend to predominate over the question of defending social property.

All these questions are however of a secondary character. The main line of the revolutionary perspective was the same; the main line of the prospects for these states was the same – political revolution or capitalist restoration. Obviously theoretical analysis and development of tactics will require the understanding of all the national and historical peculiarities of each country.

The fundamental basis of this revolutionary strategy is the understanding of the current epoch as ‘transitional’, transitional between capitalism and socialism; all the objective pre-requisites for socialism are present, and the chief obstacle to the transformation of society is the opportunist character of the leadership of the proletariat.

The Theory of ‘State Capitalism’ and the Korean War

In 1950 a tendency emerged from the Fourth International which fundamentally rejected the ‘deformed workers state’ position. While the Socialist Review Group in Britain was not the first, and far from the last, group to split over the question of Trotskyism’s attitude to the Stalinist regimes, this grouping has proved to be remarkably stable and persistent. Known in Australia as the International Socialist Organisation, this tendency

is characterised by its adherence to the theory of ‘State Capitalism’.

Just as the ‘deformed workers state’ characterisation has to be understood in relation to the perspective of political revolution and defence of nationalised property relations, so ‘state capitalism’ has to be understood in relation to the political perspective that it was connected with.

The emergence of this grouping coincided with the beginning of the Korean War. Their orientation in relation to the Korean War was quite clear: ‘Neither Western Capitalism nor Stalinist Totalitarianism... we lend no support to either side in Korea’.¹³⁸ The Trotskyist movement was agitating against the imperialist intervention, organising dockers to ban the shipment of materials, lobbying ‘left’ parliamentarians to get their governments to withdraw support from the war, holding public meetings to expose the cynical nature of the ‘United Nations’ action, and defending the right of Korean workers to solve their own problems.

The IS claimed ‘instead our solidarity is with the Koreans in their struggle against both war camps and for national independence and democratic socialism. ‘ This appears to be an honourable and more left-wing position, refusing to lend support to Stalinism, standing by the masses in opposition to both Stalinism and imperialism. But this is not so. The context of the time was McCarthyism, anti-communist witch-hunting and a relatively conservative working class in the old capitalist countries like Britain. The meaning of this ‘Third Campism’ (a characterisation accepted by the IS at the time) is given in the perspective of supporting neither side, that is, of explaining why workers should not work for the defeat of their ‘own’ imperialist governments, why for all practical purposes the war was nothing to do with them; it amounted to washing one’s hands of responsibility for defence of nationalised property relations. It was a capitulation before anti-communism, and an adaptation to the prevailing mood of the middle-classes who were losing confidence in the proletariat as a revolutionary force.

Without being able to defend the past gains of the working class, however miserable, however distorted and bureaucratised, it is impossible to make new gains. This is the essence of the revolutionary content of the ‘deformed workers states’ orientation. It has always been an extremely difficult position to hold, there is no doubt. It is the easiest thing in the world to turn one’s back upon conservative trade unions, miserable economic gains, facile democratic rights, to keep one’s banner clean; but revolutionary methods arise only on

138 See *The Origins of the International Socialists*, Pluto 1971.

the basis of defending the achievements of earlier periods, and transcending them.

Pabloism

In January 1951, during the lead up to the Third World Congress, the Secretary of the International Secretariat of the Fourth International, Michel Raptis (Pablo), published an article entitled 'Where are We Going?'. It was widely recognised that the views expressed in the article went only part of the way to the full scope of the position Pablo was developing. It contained many ambiguous formulations and omitted other questions.

The drift of Pablo's position was this: the transitional period would be a protracted period covering centuries, and during this period deformed workers states would co-exist with capitalist states; these deformed workers states, despite their weaknesses, would be the main obstacles and threat to capitalism; the period would be dominated by the drive towards imperialist war, in which the Stalinist leaders of the deformed workers states would be obliged to lead world revolution in order to defend themselves against imperialism; consequently, there was no need of an independent, separate Fourth International, in the sense of mass working class parties in every country; since objective conditions would force the Stalinists to lead the revolution, it would be the best policy for Trotskyists to dissolve their organisations into the Communist Parties of the various countries, retaining only an international centre for publishing and circulating Trotskyist literature.

This position was correctly characterised as 'liquidationism' by those who opposed Pablo. First to oppose Pablo's positions were the French section of the Fourth International, the Parti Communiste Internationaliste (PCI). After the 3rd Congress, the International Secretariat, under Pablo's urging, ordered the PCI to liquidate itself into the French Communist Party. The majority of the PCI opposed this policy. The majority were then bureaucratically expelled by the International Secretariat, supporting a minority led by Pierre Frank.

This outrageous bureaucratic action did not bring an immediate response from other sections. The US and British sections, for instance, did not join the fight against Pablo until they found Pablo supporting opposition sections within their own organisations, and working to undermine the existing national leadership.

Other European leaders of the FI also were unclear as to the implications of Pablo's position. Ernest Mandel held some differences with Pablo, but agreed with his general line, and did not publicly break from Pablo.

Facing the liquidation of the Fourth International being carried out by the International Secretariat, a number of national sections formed themselves into the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI). The object of the ICFI was to group together those who were opposed to the liquidation of the Fourth International and thwart Pablo's bureaucratically imposed policy.

What resulted was a split in the Fourth International. Mandel and others opposed the formation of the ICFI and defended Pablo. For 12 years from the split in the French section in January 1952 until 1963, the FI was split between the supporters of the 'Pabloist' International Secretariat and the most important national sections, including the American SWP, the Latin American sections, the British section, Ceylonese section, the majority of the French Section. Pablo himself left the International not long after the split, as the implications of his positions developed, but the split remained, with less dramatic differences, but differences nonetheless, on the orientation of Trotskyists in relation to Stalinism.

The principle questions which were at issue here were these. Firstly, did the formation of deformed workers states characterise a whole epoch, or was it a transitory phase? Secondly, given that the existence of the deformed workers states placed the Stalinists in a position to lead the major struggles against capitalism and imperialism, did this imply that revolutionaries should support them, while endeavouring to 'push them to the left', or should revolutionaries continue to regard Stalinism as a counter-revolutionary trend, and retain their organisational and political independence? Thirdly, would 'objective pressures', i.e. the responsibilities of leading the struggle against imperialism, push the Stalinists to the left, or would they become more and more reactionary?

The formation of the ICFI meant the affirmation of the basic gains of the previous period – that the deformed workers states were not permanent features of this epoch, but relatively unstable formations which required a political revolution; that revolutionaries had to retain their political and organisational independence of Stalinism, and struggle to build an alternative, mass, International; that Stalinism could not be transformed into a revolutionary current and could not defend the gains of the past.

Nevertheless, this split had a devastating effect upon the Fourth International. Pabloism clearly represented the influence and pressure of Stalinism within the Fourth International and its effects ran very deep.

Those sections which formed the ICFI did not intend to form a rival international organisation, since their perspective was to overcome the split.

In reality however, each section increasingly pursued a 'national road', concentrating their attention on building their national organisations.

This tendency has been described as 'national Trotskyism'¹³⁹. The worst affected sections were probably the British (Gerry Healy's Socialist Labour League) and the French (Pierre Lambert's Organisation Communiste Internationaliste), who had an orientation more towards the strong Socialist/Labour parties in their own countries.

The narrow nationalism of Stalinism, and also the bureaucratic centralist internal regime became firmly implanted, especially in the SLL, despite correct criticisms of 'Pabloism'.

A partial re-unification of the majority of the ICFI (the American SWP and the Latin American sections) with the residual FI, in 1963, never overcame the basic differences that had caused the split, and 'Pabloism' has continued to re-appear in the Trotskyist movement ever since. The split so weakened the movement that it has remained marginalised by Stalinism and reformism in most countries for most of the period since.

The defence of the perspective of political revolution to overthrow Stalinism in the workers states, and social revolution in the capitalist countries (also in opposition to Stalinism), was a gain of fundamental importance for Marxism. In the face of the apparent stability of Stalinism this gain was made at enormous cost.

The events of 1989-90 have proved the correctness of this perspective, but, perversely, not by the success of the political revolution, but by the progressive disintegration of the nationalised property relations of the deformed and degenerated workers states.

Stalinism and the national liberation movement

One of the implications of the capture of the first workers state by Stalinism was that Stalinism found itself at the head of the national liberation movement that exploded after the end of World War II. The main leaders of this movement, people such as Mao Tse Tung and Ho Chi Minh, were won to the Communist International during the period immediately after the October Revolution, when the International was led by Lenin and Trotsky. They were trained as leaders during the period of Stalin's rise to power. The leaders of

139 Nahuel Moreno of the Liga Internacional de las Trabajadores coined the term 'national Trotskyism'. Moreno's organisations in Latin America participated in the ICFI and the later partial reunification, but later left the United Secretariat.

the Communist Parties in the East were replaced, corrupted, murdered or misled until these parties were re-formed in the Stalinist mould. It was these Stalinised parties that found themselves at the head of vast national movements. On the whole these national liberation movements found their way to victory despite everything, despite all the betrayals and misleadership of Stalinism; but at enormous cost, and only at the end of the day to arrive at bureaucratised, conservative states in which the 'heroes of the revolution' set themselves up as local Stalin-figures.

Vietnam

The betrayal of the August 1945 revolution in Vietnam led to 29 years of bitter war against the French. The revolutionary proletariat of Saigon was abandoned as Ho Chi Minh turned to the peasantry in pursuit of the Stalinist perspective of 'People's Democracy'.

Following the victory at Dien Bien Phu in July 1954 the Stalinists accepted a two year division of the country which (surprise, surprise!) was used by the US to set up a fake state in the South, condemning the Vietnamese people to another 20 years of war, this time against the US.

The NLF was continually denied sufficient weapons to defeat the Americans. The USSR and China wanted only to keep the Americans tied up in a protracted war; the Vietnamese never had the air-power to match the USA, since the Stalinists did not want to provoke the USA by giving them an equal fight. Rivalry between China and the USSR denied even basic military hardware as the rival bureaucracies sabotaged each other's aid.

The Tet Offensive of February 1968 shook imperialism to its foundations, not only because the NLF had struck at its most secure base, but also because for the first time the urban workers also showed their strength. The USSR and China combined to pressure the NLF into negotiations leading eventually to an impossible 'checker board' truce negotiated at Paris on 27 January 1972.

Whatever the intentions of the negotiators there could be no peaceful co-existence. The NLF entered Ho Chi Minh City in April 1974 dealing imperialism a blow it would never forgive.

Vietnam remains today one of the poorest countries in the world. The US have been aided in their continued persecution of the Vietnamese revolution by the Chinese Stalinists who launched a 3 week military attack on Vietnam in February 1979 and have supported the American blockade against Vietnam and supported Pol Pot's war against them in Cambodia.

Cambodia

The most extreme example of Stalinist strategies for national liberation is given by Pol Pot, who still enjoys the support of the USA and is (1990) the only government of Cambodia recognised by the United Nations.

Pol Pot's perspective was quite simply to liquidate the entire urban population and the better-off or educated sections of the rural population, to destroy all productive forces more advanced than the Iron Age.

Cuba

The Cuban Communist Party which was legal under the Batista regime, took no part in the Revolution (July 1953 – Jan 1959) at all. Nevertheless, for perfectly pragmatic reasons (the need for international support against the Americans) Castro took over the Communist Party and declared himself loyal to Moscow.

Means and ends are inseparable as regards Stalinist perspectives for national liberation: support for a war of national liberation only in so far and to the extent that such a war aids the diplomatic policy of the Stalinist bureaucracy; negotiated settlement and peaceful co-existence are pursued until the movement can no longer be contained; reliance on the peasantry and if possible the 'progressive sections of the national bourgeoisie', total political exclusion of the urban working class; capitalism, small-farming, bureaucratic-centralist 'planning', but never, never workers democracy.

The questions at issue are basically those same questions fought out by the Bolsheviks in Russia in the 30 years leading up to the October 1917 Revolution; the difference is that the 'People's Democracy' perspective is supported, not by the Mensheviks, but by the inheritors of the proletarian revolution.

China

At the end of the civil war in China that broke out after the defeat of the Japanese, the Chinese Communist Party came to power at the head of a peasant army. From 1949 to 1952 a program of land reform and nationalisation of the foreign companies was carried out simultaneously with attempts to retain bourgeois leaders in the government and protect capitalist property. Left Oppositionists who had continually fought for expropriation of landowners, formed workers organisations, and exposed official corruption, were consistently repressed.

In December 1952 and January 1953 the entire Trotskyist movement (and their relatives) were rounded up and imprisoned, in most cases never to be

seen or heard of again. Impending invasion by the United States who pushed towards the Chinese border from Korea forced the Stalinists into an about-face. Facing open sabotage and opposition from the right, bourgeois elements were expelled from the government and widespread expropriation of capitalist property carried out.

