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# The Rise and Fall of Stalinism



## How and why did the bureaucratic dictatorship fail?

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"The basis of bureaucratic rule is the poverty of society in objects of consumption, with the resulting struggle of each against all. When there are enough goods in a store, the purchasers can come whenever they want to. When there are few goods, the purchasers are compelled to stand in line. When the lines are very long, it is necessary to appoint a policeman to keep order. Such is the starting point of the power of the Soviet bureaucracy."

**Leon Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed*, 1936**

**Cover image:** the 1956 Hungarian Revolution against Stalinist rule

# The Rise of Stalinism

*(Chapter 2 of The Legacy of Leon Trotsky)*

inqaba YA BASEBENZI
MARXIST WORKERS TENDENCY

## by Richard Monroe & Philip Masters, 1990

**On October 25, 1917, the Provisional Government was overthrown in Petrograd. The Russian working class took state power. The Congress of Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers Deputies, highest organ of workers' democracy, was in session in the capital.**

**Following Lenin, Trotsky spoke there: "We rest all our hope on the possibility that our revolution will unleash the European revolution. If the insurrectionary peoples of Europe do not crush imperialism, then we will be crushed." (*History of the Russian Revolution*)**

The delegates, wrote an observer, "greeted him with an immense crusading acclaim, kindling to the daring of it, with the thought of championing mankind." (John Reed, Ten Days that Shook the World)

"At any rate", remarked Trotsky later, "it could not have entered the mind of any Bolshevik at that time to protest against placing the fate of the Soviet Republic, in an official speech in the name of the Bolshevik Party, in direct dependence upon the development of the international revolution". (*HRR*)

The capitalist class through Europe launched a furious struggle against the workers' state, by sabotage, boycott, and war. A civil war raged, with peaks and intervals, pitting not only the internal reaction but 17 imperialist armies against the revolution from 1918 until the spring of 1921. Trotsky was responsible for the organisation of the Red Army which defeated the military counter-revolution.

But it was not only the heroic resistance of the Russian masses spearheaded by the Red Army which held off counter-revolution. Splits among the imperialists were skilfully exploited by the Bolsheviks. Above all, there was a revolutionary upsurge of the working class through Europe – as a combined result of the burdens heaped on the masses by the First World War and the inspiring example of the Russian revolution.

### The post-war revolutionary wave

A strike by Hungarian munitions workers in January 1918 spread like wildfire through Germany, involving over two million workers. Then, on 4 November 1918 mutiny broke out at the German military base of Kiel and ignited revolution. Within days, every city in Germany was in the hands of workers' councils: soviets.

Mass strikes and army mutinies smashed the imperial Austro-Hungarian regime, bringing the disintegration of the empire. A revolutionary soviet government took power in Hungary in March 1919.

France was swept by mass strikes and naval mutiny. British soldiers mutinied, and the Red Flag was hoisted in the industrial heartland of Scotland. Ireland was in armed revolt against British rule. In Italy in 1920 there was a wave of factory occupations. Strikes involving four million workers convulsed the USA in 1919.

Bolshevik propaganda appealed to the troops of the invading armies and to the working class across Europe, to support and take forward the Russian revolution. The old parties of the Second International split, with big sections, sometimes majorities, rallying to the banner of the Third (Communist) International launched by the Bolsheviks. It had nearly 3 million members by 1921.

This revolutionary wave forced the imperialist powers to call a halt to their military intervention against the revolution. But the West European working class was not able to hold on to its early gains. While not finally crushed, the revolutionary wave was turned back.

**Primarily responsible for this were the reformist leaders of the Second International, who used the authority they still retained to prop up capitalism and its state power.** The Communist Parties were still too weak and inexperienced to take advantage of this situation, as the Bolsheviks had been able to against the Mensheviks.

The treacherous role of the reformist leadership in the 1918-1920 revolutionary wave is summed up in one incident. On November 10, with the imperial regime in Germany on its knees, and power in the hands of the workers and soldiers, Noske, Scheidemann and Ebert of the Social-Democratic Party (SPD) were included in a new republican coalition government.

That night Ebert was phoned by a senior general. "What do you expect of us?" asked Ebert. "Field Marshal Hindenbcrg expects the government to support the officer corps in maintaining strict discipline and strict order in the army." "What else?", replied Ebert. "The officer corps expects that the government will fight against Bolshevism and places itself at the disposal of the government for such a purpose." Ebert asked the general to pass on "the government's thanks to the Field Marshal"!

The mass of workers and soldiers regarded the SPD as their party. But its leaders were conscious agents of counter-revolution. Rather than organising the over-throw of the capitalist state, and establishing a new state based on the power of the working class, they induced the masses to accept the authority of a capitalist parliament – while they set about rebuilding the armed forces to break the revolutionary movement.

Similar obstacles faced the revolutionary working class movement in every country in Europe.

A revolutionary situation erupted again in Germany in 1923, but the German Communist Party failed to lead it to success. For all the efforts of the Bolsheviks, the Russian revolution remained isolated. This was to have terrible consequences for its fate, and the fate of workers' revolution worldwide for a whole period.

### Bolshevik internationalism

Dialego, in his "What is Trotskyism?", ridicules Trotsky's: "astonishing argument that revolution could only succeed in Russia if it is 'united with the socialist proletariat of Western Europe.' "

"Revolution within a 'national framework' is doomed", was, he claims, Trotsky's position.

> "On its own it will collapse. Only world revolution is possible. It is not difficult to see why this analysis made it almost impossible for Trotsky to contribute constructively to tackling the problems of post-revolutionary Russia – once it had become clear that revolutions in the advanced capitalist countries (despite the uprisings in Germany and Hungary) were not going to succeed."

The need for workers' revolution in Europe to ensure the survival of the revolution in Russia was, as we have seen, not some idiosyncratic notion of Trotsky's, but the perspective of Bolshevism as a whole. In turn, Dialego's dismissal of this idea is a rejection not of "Trotskyism", but of proletarian internationalism. It abandons any Marxist understanding of what is needed to achieve socialism. It is infected with the contagion of Stalinist ideas of "socialism in one country".

Lenin believed that **not even a democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry on a capitalist basis** could be sustained in Russia unless the working class overthrew capitalism in the West. In 1905 he wrote: "the Russian revolution can achieve victory by its own efforts, but **it cannot possibly hold and consolidate its gains by its own strength. It cannot do this unless there is a revolution in the West.** (*Two Tactics*. Our emphasis.)

After 1917, Lenin again and again emphasised the need for workers' revolution in the West. "It is absolutely true", he declared in March 1918, "that without a German revolution we will perish.... under all possible or conceivable eventualities, if the German revolution does not begin, we perish.... International imperialism... which represents a gigantic actual power...could in no case and under no conditions live side by side with the Soviet Republic. Here a conflict would be inevitable. Here... is the greatest historic problem... the necessity of evoking an international revolution". (Quoted in *History of the Russian Revolution*)

By July 1921 the civil war had been won, but Lenin resisted any complacency: "We have got a certain equilibrium, although extremely fragile, extremely unstable, nevertheless such an equilibrium that a socialist republic can exist – of course not for long – in a capitalist environment." (Quoted in ibid)

Trotsky had always put forward a similar position. In 1909, for example, he wrote:

> "The revolutionary authorities [i.e. a workers' government in Russia] will be confronted with the objective problems of socialism, but the solution of these problems will, at a certain stage, be prevented by the country's economic backwardness. There is no way out from this contradiction within the framework of a national revolution.
>
> "The workers' government will from the start be faced with the task of uniting its forces with those of the socialist proletariat in Western Europe. Only in this way will its temporary revolutionary hegemony become the prologue to a socialist dictatorship. Thus permanent revolution will become, for the Russian proletariat, a matter of class self-preservation. If the workers' party cannot show sufficient initiative for aggressive revolutionary tactics, if it limits itself to the frugal diet of a dictatorship that is merely national and merely democratic, the united reactionary forces of Europe will waste no time in making it clear that a working class, if it happens to be in power, must throw the whole of its strength into the struggle for a socialist revolution." ("Our differences", reprinted in *1905*)

This is the passage which Dialego refers to when describing Trotsky's "astonishing" arguments. In the course of 'paraphrasing' it, Dialego, to say the least, loses some of its meaning! Trotsky does not say revolution could only **succeed** in Russia if it is united with the socialist proletariat in Western Europe – but that a workers' government, i.e. a successful revolution, would need to unite with the Western proletariat in order to survive indefinitely.

Trotsky nowhere says "Only world revolution is possible"! What he warns is that a revolution in Russia would, "at a certain stage" run up against **imperialist-backed counter-revolution**, and **Russia's backwardness**. His perspective of 1909, far from being "astonishing", was of course amply borne out by what took place after 1917.

Warming to his theme, nevertheless, Dialego continues with his lecture:

> "Trotsky's all-or-nothing approach to world revolution reflected more than naive optimism. It stemmed from his failure to get to grips with the national question. Class struggle, as the *Communist Manifesto* emphasises, is international in substance, but national in form. It is precisely because socialism arises through the struggle for democracy that the working class must represent the interests of the nation as a whole. Winning 'the battle of democracy' as a prelude to the struggle for socialism is only possible if the proletariat becomes 'the leading class of the nation'.
>
> "Ignore the democratic revolution and you ignore the national framework within which every class struggle necessarily occurs. This is the point which Trotsky and his followers have never understood. The proletariat of each country must first settle accounts with its own bourgeoisie....In theory Trotskyists should stand aloof from the struggle for national liberation since the logic of their position asserts that unless revolution is socialist in character and worldwide in scope, betrayal and defeat is the inevitable consequence."

It is, of course, quite rich of Dialego to lecture Trotsky, (who, with Lenin, led the working class to power in Russia) that "the proletariat of each country must first settle accounts with its own bourgeoisie"!

But underneath this, and some other apparent "commonplaces" – that the proletariat strives to become the leading class of the nation, that socialism is impossible without democracy – Dialego here puts forward essentially **reactionary** ideas.

It is, for example, a complete distortion of the *Communist Manifesto*, and of Marxism, to assert that "every class struggle necessarily occurs... within a national framework". Lenin himself long ago replied to such an argument and labelled it for what it was: opportunism.

The Manifesto states that the working class "must constitute itself the nation". Regarding this, Lenin commented:

> "the opportunists distort that truth by extending to the period of the end of capitalism that which was true of the period of its rise. With reference to the former period and to the tasks of the proletariat in its struggle to destroy, not feudalism but capitalism, the *Communist Manifesto* gives a clear and precise formula: 'the workingmen have no country'. One can well understand why the opportunists are so afraid to accept this socialist proposition, afraid, even, in most cases, openly to reckon with it.

> "The socialist movement cannot triumph within the old framework of the fatherland. It creates new and superior forms of human society, in which the legitimate needs and progressive aspirations of the working masses of each nationality will, for the first time, be met through international unity, providing existing national partitions are removed." ("The Position and Tasks of the Socialist International", 1914, *Collected Works*, XXI)

"The socialist movement cannot triumph within the old framework of the fatherland. It creates new and superior forms of human society" – this is the essential point which Dialego is also afraid "openly to reckon with". His caricature of Trotsky's internationalism reflects his own **nationalist narrow-mindedness**, the "socialism in one country" mentality of Stalinism.

He stands with the Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries – those who could not complete the democratic revolution in Russia, and who, in 1917, also opposed the "astonishing argument" of Bolshevik internationalism.

These "leaders" were scandalised, in the words of one of them, at the idea of putting out "the fire of the capitalist war by converting the revolution into a socialist and world revolution". Kerensky himself, shortly before his government was overthrown by the working class, wailed: "There is no more dangerous enemy of the revolution, the democracy and all the conquests of freedom than those who... under the guise of deepening the revolution and converting it into a permanent social revolution are perverting, and it seems have already perverted the masses." (*History of the Russian Revolution*)

Of course Marxism does not say "only world revolution is possible.... an all-or-nothing approach... unless revolution is socialist in character and worldwide in its scope, betrayal and defeat is the inevitable consequence". That is a typical Stalinist caricature. Dialego tries to convert the Marxist realism of Trotsky simultaneously into utopianism and defeatism.

Trotsky replied to such a silly point long ago:

> "That the international revolution of the proletariat cannot be a simultaneous act, of this there can of course be no dispute at all among grown-up people after the experience of the October Revolution, achieved by the proletariat of a backward country under pressure of historical necessity, without waiting in the least for the proletariat of the advanced countries 'to even out the front'. (*The Third International After Lenin*)

When Trotsky set out the relation between 'national' and 'international' in the socialist revolution, he did so very precisely: "The socialist revolution begins on national foundations", he wrote in Permanent Revolution, "but it cannot be completed within these foundations...a national revolution is not a self-contained whole; it is only a link in the international chain. The international revolution constitutes a permanent process, despite temporary declines and ebbs".

In this, he, with Lenin and the Bolsheviks, merely carried forward the ideas of Marx and Engels, who had explained in 1850, that it was the task of the working class to "make the revolution permanent until all the more or less propertied classes have been driven from their ruling positions, until the proletariat has progressed sufficiently far – **not only in one country but in all the leading countries of the world** – that competition between the proletarians of these countries ceases and at least the decisive forces of production are concentrated in the hands of the workers." (Our emphasis)

The socialist revolution is a world revolution not for sentimental or idealistic, but material reasons. "Internationalism is no abstract principle but a theoretical and practical reflection of world economy, of the world development of productive forces and the world scale of the class struggle", explained Trotsky (*The Permanent Revolution*).

Socialism, as he put it in his *History of the Russian Revolution*,

> "is the organisation of a planned and harmonious social production for the satisfaction of human wants. Collective ownership of the means of production is not yet socialism, but only its legal premise. The problem of a socialist society cannot be abstracted from the problem of the productive forces, which at the present stage of human development are world-wide in their very essence. The separate state, having become too narrow for capitalism, is so much the less capable of becoming the arena of a finished socialist society. The backwardness of a revolutionary country, moreover, increases the danger of being thrown back to capitalism."

The reasoning is the same as Lenin's: "The socialist movement cannot triumph within the old framework of the fatherland. It creates new and superior forms of human society."

This was why the Bolsheviks struggled to defend the Russian revolution by spreading it internationally. The military intervention between 1917 and 1921 was the most immediate threat. But it was, as Trotsky explained, "merely the most acute expression of the technical and industrial predominance of the capitalist nations". (*ibid*)

The isolation and backwardness of the Soviet Union – particularly after the defeat of the German revolution in 1923 – prepared the way for the rise of the bureaucracy headed by Stalin, carrying through a political counter-revolution and usurping power from the working class in this, the first workers' state.

### The rise of the bureaucracy

The civil war inflicted heavy costs on the Soviet Republic. By 1920, the output of large-scale industry was only 14% of the 1913 level. Outbreaks of famine resulted in 5 million deaths in 1921-22 alone.

The industrial working class, backbone of the revolution, was decimated. The number of industrial workers fell by half between 1917 and 1920. Most of the revolutionary cadres of the factories perished fighting in the civil war. The imperatives of sustaining production forced long hours of work. The masses were gripped with exhaustion.

In the summer of 1917, in the middle of the revolution, Lenin had written a major theoretical re-examination of the Marxist theory of the state: his classic work *State and Revolution*. It was directed principally against the distortion of Marx's and Engels's writings which had crept into the ideas of even the most left of the reformist leaders of the Second International. It was directed to working out how the working class should govern when it took power in Russia.

As Trotsky summarised Lenin's position:

> "Lenin, following Marx and Engels, saw the first distinguishing feature of the proletarian revolution in the fact that, having expropriated the exploiters, it would abolish the necessity of a bureaucratic apparatus raised above society – and above all, a police and standing

army. The proletariat needs a state – this all the opportunists can tell you,' wrote Lenin in 1917, two months before the seizure of power, 'but they, the opportunists, forget to add that the proletariat needs only a dying state – that is, a state constructed in such a way that it immediately begins to die away and cannot help dying away.' " (*State and Revolution*)…

"The social demand for a bureaucracy arises in all those situations where the sharp antagonisms require to be 'softened', 'adjusted', 'regulated' (always in the interests of the privileged, the possessors, and always to the advantage of the bureaucracy itself). Throughout all bourgeois revolutions, therefore, no matter how democratic, there has occurred a reinforcement and perfecting of the bureaucratic apparatus. 'Officialdom and the standing army – ' writes Lenin, 'that is a 'parasite' on the body of bourgeois society, a parasite created by the inner contradictions which tear this society, yet nothing but a parasite stopping up the living pores.' "

"Beginning with 1917 – that is, from the moment when the conquest of power confronted the party as a practical problem – Lenin was constantly occupied with the thought of liquidating this 'parasite'. After the overthrow of the exploiting classes – he repeats and explains in every chapter of *State and Revolution* – the proletariat will shatter the old bureaucratic machine and create its own apparatus out of employees and workers. And it will take measures against their turning into bureaucrats – 'measures analysed in detail by Marx and Engels: (1) not only election but recall at any time; (2) payment no higher than the wages of a worker; (3) immediate transition to a regime in which all will fulfil the functions of control and supervision so that all may for a time become 'bureaucrats', and therefore nobody can become a bureaucrat. You must not think that Lenin was talking about the problems of a decade. No, this was the first step with which 'we should and must begin upon achieving a proletarian revolution.' "

"The same bold view of the state in a proletarian dictatorship found finished expression a year and a half after the conquest of power in the program of the Bolshevik Party, including its section on the army. A strong state, but without mandarins; armed power, but without the Samurai! It is not the tasks of defence which create a military and state bureaucracy, but the class structure of society carried over into the organisation of defence. The army is only a copy of the social relations. The struggle against foreign danger necessitates, of course, in the workers' state as in others, a specialised military technical organisation, but in no case a privileged officer caste. The party program demands a replacement of the standing army by an armed people."

"The regime of proletarian dictatorship from its very beginning thus ceases to be a 'state' in the old sense of the word – a special apparatus, that is, for holding in subjection the majority of the people. The material power, together with the weapons, goes over directly and immediately into the hands of workers' organisations such as the soviets. The state as a bureaucratic apparatus begins to die away the first day of the proletarian dictatorship. Such is the voice of the party program – not voided to this day." (*The Revolution Betrayed*)

This was the nature of the workers' democratic state which the Bolsheviks sought to build in the Soviet Republic. But social backwardness, combined with the hardships of the civil war, meant that reality increasingly diverged from the program.

With an over-worked and exhausted working class, increasingly depleted of the cadres of 1917, the soviets gradually dwindled and ceased to function as organs of working class power. Administration passed into the hands of state officials, increasingly unchecked by the working class.

The Bolsheviks tried to fill positions of government with dedicated cadres, but there were far too few, above all far too few with the necessary skills of administration and literacy, to occupy the hundreds of thousands of posts required. The state was "filled out" with officials from the old Tsarist apparatus, representing the outlook of more privileged elements of society. "Thus on all sides", wrote Trotsky later, "the masses were pushed away gradually from actual participation in the leadership of the country". (*The Revolution Betrayed*)

But, above all, it was the backwardness of Russia that was the problem. "The basis of bureaucratic rule" – Trotsky was to explain – "is the poverty of society in objects of consumption, with the resulting struggle of each against all. When there is enough goods in a store, the purchasers can come whenever they want to. When there is little goods, the purchasers are compelled to stand in line. When the lines are very long, it is necessary to appoint a policeman to keep order. Such is the starting point of the power of the Soviet bureaucracy." (*Ibid*)

The officials of the state exploited the conditions of backwardness, illiteracy, and shortage of skills to extort privilege for themselves. "We took over the old machinery of state," declared Lenin in 1921, "and that was our misfortune. Very often this machinery operates against us... We now have a vast army of government employees, but lack sufficiently educated forces to exercise real control over them."

The bureaucracy was reinforced by the economic retreats the Bolsheviks were forced to make in 1921. Regimentation of production during the civil war had disrupted the exchange of goods between town and country, and was threatening to alienate the peasantry from the revolution. The "New Economic Policy" (NEP) provided some concessions to capitalists and richer peasants to step up production for the market as a means of feeding the towns and reviving industry.

These privileged layers provided a social support for the bureaucracy, as indeed did the peasantry as a whole. As Lenin put it, "While we continue to be a country of small peasants, there is a more solid basis for capitalism in Russia than for communism". (Quoted in *Platform of the Joint Opposition*)

The Communist Party was also affected. Its revolutionary cadre became diluted by an influx of ex-Mensheviks, bureaucrats, so-called "NEP-men" etc. – those who wanted to use the party to promote their individual interests rather than to serve the revolution.

Joseph Stalin, a long-time party member, no theoretician but a good organiser, was appointed to a body to fight bureaucracy and corruption in the Party – and then, in 1922, was made General Secretary. But he used these positions to strengthen the bureaucratic tendency in the party and the state. As Trotsky put it, "The entire effort of Stalin...was thenceforth directed to freeing the party machine from the control of the rank-and-file members of the party... The petty bourgeois outlook of the new ruling stratum was his own outlook. He profoundly believed that the task of

creating socialism was national and administrative in its nature." (*The Revolution Betrayed*)

Lenin was seriously ill by the end of 1922. He was never again able to play a full role in political life. But, from his sick bed, he grew increasingly concerned about the bureaucratic distortions which were developing, and combatted them in his writing. In a brief note, later to be known as his "Testament", Lenin even recommended that Stalin be replaced as General Secretary (a document which, needless to say, was suppressed by the bureaucracy after Lenin's death.)

Lenin entrusted Trotsky with the job of taking Stalin to task at the Party Congress in April 1923 for his incorrect and bureaucratic handling of the national question in Georgia. Stalin, unwilling to force confrontation with Lenin still alive, backed down. But, in the following months, the erosion of democracy in the Party became of increasing concern to its anti-bureaucratic, Bolshevik wing. Trotsky took a leading role in combatting Stalin and his allies on the question of workers' democracy, as well as of economic policy.

### "Socialism in one country" against Marxism

One of Dialego's charges against Trotsky is that because he believed "only world revolution is possible" it was "almost impossible for Trotsky to contribute constructively to tackling the problems of post-revolutionary Russia – once it had become clear that revolutions in the advanced capitalist countries (despite the uprisings in Germany and Hungary) were not going to succeed".

The idea is a nonsense, as anyone who has read Trotsky's voluminous writings on electrification, heavy industry, the relation between town and country in the Soviet Union, voluntary collectivisation of agriculture, etc., would know. In fact Trotsky and his supporters, who became known as the Left Opposition, continued to provide the most realistic and constructive policies for the defence of the workers' state, not only on international questions, but on the economic and political tasks posed within the Soviet Union itself.

As Trotsky put it, "so long as the Soviet Union remains isolated, and, worse than that, so long as the European proletariat suffers reverses and continues to fall back, the strength of the Soviet structure is measured in the last analysis by the productivity of labour". (*The Revolution Betrayed*) The economic policies he advocated were intended to promote this.

In contrast, on both national and international questions, the bureaucracy swung through a series of bewildering and damaging empirical zigzags through the 1920s and 1930s.

At the Party Congress in 1923, Trotsky drew a balance sheet of NEP, showing a dangerous lag in industrial production, and a tendency for agricultural prices to fall and industrial prices to rise, which threatened to alienate the peasantry from the revolution. The Congress accepted his arguments for a turn to development of the state sector on the basis of a central plan and the expansion of industry, to eventually absorb and eliminate the private sector.

But, under the influence of the bureaucracy, bound to the "private sector" by ties of common privilege, the policy remained a dead letter. It was denounced by the right-wing of the bureaucracy as "super-industrialisation". (Six years later, swinging on a zig-zag to the left against a looming danger of capitalist restoration, Stalin was to implement a version of the Left Oppositions' proposals, though by grossly distorted and repressive means which were far from what Trotsky envisaged.)

