

ii) Demands and Struggle

The failure of Trotskyism to see that certain aspects of Leninism were historically specific has meant that the relationship between the vanguard organisation and the working class is seen in static terms. The relationship continues to be seen as determined by an analysis of *consciousness*.

"The Leninist concept of the Party cannot be separated from a specific analysis of proletarian class consciousness." (Mandel — 'The Leninist Theory of Organisation')

For Mandel, Leninism is the 'Marxist science of the subjective factor'. So the party becomes based on a view of class consciousness as inherently limited. As we said earlier, the potential of consciousness, while not automatic or spontaneous, arises primarily from the conditions of struggle. Modern Trotskyism is notable for seldom analysing the changing conditions and arising content. In fact it is precluded from doing so seriously by its view of an unchanging epoch and an inherently limited consciousness. The above pamphlet by Mandel is abstract from start to finish. It never situates relations between party and class in changing conditions of struggle, but rather in absolutes of consciousness, spontaneity, the party and the like.

We have indicated through the pamphlet some of the changing conditions. But to briefly state some of them, brought about by different relations between working class, capital and state.

- i) With the interventionist role of the state, wage struggles, in particular fights to separate wages from productivity (eg via guaranteed lay-off pay demands) are directly political. This is not because they involve the state, but because they are more immediately anti-capitalist and less defensive.
- ii) The tendency towards a de-skilled and proletarianised composition of the working class makes unification of the proletariat both a different and potentially more possible process: particularly through struggles against gradings, work hierarchy and for parity etc.
- iii) Community, health, education and welfare services being drawn into a more direct relationship with capitalist production (via the state) has increased the anti-capitalist potential of struggles outside the factory and the strategic importance of organising with housewives, health workers students etc.

In general, we think that the daily (sometimes called 'immediate' or 'spontaneous') struggles of the class have a greater political potential (that is for being directly anti-capitalist) than in the period when the Leninist theory of the party was formulated. This is the product of the changing composition of the working class, the changed role of the state and the new structures of capitalism.

The rigid distinction between 'politics' and 'economics', or 'defensive' and 'offensive' struggle makes less sense now. This is not to collapse every sort of struggle into one another, nor to pose a spontaneously socialist consciousness. Merely to indicate that politics is less of an 'outside' factor that organisations have to bring into the struggle. Rather they have to discover, direct and generalise it from within the struggle, to overcome the continuing hold of sectionalism, reformism and bourgeois ideology in general. It should be noted that there are some exceptions to the above model. Some politics remains explicitly external and is raised as a principle by the vanguard organisation. An example being support for the liberation struggle in Ireland and similar situations.

Nevertheless, these attempts to re-analyse class struggle determine for us the nature of party-class relations. Because of

the largely static nature of their analyses, Trotskyists still pose the problem as one of the 'injection' of a political programme.

"The building of the revolutionary party is the process whereby the programme of the socialist revolution is fused with the experience of the majority of advanced workers' struggle". (Mandel 'Leninist Theory of Organisation' p.5)

Unfortunately, Trotskyists see this programme as being worked out *above* the changing process of struggle, in a supposed scientific process that Mandel calls 'theoretical production'.

"The gradual injection of these demands into mass struggles can only come about through the efforts of a broad-based layer of advanced workers, who are closely linked to the masses and who disseminate and publicise these demands which do not normally grow out of the day-to-day experience of the class". (Mandel p. 17 as above)

In other words, these 'advanced workers' are the passive carriers of a 'politics from the outside'. Perhaps this helps to explain why party leaderships (responsible for this 'theoretical production') can so often have bureaucratic and manipulative relationships with the rank and file members.

These positions affect the application of such programmes. From the position that the correct programmes can be worked out above the struggle there is a tendency for Trotskyist groups to believe that if they are big enough in a crisis situation, then the transplantation of such a set of demands can lead the working class to power. Talking of how there could have been a revolution in May '68 in France, Mandel says:—

"At that precise moment small nuclei of workers armed with the correct political programme. . . would have been enough of prevent the dispersal of the strikers, to inspire mass occupations and the democratic creation of strike committees in the principal factories of the country". (Mandel — 'Lessons of May '68')

Or a variation:—

"Events such as the French strike of May '68, to which the transitional programme provided a key set of demands, that had those who used them been strong enough, could have led the workers' movement step by step to the conquest of power." (Workers Fight)

This political approach in fact only creates self-appointed vanguards, who can teach but cannot learn. The ironic thing is that there have been hordes of Trotskyist sects or organisations with such programmes for decades, yet they have seldom played a key leadership role. They don't seem to question that the limited impact is not due to any lack of *size* (or to Stalinist or reformist betrayals) but to the lack of *relevance*. The Italian organisation Lotta Continua once correctly noted that the problem was not to *put yourself* at the head of the masses, but to *be* the head of the masses.

To be in this situation the vanguard organisation must be prepared to learn, particularly from the qualitatively higher periods of *mass* struggle. The Trotskyist approach precludes this as another quote from Mandel shows:—

"The proletarian army will never reach its historical objectives if the necessary education, schooling and testing of a proletarian vanguard in the working out and agitational application

of the revolutionary programme in struggle, has not taken place *before* (our emphasis) the outbreak of the broadest mass struggles". (from 'The Leninist Theory of Organisation') For us the vanguard organisation must sink itself into the changing process of struggle, to learn the effects of changes on consciousness so we can articulate working class needs and generalise them. Also to form organisations adequate to the tasks of the situation. The Trotskyist approach leads to programmes from without and organisations from above. Finally, a theory which recognises that class consciousness is multi-layered and is flexibly conditioned by changing conditions, enables a more balanced understanding of how the working class can become a revolutionary class. The Trotskyist theory lays such stress on working class domination by capitalism and bourgeois ideology that it is forced to reduce the transition from class-in-itself to class-for-itself as a sudden 'ignition' of consciousness in crisis/dual power situations. The effect is to create a too strong discontinuity between periods of 'normal' class struggle and a revolutionary crisis. We return to this theme later.