Alarmed by the crisis set off by Khrushchev's speech at the 20th Congress of the CPSU admitting Stalin's crimes, and the partial disintegration of the Communist Parties around the world following the repression of the Hungarian revolution in 1956, the Chinese CP began to look towards its independence from the Kremlin. Rapid industrialisation was the only means of achieving this independence.

Mimicking Stalin's disastrous policies of the 'Third Period', the Great Leap Forward was initiated in 1958. The conflict between the rival national bureaucracies came to a head in August 1960 with Khrushchev's withdrawal of Soviet technical aid.

[The theoretical problems that the Trotskyist movement has had in characterising the USSR are put into perspective if we observe how Stalinism deals with this problem. From being not only a workers state, but, since 1935, 'actually existing socialism', the USSR was transformed into an imperialist country by the replacement of Stalin by Khrushchev, in the view of the leaders of Chinese Stalinism! Likewise, the supporters of Mao now characterise China as a 'fascist' country, by virtue of the substitution of Deng Shao Ping for Mao Tse Tung].

With the detonation of its first atom bomb in October 1964, the Chinese Stalinists now felt themselves able to rival Moscow for leadership of the Stalinist movement. In order to challenge the hegemony of the Russians the Chinese generally took up an ultra-left position in the international arena. Facing the opposition of entrenched bourgeois elements in the bureaucracy as well as a pro-Soviet opposition, Mao launched the 'Cultural Revolution' in August 1966. The absurdities of this campaign are now recognised by all. Ignorance and parochialism were elevated to the level of cardinal virtues. Chinese industry, science, art and technology were set back decades.

If we could have socialism in one country, then 'socialism in one commune' would be even better, with every commune urged to set up its own iron and steel industry! The decentralisation of industry served further to weaken the proletariat in relation to the peasantry upon whom the CP relied for political support. The peasantry were deemed not only to be experts in agronomy (which they could well claim) but also every branch of science and culture. Intellectuals were sent to the countryside to 'learn from the people'... and eat

lots of humble pie.

By February 1969, Mao had secured his hold over the apparatus and secured sympathising Communist Parties in most countries of the world, in opposition to the pro-Moscow parties. Internally, Mao's policy could best be described as bonapartism, in as much as by appealing to the masses for support against the bureaucracy, he left the masses only the opportunity of declaring their loyalty to the 'Great Helmsman'. On the international arena, Maoism found a response with ultra-left criticisms of the Kremlin, in much the same way as had Tito 20 years earlier.

With the economy in almost total collapse and rising dissatisfaction amongst the people at the obvious failure of the hoped-for economic miracle, the Chinese CP made a sharp turn to the right. Fearful also of the military threat from the USSR, the Chinese now pursued an alliance with the United States, condemning 'Soviet Social-imperialism', described as a greater danger than imperialism itself.

The Chinese now sought to out-do the Soviet Union in 'peaceful co-existence', with the betrayal of the Vietnamese Revolution the centrepiece of 'Ping-pong diplomacy', culminating in China's admission to the UN in October 1971. This policy has coincided with a turn to joint ventures with foreign capital, re-introduction of the market, encouragement of capital accumulation and creation of mass unemployment in order to facilitate the growth of wage-labour. Holding out to imperialism the prospect of lucrative markets of unparalleled scope, the bureaucracy has resolutely trodden the 'capitalist road'.

Central to the bureaucracy's economic and political policy has been the placating of the better-off peasantry, many of whom have now become quite wealthy. The bureaucracy shifted resources to the countryside in a big way, and secured the loyalty of the rural masses against the urban workers and intelligentsia.

They have also bought social peace with the import of consumer goods, at the cost of accumulation of a huge foreign debt. Naturally, few benefits of this move have flowed to the urban workers – denied any political freedoms, and seeing the upper-crust grow fat on the new economic policies. Contrasting their own position with the growth of democratic rights in Gorbachev's Russia, the urban workers and youth eventually rose up in May 1989. Again, it was the CP's base in the rural peasantry that was used to crush the working class and young intelligentsia in the massacres of June 1989.

As a political current in the advanced capitalist countries, Maoism has been in irreversible decline since the period of 'ping pong diplomacy'. It's position in

the 'Third World' has been firmly rooted in the need of liberation and workers' movements for material aid. The sudden withdrawal of aid by the USSR and Eastern Europe will increase interest in Beijing as a source of funds. However, China's record in support for national liberation struggles is even worse than Russia's. In Angola China supported the pro-imperialist UNITA for the sole reason that UNITA was fighting the MPLA which was supported by Moscow. Likewise, all the atrocities of Pol Pot are fine, so long as he is fighting the Vietnamese who are supported by Moscow.

9) The Collapse of Stalinism

A socialist revolution was made in Russia in 1917. Now the main tasks of social revolution are posed again. Up until 1933 revolutionaries saw the problem of the degeneration of the Soviet Union as one of winning the Comintern back to Marxism. From 1933 until recently, revolutionaries fought for 'political revolution' – overthrow of the government without the need for expropriation of the capitalist class. Now, the tasks are even more extensive, as the economic base has slipped, and continues to slip back to capitalism.

This backward movement also contains the forward movement: the collapse of the principal barrier to socialist revolution with the workers' movement – Stalinism.

Political Revolution

From 1933, when Trotsky came to the conclusion that regeneration of the Communist Party was no longer possible, the perspective of the Trotskyist movement has been the revolutionary overthrow of the Stalinist regime in the USSR. This revolutionary strategy is distinguished from social revolution only because it does not entail expropriation of the private property in the means of production, which had already been carried out (and at the moment of writing, has still not been obliterated).

Further, such a political revolution does not actually entail the passage of power from one class to another, but simply the taking of political power by the working class from a bureaucracy which has usurped political power from the workers. However, the meaning of this statement is really nothing more than is contained in the statement that the capitalist class does not have a social base in private ownership in the means of production in the USSR.

The implication of the distinction between social revolution and political revolution as it relates to the state itself, is only significant when taken in the international arena. The bureaucracy has control of the soviet state and thus appears before the workers of their own country as no better than any capitalist class. However, despite the abject and systematic collaborationist policy of the bureaucracy in relation to imperialism, the Soviet state is still a force outside of the control of imperialism.

This is a situation which is capable of transforming itself. The current leadership of Stalinism is turning increasingly to imperialism, not only for collaboration on the international arena, which has always been its policy, but also for support against the working class at home.

There can be no doubt that, at the present juncture, the strategy of imperialism

in relation to the state in both the USSR and Eastern Europe is to take over the state, rather than smash it. This could change, but only in the event of a successful political revolution.

Development of the Political Revolution in Eastern Europe and the USSR

Political revolution means the independent mobilisation of the working class with a program aimed at the working class regaining political control of the state, and implicitly, the economy. It would be fatuous to describe what has been taking place this year (1990) in Europe and the USSR as political revolution, for the political revolution has merged with the restoration of capitalism.

First Phase: the spontaneous anti-Stalinist uprising of the working class

The political revolution in the USSR was forestalled by the Great Patriotic War; it began in Eastern Europe virtually as soon as the Red Army arrived.

While the overwhelming military superiority of the Red Army was able to suppress the revolution at first, as early as June 1953, in Berlin a general strike on the issue of prices, wages and democratic rights was of a definite proletarian, socialist, anti-Stalinist character.

Food riots and prolonged fighting with the army in Poznan, Poland, was again clearly proletarian and socialist in its character. Broad masses of women, poor people and youth were joined by Communist Party members, organised workers and 'Scouts'. The Communist Party headquarters was stormed in an attack on bureaucratic privilege. Wladyslaw Gomulka, a popular and long-time Communist who had led the government in the immediate post-war period, and had been removed and imprisoned for his opposition to the blatant exploitation of Poland by the USSR, was 'rehabilitated' into leadership to appease the movement. Witnessing the swift suppression of the uprising in Hungary in October-November 1956, Gomulka steered a cautious and loyal path.

Hungary

The high-point of the political revolution was Hungary October 1956. The report by Peter Fryer, then foreign correspondent for the British Daily Worker in Budapest, *The Hungarian Tragedy*, is an unsurpassable record of this heroic

struggle and its profound impact on the whole history of Communism.¹⁴⁰

‘It began with a students’ demonstration, partly to show the students’ sympathy for the people of Poland, who that weekend, through Gomulka and the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers Party, had resolutely rebuffed an attempt by an unprecedented delegation of Soviet leaders to get tough with them. ...

‘First Gero had gone on the wireless to make an address which, ‘poured oil on the flames’. He had called the demonstrators (now joined by workers from the factories, to which the students had sent delegations) counter-revolutionaries – ‘hostile elements’ endeavouring to disturb ‘the present political order in Hungary’...

‘Secondly, the crowds which had gathered outside the radio station to ask that students’ demands be broadcast were fired on by AVH men, 300 of whom were in the building. This was, without question, the spark that turned peaceful demonstrations into a revolution.

‘What had the students been demanding before the shooting at the radio station? First and foremost the replacement of Hegedus as Prime Minister by Imry Nagy. The election of a new Party leadership by a national congress. Friendship with the Soviet Union, but on the basis of equality. Withdrawal of Soviet troops from Hungary. Free elections. Freedom of the press. Academic freedom. The use of Hungary’s uranium stocks by Hungary herself.’

After arriving in Hungary Peter Fryer went to Magyarovar. The previous day, a peaceful demonstration of 5,000, inspired by the events in Budapest, had marched to the AVH (political police) headquarters and demanded they remove the red star, symbol of the Soviet occupation. The AVH replied with a hail of machine gun fired in which 80 were killed. The crowd had gone to the army barracks and demanded and received weapons. The crowd stormed and took the AVH headquarters.

Fryer was taken to meet the revolutionary committee in Magyarovar.

‘It had been set up after the events of the previous day, and was in continuous session, mainly organising food supplies and arranging contact with the similar committee at Gyor, the county town. The twenty members of the revolutionary committee were all local men; none could be called an emigré. Some were Communists, but rank-and-file Communists, not officials. What had happened to the officials? “The party secretary was a bully, but he was

140 The Hungarian Tragedy, by Peter Fryer, first published December 1956, published in 1986 by New Park Publications. Obtainable though scarce in Australia.

not a criminal. We told him to go home and stay there for a bit”.

‘Most of the committee members were former members of the Social-Democratic Party, who for one reason or another had dropped out of political activity since the Communist Party and the Social-Democratic Party were merged in the Hungarian Working People’s Party in June 1948. ...’

The revolution culminated in the creation of a genuine Soviet government, a coalition which placed Imry Nagy, a former Communist Party leader at its head. It was brutally crushed by the intervention of Soviet tanks, with 20,000 Hungarians and 3,500 Russians dying in the fighting.

From the initial uprising on October 23, the revolution lasted only 18 days. The great speed of events, combined with the Stalinist monopoly on the means of communication, and bourgeois misrepresentation, meant that it was all over before the working class of the world was able to respond to the call of the Hungarian workers. Although the movement was spontaneous, the political background of all those who held leading positions in the revolution was communist or socialist of one kind or another. The revolution did not have time to develop a program as such, but its political character was unambiguous and clear – it was the program of political revolution.

The revolution underestimated the capacity of the Stalinism to utilise its armed force, or more likely, as a spontaneous uprising, it never considered the question. Clearly, the revolution lacked international support capable of repelling the Stalinist invasion. The hold of Stalinism over the USSR and its armed might was the only factor that prevented Hungary from surpassing Stalinism, and initiating a period of the renewal of Marxism in Europe.

Nevertheless, the Hungarian workers dealt a death-blow to Stalinism of international proportions – the membership of the Australian Communist Party declined from 20,000 to 8,000 in the aftermath of the uprising and its repression; and this was a world-wide trend. No genuine communist remained in the ranks of the CPs after 1956.

But at the same time, the repression of the political revolution also took its toll on the workers of Europe. The Polish workers retreated after witnessing the fate of their comrades in Hungary, and while never abandoning the fight for national independence and political freedoms, proceeded with considerable caution thereafter, and a generation would grow up under the suffocating pall of Stalinism, before a new uprising took place.

Transition to a new phase

The upsurge of revolutionary struggles in the West and Third world gave fresh inspiration to the workers of Eastern Europe.

The ‘Prague Spring’ of 1968 was both an echo of what had gone before, and a harbinger of what was to come to fruition in 1990. The reform movement was organised and led from within the leadership of the Czech Communist Party, with a program that is more or less the same as that of Gorbachev 20 years later.

The movement was based principally in the bureaucracy and the intelligentsia, and rather than the working class. As a result, the Soviet intervention found it relatively easy to regain control, and compared with Hungary in 1956, the participation of the working class in resisting the invasion was minor.