In the same period Trotsky led a struggle against bureaucratic domination in the Party, including an open letter addressed to Party members calling on the rank and file, particularly the youth, to "regenerate and renovate the party apparatus". This was received with tremendous enthusiasm by party workers, but was naturally taken by the bureaucracy as a declaration of war.

For Dialego, no doubt, Trotsky's "differences" with the leadership on economic policy and his defence of workers' democracy against bureaucratic degeneration represents an "inability to contribute constructively to tackling the problems of post-revolutionary Russia"! So debased, so monolithic, has the knee-jerk mentality of Stalinism become!

1923-24 marked a turning point in the consolidation of the power of the bureaucracy. In the midst of these struggles in the Party the 1923 German revolution was defeated. Then, in January 1924, Lenin died. Both these setbacks had a hugely demoralising effect on the working class. The position of the bureaucracy was enormously strengthened – and it chose the time to consolidate its power against the Party opposition and Trotsky.

For the next Party Congress, in January 1924, the bureaucracy resorted to vote-rigging to almost completely exclude representatives of the opposition. From then on, Party Congresses were held far less regularly, and ceased to be genuine forums of democratic debate.

Then, as a "tribute" to Lenin, they opened the doors of the Party to hundreds of thousands of raw recruits who, though workers, would, without familiarity with the issues involved between the leadership and the opposition, be inclined to follow the established leadership.

In December 1923 the term "Trotskyism" was coined by the bureaucracy. Trotsky had enormous authority as a theoretician and as co-leader of the October Revolution. It was necessary to rewrite history to try to cover his name in mud. The tactic was to rake up every past difference between Lenin and Trotsky to try to insinuate that Trotsky had "always" been opposed to Bolshevism. Dialego's account of "Trotskyism" follows faithfully in this tradition, being, if anything, rather cruder and more childish.

From 1924 Stalin decisively turned his back on the ideas of Marx, Engels and Lenin when he proclaimed that socialism could be achieved in Russia on its own.

> "The party" he declared in November 1926, "always took as its starting point the idea that the victory of socialism in one country means the possibility to build socialism in that country, and that this task can be accomplished with the forces of a single country." (November 1926)

Yet, as late as February 1924 Stalin had still been putting forward – in his own mechanical way – the commonly-accepted standpoint of Bolshevism:

> "can the final victory of socialism in one country be attained, without the joint efforts of the proletariat of several advanced countries? No, this is impossible... for the final victory of socialism, for the organisation of socialist production, the efforts of one country, particularly of such a peasant country as Russia, are insufficient. For this the efforts of the proletarians of several advanced countries are necessary."

Such was the fundamental about-face on the question of proletarian internationalism which followed from the rise to power of the bureaucracy.

## Germany in 1923

In 1923, Trotsky had examined the defeat of the German revolution, identifying errors of the leadership of the German Communist Party for which Stalin and his allies were in part responsible. But the retreat of Stalin into the "theory" of "socialism in one country" led to greater disasters internationally. The defeat of workers' revolution in China in 1927 was another decisive turning point in the fate of the socialist revolution.

Trotsky, charges Dialego, "greatly exaggerated the prospects of revolutionary change in Germany in 1923 and in Britain during the general strike of 1926. He condemned Bolshevik strategy in China..." These claims are part of the age-old litany of Stalinism.

The revolutionary crisis which erupted in Germany in 1918 was not conclusively resolved until Hitler took power in 1933. Between those years, the period of the Wiemar Republic, the tide of revolution ebbed and flowed.

Dialego's hidden insinuation that Trotsky was an ultra-leftist seeing revolution on the agenda every day is wholly unfounded. At the 1921 Comintern Congress, for example, Trotsky and Lenin were in a minority in the Russian Party leadership in arguing that the defeats the German revolution had already suffered meant that a temporary retreat by the working class was inevitable. They were dubbed the 'right wing'. Trotsky criticised the leadership of the German Communist Party (KPD) for ultra-leftism, especially their March 1921 call for a general strike.

Lenin and Trotsky maintained that the KPD should campaign for a united front with the German Social Democratic Party (SPD), which still had majority support among the workers. By calling for, and organising, joint campaigns of action in which the KPD members could struggle side by side with the rank-and-file of the SPD, possibilities would open up of splitting them from their reformist leadership and winning them to see the need for a revolutionary struggle for power.

At this time opponents of Lenin and Trotsky argued that they had "written off" the revolutionary potential of the German working class and "capitulated to reformism"! But of course, Lenin and Trotsky were confident that the working class would return to the revolutionary offensive. The tactics of the united front were designed to ensure that, unlike in 1918, the KPD entered the new revolutionary situation with the largest possible forces of the class already united under its banner.

Revolutionary crisis did indeed again engulf Germany in 1923. Underlying it was chronic economic collapse, reflected in staggering inflation. The price of a loaf of bread, for example, rose from less than 1 mark to 201 billion marks in ten months! The working class swung sharply to the left. A general strike took place in May. In August a general strike forced the resignation of the national government. Workers' militias were being formed. The KPD membership was growing by tens of thousands.

Contrary to what Dialego would have us believe, all the leaders of the Comintern were agreed that a revolutionary situation was opening up.

But the KPD proved unable to meet the challenge. Its leadership was divided. Brandler, head of the Party, trying to "correct" the ultra-left mistakes of 1921, erred grossly on the side of caution. Fundamentally, the KPD failed to use the opportunities to prepare the workers to take power. In October, belatedly, they launched a plan for insurrection, then called it off at the last moment, leaving the KPD workers of Hamburg, through a bizarre error, to hurl themselves alone against the forces of the state.

Trotsky was notable for the honesty with which he drew the lessons of those events. Russian Comintern leaders allied with Stalin, such as Zinoviev and Bukharin, made a scapegoat of Brandler. But, rather than criticising his irresolution, they reversed their analysis of the objective situation, and argued that Brandler and the KPD had "over-estimated" the possibilities of revolution.

Trotsky would have none of this. As he put it later:

> "Why didn't the German revolution lead to a victory? The reasons for it are all to be sought in the tactics, and not in the existing conditions. Here we had a classic example of a missed revolutionary situation. After all the German proletariat had gone through in recent years, it could be led to a decisive struggle only if it were convinced that this time the question would be decisively resolved and that the Communist Party was ready for the struggle and capable of achieving the victory. But the Communist Party executed the turn [to insurrection] very irresolutely and after a long delay. Not only the rights but also the lefts [in the KPD]... viewed fatalistically the process of revolutionary development up to September-October 1923." (*The Third International after Lenin*)

Speaking to workers in Georgia in April 1924, he said:

> "The future favours us. But the past must be analysed correctly. The turn about this past year, in October-November, when German fascism and the big bourgeoisie came to the fore, was an enormous defeat. We must record it, evaluate it, and fix it in our memories that way, in order to learn from it. It is an enormous defeat. But from this defeat the German party will learn, become tempered, and grow. And the situation remains, as before, a revolutionary one."

In Britain, the general strike of 1926 provoked a profound social crisis. The small Communist Party had an opportunity to lead hundreds of thousands of workers in opposition to the reformist TUC (Trades Union Congress) leadership, and take big steps forward in preparing the working class for power. But Stalin and the bureaucracy were tied into an opportunistic alliance with "lefts" on the TUC Council. The TUC right wing betrayed the strike at the first opportunity. Stalin's "left" allies offered no resistance.

After ten days, with the strike still spreading, the TUC General Council unanimously called it off. This was sheer capitulation to the capitalist class. It condemned the working class in Britain to a historic defeat. Stalin and the Comintern were wholly complicit in it. Trotsky and the Left Opposition correctly sought to draw the widest attention to the consequences which the bureaucracy's policies of "socialism in one country" were having for the working class internationally.

## China

As serious as these defeats was the defeat of the Chinese revolution in 1927. It was, indeed, the more serious in that it followed from the deliberate abandonment by Stalin and the Comintern of the fundamental program which had guided the working class to power in Russia in 1917.

Dialego tells us Trotsky "condemned Bolshevik strategy in China". In reality, what Trotsky condemned in China was the Comintern's failure to put forward Bolshevik policies.

China, then as now, was the most populous country on earth. The overthrow of the Imperial regime in 1911 ushered in a period of huge instability. China fragmented under the rule of feudal

warlords. The weak semi-colonial governments at the centre were totally incapable of tackling the tasks of "bourgeois revolution" – the liberation of the peasantry from the landowners, ending imperialist domination, securing democratic rights, and uniting the nation.

The conditions were a classic confirmation of the theory of permanent revolution – that, to carry out these bourgeois-democratic or national-democratic tasks, the working class needed to place itself at the head of the nation, take power, and establish a workers' state with the support of the peasantry and other oppressed layers in society. The program of the Bolsheviks in Russia in 1917 was revealed to be just as vital in every under-developed country dominated by imperialism.

From 1920 there was a rising tide of strikes, uprisings and land seizures among the workers and the peasants. The membership of the trade unions doubled and doubled again in three years, embracing nearly 3 million workers by 1927. Peasant leagues in the southern provinces organised ten million peasants. The Chinese Communist Party, formed in 1921 grew to 60,000 members, with a far wider influence among the masses.

With Bolshevik policies, the Chinese Communist Party could have united the working class and peasantry in a struggle for power. Instead, the "Bolshevik" leaders of the Stalinist Comintern urged the Chinese Party to join the nationalist Kuomintang (KMT) party of Chiang Kai Shek as individual members, to **abandon** any independent program, to dissolve their independent press – **even to hand over a list of members to the KMT leadership** – and unswervingly to support their policies of anti-imperialist and national democratic revolution **within the framework of capitalism**.

The Kuomintang, proclaimed Stalin's Comintern, was "a revolutionary bloc of the workers, peasants, intellectuals, and urban democracy [i.e. the petty bourgeois and bourgeois] on the basis of a **community of class interests** ... in the struggle against the imperialists and the whole militarist-feudal order". (*Resolution of Executive Committee of the Comintern*, March 1926. Our emphasis)

Trotsky and the Left Opposition warned that the Kuomintang was a **bourgeois** organisation, and, like the bourgeois parties in Russia, incapable of serious struggle against imperialism and feudalism, or for democracy. Chiang Kai Shek was not a representative of a "progressive national bourgeoisie", but a reactionary. The policy of the Comintern, they insisted, was a reversion to **Menshevism** – the subordination of the interests of the working class (and peasantry) to those of the bourgeoisie, and of the landlords and imperialism also.

Indeed, these policies were a caricature even of Menshevism. The bourgeois Kuomintang was welcomed by Stalin into the Comintern as a sympathising section! Chiang Kai Shek was covered with the mantle of world communism. It was a recipe for disaster.

Trotsky's warnings were only too tragically confirmed. When the workers of Shanghai, largest industrial city, rose up in 1927 and, led by Communist militants, established a form of soviet power, Stalin and the Comintern urged them to hand power back to Chiang Kai Shek! Chiang chose his moment to turn on the politically disarmed working class, and to drown the revolution in an orgy of slaughter.

Kornilov had failed to carry through counter-revolution against the working class in Russia. Chiang Kai Shek succeeded in China. This was the measure of the difference between the policies of Bolshevism and the Menshevik policies imposed by Stalinism on the Chinese Communist Party.

The Comintern, after flirting with a "left" rival of Chiang in the Kuomintang, resulting in further defeats for the Chinese masses, then swung to an ultra-left course and, with the revolutionary tide on the ebb, tried to engineer an insurrection in the other main industrial centre of Canton, which was also drowned in blood.

### The bureaucracy consolidates its power

"The panicky retreat of the German Communist Party [in 1923]", explained Trotsky, "was the heaviest possible disappointment to the working masses of the Soviet Union. The Soviet bureaucracy straightway opened a campaign against the theory of 'permanent revolution', and dealt the Left Opposition its first cruel blow.

> "During the years 1926 and 1927 the population of the Soviet Union experienced a new tide of hope. All eyes were now directed to the East where the drama of the Chinese revolution was unfolding. The Left Opposition was recruiting a phalanx of new adherents. At the end of 1927 the Chinese revolution was massacred by the hangman, Chiang-kai-shek, into whose hands the Communist International had literally betrayed the Chinese workers and peasants. A cold wave of disappointment swept over the masses of the Soviet Union. After an unbridled baiting in the press and at meetings, the bureaucracy finally, in 1928, ventured upon mass arrests among the Left Opposition.
>
> "To be sure, tens of thousands of revolutionary fighters gathered around the banner of the Bolshevik-Leninists. The advanced workers were undubitably sympathetic to the Opposition, but that sympathy remained passive. The masses lacked faith that the situation could be changed by a new struggle. Meantime the bureaucracy asserted: 'For the sake of an international revolution, the Opposition proposes to drag us into a revolutionary war. Enough of shake-ups! We have earned the right to rest. We will build the socialist society at home. Rely upon us, your leaders!' This gospel of repose firmly consolidated the apparatchiki and the military and state officials and indubitably found an echo among the weary workers, and still more the peasant masses". (*The Revolution Betrayed*)

"After Lenin's death", Dialego tells us, "Trotsky became a bitter critic of Stalin's leadership... [in 1929] he was sent into exile after leading street demonstrations against the Soviet government".

It is, of course, remarkable, that the great "democrat" Dialego finds nothing in the slightest strange about someone being deported from his country for leading demonstrations against its government! Such is Dialego's uncritical adulation of Stalinism.

The reality is that the bureaucracy had no political answer to the ideas that Trotsky and the Left Opposition were putting forward – for revival of the soviets, the restoration of workers' democracy, a bold program of "industrialisation, electrification and rationalisation, based upon increasing the technical power of the economy and improving the material condition of the masses", and of building the Communist International as a mass revolutionary force.

Instead the bureaucracy launched a vicious campaign of intimidation – a witch-hunt. Spokespersons of the Left Opposition were sworn at and howled down when they tried to speak, on the Central Committee, and throughout the Party.

Already, in 1926, Lenin's widow Krupskaya had remarked: "If Ilyich [Lenin] were alive, he would probably already be in prison". In 1928 the old Bolshevik leader Bukharin, in a secret conversation

with his comrade Kamenev, remarked of Stalin: "What can we do in the face of an adversary of this sort, a debased Genghis Khan?" That was the atmosphere that was now developing in this state in which the working class had achieved its greatest victory in history.

On the tenth anniversary of the October Revolution, in the face of the witch-hunt against them, the Opposition organised mass demonstrations in Moscow and Leningrad, with the slogans "Let us turn our fire to the right – against the kulak [rich peasant], the NEPman, and the bureaucrat!", "Let us carry out Lenin's Testament!", "Against opportunism, against a split, and for the unity of Lenin's party!"

The bureaucracy broke up the demonstrations by force, and followed this with mass expulsions of Opposition supporters from the Party. Trotsky was expelled and deported to Central Asia – and then, because he remained a focal point for the Opposition – deported from the Soviet Union early in 1929.

Marxist opposition to the rule of the bureaucracy continued, but from this point driven underground. Through the 1930s, Stalin, veering this way and that to consolidate his personal position, launched waves of repression not merely against Marxists, but supporters of opposing tendencies in the bureaucracy. By the early 1930s, expulsions from the Party ran into hundreds of thousands.

From 1928-9, with opposition to their rule growing among the kulaks and threatening a restoration of capitalism, Stalin and the bureaucracy made a huge lurch to the "left", domestically and internationally. At the cost of millions of lives, agriculture was forcibly collectivised, and industrialisation forced ahead. Forced labour was used on a massive scale. All this spurred on greater bureaucratic centralisation and repression.

Internationally, Stalin's now bureaucratically-controlled Comintern promoted the wildly ultra-left policy of denouncing Social Democratic reformism as "the moderate wing of fascism... They are not antipodes but twins". The fatal consequence – for which the Comintern bears the full responsibility – was a crushing defeat for revolution in the key country of Germany, and the conquest of power by Hitler in 1933.

### The victory of Hitler

Regarding Trotsky's political standpoint in the 1930s, Dialego writes:

> "It is true that in exile Trotsky was critical of the sectarian positions taken by the international communist movement (the Comintern) between 1929 and 1933... Nevertheless he was (it would seem even more) vehemently opposed to the democratic Popular Front strategy which the Comintern had adopted by 1935 as a way of tackling these political weaknesses...Although the Popular Fronts played a key role in the struggle against fascism (particularly in Spain and France), they were denounced by Trotsky and his International as one of 'the political resources of imperialism in the struggle against proletarian revolution.' "

The recognition that Trotsky was correct in opposing the ultra-leftism of Stalin's Comintern during 1929-1933 is one of the few positive things Dialego has to say about him. But Dialego fails to mention that Trotsky was denounced by the Comintern as "counter-revolutionary" for making these criticisms.

Moreover Dialego totally ignores **that the fatal consequence of the Comintern's ultra-leftism in this period was the victory of Fascism in Germany.** This was the worst defeat of the period for the working class internationally. More than any other single event, it prepared the way for World War II, the invasion of the Soviet Union by Hitler at huge cost to the Soviet people, and the extermination of 6 million Jews. In Trotsky's eyes, the role of the Comintern in preparing the way for this sealed its death-knell as an instrument of international proletarian revolution.

The collapse of the New York Stock Exchange in October 1929 led to worldwide capitalist depression. Germany, in particular, was devastated. There was a polarisation of the classes between counter-revolution and revolution.

Hitler's Nazi gangs – financed by big business – played on the fears of the middle class and the despair of the growing numbers of unemployed to build support. But the German labour movement was the most powerful in the capitalist world, and, among the organised workers, there was almost no support for Hitler. However a majority of the workers still followed the SPD leaders, who futilely hoped that Hitler could be kept from power if they supported more "moderate" bourgeois governments.

Trotsky poured scorn on the cowardly betrayal of the workers by the SPD leaders – whose hands were already stained with the blood of collaborating with the armed forces in crushing the revolution of 1918.

Against one of them, Hilferding, who argued that the working class had no possibility of taking power in Germany, he thundered:

> "According to Hilferding, in Germany today, where the proletariat composes the majority of the population and the deciding productive force of society, the united front of the Social Democracy and the Communist Party could not place the power in the hands of the proletariat! When is the precise moment, then, that the power can pass into the hands of the proletariat?
>
> "Prior to the war was the perspective of the automatic growth of capitalism, of the growth of the proletariat, and of the equal growth of the Social Democracy. This process was cut short by the war, and no power in the world will restore it. The decay of capitalism means that the question of power must be decided on the basis of the now existing productive forces.
>
> "By prolonging the agony of the capitalist regime, the Social Democracy' leads only to the further decline of economic culture, to the disorganisation of the proletariat, to social gangrene. No other perspectives lie ahead; tomorrow will be worse than today; the day after tomorrow worse than tomorrow. But the leaders of the Social Democracy no longer dare to look into the future. Theirs are all the vices of the ruling class doomed to destruction; they are light-minded, their will is paralysed, they are given to blubbering over events and hoping for miracles." (*The Struggle Against Fascism in Germany*)

But Trotsky was equally harsh on the leaders of the German Communist Party (KPD), who, on instructions from Moscow, were isolating their membership from the rank-and-file of the SPD by branding Social Democrats as "social fascists" – and even joining the Nazi stormtroopers in breaking up SPD meetings. Some KPD leaders were even arguing that the best possibility would be for Hitler to take power, so that Fascism would "exhaust" itself, and prepare the way for workers' revolution!

Trotsky explained that the workers in the SPD remained there, not so much out of confidence in their leaders, but lack of confidence

in an alternative. Polarisation between the leadership and the membership was inevitably sharpening. Fascism threatened to atomise the proletariat: it was a direct threat to every worker and workers' organisation. The task for the German Communist Party was to implement the policy of the united front – calling for joint campaigns of action by the KPD and SPD against the Nazi menace.

"It is necessary", Trotsky wrote, "without any delay, finally to elaborate a practical system of measures – not with the aim of merely 'exposing' the Social Democracy (before the Communists) but with the aim of actual struggle against fascism. The question of factory defence organisations, of unhampered activity on the part of the factory councils, the inviolability of the workers' organisations and institutions, the question of arsenals that may be seized by the fascists, the question of measures in the case of an emergency, that is, of the co-ordination of the actions of the Communist and the Social Democratic divisions in the struggle, etc., etc. must be dealt with in this program.

> "In the struggle against fascism, the factory councils occupy a tremendously important position. Here a particularly precise program of action is necessary. Every factory must become an antifascist bulwark, with its own commandants and its own battalions. It is necessary to have a map of the fascist barracks and all other fascist strongholds, in every city and in every district. The fascists are attempting to encircle the revolutionary strongholds. The encirclers must be encircled. On this basis, an agreement with the Social Democratic and trade union organisations is not only permissible, but a duty. To reject this for reasons of 'principle' (in reality because of bureaucratic stupidity, or what is still worse, because of cowardice) is to give direct and immediate practical aid to fascism."
>
> "If the KPD adopted a fighting united front policy", Trotsky continued: "instead of the articles and speeches which are convincing only to those people who are already convinced without them, the agitators will find a common language with new hundreds of thousands and millions of workers. The differentiation within the Social Democracy will proceed at an increased pace. The fascists will soon feel that their task does not at all consist merely of defeating Bruening, Braun, and Wels [bourgeois government ministers], but of taking up the open struggle against the whole working class. On this plane, a profound differentiation will inevitably be produced within fascism. Only by this road is victory possible." (*Ibid*)

Through the united front, in other words, the workers in the SPD could be won away from their reactionary leaders and united under the revolutionary banner of the KPD. This revolutionary unity would divide and weaken the fascists and prepare the way for workers' revolution.

Trotsky's advice and warnings went totally unheeded by the KPD leadership. The workers' movement had defence guards (the Reichsbanner and Red Front) with over a million armed members. But the failure to achieve unity in action – **a result of Stalin's Comintern's disastrous policies** – allowed Hitler to come to power, in his own words, "without a pane of glass being broken".

This disaster, prepared by Stalin and the bureaucracy, was never seriously analysed in any of the Communist Parties of the world. Stalin and the Comintern leadership never openly acknowledged that their mistakes had led to it. Hitler's victory was even passed off for a time as a triumph for the workers' movement on the incredible grounds that it would 'spark' a revolution!

### The defeat of the Spanish revolution

After this disaster, Stalin's regime went through another erratic zigzag, veering to the right, domestically and internationally.

Trotsky, Dialego concedes, was critical of the Comintern's sectarianism between 1929 and 1933. But, he adds: "Nevertheless he [Trotsky] was (it would seem even more) vehemently opposed to the democratic Popular Front strategy which the Comintern had adopted by 1935 as a way of opposing these political weaknesses."

It is completely wrong to present the "Popular Front" strategy as a "solution" to the sectarianism of 1929-33. The victory of fascism in Germany intensified the imperialist ambitions of German capitalism, posing a renewed threat of military intervention of the Soviet Union. Against this danger, a Bolshevik policy would have been to build, through the Comintern, a revolutionary alliance of the **working class internationally** against Fascism.

Instead Stalin sought "anti-fascist" alliances with Germany's **bourgeois** imperialist rivals: in particular, France and Britain. **For the first time the Soviet bureaucracy turned to deliberate alliances with capitalist powers and with the bankers of New York, Paris and London.**

The policy of the Popular Front was forced on the Parties of the Comintern as a consequence of these diplomatic manouevres. The working class must "ally with", i.e. imprison itself in subordination to, the "anti-fascist" sections of the bourgeoisie, and abandon any thought of socialist revolution. The programme of the workers' parties must be watered down to win the "approval" of the bankers, industrialists and capitalist politicians. **Yet it was in defence of the capitalist system that the threat of Fascism had been unleashed!**

The Popular Front was a policy of class-collaboration – even more outrightly Menshevik than the policies pursued by the Comintern in China in the 1920s. **It did not protect democracy.** Pursued in conditions of sharpening class polarisation, it led to new disasters for the working class – particularly in Spain.

