

3. Foundations of the 4th International

This period of Trotsky's life is dominated by three themes:—

***STALINISM;** much of Trotsky's writing during this period was taken up with analysing the changing phases of Stalinism.

***FASCISM;** Trotsky provided the only coherent Marxist analysis of that period of national Socialism and fascism.

***BUILDING AND FORMATION OF THE 4th INTERNATIONAL;** for the founding conference in 1938 Trotsky wrote

'The Death Agony of Capitalism and The Tasks of the F.I.: A Transitional Programme'. In a real sense this was Trotsky's will and testimony. The implications of the founding of the FI and its programme still hold an important influence over Trotskyist groups today.

In addition, and sometimes linked to these main preoccupations, he wrote a mass of material on Britain, Spain, Italy and Germany, dealing with everything from the trade union question to the contradictions facing the various ruling classes. He wrote on the tactics of the united front and on 'entrism'. And he wrote three major historical works which were to become Marxist classics: 'My Life', an autobiography written in the early 1930s; 'A History of the Russian Revolution'; and 'The Revolution Betrayed'.

(i) THE POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS

A year after his expulsion from Russia, Trotsky helped to set up the *International Communist League*, which held its founding conference in 1930. Its programme was a direct response to second period Stalinism, characterised as it was by the programme of socialism in one country, and diplomatic alliances with bourgeois and social democratic forces in other countries.

The ICL was very small, but contained followers in countries which included the US, China, Germany, Spain and Britain. The ICL considered itself an expelled section of the Third International, fighting to regenerate it. At this time the Third International was still considered a revolutionary force and there was no talk of forming a new international.

But the programme of the ICL was already out of date when it was outlined. By 1928, Stalinism had begun to move into its Third Period. According to Stalinist theoreticians, the third period of capitalist consolidation was characterised by 'rapid development of the contradictions in the world economy' and a 'maximum sharpening of the general crisis of the world economy'. Third Period Stalinism represented a sharp even dramatic, break from the right wing policies of the Second Period. The Third Period saw in every working class struggle, in every ruling class problem, the imminent revolution. It was as ultra-left as the preceding period had been ultra-right. It was a crude response to the mounting contradictions of world capitalism in the 1930s — contradictions which included the Wall St. Crash of 1929, unheard-of inflation, and the growth of fascism in Germany and Italy.

So Trotsky's political work and writings in the 1930s were to be directed against the absurd zig-zags and turns in Comintern policy. These errors brought out much of the best of Trotsky's work, allowing his sharp sense of social movements and trends to come to the fore. His analysis of fascism was strongest in its strategical sense. He cut through the disast-

rous characterisation of social democracy as social fascism and developed the concept of the united front as a basis for working class and left wing unity. As an actual in-depth analysis of the roots of fascism, particularly the psycho-sociological basis it was less useful and therefore not necessarily transferable to other periods. It underestimated the grip of fascist ideas and as is recurrent in Trotsky's writing overestimated the power of revolutionary leadership. For example, he wrote:—

"Fascism would in reality fall to pieces if the Communist Party was able to unite the working class and by that alone transform it into a powerful revolutionary magnet for all the oppressed masses of the people". ('Fascism, Stalinism and the United Front' - *International Socialism Journal Special* p.13).

But before long another Comintern zig-zag took place, taking policy to the right and Trotsky's attention was rightly diverted to attacking the opportunism of this new turn. The central Comintern concept was the 'People's Fronts' which would unite not just social democrats (i.e. the previous 'social fascists') but also 'entire nations' in the cause of peace and anti-fascism. In France and Spain the policies led to a failure to develop revolutionary situations and the communist parties played important roles in channelling the movements into safe reformist directions.

As Trotsky wrote about Spain:—

"Notwithstanding the fact that the Spanish proletariat stood in the final day of the revolution, not below but above the Russian proletariat of 1917 — by setting itself the task of rescuing the capitalist regime, the Popular Front doomed itself to military defeat".

(ii) BUILDING THE 4th INTERNATIONAL

In 1938, against a background of impending world war, fascist and quasi-fascist regimes in control of large chunks of Europe, the defeat of the Spanish revolution, in Russia — purges at home and increasing accommodation to bourgeois governments and parties abroad, and the growing patriotic nationalist feelings in working class organisations in much of the rest of Europe, the Movement for the Fourth International became the Fourth International.

The founding conference, which lasted one day, was attended by 21 delegates from 11 organisations. The largest was the American SWP with around 1,500 members. Some of the groups were mere handfuls of people. The FI as a whole had no mass working class following or implantation.

The isolation of the 4th International was strongly conditioned by the campaign of slander by the Stalinist regime. Millions of left wing activists were successfully immunised against Trotsky by the Moscow show trials and the constant repetition of charges that Trotsky was a fascist agent etc. There can be little doubt that for survival purposes alone, Trotskyism had to organise its forces. The continuity of revolutionary Marxism or what they called 'Bolshevik-Leninism' was linked to that survival.

What is more doubtful, however, is the inflated claims of significance and leadership which distorted and continues to distort Trotskyism. The historic task that Trotsky gave the FI was determined by his analysis of the epoch and the specific conjuncture. Mankind was faced with the choice between

'socialism or barbarism'. The desperate gamble rested on the assumption that the objective conditions were not merely ripe, but over-fulfilled. In the Transitional Programme, the political basis of the FI, he wrote:—

"The orientation of the masses is determined firstly by the objective conditions of decaying capitalism, and second by



German CP leaders review Communist Militia in 1933.

the treacherous politics of the old workers' organisations. Of these factors, the first, of course, is the decisive one; the laws of history are stronger than the bureaucratic apparatus". p. 7

And:—

"In all countries the proletariat is racked by a deep disquiet. The multi-millioned masses again and again enter the road of revolution. But each time they are blocked by their own conservative machines". p.7

It follows, therefore, that:—

"The world political situation as a whole is chiefly characterised by a historical crisis of the leadership of the proletariat. The historical crisis of mankind is reduced to the crisis of the revolutionary leadership". p.6

On the one hand, capitalism was about to cease to exist. On the other, the working class was ready for revolution, and Trotsky confidently expected that mass working class uprisings would 'fill the sails' of the FI and rapidly turn it into a genuine workers' organisation.

The second major component of the Transitional Programme was an analysis of the nature of the communist parties.

"The Third International has taken the road of reformism at a time when the crisis of capitalism definitely placed the proletarian revolution on the agenda. . .the bureaucracy which became a reactionary force in the USSR, cannot play a revolutionary role in the world arena". p.37

More importantly, Trotsky firmly believed that the Russian CP and the whole of the Third International were on the verge of collapse. In 1939 he wrote:—

"Might we not place ourselves in a ludicrous position if we affixed to the Bonapartist oligarchy the nomenclature of a new ruling class, just a few years or even months prior to its inglorious collapse?" ('The USSR in War')

Unfortunately, neither aspect of the Transitional Programme was correct. The Russian CP was certainly far stronger than Trotsky gave it credit for, for reasons we explain in the next section. On the more important question of the stability of the system the projections were obviously factually incorrect. In a relatively short space of time, far from collapsing, capitalism was to enjoy its longest period of uninterrupted and sustained growth. Far from being 'socialism or barbarism', the reformist solution was once again open for the system. Nevertheless, this was after the war. Trotskyists will point to the special facts not only of war and inter-imperialist rivalry, but the treachery of Stalinism, technological and other 'booms' etc. It is true that the specific factual predictions are not the main thing. It is also true that it was very difficult for Marx-

ists to foresee stability in the 1930s. Socialism or barbarism, with the rise of fascism and the slump did appear to be the choice. In this sense the Transitional Programme was a genuine attempt to provide a solution to this final crisis. In it Trotsky writes:—

"It is necessary to help the masses in the process of daily

struggle to find the bridge between present demands and the socialist programme of the revolution. This bridge should include a system of *transitional demands*, stemming from today's conditions and today's consciousness of wide layers of the working class and unalterably leading to one final conclusion; the conquest of power by the proletariat". p.8

For a pre-revolutionary situation, allowing for certain exaggerations, the Transitional Programme was excellent. Transitional demands, sensitively handled could fulfil their intended function as bridging factors. The weakness, however, was not that it didn't predict the future, but that it did not adequately describe the existing period. Because even in the 1930s there were important changes maturing in the womb of the capitalist system, which were to act as a spring-board for the post-war boom and radically alter the content of class struggle. We get a hint of this failure to grasp the new dynamic of capitalist development when Trotsky writes in the Transitional Programme:—

"New Deal politics (in the USA). . .like Popular Front politics. . .opens no exit from the economic blind alley". p.6

And a year later he described Roosevelt's New Deal economics as 'reactionary and helpless quackery'. (Foreword to 'The Living Thought of Karl Marx') Unfortunately, it was precisely this 'quackery' which was to be the basis on which international capitalism re-stabilised itself.