In Poland however, riots which broke out in 1970 against the imposition of food price increases, and a wave of strikes still retained a powerful working class character. Again the government was forced to make concessions, but retained control with the ever-present threat of Soviet intervention.

The generation which has grown up in Eastern Europe knows nothing of the War and Nazi occupation except lectures from their Stalinist masters. Western Europe is now prosperous, but economic stagnation, political repression, national exploitation, environmental devastation and austerity are their lot.

In the words of the Transitional Program (1938): ‘...the chief strength of the bureaucracy lies not in itself but in the disillusionment of the masses, their lack of a new perspective. ... the impetus to the Soviet workers’ revolutionary upsurge will probably be given by events outside the country. ...’

Second Phase: transformation of political revolution into a return to capitalism

Throughout the 1970s and 80s a left opposition to Stalinism existed in Poland. The KOR as well as a number of Trotskyist groups put forward a Marxist perspective and worked for the overthrow of Stalinism. The powerful organised

working class proved itself the only vehicle capable of defeating Stalinism. The Polish Marxists on the whole recognised that the only correct perspective in relation to this movement was to fight within it for a revolutionary perspective and to fight within Solidarity against the pro-imperialist, pro-Church policies of its leadership.

While there were political problems and mistakes made in this struggle, the blame for the failure of the revolutionary perspective to win the masses of the Polish working class cannot just be laid at the feet of the Polish left – while

Thatcherism reigned in Britain, is there any reason to suppose that it should not also have supporters in Poland? It is demonstrable that workers in a western capitalist country have, on the whole, more control over their lives, more democracy, than workers in a country ruled by Stalinism, the more so where Stalinism took the form of a military government sustained by a foreign power.

The movement for democracy in China in 1989 was concerned above all, virtually exclusively, with the demand for political freedoms. The bureaucracy was already leading the way back to capitalism, in the name of 'market socialism' – but without the democratic institutions of the old capitalist countries. The movement did not have an economic program, or where it did, it varied from one extreme to the other. The only economic grievances expressed by the movement was resentment of the shift of economic resources in favour of the countryside, and a generalised call for an end to poverty and a desire to share the perceived affluence of the capitalist countries. The fact that it was the visit of Gorbachev, representative of the Soviet Union, that triggered the demonstrations, is an indicator of the fact that the movement did not perceive itself as restorationist. There is considerable evidence that a democratisation of the political and economic system, without challenging collective ownership, was the predominant conception of the demonstrators.

There is no doubt that the Chinese uprising, and its brutal repression, was both an inspiration and a warning to the workers of Europe and the USSR. Barely 3 months passed before the movement was taken up, first in a wave of strikes in the USSR, and then with the demonstrations in East Germany.

In Hungary, the bureaucracy has led the country back to capitalism, with very little fundamental opposition. In Bulgaria, East Germany and Czechoslovakia sections of the bureaucracy rapidly saw which way the wind was blowing. In Rumania a section of Stalinism manoeuvred itself into the head of the movement, despite the suicidal obstinance of Ceausescu and his political police.

In most cases, however, the inspiration and leadership of these movements have come from the intelligentsia, in particular writers, playwrights, musicians and poets – 'honest brokers', people who were perceived as having the virtues of honesty, and **not** to have any political or economic program.

While there is no doubt that the present direction is towards the restoration of capitalism, the real future of Eastern Europe and the USSR is only beginning to be placed on the agenda. The main objective of the masses has been to gain 'ownership' of their political process, under conditions where they lacked any

definite program, any leadership or organisation that they could trust, and where time had run out, from the standpoint of the catastrophic decline of the economy. Altogether, the political situation is wide open.

Why has the Political Revolution been overtaken by the collapse of the deformed workers states and their return to capitalism?

First and foremost in trying to answer this question, I have to say that the principal reason for the failure of the political revolution has been the lack of revolutionary leadership. In particular, the lack of an alternative leadership capable of politically surviving and organising within the countries dominated by Soviet military occupation; and the lack of a revolutionary example and political support from the West. The Trotskyist movement **must**, in a self-critical way, understand how it has failed in one of its chief objectives, by not providing this leadership.

However, it must be said at the outset, that no other political tendency even addressed the problem of political revolution against Stalinism, far less solved it!

The effectiveness of Stalinism as a system of repression is undeniable, making due allowance for the fact that it lasted for a mere 40 years in Europe. The re-stabilisation of Stalinism after World War II was based on the support of imperialism in a time when it needed quid-pro-quo from Stalinism, the military strength of the USSR, and the simple fact that between them, fascism and Stalinism had physically eliminated so many revolutionaries, that few survived to oppose the imposition of Stalinism in Europe.

By the time that the political revolution in Europe had begun to gain momentum, the Trotskyist movement was suffering grave political problems which flowed out of the conditions created by the post-war boom and the hegemony of Stalinism, and its apparent stability. Reduced to very small numbers by 1945, predominantly **not** in countries where revolutionary crises arose in the next period, the Trotskyist movement had not had conditions conducive to its growth.

In China, we see also the difficulties of making the political revolution in a state based on the peasantry, where the workers are outnumbered 50 to 1 by a backward peasantry, which has provided a conservative base for a brutal Stalinist regime.

In Eastern Europe, and for that matter, most of the Soviet Union, the class questions have been overshadowed by the national question. There can be no question of solving the question of liberation of the proletariat, outside of

national liberation. The fact that the oppressing nation is a degenerated workers state has complicated the question of the fight for socialism there enormously.

Also, in Eastern Europe, while Communism does have a long and proud history, the fact remains, that it has but a slender basis in the working classes of these countries, in the context of 'socialism' being the official creed.

The failure of the Fourth International to defeat Stalinism in the West and make a new revolution is a subject to which we must pay serious attention. We have to do so understanding that the problems of the Fourth International were the problems of the working class, **not** ideological or organisational problems, as such.

The failure of the Fourth International to establish itself in the Stalinist bloc is a subject which must be given special attention. Clearly, the events of the last year have proved at least that **the opportunity** must have been present.

The USSR: 1945 – 1990 – The Collapse of Stalinist Hegemony

Since the bureaucracy concentrates in its own hands all the levers of social power, but yet lacks an independent base in international division of labour, the history of Stalinism has been characterised by zig-zags. From 1923 to the War these zig-zags took the most extreme forms.

In the years immediately after the war, the energies of the Soviet working class were directed towards rebuilding. With 15 million killed defending the Soviet Union from fascism, the masses had little heart for fighting the bureaucracy.

Abroad, Stalinism was intent on taking what it needed from the 'buffer states' and endeavouring to set up states embodying their perspective of peaceful coexistence with capitalism. The growing hostility of US imperialism combined with the renewed militancy of the European workers forced them into the establishment of deformed workers states, expanding the Soviet economy.

For ten years the bureaucratic method of economy proved sufficient for the purposes of rebuilding from the devastation of the war. By 1953, after the death of Stalin, the frustrations and aspirations of the workers and Europe had reached a point where the political revolution began to manifest itself.

The decade following saw Khrushchev's famous speech to the 20th Congress in February 1956 followed on one hand by the brutal suppression of the political revolution, and on the other attempts to appease the opposition, including re-introduction of market relations, capital accumulation and 'the

profit motive'. These measures however, only fuelled the opposition from both left and right. Increasing instability saw the bureaucracy beginning to lose control.

Khrushchev's removal in October 1964 marked the end of any attempt to find a way out of the impasse, and the bureaucracy determined to rely solely on its own administrative efforts to deal with all social questions, within a nuclear-armed, hermetically sealed sanctuary, safe from the political or military threat from imperialism.

This was to be a period of uniform decline, economically and culturally. The bureaucratic-centralist method, 'command economy', was totally inadequate for the tasks of modernising the economy. Quantitative expansion of production was as far as it could go; qualitative change and improvement was impossible without the independent activity of social forces too large for the bureaucracy to control. The Soviet economy became more and more backward; the masses more and more disillusioned; stagnation and decline.

The 1979 invasion of Afghanistan proved to be more than the resources of bureaucratic rule could manage. The bureaucracy was now beginning to lose control. A new generation growing up in the Soviet Union was sufficiently affluent and secure to be indifferent to appeals to patriotism or fear, sufficiently educated and cultured to be conscious of the backwardness of Soviet society; the social system alienated the vast majority, and encouraged individualism and parochialism.

The emergence of Solidarity in Poland marked the beginning of the end. In 1985 Gorbachev came to power with a mandate to deal with crisis by any means and with a perspective of appealing to imperialism for assistance.

However, by January 1990, the forces of disintegration flowing into the Soviet Union from Europe were irresistible, and the return of capitalism inevitable.

Stalinism in the capitalist countries

After the War Stalin enforced the 'peaceful road to socialism' on to the Communist Parties throughout the capitalist world, except South Africa. This was an indispensable part of Stalin's perspective of peaceful co-existence with imperialism. 'Communism' was distinguished from reformism only by rhetoric, and the superior capacity for double-talk and cynicism. Just as old-fashioned Social-Democracy had combined bureaucratic wheeling and dealing with Sunday-picnic rhetoric about a far-distant utopia of socialism, Stalinism replaced the future utopia with a fantasy of 'actually existing socialism' in the USSR and Eastern Europe.

The crushing of the Hungarian Revolution in 1956 shattered this fantasy. Millions who had believed in the fantasy left the CP and on the whole left politics, or joined the right-wing, though a precious few did draw revolutionary conclusions.

The Sino-Soviet split in 1960 was a further blow to Stalinism's influence around the world. The national split in the Stalinist bureaucracy triggered a world-wide split of the Communist Parties, with pro-Beijing parties appearing in opposition to pro-Moscow parties in almost every country. This did serve to re-capture a section of workers, youth and national-liberation fighters for Stalinism, by virtue of the ultra-left stance taken by Maoism in its bid for leadership of world Stalinism. However, the breakdown of the apparent monolithism of Stalinism was a real blow, and the next 30 years saw a steady growth of the disintegration of Stalinism, with split following split as the influence of Stalinism declined.

'Euro-Communism' appeared in Italy, France and elsewhere as a continuation of Stalinism's essential characteristic of 'socialism in one country'. The peculiar characteristic of this trend was its abandonment of the orientation towards the working class. The theoreticians of Euro-Stalinism wrote the dictatorship of the proletariat out of their program altogether (which was at least honest, for it had long been abandoned in political practice, and remained in the program only as a relic of a long-gone past), and even went so far as to write the working class out of existence altogether.

It appears to be quite senseless to continue to describe as 'Stalinism' a political creed which has separated itself from its social base in the bureaucracy of the workers states to the extent of denying even the existence of the working class. It is indeed a contradiction, but a contradiction accurately reflecting that material reality of a social layer in the process of losing its social 'reality'.

The political and social theory has to be amended by the Stalinists of France or Britain to comprehend the translation of the same politics into a new situation. The politics is the resolution of political conflict by bureaucratic manoeuvre based on balancing between the classes.

While every state machine is the instrument of class rule, it has always been in the interests of the state to conceal its class-nature, and present itself as above-class or non-class. Also, the bureaucratic fix-it merchants of the Stalinist parties of the capitalist world find the class struggle distasteful at a certain point.

The 'historic compromise' in Italy, the CP support for the French nuclear bomb, marked the end of the role for these parties as heirs of the October

revolution.

In general the old-fashioned reformist parties in Europe have steadily supplanted the CPs in the working class, while the Euro-Stalinists gradually dissolved into the social movements.

The split between ‘Euro-Communists’ and ‘Moscow Line’, between adaptation to the local bourgeoisie, via the reformist bureaucracy, and continued adaptation to the Kremlin, has in fact anticipated the recent crisis within the bureaucracy of the USSR itself. It is as if the Comintern, created as a weapon wielded by the USSR to overthrow imperialism, has been captured by imperialism and transformed into an instrument for restoration of capitalism in the USSR!

Stalinism is now virtually indistinguishable from any other bourgeois trend in the capitalist world. Its disintegration in the capitalist countries anticipated its disintegration within the workers state bureaucracies.

This is not to say that Stalinism’s day is over. The bashing of oppositionists by Rumanian miners shows Stalinism will continue to play a reactionary role.

It still represents the pressure of the bourgeoisie within the workers movement, and will continue to play a reactionary role. But its influence is qualitatively weakened, and there is no doubt that it can now be eliminated as a significant political force where it does not still hold actual state power.

Did Stalinism Fall or was it Pushed?

Unable to tolerate the independent activity of the working class, nor the growth of the bourgeoisie, the Soviet bureaucracy has been unable to develop either the economy or the culture of its society. Bureaucratic-centralised planned economy could not go beyond reconstruction and replacement, except by the one-sided development of specialised branches of industry which are on the whole developed by capitalism in the same way – the nuclear bomb in 1949, and the Sputnik in October 1957.