The overthrow of the monarchy in 1931 unleashed a period of revolutionary and counter-revolutionary turmoil in Spain, a backward European country. Again and again the workers and peasants launched themselves against their class enemies – the capitalists and landlords – in a struggle to transform society. With Bolshevik leadership and the program of the permanent revolution, as Trotsky put it, the working class would have had some ten opportunities for taking power.

In 1936 the Spanish masses elected a "Popular Front" government – and, along with this, set out to implement its program of social change through strikes, land seizures, and struggle from below. But the leadership of the Popular Front insisted that the aims of the struggle must be confined to the establishment of a democratic Republic on a capitalist basis. Spain was a backward country: conditions were not "ripe" for socialism. It was a "bourgeois revolution".

Stalin's Comintern presented the Popular Front as an alliance of the working class with a "progressive bourgeoisie". **But the Spanish capitalists to a man vehemently opposed this "Popular Front".** It was, in Trotsky's words, an alliance merely with the "shadow of the bourgeoisie" – with bourgeois politicians, resting on support among the middle classes, who wanted to defend capitalism. In power, the Popular Front propped up the existing capitalist state.

Months into the Popular Front government, General Franco led the bulk of the armed forces into revolt. Civil war broke

out between Franco and the Republic. Trotsky immediately wrote (July 30, 1936) to outline the disastrous consequences of Popular Front policies: **"the 'republican' army took the field against the people. Thus it became clear that the Popular Front government had maintained the military caste with the people's money, furnished them with authority, power, and arms, and given them command over young workers and peasants, thereby facilitating the preparations for a crushing attack on the workers and peasants."** ("The Lesson of Spain", *The Spanish Revolution*. Our emphasis)

Against Franco's uprising, the workers of Madrid and Barcelona seized arms from the barracks and formed militias to defend the Republic. But the response of the Popular Front, egged on by Stalin and the Spanish "Communist" leaders, was to disband the militias and force the workers into the Republican army commanded by bourgeois generals, some of whom had dabbled in intrigues against the Republic.

> "Even now, in the midst of civil war", continued Trotsky in the same article, "the Popular Front government does everything in its power to make victory doubly difficult. A civil war is waged, as everybody knows, not only with military but also with political weapons. From a purely military point of view, the Spanish revolution is much weaker than its enemy. Its strength lies in its ability to rouse the great masses to action. It can even take the army away from its reactionary officers. To accomplish this, it is only necessary to seriously and courageously advance the program of the socialist revolution."
>
> "It is necessary to proclaim that, from now on, the land, factories and shops will pass from the hands of the capitalists into the hands of the people. It is necessary to move at once towards the realisation of this program in those provinces where the workers are in power. The fascist army could not resist the influence of such a program for twenty-four hours; the soldiers would tie their officers hand and foot and turn them over to the nearest headquarters of the workers' militia."
>
> "But the bourgeois ministers [in the "Popular Front" government] cannot accept such a program. Curbing the social revolution, they compel the workers and peasants to spill ten times as much of their own blood in the civil war. And to crown everything, these gentlemen expect to disarm the workers again after the victory and expect them to respect the sacred laws of private property. Such is the true essence of the policy of the Popular Front. Everything else is pure humbug, phrases, and lies!"
>
> "Many supporters of the Popular Front now shake their heads reproachfully at the rulers of Madrid! Why didn't they foresee all this? Why didn't they purge the army in time? Why didn't they take the necessary measures?..."
>
> "It is naive to claim that the Spanish republicans or the Socialists or the communists foresaw nothing, let something slip. It is not at all a question of the perspicacity of this or that minister or leader, but of the general direction of the policy. A workers' party that enters into a political alliance with the radical bourgeoisie by that fact alone renounces the struggle against capitalist militarism."
>
> "Bourgeois domination, that is to say, the maintenance of private property in the means of production, is inconceivable without the support of the armed forces for the exploiters. The officers' corps represents the guard of capital. Without this guard, the bourgeoisie could not maintain itself for a single day. The selection of the individuals, their education and training, makes the officers as a distinctive group uncompromising enemies of socialism. Isolated exceptions change nothing. That is how things stand in all bourgeois countries."
>
> "The danger lies not in the military braggarts and demagogues who openly appear as fascists; incomparably more menacing is the fact that at the approach of the proletarian revolution the officers' corps becomes the executioner of the proletariat. To eliminate four or five hundred reactionary agitators from the army means to leave everything basically as it was before."
>
> "The officers' corps, in which is concentrated the centuries-old tradition of enslaving the people, must be dissolved, broken, crushed in its entirety, root and branch. The troops in the barracks commanded by the officers' caste must be replaced by the people's militia, that is, the democratic organisation of the armed workers and peasants. There is no other solution."
>
> "But such an army is incompatible with the domination of exploiters big and small. Can the republicans agree to such a measure? Not at all. The Popular Front government, that is to say, the government of the coalition of the workers with the bourgeoisie, is in its very essence a government of capitulation to the bureaucracy and the officers. Such is the great lesson of the events in Spain, now being paid for with thousands of human lives..."
>
> "The political alliance of the working class leaders with the bourgeoisie is disguised as the defence of the 'republic'. The experience of Spain shows what this defence is in actuality. The word 'republican', like the word 'democrat', is a deliberate charlatanism that serves to cover up class contradictions. The bourgeois is a republican so long as the republic protects private property. And the workers utilise the republic to overthrow private property. The republic, in other words, loses all its value to the bourgeois the moment it assumes value for the workers..." (*ibid*)

"The Popular Fronts played a key role in the struggle against fascism (particularly in Spain and France)", claims Dialego. Trotsky was "vehemently opposed to the democratic Popular Front strategy". Trotsky's indictment was that the Popular Front could **not** defend democracy. Capitalism in Spain could not afford democracy. It "tolerated" the Popular Front only to prepare the ground for fascist reaction.

The leaders of the Popular Front refused to mobilise revolutionary action by the workers and peasants to break the armed forces of the capitalist state and replace them by the power of the armed people – as the Bolsheviks had done in the far more backward conditions of Russia. By that fact, the leaders of the Popular Front, **far from defending democracy, prepared the ground for the rise of the counter-revolution.**

"A workers' party that enters into a political alliance with the radical bourgeoisie by that fact alone **renounces the struggle** against capitalist militarism" – that was Trotsky's indictment of the strategy of the Popular Front. "The Popular Front government, that is to say, the government of the coalition of the workers with the bourgeoisie, is in its very essence a government of **capitulation** to the bureaucracy and the officers."

The Stalinists in the 1930s also accused Trotsky of "jumping

stages" in the Spanish revolution. As Trotsky paraphrased their arguments: " 'What kind of revolution do you have in mind', the philistines of the Popular Front demand of us, 'democratic or socialist? The victory of [the Republican]... army over Franco's would mean the victory of democracy over fascism, that is, the victory of progress over reaction.' "

To this Trotsky replied:

> "One cannot listen to these arguments without a bitter smile. Before 1934 we explained to the Stalinists tirelessly that even in the imperialist epoch democracy continued to be preferable to fascism; that is, in all cases where hostile clashes take place between them, the revolutionary proletariat is obliged to support democracy against fascism.
>
> "However we always added: We can and must defend bourgeois democracy not by bourgeois democratic means but by the methods of class struggle, which in turn pave the way for the replacement of bourgeois democracy by the dictatorship of the proletariat [i.e. proletarian democracy]. This means in particular that in the process of defending bourgeois democracy, even with arms in hand, the party of the proletariat takes no responsibility for bourgeois democracy, does not enter its government, but maintains full freedom of criticism and of action in relation to all parties of the Popular Front, thus preparing the overthrow of bourgeois democracy at the next stage.
>
> "Any other policy is a criminal and hopeless attempt to use the blood of the workers as cement to hold together a bourgeois democracy that is **inevitably doomed to collapse regardless of the immediate outcome of the civil war....**
>
> "The government of Stalin-Caballero tries with all its might to imbue its army with the character of a 'democratic' guard for the defence of private property. That is the essence of the Popular Front. All the rest is phrasemongering. Precisely for that reason, the Popular Front is preparing the triumph of fascism. Whoever has not understood this is deaf and blind." (*ibid*)

And it was in this sense that Trotsky correctly regarded the Popular Front, in the phrase quoted by Dialego, as one of "the political resources of imperialism in the struggle against proletarian revolution".

Trotsky's warnings were again tragically borne out. The false policies of the Popular Front leaders increasingly exhausted and disillusioned the masses. In 1937 these "democratic" leaders of the Popular Front turned on the masses themselves, crushing an uprising of the workers of Barcelona. Meanwhile, the capitalists, who the Popular Front had hoped to win to the side of "anti-fascism" through their "moderation", continued to bank-roll Franco's counter-revolution. The Fascist Franco defeated the revolution in Spain in 1937, and held power until his death in 1975.

The Russian bureaucracy and the Spanish Stalinists are forever stained with the blood of the militant Spanish workers who they led to the slaughter and butchered in their thousands in a vain attempt to prove to the capitalists their fitness to rule on their behalf.

## A river of blood

The forward thrust of revolution in Spain in 1936 had, however, revived the morale of the working class in Russia – and internationally. The bureaucracy in Russia regarded this new confidence of the working class as a danger. It was provoked into evermore bizarre repression.

In 1936-7 virtually every remaining "Old Bolshevik" leader of 1917 was put on trial in the so-called "Moscow Trials". Broken in prison, blackmailed and cowed, with their "confessions" dictated by Stalin's secret police – they were accused of murder, sabotage, terrorism – any fantastic crime to discredit them and terrorise others. With one or two token exceptions, they were all condemned to be shot.

Though not supporters of the Left Opposition, they were all accused of "Trotskyism" – of conspiring with Trotsky, now vilified as an "agent of capitalism", an "agent of fascism", and a "German spy".

Even the London *Times* correspondent in Russia admitted: "The root of the matter is that Stalin never completely won the battle between his own policy and Trotsky's internationalist policy. Nor can final victory ever be his... Communism remains an international creed." (21/8/1936)

**Every one of the accusations in the Moscow Trials, every murder, was admiringly reported and defended by the Communist Parties around the world, including Dialego's SACP.**

The Moscow Trials were the tip of the iceberg of what Trotsky described as a "one-sided civil war of the bureaucracy against the Bolshevik Party". Arrests followed arrests. Left Oppositionists in Siberian labour camps were taken out in groups to be shot. Altogether, tens of thousands, the cream of the Bolshevik Party, were wiped out. Of some one and a half million Communist Party members in 1939, only 1,3% had been members at the time of the October Revolution. Of Lenin's Central Committee of 1917, only Stalin survived as a leader.

The total death toll under Stalin in the 1930s is estimated as at least 12-15 million.

A last surviving leader of 1917, Raskolnikov, ambassador to Bulgaria during the 1930s, was recalled in 1938 to Moscow for "promotion" (i.e. to be shot), and instead fled into exile. He wrote to Stalin:

> "With the help of dirty forgeries, you staged false trials and made up accusations which are more ridiculous than the witch trials of the Middle Ages...Inert pulp writers glorify you as a semi-deity born of the sun and moon and you, like an Eastern despot, enjoy the incense of crude flattery. You mercilessly exterminate talented writers who are personally displeasing to you... Sooner or later, the Soviet people will put you on trial as a traitor to socialism and the revolution." (Published for the first time in the USSR in the magazine *Ogonyok* in June 1987)

Stalin's reign of terror was not mere personal dementia, individual power-hunger, or the result of the "cult of the personality". **It was the culmination of a political counter-revolution against the working class, which nevertheless rested itself on the change in property relations which had been won by the working class in the 1917 revolution.**

The last vestiges of the Bolshevik Party were wiped out. A river of blood now flowed between Marxism and the regime in Russia. On August 20, 1940, Trotsky himself, now in exile in Mexico, was assassinated by an agent of the secret police on the orders of Stalin.

"Until his death in 1940," – Dialego tells us – "Trotsky remained hostile to the Comintern, and continued to agitate vigorously for the overthrow of the 'counter-revolutionary bureaucracy' (i.e. the government!) of the USSR."

Dialego, of course, is here insinuating that Trotsky was himself a "counter-revolutionary". Trotsky stood for the restoration of workers' democracy in Russia. At first he believed this could come about by the reform of the Soviet Communist Party and the Comintern. But the responsibility of Comintern policy for the victory of Hitler, and its refusal to acknowledge its bankruptcy, was a decisive turning-point. The political counter-revolution was complete. The Soviet working class would now have to restore workers' democracy by overthrowing the bureaucracy in a political revolution. A new workers' international would need to be built.

At the same time, Trotsky recognised that the Russian working class would not move against the bureaucracy **if they believed this would open the way for a capitalist counter-revolution.** Contrary to Dialego's insinuations, Trotsky stood wholly with the Russian masses against capitalist counter-revolution or military invasion. Until his death he defended the gains of the October Revolution – the gains of nationalised and planned economy – and insisted that the bureaucracy itself defended those gains, though in its own ways, and in its own interests. It would be not only conditions within Russia, but on an international scale, which would determine the possibilities for restoring workers' democracy.

Dialego insinuates that Trotsky was a "counter-revolutionary". He makes no mention of the fact that Stalin **signed a "peace" agreement with the Fascist Hitler** in 1939 in a futile attempt to hold off invasion of the Soviet Union. Hitler nevertheless chose his time, and invaded in 1941. Stalin had failed to prepare against this. He had "purged" not only the best generals in the army, **but a quarter of a million of the officer corps!**

The bureaucracy's policies, internationally and at home, all but prepared the way for the defeat of the Russian revolution. This was prevented only by the enormous heroism and sacrifice of the Soviet people in the war against Hitler.

"While most communists today would no longer accept the view (current during the Stalin period) that Trotsky was 'an agent of fascism', few would deny that throughout his life Trotsky hindered rather than helped the struggle for socialism." This is the petty "final judgement" which the Stalinist Dialego now delivers on Trotsky.

Trotsky does not need exoneration by Dialego from the charge of being "an agent of fascism". Rather, Dialego needs to explain why a regime that he still regards as "socialist" criminally persecuted and murdered not just Trotsky, but hundreds of thousands of people on that false basis.

The truth is that, despite all the levers of state power in the hands of the bureaucracy, Trotsky and the Left Opposition were a deadly terror – because they sustained the genuine ideas of Marxism, workers' democracy, and socialism, which, taken up by the working class, would spell the end of the rule of the bureaucracy and re-open the way to socialism.

Leopold Trepper was a loyal Communist Party member in the 1930s who, with a post in Russian Military Intelligence, was in a position to see the conduct of the Left Opposition under persecution.

Breaking later with Stalinism, he wrote in his memoirs: "The Trotskyites... following the example of their leader, who was rewarded for his obstinacy with the end of an ice axe... fought Stalinism to the death and they were the only ones who did. By the time of the great purges, they could only shout their rebellion in the freezing wastelands where they had been dragged in order to be exterminated...

> "Today, the Trotskyites have a right to accuse those who once howled along with the wolves. **Let them not forget, however, that they had the enormous advantage over us of having a coherent political system capable of replacing Stalinism.** They had something to cling to in the midst of their profound distress at seeing the revolution betrayed. They did not 'confess' for they knew that their confession would serve neither the party or socialism." (*The Great Game*. Our emphasis)

Tragically, criminally, it is the rule of Stalinism – and the base servility of Communist Party leaders around the world who have supported it – which, since the 1920s, has "hindered rather than helped the struggle for socialism".

For preserving, developing, and struggling for the legacy of Marxism, the name of Trotsky will endure so long as humans live on this planet, and when all those who preached and practised Stalinism are forgotten with contempt.

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# The Nature of the Soviet Regime

***(Chapter 3 of The Legacy of Leon Trotsky)***

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YA BASEBENZI
MARXIST WORKERS TENDENCY

## by Richard Monroe & Philip Masters, 1990

**Neither Marx, Engels nor Lenin ever imagined that a state with the grotesque totalitarian character of Stalin's dictatorship would arise in the course of the world transition from capitalism to socialism.**

Marxism has always rejected the idea put forward by capitalists and every brand of reformism: that the state has become a necessary condition of human existence. The state, explained Marx and Engels, arose with the development of society into classes. Taking power, the task of the working class was to dissolve class society. With this, the state also would wither away and disappear.

As they put it in the *Communist Manifesto*:

> as the working class "sweeps away by force the old conditions of production, then it will, along with these conditions, have swept away the conditions for the existence of class antagonisms and of classes generally, and will thereby have abolished its own supremacy as a class."
>
> "In place of the old bourgeois society, with its classes and class antagonisms, we shall have an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all."

The establishment of the first worker's state through the 1917 Russian Revolution was the highest achievement of human history. Yet, under the rule of the bureaucracy, this state degenerated into a form of rule barely distinguishable from Hitler's Fascism.

As Trotsky wrote in 1936:

> "However you may interpret the nature of the present Soviet state, one thing is indubitable: at the end of its second decade of existence, it has not only not died away, but not begun to 'die away'. Worse than that, it has grown into a hitherto unheard of apparatus of compulsion. The bureaucracy not only has not disappeared, yielding its place to the masses, but has turned into an uncontrolled force dominating the masses. The army not only has not been replaced by an armed people, but has given birth to a privileged officers' caste, crowned with marshals, while the people, 'the armed bearers of the dictatorship,' are now forbidden in the Soviet Union to carry even non-explosive weapons.
>
> "With the utmost stretch of fancy it would be difficult to imagine a contrast more striking than that which exists between the schema of the workers' state according to Marx, Engels and Lenin, and the actual state now headed by Stalin. While continuing to publish the works of Lenin (to be sure, with excerpts and distortions by the censor), the present leaders of the Soviet Union and their ideological representatives do not even raise the question of the causes of such a crying divergence between program and reality." (*The Revolution Betrayed*)

Trotsky made an enduring contribution to Marxism by explaining how and why this "crying divergence" had taken place, the nature of this regime, and how its contradictions could be overcome.

### Marxism on the workers' state

The state, Engels had explained, is a "power, arisen out of society but placing itself above it, and alienating itself more and more from it... This public power exists in every state: **it consists not merely of armed men but also of material adjuncts, prisons and institutions of coercion of all kinds.**" (*Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State*)

As an inherently repressive institution, the state - Engels also explained - was "at best an evil inherited by the proletariat after its victorious struggle for class supremacy, whose worst sides the victorious proletariat, just like the Commune, cannot avoid having to lop off at once as much as possible until such time as a generation reared in new, free social conditions is able to throw the entire lumber of the state on the scrap heap." (Introduction to Marx's *Class Struggles in France*. Our emphasis.)

At the same time, against anarchism, Marx and Engels insisted that the proletariat, on coming to power, could not simply **abolish** the state. The proletariat **needed** its own state, to use against all the forces of capitalist counter-revolution. There was no point trying to hide, or prettify, this reality.

Engels, for example, once wrote to the German Marxist Bebel criticising the idea of a "free people's state", then current in some sections of the German workers' movement. This concept was, he wrote, "pure nonsense": "so long as the proletariat still uses the state, it does not use it in the interests of freedom, but to hold down its adversaries, and as soon as it becomes possible to speak of freedom the state as such ceases to exist." (18-28/3/1878, *Selected Works*, II, 42)

The classical works of Marxism referred to the "**dictatorship** of the proletariat." By this, they intended not to hide the fact that so long as a state existed, it would be an instrument of repression. But, in contrast to all previous states which served the interests of an exploiting minority, the proletarian state would exercise its repression in a **democratic way**. The proletarian state would **for the first time** represent the interests of **the majority** in society: the toilers and the producers of wealth.

"Capitalist democracy" - wrote Lenin in his marvellous resummation of the Marxist theory of the state *State and Revolution* - "is inevitably narrow and stealthily pushes aside the poor, and is therefore hypocritical and false through and through." This remains the case, even in the most democratic of bourgeois societies.

From capitalist democracy, Lenin continued,

> "forward development does not proceed simply, directly and smoothly, towards 'greater and greater democracy', as the liberal professors and petty-bourgeois opportunists would have us believe. No, forward development, i.e., development towards communism, proceeds through the dictatorship of the proletariat, and cannot do otherwise, for the **resistance** of the capitalist exploiters cannot be **broken** by anyone else or in any other way.
>
> "And the dictatorship of the proletariat, i.e. the organisation of the vanguard of the oppressed as the ruling class for the purpose of suppressing the oppressors, cannot result merely in an expansion of democracy. **Simultaneously** with an immense expansion of democracy, which **for the first time** becomes democracy for the poor, democracy for the people, and not democracy for the money bags, the dictatorship of the proletariat imposes a series of restrictions on the freedom of the oppressors, the exploiters, the capitalists. We must suppress them in order to free humanity from wage slavery, their resistance must be crushed by force; it is clear that there is no freedom and no democracy where there is suppression and where there is violence."

The proletariat, Lenin emphasised, needed: "a centralised organisation of force, and organisation of violence, both to crush the resistance of the exploiters and to **lead** the enormous mass of the population - the peasants, the petty bourgeoisie, and semi-proletarians - in the work of organising a socialist economy." (*Ibid*)

In all previous states, the exploiting class had maintained its rule, in one form or another, through **a standing army and a bureaucracy** - a specialised machinery of repression. But the proletariat could construct its state on a different basis.

Even to suppress the exploiters, - as Lenin put it -"since the majority of the people **itself** suppresses its oppressors, a 'special force' for suppression **is no longer necessary!** In this sense, the state begins to **wither away**. Instead of the special institutions of a privileged minority (privileged officialdom, the chiefs of the standing army), the majority itself can exercise these functions, and the more the functions of state power are performed by the people as a whole, the less need there is for the existence of this power." (*Ibid*)

Following Marx and Engels, Lenin showed how the working class in the Paris Commune - even though that experience was short-lived and imperfect - had pointed the way to this.

The Paris Commune had replaced a standing army by the people-in-arms. It had created a state of employees and workers, taking measures against their rising "above society" as privileged and unaccountable bureaucrats, namely: "(1) not only election but recall at any time; (2) payment no higher than the wages of a worker; (3) immediate transition to a regime in which all will fulfil the functions of control and supervision so that all may for a time become 'bureaucrats', and therefore nobody can become a bureaucrat."

> "Capitalist culture" - Lenin added - "has created large-scale production, factories, railways, the postal service, telephones, etc., and on this basis the great majority of the functions of the old 'state power' have become so simplified and can be reduced to such exceedingly simple operations of registration, filing and checking that they can easily be performed for ordinary 'workmen's wages', and that these functions can (and must) be stripped of every shadow of privilege, of every semblance of 'official grandeur.' " (*Ibid*)

**With computerisation and automation, how much more possible is all this today!**

> "Abolishing the bureaucracy at once, everywhere and completely, is out of the question", Lenin continued. "It is a utopia. But to smash the old bureaucratic machine at once and begin immediately to create a new one that will make possible the gradual abolition of all bureaucracy - this is not a utopia, it is the experience of the Commune...
>
> "We, the workers, shall organise large-scale production on the basis of what capitalism has already created, relying on our own experience as workers, establishing strict, iron discipline backed up by the state power of the armed workers. We shall reduce the role of state officials to that of simply carrying out our instructions as responsible, revocable, modestly paid 'foremen and accountants' (of course, with the aid of technicians of all sorts, types and degrees).
>
> "Such a beginning, on the basis of large-scale production, will of itself lead to the gradual 'withering away' of all bureaucracy, to the gradual creation of an order - an order without inverted commas, an order bearing no similarity to wage-slavery - an order under which the functions of control and accounting, becoming more and more simple, will be performed by each in turn, will then become a habit and will finally die out as the special functions of a special section of the population." (*Ibid*)

Marx and Engels had anticipated that the working class would establish its own state first in the most industrialised countries - where its education and culture was also most developed. Lenin wrote *State and Revolution* with the expectation that workers' revolution would spread, in a measurably short space of time, from Russia to the more advanced countries of the West - or be defeated.