TRANSITIONAL DEMANDS

We have dealt so far with the limitations of the Trotskyist concept of the *form* of relationship between party and class. We now turn to an examination of the *content* of those relations through a critical examination of transitional demands. In an earlier section we dealt with how the Transitional Programme had arisen in the 1930s. Its great strength was that by overcoming the traditional split between minimum and maximum demands it dually posed ways of taking the struggle forward to questions of seizing power. However, its actual context created its functional usefulness. In the late 1930s 'socialism or barbarism?' did appear to be a concrete choice, and the collapse of capitalism and a period of dual power were possibilities. Its weakness is twofold. Firstly, it underestimated the possibility of regeneration of the system, even in 1930s conditions. Secondly, it did not see the Transitional Programme as historically specific. This is shown by the fact that its outlines were formulated in the 1920s and early 1930s and yet it is still put forward as useful in whole or modified form by Trotskyists today.

The albatross of the Transitional Programme leaves Trotskyism to put forward (albeit half-heartedly) that capitalism is always in danger of imminent collapse. Statements that were half-true in the 1930s are universalised. Hence the IMG says:—

"The essential nature and necessity of such a programme is determined, at the most fundamental level, by the fact that capitalism cannot even solve the immediate problems of the masses." ('Building the Fourth International In Britain' — 1972)

As we have said before, once the stability and possibility of recuperation of working class needs are ignored, then the continued existence of the system can only be blamed on weak leadership or some other idealist formulation. To be fair, precisely because of the problems its use creates, few Trotskyist organisations actually use the full Transitional Programme. For those that try to (like the WRP) it is easy to criticise some of the ludicrous demands about workers' militias etc. In these situations it is simply a case of groups putting forward what they would like to happen (or what could happen in a dual power situation) with no link to the reality of the situation. The 'Militant' group's call for a workers' militia organised by the trade unions in Northern Ireland is a classic case, especially as those unions are pillars of the sectarian Orange order. Most Trotskyist groups are selective in their use of transitional demands, so we will examine a couple of the more widely used ones — 'workers' control and 'open the books'. We will try to show that transitional demands cannot effectively be used outside dual power situations and that if they are their uses degenerate into 'exposures' or abstract 'educating' perspectives.

WORKERS' CONTROL

Trotskyist groups do not, as certain ultra-leftists suggest, put forward workers' control of capitalist industries as a substitute for full workers power under socialism. On the contrary, it is seen as a transitional stage to workers' self-management. In the Transitional Programme, Trotsky wrote:—

"The working out of even the most elementary economic plan — from the point of view of the exploited and not the exploiters — is impossible without workers' control, that is without penetration of the workers' eyes into all open and concealed springs of the capitalist economy. Committees representing individual business enterprises should meet at conference and choose corresponding committees of trusts, whole branches of industry, economic regions and finally of national industry as a whole. Thus workers' control becomes a *school for planned economy*. (Trotsky's emphasis) On the basis of the experience of control, the proletariat will prepare itself for direct management of nationalised industry, when the hour for that eventuality strikes".

Trotsky wrote that when he believed that the collapse of the system was at hand. Lenin, writing in 1918, a situation of real elements of dual power, was even more explicit:—

"We have to expropriate them. That is not where the hitch lies. . . I told every workers' delegation. . . You would like to be confiscated? Very well, we have blank forms for a decree ready. They can be signed in a minute. But tell us, have you learned to take over production and have you calculated what you will produce? Do you know the connection between what you are producing and the international market? Whereupon it turns out they have not learned this yet".

Workers' control, then, is a 'school for a planned economy'. Therefore, as one Trotskyist group says:—

"Full workers' control, of course, can only be achieved in a pre-revolutionary situation and constitutes, under these conditions, dual power at factory, then at national level". ('The Battle for Trotskyism' — Workers Socialist League' p.15)

The problem arises when the demand is used outside of that context. It is our contention that it cannot be a 'school for a planned economy' in conditions of normalised capitalist production. Yet this is precisely how it is used by Trotskyists. In the last named document the WSL continue:—

"prior to this (dual power) the demand for workers' control, carefully used, educates the advanced layers and tests out the class itself". (p.15)

Modern Trotskyism is caught in an ambiguous position. While acknowledging that workers' control cannot exist outside of a pre-revolutionary situation, they continue to use it, largely propagandistically, because it is the centrepiece of the Transitional Programme. Why can't it be used in normalised capitalist production, even in a crisis situation? Firstly, because in the concrete material circumstances it arises in, the demand functions to impel workers to take responsibility for the running of the factory. This is not the aim of Trotskyists, but to talk of its use to 'educate the advanced layers' is an abstraction. In the real circumstances (workers' co-operatives etc.) the 'education' is imposed by capitalist competition. That is, the workers controlling, not simply their own exploitation, but speed-up, redundancies etc. The workers are not learning to plan the economy but to adapt to the capitalist system.

The more sophisticated Trotskyist groups (eg. IMG) recognise this problem. They say that while propagandising for workers' control, a position of 'no workers' responsibility for the running of firms under capitalism' would accompany it. Hence, they concretise that around demands for *vetoes*, over mobility of labour, line-speeds etc.

While demands for particular vetoes are fine, the problem arises when they are linked with generalised demands for workers' control — i.e. the many demands for 'nationalisation under workers' control' that appear in Trotskyist programmes. A concrete demand for an extension of workers' power in particular and often temporary situations is confused with a propaganda slogan. As the IMG say in their recent '4th International Theses on Britain' — "generalised workers' control of the whole economy is now a 'propaganda task'," relating to current and past revolutionary experiences. And as they say in 'What Is Workers' Control?' —

"The struggle for workers' control is only possible, therefore, if it is seen as part of a struggle for a workers' government which can challenge the power of the state on a nationwide basis." (J. Marshall — Red Mole 13.3.72)

Unfortunately, in Britain we are nowhere near that situation. In present circumstances the state and some employers are actually employing what they call workers' participation and control to help resolve the crisis, through incorporation of workers' representatives. To use the demand for workers' control in such circumstances where its meaning will inevitably be dictated by the existing power relations, destroys and indeed makes dangerous the educative value of the concept. The problem only arises because of the impossibility of using transitional demands properly outside the situation of dual power. The concept of workers' control should be used in a purely educational sense to explain a distinct future situation, while developing concrete forms of workers' power in the real conditions we operate in.