Fearing both imperialist war and internal political revolution, its strategy is wedded to maintenance of ‘peace’. By limited assistance to the national liberation struggle against imperialism, relying upon its own military might as a deterrent to imperialist attack, it bargains for its own peace and limited participation in the world economy by both restraining and maintaining the masses.

On the other hand, the working class has been unable to overthrow the bureaucracy. It lacks an alternative program and the support of a proletarian movement going beyond Stalinism in the world outside. Internationally the

working class has been unable to build a new leadership, and the national liberation movement could not transcend Stalinism.

After the bureaucracy abandoned hope of resolving the economic and cultural crisis by their own administrative efforts, facing the necessity of releasing their grip on society, they turned not to the working class, but to imperialism for support against the masses, and a solution to the economic and cultural crisis.

They found imperialism willing to do business.

The economic crisis of capitalism

The period of decline in the Stalinist bloc after 1964 also saw the end of the post-war boom in the capitalist world. The industrialisation of 'Third World' after the Oil crisis of 1973 was transformed, with the collapse of the commodity boom, into intensified competition and economic decline, which has seen unemployment become permanent and endemic in all capitalist countries despite continual technological progress.

The rate of profit has fallen to almost zero while debts have accumulated to frightening proportions, with the USA transformed into the world's largest debtor nation.

The search for avenues for trade and investment has driven a world-wide privatisation drive, with areas of the economy formerly disdained as unprofitable, now put up for auction. Increasingly, the capitalists have come to appreciate the attraction of the vast markets controlled by the Stalinist bureaucracy, and have become more and more reliant on trade with them to sustain economic activity. Like divorcees returning to the altar, the leaders of imperialism and

Stalinism can hardly imagine how they ever lived without each other!

Revolutionary Perspectives

The Pablo-ist perspectives of 'centuries of deformed workers states' and 'objective pressures forcing Stalinism to fight imperialism' are now thoroughly consigned to past history.

The third-camp perspective of the adherents of the theory of 'state capitalism', mistaken as it is, will possibly strengthen itself out of the current changes, for defence of past gains of the working class in the face of the manifest bankruptcy of the deformed and degenerated workers states is no easy task.

The 'two-pronged' perspective of the Trotskyist movement over the past 50

years, correct as it was, has been in essence overtaken by events. The tasks of the political revolution have not been completely supplanted, as capitalism has still not been restored in the USSR, and only marginally in Eastern Europe.

However, what is clear is a growing together of these two arms of revolutionary strategy, a mutual inter-penetration.

The task today is **political-socialist revolution** in USSR as well as Eastern Europe – the organisation of the working class along a similar program as applies in the capitalist countries, but with a program of defence of state property against privatisation having greater significance, and with democratisation of the state a part of the program, while in the capitalist countries this would be really just a tactical orientation.

The next period in USSR and Eastern Europe will be one of continuing and irresolvable crisis, with the high expectations, extensive level of organisation and social consciousness of the masses, their hostility to politicians, bureaucrats and entrepreneurs, their reduced fear of war, clashing with the terminal economic malaise of the old ‘planned economies’ and the crisis of stagflation in the West.

What is lacking in the USSR and Eastern Europe is an alternative program which requires possibilities for rebuilding the bonds with the workers of the West in a common struggle, and an understanding of their past. The Trotskyist movement can offer this although it is ill prepared to do so.

Not only the real past history of the USSR, but the process which has led to the disintegration of the Trotskyist movement in the West is unknown to the workers of the East.

The systematic and broad distribution of literature covering the period from 1923 to the present is required to bridge this gulf. The outcome of the discussion around this literature must not be forced. It will take time.

A difficult but vital task is the creation of a counter-model of the revolutionary Marxist. It is probably impossible for anyone brought up in the capitalist world to imagine how pervasive and alienating was the noxious atmosphere of Stalinism which is all people of the Stalinist bloc know of Marxism.

And yet without a clear understanding of the antipathy of Marxism and Stalinism it is impossible to come to a rational and revolutionary understanding of the meaning of this nightmarish period of European-history.

Even a very few individuals who can begin to show the workers, youth and

intellectuals of Eastern Europe and Russia what is a Marxist human being can make a huge change to the political future of this part of the world.

Beginning with very small circles, those who wish to struggle for a socialist program must be organised to facilitate this project of clarification and reexamination of the history of the past decades, while opening up contact with all kinds of workers' organisations in the West. Doubtless, competing groups will appear. Common goals must be sought. The facilitation of international links is vital, and would be welcomed by everyone 'over there'.

We must build an organised workers party of opposition seeking democratic control of all aspects of social life; control of production by workers irrespective of whether the owner is the state or a capitalist entrepreneur; organised campaigns over environmental and social policy, forcing compliance with wishes of communities; defence of welfare standards, child care facilities etc;

Reliance on the organised strength of the workers; defence of national rights while fighting against all manifestations of chauvinism and racism on either side. Support for national self-determination even where it threatens, or leads directly to the break up of the great workers states, since otherwise there is no prospect for gaining democratic control over the state apparatuses. Facilitating local control, but opposing disorganisation and break up of economy.

The State

Imperialism now rightly regards political-economic methods the most reliable means of defeating the Soviet State. Nevertheless, the nuclear-armed Soviet state still poses a threat to imperialism. It needs to tie the Soviet state into a system of alliances. Meanwhile, economically and politically imperialism is eroding the social basis of the Soviet State.

The building of a fortress-workers state – without a political perspective for the overthrow of imperialism by proletarian revolution – has failed to create conditions for the building of socialism. This perspective must not be resurrected.

All the contradictions inherent within the USSR and the deformed workers states are at their sharpest with the Soviet State, the Red Army, itself.

Democratisation of the state machine is the only prospect for disabling it as a weapon of repression, while retaining it as a deterrent against imperialism. There **is** a danger of the USSR state becoming a capitalist state. Basically **the class nature of the state will now have to be determined in a struggle** between the classes on an international arena.

Our main demand must be for democratic control of the state. The laying hold of the state machine by the organised working class. The USSR state as a potential and actual weapon against the working class must be answered by dismembering it and taking it over.

This 'taking over of the state machine' is not as distinct from 'smashing it' as might appear.

At first we must advance demands for 'community control' and democratic, accountability, anti-corruption etc slogans, democratisation of the army, disbandment of the secret police and such elements with trials, exposes etc.

But the main issue remains still the destruction of the imperialist war machine by the workers of the imperialist countries. There can be no stable development of workers democracy so long as imperialism holds its nuclear arsenal.

Where to for Stalinism?

Stalinism continues as a political current after the abolition of the workers state bureaucracies. It is difficult to distinguish Stalinism as a distinct political current once its social base in the workers state bureaucracy is cut off.

It began as a centrist or reactionary current within the leadership of the revolutionary stratum; it has long since ceased to be in any sense revolutionary, and over the last 30 or 40 years has become more and more alienated from the revolutionary stratum.

It's life blood is isolated workers states. The next workers state to appear will attract unemployed Stalinists, and will regenerate new Stalinist currents, since Stalinism arises on the social basis of the isolated workers state, and will continue to do so. But thrice bitten ...

Could the degeneration of the October Revolution be repeated by a future revolution?

Not really. Economic, social and political progress relegates Stalinism to a now past period. It is possible to say this however, only on the understanding that history has now provided us with sufficient forces to overcome Stalinism; but it has not and cannot prevent its re-appearance. It won't fall, it must be pushed!

The comparable danger now is the political degeneration arising on the basis of the marginalisation of Marxism, and it is our responsibility to show how Marxism can take up the new responsibility to place itself at the head of the masses.

What lessons should be drawn by socialists from the failure of the Stalinist version of ‘planned economy’?

It has been sufficiently stressed already that the Stalinist project of building a bureaucratic-centralised command economy within an isolated backward country **has nothing in common with Marxism**, and presupposed the liquidation of Marxism for its imposition. Nevertheless, the classics of Marxism from the period before 1921 deal with socialist economic planning and management only in the most general and abstract way. That is entirely appropriate, since it is not possible to go further than that without the benefit of historical practice.

After 1921 Trotsky made a consistent and thoroughgoing criticism of the course being taken by the Soviet regime. The implementation of the New Economic Policy was the fruit of the recognition that it was not going to be possible to proceed directly from “military communism” to genuine socialist development as part of a Socialist United States of Europe.

Trotsky had some opportunities to test out his ideas in the Hydro-electric Commission and some other posts, but in the main, from 1923, economic and social policy was determined by Stalin.

In relation to socialist economics two kinds of problems have arisen. Firstly, those principles which will guide our thinking on economics in the transitional epoch. Secondly, there is the conception we have of economy in that distant time when the working class is the dominant social class on a world scale, and the power of imperialism has been broken.

The problems of the transitional epoch are the incomparably more complex and difficult ones. We may be confident that at whatever time we are posed with the problems of the second kind, once we have successfully dealt with the problems of the transitional epoch, then there will be plenty of resources to solve these problems of the future.

The basic premise for approaching the problems of economy within an isolated workers state is the understanding that, as such, they are **unsolvable**.

The words of Engels, from part VI of *The Peasant War in Germany*, concerning the crushing of the peasants’ revolt of 1525, contain a sombre warning:

‘The worst thing that can befall the leaders of an extreme party is to be compelled to take over a government in an epoch when the movement is not yet ripe for the domination of the class which they represent, and for the realisation of the measures which that domination implies.

‘What they can do depends not upon their will but upon the degree of

contradiction between the various classes, and upon the level of development of the material means of existence, of the conditions of production and commerce upon which class contradictions always repose.

‘What they **ought** to do, what their party demands of them, again depends not upon them or the stage of development of the class struggle and its conditions. They are bound to the doctrines and demands hitherto propounded, which, again, do not proceed from the class relations of the moment or from the more or less accidental level of production and commerce, but from their more or less penetrating insight into the general result of the social and political movement.

‘Thus they necessarily find themselves in an unsolvable dilemma. What they can do contradicts all their previous actions, principles, and the immediate interests of their party, and what they **ought** to do cannot be done. In a word, they are compelled to represent not their party or their class, but the class for whose domination the movement is then ripe. In the interests of the movement they are compelled to advance the interests of an alien class, and to feed their own class with phrases and promises, and with the assertion that the interests of that alien class are its own interests.

‘Whoever is put into this awkward position is irrevocably lost. ‘

Conditions for the implementation of socialist economic policies have improved since 1525, so an over-pessimistic or literal meaning should not be attached to the above quotation, but we have to take seriously the warning sounded.

A clear distinction must always be made between state power and the social relations of production. It is incomparably easier for the organised working class to conquer state power, than it is for the working class to gain exclusive control over the economy. Indeed, socialist relations of production can only be envisaged as the far distant end-point of development, corresponding to the period of the withering away of the state.

It should go without saying, that a revolutionary must never confuse the holding of office within a bourgeois state with the smashing of the capitalist state, and the establishment of a workers state.

The exercise of state power, and the class struggle taking place within the relations of production are closely connected. Having gained state power, the working class should never release it.

While holding state power, the use to which that power must be put shall be to take whatever measures are necessary to take society one more step along the road to socialism.

The Marxism of Today

This means intervening in economic life so as to raise the level of economic, social and political activity of the working masses; raising their level of consciousness, increasing the degree to which the masses are in control of their own destiny; increasing the productivity of labour; giving leadership, but never commanding, except in so far as is demanded by the masses themselves.

There is no sharp line between the principles of Marxism as relating to the development of theory, as relating to democratic-centralist political organisation, and as relating to leadership of a whole country.

In solving the problems of revolutionary theory and organisation, we are simultaneously preparing the theoretical means for solving the problems of the dictatorship of the proletariat. The Marxists will always be a 'faction' within the working class, never, ever its rulers.

10) The Marginalisation of Revolutionary Politics

The Crises of Revolutionary Organisation

All four revolutionary Internationals – the International Workingman’s Association of Marx and Engels, the Socialist International, the Communist International and the Fourth International – have all adhered to the thesis that the proletariat required for its emancipation a political party, and moreover, a political party organised on an international basis.

The First International succeeded in establishing Marxism as the theory of proletarian revolution, and created a base for Marxism in all the developed countries of the world. The First International was wound up by its founders, in July 1876, once the political conditions for its healthy development had receded. The Second (Socialist) International was later initiated to continue its tasks.

The Second International succeeded in establishing mass parties, but fell victim to social chauvinism – the corruption of the upper echelons of the working class by the bourgeoisie. The Russian Revolution was made independently of the Second International by its Russian section. The Second International established however the mass trade unions and educated a stratum of workers which provided the initial cadre which responded to the Russian Revolution, and broke from reformism.