In power, the Bolsheviks sought to build a workers' state on the lines outlined by Lenin. "Comrades, working people", wrote Lenin in a decree "To the population" issued within days of the October insurrection:

> "Remember that now you yourselves are at the helm of the state. No one will help you if you yourselves do not unite and take into your hands all affairs of the state. Your Soviets are from now on the organs of state authority, legislative bodies with full powers.
>
> "Rally round your Soviets. Strengthen them. Get on with the job yourselves; begin right at the bottom, do not wait for anyone. Establish the strictest revolutionary law and order, mercilessly suppress any attempts to create anarchy by drunkards, hooligans, counter-revolutionary officer cadets, Kornilovites and their like.
>
> "Ensure the strictest control over production and accounting of products. Arrest and hand over to the revolutionary courts all who dare to injure the people's cause...the great cause of peace, the cause of transferring the land to the peasants, of ensuring workers' control over the production and distribution of products." (*Pravda*, 6/11/1917)

But the fact that socialist revolution not only began in backward Russia but remained isolated there created entirely new circumstances for the development of the workers' state.

### "Bourgeois state without the bourgeoisie"

When Lenin, before his death, began to combat the bureaucratic distortions developing in the Soviet state, he started his analysis again from the ideas of Marx and Engels.

Marx had emphasised the obvious point that the working class, on taking power, began building "a communist society, not as it has developed on its own foundations, but, on the contrary, just as it emerges from capitalist society; which is thus in every respect, economically, morally and intellectually, still stamped with the birth-marks of the old society from whose womb it comes." (Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Programme*) Lenin re-emphasised this reality in *State and Revolution*.

Marx (Lenin pointed out) had distinguished two phases of society in its development towards communism: a 'lower' and a 'higher' phase. In the first phase, the working class would still be struggling to emancipate itself from all it had inherited from the old society. Only with the "higher stage of communism" would all this be overcome:

> "In the higher phase of communist society, after the enslaving subordination of the individual to the division of labour, and therewith also the antithesis between mental and physical labour has vanished; after labour has become not only a means of life but life's prime want; after the productive forces have also increased with the all-round development of the individual, and all the springs of co-operative wealth flow more abundantly - only then can the narrow horizon of bourgeois right be crossed in its entirety and society inscribe on its banners: From each according to his [or her] ability, to each according to his [or her] needs!" (Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Programme*)

As Trotsky summarised the same idea of a lower stage of communism:

> "Capitalism prepared the conditions and forces for a social revolution: technique, science and the proletariat. The communist structure cannot, however, immediately replace the bourgeois society. The material and cultural inheritance from the past is wholly inadequate for that. In its first steps the workers' state cannot yet permit everyone to work "according to his abilities" - that is, as much as he can and wishes to - nor can it reward everyone "according to his needs" regardless of the work he does. In order to increase the productive forces, it is necessary to resort to the customary norms of wage payment - that is, to the distribution of life's goods in proportion to the quantity and quality of individual labour. (*The Revolution Betrayed*)

Trotsky, in this passage, perhaps condenses the argument too much. The labour of the working class creates the value of what is produced. But the **product** is the private property of the capitalists, because they own the means of production. The capitalists pay in wages to the workers only a part of the value of what is produced. The rest is unpaid (surplus) labour by workers which goes to form the profit made by the capitalists.

In the "lower stage of communism" the means of production have been taken out of the private ownership of the capitalists, and are owned by the workers' state, under the democratic control and management of the working class.

On this basis, capitalist parasitism is abolished. Under capitalism, large layers of society earn money for doing no productive labour - those Lenin called the "coupon-clippers", the buyers and sellers of stocks and shares, the gamblers in currencies, etc. Under workers' democratic rule the first principle would be to provide productive work for all, and that "he who does not work, neither shall he eat" (unless, of course, pensionable, sick, disabled, etc.).

In the lower stage of communism, there would still be a division between surplus labour and what is paid in wages. Out of the total wealth produced, a certain proportion would be deducted for re-investment and other social expenditure - though in contrast to the situation under capitalism, the distribution of this surplus would be democratically determined.

The remainder would form the amount out of which wages would be paid. Under capitalism, different layers and individuals among the working class receive different payments, around criteria of skill, experience, educational qualifications, etc. - though, at root, the level of wages is determined by the class struggle and by the degree of development of the capitalist society. Under the lower stage of communism, in contrast, it would be possible to pay every worker **in accordance with the amount of labour that he or she had performed.**

But as Marx, and, following him, Lenin, pointed out, even this would not establish equality or take full account of the criterion of **need**.

> "In fact, everyone, having performed as much social labour as another" - explained Lenin - "receives an equal share of the social product (after the above-mentioned deductions) But people are not alike; one is strong, another is weak; one is married, another is not; one has more children, another has less, and so on... The first stage of communism therefore, cannot as yet provide justice and equality: differences, and unjust differences, in wealth will still persist." (*State and Revolution*)

Capitalism has been abolished in respect of the laws governing the ownership of production. But capitalism has not yet been abolished in respect of the laws governing the distribution of products. These principles, in Marx's words, still 'conformed to **bourgeois** law.' The inequalities of bourgeois law in this respect continued to prevail, Lenin explained, "so long as products are divided 'according to the amount of labour performed'."

The socialist principle, 'An equal amount of products for an equal amount of labour', has been realised. "But this is not yet communism, and it does not yet abolish 'bourgeois law', which gives unequal individuals, in return for unequal (really unequal) amounts of labour, equal amounts of products."

It followed, concluded Lenin, that, paradoxically, the **bourgeois state** still existed - or, at least, that the dictatorship of the proletariat had to operate in part, as a bourgeois state: "Of course, bourgeois law in regard to the distribution of **consumer** goods inevitably presupposes the existence of the **bourgeois state**, for law is nothing without an apparatus capable of **enforcing** the observance of the rules of law. It follows that under communism [more strictly, under the 'first stage of communism' - Eds] there remains for a time not only bourgeois law, but even the bourgeois state, without the bourgeoisie!"

Thus **even if the working class had taken power first in the most advanced capitalist countries,** the proletarian state would, at the beginning and in certain respects, still have had the characteristics of a "bourgeois state, without the bourgeoisie." This would become transformed, above all, through the development of the forces of production, eliminating scarcity and want, and creating the ability to provide for the needs of all - combined with the training of all in the practices of administering society to promote the withering away of the state.

Today, the forces of production world-wide are enormously more developed than was the case when Marx, Engels, or Lenin were writing. With socialist revolution in the advanced capitalist countries - or with the restoration of workers' democracy in the advanced Stalinist states - the possibilities for developing production, shortening the length of the working day, etc., are immeasurably greater. With that, so is the possibility of moving rapidly through the "lower stage" of communism to its "higher stage".

## Trotsky on the Soviet state

But the first workers' revolution took place first not in an advanced country but in Russia, backward and undeveloped. By that token, the "bourgeois" characteristics of the proletarian state were the more pronounced at the outset. More than that, Russia was a society stamped not merely with the legacy of capitalism, but centuries of pre-capitalist backwardness, ruled over by a despotic imperial state machine.

When Lenin analysed and explained the bureaucratic distortions in the Soviet state, he did so in terms of these "bourgeois" and pre-bourgeois characteristics of the state. The necessary functions of the state in regulating distribution on an unequal basis could be tilted by the officials of the state in their own favour, in their own interest.

Trotsky took these arguments further. Lenin's statement regarding "a bourgeois state without the bourgeoisie" was, as he pointed out, a "highly significant conclusion, completely ignored by the present official theoreticians [i.e. the Stalinists]."

> "Insofar as a state which assumes the task of socialist transformation is compelled to defend inequality - that is, the material privileges of a minority - by methods of compulsion, insofar does it also remain a 'bourgeois' state, even though without the bourgeoisie. These words contain neither praise nor blame; they merely name things with their real names."
>
> "The bourgeois norms of distribution, by hastening the growth of material power, [i.e. permitting the development of the forces of production] ought to serve socialist aims - but only in the last analysis. The state assumes directly and from the very beginning a dual character: socialistic, insofar as it defends social property in the means of production; bourgeois, insofar as the distribution of life's goods is carried out with a capitalistic measure of value and all the consequences ensuing therefrom. Such a contradictory characterisation may horrify the dogmatists and scholastics; we can only offer them our condolences." (*The Revolution Betrayed*)

The evolution of the workers' state was "determined by the changing relations between its bourgeois and socialist tendencies", continued Trotsky.

Under conditions where the forces of production were developed sufficiently, the socialist tendency in the state could triumph, making it possible for the "final liquidation of the gendarme [policeman] - that is, the dissolving of the state into a self-governing society." But in Russia the reverse had happened.

> " 'A bourgeois state without the bourgeoisie' proved inconsistent with genuine Soviet democracy. The dual function of the state could not but affect its structure. Experience revealed what theory was unable clearly to foresee. If for the defence of socialised property against bourgeois counterrevolution a 'state of armed workers' was fully adequate, it was a very different matter to regulate inequalities in the sphere of consumption."

The working class, anyway weakened in the civil war, had the least interest in grappling with these problems of regulating inequality. The bureaucracy, on the other hand, relished it. As Trotsky put it: "Those deprived of property are not inclined to create and defend it. The majority cannot concern itself with the privileges of the minority. For the defence of 'bourgeois law' the workers' state was compelled to create a 'bourgeois' type of instrument - that is, the same old gendarme, although in a new uniform."

Hence, if the state in Russia was not "dying away", but was growing more and more despotic, if a bureaucracy was consolidating itself in power over the working class, this was not simply for "some secondary reasons like the psychological relics of the past, etc., **but is the result of the iron necessity to give birth to and support a privileged minority so long as it is impossible to guarantee genuine equality.**" (*ibid*, Our emphasis)

> "The tendencies of bureaucratism", continued Trotsky, "which strangles the workers' movement in capitalist countries, would everywhere show themselves even after a proletarian revolution. But it is perfectly obvious that the poorer the society which issues from a revolution, the sterner and more naked would be the expression of this 'law', the more crude would be the forms assumed by bureaucratism, and the more dangerous would it become for socialist development. The Soviet state is prevented not only from dying away but even from freeing itself of the bureaucratic parasite, not by the 'relics' of former ruling classes, as declares the naked police doctrine of Stalin, for these relics are powerless in themselves. It is prevented by immeasurably mightier factors, such as material want, cultural backwardness and the resulting domination of

> 'bourgeois law' in what most immediately and sharply touches every human being, the business of ensuring his personal existence." (*Ibid*)

Russia entered upon the socialist revolution, in Lenin's words, as "the weakest link in the capitalist chain." With the revolution **remaining isolated**, bureaucratisation of the state was unavoidable. In the Russian workers' state the "bourgeois tendencies" regarding distribution of goods triumphed over the "socialist tendencies." What had at the beginning been mere "distortions" developed into a **system**. Quantitative change became qualitative change. The bureaucracy entrenched itself in state power as a force with a material interest. "Bourgeois law" as regards distribution prevailed. **But the means of production remained state property.**

In the first years of the workers' state, what Lenin, Trotsky, and the Bolsheviks feared - if the Russian revolution remained isolated, was a restoration of capitalism. This possibility remained inherent in the reality of the conflict between the "bourgeois" and the "socialist" tendencies in the state.

But the counter-revolution developed in a different way. The bureaucracy usurped power from the working class, but **continued to rest on the same basis of nationalised and planned economy.** It carried through a **political** and not a **social** counter-revolution.

**This fact in itself showed the superiority of nationalised and planned economy over capitalism.** The bureaucracy defended this economy, on the one hand because it feared to provoke the Russian working class by moving towards capitalism. As well as this, it did so because an expanding economy assured it of its own increasing privilege.

With nationalisation and planning, though at huge cost, the Soviet economy developed rapidly, even under the rule of the bureaucracy - at rates of 15%, 20% a year at their height, rates never achieved in the history of capitalism. In contrast, between World War I and World War II at least, capitalism made no fundamental breakthroughs in developing the forces of production, but lurched from crisis to crisis.

But, as we shall see later, the conditions in which the Soviet bureaucracy exists today are different from at that time.

### The Soviet Union had not "achieved socialism"

Stalin and the bureaucracy concealed their counter-revolution by presenting their regime as in complete continuity with the regime of the October revolution. "From the proletarian character of the government, the bureaucracy deduces its birthright to infallibility: how can the bureaucracy of a workers' state degenerate?" wrote Trotsky. "The state and the bureaucracy are thereby taken not as historical products but as eternal categories: how can the holy church and its God-inspired priests sin?" (*The Struggle against Fascism in Germany*)

Nevertheless, the bureaucracy could not escape tangling themselves in ideological contradictions.

Bolshevism described the Russian revolution as a socialist revolution. The term "socialist republic" was used by Lenin - as by Trotsky - to describe the Soviet Union in its early years. But these were not intended to represent a self-contained and completed process. They were not intended to convey the idea that socialism could be **achieved** in the framework of one country. These concepts identified way-stations in the struggle for the world socialist revolution.

This applied to the question of the Soviet state itself. The **Bolshevik** program of 1919 honestly declared: "The Soviet power openly recognises the inevitability of the class character of every state, so long as the division of society into classes, and therewith all state power, has not completely disappeared."

In glaring contrast, the 1936 constitution of the Soviet Union of **Stalin's secret police dictatorship** (which for the first time ratified a one-party state) proclaimed that "the principle of socialism has been realised." The 1935 Congress of the Comintern, in even more self-contradictory terms, declared that "the final and irrevocable triumph of socialism and the all-sided reinforcement of the state of the proletarian dictatorship, is achieved in the Soviet Union."

Among the decrees and regulations issued against the working class under this constitution were the following: the introduction of labour passports (20/12/1938); penalties for lateness in coming to work, and abolition of social security benefits for workers 'guilty' of such 'offences' (28/ 12/1938); denial of workers' rights to move from job to job, and absenteeism of more than twenty minutes punishable by imprisonment (26/6/1940). Yet this constitution proclaimed the Soviet Union was a "socialist" society!

As Trotsky pointed out,

> "If socialism has 'finally and irrevocably triumphed', not as a principle but as a living regime, then a renewed 'reinforcement' of the dictatorship is obvious nonsense. And, on the contrary, if the reinforcement of the dictatorship is evoked by the real demands of the regime, that means the triumph of socialism is still remote. Not only a Marxist, but any realistic thinker, ought to understand that the very necessity of 'reinforcing' the dictatorship - that is, governmental repression - testifies not to the triumph of a classless harmony, but to the growth of new social antagonisms." (*The Revolution Betrayed*)

Classes have been finally liquidated, proclaimed the bureaucracy, but "elements of former classes still remain"; there are petty speculators, corrupt elements, etc. But, responded Trotsky, what serious counter-revolutionary threat could such "elements" and individuals pose to "socialism"...if socialism had already been achieved? Lenin had said that a **special** machinery of repression was not required **even to crush the resistance of the exploiting classes as a whole.**

"We have reached only 'socialism', the 'lower stage of communism' ", proclaimed the bureaucracy: it is only with communism itself that the state will disappear. They appeared to be on better grounds here.

But, as Trotsky pointed out,

> "if the country is really now on the road from socialism, that is, the lower stage of communism, to its higher stage, then there remains nothing for society to do but to throw off at last the strait-jacket of the state. In place of this - it is hard even to grasp this contrast with the mind! - the Soviet state has acquired a totalitarian-bureaucratic character." (*Ibid*)
>
> "By the lowest stage of communism", he explained, "Marx meant, at any rate, a society which from the very beginning stands higher in its economic development than the most advanced capitalism.... The present Soviet Union does not stand above the world level of economy, but is only trying to catch up to the capitalist countries." (*Ibid*)

The bureaucracy claimed that the overwhelming statisation of property proved that socialism had been achieved. Trotsky responded:

> "it is exactly for the Marxist that this question is not exhausted by a consideration of forms of property regardless of the achieved productivity of labour....
>
> "In order to become social, private property must as inevitably pass through the state stage as the caterpillar in order to become a butterfly must pass through the pupal stage. But the pupa is not a butterfly. Myriads of pupae perish without ever becoming butterflies. State property becomes the property of 'the whole people' only to the extent that social privilege and differentiation disappear, and therewith the necessity of the state. In other words: state property is converted into socialist property in proportion as it ceases to be state property." (*Ibid*)

The full socialisation of property, in other words, was impossible

without workers' democracy and world socialist revolution.

The 1936 Stalinist constitution proclaimed: "In the Soviet Union, the principle of socialism is realised: From each according to his abilities, **to each according to his work**". (Our emphasis) To this Trotsky retorted:

> "This inwardly contradictory, not to say nonsensical, formula has entered, believe it or not, from speeches and journalistic articles into the carefully deliberated text of the fundamental state law. It bears witness not only to a complete lowering of theoretical level in the lawgivers, but also to the lie with which, as a mirror of the ruling stratum, the new constitution is imbued.
>
> "It is not difficult to guess the origin of the new 'principle' To characterise the communist society, Marx employed the famous formula: 'From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs.' The two parts of this formula are inseparable. 'From each according to his abilities' in the communist, not the capitalist, sense, means: Work has now ceased to be an obligation, and has become an individual need; society has no further use for any compulsion. Only sick and abnormal persons will refuse to work. Working 'according to their ability' - that is, in accordance with their physical and psychic powers, without any violence to themselves - the members of the commune will, thanks to a high technique, sufficiently fill up the stores of society so that society can generously endow each and all 'according to their needs', without humiliating control.
>
> "This two-sided but indivisible formula of communism thus assumes abundance, equality, an all-sided development of personality, and a high cultural discipline...
>
> "Instead of frankly acknowledging that bourgeois norms of labour and distribution still prevail in the Soviet Union, the authors of the constitution have cut this integral communist principle in two halves, postponed the second half to an indefinite future, declared the first half already realised, mechanically hitched on to it the capitalist norm of piecework payment, named the whole thing 'principle of socialism', and upon this falsification erected the structure of their constitution!" (*The Revolution Betrayed*)

### The bureaucracy was not a class

In explaining the nature of the Soviet regime Trotsky had also to address the arguments of some "socialist" intellectuals who asked (as Trotsky paraphrased their arguments): "Is it really possible to identify the dictatorship of an apparatus, which has led to the dictatorship of a single person, with the dictatorship of the proletariat as a class? Isn't it clear that the dictatorship of the proletariat is excluded by dictatorship over the proletariat." ("*The Class Nature of the Soviet State*", 1933)

Some of these concluded, from this, that capitalism must have been restored in the Soviet Union. Some said the Soviet bureaucracy represented a new type of ruling "class" unforeseen by classical Marxism. Some said the regime was "state capitalist." Trotsky answered, and rejected, all these arguments.

Yes, Marxism explained that the state was a class dictatorship, defending the property of that class. But "the dictatorship of a class does not mean by a long shot that its entire mass always participates in the management of the state" - as was evident from examining the history of previous ruling classes.

It was true that the rule of the proletariat differed from that of exploiting ruling classes in that its mission was to achieve classless society. To do so, it needed to draw ever wider masses of the people into the task of running society. "This argument is undebatable", wrote Trotsky, "but in the **given** case it merely means that the present Soviet dictatorship is a **sick** dictatorship. The frightful difficulties of socialist construction in an isolated and backward country coupled with the false policies of the leadership - which in the last analysis also reflects the pressure of backwardness and isolation - have led to the result that the bureaucracy has expropriated the proletariat politically in order to guard its social conquests with **its own** methods."

"The anatomy of society is determined by its economic relations", he insisted. "So long as the forms of property that have been created by the October revolution are not overthrown, the proletariat remains the ruling class."

To the argument that the bureaucracy had become a **new** type of ruling class, Trotsky replied:

> "A class is defined not by its participation in the distribution of national income alone, but by its independent role in the general structure of economy and by its independent roots in the economic foundation of society. Each class (the feudal nobility, the peasantry, the petty bourgeoisie, the capitalist bourgeoisie, and the proletariat) works out its own special forms of property.
>
> "The bureaucracy lacks all these social traits. It has no independent position in the process of production and distribution. It has no independent property roots. Its functions relate basically to the political **technique** of class rule.
>
> "The existence of a bureaucracy, in all its variety of forms and differences in specific weight, characterises every class regime. Its power is of a reflected character. The bureaucracy is indissolubly bound up with a ruling economic class, feeding itself upon the social roots of the latter, maintaining itself and falling together with it...
>
> "... the privileges of the bureaucracy by themselves do not change the bases of the Soviet society, because the bureaucracy derives its privileges not from any special property relations, peculiar to it as a 'class', but from those property relations which have been created by the October revolution, and which are fundamentally adequate for the dictatorship of the proletariat.
>
> "To put it plainly, insofar as the bureaucracy robs the people (and this is done in various ways by every bureaucracy), we have to deal not with **class exploitation**, in the scientific sense of the word, but with **social parasitism**, although on a very large scale." (*ibid*)

### Bonapartism

The Soviet Union then, remained a 'dictatorship of the proletariat', a workers' state, **because of the nature of property relations.** The bureaucracy was not a new ruling class, but like a parasitic tumour (cancer): "it could grow to tremendous size and even strangle the living organism, but a tumour can never become an independent organism." (*ibid*)

The bureaucracy used the state machine parasitically to consume a vast share of the wealth produced by the working class on the basis of proletarian property relations: nationalisation and planning.

Drawing on the legacy of Marxism, Trotsky characterised the rule of the bureaucracy as a form of **Bonapartism**.

Marx and Engels had analysed the phenomenon of Bonapartism in the rise of capitalist society: in particular, the rule of Napoleon Bonaparte (1799-1815) and Louis Napoleon (1851-1870) in France. They had explained the Bonapartist character of Bismarck's rule in Germany (1860-1890).

Trotsky had also used the concept of Bonapartism to analyse transitional bourgeois governments which arose in the struggle between workers' revolution and the counter-revolution - in Russia in 1917, and in countries in Western Europe in the 1930s. On the basis of the different property relations (proletarian rather than bourgeois) he applied the same concept to the Soviet Union.

The state, in general, is an instrument of class rule. Bonapartism is

a form of rule by the dictatorship of a person, or a clique, exercised through the armed forces and bureaucracy of the state machine, in which the state apparently arises **above** the main contending classes, balancing between them, though in the last instance defending the existing property relations.

"If you stick two forks into a cork symmetrically, it will, under very great oscillations from side to side, keep its balance even on a pin-point: that is the mechanical model of the Bonapartist super-arbiter", was how Trotsky once put it. (*History of the Russian Revolution*)

The possibility of such Bonapartist government is inherent in the nature of the state. As Engels explained, the state originated in conditions where society had:

> "split into irreconcilable antagonisms which it is powerless to dispel. But in order that these antagonisms, these classes with conflicting economic interests might not consume themselves and society in fruitless struggle, it became necessary to have a power, **seemingly standing above society**, that would alleviate the conflict and keep it within the bounds of 'order'; and this power, arisen out of society but placing itself above it, and alienating itself more and more from it, is the state." (*Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State*)

Under "normal" conditions, the ruling class has all manner of means for exercising its control over the standing army, bureaucracy and institutions of coercion of all kinds which constitute the machinery of state. But, in conditions of social crisis, the very fact that these institutions are special, self-organised bodies - on the basis of a hierarchy of command and obedience - gives them an autonomy of manoeuvre.