Similar problems arise in relation to one particular aspect of workers' control — the demand for employers to 'open the books'. While there are circumstances in which a demand for the release of commercial information can be very useful, as a generalised demand it is dangerous. Trotskyists advocate it to expose to workers that employers are lying about profits, bankruptcy etc. The problem maybe they aren't lying, especially in today's crisis situation. If that situation arises and they really are bankrupt then Trotskyists say that workers should refuse to take responsibility. Fine, but an undifferentiated use of the slogan 'open the books' can have undermined such attitudes. If workers have demanded to know the 'real' position, then find out it is adverse, then it defuses the situation more than if they'd taken a 'no responsibility' position in the first place. This is especially important where multi-national firms can manipulate the books and effectively disguise the fact.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF A TRANSITIONAL APPROACH

The difficulties of implementing a Transitional Programme has led some Trotskyists to be increasingly selective and to recognise the propagandistic basis of such demands. A particular focus of this has been the questioning of 'calls to action' linked to transitional use of demands like that of a general strike. IMG have written:—

"Once the role of the party is defined as *presenting ideas* (our emphasis) to the working class then it is clear that it is perfectly possible to present a programme for the destruction of capitalism at any time. The task of the party must therefore not be defined as calling the masses to action, but rather as explaining a rounded conception of the situation." ('Building the 4th International in Britain')

The problem of dealing with the limitations of transitional demands in this way is that they 'solve' the lack of realism by expansion of their 'exposure' function. The traditional demand located in this perspective is 'For a Labour Government with socialist policies', used particularly by the WRP. This is used in a cynical way, as its advocates know that it is impossible. The aim becomes that of involving the workers

in the struggle for the impossible, so that the lack of success will 'expose' the limitations of reformism. Unfortunately, it is far more likely that the inadequacies of the demand will be exposed and workers will realise the futility of any effort expended, thus exposing the revolutionaries instead.

This demand has been rejected by the more realistic Trotskyist organisations. The IMG has replaced it with calls for a 'workers' government'. While slightly more related to existing struggles of some sort (eg. for more democracy and accountability in the Labour Movement) it is still unrealistic and feeds illusions in reformism. In their election manifesto of 1974 IMG called for 'a government based on the organisations of the working class! For a Republic of Workers' Councils!' There are no concrete manifestations of trends inside the Labour Party or the working class that would make either of these demands remotely realisable within the foreseeable future. As this is the case and most militants know it, they appear as absurd.

The real educational value of raising issues of the tasks of a workers' government or the necessity and problems of building workers' councils (eg. via discussion of Chile or Portugal) are lost by their use in programmatic form, which mystifies the real task of the situation today. Given their use outside a realistic context, transitional demands can only be abstract. This includes the endless calls for general strikes and Councils of Action etc. that have littered the history of Trotskyism. They seldom show any realistic progress towards the intended goal.

It is worth noting that the concept of 'raising consciousness' implied in the transitional model is weak. It is built on a rationalist model where people's consciousness can be raised in a 'battle of ideas'. Trotskyists often explain that it is their aim to debate with the reformists and expose them in front of the masses by superior argument. Unfortunately there is more than ideology that binds reformism and the masses together. There is also the question of *power*. How many times have revolutionaries 'smashed' reformists in argument, yet still lost in real terms?

The Trotskyist approach to demands and struggling for them can seldom break these power relations because they so often confirm the 'powerlessness' of the working class and militants by setting unwinnable targets plus abstract principles masquerading as political strategy. The weaknesses of their approach are reinforced by their attitude to working class consciousness. This is usually talked of in terms of 'backwardness' as if the ideas were somehow illusory or false, creating the illusion that they can be swept away by the correct ideas of the programme of the party. When this doesn't happen it is usually explained by the get-out clause of a 'time-lag' in consciousness.

A classic example is this statement from Tony Polan:—

"The accumulated momentum and authority of illusions enable them to maintain their power over the essentially conservative mind of man, long after the objective conditions — the economic base — for them have disappeared. In the May days in France, the reliable material forces of the capitalist state were little more than a few thousand CRS thugs. The fact that the working class remained subject to the ideology of Stalinist reformism *alone* ensured the survival of the French bourgeoisie". ('Why the SLL is not Marching')

As we have said before, the mistake lies in not recognising that ideology is part of the objective conditions. Ideology is lived relationships, reflecting the reproduction of everyday relationships in capitalist society and this includes the power of both the state and the French Communist Party in the above instance. Unless the depth and complexity of people's consciousness is given full credence, then failures can always be written off by 'betrayals' and 'bad leadership'.



Revolutionary demands need to mobilise class power.

Having made these criticisms, we are by no means suggesting that all or even most of the demands used by the better Trotskyist groups are bad. They do recognise the need for wide-ranging demands related to the actual dynamic of different situations.

But the left needs to work on demands that are part of strategies to actually advance working class power by relating to a realisable target connected to revolutionary ways of fighting everyday struggle. Big Flame has been weak in developing from the limitations of short-term demands, that do little more than articulate militancy, but do not significantly generate a higher level of struggle.