We would not be overcritical of Trotsky for not grasping these admittedly new developments. But what is a strong criticism is that his whole methodology and conception of the epoch precluded him from seeing any elements of stability or revival genuinely re-asserting themselves. Trotsky turned the concept of the epoch, as an epoch "of war, crises and revolutions' into a vastly exaggerated and mechanical assertion of the collapse of capitalism. The perspective of the Transitional Programme stands oddly against one of his own criticisms as one of the phases of Stalinist politics:—

"We reject the apocalyptic presentation of the 'third period' as the final one; how many periods there will be before the victory of the proletariat is a question of the relation of forces and the changes in the situation. . . We reject the very essence of this strategic schematisation with its numbered periods; there is no absolute tactic established in advance for the 'second' or 'third' periods." ('The Turn in the Communist International and the German Situation' 1930)

This methodology and characterisation of the epoch is the basic flaw behind many of the aspects of modern Trotskyist politics as we will examine fully later. But before this we have to turn to examine the evolution of Trotskyism without Trotsky in the post-war period.

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From the war until the mid-1960s Trotskyism, with the exception of some rare moments, remained an isolated revolutionary current internationally. In Britain the Trotskyist movement split, fused and expelled each other with monotonous regularity. The legacy of Trotsky's politics made re-adjustment to the new post-war conditions of capitalism very difficult.

THE CAPITALIST REVIVAL AND THE ECONOMIC CRISIS

The Transitional Programme had said that capitalism had no future; productive forces had stagnated and reforms were impossible. After the war the FI continued the same analyses. Mandel, their leading economist wrote for the FI in 1946:—

"There is no reason whatever to assume that we are facing a new epoch of capitalist stabilisation and development. On the contrary, the war has acted only to aggravate the disproportion between the increased productivity of the capitalist economy and the capacity of the world market to absorb it."

This analysis was re-affirmed in 1948 and substantially accepted again in 1951. A majority of the newly formed revolutionary Communist Party (the only united Trotskyist grouping ever to exist in Britain) did not accept it fully, but had little by way of counter-analysis. The followers of Gerry Healey maintained the orthodox line in Britain. This line only came to be re-assessed in 1954/5, when the imminent world economic crisis was unlikely, and even the FI had to change its tune.

The FI's mode of analysis had failed to take into account the changes introduced by capitalist governments in the context of the new theories of Keynes. This affected key variables which altered the economic mechanisms of crisis — the use of wages and the role of the state. The capitalist crisis, as Marx had shown is in essence always the same problem; it is rooted in production and in attempts to stem the falling rate of profitability by increasing the organic composition of capital. But this is manifested in different forms in the actual economic market. Before the war it was manifested by a disjuncture between supply and demand. This was how Mandel saw it in the previous quote — a crisis of overproduction; too many goods with not enough demand to buy them.

After the war, guided by Keynesianism, governments attempted to solve this problem of 'effective demand'. They did this firstly by making the wage a political weapon of capitalism's development. Thus they could try to tie working class interests to the system through consumerism. Tied to this was an enlargement of the role of the state — in economic planning, direction of investment, creation and control of the welfare system, and also organisation of education and housing, tax and monetary policies, nationalisation. The aim of this was to make the state the 'collective brain of capital', with the ability (especially as it was to be the largest employer) to regulate demand, economic development and oversee the relationship between wages, productivity and investment.

None of the 'special factors' mentioned by Trotskyism (third technological revolution, arms spending etc.) can account for the massive growth rates and sustained nature of the boom. It was a new phase of capitalist development that even the new Trotskyist groups perform incredible somersaults to attempt to explain, to avoid the consequences for

Trotsky's conception of the epoch. Hence a classic from the RCG on FI policy:—

"There was no comprehension of the difference between the general features of the imperialist epoch (eg. stagnation and decay) and its specific expressions in the post-war period (boom, renewed strength of reformism)". (Revolutionary Communist no.2 p.30)

The political consequences of the boom were to recharge capitalism's batteries, a far cry from the death of reformism announced in the Transitional Programme. In fact, only social democracy could have ushered in the new regenerated system and cement working class identification with the state.

THE STATE AND SOCIALISM

Trotskyism found it difficult to grasp the new role of the state. The whole left had been used to seeing the state as merely providing the legal and political framework for the dominance of the ruling class. State planning and nationalisation were seen as socialist and anti-capitalist measures. If Trotskyism had criticised state planning under capitalism, it was only on the basis that it was too little and in the wrong context:—

"The increasing practice of intervention in the economy by the state is an involuntary homage rendered to socialism by capitalism".

(Mandel — 'Marxist Economic Theory' p.541)

These weaknesses flow directly from the Trotskyist analysis of Russia which identified a workers' state with nationalised property relations. By asserting that this was the economic basis for socialism, they implicitly reduced capitalism to private ownership. A critique of the limitations of the Russian economic model would have provided the basis for an understanding of the new forms of state control and intervention in the West.

THE SPREAD OF STALINISM

If confusion about the nature of post-war capitalism was to create problems, it was nothing compared with the chaos that the debate over the 'Stalinist' countries was to cause in the world Trotskyist movement. In the Transitional Programme Trotsky still saw the Stalinist party/state machine as a Bonapartist group in an extremely precarious position. He saw the right wing of the bureaucracy as in the ascendant and predicted that unless the workers crushed the bureaucracy there would be a determined attempt to revise the 'socialist' character of the USSR and restore capitalism. He said that the dominant sections of the bureaucracy could only maintain their privileges by neglecting nationalised property, collectivism and the monopoly of foreign trade. Again, he failed to see that it was through this that they maintained those privileges. With the elimination of all opposition, the bureaucracy was consolidating its power and had no intention of 'restoring capitalism'. The USSR emerged from the war stronger than ever and expanded and imposed regimes on the Russian model in Eastern Europe and North Korea. There were more genuine revolutions led by local communist parties in Yugoslavia and Albania, and a little later the momentous revolutions in China and Vietnam.

At the FI conference in 1946 they had to face up to these problems. The Eastern European regimes had not even been created by the working class, so as Hallas points out:—

“If the Soviet bloc are workers’ states then the FI and the Transitional Programme were wrong to say Stalinism cannot overthrow capitalism”. (I.S. Journal 40)

They entered into long and semantic arguments to try and avoid the issue. The first formulation was amazingly that the ‘Soviet bloc’ were still capitalist countries ruled by an extreme form of Bonapartism. China was later to be labelled ‘capitalist’, Russia remained a ‘degenerated workers’ state’. This enabled them to maintain true to one side of the argument, but it was a ludicrous position given their analysis of Russia.

The new regimes were almost identical to the original model. Such idiocies were compounded by a series of amazing somersaults over the question of Yugoslavia. In 1948 it was expelled from the Cominform (successor to the 3rd International) as ‘revisionist’ and ‘Trotskyist’. Anxious for allies against the Kremlin, the FI declared that the Yugoslavian CP was a ‘revolutionary party’ — therefore condemning as rubbish all they had said before about its ‘Stalinist’ nature.