This is particularly the case in capitalism, where there is far greater separation than in any previous society between economic power (private ownership of the means of production) and political-military power (the state machine).

The rule of Napoleon I in France was the culmination of a **political** counter-revolution against the popular masses who had been the driving force of the French bourgeois revolution. As Trotsky summed it up:

> "The deepening but still very immature antagonism between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat kept the nation, shaken as it was to its foundations, in a state of extreme tension. A national 'judge' was in these conditions indispensable. Napoleon guaranteed to the big bourgeoisie the possibility to get rich, to the peasants their pieces of land, to the sons of peasants and the hoboes a chance for looting in the wars. The judge held a sword in his hand and himself also fulfilled the duties of bailiff [steward for the property-owners]." (*History of the Russian Revolution*)

Napoleon I ruled by the sword. He balanced between opposing classes in society. But he defended the new bourgeois property relations, and continued clearing away the remaining feudal obstacles. This was classic Bonapartism, when capitalism was on the ascendancy.

In 1851 Louis Napoleon (III) came to power in France in conditions where the working class had been developing for half a century, where it had shown its own independent social power in attempting insurrection in 1848, but where it was not yet strong or conscious enough of its own tasks to seize power. The bourgeoisie, on the other hand, was divided, terrified of the proletariat, and in crisis. Copying the first Napoleon under these different conditions, Napoleon III took power, balanced between the bourgeoisie and the working class, and rested principally on the "intermediate" social layer of the peasantry. A relative industrial and commercial "boom" in France stretched out Louis Napoleon's rule until he was overthrown in 1870.

In the midst of the Russian revolution of 1917 the Kerensky government claimed for itself unlimited dictatorial powers. With the Tsar overthrown, it was trying to rise as a Bonapartist force of "order" between the weakened landlords and capitalists and the rising revolutionary working class and peasant masses. But the social conditions were different from those in which Bonapartism had arisen in the nineteenth century. Capitalism was no longer a rising force worldwide: it was ripe for overthrow, and it was **blocking** the development of Russia.

Kerensky and other aspirant Bonapartists "were confronted by a great revolution which had not yet solved its problems or exhausted its force", wrote Trotsky. "There was no equilibrium. The revolution was full-blooded. No wonder Bonapartism proved anaemic." (*ibid*)

In the crisis in Western Europe in the 1920s and 1930s, similarly "anaemic", transitional, Bonapartist regimes arose, trying to balance between the forces of revolution and those of counter-revolution. Thus in Germany the Bruening government [see Chapter 2] was Bonapartist, balancing between the forces of Fascism, and those of the working class (still mainly trapped under the leadership of Social-Democratic reformism). In contrast to Russia in 1917, this Bonapartist rule was displaced by open fascist counter-revolution - as the result of the disastrous policies of the Stalinised German Communist Party.

Bourgeois Bonapartist rule takes many forms, involving different combinations of its component elements, under differing relations between the classes. Bonapartism in late capitalism differs from Bonapartism when capitalism was rising. But with the delay of the world socialist revolution, Bonapartism in one form or another has become a widespread feature of bourgeois governments, especially in the "Third World".

Imperialism dominates the capitalist countries of the "Third World", for the most part condemning the mass of the people to poverty. Their weak "national" bourgeoisies are incapable of leading serious struggle against imperialism or landlordism, uniting the nation, or developing the economy. The working class is held back by reformist and Stalinist leadership and the weakness of Marxism. The political consequence is Bonapartist rule - military dictatorships, "one-party states", weak semi-Bonapartist parliamentary regimes, and shifts from one to the other - balancing between the opposing classes.

### Proletarian Bonapartism

It was the same Bonapartist features, of a government "rising above society", ruling by the sword, balancing between the classes (nationally and internationally), but preserving the existing property relations, which existed in the Soviet regime - and led Trotsky to characterise this peculiar **form** of the dictatorship of the proletariat as **proletarian Bonapartism**.

The conditions of relative scarcity in Soviet society, he pointed out, perpetuated all manner of conflicts of interest - of "social contradictions". These existed "between the city and the village; between the proletariat and the peasantry;... between the national republics and districts; between the different groups of peasantry; between the different layers of the working class; between the different groups of consumers; and finally, between the Soviet state as a whole and its capitalist environment."

"Raising itself above the toiling masses, the bureaucracy regulates these contradictions" - that is to say, it kept them "under control" - by favouring now one interest group, now another, balancing between them. "It uses this function [of regulation]", continued Trotsky, "in order to strengthen its own domination. By its uncontrolled and self-willed rule, subject to no appeal, the bureaucracy accumulates new contradictions. Exploiting the latter, it creates the regime of bureaucratic absolutism."

Thus, he concluded: "The **social** domination of a class (its dictatorship) may find extremely diverse political forms... The experience of the Soviet Union is already adequate for the extension of this very same sociological law - **with all the necessary changes** - to the dictatorship of the proletariat as well.

"In the interim between the conquest of power and the dissolution of the workers' state within the socialist society, the forms and methods of proletarian rule may change sharply, depending upon the course of the class struggle, internally and externally.

The regime under Stalin was fundamentally different from the regime in the first years of the workers' state, although the underlying property relations were the same. "The substitution of one regime by another did not occur at a single stroke, but through a series of measures, by means of a number of minor civil wars waged by the bureaucracy against the proletarian vanguard.

> "In the last historical analysis, the Soviet democracy was blown up by the pressure of social contradictions. Exploiting the latter, the bureaucracy wrested the power from the hands of mass organisations. In this sense we may speak about the dictatorship of the bureaucracy and even about the personal dictatorship of Stalin. But this usurpation was made possible and can maintain itself only because **the social content of the dictatorship of the bureaucracy is determined by those productive forces which were created by the proletarian revolution.**
>
> "In this sense we may say with complete justification that the dictatorship of the proletariat found its distorted but indubitable expression in the dictatorship of the bureaucracy." ("*The Workers' State, Thermidor, and Bonapartism*", 1935. Emphasis in original)

But this regime had its own unique features. Trotsky added to his characterisation of the bureaucracy in The Revolution Betrayed. He emphasised that the bureaucracy had achieved a greater degree of independence from the class which it dominated than in any previous form of Bonapartist rule.

"In bourgeois society, the bureaucracy represents the interests of a possessing and educated class, [i.e. the capitalist class] which has at its disposal innumerable means of everyday control over its administration of affairs. The Soviet bureaucracy has risen above a class [i.e. the working class] which is hardly emerging from destitution and darkness, and has no tradition of dominion or command."

Fascism was one extreme variant of Bonapartist dictatorship, based on the middle class, 'distancing' itself from the capitalists, and crushing and atomising the working class. Nevertheless "the fascists, when they find themselves in power, are united with the big bourgeoisie by bonds of common interest, friendship, marriage, etc.." But the Soviet bureaucracy took on "bourgeois customs without having beside it a national bourgeoisie."

"In this sense we cannot deny it is something more than a bureaucracy", Trotsky pointed out. "It is in the full sense of the word the sole privileged and commanding stratum in the Soviet society.

There was a further, no less important, difference from previous forms of Bonapartism, rooted in the fact that the principal means of production were now in the hands of the state. This, Trotsky explained, created "a new and hitherto unknown relation between the bureaucracy and the riches of the nation. The means of production belong to the state. But the state, so to speak, 'belongs' to the bureaucracy."

In both these respects, the bureaucracy in the Soviet Union had become more powerful as against the class whose property relations it defended, than in any system of bourgeois Bonapartism or fascism.

For Trotsky, the Soviet Union was a regime **in transition** from capitalism to socialism or, more precisely, "a **preparatory** regime **transitional** from capitalism to socialism." (*The Revolution Betrayed*)

It was only preparatory because the productive forces - despite their rapid growth - were still far behind those of the most advanced capitalist countries and "far from adequate to give the state property a socialist character." Backwardness, and scarcity, created "a tendency towards primitive accumulation" - towards "grabbing what you can" - which disrupted the development of planned economy. The bourgeois norms still necessarily present in regard to distribution promoted the development of new inequalities, above all, the rise of the bureaucracy. Economic growth, while it provided benefits for the mass of workers and peasants, also promoted the growth of the privileged bureaucratic layers.

The bureaucracy, furthermore, had "converted itself into an uncontrolled caste alien to socialism" - although "the social revolution, betrayed by the ruling party, still exists in property relations and in the consciousness of the toiling masses".

The "further development of the accumulating contradictions", Trotsky concluded, "can as well lead to socialism as back to capitalism. However, "on the road to capitalism the counter-revolution would have to break the resistance of the workers" while "on the road to socialism the workers would have to overthrow the bureaucracy."

In the last analysis, the question of which direction would be taken by the Soviet Union would be decided "by a struggle of living social forces, both on the national and the world arena." (*The Revolution Betrayed*)

Since that time, because of nationalised and planned production, the Soviet Union has risen to become an economic giant - though, under the rule of the bureaucracy, at tremendous and unnecessary cost of human lives. For reasons explained in the next chapter, the Stalinist system - proletarian Bonapartism - has spread from the Soviet Union itself to other countries of the world.

Yet, in all these countries, in one form or another, the essential contradictions identified by Trotsky exist, and in intensified form. The economic stagnation, even decline, and the acute social crisis now unfolding in the Soviet Union is the starkest expression of this.

Proletarian Bonapartism, like bourgeois Bonapartism, is a regime of crisis. In the case of the Stalinist regimes, the crisis - for both internal and international reasons - has been protracted. But now the system of Stalinism is headed for collapse.

The alternatives again posed are the restoration of capitalism - or a political revolution by the working class, overthrowing the bureaucracy, restoring workers' democracy, and opening the road again to world socialist revolution.

# The Crisis of the Stalinist States

*(Chapter 4 of South Africa's Impending Socialist Revolution)*

inqaba YA BASEBENZI
MARXIST WORKERS TENDENCY

## by Marxist Workers Tendency, 1982

Despite the subsequent degeneration of the Russian revolution, its effects continue to reverberate around the world. By overturning the barriers of capitalism in an area covering one-sixth of the earth, the revolution allowed a backward country to rise in the space of two generations to what is now the second greatest industrial power.

In the fifty years from 1913 (which was the high point of the pre-revolutionary economy in Russia) total industrial output increased more than 52 times, compared with 6 times in the USA and twice in Britain. This was despite the terrible destruction wrought, and tens of millions of lives lost by the people of the Soviet Union in this period, as a result of imperialist invasions, civil war and famine.

In the same fifty years, industrial productivity in the USSR increased by 1 310%—as compared with a 332% increase in the capitalist USA, and a 73% increase in capitalist Britain.

The fastest rate of growth of the productive forces in the USSR took place in the decade before the Second World War, when industrial production grew at an annual average of 20%. Despite the devastation of the Soviet Union in the War, state ownership and economic planning allowed a rapid recovery. Industrial growth averaged 10% in the 1950s, and 8,5% in the 1960s.

Output of electricity increased from 91 billion Kwh to 740 billion Kwh between 1950 and 1970. Oil production increased from 38 million tons to 353 million tons. Similar dramatic increases were achieved in all the industrial sectors.

In the case of steel, which is the single most important indicator of the industrial base of an economy, production was only 4,3 million tons in 1928 (the start of the first five-year plan). By 1970 it had reached 116 million tons. (Today it is 150 million tons—more than the United States, and more than the whole of the EEC.) Also the production of consumer goods multiplied. The output of knitwear rose from 197 million units in 1950 to 1 134 million units in 1970, and the production of domestic refrigerators from 1 500 to 4 100 000.

In 1950, the average annual consumption of meat per head of population in the USSR was 26 kg; by 1970 it was 48 kg. Milk consumption rose from 172 kg to 307 kg; eggs from 60 to 158; fish from 7 kg to 15 kg; sugar from 12 kg to 39 kg.

For the people of the Soviet Union, the strength of the planned economy meant (by the mid-1970s) 25 doctors and 112 hospital beds for every ten thousand people; rents at an average of 4,5% of total family expenditure; 20 weeks' paid maternity leave; retirement at 60 for men and 55 for women. In transport, housing and heating, tremendous advances have taken place.

By the end of the post-war upswing of capitalism in the West, the Soviet Union was spending twice as much on social welfare per head of population as the British 'welfare state', and five times as much on education, science and culture.

From the Marxist point of view, these facts are the historical justification of the Russian Revolution, and provide overwhelming proof of the superiority of planned economy over capitalist anarchy. They were achieved **despite** the Stalinist degeneration of the revolution and the horrible bureaucratic deformity of the workers' state.

The overthrow of capitalism in Eastern Europe after the Second World War led to similar leaps forward by economies that were in most cases relatively backward.

At the end of the War, the Stalinist dictatorship in Russia robbed the equivalent of R80 billion in money, goods and industrial plant from East Germany, annexed Rumanian and Polish territory and plundered the whole of Eastern Europe by imposing distorted terms of trade on the 'fraternal socialist countries'. Yet the superiority of state ownership and planning meant that these economies were able to grow at over 9,5% per year in the 1950s, and over 6,5% per year between 1960 and 1973—much faster than any of the major capitalist countries with the exception of Japan.

### Progress

Impressive though these achievements may be, they nevertheless fall far short of the progress which would have been possible had the bourgeoisie been overthrown in the advanced capitalist countries and the socialist revolution carried through internationally.

With regimes of workers' democracy, and the integration of the productive forces and economic planning world-wide, all the problems of poverty, oppression and war would already have been eliminated from the face of the earth. Contrasted with workers' democracy and socialism, the national bureaucratic dictatorships of Russia, Eastern Europe and the other deformed workers' states have always been a reactionary shackle on the development of society.

Nonetheless, given the delay of the social revolution in the industrialised countries of the West, the Stalinist bureaucracies have played a **relatively progressive** role in comparison with capitalism. They have (at least in the past) been able to develop the productive forces at a far higher rate than the bourgeoisie, even though, as Trotsky explained, at three times the cost. **The development of the productive forces is the mainspring of human progress.**

Considered historically, the Stalinist bureaucracies have played the role in relatively backward countries of organising the development of industry in an epoch when the capitalist class could no longer do so. Thus, in this sense, Stalinism has played the role previously performed by capitalism in other countries in its own progressive stage.

### Delay

The whole existence of Stalinism has depended on the delay of the world revolution—on the ripeness of the world for socialism combined with the defeats of the proletariat and its failure to take command of the productive forces internationally and reorganise society on the basis of its own democratic rule.

The totalitarian regimes of Stalinism do not represent a new historical stage in the development of humanity, but a deformity and distortion in the course of the transition of society from capitalism to socialism.

The process of history can be very slow, and very convoluted, but it is also very thorough. The almost 70-year existence of the

bureaucratic regime in Russia, and subsequently in the other workers' states, is really only the blinking of an eye in the span of history.

The transition from feudalism to capitalism extended over centuries and produced a wide variety of regimes. Over a long period the bourgeoisie, owning the most advanced means of production, became the dominant economic class and ruled the economic system—without having yet attained direct command of the state. In France, for example, capitalist predominance over production was established well before the French Revolution which led to the establishment of their political rule.

In contrast, the transition from capitalism to socialism requires the conscious control of the producers over every aspect of production, society and the state. Workers' democracy is absolutely necessary in order to carry through **socialist** transformation.

The bureaucratic castes which have usurped power from the working class, in a series of relatively undeveloped countries in peculiar historical circumstances (see Chapters 2 and 5 of *South Africa's Impending Socialist Revolution*), are no more than a temporary aberration. **The progress of the world revolution, the rise to power of the working class in the industrialised countries of capitalism, would remove the entire basis on which Stalinism has existed, with the result that these regimes would be swept away.**

At the same time, even while the socialist revolution in the West has been delayed, the development of industry in the deformed workers' states of the East has itself laid the basis for the replacement of the bureaucracies by regimes of workers' democracy.

The very successes of the planned economy in the USSR, Eastern Europe and elsewhere have provided, for an extended period, a basis of stability for Stalinist rule. In the process the bureaucracies have hardened as a privileged aristocratic caste, now largely hereditary, and growing ever more apart in life and outlook from the mass of working people on whose backs they sit.

Precisely as the productive forces have developed, so the possibility has grown of more and more exaggerated privileges, disparities of income, and all the associated trappings of status, power and prestige. And the more the state-owned and planned economies progressed, the more their bureaucratic overlords swelled with the delusion that their system would last forever.

In the decades after the Second World War, while the bourgeoisie in the West became supremely confident that it had solved the problems of capitalism and could look forward indefinitely to a rosy future, the Stalinist bureaucracies of the East drew similar conclusions for themselves on an opposite economic foundation.

But in the West, capitalism was preparing its gravedigger in the form of the renewed strength of the working class; and in the East likewise the planned economies have prepared the social forces and conditions for the overthrow of Stalinism.

(In this chapter we are dealing with the situation in Russia and Eastern Europe. We shall refer in the next chapter to the essentially similar processes affecting the Chinese Stalinist regime.)

In Russia at the time of the Revolution, the working class was less than 15% of the population. In the Soviet Union today there are 135 million workers in a population of about 260 million. Taking also the workers' families into account, all but a small percentage of the entire population are working class.

Also in Eastern Europe, in what were formerly mainly peasant countries, the working class is now the absolutely overwhelming social force. Together with the economic contradictions of bureaucratic rule, this prepares the way for the political revolution against Stalinism.

## Basis of the political revolution

The tasks which confront the peoples of the deformed workers' states are to replace bureaucratic dictatorships with regimes of workers' democracy, which will mean democratic transformation in every aspect of society and will clear away the barriers in these countries to transition to socialism.

The overthrow of the bureaucracies will mean a **political revolution** and not a **social revolution** because in contrast with the West, the fundamental social task of the revolution has already been carried through. This is the abolition of private ownership of the means of production and the replacement of capitalism by a system of state ownership and economic planning.

The basis of the political revolution is prepared not only by the rise of the working class, but also in the increasing change of bureaucratic rule from being a **relatively progressive** factor in the development of the productive forces, to an **absolutely reactionary** fetter.

The beginnings of this change have been evident for some decades, and it was already anticipated in the analysis made by Trotsky fifty years ago. But in the course of the 1970s this change has become so blatantly obvious that the bureaucracies themselves are now affected with uncertainty, anxiety and dread for the future.

Nobody, not even the 'all-powerful' regimes of Stalinism, can escape the dialectic of history. As things develop, they change, and turn into their opposites. It was possible for the bureaucracy to play a relatively progressive role in developing industry when it was still mainly a question of laying down the basic infrastructure of a modern economy in underdeveloped countries. But the methods of *diktat* and bureaucratic command are incapable of effectively managing a sophisticated industrial economy, and of ensuring the harmonious further development of the productive forces.

There is a very delicate balance in a modern economy between industries making the means of production, and consumer industries. The relationships of interdependence between the various enterprises are extremely complex because of the extent of the division of labour and specialisation.

Under capitalism, despite its contradictions, the market has played the role of an automatic check on quality, on productivity, on maintaining the linkages within the productive system, and on relating the economy to the needs of society.

While state ownership and planning frees the economy from the anarchic forces at work under capitalism, and from periodic slumps and booms, it increasingly requires the direct participation of the bulk of working people in planning, managing and controlling production. **Workers' democracy is as essential to the development of the planned economy as oxygen to the human body.**

### Plan

In an economy freed from market relations, the plan has to determine what goods and services shall be produced and by whom, and allocate the means necessary to produce them.

Centralised planning has to cover incomes, prices, investment, costs, quality, technical progress, the allocation of the surplus and much else besides, and co-ordinate the efforts of tens of thousands of production units, in respect of vast numbers of products. The number of products in the Soviet economy today runs to 12 million!

Without workers' democracy—without the constant involvement, initiative, check and corrective of the producers in every level of the system—all these functions are carried out by bureaucratic edict. The various layers of the bureaucracy may involve millions of officials and functionaries, but everything centres on a top hierarchy in Moscow, Prague, Warsaw, Sophia, Bucharest, Belgrade, etc.

Even with computers, it is impossible for the bureaucracy to manage the economy so as to release the maximum possibilities inherent in the level of the productive forces at each stage in the

development of industry. In fact, the more sophisticated the level of development, the more the system seizes up.

Plans are incomplete, contradictory and late. Bureaucracy stifles initiative and innovations by the workers, and thereby hamstrings the advance of the productive forces themselves. A dead hand rests on science, education and culture.

### Frustration

Within the bureaucracy, each layer of minions aims to please the higher bureaucrats, so as to ensure privilege and promotion. At the same time, everyone is looking over his or her shoulder for the secret police. The system breeds boot-licking mediocrities. There is an enormous inertia of officialdom leading to frustration at all levels.

Above all, as Trotsky warned, it is in the realm of quality that the system breaks down. Without democratic control, production is adjusted merely to the quantities laid down in plan-instructions, while the needs of the people for goods of quality are neglected.

Because quality is difficult to define, it is impossible to achieve by methods of command. Within the lower levels of the bureaucracy, complex devices of falsifying figures, cheating, cutting corners, etc., have been evolved.

Thus, inevitably, monumental waste plagues the system. In the Soviet Union, the regime has itself revealed that up to one half of goods produced in the factories have to be rejected as unfit for use. This in turn means severe dislocations throughout the economy—machinery left rusting and unusable for want of parts, delays in the completion of investment projects, shortages of consumer goods, and so forth.

Despite spending proportionately much more than do most of the capitalist countries on research and development, the pace of innovation in industry in the Stalinist states has been sluggish. Again this is because of bureaucracy. While the USA and West Germany have been putting more than 50% of their inventions into practice within roughly a year, Russia takes more than three years to get that far.

Inventions often require the signatures of 36 different ministries before they can be implemented! Thus, in a survey of machine-tool factories, it emerged that four-fifths of all decisions to replace equipment were taken because the machine was physically worn out, and only one-seventh because it was obsolete. Out of total investment, twice as much is spent on replacing and repairing equipment than is the case in the USA. As a result, repair bills are enormous, occupying one-tenth of the entire industrial work-force.

Agriculture in the Soviet Union has never really recovered from the forced collectivisation under Stalin. At that time the peasants actively resisted and sabotaged production, because of the monstrous way collectivisation was imposed. Today, seeing little advantage for themselves in the advancement of agriculture, seeing the bureaucrats lording it over everything and fattening themselves on the backs of society, the peasants and agricultural workers continue a passive resistance to the commands of the regime.

The rate of growth of agriculture has lagged persistently behind industry. In the 1950s it was under 5% per year; in the 1960s only 3%; and in the last four years it has averaged 2%.

### Productivity

Much of the growth of agriculture in the past has come from extending the area under cultivation, rather than raising the productivity of existing farms. In the 1950s agricultural productivity rose only 2% annually; in the 1960s only 1%; and in the 1970s productivity actually fell. This is despite high levels of investment in agriculture. Now, moreover, the possibility for extending agriculture is reaching its limits.

Because of relatively higher wages, and better conditions in the cities, there has been a big migration of youth from the land. It is now mainly old people who are left on the farms, and many state farms are entirely without mechanics and have very few male workers. Students and factory workers have had to be drafted to bring in the harvests.