The Trotskyist use of transitional demands has always had the advantage of being able to bridge short and long term situations, albeit in a distorted way. To avoid these weaknesses we have been trying to develop the concept of 'medium-term' demands, that would act as a bridge between immediate agitation and wider propaganda for socialism. These are 'demands' which are general goals indicating autonomous working class needs. Their realism flows not so much from whether they can be achieved under capitalism but because concrete processes and immediate demands can be linked to them. In this way the masses can recognise their needs in them and how they are related to both a critique of

capitalism and the socialist alternative. Each general 'demand' or perspective would therefore be linked to immediate demands and also to ways of organising. Some examples would be:—

- (i) Guaranteed income for employed and unemployed (40 hours pay — work or no work; automatic cost of living indexes, minimum living income for unemployed and claimants)
- (ii) Independent income for housewives (Full unemployment rights and benefits for women, increased family allowances paid directly to women, payment to housewives for care of sick and elderly due to cut-backs etc.)
- (iii) The right to control our own bodies. (Abortion on demand, no discrimination against gays, full contraception and sex education facilities in schools etc.)

This approach also avoids the weaknesses of the other alternative to transitional demands — the minimum-maximum split. The SWP has made it one of the bases of their politics, wisely avoiding the mistakes of traditional Trotskyism. But as they have no bridging alternative their politics tends to be split into moralising about capitalist corruption versus the socialist utopia, or narrow economism. The latter manifests itself in the reduction of daily struggles to their lowest common denominator and not allowing 'political' demands to be raised in their rank and file movements.

iii) Unification of the Class

COMPOSITION OF THE CLASS, AUTONOMOUS ORGANISATION AND PARTY FORMATION

The unification of the working class, the growth of the revolutionary party and ultimately the seizure of power are all inseparable problems. Yet the revolutionary movement has tended to greatly oversimplify the process, particularly Trotskyism. An oft-repeated refrain is that — "The revolutionary party must make all progressive demands and movements of all oppressed social layers its own". This is used to justify the necessity for a general political organisation in a situation where many militants see their activity in autonomous movements as *opposed* to membership of revolutionary organisations. The problem is that while the statement is true in a long-term sense, the *formal* existence of a general party or organisation in no way guarantees its capacity to be that factor of unity. This applies even where such an organisation brings together militants from every sector *inside* its own for formation. Instead it must seek to prove in practice that it understands the particular dynamic of each sector of the class (women, blacks etc.) It must understand their respective independent needs, while it attempts to find points of unification as the struggle develops. At the moment the tendency is to submerge particular needs in such 'general' organisations and strategies, subordinating them to the models of organisation and politics of the stronger and more traditional sectors.

We have already seen that in the general sense and particular in the third world, Trotskyism tends to underestimate non-traditional sectors like the peasantry in the struggle for socialism. Similar errors are made in the advanced capitalist countries.

The working class is regarded as synonymous with industrial workers by many Trotskyists. They fail to recognise the real divisions on the basis of sex, race or other factors. The problem of unification of the working class is seen in terms of overcoming *ideological* divisions. In all the calls for blacks and whites, or men and women to 'unite and fight' it is seldom recognised that there are solid *material* reasons for division (differences in access to wages, position in the job hierarchy etc.) Out of these arise substantial differences in power which cannot be eliminated by calls for unity. They require autonomous organisation by each specifically oppressed sector.

The strength of the autonomous movements, who often come into being ignored or opposed by the traditional left, has created a situation where all but the most backward Trotskyist groups now formally recognise the need for such organisation. Nevertheless, such support is still distorted by the fact that they are seen as *marginal* sectors. The schema is still the traditional one where peripheral sectors or the 'middle class' are won over by the vanguard organisation to the industrial working class and *its* programme. Take, for instance, this statement, part of the founding document from the fusion conference of IMG/Spartacus League in 1972:—

"In periods before 1945 the social unrest in these 'peripheral' groups would have found its natural leadership in the political struggles of the working class. However, due to the relative passivity of the working class, this has not occurred. Although the working class is the only class which is capable of resolving the contradictions of capitalism which affect these

other groups, nevertheless it does not automatically gain the leadership of all the oppressed sectors of society. It only gains this leadership when it can show in practice that only the proletariat has the physical power, social cohesion, political leadership etc. to destroy the particular oppressions suffered by these other groups. . . A clear example is the increasing struggle of women . . . These struggles are of extreme importance in that they continue by their efforts to disintegrate the hold of bourgeois ideology over society, enable other sections of these movements to be won directly to Marxism, and at least neutralise large sections of the petty bourgeoisie. It therefore is an elementary duty of revolutionaries to continue to support and attempt to lead such struggles by winning them to socialist positions" (Red Mole Special Supplement. p.2)

In this quote we can see why, despite formal recognition and principled positions on autonomy, activists in the various movements are suspicious of and hostile to the revolutionary left and vanguard organisation. The passage only recognises a one-way process of adaptation, that is, the integration of other groups into an already formed politics and way of organising. There is no concept of learning from their rich experience, still less of so-called peripheral movements redefining socialism to account of their needs. It is presented that it is still the industrial working class that 'solves the oppression' of 'other groups' because it has the muscle. The contradictions of sexual and racial oppression are reduced to their manifestations under capitalism and the ending of that system presumed to be the guarantee of the withering away of oppression.

In fact the IMG and the mainstream 4th International are probably the best current of Trotskyism on this question. At least their post-war concept of 'from periphery to centre' enabled them to locate and respond to non-traditional sectors and struggles. But the 'periphery to centre' concept (see Section 4) does not solve the question. It still puts forward a narrow definition of the working class in which a move to the 'centre' involves an underlying assumption that there is a rigid hierarchy of importance. The concept helps to explain why so many activists in autonomous movements experience interventions by Trotskyist groups as 'raiding parties' where they are taught where 'the real struggle' is.

