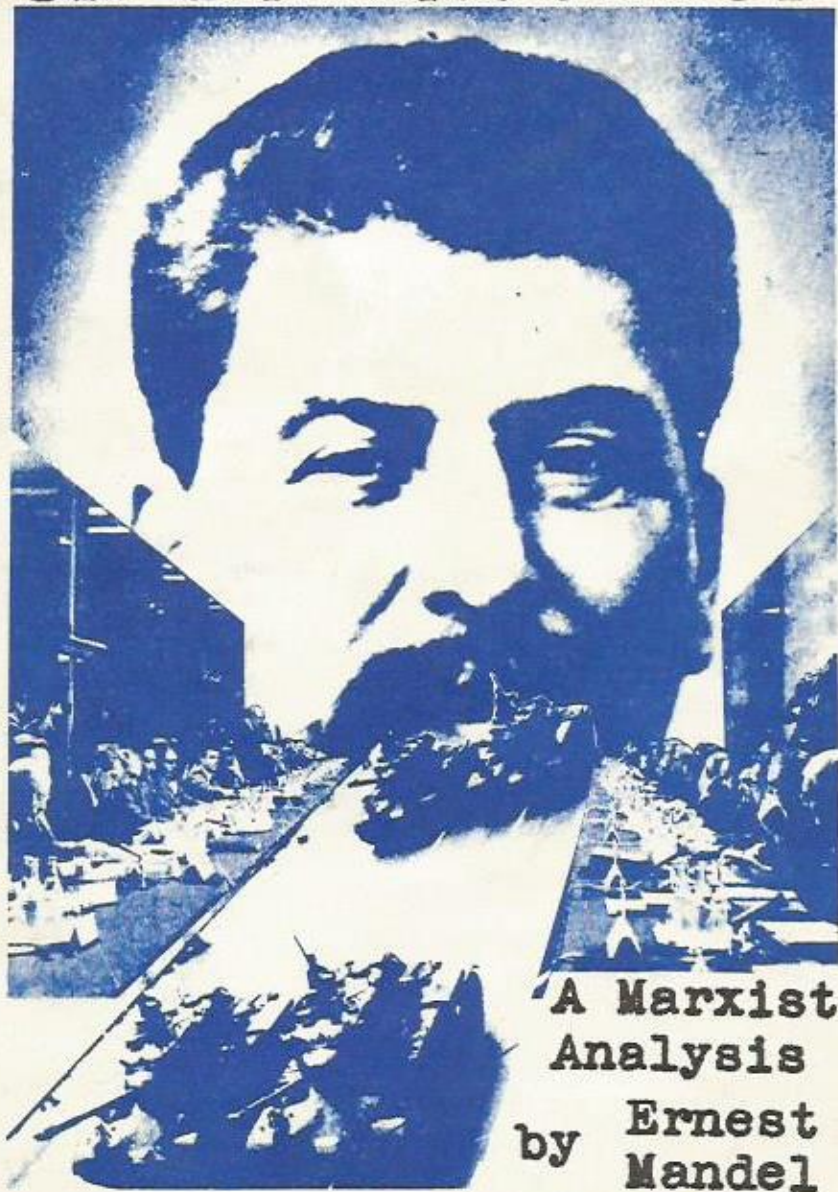
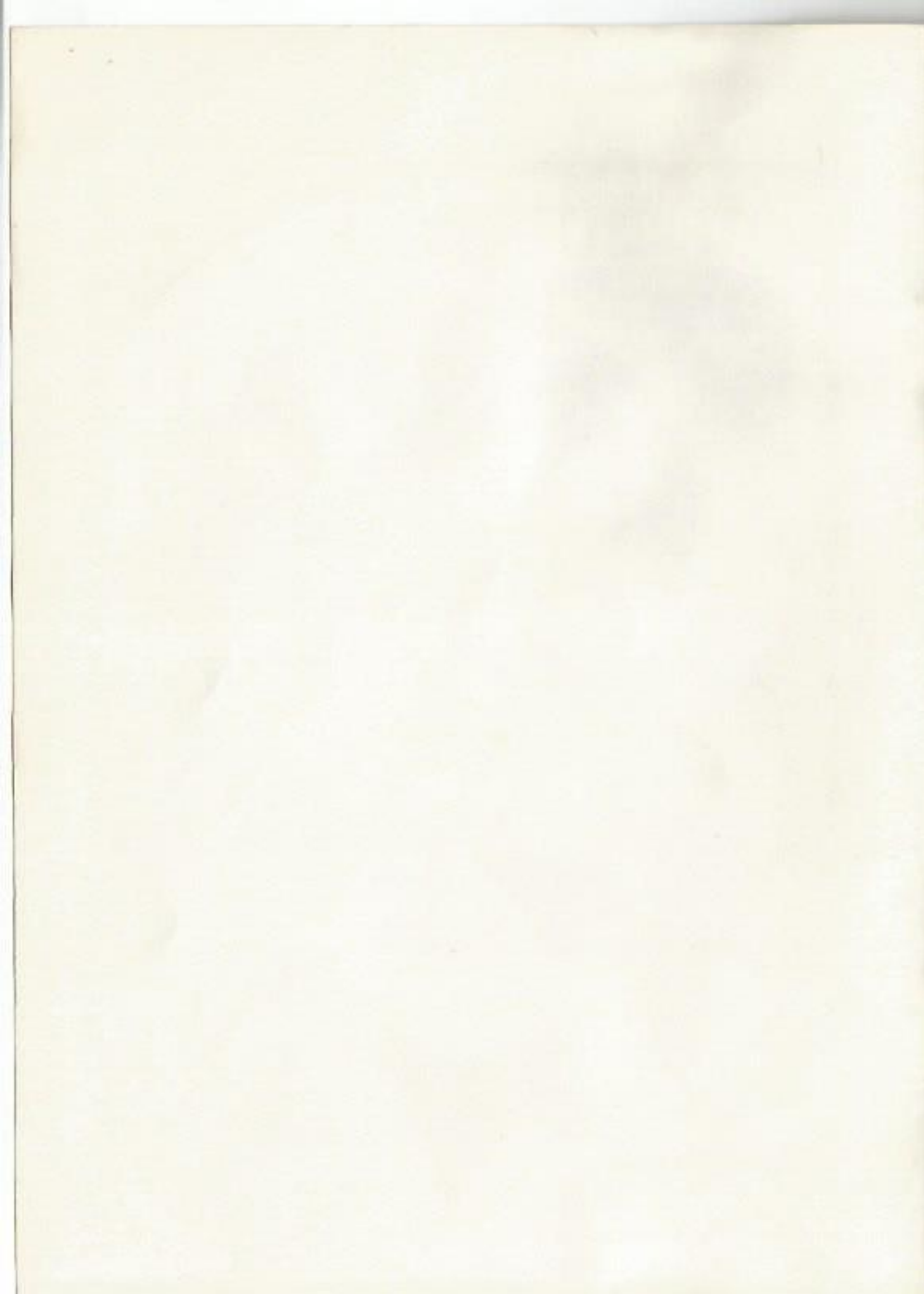