They could not carry on with such contradictions. In 1951 the FI conference, pushed by Michael Pablo, one of its main leaders, decided that the new regimes were ‘deformed workers’ states’. (Note the subtle difference between deformed’ and ‘degenerated’)

“Totally deformed workers’ states came into existence, ones which had extremely progressive property relationships, but were hampered by the Kremlin-imposed political apparatus”. (‘The Fourth International’ — A ‘Militant’ group pamphlet)

So the Trotskyist movement adjusted and maintained its analytical separation between base and superstructure, abstracting property relations from social relations as a whole. These positions on Eastern Europe were at least a logical progression although opposition remained, including the ‘Healeyites’ in Britain.

THE SPLITS IN THE TROTSKYIST MOVEMENT

From the early 1950s to the middle 1960s major developments were to take place in world Trotskyism as the movement tried to come to grips with its traditional conceptions. The splits which characterise the Trotskyist movement today largely derive from this period.

(i) SEPARATION

Some sections of the movement ended up separating from it, though still defining themselves as part of the Trotskyist tradition. The most notable of these was the grouping that eventually became the International Socialist (and later the Socialist Workers Party) in Britain. In 1948 Tony Cliff, the later leader of I.S., was expelled for advocating the view that Russia was ‘state capitalist’. Such tendencies, usually also advocating the view that the bureaucracy was a class, became a major division in Trotskyism. We deal with the question of state capitalism in the final section. The other distinguishing feature of this tendency was an analysis of the boom structured around the concept of the ‘permanent arms economy’. Michael Kidron in ‘Western Capitalism Since the War’ claimed for I.S. that state expenditure on armaments acted as a built-in stabiliser for the economy. This is supposed to offset the tendency for the rate of profit to fall, postponing overproduction and slump by diverting resources from the productive sector. We haven’t the space here to deal with detailed criticisms. We will make three short points.

1. This theory overemphasises arms spending in relation to total government expenditure. Increased state expenditure has played a significant role in maintaining social and economic stability by maintaining a level of demand and full em-

ployment. But any public expenditure can play a similar role to arms spending — including housing, education, health and the nationalised industries.

2. Its role as a stabiliser was from the beginning riddled with contradictions and cannot be the major explanation for the growth of inflationary crises in the late 1960s. Outside a period of expansion, the strictly ‘unproductive’ nature of such expenditure from the point of view of capitalism as a whole, creates pressure on private capital as it decreases the amount available for accumulation. I.S. concentrated on explaining the inflationary crisis as a function of the internal contradictions of the permanent arms economy, rather than straddling from its relation to overall state expenditure, to the private sector and its accumulation problems.

3. It took the crisis outside the sphere of working class action, making it purely a question of the internal functioning of the system. By not grasping this, it failed to fuse the crisis and class struggle. I.S. analyses of industrial struggle (eg. as put forward in ‘The Employers’ Offensive’) are largely unconnected to their overall economic theory.

Despite these criticisms it must be said that the theory of the permanent arms economy was at least a genuine attempt to get to grips with a new problem. Even more importantly, because I.S. had a theory of the boom it could escape the economic lunacies of the FI.

(ii) ORTHODOXY AGAINST REVISIONISM

The FI still believed that all the conditions existed to ensure the world victory of socialism, except international revolutionary leadership. Yet they had to acknowledge that, despite some experienced cadres, they couldn’t provide it as organisations. In the context of coming to terms with the ‘long boom’ and the power and spread of Stalinism — they decided on a policy of *entrism*. That is, they recommended that Trotskyist groups should enter into the mass parties (some had already done so) to conduct long-term work in building up a working class base. Their public face was supposed to be kept through public meetings and a journal. These mass parties were conceived as either social democratic (Britain, Australia) or Communist (France, Italy). The FI agreed in 1951 that:—

“In countries where CPs were a majority of the working class, they can under exceptional circumstances and under pressure of very powerful uprisings of the masses, be led to project a revolutionary orientation and counter to the Kremlin directives.”

(Pablo — ‘The Rise and Decline of Stalinism’)

In fact, to see the CPs as potentially revolutionary was wrong on two counts. Firstly, in the midst of the developing Cold War and East-West antagonism, the European CPs were becoming *more subservient* to Moscow (hence the total support for the suppression of the Hungarian Revolution). Secondly, the CPs had adapted to the re-formed capitalism, by means of the ‘peaceful roads to socialism’, in which they abdicated any revolutionary strategy and Leninist analysis of the state and parliament.

These changes proved too much for a minority of the FI (Healeyites in Britain, Lambertists in France) so they split from the official FI and formed their own alternative. The split became characterised as between ‘orthodoxy’ (the Healeyite minority) and ‘revisionism’ (the Pabloite majority). In Britain this split and the ensuing faction fighting lost Trotskyism the considerable periphery it had built up inside the Labour Party through the journal ‘Socialist Outlook’. The majority of the Socialist Workers Party (the American section and the biggest and most important) also rejected the change.

The majority strategy of ‘deep entrism’ was inevitably coupled with renewed attempts to understand the low level of class struggle in the advanced capitalist countries, together

with the strengthening of reformism via the Labour Party and the unions. It appeared as though the European proletariat had been bought off. To see beyond this was difficult for the revolutionary movement given that it lacked the conceptual tools to re-analyse the situation.

What happened instead was that the FI majority *retreated from confronting the question* by concentrating its analysis and practice on the question of the colonial revolution:—

“This is the period when the conception of the revolution’s advance ‘from the periphery to the centre’, from colonial and semi-colonial countries towards the imperialist citadels of the advanced capitalist countries of the U.S. and Europe was worked out.”

(International Marxist Review No.3)

This orientation was naturally boosted by the Chinese split with the Russians, and the Cuban and Algerian revolutions, (with Pablo playing an important part in the latter). ‘From periphery to centre’ remained the strategy of the FI majority and still remains an important part of FI politics. This helps to explain the politics of the IMG in Britain, which is the official FI group. They applied the ‘periphery to centre’ analysis of the advanced capitalist countries and logically reasoned that their main role was to build solidarity movements with the anti-imperialist struggle. In this way they believed that they could win the leadership amongst layers of the population least affected by labourist and chauvinist ideology — students, immigrants etc. It explains the important role that they have always given to solidarity work in relation to the Irish struggle. A consequence of this, of course, has been that all over Europe the FI is extremely weak in relation to the workers’ movement.

The policy changes, however, were too much for some groupings. In 1960 a tendency broke away under the leadership of Posadas, who was head of the FI’s Latin American section. They had some mass support in Latin America, notably in Bolivia amongst the tin miners. They took an ultra-left line that the Third World War was imminent and even necessary for socialism to rise from the ashes of the nuclear holocaust.

“The Bolshevik militant of this epoch is he who is prepared to face the last settlement of accounts between capitalism and the socialist revolution and the workers’ states, which will be settled within the nuclear war.”
 (“Red Flag”)

As a consequence they set up their own ‘Posadist’ FI which was represented in Britain by a tiny sect — ‘The Revolutionary Workers’ Party’ — with a journal called ‘Red Flag’. The second and more important split involved Pablo himself and his supporters. Disagreements began in the early 1960 about interpretations of the colonial revolution, in particular the Cuban and Algerian situations. The ‘determining break’ came over the question of Pablo’s ‘critical support’ that the FI was giving the Chinese communists. The Pabloites maintained that China was definitely ‘Stalinist’. The split came in 1965 and they now call themselves the Revolutionary Marxist Tendency of the Fourth International. Their journal reveals that they have learned some important lessons, but their past remains like a dead weight on them, preventing them from learning more.