The Russian Revolution created the basis for the founding of the Communist International which politically fought against the Socialist International to win the working class away from dependence on the bourgeoisie to revolutionary policies. The Third International established parties in almost every country in the world, many of them very strong, but fell victim to the degeneration of the USSR following the failure of the post-war revolutionary upsurge to overthrow capitalism in any country outside of the USSR.

Communist Parties crystallised in a very short period of time, with formerly disparate groups and individuals coming together to form new parties, in most cases fairly uncritically accepting the leadership of those who had made the Russian Revolution. There is no doubt that the Communist International rallied to its banner all the best and most revolutionary elements in the world. However, despite the high level of culture and organisation of the European working class, these parties did not have anything like the political maturity of the Bolsheviks. None were more than four years old before their own political immaturity was overtaken by the political degeneration of their Soviet mentors.

The Fourth International was born out of the International Left Opposition, a faction of the Communist International. The aim of the International Left Opposition was to fight within the Comintern to politically expose and defeat Stalinism. From the mid-1930s it was necessary to take on the task of building a new revolutionary International leadership in the working class, in opposition to both Stalinism and reformism.

The period following the Second World War presented the opportunity for the success of this program. However, the repression and reaction of the previous twenty years had so weakened and isolated the politically advanced section of the international proletariat, that the Fourth International was unable to lead the upsurges that took place. The revolutionary crisis passed leaving Stalinism militarily in control of half of Europe, and the Fourth International decimated and marginalised.

Up until the First World War, the Second International was the party of the proletariat, and most revolutionaries of that period were a part of it, despite its degeneration towards reformism. Some syndicalists and revolutionary sects remained outside, but in the main, the Marxists remained in the International.

Between the Wars, the Second and Third Internationals competed for influence within the working class. Both were mass movements on the whole, and despite the degeneration of the Comintern, the struggle between these two parties reflected the political split within the working class, between revolutionary and reformist perspectives.

The social base of Stalinism within the workers states has allowed Stalinism to occupy this political space, even after its abandonment of revolutionary perspectives of any kind at all after 1933, and the Fourth International has remained a party of opposition.

Class, stratum and party

It is a well-known thesis of Marxism that political parties express the interests of classes. It was on this understanding that the Socialist International was founded, to build political parties of the working class. However, a party representing the interests of a class crystallises only slowly over a long period of time, as the class itself comes into being, becomes self-conscious, and becomes eventually perhaps the dominant class in society.

While the 'aristocracy of labour' could be traced back into feudal times before the proletariat had come into existence, from the latter part of the 19th century, the bourgeoisie pursued a definite and conscious policy of co-opting this upper stratum. The success of the imperialist bourgeoisie in co-opting an upper stratum of the working class led to a political split in the working class.

After the Russian Revolution, this was manifested in the existence of two mass working class political parties – a Socialist Party and a Communist Party.

The situation in Germany in the late 1920s and early 1930s would be the classic case of this. The reformist SPD was supported by about half the working class, predominantly among the better-off and unionised workers; the Stalinist KPD was supported by about half the working class, predominantly the poorer, more militant sections. Here the split was aggravated by the degeneration of the Communist International. While correct leadership from the KPD could have overcome the split in the class, there is no doubt that that split had a real social basis independently of Stalinism's inability to overcome it.

In other words, under conditions of class struggle, with the working class an oppressed class, but with significant political strength, there exists, and shall exist, both a reformist stratum and a revolutionary stratum within the working class.

The founding of the Third International was a recognition that this split existed and that it could be resolved only by a political struggle for the allegiance of the working class, between rival political parties. The upper stratum of the working class which held the leadership of the trade unions and labour parties, was lost to revolution, but was entrenched within a substantial, more conservative stratum of the working class.

During the first ten years of its existence the Trotskyist movement fought as a faction **within** the Comintern, with the perspective of reforming the Comintern. There can be no doubt that that program had eventually to be abandoned. There was no alternative to the building of a Fourth International, outside and in opposition to the Third.

Not one, not two, but **three** parties competing for influence within the working class. And yet as the decisive moment of the class struggle draws near, society lines up **for and against** the major proposition of the day.

The thesis here is that within society generally there are not only classes, but strata within those classes, which form the social base for political parties. These strata grow and fade, transform, interpenetrate, etc, in a way more or less intermediate between the relative stability of whole social classes, rooted in the relations of production, and political parties, which come and go subject not only to political changes in society as a whole, but subject to all kinds of subjective and chance factors.

There is within the working class a revolutionary stratum and a reformist

stratum. These strata are ill-defined and lack self-consciousness, but form the social base of the various parties and political groups competing for influence within the working class and other sections of the masses.

While the existence of a single political party expressing the perspectives of the revolutionary stratum gives self-consciousness to the revolutionary stratum, where no such party exists, or a multiplicity of competing groups, there is nevertheless a rudimentary self-consciousness, embryonic forms of collective theory and practice, programmatic development, etc, taking place within this stratum.

The development of a revolutionary crisis may bring about the crystallisation of these strata, but need not lead to the translation of that political differentiation into the consolidation of the revolutionary stratum into a revolutionary party. If that is to be achieved however, that revolutionary stratum is what forms the social basis of the revolutionary party.

The success of the revolution depends on the ability of the revolutionary stratum of the working class to find how to draw the mass of the workers with it, and the ability of the working class to draw the whole of the oppressed mass with it against the capitalists. Thus the political tasks confronting the revolutionary party include all strata of society, not just the working class, and certainly not just the revolutionary stratum of the working class.

The writings of Trotsky in the early 30s are the only Marxist classics concerned with these questions. A whole range of theoretical problems are raised once we begin to look at the dynamics of these strata within the working class; how stable and distinct are they? what are their social origins and make-up? how socially and politically independent are they? what is the extent of mutual political influence? etc etc These questions must be the subject of further investigation.

Problems of the Fourth International

When the leaders of the Left Opposition were forced to the conclusion that the Third International could not be reformed and was completely lost as a vehicle of revolution, this was in the context of the historic defeats being inflicted on the working class of Europe and Asia. In this context, not only was the Third International not open to a return to Marxism, but the revolutionary stratum of the working class as a whole was in retreat. Revolutionary Marxism was even more repressed and embattled than it had been during the 1920s when questions of strategy and tactics had been fiercely debated within the ranks of the class, just as they were within the various Communist Parties.

At the time the Fourth International was founded in 1938 and for a generation afterwards the Communist International was still the Party giving expression to the politics of the revolutionary stratum of the working class. The political, ideological and organisational problems of the Fourth International were not inevitable, but flowed with enormous force out of this situation of being an alternative revolutionary party, but isolated from the revolutionary stratum of the masses.

From its emergence as an opposition tendency within the Comintern in the mid-1920s, to the completion of the Stalinist bureaucratic overturns after the second world war, the Trotskyists faced difficulties immediately arising from the defeat of the working class, their own small numbers their isolation and the repression directed against them.

From 1951 onwards the Fourth International was beset by an unceasing series of organisational and ideological distortions which flowed from the difficulties facing the working class, and which further undermined its ability to successfully intervene in the situation and break out of its isolation from the advanced proletariat.

These political problems manifested themselves in the following forms:

‘State capitalism’

The Socialist Review Group led by Tony Cliff and Duncan Hallas split from the British Trotskyists. This tendency abandoned the defence of the USSR and the deformed workers states, labelling all these states as capitalist states. They have been known since as the International Socialists. Methodologically, they have substituted impressionism for Marxism, ‘simple socialism’, and they avoid a struggle against the bureaucracy by belittling the past gains of the working class.

While the IS continues to advocate proletarian socialist revolution it is unable to challenge for the leadership of the working class since it cannot defend its gains, and is reconciled to permanent opposition.

‘Pablo-ist liquidationism’

Michel Raptis (Pablo), then Secretary of the International Secretariat of the Fourth International, put forward in 1951 the proposition that Stalinism would be forced by objective pressures to lead the world revolution.

The conclusion that flowed from this was that there was no need of a Trotskyist International in the sense of mass parties in every country, and that revolutionaries should rejoin the Communist Parties, or whatever was the ‘existing leadership’, and facilitate this objectively necessary leftward

movement.

‘Pabloism’ is a much-misused word, and there is grounds for disputing what is the essential characteristic of this tendency, and to what extent it is appropriate to give Michel Pablo’s name to it, considering that he left the United Secretariat of the Fourth International (USec) within two years of propounding his theory.

Nevertheless, I have chosen to use the term, since the history of our movement has proved that ‘Pabloism’ is a real and definite political malaise, and I have chosen, for the sake of clarity, to limit the use of the term to liquidationism flowing from adaptation to ‘existing leadership’. I use the term ‘existing leadership’ rather than limiting the concept to capitulation to Stalinism, because I believe that adaptation to national liberation leaderships which may be independent of Stalinism to a greater or lesser extent, is essentially the same political phenomenon.

The evolution of the Australian SWP, now the Democratic Socialist Party (DSP), is a pure manifestation of Pabloism, so it is clear enough that the concept is as relevant here and now as it was in Europe 40 years ago.

Beginning with the tendency to operate as overseas supporters of the Vietnamese Communist Party or the Cuban Communist Party, the DSP has now left the Fourth International and denounced Trotskyism. The systematic rewriting of history being conducted by the DSP leaders is a preparation for liquidating itself into some kind of merger with a section of Stalinism, abandoning forever the possibility of defeating Stalinism.

The DSP’s project of setting up a Green-Left newspaper has to be seen in this light. The DSP is not a group in condition to defend principles or historical lessons against Stalinism or bourgeois trends; this project has to be seen as the DSP endeavouring to liquidate itself further into a bourgeois-radical milieu.

One of the most important tasks of revolutionaries in countries like Australia, during the past decades has been to be able to lead solidarity movements lending support to the various liberation struggles without capitulating to the Stalinist leadership of the liberation movements themselves (Castro, the Philippines CP, Vietnam, etc). It is regrettable that groups like the DSP have failed to offer this critical support.

The other, ‘European’, wing of the USec also failed in this way, both during the period of ‘guerilla-ism’ when Marxism was abandoned by a whole wing of the USec for a period, and later on, when the desire to support the Sandinistas led to an inability to defend Marxists fighting independently of the Sandinistas.

‘National Trotskyism’

This is the tendency which manifested itself in those sections of the Fourth International which formed the ICFI in opposition to Pabloism, but then turned away from the problems of building an international organisation, and concentrated instead on building a national organisation in their own country, and then setting up satellite groups off-shore. The most extreme example of this was the British section, the SLL.

The Russian Revolution was made by the Russian section of the Second International, in opposition to the majority of the international leadership, and the Revolution proved to be a means towards regenerating the International. The Bolsheviks of course dominated the leadership of the Third International. Only they had the political maturity to do so; it could not have been otherwise.

Nevertheless, in its short period of healthy growth it was genuinely revolutionary elements that came to the Third International. The inability of the Third International to overcome the political degeneration of the Bolshevik Party in the USSR, was a function not so much of its centralism and role of the Russian section within that centralism, as a function of the immaturity and weakness of the non-Russian sections, which the Bolsheviks had been unable to overcome before being crushed by Stalinism themselves.

However, the retreat of the ‘national Trotskyist’ tendency (US SWP, British SLL, French OCI, in particular) from the problems of building an International, in the 1950s and 60s, flowed precisely out of the difficulties of the period and out of the nationalist outlook of the bourgeoisie and its influence within the revolutionary movement. Thus, ‘national Trotskyism’ opened the way to serious political, social and ideological degeneration in the sections affected.

The prolonged isolation of the movement, from its founding in the 1930s up to the 1960s, combined with the effects on the proletariat of the mis-leadership of Stalinism led to a new phase of political crisis for the Trotskyist movement.

The crisis of Stalinism began in 1956 with the rise of political revolution in Poland and Hungary in particular, and its repression by Red Army tanks, the death of Stalin and Khrushchev’s denunciation of Stalin’s reign of terror, and this was followed by a renewed upsurge of revolutionary struggles in the 1960s, over which Stalinism was no longer able to maintain hegemony.

Faced with these great opportunities, but ill-prepared for the challenges that would be presented, the Trotskyist movement fell victim to a whole host of political problems which it shares with other political tendencies:

Sexism and patriarchy

Changes building up in the social relations of production in the advanced capitalist countries led to a blossoming of the women's liberation movement.

The new political conditions were created in the first instance by the progress of the national liberation struggles against imperialism. This struggle combined with the political liberalisation required by the post-modern forces of production developing in the US and Europe, and was taken up in the struggle of black people in the USA against their racial oppression. The critique of the civil rights movement combined with the struggle of people oppressed in the 'Third World' to focus attention on the illusory and deceptive character of the supposed freedom of life under bourgeois democracy.