The real crisis of agriculture is shown in the fact that, while private plots cover only 3% of total farmed area, they produced in 1976-79 just over 25% of agricultural output. This induced the turn by the bureaucracy last year to a policy of encouraging private farmers' plots, the keeping of a cow, chickens, etc, as a means of attempting to relieve shortages.

But for the bureaucracy there is no escape from the absurdities and imbalances produced by Stalinist methods. For instance (as Soviet officials have admitted), waste, inadequate storage provisions, and poor packaging and distribution mean that at least 50% of all fruit and vegetables grown get spoiled by the time they reach the shops.

At the same time, the lag of productivity in agriculture has necessitated enormous subsidies in order to keep food prices from rising steeply. Thus, today, it is actually cheaper for farmers to buy bread and feed it to their pigs, rather than feed them grain! *Pravda* has recently announced stiff penalties for peasants who do this.

The crisis of agriculture under Stalinism is an important ingredient in the developing crisis of the whole system, because of the role of agriculture in determining the standard of living of the population.

The last three years of disastrous harvests in the USSR have produced serious shortages of fodder, and made it exceptionally difficult to increase meat production. Indeed, in 1980 there was a 3% drop in meat production, with possibly a 5% drop in meat supplies to the cities. Rationing has been imposed in some cities, while queueing for food and other consumer goods has become endemic.

Over the past 15 years, individuals' deposits in savings banks have increased more than eight times over, mainly because of the shortage of consumer goods on which to spend the money. Those city-dwellers who can afford it carry a month or two's salary with them at all times, to snap up scarce items in bulk as they appear the shops.

The 'parallel market' (what used to be called black market) has not disappeared over time but, on the contrary, is flourishing. It now covers not only consumer goods, but even steel, coal and other materials! Increasingly, goods are obtained and even allocated to factories by means of the bribery and corruption of officials.

Bureaucracy breeds corruption, and this is a permanent feature of the Stalinist system. Of course, the most senior bureaucrats rail publicly against corruption, just as they condemn mismanagement, waste, inefficiency, red tape—in fact 'bureaucracy' itself. In like manner might the devil preach against sin!

Action is taken from time to time when these abominations reach such proportions that the rule of the bureaucracy itself might be jeopardised if they were allowed to continue unchecked. Also, allegations of corruption against senior officials tend to surface when struggles are taking place behind the scenes within the bureaucracy.

Just a few recent examples should be enough to show the extent and scale of corruption (although volumes of cases can be compiled from the official press itself, going back decades).

In the 'Caviar scandal' of 1980, more than 200 officials of the Ministry of Fisheries (including top Secretariat members) were arrested in connection with a multi-million rouble swindle which had apparently gone on for ten years. By arrangement with a Western firm, they sold caviar under the label of herring and deposited their share of the rake-off in secret Swiss bank accounts.

### Embezzled

In June 1981, the deputy minister for the petro-chemical industry in the Soviet Republic of Azerbaijan was placed on trial for

corruption, with four other officials. Over four years he had embezzled 4 million roubles with the help of senior management in one of the factories under his control. The funds were spent on a luxurious administration building instead of on laboratories, and on buying cars, apartments and holiday homes for themselves. **But how was this not detected for four years?!**

As we go to press, there is news of the arrest of Kolevatov—the most senior official in charge of Russian circuses. For years, it is alleged, he had extorted from circus performers a bribe in return for giving them permission to go on overseas tours. When his home was raided he was found with diamonds worth more than a million roubles.

Simultaneously there are reports in the Russian press of a scandal at the visa office, where bribes have been demanded for permission to Soviet citizens to travel abroad.

These instances merely lift a corner of the lid on the sewer of corruption and pilfering in the Stalinist system. In one way or another every layer of society is affected. As a result, to protect the publicly-owned economy from personal plunder, over two million guards and watchmen have to be employed in the USSR – 30 times the corresponding figure for capitalist Britain, which has only a quarter of the Soviet population.

### Replaced

In 1974 the Soviet Minister of Culture, Mrs Furtseva, was exposed and dismissed for embezzling the equivalent of R100 000. She replaced the misappropriated funds—but where, in a supposedly 'socialist' country could she possibly lay her hands on such big sums, completely out of the reach of ordinary workers? **The question answers itself in showing the real privileges, incomes and opulent standards of the top bureaucracy of managers, generals and politicians.**

In the Soviet Union, many Communist Party officials earn five times the wage of the average worker—and Marshalls of the armed forces more than 20 times as much. To this must be added all the perks and privileges which go with power. Special luxury shops, special holiday facilities and rest homes, special medical services, special suburbs, luxury flats, country villas, cars with chauffeurs, and special schools are reserved for an elite of approximately 250 000 top party and state officials and their families.

Bureaucratic segregation from the mass of the working people even extends to having specially reserved lanes of the streets for their limousines to drive down, so that their highnesses are not delayed by irritating traffic jams.

Brezhnev, for example, is well known to have a fleet of private limousines. Even Kissinger, the representative of American capitalism, was staggered when he visited Russia by the lavish opulence and luxury enjoyed by members of the Communist Party Politburo—on a scale which only multi-millionaires in the USA can afford.

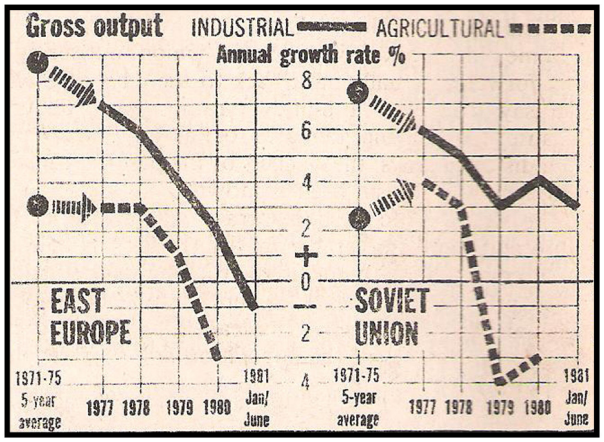
The Stalinist bureaucracy has nothing in common with the Bolshevik regime led by Lenin and Trotsky, except the economic foundation resulting from the overthrow of capitalism. In the early years of the revolution, when privileged salaries four times the wage of ordinary workers had to be paid to technicians and specialists because of the terrible shortage of skills, Lenin frankly described this as a "capitalist differential".

But Bolsheviks did not profit from these conditions. When, for instance, in 1918, the business manager of the Council of People's Commissars tried to raise Lenin's salary on grounds of his tremendous workload, Lenin denounced it as "illegal" and wrote the man a severe reprimand. Krupskaya (Lenin's widow) wrote in her memoirs that he got very angry when any attempts were made to create favoured living conditions for him. "I remember how angry he was over a pail of *khalva* which Malkov, then commander of the Kremlin, once brought him."

Stalinism is separated from Leninism by a chasm of history—of bloodshed, degeneration and corruption. Now history has prepared its downfall.

The very development of the economy which the bureaucracies believed would consolidate their rule, on the contrary undermines it completely. More and more, bureaucratic planning and command is stifling the advance of production, not only in the USSR but throughout Eastern Europe as well.

The rate of growth in the COMECON countries averaged 10% in the 1950s, 7% in the 1960s and only 5% in the 1970s. This slow-down reflected the gradual clogging up of the productive system and its increasing suffocation under the deadweight of bureaucracy. By the end of the 1970s the Stalinist oases of Eastern Europe and Russia were in the grip of a severe economic crisis which the following graph plainly illustrates:




From being relatively progressive in their development of the productive forces, the bureaucracies have become **absolutely reactionary**. There is no way out of the impasse facing the peoples of these countries except the political revolution and the establishment of workers' democracy, which alone can lead to socialism.

## Economic, social and political contradictions

The claims of the Stalinists that Russia has achieved "mature socialism" and that the present generation would "live in communism" have boomeranged, and now stand as an unanswerable indictment of the bureaucracy in the eyes of the masses.

There is an enormous cynicism among ordinary people towards the lies and postures of the bureaucracy. This is reflected in the jokes which circulate among the workers.

Ingrained scepticism towards the official propaganda of the radio, television and press such as *Pravda* ("Truth") and *Izvestia* ("News") has given rise to the popular saying that "there is no *Izvestia* in *Pravda*, and no *Pravda* in *Izvestia*."

In the food queues there is a standing joke about the difference between 'socialism' and 'communism': "Under socialism you cannot get any meat. Under communism you know you don't need meat."

Living standards of the population continued to rise up to about the mid-1970s, which provided a means of reinforcement of the Stalinist regimes. But now, with few exceptions, living standards are stagnating. Economic plans have to be revised downwards, and there is no possibility of returning to the rates of growth of the past.

In fact, the economies of the deformed workers' states are now growing at a rate only slightly faster than capitalism, and can even be exceeded by some of the capitalist countries during temporary periods of boom. Thus, while we are in the epoch of the social revolution in the West, we are also in the epoch of the political revolution in the East.

Some older workers in the Soviet Union, not seeing a way forward, actually hark back to the days of Stalin and say that even a bloody tyranny was "better" because at least living standards rose at that time. But in such distorted ways, the ripeness of the political revolution against Stalinism itself is shown.

The stranglehold of bureaucracy will be felt to be more and more intolerable by the working people of these countries, with the result that hardships, shortages, price rises, crimes of corruption, police provocations and brutalities, etc., can lead at any time to explosive movements of the population and set a revolution in motion.

### Unresolved

The unresolved national question in the Soviet Union and throughout Eastern Europe inflames the situation even further and can precipitate mass upheavals.

In many of the Soviet Republics over the years there have been repeated local outbursts of rebellion against the domination of the Russian bureaucracy, struggles for equality, language rights, etc. Quickly crushed by military and police action, these events are usually only reported much later as news of them creeps past the official censorship.

Better known is the seething resentment of the peoples of most of the countries of Eastern Europe against what they feel as domination by the Soviet Union. Within many of these countries too—as in the Kosovo province of Yugoslavia—national divisions and antagonisms fester.

Because each bureaucracy defends and strengthens the existing national state as the basis of its self-interest, power and privileges, it is incapable of solving the national question. Only on the basis of workers' democracy can the free cooperation of the peoples be ensured and national divisions overcome.

For decades now, in attempts to overcome the suffocating effects of their own system, the bureaucracies have passed through a series of zig-zags in their methods of economic planning and control. Without in any way altering the character of their regime, they have attempted moves towards greater centralisation; then swung over to policies of decentralisation. As each has failed in turn, and seized up in its own contradictions, there has been a renewed swing in the opposite direction—to re-centralisation, then to re-decentralisation, and so on.

The bureaucracies have also come up against the limits of the national boundaries of their economies, and in the process the reactionary idea of "socialism in one country" has had to be thrown away. Policies of autarky or self-sufficiency are impossible in a world dominated by modern industry and a highly developed international division of labour.

Where cheaper goods, produced on the basis of the most advanced technique, are available on the world market, there is an inescapable pressure on all economies to enter the market in order to obtain the advantages of the international division of labour. Especially in relation to electronics, computers and other technologically advanced equipment, the Stalinist states have been compelled to turn to trade with the West.

At the same time Russia, for example, has been forced to go to the world market to buy grain as a result of repeated bad harvests coming on top of bureaucratic bungling. This year its grain purchases from the West are expected to amount to 42 million tonnes. The situation has now developed where the planting programme of United States agriculture is heavily geared towards exports to the Soviet Union.

In order to buy on the world market, the Stalinist states must also sell on the world market. Total East-West trade has increased six times in the 15 years up to 1980. 30% of East European trade is now with capitalist countries, while Russia's trade with the West has been increasing faster than her trade with Eastern Europe. By 1990, for example, some 30% of West Germany's gas is expected to be supplied by pipeline from Siberia.

All this demonstrates the inseparable inter-relation of the whole modern world economy, as Marxism has always explained.

### Debt

Forced by the crisis of bureaucracy to seek a blood transfusion of technology from the West, the Stalinist states – in particular those of Eastern Europe – also turned to borrowing heavily from Western governments and banks. By 1980 the total COMECON debt to the capitalist countries amounted to $70 billion.

Russia's debt now totals about $11 billion (net), and could well double or even treble by 1985. Hungary owes more than $7 billion; East Germany $12 billion; Rumania $9 billion; and Poland alone more than $27 billion.

The case of Poland dramatically illustrates both the impasse of Stalinism and the complete abandonment by the bureaucracy of even the most basic understandings of Marxism. In 1971 the Polish bureaucracy, faced with severe economic and political problems, embarked on a 'dash for growth' with the aid of Western technology bought with Western loans. These loans were premised on the ability of Poland to export to the West sufficient coal, shoes, textiles and other goods to finance the interest and repayments.

Like the capitalists, the bureaucracy did not have a grain of an idea that the post-war upswing of capitalism would come to an end. They were therefore hit hard by the onset of the capitalist crisis, which has had the result that there is no longer the expected market for Polish exports in the West.

As Polish exports slumped, while payments of foreign debt fell due, the bureaucracy tried to exact greater output from the workers and farmers.

Faced with the worsening crisis of agriculture, the bureaucracy had previously tried to raise food prices—but had repeatedly been forced to back down in the face of determined resistance by the workers. Now the bureaucracy moved again to impose price rises, at a time of chronic food shortages and widespread breakdowns in supplies.

This precipitated the explosion of the Polish revolutionary events from 1980-81.

In turn, of course, the inevitable consequence of the revolutionary turmoil was a further dramatic drop in production and the virtual grinding to a halt of the Polish economy. The Western banks were faced with the choice of either agreeing to postpone ('reschedule') Polish debt repayments, or else suffer a complete default.

95% of the debt which was due in 1981 was in fact rescheduled. Now there is the situation where, to finance the imports which it must have to get industry working again, Poland needs another $12-15 billion in loans by 1985. The Western banks now want guarantees from their own governments before advancing more.

Not only Poland but also Rumania cannot meet its debts and requires rescheduling.

### Inflation

Running through the economies of the deformed workers' states today is the infection of inflation. This has mainly been imported from the capitalist economies as a result of East-West trade.

For example, the prices of imports to Hungary between 1970 and 1977 increased by 165%. By 1979-80 inflation in Hungary was running at 12%, while wages rose only 3%.

In Poland the rate of inflation was between 11% and 9% a year between 1978 and 1980. Now it will be vastly higher because, under martial law, the regime has been able to impose price rises of as much as 400% on consumer goods.

Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Rumania, East Germany and the USSR itself have all announced price rises from 1979 onwards.

Yugoslavia has had a 50% rate of inflation, and on top of that the bureaucracy raised food prices massively in August 1981.

Inflation is a serious disease for a planned economy, disrupting the complex inter-relations of the productive system. In the case of the Stalinist states, it adds to the severe dislocations and imbalances inherent in bureaucratic rule.

Participation on the world market is absolutely necessary and unavoidable, as Trotsky pointed out. But it merely heightens the contradictions of Stalinism and raises all the more clearly the need for the carrying through of the social revolution in the West and the political revolution in the East.

## Hungarian Revolution of 1956

The first big outbreaks of the political revolution against Stalinism occurred in Eastern Europe in the 1950s—most notably in Hungary in 1956.

It is a monstrous falsehood to allege that the Hungarian revolution was an attempt at capitalist counter-revolution. This, of course, is the way the Hungarian working class was slandered by the Stalinist regime and by Communist Party leaders and their hangers-on internationally. It is also the myth put about for their own purpose by the imperialists, who have always sought every opportunity to pretend that freedom equals capitalism.

In fact the movement in Hungary proceeded immediately to lay the foundations for a healthy, democratic workers' state. With virtually the whole working population of Hungary in action, the bureaucracy lost control of the military-police apparatus of repression, and its complete lack of support in society was exposed.

With two general strikes—hardly the weapon of 'capitalist counter-revolution'—and two insurrections, the bureaucracy was overthrown in Hungary.

Workers' councils sprang up, linking up regionally and beginning to take the affairs of society into their hands. Weighing up and testing in the initial confusion the different possibilities that were available to them, the workers rapidly turned to the task of establishing democracy on the basis of the planned economy.

Instinctively they advanced essentially the same programme for workers' democracy that Lenin had outlined. In the first years of the Russian Revolution, before the bureaucratic degeneration took hold, the Bolsheviks had insisted on four vital safeguards:

- All power to be vested in Soviets, i.e. councils composed of delegates elected from their workplaces and districts, and subject to immediate recall by those who had elected them. This obliged delegates to report back to mass meetings of their workmates on the issues under discussion, and harnessed the energies of the workers in the tasks of government. The Soviets were the most sensitive instrument yet devised for measuring the changing consciousness and will of the masses and translating it into action.

- All the working people were to bear arms and to be trained in a militia to guard against abuses under a separate standing army, and so defend the gains of the Revolution against attacks from any quarter, internal or external.

- All simple administrative duties were to be rotated among the widest possible number of the working people, to prevent the crystallisation of an entrenched caste of bureaucrats.

- No official of the workers' state was to receive a salary above that of the average skilled worker, plus the necessary expenses to be strictly audited by the workers' organisations. This was to ensure that there was no material incentive for careerism to take root among state officials.

But, by the process of degeneration explained in Chapter 2, all these safeguards were dismantled and eliminated as the Stalinist dictatorship took hold in Russia. In the struggle against Stalinism in the 1920s and 1930s, the International Left Opposition had based itself on Lenin's original programme for workers' democracy—which became the programme for the political revolution against the bureaucracy.

### Demands

In Hungary in 1956, the newly created revolutionary councils immediately hammered out a programme containing similar demands:

For a broad government comprising representatives of the workers' organisations and the youth; for a "national guard composed of workers and young people"; for workers' councils in all the factories "to establish (a) workers' management and (b) a radical transformation of the system of central planning and direction of the economy by the state".

To these were added basic demands for pension and family allowance increases, and wage rises for the lower paid. With the national average wage at about 1 000 forints, the programme demanded "maximum monthly wages to be fixed at 3 500 forints". This was aimed against the bureaucrats and army officers who were earning between 9 000 and 12 000 forints.

Together, these demands formed the essential programme for the political revolution in Hungary—**adopted less than three days after the uprising began.**

Full-scale Russian military invasion was needed to destroy these historic achievements and to smash the movement of the Hungarian workers. In fact, two Russian invasions and the slaughter of as many as 50 000 Hungarians was the only basis on which the grip of the bureaucracy on society could be restored.

The first Russian troops sent to Hungary became infected with the revolutionary mood, and began to respond to the appeals of their Hungarian brothers and sisters. The bureaucracy had to call in what were then backward peasant troops from Siberia and tell them they were being sent to put down a fascist uprising in Berlin!

On several other occasions, most notably in the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, the bureaucracy has resorted to the use of military force against the workers. The developments in Czechoslovakia were different from those in Hungary, in that the process started as an experiment in 'liberalisation' by the Czech bureaucracy. This evoked a response from the population that threatened to go beyond the ability of the bureaucracy to control. But also in Czechoslovakia there was no possibility of the restoration of capitalism

In the whole of Eastern Europe, and the USSR—as also in China and other states where capitalism has been decisively overthrown—there is now no material or social basis for the restitution of the bourgeoisie. The mass of the population take state ownership of the means of production and planned economy as entirely natural, and it would be as absurd to pose the restoration of capitalism there as it would be to pose the return of feudalism in Europe.

The fact that in these countries some reactionary individuals and small groups of intellectuals can be found who favour a return to capitalism (or in Solzhenitsyn's case, even a return to Tsarism!) merely demonstrates the extent to which they have been driven mad by the crimes of the bureaucracy.

In all these countries it is a social impossibility to restore private ownership of industry and of the other main means of production—which is what a return to capitalism would necessitate. This would be obvious to anyone who takes the trouble to think the matter through concretely.[1]

Naturally the Stalinists love to highlight the statements of these 'dissidents', to use them as a smokescreen and justification for the bureaucracy itself. Thus all who oppose the bureaucracy are denounced as "enemies of socialism" intent on restoring capitalism. Nevertheless, the movement of history itself explodes these lies.

## The movement in Poland

Above all it has been the events in Poland over the past two years which have exposed internationally the real character of the bureaucracies and brought out clearly the essential lessons of the political revolution.

There have been repeated movements of the Polish workers against the regime since the 1950s. Although temporary and partial victories were achieved, each time the bureaucracy was able to reconsolidate its position and impose renewed repression on the masses.

But in July-August 1980 there was a renewed mass movement—involving the whole working population in opposition to shortages and price increases, and demanding higher wages and the right to independent trade union organisation. (The official 'trade unions' in the Stalinist states are not trade unions at all but instruments of the bureaucratic apparatus for disciplining and controlling the working class.)

In the Gdansk region, power effectively passed into the hands of a joint council representing 400 factories (in essence, a soviet). Out of this ferment, without the permission of the bureaucracy, Solidarity was set-up and its membership quickly swelled to 10 million. Solidarity spoke for the Polish people against the parasitic caste that oppresses them.

Despite all the crimes of Stalinism committed in the name of 'socialism', there was not the slightest basis of support on the part of the Polish masses for a return to capitalism. This was made clear in all the mass meetings and conferences of Solidarity, where what was demanded was democratic change in the direction of bringing the planned economy and state ownership under workers' control.

Even the bourgeois press in the West had to drop its conventional propaganda and admit that there was no movement against socialism itself. It was only as the movement declined, and all the more so once the Polish workers were silenced by military dictatorship, that the Stalinists dared raise their voices to claim that a capitalist counter-revolution was under way in Poland. Naturally, the bourgeois media are now only too pleased to report this slander as though it were the truth.

It is the fate of a defeated revolution to be vilified by its enemies when it cannot answer back.

### Squandered

The movement in Poland was a political revolution to establish workers' democracy and clear the way for the transition to genuine socialism. But tragically, because of the weakness of the forces of Marxism internationally, the Polish working class was led from the start by a leadership which squandered all the opportunities presented to them, and condemned the workers to defeat.

They did not understand that it is impossible to achieve gradual reform of the Stalinist system, and that Poland could not be half totalitarian and half free. No genuinely independent workers' organisation can long co-exist with the Stalinist bureaucracy. Either the bureaucracy had to be totally eliminated and workers' control established over every aspect of production and society — or else eventual defeat of the movement was inevitable.

This position, explained in *Inqaba ya Basebenzi* in January 1981, was confirmed by events.

The bureaucracy of a deformed workers' state is inherently totalitarian, and incapable of reform in the direction of workers' democracy. The totalitarian nature of these regimes, of course, is made much use of by the bourgeoisie in its propaganda against 'socialism'.

It is indeed a paradox, which needs to be explained, that (at least in many countries) capitalism has been able to tolerate forms of democratic expression, opposition parties, independent trade unions, etc., while similar freedoms are intolerable to Stalinism.

Even in its most liberal form, bourgeois democracy is a distorted and truncated system, tolerating opposition only within limits which do not fundamentally threaten the property and social power of the capitalist class. But the Stalinist bureaucratic castes, in contrast, can maintain their rule only by ruthless police-state methods and the complete suppression of opposition of any kind.

The reason for this is not, as the bureaucracies claim, because of the threatening encirclement by imperialism. The absurd logic of their argument is that 'socialism' cannot be defended against capitalism by the workers of the workers' states—cannot be defended by Lenin's method of revolutionary internationalism, and an appeal to the fraternal aid in common struggle of the workers of the West. On the contrary, 'socialism' has to be defended by the bureaucracy and its secret police **against the Polish, Hungarian, Russian, etc., working classes!**

In fact it is not socialism which is defended by the totalitarian system of Stalinism; but the power, privileges, incomes and prestige of the parasitic bureaucratic caste itself.