(iii) THE MINORITY RETAINS ITS ORTHODOXY

The minority of the original FI represented by the Healeyites in Britain opposed most of the ‘revisionist’ developments, setting up their own FI. In Britain they had a field day. The revisionists like Pat Jordan and Ken Coates were buried so deep within the Labour Party that it was difficult to find them; they didn’t even have their own theoretical journal. Given this, and the colonial orientation, of the revisionists, the Healeyites could claim that such entrism was suicide and that they represented the fundamentals of Marxism and Trotskyism on the role of the working class (by which they mean

In reaction to the Stalinist suppression of the workers’ revolt against the bureaucracy in Hungary and the British CP’s support of the Russian invasion, hundreds of important militants left the Communist Party. The orthodox Trotskyists had a ready made analysis in Trotsky’s analysis of Stalinism; ideas for the future and a capacity and desire to organise. Many of the ex-CP members then joined. In 1957 they founded a twice weekly newspaper, the ‘Newsletter’, which in its early days was an excellent non-sectarian revolutionary paper. They also called a rank and file conference attended by 600 militants on an anti-bureaucratic platform, and produced a number of good agitational, industrial pamphlets. A sharp contrast again to its successor, the conferences of the stage-managed and manipulated farces of the ‘All Trades Union Alliance’. A theoretical journal, the ‘Labour Review’, was also published which contained some valuable articles on politics and history. Their theory now is a ritual incantation of sacred texts and abstract formulae derived from the past. As Hallas points out:—

“It started with a cadre of militants superior in numbers, talent and experience, to that of any previous revolutionary organisation since the formation of the Communist Party in 1920-21.” (I.S. Journal 40)

But despite gains in the Young Socialists (Labour Party) the Socialist Labour League (now the Workers’ Revolutionary Party) that they founded in 1959, soon faltered and lost much of its industrial base, and turned into a sectarian organisation that we know so well today. The reason is very simple — when combatting Stalinism and winning over CP members it was in a good position, able to draw on a wealth of experience. But when it came to a question of political strategy in modern class struggle it was bankrupt.

That bankruptcy was rooted in the limitations of orthodox Trotskyism. The major limitation was that they were still wedded to the idea that the economic crisis would be of the pre-war slump/catastrophe type. The date of the predicted collapse was simply put back year after year, rather like the Jehova’s Witnesses predictions of the end of the world. As the SLL became totally sectarian and engaged in no common activity with the rest of the left, it could have no feedback on its ideas, which became totally static. The SLL could never be wrong, so their pretentious ‘world leaderships’ and ‘world congresses’ of politically impotent groups could continue, although by now there was not much left of their section of the FI, having split from the French section.

Such decline and developments in the SLL were only countered by increasing activity, producing counter-productive political spectacles like those at Alexandra Palace, noted for their mass passivity and intense manipulation, ruthless bullying discipline, building the organisation around the selling of a substitutive newspaper and recruiting star names like Vanessa Redgrave. As they have such a high turnover in membership, most don’t remember the wrong predictions and bad politics that went before — which also leads to an increased sectarianism as their members must be ‘protected’ from other left wing groups who have longer memories.

Their necessary stress on the ‘central role of the working class’ has led to a blind and ultra-left position on the anti-imperialist struggles. For instance, after the Cuban Revolution that maintained that Cuba was still capitalist. This derives from the perverse logic that only a working class revolutionary party can make a revolution. Hence— no party in Cuba, no revolution! They failed to develop a perspective on the creative and important role of the peasantry and agricultural proletariat in anti-imperialist struggle. The WRP is a politically bankrupt organisation. We would be dishonest if we judged Trotskyism by their standards.

5. Modern Trotskyism

Introduction

In the period we have examined the Trotskyist movement collapsed into undialectical extremes. 'Orthodoxy' remained trapped within an economic analysis only applicable to a past era and a view of class struggle so narrow that it could only impose old categories on every situation, learning nothing. 'Revisionism', in trying genuinely to adapt and understand new conditions, tended to retreat from an analysis of the advanced capitalist countries and the changed nature of the working class, choosing to locate its theories and practice primarily around colonial and neo-colonial questions.

The unfavourable conditions the revolutionary left had to operate in (long boom, cold war etc) intensified the difficulties Trotskyism had in adapting to changed conditions. But despite the weaknesses of implantation and analysis Trotskyism still managed to regenerate itself and become the dominant factor in a much-increased revolutionary left movement in some European countries. Of course, this was not a voluntaristic process. The setting was the increase in workers' militancy (especially France '68 and Italy '69), the growth of the autonomous movements of women, students and immigrants and the anti-imperialist struggles in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

But why the regeneration in a context where traditional Trotskyism showed very little understanding of the new struggles? This was certainly the case. With some exceptions Trotskyism was either hostile or very slow to understand the workers' movement and remains today sceptical and distant from any analysis of housework and community struggle. Student movements, especially as they lost their momentum were often used as fodder for 'industrial work'. In industry the Trotskyist organisations had years of tradition of fertilising the trade unions and tended to miss vital moments of struggle outside the political and organisational framework of trade unionism. This was especially the case in Italy where the Trotskyist groups remain small and uninfluential, partly for this reason.

The regeneration was a product of a number of factors. Firstly, when these various struggles emerged, in most countries the Trotskyist organisations were the only ones prepared. Not prepared in any real political sense, but they had the organisations, the speakers, the political programmes. No matter how inappropriate any of their models were, in the absence of an alternative they were bound to make an impact on the growing number of mostly ex-student militants.

Secondly, the alternatives, where they existed, made serious errors which fuelled the growth of Trotskyism. In particular, both the anti-authoritarian movement in Germany and the so-called 'Mao-Spontaneist' currents in France had at first the political dominance and weight of numbers. But this 'new left' suffered from an over-emphasis on the critique of authority relationships, a lack of consistent organisational models and sometimes substituted eclectic political practice for a balanced, planned series of interventions with an industrial component.

Britain in the late sixties had only the 'Solidarity' group as an organised alternative, which despite producing a couple of useful pamphlets, was, and is, an ultra-left sect, totally hostile to Marxist concepts of organisation and politics. Other 'libertarian' groups were involved in useful local practice, mainly around 'community' issues, but were opposed to organisation and to industrial activity, basing their practice on the idea that the vanguard would emerge from the 'fringes' of the working class.

Big Flame emerged as a local group in Liverpool in 1970. Despite being industrially based and open to the idea of developing an organisation, it was slow to develop a viable model of general organisation and to rid its politics of remnants of ultra-leftism.

In contrast, Trotskyism, by its very rigidity, offered a political consistency and sense of serious organisation lacking elsewhere. This was definitely helped by its having a world presence, no matter how weak or at times mythical. Its commitment to a world revolutionary process and to backing anti-imperialist solidarity movements helped establish an implantation among students and ex-students and even some isolated working class militants. The revolutionary left, given its relative weakness, is susceptible to theories of instant revolution and an ultra-left distrust of any institutional or governmental power (China, Angola, Cuba etc), where the contradictions of class struggle also work themselves out.

Revolutionary organisations which are 'nationally' based in one country and which have a much longer-term perspective of building a new 'International' have difficulty in establishing their international commitments in the eyes of some militants. There is also the reminder of the opposite to the Trotskyist international mythology — in the Maoist groups who have subordinated their international perspectives to tail-ending the national interests of the Chinese state.

It is no accident that it is Italy where a 'new' left had done its theoretical homework, particularly in the theoretical analysis of the magazine 'Quaderni Rossi' and the practice of the Potere Operaio groupings (Workers' Power), that the most serious serious organised alternative in Europe to Trotskyism emerged, and where three sizeable revolutionary organisations exist, none of which are Trotskyist (Lotta Continua, Avanguardia Operaia and PDUP). Neither is it an accident that the two largest European organisations with a Trotskyist background are precisely those which have challenged the Trotskyist tradition from within its general framework.