The need of capitalism to socialise the labour of women, and the changing labour-requirements of industry, called into question the legitimacy of patriarchy in bourgeois society. Women became conscious of the oppression under which they laboured and found the means to fight it.

Patriarchy had always existed within the Marxist movement, as it had everywhere, until the political and ideological means for fighting and exposing patriarchy were developed in the early 1970s. A decisive contribution was made in that struggle by women from the revolutionary-Marxist movement.

Instead of responding to this new revolutionary development by learning from it and offering it leadership, most Trotskyist currents fell victim to entrenched patriarchy and either rejected women's liberation as a 'diversion' or opportunistically adapted to it.

The record of the Trotskyist movement is not uniformly bad in the way it responded to the challenge of women's liberation. The US SWP made an important contribution both theoretically and politically. In the main however, the Trotskyist movement failed to revolutionise its theoretical framework or its organisational methods and failed to offer leadership. This resulted in the split between revolutionary socialism and women's liberation which has been a great blow to both.

The political roots of this split can be traced back to the betrayal of women by the Comintern under Stalin in the mid-1920's. The reversal of the policy of the Revolution in relation to women and the family was at the very start of Stalin's attack on the revolution, and this retreat was reflected in the Comintern very early.

The Trotskyist movement was too weakened politically by the early 1970s to

be able to rise to this challenge and overcome the patriarchy within its ranks.

‘Sectarian bureaucracy’

Bureaucratic-centralist regimes manifested themselves in those very organisations which had been created in the fight against bureaucratic centralism.

Isolation from the working class, marginalisation and the repression and misrepresentation of Stalinism led to very tough conditions of internal political struggle within the movement through the 1940s and 50s.

These difficulties combined from the 1960s with the possibility of building half-substantial organisations based on middle-class people who readily accepted the direction of leaders who had established revolutionary organisations in the previous period.

Sectarianism grew on the basis of the interests of apparatuses which, though small compared with the labour bureaucracy, in the absence of a mass movement capable of exerting countervailing social pressures, were sufficiently large to engender what could be called ‘sectarian bureaucracy’.

A tendency towards ultra-leftism was present in the movement thrown up by the social crises of the 1960s and 70s, as were other tendencies. Mature political leadership could have overcome this problem. Sectarianism found a new source of sustenance in the bureaucracies of the revolutionary factions which had an economic interest of their own, and expressed this in sectarian political methods.

The social phenomena manifested in such organisations are not only generically similar to the phenomena found in religious sects, but originate from the same social problems, despite the contrasting content of their ideology and their different social base.

The upsurge of revolutionary sentiments in the advanced capitalist countries in this period, inspired by the struggles of the oppressed people, was out of proportion to the actual revolutionary opportunities of the period.

This contradiction required the utmost political maturity if political leadership was to be given. Sectarian bureaucracy was one of the forms taken by the failure to provide this politically mature leadership.

Opportunism

Opportunism has frequently manifested itself in the form of adaptation to the labour bureaucracy or left sections of the bureaucracy, various governments with greater or lesser credentials for being anti-imperialist, various social

movements, as well as entirely transitory movements offering the possibility of a few recruits or a few dollars for the party funds.

The tendency towards opportunism was accentuated by the lack of revolutionary opportunities. No section of the Trotskyist movement has been opportunist in its overall character. However, suffering from marginalisation and isolation as a by-product of their left positions, Trotskyists groups have frequently become disoriented to the extent of entering into opportunist relationships with other tendencies.

Political incest

With the movement so fragmented, and with so many individuals educated in Trotskyism but for one reason or another without an organisation, revolutionary groups can make a full-time job out of organising and campaigning amongst other groups and individuals. The struggle to resolve this fragmentation by re-organisation and regroupment has become for some a perspective in itself.

Import and export of national organisation.

The national Trotskyist tendency has created a bogus set of rival contenders for the title of International. Bogus, not because 'national Trotskyism' is any less a part of Trotskyism than any other section of our movement, but because the relations between the national sections were bogus; in each case, there was one 'leading section' and, basically, overseas branches.

These overseas branches however were placed in an invidious position. In general they saw themselves, and with some justification, as internationalists, since they willingly deferred to the leadership of an International, and in this way sought to overcome the limitations of their national existence. However, they instead invariably fell victims to the national limitations of the 'leading section' and then imported these political problems into their own country, often with ludicrous results, which are too numerous to catalogue. One example, while the British SLL pursued policies based on exaggerated characterisation of the slump hitting Britain in the 1970s, its Australian overseas branch copied the same orientation, under conditions of relatively full employment in Australia.

Further, instead of the political differences which led to the existence of rival centres being resolved in a genuine international forum, these differences are consolidated and extended; instead of the differences being resolved by internal discussion and political struggle, they are fought out by competing sections in each country. Since the overseas branches adhere with some good

reason to their particular leading section, they cannot resolve the split in the revolutionary movement within their own country without the resolution of the split at international level. But the relations within the 'Internationals' are unequal, and the overseas branch cannot transmit its views and interests into the international arena. Distance provides the opportunity to create fantasies in relation to the virtues of the leading section, in order to humble the overseas sections.

Also, membership of an international organisation can act as a means of sustaining small groups and individuals in a country, with the illusion of belonging to a revolutionary party. To a certain extent, the Usec forms a society whose life is a substitute for the life of a revolutionary organisation existing as a part of the mass movement within any particular country.

Is the Revolutionary Party a Mistaken Perspective?

The upsurge of social movements and revolutionary struggles of all kinds that took place internationally in the late 60s and early 70s swelled the ranks of the Trotskyist movement both qualitatively and quantitatively, but did not resolve its problems. Many people recoiled in horror from the organisational problems of the Trotskyist, Stalinist and reformist parties and sought alternative forms of organisation. In general such alternatives do not challenge the existing class structure, have been directed at achieving immediate or short-term objectives rather than being concerned with social revolution, or have been dealing with only one aspect of social life.

All kinds of social change may be best pursued without the formation of a political party, and indeed, the formation of a political party may prove to be an actual barrier to the achievement of social gains that can be made by well-organised social movements that exert pressure on every political party towards the same objective.

For instance, women of all political persuasions (even, eventually, right-wing women) have pressured for changes in the practices and policies of the various institutions with which they have been dealing and in the main been highly successful, even in the Christian Church! It would have been a mistake to set up a political party based on such a perspective.

Likewise nuclear disarmament is a policy which quite rationally will find a response within most genuine political parties. The demands of the environmental movement will find a valid response in any political party, even those of the big bourgeoisie.

The revolutionary struggle for socialism however runs counter to the objectives of every other political party, and requires a political party of its

own.

The aim of revolutionary socialism is to place political power into the hands of the working class majority of the population. This contrasts with the position of the bourgeoisie who built up formidable bases of economic and cultural power within feudal society before making the bourgeois revolution. The proletariat has no such bases within the capitalist economic structure.

Revolutionary socialism is a political perspective and not the simple economic self-interest of a social group, so organisations such as trade unions based solely on social position, are inappropriate for the struggle for socialism, although the unions are obviously a field of struggle for political perspectives.

The nature of the objective, socialism, requires a particular kind of vehicle for its achievement. This is one social change that cannot be achieved for the working class, on their behalf, but must in all reality, be achieved by the working class.

A party of revolutionary socialism is a stage in the process of building up the elements of the new society within the old. The problems of leadership within the working class, and their relationship with other classes is worked out and solved within the party, while the working class still remains an oppressed class.

The distinguishing feature of the new society is that the mass of producers determine their own history, free not only of the physical and economic oppression of the bourgeoisie, but free also of the domination of bourgeois ideology. The party is the kind of organisation that can nurture that growing together of the workers movement and socialist theory.

Socialism is not just a particular social issue, but rather an approach to solving every question. Equally, Marxism is not just a social theory, but a whole world outlook.

There can be no social revolution without the embedding of Marxism deeply within the revolutionary stratum of the working class. It is essential that Marxist theory is recognised as the norm (even if not all agree on 'interpretation') within the revolutionary stratum, and that Marxism, truly as such, is the predominant ideology at least among the most class conscious and organised layers. It is the establishment of Marxism as the dominant ideology of the revolutionary stratum of society, given a material form through organisation, that constitutes this 'embedding' of Marxism.

A revolutionary party is the organisational form of the unity of the revolutionary world outlook – Marxism, and the social body, the

revolutionary stratum of the working class. Other organisational forms perform other functions.

What do we mean by a party?

Specifically, a party is a political organisation which represents a definite political current or stratum within society, understood in relation to the class struggle – a specific historical perspective. The socialist revolutionary perspective is one held by very many people, even in a relatively ‘peaceful’ society like Australia. However, since the 1920s when the Communist Party began to degenerate, before it ever matured, there has not been a party which actually organised that revolutionary stratum and expressed its interests and perspectives. The revolutionaries, despite having the most advanced political position, have suffered the gravest ideological and organisational problems.

The very process of breaking new ground brings with it necessarily the possibility of error, even absurdity, and no guarantee that that absurdity will eventually prove to be a truth. Those who dare to break from the norms of society always run the risk of becoming ‘de-railed’. But only by fighting through those problems can a solution to the crisis of humanity be found.

But the problem is broader than that of ideological problems and distortions. Even a perfect revolutionary organisation established today could not be seen as a party until it came truly to at least represent all the revolutionaries. It would still not be the true ‘party of the proletariat’, since that is something that only gradually comes into being in the course of the revolution itself, as the whole class undergoes deep-going change and crystallisation; when other non-revolutionary perspectives have become marginalised!

In actuality, political parties play a great variety of different roles in different countries at different times, depending on the governmental structures and on historical development of class relations.

While it would be a mistake to try to impose any kind of schema on to political organisation, the political party must be seen at least as the ideal of organisation for socialist revolution.

Alternative Routes to Social Revolution

“social movements”

One alternative strategy is to facilitate the growth of a web of action groups, social movements, alliances, pressure groups, etc on the understanding that such forms of organisation, tested out in repeated experiences, will under revolutionary conditions, coalesce into a movement with sufficient self-

consciousness to defeat the capitalist enemy and win over the mass. Vain hope, quite frankly.

Inasmuch as this perspective involves the opportunity to participate in actual social changes, in 'winnable' struggles, accumulating experience that cannot be got by purely defensive or propaganda work, this kind of practice is invaluable. There is no doubt that such campaigns also educate people and help towards the kind of total change in outlook required for the overthrow of capitalism.

For instance, the environmental movement has succeeded in conveying to the masses the idea that problems cannot be solved piecemeal, locally, and has to some extent proved the need for a planned economy; it has also popularised ideas of accountability of government and capital; without ever stepping outside the bounds of acceptability to bourgeois society. (It has of course done all sorts of other things, entirely consistent with its character as a bourgeois movement).

Education is a fine thing, of course. But it would be a mistake to think that socialist revolution can be achieved by a process of education and 'raising of consciousness' proceeding spontaneously within the framework of bourgeois society. To understand this is a very fundamental question of the theory of knowledge. The social relations of production determine the spontaneous development of ideology.

The chief characteristic of this kind of work in action groups and so on however is that it is based on the activity of a group of activists who spontaneously adhere to the activist role, on the one hand, with the rest of the world being the object of pressure, on the other. It is the diametric opposite of trade union work, in which the activist acts as a representative of the mass, albeit organised sectionally. Although the action groups and social movements appear from time to time to be more militant and progressive than the trade unions, basically they are in a similar category, in the sense that they are directed towards defence of definite sectional interests within the existing class relations, and not the overturn of class relations in social revolution.

One could envisage a social revolution (i.e. the seizure of public power by the proletariat) growing out of a campaign organised like many issue-based campaigns in the past. One could envisage the formation of action groups etc. from the un-organised mass of the revolutionary stratum and a campaign in favour of workers power building up and confronting the State.

While the spontaneous development of the revolutionary stratum could produce a relatively coordinated action by itself against the capitalists, it is impossible for such a movement to win leadership of the mass, implement a

strategy worked out scientifically and place state power in the hands of the working class, because it is based on the spontaneity of just one stratum.

While possibly effective in causing political change or crisis, this kind of organisation does not solve the problem of building new structures for the exercise of political power, except where the objective is a reactionary one in which the activists aim to seize political power simply on their own behalf, or concentrate power in the hands of an existing structure.

The recent uprisings in Eastern Europe showed among other things that the organisations and people who overthrow the old society do not necessarily inherit power in the new society. The local forum groups in East Germany got nothing at all in the general elections which followed the overthrow for which they were mainly responsible. The Stalinists manoeuvred themselves to the head of the revolution in Rumania.