IS/SWP are possibly the worst culprits, using united fronts and autonomous movements to cynically recruit, *when* they feel these forums have power and numbers. Their interventions in the National Abortion Campaign are a case in point, as is their work around racism. Excellent propaganda work was distorted by failing to recognise the legitimacy of autonomous black organisation. They consequently lost most of their key black cadre who left in disgust. Even in their work on unemployment, where they have discovered that it is actually the unemployed who are attracted to 'right to work' organisation, rigid views of power and class are maintained. As in other instances 'marginal' groups are used as entrances to the 'real' working class. One of the 'Rank and File' leaders, Carol Douras, opened a Right to Work Conference with the remark that:—

"Unemployed workers lose their rights and their power. Those of you with jobs have the power. You have to take up the fight". (I.S. Journal 94)

This also helps to explain the fetish of trade union delegation as the basis of campaigns, a theme we will return to in the next section. The narrow definition of power and class reflects yet again that much political theory was formed and has not been much altered since the early part of the century. A period when Leninist formulations were adequate as political strategy and when the industrial component of the working class was overwhelmingly dominant.

This is not the case today. The post-war changes in the structure of capitalism have created a very different composition of the working class. This includes:—

- * The role of immigrant labour, creating important roles for the black and similar sections of the class.
- * The proletarianisation of sectors of white collar work and professional workers, reflecting itself in the changing class character of higher education and students.
- * The expansion of the state sector, creating a big layer of public service workers including many women.
- * The bringing closer to production of many aspects of social life, connected to the family and community; increasing the role and importance of housewives.
- * Changes in the actual composition of the industrial working class, with a movement from skilled to massified work.

The result is two-fold. Firstly, political strategy, including party formation and building towards taking power, must reflect the broadening of the working class. As *Avanguardia Operaia* said when criticising the traditional narrowness of their fraternal organisation, I.S. —

“The grouping of social forces that can carry out this autonomous organisation and task of a general national movement towards socialism is wider and qualitatively different from the straightforward working class of the industrial workers. (I.S. Journal 84 p.16)

Without this broadening a narrow workerism and economism will result, tending to tail after the lowest common denominator of struggles. We also have to recognise that there is a greater variability of struggles and demands that cannot be unflexibly reduced to ‘central-strategical’ projects, like a general strike to bring down the government (See ‘The Situation in Britain and the Tasks of the IMG’ — *International* Vol.2 No. 2)

Secondly, the question of class alliances is no longer characterised by a simple division into ‘centre’ and ‘periphery’. While the industrial working class remains a key, probably *the* key sector, because of its economic location, the primary question is that of politically unifying the broader working class. This means recognising the particular nature of the struggles of each sector and its need for autonomy as the spring board for unification. It means seeing that power is also political and social, reflecting the capacity to struggle, as well as narrowly economic. These things do not justify separatism, merely a recognition that the process of unification is more uneven than currently recognised in the Trotskyist schema.

SOCIAL DEMOCRACY

Given that the goal of working class unification is the seizure of power, we have to give consideration to the role of social democracy. Social democracy and how to combat it has always been one of the key differences between Trotskyism and other revolutionary tendencies. In the last couple of years we’ve seen a strong move by Trotskyist organisations towards an entrism strategy. This has involved their organisations joining Trotskyist groups already in the Labour Party (Militant, Chartist etc.): the difference being that for IMG, ICL etc it is part of a dual strategy of having one foot in the Labour Party and one in extra-parliamentary struggles. We are totally opposed to entrism and regret this orientation by substantial parts of the revolutionary left. We think it derives from an analysis of reformism and social democracy that has static and institutionalised elements.

Entrism and the traditional Trotskyist orientation are based on the belief that the Labour Party is the mass party of the working class and that revolutionaries therefore have to be in or around it to break its hold. This derives from two inter-related positions:—

- (i) That the Labour Party was a party built by the unions to defend their interests. It remains a party that the unions, which millions of workers belong to, have direct links with.
- (ii) Because the majority of the working class *votes* Labour, it shows that they are loyal to it and believe in its policies and in parliamentarianism etc. These ‘illusions’ show that workers are loyal because the Labour Party represents the general political consciousness of the masses, that is reformism.

For these reasons, Trotskyist groups argue that Lenin’s advice holds — to enter or work around the Labour Party. They tend to see any attempt to challenge such a strategy as simply an echo of old debates of Leninist versus ultra-leftist.

“The discussion that echoed in radical circles around the 1970 election — and which is still with us today — was merely a belated repetition of that which had shaken the young Communist Party, or earlier still, the socialist movement around Hyndeman in the 1900s”.

(“The Labour Party—Which Way?” — League for Socialist Action. p.3)

The same pamphlet emphasises historical continuity to explain that the working class has always been ideologically subordinate and therefore loyal to the Labour Party. Hence:—

“Such a loyalty was not only able to overcome the disillusion of the Wilson experience but of every successive Labour government prior to that one”. (p.4)

Such an historically static analysis is institutionalised in that it makes permanent the elements involved; the nature of the Labour Party, the consciousness of the working class, what reformism is and so on. In our view the hold of reformism over the working class has to be looked at in a more dynamic and historical way. We acknowledge, of course, the grip of certain ideas like the neutrality of the state and the law, action through official channels/parliamentarianism and others. Yet this grip is neither static nor unchanging in its nature. At high points in class struggle like the General Strike, but *also* in many daily situations, either the ideas or the institutions are seen to crumble. Yet the situation remains in flux because the power of the reformist organisations and the weight of tradition always tends to limit the situation unless a clear alternative is built.

As we have said previously, such obstacles cannot be overcome solely through the battle of ideas. Reformism is not an external stranglehold on struggle linked to permanently limited consciousness, it is a living relationship that is inside the experience of the working class. It is this failure that leads Trotskyism to fail to grasp the changing historical relationships and bases of reformism and the class struggle. If we examine how reformism has changed since the war, it is obvious that the Labour Party and the trade union machines have been integrated into the running of the system.