In Britain the International Socialists most successfully 'rode the movement's back' in the late sixties, remaining flexible and open enough to attract many militants looking for an organised alternative. They had a different (if wrong!) analysis of the post-war boom (in the theory of the 'permanent arms economy'), rejected the theory of permanent revolution (even if they had an even more ultra-left version derived from a 'state capitalist' position) and, most decisively, rejected the Transitional Programme (even if returning to a Second International' split between maximum and minimum programmes).

IS have not advanced a revolutionary theory and practice based on new post-war conditions. Their model has often been the early years of the Comintern and the British Communist Party, the Minority Movements and so on. But by their flexibility and imagination they have been able to get closer to the working class movement, in particular to left-wing stewards, to whom I.S.'s lively, anti-bureaucratic but economistic politics has a strong appeal. It is a tragedy that I.S.'s sectarianism and obsession with party building has reduced its impact on the left and in the working class: not to mention losing most of the old leading and middle cadre, especially in 1972-4 period.

In the following sections we hope to show how the traditional political analysis of Trotskyism still distorts its ability to understand the dynamic of class struggle internationally and domestically.

b)i Party, Class and Epoch

A major part of any political theory is its view of the general relationship between party and class. It is linked to its analysis of the context of class struggle and specifically to the nature of the 'epoch'.

Modern Trotskyism holds a mechanical and a-historical conception of party and class relations, primarily because it has a partial and abstract understanding of Leninist theory. We will examine the context that gave birth to Leninism, and show how changes in the economic and political relations between capital, state and working class since then must lead to a resituating and reappraisal of that theory. The basic weaknesses of Trotskyism are a result of a failure to do this.

Trotskyism emerged as the defender of the revolutionary Marxist tradition against Stalinism and the degeneration of the Russian revolution. So its basic belief was the maintenance of the concept of the Leninist party, as the Russian and similar versions worldwide became bureaucratic and reformist. The Leninist conception provided the link to a revolutionary and democratic tradition of organisation. Now, as ever, Trotskyists want to build Leninist parties as the essential prerequisite for proletarian revolution. This view is *partially* mistaken: not because there are no elements of Lenin's idea that are relevant today, on the contrary there are plenty. But rather because Leninism was partly based on the particular Russian and European context, which has now changed. This is not accepted by Trotskyists. For them the needs of 1917 are the same as those of today. This leads to the repetitive, unimaginative and unchanging line on organisation that is manifested by Trotskyist groups today.

A couple of examples:—

'If only the workers in Paris had remembered the experiences of Paris 1936, of the Italian workers in 1920, if only they had had a revolutionary party, for such a party is the memory of the class.' (Tony Cliff of IS[SWP] writing in *Socialist Worker*)

Or if you prefer further back in history:—

'The remarkable thing about the audacity of the Paris workers is that the problems they took up in 1871 have not been solved to this day. We know the main reason for this. It does not lie in the immaturity of the objective conditions, nor in the lack of vigour of the mass struggles. It lies in the absence of an adequate revolutionary organisation.' (From *'On Bureaucracy'* by Ernest Mandel — IMG)

If only things were that simple! If revolutionary organisations are to be 'the memories of the class', they will have to start remembering that the function of a memory is to help *differentiate* between different periods, objective conditions and political tasks. Trotskyism suffers from a one-dimensional memory. In every situation, as each event in modern history unfolds — Chile — Portugal — 'if only there had been a party' the cry goes up. But it is not just a question of different conditions creating different organisational needs. Why is there no party uniting the real class vanguards? We may all want a party, but desiring it is not enough.

A certain level of consciousness and experience, the development of the struggle to the level where unification of the working class and its vanguards is taking place, a certain general ripeness of conditions — without these the necessity of the party cannot be turned into reality in most situations. Without some of these conditions the formation of a party tends to be the imposition of *an administrative machine* at the head of struggles and a working class that is not ready to recognise the legitimacy of the party as its own. Yet the problem is largely unseen by Trotskyism. Trotskyists believe it is necessary to build fully formed democratic centralist parties in any conditions, as the essential basis for further development. They may be small, but an embryo is better than nothing! For instance:—

'Even if we were still in the dark days of the 1930s, 40s or 50s in which the strength of the Trotskyist movement was miniscule, this would not in the slightest alter the necessity for a democratic centralist International.' (IMG)

The belief that the party or a party is not appropriate to and will not emerge in certain conditions, does not lead us to passivity. Organisational structures and tasks will be geared to specific circumstances. At some stages, organisation needs to be of a more preliminary character, looser and more open, with different relationships to the working class and the struggles that emerge. The role of the organisation would be to help develop the mass struggles and consciousness of the working class to the point at which a party becomes a direct necessity for the mass vanguards. However, it is not merely a question of the 'ripeness' of the situation and the level of struggle, it is also a question of what kind of struggle and what kind of working class. Surely the working classes and their struggles of Europe 1917 and Turin 1920 differ from those of Britain 1976 — or Chile 1976 — or Portugal now? Doesn't this pose the need for a very different *relationship*, political and organisational, between party and class. For Trotskyists the answer is essentially No! The consciousness and capacity for struggle of the working class has been given firm bounds in Trotskyist theory — its spontaneous, immediate, daily struggle cannot go beyond trade unionism, beyond seeking reforms under capitalism. The categories of Lenin's time — consciousness, spontaneity, organisation — remain fixed for all time, and transposed on to every future situation.

'Spontaneous struggles of the working class are limited to what is possible within bourgeois society, the revolutionary party leads the working class struggle for the overthrow of the system.' (Revolutionary Communist Group) (Revolutionary Communist No.1 p.12)

In other words, for Trotskyists, the party is still the sole provider of politics and consciousness to the working class — the distance between party and class remains wide. We will return to these questions of the nature of modern class struggle later in more detail. Suffice it to say, however, that the fixed analyses of Trotskyism creates a very structural/administrative concept of the need for the party.

'One of the central contradictions of the Bolshevik's revolutionary theory was their understanding of the significance of organisational questions to the formation of the revolutionary party.' (RCG) (Revolutionary Communist No.1 p.15)

They argue that out of the unevenness of consciousness, experience and struggle in the working class and the need for co-ordinated and directed attempts to seize power, which cannot arise spontaneously, arises the necessity for a given organisational structure — a structure of centralised leadership organised in the most democratic way possible. *This is absolutely correct*. It is also difficult to argue against most of the principles of democratic centralism, in conditions where they are possible and necessary.

- Full freedom of discussion
- Centralised direction of the political discussion in the organisation
- Centralisation of experience and national direction of activity
- Independent initiative and interpretation by the member ship in implementation
- A controlled degree of specialisation and division of labour, checked by a certain level of rotation of tasks.
- Political training of members to create cadres.

But no matter how perfect the structures may be, *they don't tell us much about the content of the relationship between party and class in given periods and situations*. It is the nature of the working class and its relation to capital and state in different situations that is our starting point. In other words, even where it is possible, democratic centralism is a *secondary*

organisational question. *The key determinant is the conditions of struggle*. Unless the more general and 'timeless' aspects of Leninist theory of organisation are separated from and put into the context of the conditions of the struggle operating in that period, then our notions of party and class will be as empty.

THE LENINIST THEORY OF PARTY AND CLASS — ITS LIMITS AND CONTRADICTIONS

The context that gave meaning to the Leninist relationship between party and class was *Europe* of the first part of the 20th century. It is a common mistake for critiques of the 'out-datedness' of Lenin to root its context solely in Russia and its special conditions of police state, large peasantry, the all-pervading state power etc. The thrust of the Leninist theory was aimed at breaking the predominance of the European schools of Marxism and substituting an alternative theory of revolution. It is true that it was the Russian conditions that pushed Lenin and the Bolsheviks into rejecting a Marxism which condemned them to wait for the development of capitalism before adopting the methods of socialist revolution. The dominant Marxist theory held that the revolution must go forward *by stages*, that in so-called underdeveloped countries like Russia, there must be a bourgeois revolution, led by the bourgeoisie, before revolutionaries could start fighting for socialism. Lenin's rejection had implications wider than for Russia. It was the weapon to break the reformist gradualism that had come to dominate Western Marxism. In the more advanced industrial countries the characteristic form of Marxism was in mass parties that were loose and open, yet bureaucratically run, and which fought for power primarily in parliament — combined with trade unions that carried out defensive economic struggle. Leninist theory had wider implications because Russia was not the 'backward' country that some maintained. It suffered from uneven development, rather than underdevelopment. For combined with the large agricultural sector were some of the most advanced factories and industries in the world, with high concentrations of skilled workers. In the rest of Europe these skilled workers were at the centre of struggle and the revolutionary process — for example, the common cycle of struggle that swept Europe in the early 1900s . . . the 1905 Russian revolution, Italy's first general strike in 1904, mass strikes of miners in the Ruhr etc.