In no case, of course, did the working class take power into its own hands, although they changed the institutions by which power was to be wielded on their behalf.

The socialist revolution cannot, like other social upheavals succeed while it remains a spontaneous process; the socialist revolution is that moment when a large group of people pursuing a definite goal within a spontaneous social process ... becomes the dominant social class in a society consciously determining its own history.

In an 'action group' or 'social movement', people join together across quite different political perspectives, in pursuit of a definite social objective. Such entities are perfectly valid and necessary, but they are not substitutes for parties, and do not in any way form a possible kernel or germ for a revolutionary party.

Their role is different. At any given moment various demands receive mass support. It is natural that such demands should be supported by organisations dedicated specifically towards pressing them.

The transformation of society is a different project which is tied up with dealing with every question from a different perspective; the party is the organisation which represents a specific approach to every problem, and cuts across the organisation of action groups and social movements.

There is an inherent tendency in such social movements to grow into parties (if they do not break up and disappear), putting forward a definite approach to every question. This may come as the by-product of the success of a single-issue campaign, which offers the political wherewithal to the leaders of the movement to exercise political power within the existing social structure.

It is at this stage that the movement tends to display its dominant ideological content. Faced with responsibility for dealing with the complete range of political questions, a political struggle breaks out within the movement reflecting the range of different political perspectives within the movement, which in general proves that there is nothing new under the sun. An example of this is the crisis of the environmental movement over the immigration question.

The spontaneous evolution of social movements is towards bourgeois ideology. This spontaneous evolution can be countered however if there is a potential within a movement to develop in the direction of revolutionary perspectives which is fostered by the intervention of revolutionaries.

Only by fighting for the revolutionary Marxist perspective within every social movement or action group can we lay the basis for a party which puts forward a revolutionary approach to every question. But this requires organisation that cuts across the social movement structure entirely and is completely independent of any of them.

We can **envisage**, as I have said, a social movement that develops towards a call for social revolution. A 'revolutionary pressure group', a revolutionary magazine or newspaper, a revolutionary stratum or milieu, acting within such a social movement could never over-ride the spontaneous domination of bourgeois ideology, nor transform such a social movement into a force able to actually lead the whole working class to take and wield political power.

A more developed, coherent and ideologically mature level of organisation would be required for that.

“Overseas Catalyst”

There is a belief that we should not worry too much about building a revolutionary party for the moment since this will only become possible after a successful revolution in another country, at which point the leaders of this new revolution will act as catalysts for a new International, and everyone will 'see the light.'

Even should a successful revolution in another country provide the stimulus towards the crystallisation of the revolutionary stratum into a revolutionary party, as a part of a revolutionary International, there is no reason to suppose that such a revolutionary party would be able to mature sufficiently quickly to achieve victory in the face of repression and reaction. Unity of purpose is a healthy thing. Nevertheless, experience shows that the same political problems exist even when the desire to work towards a common goal creates good conditions for political co-operation and discussion.

Despite the first-rate leadership offered by the Bolsheviks to the new parties of the Communist International, from the very beginning the track record of the Communist Parties was a comedy of errors.

Even if we accept that the crisis of revolutionary leadership will be resolved on the international arena rather than within Australia, it is essential that we begin now to prepare the foundations for such a revolutionary party. Thus, we cannot rely upon an external stimulus to create conditions for the creation of a revolutionary party.

“Take-over of ALP”

At certain historical junctures Marxists have worked as members of the Labor Party. This may be a tactical policy, due to the opportunities for conducting joint struggles against the bureaucracy with newly politicised workers, and possibly due to the lack of opportunities for political work outside of the ALP. However, where from time to time, this tactic is elevated into a strategic line, having the object of reforming the Labor Party into a revolutionary party, this is quite mistaken. The whole structure of the Labor Party is inherently that of a reformist party, and it is deeply locked into its relations with the bourgeoisie. Doubtless, under suitable conditions the Labor Party will suffer considerable crisis due to its compromise position, and revolutionaries could accentuate that. But a leadership for the revolutionary stratum of the working class can never come by means of ‘changing’ the ALP.

“Micro-Revolutionary Party”

Over the last 40 years Marxism has been defended mainly by small revolutionary sects that modelled themselves upon the Bolshevik Party. It is typical of the small revolutionary sect to act out in a theatrical way the role for which it is rehearsing, as if the theory of drama, not society, were appropriate.

There has been a tendency to take for granted that the only means of growing a revolutionary party is to begin with a micro-party and add people until you have/fully grown party. It is apparent that there is no basis for such an assumption. The most important thing is that revolutionaries, and those with whom they work politically, learn to act appropriately to the situation at the time, in order to be able to continuously change the form of organisation accordingly; not to endlessly rehearse the practices which are appropriate to a later period.

The problem of creating a nucleus for a revolutionary party, under conditions when, for a protracted period of time the revolutionary stratum of society has been disorganised and atomised, is quite distinct from the problem of building

the revolutionary party as such, in opposition to reformism, and strengthening the influence of it within the class, of strengthening the leadership of the working class within the masses as a whole, etc, which were the questions which most pre-occupied the Bolsheviki.

The period of revolutionary circles in Russia saw quite different forms of organisation from that which came with the founding of the RSDLP-proper in 1903.

The RSDLP could not have been founded in 1883 when the Emancipation of Labour Group was founded, and the ELG was then a qualitative step forward from what had gone before. It would be mistaken to see these earlier forms of organisation as 'wrong' simply because Lenin had to conduct a struggle against them to found the Bolshevik Party.

All, including correct, ideas have to be fought against and overcome, once they fall behind the requirements of the time. Defence of an idea once it has passed its time is reactionary and unscientific; but then again, so is advocacy of an idea inappropriate to its time because it belongs to a future time. Lenin's article, Two Letters, of 1908, makes this point against the otzovists.

From here on, for want of any suitable term, I shall refer to the revolutionary group (it could be 'nucleus' or 'league' or anything else) for that organisation which is required here and now as the first step towards the formation of a revolutionary party, truly revolutionary and truly a party.

Revolutionary Group

Perspectives for the building of a revolutionary party fall broadly into two categories; the question of international organisation or affiliation, and the remaining questions of building a party within the national arena. The resolution of the problems of each is inseparably bound to resolution of the other.

The guiding principle for solving the question of organisation in the current period is the Leninist theory of organisation, democratic centralism. This means simply that we have to apply the dialectical materialist method to solving the problem of organisation, avoid setting textual principles above material relations, and avoid elevating relative truths into absolutes. It means that we understand the transition from revolutionary theory and organisation around theory to the transformation of social relations as one continuous process.

In its broadest definition, the specific role of revolutionaries is to each day determine what action will take the working class one step along the road to revolution, and to act accordingly.

That action is also what is necessary to determine what is to be done, not just for us, but as a step towards class consciousness for the working class. The class struggle provides the conditions for scientific consciousness, the revolutionary must 'introduce' that consciousness into the class struggle.

However, to leave it there misses the fact that attention has to be paid also to the maintenance of that revolutionary leadership, since its ability to act as such cannot be taken for granted, but must be generated out of the life of society and the practice of revolutionaries within it.

Once the party has become a party as such, the 'welfare' of the party's members, their continuing ability to function as revolutionaries, is not really a problem, because the problems of the party are those of the mass of which they are a part. However, in the intervening period that we are now facing, which includes the problem of transforming a layer of isolated groups and individuals of diverse ideology into an organised, self-conscious body, this is a real problem.

It is necessary to understand that a revolutionary party or group is a social entity which like all social phenomena grows, declines, changes, has crises etc, and its life-process has to be understood by the application of social theory. This seems to be stating the obvious, but for instance, this simple assertion will forbid us from reasoning in a formalistic or mechanistic way.

A Vehicle for Marxist Theory

In the preparatory stages of the creation of a revolutionary party, certain specific characteristics of Marxist theory must be taken into account:

Marxist theory does not arise spontaneously, but like the theories of natural science must be learned. Consequently, the revolutionary party is also an institution for the furtherment of a particular branch of knowledge, and must be so organised as to foster the progress of revolutionary theory.

Marxist theory cannot be learnt in a literary fashion (if there ever was a theory which could) but must be learnt in connection with appropriate practice. Consequently, the revolutionary party is a practical instrument for revolutionary activity.

However, the opportunities for such revolutionary practice are limited. We do not everywhere and always have actual revolutionary conditions. The party must therefore be capable of engaging in every kind of social practice, and theoretically equipped to connect such practice with its revolutionary goals.

Marxist theory is constantly under attack and has precious little in the way of resources for its propagation and development. Consequently, the

revolutionary group must be capable of considerable resilience, of supporting and inspiring its members under all possible conditions of attack and isolation.

An organisation which is not capable of developing Marxist theory under these conditions cannot perform the tasks of a revolutionary group.

An Appropriate Revolutionary Perspective

What are our tasks?

We have to popularise Marxist theory, and draw a clear line between Marxism and its corrupted forms, especially Stalinism. From the very beginning we have to place Marxism, and not any of its corrupted forms, at the centre of the process. This is problematic, because Marxism is not a slogan or a policy or a demand or a point on the political spectrum. As a theory it requires study; it is rendered unpopular by mystification, misrepresentation, repression and attack; it is contrary to bourgeois common sense -

- **how to popularise Marxism, and not some caricature?**

We have to make political changes which will facilitate the growth in influence of the revolutionary group, and create conditions in which the revolutionary stratum is strengthened in relation to the mass, and clarify the tasks of revolution at the current stage. The transition to a revolutionary party can only be prepared by its nucleus first becoming a demonstrable determinate of political change. Agitation tasks are contained within this, but are clearly insufficient.

We have to make the revolutionary group a pole of attraction over and above its ability to actually convince, educate and lead; able to resist vilification, misrepresentation, media attack, the activity of agent provocateurs, etc; a centre for the development and implementation of revolutionary tactics and strategy, while, being a means of sustaining revolutionaries until the group becomes the genuine leadership of a whole stratum of the masses.

The Current Juncture

Two important new factors are present:

- Stalinism has collapsed, and no longer holds a leading position within the revolutionary stratum of the working class or intelligentsia; and
- a whole generation has witnessed the organisational absurdities of the Second, Third and Fourth Internationals and has no need of

revolutionaries who are not prepared to transcend the problems of the past and learn the lessons.

We have to transform the Trotskyist movement from the tendency of opposition to Stalinism, to the party of revolution.

In a sense, the current moment is a return to the conditions of the early 1920s with the opening up of the opportunity of forming a new party representing the revolutionary perspective within the working class; however, the immediate impulse is not the **victory** of the first proletarian revolution, but the **collapse** of Stalinism.

Thus, while recognising that the opportunity is now present to build a revolutionary party, we must also see that the movement is already fragmented and that we face a period of re-orientation but entirely new problems in initiating this new revolutionary party.

The Bourgeois Media

Particularly over the last 40 years the mass media has played an important role in culture. Vast forests have been consumed by literature on this subject, which hardly needs to be added to. However, we have to look at a couple of problems which are posed by the bourgeois media.

Firstly, the structure of the mass media is to a large extent inherently bourgeois, independently of its personnel or ownership, at least so long as it exists within bourgeois society. That is, there are severe limitations on the extent to which it can be used as a weapon of anti-bourgeois propaganda or education.

On the other hand, precisely because this character arises from the nature of the media, and not because of its ownership or its actual political direction, the media also harbours the same contradictions and crises as society as a whole, and this crisis will be reflected in the media.

While the capitalist media will remain powerful weapons of right wing political agitation, they are not totally immune from utilisation from time to time in the other direction, and routinely expose people to a far wide variety of news and social or political commentary than was the case in any previous time.

Secondly, a revolutionary party organ, be it a weekly newspaper or a TV station, cannot rival the influence of the actual bourgeois media, except to the extent that the party's organisation has already paved the way for it. The reasons are two-fold; firstly, the above inherently bourgeois character of the media; secondly, the vast capital resources required to run a serious mass

media enterprise.

At a future time when revolutionaries have sufficient political influence and material resources to raise their publishing activities to the level of mass circulation daily papers and TV stations, etc, the associated problems will have to be looked at in detail, but that is a problem for a future time. As soon as we have the opportunity to hit back at the bourgeois mass media on an equal footing, we will obviously utilise that opportunity to the full. In the intervening period, our publishing activities will, in general, correspond to the development of our organisation and its influence.

The above considerations do not exclude any particular publishing project, the resources for which are available. It only needs to be said that we should treat with some caution attempts by relatively small groups, to build counter-media of the kind created by revolutionaries in the early part of this century.

It is a long time now since revolutionary groups stopped trying to hold soap-box street meetings. It is increasingly recognised that the role of the left-wing paper is not to rival the mass media, but to offer the same sort of service that specialised magazines and papers offer to people involved in some specialised activity or cultural pursuit. Such papers and magazines seek to be primary sources of news only in relation to a fairly restricted arena.