The Labour Party was the overseer of the important post-1945 reforms aimed at extending the system and integrating class struggle. These, however, represented the historical turning point of reformism. After that, as a general strategy, it could go no further. Hence the growth and strength of ‘revisionism’ inside social democracy. This does not lead to an ultra-left position which sees all reforms as impossible or reactionary. Although they have not had a real reforming strategy, their counter-strategy, that of competing solely as better managers of capitalism permits particular reforms and directions that can still integrate the working class and its struggles.

The most important product is that the new position of Labour and union leaders as co-managers of the system necessarily alters the basis of reformism inside the working class. The process of integration has been clearly visible and felt materially by the working class which has had to rely more on its own struggles. Even during the 1950s, when a period of economic expansion gave little space for struggles, a new 'home-made' reformism largely replaced working through official union channels. This new reformism was less rooted in adherence to reformist *institutions* or the traditional *ideological* basis of illusions in parliament and the Labour Party. It was more interior to everyday struggle and therefore more volatile and changeable. It was particularly rooted in the type of struggle characteristic of the period: based on *sectionalism and delegation*.

Sectionalism is the belief and mode of struggle that depends on seeing each sector of the working class having separate interests, for instance in 'special case' wage claims. Trotskyism makes the mistake of seeing the struggle of *one sector itself* as reformist: revolutionary struggles being connected only to overtly 'political' objects, connected to state power and united working class action. But the struggles of one sector can open up the way for the rest of the class, by passing generalisable demands, eg. for across the board increases. Most struggles in themselves can be either revolutionary or reformist depending on the content, context and form. For instance, women fighting on an estate for nurseries is not reformist if it increases the anti-capitalist consciousness, organisation and unity of the women involved. Sectionalism in the first sense has been dominant in post-war class struggle and has held back opposition to wage controls, cuts and many other things. It extended its hold precisely because the working class had to rely on its own struggles in a period when sectional struggles could win. Delegating the battle to representatives also consolidated itself as part of the same process and has become a real handicap when the unions and shop stewards increasingly abdicate from the fight-back. In fact, we have to see the present retreat as a product of the class's struggles and consciousness being trapped inside those of the period of expansion. This 'interior' reformism ensures that social democracy can remain powerful even when the actual material possibility of reforms has diminished. This hold is consolidated by its *power* relative to the *powerlessness* of the working class movement trapped inside inadequate ways of fighting and thinking.

These changes tend to be underestimated by Trotskyism:—

"Workers vote Labour in their millions, not because of this or that leader or policy, nor because Labour is the only electoral alternative to the Tories, but because they see Labour in class terms as *their party*".
(*'What We Stand For'* — I.S. Trotskyist Opposition 1973 p. 48)

The relationship between the working class and reformism is still seen in traditional terms. Entrism is defended by reference to who built the Labour Party and what it meant in the period of its growth. We recognise that what the Labour Party represented in the minds of the masses was a positive thing. Reformism had not been seen in experience of parliamentary government. But things are different now. There can be no doubt that the working class struggle and the Labour Party have grown more distinct in most areas in political and organisational terms. Pointing to voting figures that continue despite the 'betrayals' is a misleading exercise. It confuses two separate political processes — parliamentary and extra-parliamentary struggle. In a bourgeois democracy, where 'politics' is presented in parliamentary terms and where such institutions continue to have a relationship to ongoing social forces, then of course working class people will vote, usually for the party which is closest to them. But few working class people today vote Labour because they have illusions that it will advance socialism or even their daily interests. They do so because the basic class instinct makes them choose the lesser evil. An unconditional 'vote Labour' position can act-

ually reinforce residual illusions. Large numbers of Labour voters have and will abstain or vote for a socialist alternative.

Voting Labour is a *tactical* question dependent on the particular balance of forces. Meanwhile, we must build a political and organisational alternative to Labour as a reference for vanguard sectors.

As for the equation of membership of the unions with identification with Labour, this leads to the illusion that when entering into debate with reformist leaders, you are addressing the whole of the working class. Many industrial workers cannot be reached within the union structures or even the 'Labour Movement'. This applies even more to non-industrial sectors like housewives. Concentration on the Labour Movement, an inevitable aspect of the entrism orientation, so often leads to 'revolutionary socialism' divorced from the mass of the working class.

The growth of entrism has happened in the wake of working class retreat. It is not even a genuine combination of activity. In general it tends to push struggles to go inside the Labour Party and Movement, thus running the risk of reducing their energy and effectiveness gained from having a *mass* orientation, usually by-passing the traditional institutions and channels. This underestimates the potential of independent working class action. IMG says:—

"For the majority of the most militant workers who are already and will be engaged in struggles, what is posed as yet is not the question of whether they should or should not politically break with the Labour Party, but what policy, programmes and leadership shall be fought for inside the Labour Party and Labour Movement."

(*'4th International Theses on Britain'*)

This institutionalised concept of the working class is extended even more dangerous by an IMG split-off, the L.S.A. —

"It means pioneering the struggles outside the party — those of the women's liberation movement, the black community or the unions — inside the party and ensuring it is not headed off by 'right' or 'left' wings." (*'Which Way for Labour?'* p.26)

Such an orientation not only diverts struggles but also mystifies the real potential for change and usefulness inside the Labour institutions. The history of the working class movement is littered with 'paper' bodies, based on so-called delegates, which actually substitute building organisations based on activists prepared to fight. None of this means we are against work in the Labour Movement or 'delegated bodies'. On the contrary, we are for a genuine combination of mass work and more 'institutional' activity. But we want to clearly prioritise building mass independent working class activity. The danger of entrism is that whatever the intentions it prioritises the opposite. This is also true of our attitude to events inside the Labour Party. While we are not entrists we would support, tactically, activities of the left inside it, *if* it helped the mass movement outside. This helps an orientation to the comrades who work in the Labour Party for essentially local reasons. Even here, however, we should recognise that entrism is often seen as conspiratorial. It can involve a lot of distant manoeuvring that can put power in the hands of 'left-wingers' who are as frightened of the power of working class people as the people they replaced. In the end we think that by pushing people back towards an identification with Labour, the entrism-exposure strategy increases the dependence of the working class on those politics which constitute the power of Labour over the class. In today's conditions it is increasingly *power* and not simply *ideology* that constitute the hold of reformism. It is a difficult task to build an alternative working class and popular power. Entrism is safer, but the road in the end will be longer because of it.

c) Bureaucracy

ANTI-BUREAUCRACY — A SUPERFICIAL METHODOLOGY

We have dealt in some detail with the inadequacies of Trotsky's analysis of the Soviet regime and the role of the bureaucracy within it. The mistake lies mainly in characterising the bureaucracy as a 'parasite on a healthy body', i.e. the workers' state. This implies a mechanical separation of the base and superstructure, leading to a shallow concept of change that transforms political structures, but not the basic socio-economic features of society.