So when Lenin proposed alternative strategies, the impact was felt eventually in other European countries. The dominant Marxist theory was not only no use to the Bolsheviks because it condemned them to a passive and subordinate role to the bourgeoisie: it also condemned them *to accept the spontaneous struggle of the workers*. Because we are concerned with the specific question of party and class, it is the latter which we have to examine. Why do we say 'condemned' to accept the spontaneous struggle? It is because they were in this time largely limited to *economistic trade unionism*. In European conditions (as well as in the specific Russian context, where it was constantly necessary to ensure proletarian rather than bourgeois control of the revolutionary process) only by separating and elevating the political struggle over the economic could the question of state power and its seizure be constantly posed: For Lenin this entailed a radical revision of relations between party and class. The *form* would be the tightly knit, highly centralised *vanguard party*. A cadre, combat organisation capable of intervening in and directing class struggle, not accepting its limitations as the mass bureaucratic parties in Europe did. The *content* was that this party of professional revolutionaries would bring political consciousness from outside to the daily industrial struggle, which was usually only spontaneously economic.

The specific features of the Leninist relationship between the party and the working class were dependent, then, on the level of development of relations between working class, capital and state. To explain the historical necessity for the Leninist party-class relationship we have to examine in more detail those other relationships.

Class relations tended to stop the daily struggle of the class at the point of production being spontaneously 'political'. With capitalism entering its imperialist phase, allowing new expansionary outlets — the trend towards monopoly was present. But companies were still relatively small and methods of production were mostly structured around the individual machine. This generated a class composition in the workforce which was based on the relationship of the skilled workers to these machines. The state's function was to provide a politico-legal framework for bourgeois power, generally keeping out of production in any direct sense. This meant that the worker confronted capitalism immediately in a *sectional* sense: the individual capitalist rather than collective capital and state power — and as a highly skilled *producer* divided on trade lines, with a tendency to see the problem of power more in terms of 'workers' control' rather than smashing the bourgeois state and installing the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Yet, revolutionary challenges to the system did arise from struggles connected with the factory. Crises were, in particular, provoked by attacks by capital on the skilled workers' degree of control in work. The struggles over 'dilution of labour' on the Clyde being a good example. In various parts of Europe workers councils, based on the power of skilled workers, played an important part in class confrontations. But the potential for real revolutionary challenge was held back by the type of class struggle likely to arise. The potential was dependent on an *outside political force* to focus the struggle on the objective of state power. The organisation of the skilled workers as *producers*, even its radical, workers' council form, tended to obscure the relation to state power, 'politics' and party organisation, based as it was on the particular class composition of the workforce in this period. Nowhere is this clearer than in Turin and Italian factory occupations organised by the workers' councils in 1920. Confident of their ability to run the factories without the capitalists — by staying *inside* the factories the movement failed to generalise its confrontations and prepare in a specific way at the general, state level to take power, *beyond the power to control production*.

The Leninist separation between the spheres of trade union and party activity, between economics and politics, flowed from this situation. *The party had to politically recompose the class and its vanguard outside the process of spontaneous daily struggle* and politically redirect that struggle against a consciously political object — the state.

The roots of the Trotskyist misuse of the Leninist theory of party and class can also be traced to the explanations that Lenin himself gave for the limits placed on the daily spontaneous struggle. Lenin outlined two interwoven but contradictory elements. One stressed the limitations imposed by the *conditions of struggle*, the relations between class composition, capital and state we have briefly outlined. The other was class on a theory of the 'inevitable limitations' on working class *consciousness*. Compare two quotes from 'What is to be Done?':—

'The economic struggle is the collective struggle of the workers for better terms in the sale of their labour power, for better living conditions and working conditions. This struggle is necessarily a trade union struggle because working conditions vary from trade to trade and the struggle to improve them can only be conducted on the basis of trade organisations.' and the more famous:—

'The history of all countries shows that the working class, exclusively by its own efforts, is able only to develop a trade union consciousness . . . The theory of socialism, however, grew out of theories . . . elaborated by intellectuals . . . the theoretical doctrine of social democracy arose altogether independently of the spontaneous growth of the working class movement.'

To pose political consciousness as arising not out of, but side by side with, class struggle, as the product of a marxist science developed by party intellectuals, is an idealist formulation. Consciousness cannot be deduced from consciousness, the potentiality for political struggle depends upon the particular conditions struggle arises in. While this view was not dominant in Lenin's time, it was wrong of him, and more especially later Marxists (especially Trotsky) to universalise these theories and conditions. Firstly, because its rigidity was not even appropriate to that period. Important spontaneous struggle did on occasions develop and had great significance. as Lenin later acknowledged, as in the case of the mass strikes and soviets in Russia in 1905. Secondly, its universalisation has led to consciousness being elevated above conditions of struggle as the determinant of party-class relationships. Hence, it is responsible for the extremely mechanical notions of this relationship which characterises modern Trotskyism. This reverses the real processes at work in struggle. It was the totality of the conditions of struggle that produced trade unionism as the dominant trend in class conflict and the *consequent* working class consciousness. This is not to deny the influence, even hegemony, of bourgeois ideology and its influence on trade unionism. Nor is it to pose some notion of spontaneously developing revolutionary consciousness in the working class. In some senses a socialist consciousness always comes 'from without' — that is outside any one sphere of experience, whether the factory, the home or the school — and usually only develops in interaction with revolutionary ideas and organisation. But some conditions of struggle encourage struggles to take on a political, ie. anti-capitalist, basis, which makes in turn for greater potentiality for the development of socialist consciousness. We would argue that these conditions are objectively present in modern relations between working class, capital and state — as experienced in peoples daily lives in the factory, community or college, but more of this later.

It is necessary to restore a materialist emphasis about the form and content of class struggle in line with Marx's formulation that — 'social being determines social consciousness'. Putting consciousness and ideology at the centre of analysis, as the determining factor in the level of struggle, fixes social being in such a rigid way and produces those endless abstract debates about consciousness and spontaneity that have limits for understanding of party-class relationships.

THE CONSEQUENCES

The consequences of the Leninist position on party and class were always dangerous, and remain largely unacknowledged by Trotskyist and other groups today, who have a naive faith in the ability of democratic centralism to cure all ills.

'The Leninist party does not suffer from the tendency to bureaucratic control because it restricts its membership to those serious and disciplined enough to take political and theoretical issues as their starting point and to subordinate their activities to these.' (IS)

It is primarily the static and manipulative relationship with the working class which are the foundation for organisational degeneration in modern Leninist groups. Party structures on their own are no insurance against bureaucratisation.

In a wider context the idea of revolutionary consciousness as the product of party intellectuals, with the 'subjective factor' being solely located in the party *can* lead to a serious underestimation of the creative self-activity of the masses. This means a permanent danger of an elitist and authoritarian relationship between a Leninist party and the working class. It is important to stress that this is no automatic process, it depends on the precise relationship between party and masses in the struggles of the period. For the Bolsheviks, their ability to be inside the needs and struggles of the masses and translating that into revolutionary strategy and tactics kept the relationship a living dialectic, at least until the post-revolutionary conditions of material and political decay. The same cannot be said for Trotskyist sects mechanically modelled on the Bolshevik party, cut off from the conditions which made the Bol-

sheviks *the* revolutionary party of the Russian working class.