The bourgeois mass media derive a great deal of their power from the fact that they are **primary** sources of news to the extent that they virtually define what is news. There is always a role however for the paper or magazine which provides news which is excluded from the mass media, and analysis or commentary directed at a specific readership.

Revolutionary Papers, Magazines etc

The regular publication of a magazine, paper or journal is the most basic practice of any Marxist organisation. It is not possible to engage in any broad political discussion, or to extend the group's influence and periphery without some regular printed organ. Such publication will inevitably take on a wide variety of forms according to the needs of the organisation and the working class at each particular stage of development. It is usually the most tangible public political identity that the group will have. The paper supplements, extends, deepens, stimulates and supports the practice of the group in all its arenas of struggle.

Word of mouth remains however the basic tool of our trade, supplemented by the written word for deeper examination and broader and more extensive discussion of issues, and the whole range of artistic expression for the development of concepts from time to time.

In relation to the ideological struggle against the bourgeoisie, we should ask under what circumstances can a revolutionary policy or idea withstand the assault of the bourgeois media?

Leading struggles

Groups of workers frequently show enormous strength and resilience in standing against the stream where they have entered into a struggle under their own control, properly led and educated about the issues involved. Leading such defiant struggles and preparing the networks of leadership required is our most essential task.

These struggles test out the relation of class forces, and can mark nodal points in the development of the class struggle. Unexpected outcomes in class battles can have an important impact on the working class and facilitate changes in political relations.

There is nothing really novel here, but the role of revolutionaries in leading struggles needs to be more closely examined since the task is different at the current stage than it will be at the stage when a revolutionary party has been established.

One of the central tasks of leadership should be the training of new fighters, helping them not only to become better class fighters, but as far as possible to have some understanding of what they are doing which takes at least one step towards understanding of, interest in or respect for Marxist theory.

Such organisational work will always be carried out understanding that permanent changes are very hard won. Real victories, made in hard struggle and prepared and followed up with thoroughgoing educational work is the only way.

Very intense absorption in leading such struggles, possibly to the exclusion of 'party work' should not be excluded, provided only that the nature and intensity of the activity required does not detract from the ability of the member of the revolutionary group to sustain themselves as a revolutionary.

The obligation upon revolutionaries to lead struggles of the masses, even in non-revolutionary times is not at all a question of having a 'high profile', of becoming a media-star on behalf of the workers, or any such bourgeois egotism. It is a question of expressing the **entirety** of our view as revolutionaries in the way in which we participate in struggles, and of making such changes in the relation of class forces as the situation makes possible.

Creating works of Art

The basic work of establishing the revolutionary outlook is in leading struggles and talking and writing articles explaining concepts and elaborating policies. At the current juncture agit-prop journalism and poster-art are technical skills which will have their place in any publishing enterprise, but are not sufficient for making qualitative changes in political outlook.

However, books, plays and films, paintings and other works of art have enormous potential for making real changes in how people understand the world. It is necessary to emphasise that I am not talking here about alternative methods of agitation. That exists, but what I am talking of here is something else.

The issue is how to establish a revolutionary identity, in post-modern society where the mass media hold sway. The opportunity for such creative work cannot be engineered, but where it arises, it must be utilised.

A book or film of first rate artistic merit can survive critical attack or boycott and make important and permanent changes in political life, especially if it is well-timed and can be supported by an organisation with some influence. It is a **whole**, and if it is artistically excellent, stands as such; it will be composed not to prove a single point or show one aspect, but will reflect the whole revolutionary body that entered into its production. It would be wrong to call such a work propaganda, because it cannot limit itself to political program, but is a work of art.

Nothing here can be interpreted as contrary to the fundamental independence of art from political direction or subordination to propagandist or agitational objectives. Look through history, and we see how important a work of art can be if it reflects something new and significant in the progress of culture. Where it is possible, members of the revolutionary group who are able, should work creatively, confident that their revolutionary Marxist outlook will be reflected through their art with or without any deliberate effort.

Being a model

An individual who champions a particular cause, conducts exposes, contributes important and path-breaking ideas on major, especially social or political questions, or otherwise by persistent energy and excellence forces themselves into the public gaze or reaches the top of her/his profession, can popularise revolutionary values through the way in which they pursue their work.

This includes activity in the public arena, on the fringes of politics per se,

publicly expressing the outlook of a revolutionary Marxist; a journalist, not writing Marxist political criticism, but working within the restrictions of the bourgeois media; a lawyer or academic, side by side with first class professional work, championing causes, defending cases.

Such an individual will undoubtedly face every device of personal assassination by the media to the extent that they become known as a revolutionary. However, since an individual is capable of presenting a whole, rather than this or that aspect, of being a revolutionary, isn't this an important avenue for building a revolutionary group – the presentation of a 'model'.

The use of Zamora by the MAS in Argentina is an example of sorts. The MAS deliberately presents Zamora as a public model of their ideal, and he was chosen for that specific job; he is not the leader of the MAS. Again, it is important not to equate this idea with the idea of being a 'media-star'.

According to individual circumstances such forms of revolutionary practice will combine and merge.

One problem in this project is that an individual who projects himself as a revolutionary will have a great initial hurdle to overcome, the more so the closer the activity they are engaged in is linked to politics. Trade union leadership is the most obvious case in point, journalistic activity is another.

In building up influence and authority within the trade unions we need to 'let it be known' that we are Marxists; Trotskyists and members of the revolutionary group, Communist Intervention.

The implementation of this presentation has to be worked out thoughtfully. We will let it be known, increasingly, in proportion to the extent that we have established some authority independently of our politics.

The daily duties of trade union leadership would not normally require us to trumpet our political affiliation on every possible occasion, but we should let it be known and always consciously act as a model for the revolutionary human being.

For a Revolutionary Party!

The strength of Marxist theory, plus the strength of that small number of individuals who have survived recent decades as Marxists and those of the new generation who have found their own way to Marxism, makes it a quite practicable perspective to build a revolutionary group which aims to transcend the political problems and fragmentation of the present period by the creative and moral strength of its members.

Such a vision of a revolutionary group is by its nature not something which

can be enlarged into a revolutionary party proper. The proposition is that such an organisation may be the appropriate kernel for a future revolutionary party. The issue is the establishment of an initial cadre and the entry of that initial cadre into a position to initiate a party, representing that whole revolutionary layer of society.

International Organisation

An International, which is truly such, is the world party uniting the revolutionary strata of all countries of the world. Such an International cannot begin to exist without first establishing a revolutionary party in at least one country.

The breadth and maturity of political leadership required to turn revolutionary situations into socialist revolutions make international leadership essential. **The revolutionary task in its essence** is an international one – it is in every sense **fought and won, or lost, on the international arena.**

The need for revolutionaries to work as part of an international is also necessary to help overcome national limitations, and the various pressures exerted by their own national bourgeoisie.

From the very moment of successful revolution, the International is even more urgently needed for the purpose of spreading the revolution. The building of an International is however a protracted task, which **cannot** be solved by success in one country.

The bourgeoisie has the benefit of all kinds of international experience and organisation in its counter-revolutionary activity. Participation in an International is obligatory for revolutionaries, and we do not have any time to waste.

Even though there does not exist any international organisation which can genuinely lay claim to the status of a proletarian international, participation in the international struggle with the object of resolving this crisis of international organisation is essential.

The Existing International Formations

There are innumerable organisations on the international scene laying claim in one way or another to being either the International, or more reasonably, to being the only possible nucleus for a future international.

Most, whatever their political virtues or faults, fall well short of what would be expected to justify such claims, having a mass base in no country at all, and/or being confined in their influence to one sector of the world. Even the

best today are increasingly fragmented.

The USec

The United Secretariat of the Fourth International, of all Trotskyist organisations, is the most substantial in terms of having sections or at least sympathising groups in the largest number of countries. Internal discussion is more or less unrestricted and does not suffer from excessive bureaucracy at the international level.

There are two main tendencies within the USec, the 'European' or 'Mandel' wing, and the 'American' or 'Barnes' wing. The American wing is now openly anti-Trotskyist, is in the process of breaking organisational connections and must be discounted as a Marxist International.

In one of the few instances where an Australian organisation has led its US mother organisation, the Australian SWP (now DSP), set out decisively on the road of openly denouncing Trotskyism several years before the US SWP.

The Mandel wing has held itself together and within Trotskyism over the years mainly by a near-infinite capacity to adapt and co-exist with all kinds of political trends.

In particular, its tendency towards adaptation to national liberation leaderships can become lethal for revolutionaries fighting for a Marxist perspective in opposition to such national liberation leaderships.

Nowhere does a USec section command anything like a mass base in the working class. Their sympathising group in Australia is marginal. Nevertheless, the USec does provide a forum for international discussion with Trotskyists, and provides a good network for following events in most countries of the world.

The LIT

The Liga Intemacional de los Trabajadores, International Workers League, is an international formation which is mostly confined to the Americas, with small groups in European countries. In Latin America however it has built very substantial and quite mature parties. The LIT has recently split, with the majority of the US section going with the international minority.

The LIT's main virtue is to have had some success in building a Trotskyist party in the working class in opposition to Castro-ism and Stalinism in Latin America. The regime in the International is much tighter but it appears that the LIT has considerable maturity and skill in dealing with organisational problems. This has not avoided the recent split however.

The LIT is still possibly the best prospect for building an international centre for a mass revolutionary International, despite the split and despite the LIT's concentration in Latin America.

Relations Between the Revolutionary Group and the International

The spontaneous solidarity between the revolutionary strata of the working class in the different countries is the fundamental basis of the eventual resolution of the problem of international fragmentation and the building of an international party.

An international party structure can therefore be built only in connection with the building of parties in the various countries. At the current juncture, the revolutionary group looks to the International for experienced political leadership and contact with revolutionaries mother countries; working all the time towards the common goal of a developed international revolutionary party to the extent that that becomes possible. The International looks to the revolutionary group for a connection with the revolutionary stratum of the working class in that country, increasing its own political resources with that of the revolutionary group; again working towards the common goal of a revolutionary party in that country.

Discipline will grow naturally out of political respect; but in fact the voluntary abdication of political responsibility by a national group is a more likely danger than anarchistic or nationalistic assertion of independence by the national section or group. Consequently, neither the revolutionary group nor the international organisation should be in any particular hurry to achieve political homogeneity.

We have to build a revolutionary group in Australia which in its participation in the class struggle, challenges the hegemony of the left and right wings of the labour bureaucracy and creates a model and focus for all those who identify as revolutionaries; a revolutionary group which will introduce and popularise Marxism, and all concepts required for the founding of a revolutionary party.

Only a revolutionary party can resolve the crisis of leadership of the working class. Only a revolutionary party can resolve the crisis of humanity today. Our participation in the international arena should always be based on the foundation of our struggle to found a revolutionary party in Australia, which after all, no one else can do.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

The following works are referred to in parts I and II. Works are cited not for the purposes of authority, since this is not an academic work, but in order to guide readers who wish to deepen their understanding of Marxism through further reading of the classics. All the works listed below are eminently readable. Together they cover all the issues discussed in parts I & II.

Hegel	1816	(Shorter) Logic
Marx	1845	Theses on Feuerbach
Marx	1859	Pref. to Contr'n to Critique of Political Economy
Marx	1867	Capital, Volume I
Engels	1877	Socialism: Utopian and Scientific
Engels	1884	Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State
Engels	1888	L Feuerbach & End of Classical German Philosophy
Lenin	1901	What is to be Done?
Trotsky	1906	Results and Prospects
Lenin	1908	Materialism and Empirio-criticism
Lenin	1908	Preface to 'Twelve Years'
Lenin	1908	Two Letters
Lenin	1914	Karl Marx (A Brief Biographical Sketch)
Lenin	1916	Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism
Lenin	1917	War and Socialism
Lenin	1917	State and Revolution
Lenin	1920	"Left-Wing" Communism – an Infantile Disorder
Trotsky	1923	Two letters to the Central Committee
Trotsky	1923	The New Course
Zinoviev	1923	History of the Bolshevik Party
Trotsky	1924	Lessons of October
Trotsky	1928	The Third International after Lenin
Trotsky	1929	Communism and Syndicalism
Trotsky	1930	Permanent Revolution
Trotsky	1931	Germany: The Key to the International Situation
Trotsky	1932	Germany: What Next?
Trotsky	1932	History of the Russian Revolution
Trotsky	1937	Revolution Betrayed
Trotsky	1938	Trade Unions in the Transitional Epoch
Trotsky	1938	Their Morals and Ours
Trotsky	1938	Transitional Program
Serge	1943	Memoirs of a Revolutionary