What this section of the pamphlet is interested in is the effect of the analysis of the Stalinist bureaucracy on the rest of Trotskyist politics. For if there is one thing that uniquely characterises modern Trotskyism it is an obsession with bureaucracy. We believe that the inadequacies of Trotsky's analysis have transferred themselves to create a superficial methodology of analysing the problems of institutions, particularly political organisations and trade unions.

There has been an over-concentration on bureaucracy in many areas. Great stress has been laid on replacing the 'bureaucratic leaderships' (of countries, parties, unions etc.) by revolutionary ones. The error lies in thinking that the existence of a bureaucracy is separate from the nature of the institution. So the creation of a revolutionary leadership is abstracted from the transformation or replacement of the institutions themselves. As in Russia, the transformation is seen as a purely superstructural problem. This has had the unfortunate effect of drastically simplifying the nature of the revolutionary process and underestimating the changes in working class life and institutions that are necessary to challenge capitalism. It feeds the naive view that 'if only we had the right leaders' the problems of the struggle would be solved.

As Bettelheim notes, for Trotskyism the concept of bureaucracy is a substitute for not only a deeper, but a *class* analysis. It helps mask:—

"... the political and ideological relations of which the bureaucratic phenomena were only the manifestation." (Quoted in Miliband *New Left Review* 91)

In a general sense, flowing from the analysis of Russia, Trotskyism ties bureaucracy to abstract sociological roots. Mandel says that bureaucracy:—

"... is not a class rooted in the productive process but a social layer growing out of the proletariat". ('On Bureaucracy')

The concentration on bureaucracies as parasitical layers creates a situation where the necessity for a division of labour is seen as allowing a basis for bureaucracy. A particular problem is identified with full-time officials, usually of petty-bourgeois origin. The working class is seen as weak, given its 'scientific and cultural underdevelopment', to stop the bureaucratic process.

"A working class organisation whose members are only part-time workers engaged full-time in the productive process is far more easily conquered by bureaucratic politics and ideology than an organisation which makes a conscious effort to educate and select the most conscious workers and form them into professional revolutionaries". (Mandel— 'On Bureaucracy')

The full-time official becomes trapped within a restricted world of bureaucratic privileges, with consequent social and psychological factors reinforcing the desire to be separate

from the proletarian institution. In this sense, then, bureaucratisation is seen as an inherent problem of organisation at society/state or institutional level. There is no doubt that is a degree of truth in the analysis. The Trotskyist movement has performed a vital role in identifying process of degeneration at the level of workers' democracy. Yet at the same time, Trotskyism generalises the analysis so broadly that it loses its specific usefulness, which is as part of a theory of organisation. Instead it becomes a substitute theory of general institutional processes. The bureaucracy 'becomes the location for all problems', as Debray noted. For Trotskyism:—
"... the bureaucracy is a ten-thousand-headed monster, and it is all the bureaucracy's evil doing". ('Prison Writings' p.139)

There *are* problems inherent in the division between leaders and led. But even in terms of organisational questions it is wrong to reduce it to the division of labour and the sociological split between officials and rank and file. After all, Trotskyists monotonously leave their own organisations accusing budding bureaucracies of 'Stalinism', then set up new ones which reproduce similar problems. These cannot be solved sociologically by the composition of organisations or structurally by rights of faction or perfect constitutions. The bureaucratisation of organisations, in so far as it can be solved, can only be checked by transformation in political practice and class struggle.

But the problems of state or union institutions are wider than these. We have to examine the fundamental dynamics behind Russia or the trade unions to understand why they are inadequate and how the existence of a bureaucracy fits into this. The trouble with the Trotskyist use of the concept of bureaucracy is that it induces a sense of fatalism that things will always degenerate short of the world revolution. Mandel refers to the 'dialectic of partial conquests' being at the root of bureaucratic conservatism.

Any leaps forward are seen as a danger to existing gains. But there will be 'partial conquests' for a long time and we have to examine how to change things in specific situations. The Chinese concept of revisionism is more concrete. It takes the critique of bureaucracy further. While recognising that bureaucratic elites arose out of discrepancies of power and the means to exercise it, they link it to wider questions of social relations, i.e. the problem is linked to the inadequacies of social relations and institutions in the whole society, as we explain in the next section. The Cultural Revolution was aimed at reversing the process which bureaucratisation was a part of, but Trotskyism failed to acknowledge it as an anti-bureaucratic revolution. They point to the existence of bureaucratic and undemocratic features at party and state levels. This is undoubtedly true, despite the Cultural Revolution, but it should reaffirm our basic point that the problem of transforming institutions and social relations is separable from the existence or non-existence of bureaucracies.

BUREAUCRACY AND TRADE UNIONS

These issues can be concretised by an examination of the role of trade unions. Revolutionary Marxism has taken Lenin's analysis that there are insurmountable limitations to trade union action in a capitalist society as a necessary starting point. The institutional role the unions have is as mediators in the sale of labour power. This acceptance of the 'bargain' with capital is why Lenin called trade unionism the 'bourgeois politics of the working class'. This did not stop him wanting revolutionaries to work inside the unions, but with a clear sense of the limitations.