Under capitalism, a form of democracy (however limited) is possible because it does not **necessarily** and **directly** challenge the position of the bourgeoisie as the economic ruling class. The entire system is based on private ownership of the means of production, and there is thus a separation between the mechanism of the economy and the state. Those who own and control production do not necessarily and directly control the state.

Of course, the state intrudes into the economic process, and in the last analysis the state apparatus is the means for the maintenance and defence of capitalist property.

As capitalism becomes less and less able to provide for the material needs of the working people—as the workers' struggle threatens more and more to overstep the limits of the bourgeois-democratic system and attack the basis of capitalism itself—the ultimate incompatibility of capitalism and democracy is revealed. The suppression of democratic rights under regimes of outright dictatorship becomes the order of the day if capitalism is not overthrown by the working class.

### Different

But in a society where the system of private ownership of the means of production has been abolished, where **the state** owns and controls land, the factories, mines, the financial system, trade, etc., the situation is intrinsically different. The market relations which follow from private ownership are replaced by centralised planning.

The superiority of workers' democracy to bourgeois democracy is bound up with the fact that the working class, in taking power politically, in establishing its own democratic state, becomes at the same time the master of production. Thus, on the basis of workers' democracy, every aspect of economic, social and political life is harmonised and liberated in a transition to socialism.

But once the workers' state falls into the hands of a bureaucratic caste, which rises in power and privilege above the mass of the people, democracy is necessarily eliminated from every sphere. Unlike the bourgeoisie, the bureaucracy cannot tolerate even limited democratic reform, because such reform of necessity must lead directly to challenge the bureaucracy's economic position—its status, income and privilege.

The bureaucracy depends absolutely on its complete monopoly of state power in order to maintain its very existence. This is because it has no necessary role in production, and is simply a parasite, in a society where, on the basis of state ownership, the working class is able itself to organise, manage and control the economy.

Hence the ruthless totalitarian police-state system of Stalinism. Hence also the falseness of the idea that by 'pressure' these regimes can be induced to usher in democratic changes. Unless the movement of the working class in the deformed workers' states proceeds to the complete overthrow and dismantling of the

bureaucratic apparatus, and its replacement by organs of workers' democracy at every level, it is inevitable that the bureaucracy will again and again inflict defeat on the workers.

### Powerful

In Poland, so powerful was the movement of the working population immediately after August 1980 that the regime found itself suspended in mid air without any point of support in the body of society. As Jaruzelski himself warned the 'hard-liners', it was quite impossible to use the Polish army at that time against the workers, because it would have disintegrated. It was only the secret police which remained loyal to the bureaucracy—and that is an insufficient basis for rule.

Even the Polish Communist Party underwent a profound collapse under the impact of the mass movement. Rakowski, the deputy Prime Minister of Poland (in an interview published in February 1982), was obliged to admit this about the Polish CP:

> "Disintegrated, I agree. Which is quite clear since the military had to take its place in the government. Who could deny that it went bankrupt, intellectually and politically, that it was unable to organise the society, to get the country out of the disaster, even to defend the state?"

We should say a word at this point about the character of the 'Communist Parties' in the Stalinist states. Unlike CPs in the capitalist countries, some of which have a mass base in the working class, these organisations are not workers' parties at all. They are organisations of the bureaucracy, for the defence of privilege and for the suppression of the working class. They are organisations of the officials, the army officers, the police and police agents, the managers, the careerists and the stool-pigeons.

The Communist Parties are hated by the masses in all the countries of Stalinism. In Czechoslovakia, for example, such is the contempt of the ordinary workers for CP members, that if one of their fellows joins the party he normally has to move with his family to another area and seek new friends because of the ostracism which results. The parallel in South Africa would be the workers' attitude to supervisors, 'boss boys' and *ipimpi*.

By and large, however, the predominant element making up the Communist Parties are the higher officials. In the Soviet Union, the CP are referred to as "the bosses" by the workers. Not surprisingly, when we see that a survey on collective farms in Russia found that the proportion of managers in the CP was 86% and the proportion of workers only 5%. In the engineering industry in Leningrad, the corresponding figures were managers 60% and manual workers only 13%.

The Communist Parties have no role to play in the political revolution against Stalinism, but as organisations of the bureaucracy will disappear with it. As the events in Poland showed, the CPs are not immune to the pervasive pressures of revolution, even before the bureaucracy is overthrown. They can completely collapse in a short space of time.

The initial policy of Solidarity was in fact to exclude all CP members from membership of the union (in much the same way as workers in SA want to keep agents of the bosses out of their organisations). Nothing could more clearly demonstrate the attitude of the ordinary workers to the CP.

However, after a time, about one million CP members succeeded in joining Solidarity on the instructions of the party leadership, initially with the intention of trying to bring it under control. But such was the ferment in society that these people were affected, and instead of the CP having a million members in Solidarity, Solidarity had in effect a million members in the CP! This contributed to the disintegration of the latter.

This again confirmed Trotsky's perspective that under the pressures of the political revolution, the bureaucracy would be split, with the lower layers drawn to the side of the workers, leaving those at the top in complete isolation.

There was no force in Poland preventing the working class from taking state power—and it was held back from this task only by the mistaken policies of its leader-ship. The policies of the Solidarity leaders were heavily influenced by the 'dissident' intellectuals, such as Kuron of KOR, and by the Catholic Church hierarchy to whom they turned for advice.

Blind to the inner laws of the revolution in which they were caught up, Walesa and the other main leaders of Solidarity counselled caution, moderation, limiting the movement to demands for partial reforms, and attempting to reach an accommodation with the bureaucracy.

The continued hold of the Church on the minds of the Polish masses—itself an indication of their alienation from Stalinism—turned in fact into a powerful advantage for Stalinism against the working class.

### Church

Even today it is still being argued by supporters of Stalinism in the ranks of our movement that the dissent, opposition, etc. in Poland was a result of the counter-revolutionary activities of the Catholic Church.

But in reality, the Church establishment in Poland and elsewhere in Eastern Europe long ago reached an accommodation with the bureaucracy in order to secure its position. Having over the centuries reconciled itself to the regimes of slave society, then feudalism and then capitalism, the Church now reconciles itself to Stalinism also.

The Church bureaucrats felt as much threatened by the prospect of a political revolution as the bureaucrats of the state. Between them, there was a division of labour. While the state tried to re-consolidate its instruments of repression, the Bishops worked to hold the working class back from taking power.

The church leaders, posing as the champions of humanity, don't often reveal their true attitudes openly. But in a sermon on 24 January 1982, not long after the coup, Archbishop Glemp stated that he considered it essential that General Jaruzelski should continue in power, and even described him as the last chance for Poland! "If you fight for freedom with too much enthusiasm you run the risk of losing it," he said.

And of the Church, the bureaucrat Rakowski says "They need us as much as we need them." Even the Polish Politburo hardliner, Olzowski, was reported as saying on Hungarian radio and television that "the Church in Poland is a gigantic factor for stabilisation." (BBC World Service, 25/1/82)

### Threat

From the time of the rise of Solidarity in August 1980, the main argument used by the Catholic Church, KOR, Walesa, etc., against the carrying through of the political revolution was the threat of a Russian invasion. Indeed, the military manoeuvres of the Warsaw Pact on the borders of Poland were intended to leave the Polish people in no doubt that Brezhnev would order an invasion in the event that the movement proceeded to overthrow the bureaucracy.

Just as in 1956, in the case of Hungary, the bureaucracies of all the Stalinist states understood that the victory of the political revolution and the establishment of workers' democracy in even one country, would electrify the working people in all these states and lead to revolutionary movements in country after country.

Therefore, in the event of the overthrow of the Polish bureaucracy, they would have had to stake everything on the military card.

Nevertheless, the qualitative change in the position of the Stalinist regime over the past 25 years meant that an invasion would have been an extremely dangerous course for the bureaucracy to pursue. Therefore they held back and prepared to go in only as a last resort.

A number of factors combined to produce this hesitation. Firstly, as the Kremlin recognised, and as they were no doubt advised by Jaruzelski, in the first period of the Polish movement at least there would have been a determined armed resistance by the Poles. In all likelihood the Polish army itself would have taken part in the resistance.

Probably a drawn-out guerrilla war would have ensued, and possibly as many as a million people slaughtered in order to subdue it. This would have had incalculable effects on the Soviet Union's position internationally—its relations not only with imperialism but also with the ex-colonial world, together with its position in world trade. Most important, however, would have been the perilous consequences for the bureaucracy within Russia itself, where an enormous revulsion among the people would have swelled up.

Unlike 1956, the Stalinist bureaucracy today has no confidence in the viability of its rule, and can look forward with nothing but anxious dread to the future.

Brezhnev proclaimed Russia's "right" to invade Poland as the very essence of "consistent internationalism"! In the pollution and falsification of everything that was fine in the tradition of the Russian Revolution, the Stalinist bureaucracy knows no limits.

In fact, it is the real proletarian internationalism on which Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky always relied which alone could have brought about the overthrow of the bureaucracy and the victory of the political revolution in Poland.

While the Polish working class could have taken power in their own country, they could not have sustained their victory within the boundaries of Poland alone. **What was needed was a decisive and audacious revolutionary policy when power lay within their grasp—combined with a fraternal, internationalist revolutionary appeal to their brothers and sisters, the working class, of Russia, East Germany, Hungary, etc., to actively support them.**

Only by these means could a military intervention of the Warsaw Pact armies have been paralysed and reversed. In turn that would have meant the sweeping of the political revolution throughout Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, spilling over also in Asia. At the same time it would have evoked a tremendous response of the working class in the West, and frustrated completely any attempt by imperialism to take advantage of the situation.

Indeed the Polish revolution could have set in motion an entire international chain of revolutions, social and political, in West and East. But without this internationalist perspective—their vision narrowed also by prejudices of Polish nationalism—the leadership of Solidarity inevitably led the movement to defeat.

Trying to find an impossible solution within the framework of one country, they based their strategy on the illusion of securing a reform of the system while leaving the bureaucracy in power in the state.

Therefore Walesa persistently tried to prevent Solidarity from being anything more than a trade union, when the whole logic of its development was towards the taking over of state power. Walesa even boasted that Poland's revolution was "unique" in that it did not seek to change the government! Only at the last minute, far too late, and under pressure from the rank and file, did the Solidarity leadership concede that confrontation with the regime was inevitable.

## Challenge

Spontaneously, the Polish working class moved through Solidarity to challenge the privileges of the bureaucracy, to expose corruption, and to demand political rights and freedoms irreconcilable with Stalinist rule. All the time, however, the top leadership of Solidarity acted as a dampener and fire-hose to subdue the movement.

Because of the profound feebleness of the bureaucracy, and its inability to use force initially against the workers, the impasse in the Polish revolution was long drawn out.

But no mass movement, however powerful, can remain at white heat indefinitely. Without a resolution of the question of power the movement must inevitably tire and ebb. At the same time, the turmoil of a revolution brings further disruption into economic life and, if indefinitely protracted, appears more and more as the cause of shortages, delays, and chaos.

In the first five months of 1981 alone, industrial production dropped 12% in Poland. Coal exports fell by two-thirds.

By the middle of the year, 60 000 tractors were immobilised without spares. 5 500 potato combines were unready for the harvest. The country was short of 150 000 scythes, 600 000 forks, 54 000 milking machines, etc.

Because of the suspension of new loans from the West, together with selective sabotage of the economy by bureaucratic measures and the witholding of supplies from the other Stalinist states, all sorts of spares, materials, and fuels could not be obtained.

There was an almost complete breakdown of the transport system. Food shortages reached the scale that even the basic rations could no longer be obtained in the shops. 'Parallel market' prices rocketed to five times the official prices and more. Homes were without heating. There was a virtual absence of soap and numerous other essentials.

All these hardships and more would be endured by the working class in the course of a revolution when they have the perspective of taking power and organising society. But without that perspective, facing a nightmare without end, with their movement worn down again and again by the policies, of the leadership, even the most resolute can begin to lose spirit.

With considerable cunning, General Jaruzelski, at the head of the bureaucracy, bided his time. Over the period before the coup he carried out (with Russian assistance) a reorganisation and propaganda campaign in the armed forces. Having assured himself of the reliability of his troops, and that armed resistance was unlikely, he moved rapidly to impose martial law.

Now the same rank-and-file soldiers who only months before could have been won to the side of the revolution by a bold policy have been left with no real option but to obey their officers and hold their people under the military jackboot.

That is the fate of a revolution which does not complete its work.

From such a defeat there can be no immediate recovery. While the hatred of the Polish people for their bureaucratic masters is deeper than ever, it will be a matter of years before there can be a revival of a mass movement on the scale of the past two years. That revival will come; the reprieve of the Polish bureaucracy is only temporary.

## Political revolution is international

In the other deformed workers' states of Eastern Europe and the USSR, political revolution can break out at almost any time. There is no solution to the problems of the economy and society either in Poland or in any of these countries on the basis of Stalinism.

Anxious to forestall revolutionary uprisings in their own countries, the various bureaucracies are making U-turns and zig-zags in the hope of revitalising their system.

In some cases, there are experiments in giving greater scope to market forces—in effect legalising aspects of the existing 'parallel market'—as a means of cutting through the entanglements of red tape. These do not, as some people imagine, represent a turning back to capitalism. But nor do they provide a way out of the impasse of bureaucracy, and will soon lead to new contradictions, seizures and reverses.

In Rumania, which has the lowest living standards in Eastern

Europe, the bureaucracy had attempted to escape from the suffocating effects of its own rule by attempting a policy of high-pressure industrialisation with the aid of loans from the West. Intoxicated with this, President Ceausescu had boldly asserted Rumanian 'national independence' from Moscow.

### Dislocation

But the onset of economic crisis in the West, the slowing of exports, and severe problems in agriculture, produced serious dislocation. Shortages of food became chronic, and there was a mushrooming of queues. The miners' strike in the Jiu valley in 1977, and the renewed strikes of miners and other workers in October 1981 in Rumania, profoundly disturbed the bureaucracy. Its anxiety was redoubled by the Polish events.

Consequently, Ceausescu has executed an about-turn. Investment is to be diverted to agriculture, industrial growth is to be inhibited by slashing imports, while at the same time an attempt will be made to increase exports by 14%!

Simultaneously, the bureaucracy has turned again towards Moscow, in search of the advantages of cheap Soviet oil and subsidies, as well as to seek shelter in anticipation of the coming political storms. Increasingly now, the crisis of the economies and regimes of Eastern Europe is turning them into a millstone round the neck of the Russian bureaucracy, and a drain on the Soviet economy.

While economic austerity is bound to continue for the Rumanian and other workers, the bureaucracy offers them political phrases both plentiful and cheap. Thus Ceausescu has announced his intention of dropping the formula "dictatorship of the proletariat" in favour of "a state of workers' democracy"! (No matter that neither phrase applies to his regime of bureaucratic absolutism, which, of course, is to remain unchanged. In fact there is now virtually a Ceausescu family dynasty at the head of the Rumanian bureaucracy.)

We cannot go into the situation in all these countries here. All of them to one degree or another are affected by economic and political difficulties. In Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia these are particularly severe. In contrast, Hungary and East Germany are temporarily able to maintain relatively higher rates of growth. But here, too, the fear by the bureaucracy of explosions of the working class is indicated in the repressive nature of the regimes.

In East Germany, during the height of the Polish events, even trains from Poland were turned back at the border to prevent the German people seeing the Solidarity slogans painted on the sides!

But wherever the political revolution against Stalinism breaks out first, it can only be in the Soviet Union that the process will be completed. Social revolution is international, and so is the political revolution. That has been sharply demonstrated by the examples of Hungary and Poland.

A regime of workers' democracy cannot survive within the boundaries of one country. The process must spread or it will be reversed. Victorious revolutions are possible in all the countries of Eastern Europe, but to sustain victory, enormous difficulties of carrying forward the process internationally will be faced.

But when the giant proletariat of the Soviet Union begins to move, there will be no force on earth which can stop it. The largest, and probably the most educated and cultured working class in the world, it will rediscover its revolutionary traditions.

The mass strikes during May 1980 which closed the huge Togliatti and Gorky auto works (employing 170 000 and 200 000 workers respectively), gave a foretaste of this. More recently, fearing the repercussions in the Soviet Union of the Polish events, the Russian Politburo has complained to the official trade unions that they should not be quite so servile to the state. They should make some effort (says the Politburo) to articulate the grievances of the workers instead of leaving the regime to be taken by surprise!

Finding itself cut off from the working people by a wall of contempt, hostility and sullen resistance, the bureaucracy has turned to sociological opinion surveys—in factories, schools, among youth groups, pensioners, and others—in order to find out what people are thinking! The results are sent to factory directors, city authorities and local party committees to be used as a basis for decision-making.

This is also an indication that the effectiveness of the secret police informer network, which has served the bureaucracy thus far as a gauge of the workers' views, has become inadequate. There could hardly be clearer proof of the complete absence of any organs of workers' democracy.

When the Soviet workers move on the road of political revolution, there will be no army that will be able to intervene against them, once the troops of the Red Army defy the orders of the bureaucracy and cross to the side of the working class.

And once the repressive power of the Kremlin bureaucracy is paralysed, there will be nothing to inhibit a movement of the working population throughout Eastern Europe, which would also spur movements towards social revolution in the West.

## World War?

Meanwhile, with the delay of the social revolution and the delay of the political revolution, the peoples of East and West continue to live under the shadow of the arms race, of nuclear weapons and the threat of annihilation. While world war would become a real prospect in the circumstances explained in Chapter 3, the onset of such a war is not an immediate perspective.

A conventional attack by imperialism on Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union is now an impossibility. In the period since the Second World War, Russia has developed its conventional forces to the point where it and its Warsaw Pact allies have an overwhelming military advantage over imperialist forces in Europe.

Warsaw Pact tanks, artillery and aircraft outnumber NATO's by nearly three to one. The Warsaw Pact has 47 divisions in northern and central Europe compared to NATO's 27. By spending 2-3 times the proportion of GNP on arms as, e.g., the USA, the Soviet Union is now estimated to have an overall advantage of about four to one in conventional terms.

Small wonder that in NATO's most recent full-scale manoeuvres, 'Operation Crusader', the whole exercise was based on the calculation of the generals that a Soviet advance across Western Europe could be held back for no more than three or four days.

### Suicidal

At the same time, the Stalinist bureaucracies have no interest in initiating a military invasion of the West even if they could do so without precipitating nuclear war. An attempt to establish bureaucratic dictatorship, on the Stalinist model over the powerful working class of Western Europe—when the bureaucracies are having trouble as it is maintaining their regimes in their own countries—would be a suicidal absurdity.

In terms of nuclear weapons, Russia now has tactical superiority in the European 'theatre' and has achieved at least strategic parity with the USA in the event of an intercontinental nuclear war. Both countries, together with the rest of mankind, would be wiped out in such an event.

Because of the economic transformation which has been carried through in the deformed workers' states, imperialism remains in fundamental antagonism to them. Most of all, the antagonism is directed towards the most powerful, the Soviet Union.

While US imperialism would not shrink from any real opportunity to destroy the Soviet Union by nuclear weapons, this is now impossible as a conscious policy of the ruling class because of the certainty of destruction in return.

For all these reasons, world war is ruled out in the short-term and even the medium-term. In the longer term, for the reasons already explained, the holocaust of nuclear war nevertheless hangs over us if the socialist revolution in the West is not victorious in the coming one to two decades.

Meanwhile, it is in the interests of both the capitalists and the Stalinists to employ the threat of world war as a means of subduing the working class of West and East. In the case of Russia particularly, the fear of war is a very powerful weapon of propaganda in the hands of the bureaucracy, because within living memory the population has experienced millions of deaths and the most terrible suffering and privations as a result of imperialist invasion.

In a contradictory way, imperialism and Stalinism buttress each other. As a prop to its own rule, the bureaucracy maintains an uneasy relationship of 'détente' with imperialism and forswears any encouragement or support for social revolution in any of the industrialised capitalist countries.

**Despite the opposing character of their economic systems, Stalinism, as much as imperialism, fears any struggle of the workers to take power into their own hands. This is because a regime of workers' democracy in any important industrialised country would serve as a beacon to the working class of East and West, and set in motion the downfall of both Stalinism and imperialism.**

The ripeness of the whole world for socialism, and the pressing urgency of socialist revolution is indicated in these perspectives. It has now become a race, in fact, between the social revolution in the West and the political revolution in the East. Whichever occurs first, it will mean the transformation of the world.

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## Footnotes

1. This perspective, written in 1982, was proved incorrect. Capitalism was restored across the countries of the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe in the early 1990s (see *From Perestroika to Glasnost*). This paragraph mistakenly puts forward only one side of Trotsky's 'classic' perspective for the future of Stalinism. As far back as 1936 he anticipated the possibility of capitalist restoration, especially if there was a significant delay in the political revolution, a point that is made in the MWT's *The Legacy of Leon Trotsky* (1990), included in this booklet – *Eds.*

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# From Perestroika to Capitalist Restoration




### by Rob Jones, Sotsialisticheskaya Alternativa (CWI, Russia/CIS), 2009

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Between 1982 and 1985, three general secretaries of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), Leonid Brezhnev, Yuri Andropov and Konstantin Chernenko, died in quick succession.

Mikhail Gorbachev was elected to succeed them. Just six years later, the Soviet Union collapsed, leaving a wreckage of 15 'independent' republics, each ravaged by economic catastrophe in which GDP dropped by over 50%. Russia, Moldova and Georgia experienced serious conflicts with their national minorities. Azerbaijan and Armenia went to war against each other. Tajikistan spent most of the 1990s in a state of open civil war. Only the three small Baltic states have managed to establish some form of stable democracy, but they are now bearing the worst of the world economic crisis. Russia and Belarus are far from democratic. The states of Central Asian, in particular Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, are feudal authoritarian fiefdoms.

The selection of Gorbachev marked the victory within the Soviet ruling bureaucracy of a layer of reformers who understood that changes needed to be made if the elite were to maintain power. Andropov was from this reform wing although he was a henchman of the ruling elite. As ambassador to Hungary in 1956, he saw how angry workers strung up the hated secret police from lampposts and realised that Soviet rule was just as fragile. Returning to Moscow as head of the KGB, he fiercely advocated military measures against Czechoslovakia's Prague Spring reformers in 1968. He suppressed the dissident movement and fervently supported the invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. But, in power, he took the first tentative steps to curtail the worst excesses of corruption and incompetence, which would later be expanded by Gorbachev. KGB agents planted in each workplace and residential area reported on the huge discontent building up in society at the bureaucracy's misrule.

Following the October 1917 revolution, the first steps in establishing a socialist society were taken. The main industries were nationalised and integrated into a planned economy with, at least in the early years, large elements of workers' control and management. This laid the basis for a remarkable economic development of the country. Notwithstanding the fact that pre-revolutionary Russia was one of the most economically backward countries in Europe, and despite the economic destruction caused by the first world war (1914-18), the civil war (1918-20) and second world war (1939-45), by the 1960s and 70s the Soviet Union had become an industrial powerhouse, whose economy was not subject to the chaotic booms and slumps of capitalism.

By the mid-1920s, however, a bureaucratic elite had begun to crystallise, resting on the backwardness of Russian society, the tiredness of the working class, and the failure of the revolution in other more developed countries such as Germany. The working class was pushed out of political power as the bureaucracy, headed by Stalin, extended its dictatorial tendons into every aspect of life. This bureaucratic elite, 20 million strong by 1970, was like a huge parasite sucking the lifeblood out of the planned economy, draining it of energy. Bureaucratic mismanagement created huge waste. This led to the period that Russians call 'the stagnation'. Everybody had a job, somewhere to live, and a modest wage, but life was drab, the quality of products and services very low, and huge resources were wasted or spent on arms or other unnecessary items. Increasingly, the mismanagement of the economy led to massive shortages, often of essential products.