THE RELEVANCE OF LENINISM

Despite outlining the limitations, the context and the contradictions of the Leninist model of party and class, there *are* universal lessons and truths contained in it, which are still applicable today. The first is the concept of the *vanguard organisation*. A vanguard organisation has the capacity to intervene collectively to develop class struggle, unlike either the 'mass' reformist parties (based on passive individual membership) or anarchist or libertarian 'organisations' (which are generally restricted to propaganda, because they see leadership and direction as contradictory to class autonomy). A vanguard organisation is based on grouping together conscious militants as *cadres* with the education and training to act as members of a *combat organisation*.

Lenin outlined the reasons that make an interventionist cadre organisation necessary. Essentially they are that the capitalist division of labour generates in any one section of the working class only a partial and fragmented experience of the system and the struggles against it. These differences are reinforced by the varying ideological experiences and cultural backgrounds in the working class. Also, the class struggle on a general and day to day basis lacks continuity, as the crisis expresses itself in an uneven and often isolated way. Therefore a political organisation operates to bring together militants from all sections to totalise experience and generate overall revolutionary perspectives. It links the experience and practice of struggle by bringing militants together, overcoming lack of confidence and isolation and provides consistent education. It should be rooted enough in the masses to enable it to be in the forefront of struggle and provide the necessary leadership.

The second application of Leninism is the role played by the party in arming and leading the proletariat to seize power. Some of the tasks necessary for seizing power under the conditions of modern capitalism have changed, most of which have gone unnoticed by Trotskyism. The state is a larger and more complex set of structures, with different types of political forces operative. In particular, the reformist forces (whether social democracy or the revisionist Communist Parties) are more strongly rooted, with a corresponding weakening of the revolutionary left, due to the experiences of the past half-century. It is problematical whether even in dual power situations, the revolutionary party will become an immediate 'majority' amongst the proletariat, on the Bolshevik model. Nevertheless, the period of dual power will be more protracted (albeit with insurrectionary moments) in which the party grows organically with the organs of popular power. All these tendencies reduce the insurrectionary aspects of the traditional revolutionary model of the seizure of power. But the degree of difference can also be exaggerated. It is still a case of re-situating the Leninist model.

There is a current of opinion which sees in the changed nature of society and state and in the existence of soviets and workers' councils, a lessened role for the party. But this is a bad mistake. We agree with Mandel, when he points out that the crisis does not merely grow from periphery to centre, but is a discontinuous process, that cannot be solved merely by the existence of autonomous working class organs of popular power. These do not homogenise and unify the class nor dissolve differences of ideology and interest overnight, solving all tactical and strategic problems. The centralisation of the revolutionary vanguard in the revolutionary party to 'seize the time' is still crucial. Recent events in Portugal emphasise that the process of power does reach crucial moments; turning points in which decisive action is needed — the kind of action (conditioned as it is by highly complex military, political and ideological considerations) which 'soviets' by their very nature cannot initiate or direct. It is also necessary to say that this role structures the task of the organisation, even in its embryonic and loose stages.

TROTSKYIST CONCEPTIONS OF THE HISTORICAL EPOCH

Trotskyism has also failed to re-situate the Leninist theory of party-class relations because of its analysis of the historical epoch. In practice, this analysis appears as an over-emphasis on the problem of leadership, an exaggerated belief that the lack of correct leadership is the cause of underdevelopment of the class struggle and the failure to seize power. The Trotskyist conception of the epoch has remained static and leads to an undialectical separation of 'objective' and 'subjective' factors. Take this quote from the Revolutionary Communist Group:—

'In the Imperialist epoch capitalism suffers from a deep and prolonged crisis which can only be resolved if there exists a revolutionary party capable of winning the mass of the class to its programme. The maintenance of capitalism rests, not on its material foundations, for these are in decay — but on the immaturity and backwardness of the working class and its leadership. The various sharp political turns and alternations of periods of revolutionary advance with periods of reaction, spring not from changes in the economic base, but from impulses of a purely superstructural character. In this epoch the outcome of the crisis rests on the subjective factor: the understanding, organisation and determination of the revolutionary party.' ('Our Tasks and Methods' — Revolutionary Communist No.1 . . . page 5)

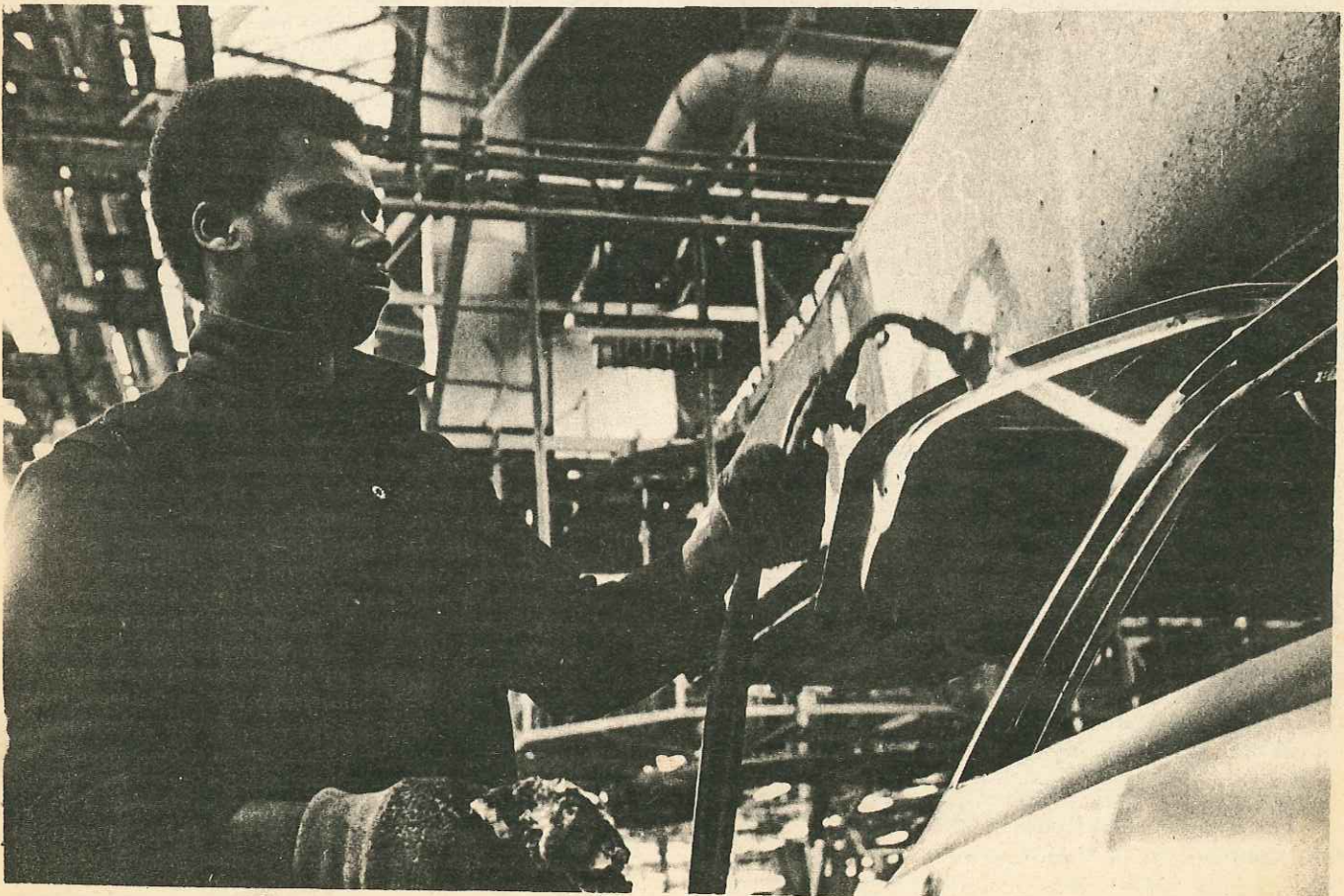
In this statement can be seen most of the weaknesses of Trotskyism. Firstly, it is absurd to see an undifferentiated period or 'epoch' which stretches from the first quarter of this century to today. To state, as the IMG does, that this 'Imperialist stage of capitalism is the epoch of wars, crises and revolutions' is both empirically inadequate and so general as to make it meaningless. If it is to show, as Lenin put it — 'the actuality of the revolution:— it saddles the revolutionary movement with a mechanical 'law' which, when it doesn't

operate, requires a substitute factor of explanation. In this 'epoch', when capitalism is supposedly finished and stagnant as a productive force, 'temporary' factors have to be used to cover the inadequacy of the analysis. These include, for various Trotskyist groups, all or one of, not simply backward leadership, but also a 'third technological revolution', arms spending, the role of the dollar and neo-colonial exploitation.