This has been largely lost by Trotskyism whose routinised practice in the unions seldom challenges its fundamental limitations. While the separation between political/economic and party/union spheres is maintained at a theoretical level, in the day to day sense the limitations connected to trade unions that are posed is the existence of a bureaucracy. Trotsky himself tended to present things in these terms. In 1929 he said:—

"If there were not the bureaucracy of the trade unions then the police, the army, the courts, the Lords, the monarchy would appear before the masses as nothing but pitiful and ridiculous playthings. The bureaucracy of the trade unions is the backbone of British Imperialism". ('Marxism and Trade Unionism' — pp.58-9)

No-one doubts the treacherous role played by trade union leaders, for instance during the General Strike. But the weaknesses of the General Strike were precisely the weaknesses of trade unionism. That is, once beyond bargaining over the terms of the sale of labour power and faced with classwide confrontations involving the bourgeois state trade unionism has gone beyond its political limits. The trade union leaders are merely the summit of this weakness and its most obvious manifestation. Failure to recognise the structural basis of trade unionism leads to illusions that trade unions can be something they are not. In 1933 Trotsky wrote in an article on unions in Britain:—

"Capitalism can only continue to maintain itself by lowering the standard of living of the working class. Under these conditions trade unions can either transform themselves into revolutionary organisations or become lieutenants of capital in the intensified exploitation of the workers". ('The Unions in Britain')

While it is necessary for Marxists to resist trade union incorporation and fight for independence from the capitalist state, we do so to provide tactical space for workers' struggles not because:—

"Only on the basis of such a strategy can the trade unions be turned into instruments serving the interests of the socialist revolution". ('What We Stand For' — Trotskyist Opposition in I.S. 1973)

This utopian naivety can only mystify the essential nature of trade unionism and exaggerate the possibilities of change of the trade union structure itself. What is created is a political framework where 'sell-out' and 'betrayal' are the explanations for the behaviour of trade unions and their leaders. Workers need to realise the structural limits of trade union activity and the degree to which union leaders can be forced to act in their members' interests.

So where does this leave the Trotskyist concept of bureaucracy? There is no doubt, as we emphasised earlier, that there are important truths in the analysis. The 'sociological' aspect of bureaucracies becoming distanced from the rank and file through the division of labour involved in being full-time officials, does create both a world of privilege and one of desire to avoid conflict. The unfortunate effect of overstressing it, however, is to put forward simplistic concepts of change, particularly those which emphasise 'corruption' of officials. As Hyman points out:—

". . . nor is the main reason the fact that on elevation out of the workplace, the full-time official becomes socially and therefore ideologically isolated from those he represents. . . By and large the average trade union official (lay or full-time) tends to be more progressive in his outlook than those he represents. The basic problem is one of function". (In 'Marxism and The Sociology of Trade Unionism')

It is the bargaining function, *not* the existence of trade union bureaucrats as a separate group in the division of labour with their own distinct interests, that creates the conditions for

social privileges. These accrue as a consequence of the necessity for there to be 'rules of the game', institutionalised bargaining involving the separation of the specialist from the mass of the workers.

Similarly, the ideology that may accompany the bureaucrat is a secondary question. There are many sincere officials who don't believe that capitalism is permanent, but who are forced by the logic of their function to accept the normality of its operation and who may adapt their beliefs to the situation they act in. Of course, they don't all act the same; ideology, political/economic context and other factors create variability. But there are broad patterns of behaviour implied by the trade union function that become increasingly likely the greater the pressure, as now in a capitalist crisis.

Paradoxically, the 'bash the bureaucracy' approach actually glorifies the rank and file. In fact, both groups may have political limitations by seeing the struggle merely in trade unionist terms. The difference is that whereas the objective situation pushes the official to stick to the rules of the game, it exerts pressure on the rank and file to overturn industrial legality and the norms of capitalist production. When they do so they often go beyond trade unionism and it is for us to transform these processes in a consciously anti-capitalist direction. This is our objection to the strategy of 'rank and filism', particularly pushed by the SWP. This sees the problem as a contradiction between trade union leaders and rank and file members, rather than between the limitations of trade union politics and the needs of mass, anti-capitalist struggle. Hence it leads to strategies based on routinised union activity, minimising politics and eventually a gradual run-down of genuine activity amongst the rank and file.

The critique of the inherent limitations of trade unionism fell by the wayside because it did not fit the needs of practice inside the unions. When time after time the unions failed to meet the needs of the struggle it was difficult for the left to say they were failing *because* they were unions. Much of the left was trapped by accepting that trade unionism was the limit of everyday working class struggle and consciousness, despite the growing trend to go beyond such limits. In such circumstances Trotskyist analysis became increasingly derivative of the analysis of the bureaucracy in Russia.

Traditional Trotskyists advance the strategy of replacing the leaders', substituting revolutionaries for existing bureaucrats of right or left. This is essentially the same as the concept of the political revolution in Russia, which leaves the the basic structure intact. Mandel indicates this when he says:—

"A political revolution, on the other hand, leaves the mode of production fundamentally unchanged and power passes from one layer of a class to another layer of the same class". ('On Bureaucracy' p.32)

Rank and filism and a greater stress on democratic control by the membership, derives, for the SWP, from the notion of the Russian bureaucracy as a privileged caste who cannot simply be replaced at the top, but must be replaced from below. Our position is that we are not against 'democratisation of the unions', or the election of left leaders. We tactically support both if they increase the power of the rank and file, just as we work inside the union structures to develop a political alternative to trade unionism. The 'replace the leaders' strategy, rank and filism or building left caucuses in the unions without posing such alternatives, mystify the nature of the unions and underestimates the capacity of the masses to struggle autonomously. The Trotskyist concept of bureaucracy has some analytical value but its overall effect is to work as a substitute analysis and strategy to the real processes being examined. Its effect on the mass of the people is to create the impression that the revolutionary left is always negative and superficial in its politics: which unfortunately is so often true.