Sometimes the arbitrary and repressive nature of the bureaucracy spilt out into open conflict. In 1962, for example, an instruction was sent from Moscow raising the price of meat and other stable foodstuffs. This coincided with the decision to reduce wage rates

at a metalworking factory in the city of Novocherkassk. Workers walked out on strike. They were met by armed troops and tanks. Hundreds were shot and killed, so fearful was the regime of workers from other areas coming out to support them.

Leon Trotsky had analysed the situation in the Soviet Union after the bureaucracy seized power. He argued that the working class should organise a supplementary revolution and sweep the bureaucracy away, allowing for a genuine democratic workers' state to be put in its place. If, however, the workers did not do that, there would be a time when the bureaucratic elite would attempt to legalise its privileges and the plundering of state property. In the long run, wrote Trotsky, in *The Revolution Betrayed* (1936), this could "lead to a complete liquidation of the social conquests of the proletarian revolution". Under Stalin, the bureaucracy defended the planned economy as the basis of its power and privileges, but it did so "in such a way as to prepare an explosion of the whole system which may completely sweep out the results of the revolution".

### Experimental reforms

Events such as those at Novocherkassk, Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Poland frightened the bureaucracy. While, at least in the early stages, the majority believed the most effective way of maintaining control was repression, a section began to reason that new mechanisms to reduce mismanagement and corruption should be sought. In the mid-1960s a group of economists began to form under the leadership of Abel Aganbegyan in the Novosibirsk Academy. They began to analyse issues such as the rift between agricultural production and the demands of the population. Their work, written in the stunted style of Soviet 'Marxism', was in essence moving towards the reintroduction of market mechanisms, at least in agriculture. Their ideas were discussed by an important layer of the ruling elite. Aganbegyan later became Gorbachev's chief economic advisor.

However, the ruling elite were not yet ready to go down this road. The source of their privileged lifestyle was, after all, the planned economy and, notwithstanding their parasitic incompetence, it was still moving ahead compared to the major capitalist economies. In 1973, the oil crisis hit the world. This helped push the west into recession but actually helped the Soviet Union as a result of extra revenue from oil exports. But this only delayed the process.

Growing discontent in Eastern Europe pushed governments, such as that of Poland, to start taking large loans from the capitalist world. These credits fuelled inflation and made the bureaucratic system of planning even more unmanageable. The costs of the cold war arms race and Afghanistan only exacerbated the problems. So, when Brezhnev died in 1982, a section of the ruling politburo seemed ready to begin experimenting. Andropov, seen as a reformer, was elected to office, only to die 15 months later. He had expressed a wish that he should be replaced by Gorbachev, but the hardliners were not yet ready for that. Chernenko, although already gravely ill, was elected as a stopgap candidate, the politburo clearly understanding that in a few more months they would vote again. This time Gorbachev won.

He did not set out to reintroduce capitalism. He wanted reforms from the top to prevent an explosion of revolution from below. But he set in motion a process that became unstoppable mainly because, by lifting the repression and to some degree encouraging ordinary people to play a more active, if limited, role in their own affairs, he opened the floodgates to allow the discontent that had built up over decades to come out into the open.

### Dissidents and opposition

Things, of course, could have happened differently. In his masterpiece, *The Revolution Betrayed*, Trotsky argued that

> "if the Soviet bureaucracy is overthrown by a revolutionary party having all the attributes of the old Bolshevism, enriched moreover by the world experience of the recent period, such a party would begin with the restoration of democracy in the trade unions and the soviets. It would be able to, and would have to, restore freedom of Soviet parties. Together with the masses, and at their head, it would carry out a ruthless purgation of the state apparatus. It would abolish ranks and decorations, all kinds of privileges, and would limit inequality in the payment of labour to the life necessities of the economy and the state apparatus. It would give the youth free opportunity to think independently, learn, criticise and grow.
>
> "It would introduce profound changes in the distribution of the national income in correspondence with the interests and will of the worker and peasant masses. But so far as concerns property relations, the new power would not have to resort to revolutionary measures. It would retain and further develop the experiment of planned economy. After the political revolution – that is, the deposing of the bureaucracy – the proletariat would have to introduce in the economy a series of very important reforms, but not another social revolution".

This was written in 1936, when the mass of workers still had clear memories of what the Bolshevik revolution, led by Vladimir Lenin and Trotsky, was really intended to achieve. It was the fear of workers organising a new revolution that led Stalin to wage his vicious campaign of terror against the remaining Bolsheviks. The terror campaign was so ruthless that, despite heroic resistance by the Trotskyists in the prison camps, the thread of Bolshevism was eventually broken. Reading the works of Trotsky in the Soviet Union was practically impossible right up until 1990.

This did not mean that there was no opposition to the ruling bureaucracy. The western media highlighted the dissidents, who were mainly intellectuals inspired to some degree or other by western liberal democracy, such as Andrei Sakharov, a nuclear physicist, who worked on the Soviet atomic bomb. Some figures from the party and army, people such as the Medvedev brothers, Roy and Zhores, and Pyotr Grigoryenko spoke openly as anti-Stalinists from the left. In 1963, the latter even formed the Union of Struggle for the Restoration of Leninism. For all their courage, however, they were in essence dissident bureaucrats. Far more numerous were young working-class opponents who formed study groups, Leninist circles and even parties, with names such as the Neo-communist Party, Party of New Communists or, later, even the Party of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat. Unfortunately, a combination of repression and the lack of a clear understanding of what needed to be done left these groups unable to develop when conditions ripened.

### The limits of perestroika

In the end, it was moves initiated by the bureaucracy itself that led to the demise of the Soviet Union. Gorbachev launched his policies of glasnost and perestroika (openness and restructuring). On the one hand, the political system was opened up to allow some criticism. Naturally, the reformers wanted that criticism to be directed against their hardline opponents without going too far. Multi-candidate elections would be allowed, but all the candidates were still members of the Communist Party.

Gorbachev was initially more cautious with the economy, speaking about uskoreniye (acceleration) and the modification of central planning. The biggest reform was to make factories and enterprises 'self-financing'. This meant that, although they had to meet their production commitments for the plan, directors could sell any surplus produced and, naturally, use the profits as they wished. Workforces were given the right to elect and de-elect factory directors, and in some cases did so. In 1987, a law was passed allowing foreigners to invest in the Soviet Union by forming joint enterprises, usually with ministries or state companies. In 1988, private ownership in the form of co-operatives was allowed in the manufacturing, service and foreign trade sectors.

None of these reforms had the desired effect. As censorship was

relaxed, and the representatives of the bureaucracy began to argue more openly, people grew inspired by the new 'openness'. When the Supreme Soviet debates were broadcast live on TV, people stopped work to crowd around the nearest set, crowds on the streets watched through shop windows. But they wanted more choice than just between candidates from the same party. Elections in May 1989 to the Supreme Soviet saw voters throughout the country crossing all the names off their ballot papers to protest the lack of an alternative. Soon, the more radical reformist deputies around Boris Yeltsin were raising the need to abolish Article Six of the constitution, which stated that the CPSU had the right to control all institutions in the country.

Perestroika proved disastrous, at least from the point of view of the workers. The reforms were, as is said in Russian, neither flesh nor fowl. By loosening the rules of the plan, resources began to be sidetracked by company directors away from core production. Organisations began to experience difficulty in getting basic supplies. And, while directors were now allowed to sell production above the plan to whoever would buy it, there was still no free market to enable this. This created real difficulties. For example, the cost of coal production was significantly higher than the price paid by the state, leaving many mines without money to cover wages.

Due to the incompetence of the ruling elite, the Soviet economy had long suffered from shortages. But, by 1989, the situation had become catastrophic. Miners could not even get soap for their showers. In Moscow, always used to privileged food supplies, the rationing of basic foodstuffs was introduced.

### Losing control

The policy of perestroika was collapsing in crisis. It did little to reduce the suffocating role of the bureaucracy but lifted the lid off the huge discontent boiling under the surface. Events began to escalate out of control.

Early in 1986, the Chernobyl nuclear power station in Ukraine blew up. While the authorities attempted to cover up the scale of the disaster, volunteers flocked in their thousands to put out the blaze, defended by no more than a bottle of vodka which, doctors claimed, would protect them from radiation. Once again, it appeared, Soviet society was based on huge sacrifices by the people, while the bureaucracy continued to bungle and steal. In 1988, an earthquake shook parts of Armenia killing 25,000 people as substandard buildings collapsed, leaving the town of Leninakan devastated. This fuelled the national question in the Caucasus.

In late 1986, the first signs that new social forces were being released began to appear. The city of Alma-Ata was shaken by a two-day student riot. The immediate cause was the sacking of Dinmukhamed Konayev, head of the Kazakhstan Communist Party (a Kazakh by nationality). The party had been racked by a struggle between Konayev and his deputy (also a Kazakh), who accused him of holding back reforms. Gorbachev decided not to support either side, appointing an outsider, a Russian, instead. Upset at the decision, Konayev's deputy whipped up the students, mainly Kazakhs, into protesting. When they were met by riot troops, they rioted. Konayev's deputy eventually took over as party chief in 1989 and, two years later, during the 1991 coup attempt, banned the Communist Party, before becoming president of Kazakhstan. His name – Nursultan Nazarbaev, still today Kazakhstan's authoritarian president.

The escalating economic crisis, splits in the ruling elite, and natural and technological disasters, fuelled discontent. National tensions escalated within months. The region of Nagorno-Karabakh (arbitrarily handed to Azerbaijan by Stalin in 1921) became the next hotspot. Mass protests by the majority Armenian population, who demanded a return to Armenia, were met with savage repression by the Azeri regime. Open war broke out between Armenia and Azerbaijan in 1991.

In the three Baltic states – Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia – there was huge resentment against their inclusion in the Soviet Union, as a result of the Hitler/Stalin pact. (Lenin and Trotsky had always supported the right of the Baltic states to self-determination.) This resentment, combined with the growing economic and social crisis, fuelled mass movements demanding the speeding up of reforms and independence. By early 1990, all three had declared formal independence.

If a mass left-wing workers' party had existed at the time, it could have unified these protests against the Soviet bureaucracy and presented a real option to ensure that a genuine socialist state could be established in the Soviet Union. A mass workers' movement did develop. Unfortunately, it was not armed with a clear programme that could resolve these crises.

### The oligarchs move in

The mass movements spreading through Eastern Europe, the growing independence movements as well as the failed policies of perestroika, were making the economic situation worse. Tax revenues were plummeting, the number of factories requiring subsidies was growing. Inflation was setting in. Meanwhile, a section of the ruling elite was jumping ship. A new law allowing the formation of co-operatives was presented as providing the right to set up cafés and small service outputs. The bureaucracy, however, used the law to set up co-operatives linked to ministries and factories to openly expropriate state property.

One of Russia's most notorious oligarchs, Boris Berezovskii, provides an example of how the process worked. In 1989 he made a deal with the management of Russia's Lada car plant. Instead of selling all its output through state retailers, it would sell its cars to him at a reduced price. He would then sell them on, at a higher price of course. Within three years, Berezovskii had a turnover of $250 million in this business alone. Workers soon learned to hate these 'entrepreneurs'.

In March 1989, the first signs of an immanent strike wave appeared in the Polar Vorkuta coalfield. The 9th brigade of the Severnaya pit struck, demanding wages paid at a decent rate and lower production norms. Echoing the reformers in Moscow, they demanded the reduction in management staff by 40% and the re-election of the technical director. Concessions were quickly made, but this small strike opened the floodgates. By July, the whole country was gripped by a half-million strong miners' strike.

In Vorkuta, Novokuznetsk, Prokopievsk and Mezhdurechensk strike committees effectively took over the running of the towns. The sale of spirits was banned and organisations set up to maintain public order. The miners were mainly concerned with their work and social conditions, including bad transport and housing, low wages, poor food and the lack of soap in the pithead showers. From the beginning, the mass meetings and strike committees insisted the strikes were non-political. But, because the miners had no political programme of their own, it was inevitable that other forces would use their movement. In Mezhdurechensk, the mine directors 'supported' the strike, complaining only that some of the demands were unachievable as long as the mines were centrally controlled. The demand for mines to be given full economic independence with the right to sell coal on the free market was soon added to the list of miners' demands.

The miners established organisations on the hoof, but proved to be politically unprepared. The only way they could have resolved the problems of the late Soviet period would be to organise to overthrow the bureaucracy and ruling elite, while maintaining state ownership and the planned economy on the basis of democratic workers' control and management. But there was no political organisation offering such an alternative in the coalfields. Instead, the very bureaucracy that was the cause of the crisis moved in on the organisations set up by the miners to promote its own political agenda. Strike committee members were taken for long negotiations, the day-to-day demands were linked to more explicit demands in the interests of the mine administrations and even the coal ministry. In many cases, individual strike leaders were encouraged to set up businesses (using the new law) which, naturally, were closely controlled by the structures of the state.

### 500 days to capitalism

In the summer of 1989, the first opposition bloc in the Soviet Congress, the Inter-regional group, was formed, headed by Yeltsin. With events unfolding at a dramatic rate, the miners' strikes gave confidence to workers that they could fight. Meanwhile, the Baltic states declared independence. Another vicious inter-ethnic conflict broke out between Georgia and South Ossetia. In November 1989, the Berlin wall was torn down. In December, the brutal dictator Nikolai Ceausescu and his wife, Elena, were executed publically during the uprising in Romania. These events scared the ruling elite but, as is said in Russian, the train had left the station and there was now no stopping it.

The Inter-regional group openly opposed Gorbachev, who found himself squeezed between Yeltsin's supporters and the hardline conservatives. Among the latter were figures such as the notorious 'black colonels' who were arguing for a 'Pinochet' solution.

The Inter-regional group had a small left wing but consisted mainly of reformers, whose agenda included market reforms and western-style democracy, even if this was not yet clearly formulated in its programme. It is a reflection of the resistance to capitalism that, even at this late stage, reformers rarely called openly for its restoration. Among the miners and other workers, this call would have met with resistance, even though some of their demands had become inherently 'pro-market'. The mood of the miners was that they really had no desire to live in a capitalist society. Nevertheless, they had lost faith that socialism was a viable system.

The Inter-regional group concentrated on removing the CPSU monopoly of power. Massive demonstrations were organised in Moscow and other cities demanding the repeal of Article Six, which was eventually abolished in the spring of 1990. In elections in the different republics, nationalist and pro-liberal candidates won the largest votes. In May, Yeltsin was elected chairman of the Supreme Soviet and, in June, in an attempt to force Gorbachev's hand, the Russian Congress of People's Deputies declared Russia's sovereignty. The 'war of laws' started with republics struggling for supremacy against the Soviet Union government.

In August 1990, the Russian government adopted the '500-day programme'. This called for the creation of "the groundwork for a modern market economy in 500 days", based on "mass privatisation, prices determined by the market, integration with the world economic system, a large transfer of power from the Union government to the republics". As the editorial in the first edition of the CWI's Russian paper at the time said: "We will die of hunger after 500 days!" In June 1991, Yeltsin stood in the election for Russian president and won 57% of the vote. He criticised the 'dictatorship of the centre', but said nothing about the introduction of capitalism. He even promised to put his head across a railway track if prices increased. Of course, he never did, even though, in 1992, prices increased by 2,500%.

### A half-hearted coup

The conservative opposition were not defending socialism, at least not as we know it. They were defending a strong centralised state. Most of all they were angry that the republics were moving to break away from the Soviet Union and that, as a result of the new 'openness', people were criticising their rule. By the 1990-91 new year holiday, Moscow was buzzing with rumours of a military coup. The hardliners held off even though the Soviet Union was collapsing about them.

In March 1991, a referendum was held in which the question was posed: "Do you consider necessary the preservation of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics as a renewed federation of equally sovereign republics in which the rights and freedom of an individual of any nationality will be fully guaranteed?" The referendum was boycotted by the Baltic states, and by Georgia, Armenia and Moldova. But 70% of the voters in the other nine republics voted yes. Finding agreement of the exact form, however, proved difficult. A New Union Treaty was drawn up. Eight republics agreed with the conditions while Ukraine held out. Russia, Kazakhstan and Belarus signed it in August 1991.

On 19 August 1991, Muscovites woke to the sound of tanks driving down the street. The hardliners had launched their long awaited coup. Gorbachev, who was actually on holiday, was said to be "too tired and ill to carry on". The 'Gang of Eight' declared that they were introducing martial law, a curfew and restoring order with the aim of "fighting the black economy, corruption, theft, speculation and economic incompetence". They were doing this, they said, to "create favourable conditions to improve the real contribution of all types of entrepreneurial activity conducted within the law". They finished with an appeal to "all political and social organisations, work collectives and citizens" to demonstrate their "patriotic preparedness to participate in the great friendship in the unified family of fraternal peoples and the revival of the fatherland".

Victor Hugo said that 'all the forces in the world are not so powerful as an idea whose time has come'. This putsch proved that the opposite is also true: the greatest military machine cannot save a regime whose time has passed! Even the tankists and paratroopers of the Soviet crack divisions sent to Moscow had no heart for a fight. The tanks were stopping at red traffic lights. One trolleybus driver stopped his vehicle at the entrance to Red Square and the tanks moved no further! A few minutes later, the news came to those already protesting that Yeltsin was calling a general strike (a call he quickly rescinded) and asking people to rally outside the White House, the seat of the Russian government. Within hours, hundreds of thousands had turned out. The whole country had begun to rise up against the coup. The putchists turned tail. One of them shot himself. Another left politics to become a rich banker. Gorbachev returned to Moscow to find the country he once ruled was no more.

Formally, the Soviet Union was disbanded in December 1991. But this was no more than recognising reality. Following the coup, all 15 republics had announced their independence. The speed of the process of capitalist restoration differed in each republic but the direction was the same. The barriers to the restoration of capitalism that had existed before were removed. In Russia's case, the Yeltsin regime banned the CPSU, moved to break up the old state structure, even going so far as to promise Russia's internal republics, such as Chechnya and Tatarstan, "as much sovereignty as they could handle". Economic shock therapy was introduced with the liberalisation of prices, mass privatisation, increases in taxation, cutbacks in subsidies to industry, and cuts in social spending.

Western advisers openly warned the Yeltsin government that they should gain the support of the former beneficiaries of Soviet rule, that is the former party chiefs, factory directors and KGB operatives by transferring ownership in the new capitalist society to them so they would not resist. Even the period of hyperinflation, which brought untold misery for the masses, was used by the ruling elite to concentrate wealth in their own hands. It is from this period on that the oligarchs gained their obscene wealth. In the Russian media, this was openly called the "process of the primitive accumulation of capital".

The Soviet people were conned. They were told that by introducing market reforms they could have living standards as in Western Europe. Rather than telling the population that the intention was to introduce capitalism, they were told that this was a struggle for 'democracy'. Almost 20 years later, living standards for the vast majority of the population are significantly lower than at the end of the Soviet period. Democracy is practically non-existent and the old ruling elite, who ruined the planned economy, are now living in luxury on the benefits of capitalist exploitation. This helps to explain why, across the former Soviet Union workers are beginning to turn back to left ideas. Only next time, they will have the experience necessary to establish a genuine socialist society, with a planned economy, workers' control and management, and self-determination in a voluntary federation of socialist states and internationalism.

# Political Education Programme

MARXIST WORKERS PARTY

**Topic 1**
**Introduction to Marxism: who were Marx & Engels and what did they say?**
**Reading 1:** Marx the Revolutionary (MWT)
**Reading 2:** The Three Sources and Three Component Parts of Marxism (Lenin)
**Reading 3:** Ninety Years of the Communist Manifesto (Trotsky)
**Reading 4:** The Communist Manifesto, Chapters 1 and 2 (Marx & Engels)

**Topic 2**
**How do Marxists understand the world? Marxism's dialectical and historical materialism**
**Reading 1:** Dialectical Materialism: the Foundation of Revolutionary Theory (MWP)
**Reading 2:** The Preface to "A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy" (Marx)
**Reading 3:** The Materialist Conception of History (Engels)
**Reading 4:** How Europe Underdeveloped Africa, Chapter 2 (Rodney)

**Topic 3**
**How is the working class exploited? Introduction to Marxist economics**
**Reading 1:** Capitalism's Big Con: Understanding Marxist Economics (CWI)
**Reading 2:** Value, Price and Profit (Marx)
**Reading 3:** Capital, selected chapters (Marx)

**Topic 4**
**Social grants & police brutality – the Marxist theory of the State**
**Reading 1:** The State (Lenin)
**Reading 2:** The State and Revolution, extracts (Lenin)
**Reading 3:** Should We Participate in Bourgeois Parliaments? (Lenin)

**Topic 5**
**How can we win the working class to revolutionary socialism? Trotsky's Transitional Programme**
**Reading 1:** The Transitional Programme (Trotsky)
**Reading 2:** Founding the Fourth International (CWI)
**Reading 3:** On the Radicalisation of the Masses (Trotsky)

**Topic 6**
**When the working class took power The lessons of the Russian Revolution**
**Reading 1:** The Russian Revolution and the Rise of Stalinism (MWT)
**Reading 2:** The Lessons of October (Trotsky)

**Topic 7**
**The rise and fall of Stalinism: how and why did the bureaucratic dictatorship fail?**
**Reading 1:** The Rise of Stalinism, (MWT)
**Reading 2:** The Nature of the Soviet Regime, (MWT)
**Reading 3:** The Crisis of the Stalinist States, (MWT)
**Reading 4:** From Perestroika to Capitalist Restoration (CWI)

**Topic 8**
**The socialist revolution in the neo-colonial world – Trotsky's Permanent Revolution vs the SACP's National Democratic Revolution**
**Reading 1:** The Theory of the Permanent Revolution (MWT)
**Reading 2:** The "New" SACP's Explanation of Stalinism (MWT)
**Reading 3:** Results & Prospects (Trotsky)
**Reading 4:** The Right of Nations to Self-Determination (Lenin)

**Topic 9**
**Lenin's theory of imperialism: why was Africa colonized and how is it exploited today?**
**Reading 1:** Imperialism: the Highest Stage of Capitalism (Lenin)
**Reading 2:** The Colonial Revolution (MWT)
**Reading 3:** A History of Pan-African Revolt, excerpts (CLR James)
**Reading 4:** Draft Theses on the National and Colonial Questions (Lenin)

**Topic 10**
**Apartheid and the liberation struggle**
**Reading 1:** The Nature and Tasks of the Revolution (MWT)
**Reading 2:** Lessons of the 1950s (MWT)
**Reading 3:** The Soweto Uprising (MWT/MWP)
**Reading 4:** Tasks of the South African Revolution (MWT)
**Reading 5:** Letter to South African Revolutionaries (Trotsky)

**Topic 11**
**Africanism vs. Marxism**
**Reading 1:** Class & Race: Marxism, Racism and the Class Struggle (MWP)
**Reading 2:** Africanism vs. Marxism (MWP)
**Reading 3:** The Third International After Lenin, selected chapters (Trotsky)
**Reading 4:** African Socialism Revisited (Nkrumah)

**Topic 12**
**The revolutionary party & democratic centralism – organising a Bolshevik party**
**Reading 1:** Our Organising Principles (MWP)
**Reading 2:** A Letter to a French Syndicalist (Trotsky)
**Reading 3:** The Class, the Party and the Leadership (Trotsky)
**Reading 4:** Tactics & Revolution, selected articles (Lenin & Trotsky)

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