Without denying the role of these factors, our criticism of Trotskyism is that it will not recognise the profound transformations of capitalism initiated in the 1930s, 40s and 50s under the influence of Keynesianism etc. Let us make ourselves absolutely clear. We are not capitulating to some form of 'revisionism' which denies that capitalism any longer has internal economic contradictions, but we believe that the post-war reforms froze that process and now provide a very different set of problems as these changes collapse into a new crisis.

The changes in the relations between working class, capital and state have decisively altered the terrain of struggle. By using wages as a motor of capitalist development (encouraging consumption and rationalisation of plant etc), by involving the state directly in economic and social management, by attempting to institutionalise the class struggle through further incorporation of the trade unions: not to mention other processes like re-structuring capital through mergers and new financial and monetary relations between states — the system was given a new lease of life.

Trotskyism fails to recognise the totality and importance of these changes in the 'material foundations', or their effects on class consciousness. We have already documented how Trotsky and his later followers failed to recognise the importance of the New Deal or the post-war Keynesian reforms. They were prevented from doing this by the very nature of their analysis. The nature of Trotsky's characterisation of the epoch meant that any identification of capitalist *development* automatically ruled out proletarian revolution. Hence:—



'If the further development of productive forces was conceivable within the framework of bourgeois society, then revolution would be impossible. But since the further development of the productive forces . . . is inconceivable, the basic premise for revolution is given.'

(Trotsky — 'The First Five Years of the Communist International' Vol. 2 p. 4)

This was added to by statements that 'capitalism could no longer meet the 'immediate needs of the masses', and that 'systematic social reforms were impossible'. Given this, any changes in capitalism, while seen by Trotskyists as a *concession to reformism*, could not be seen as real reforms. That is, as measures which tried to integrate the immediate needs of the masses (for wages and consumption, health care and education etc) into the functioning of an expanding system with any hope of success. All over Europe working class people were won to accepting these changes, not permanently, but decisively enough to ensure many years of relative social peace.

No matter what imaginative and more serious attempts by the Trotskyist movement were made to analyse post-war developments, they are held within their own theoretical straitjacket. They can only see the development or expansion of capitalism (the 'booms') as due to temporary measures or to the weakness of the 'subjective factor' of leadership.

At the IMG's Fusion Conference in 1972 they related the ability of capitalism to regenerate itself as a product of Stalinism giving the breathing space for temporary measures to create a boom situation:—

'However, the political situation since 1945 has been dominated by the fact that this bureaucracy survived the war and was able to sabotage the revolutionary movement in Western Europe 1944-6. This gave to capitalism the chance to stabilise itself temporarily and to rebuild the shattered economies of Western Europe. A large upward shift occurred in the rate of exploitation, and this provided the initial conditions for the later aspects of technological innovation, armaments production etc. which were to sustain the boom.'

(Special Conference Supplement p.2)

It is even shown in the title of Mandel's recent book, '*Late Capitalism*', to which one observer acidly responded — a system is never late until it is dead.

Trotskyism had ceased to regard the bourgeoisie as able to develop the productive forces and therefore create systematic reforms. In fact, it was able to use both the needs and the desires of the masses and the collaboration of European social democracy and Stalinism to create a new period of stability and expansion. But this does not mean the bourgeoisie became a *politically* progressive force. It was the strength, actual and potential, of the working class which forced the bourgeoisie to make reforms to develop the system: attempting, for example through the use of wages, to institutionalise class needs and struggle rather than simply negate them as in the 1930s. This only confirms Marx's often ignored statement that 'the working class is the greatest productive force of all.'

In this light, the boom and stability of the system has to be seen in certain ways. The reforms were real, systematic and entailed changes in capital's material foundations. The crisis was due to the combination of two forces. Firstly, the struggle of the working class for its economic and social needs: for income divorced from productivity and a decent level of social services. This has reinforced the second factor; the competitive crisis that capitalism cannot escape. The crisis is not a question of over-production or demand management, it is a product of the law of value, profitability and the ability of the international working class to accelerate these conditions of decline.

But for Trotskyists their analysis of the epoch has meant, as Hodgson points out:—

* A rigidly limited conception of capitalist development.

* A determinist view of the economy, laws of development that see the super-structure reacting mechanically to the base.

Unlike Marx, Trotsky did not include social relations and ideas in the economic base, hence his inability to see the working class as a productive force — seeing only the supposedly 'neutral' technology, machines etc. However, it must be said some of these concepts were part of the tradition of the 2nd and 3rd Internationals.

This separation of base and superstructure has been exaggerated on a different basis within the Trotskyist tradition and has greatly distorted its ability to see new types of class struggles in new conditions. It is completely wrong to see the nature of class struggle as dependent on 'impulses of a purely superstructural character.' The changes in class struggle are, for the most part, a direct result of changes in capital's material foundations. To take a couple of examples.

Firstly, there have been immense changes in attitudes to work as a product of mechanisation, de-skilling and 'massification', involving both manual and white collar workers. This has made many traditional left attitudes to work out of date. Workers in many industries who spend much of their time fighting the capitalist nature and organisation of work are unresponsive to traditional notions of 'workers' control'. Even the 'right to work', when unconnected to the daily fight against line speeds, work discipline and gradings, can fail to motivate struggles. What is often more important to workers is guaranteed income and jobs, whether 'work' is available or not. Like the miner who was asked why he only worked a 4-day week, and replied 'because I can't live on three days' money'.

Secondly, the role of the state. The direct involvement of the state brings home far more clearly the political nature of struggles. Its ability to act as 'collective capitalist' and shape the direction of the crisis reduces the ability for unemployment etc. to be presented as 'natural disasters'. The role of the state in social management also means that it acts as a factor of cohesion between different sectors of struggle — the community, health, education etc. — thus totalising the impact of the crisis and making links between struggles in consciousness and practice more possible; as in present anti-cuts campaigns.

Because these factors go unacknowledged, the effect on Trotskyist theory is for *subjectivity to be separated from its objective basis*. Class consciousness is seen as separate from the changing structures of capitalism and the relationships it throws up which help determine that consciousness. In practical terms it is Trotskyists' constant battle cry that the conditions were ripe, but the consciousness was lacking. But this separation is undialectical. If working class consciousness is not mature enough then that is part of the objective situation! Because Trotskyism has not re-analysed the objective conditions, then it can only conclude that the missing factor is consciousness and leadership.

What this separation leads to is the belief that leadership can be transplanted on top of the struggle; whether or not the struggle itself has undergone sufficient transformation and maturation. For Trotskyism, the existence of the party is the condition for development of the subjective factor, the supposed only missing link. So we end up where we started, with the vulgarised and over-estimated notion of leadership. A concept of leadership that bears no relationship to whether or not Trotskyists have the actual capacity to lead the from inside the process of struggle itself.