ON BUREAUCRACY



A Marxist
Analysis
by Ernest
Mandel



INTRODUCTION

The essence of Marxism consists in explaining the historical development of societies in terms of the relationships and conflicts of the various classes within them. While nineteenth-century Marxism concentrated on studying the fundamental social groups — classes — rooted in the productive process, Marxism in the twentieth century has come to realize the importance of groups which are not fundamental, which are not classes and have no fundamental roots in the process of production, but which, nevertheless, play an important role in the development of both capitalist societies and societies in transition from capitalism to socialism.

Among these secondary groups, the main place undeniably belongs to the bureaucracy. Twentieth-century Marxism discovered the phenomenon of bureaucracy because this problem, born within the working-class movement in the last years of the nineteenth-century, had grown and acquired increasing importance in the life and practice of working-class organisations.

This introductory pamphlet distinguishes two main aspects of the problem — the theoretical and the historical — and aims to answer the following questions:

What is working-class bureaucracy? How does it emerge and develop? How can it wither away?

What concrete forms does the phenomenon of bureaucracy take in the history of the working class?

What attitudes have the various tendencies inside the working-class movement taken towards the problem of bureaucracy?

BASIC CONCEPTS

I THE GENESIS OF THE BUREAUCRATIC PHENOMENON

The problem of bureaucracy within the working-class movement poses itself in its most immediate form as the problem of the apparatus of working-class organisations: the problem of full-timers and petty-bourgeois intellectuals who come to occupy the middle or top functions within the working-class organisations.

As long as these organisations are limited to tiny groups, to political sects or self-defence groups of limited numerical strength, there is no apparatus, there are no full-timers and the problem does not arise. At the very most, there is the problem of the relationship with petty-bourgeois intellectuals who come to aid in the formation of this as yet embryonic working-class movement.

However, the very growth of the movement, the appearance of mass political or trade-union organisations, is inconceivable without the creation of an apparatus of full-timers and functionaries; and the very existence of an apparatus carries within itself a potential danger of bureaucratization. From the very beginning there comes into play one of the fundamental roots of the bureaucratic phenomenon — the division of labour within capitalist society.

The division of labour within capitalist society reserves the manual work involved in day-to-day production for the proletariat, and the production and assimilation of culture for other social classes. It's tiring work, exhausting both physically and intellectually, does not allow the proletariat in its entirety to acquire and assimilate the objective sciences in their most advanced form or to maintain a continuous political and social activity: the status of the proletariat under the rule of capital is one of scientific and cultural under-development.

The development of the working-class movement brings about the creation of an apparatus and functionaries, whose specialised knowledge is necessary to fill the gaps caused by this status of the working class and is an absolutely indispensable condition of further continuation of the class struggle!

To put it very crudely, it is this specialization that gives rise to the phenomenon of bureaucracy: as soon as a number of individuals are involved in political or trade-union activity as professionals, on a full-time basis, there exists the latent possibility of bureaucratization.

This specialization, in a commodity-production society, also gives birth, at a deeper level, to the phenomena of fetishism and reification. In a society based on an extreme division of labour and of generalized commodity production, the fact that people are imprisoned in a tiny sector of global social activity tends to find its ideological expression in their attitudes: they come to consider their activities as ends in themselves and become more and more unable to understand society as a whole. Organisational structures, originally conceived as means for attaining certain social goals, come to be regarded as aims in themselves — particularly by those who are identified with them most obviously and directly, who live permanently within them and draw their livelihood from them, those who make up the apparatus: the full-timers, the potential bureaucrats.

We will now proceed to examine the psychological and ideological basis for the creation of working-class bureaucracy: the dialectic of partial conquests.

II THE DIALECTIC OF PARTIAL CONQUESTS

This dialectic manifests itself in the attitudes and activity of those who subordinate the pursuit of the struggle of the working class for the conquest of power and the radical transformation of society — building a socialist world — to the defence of such working-class conquests as have already been achieved. At the international level, they see the defence of the Soviet Union, China and/or other workers' states as of greater importance than the extension of the international revolution. For such people, the existence of workers' states in a world dominated by imperialism is an aim in itself. What has been achieved there for them constitutes socialism, and they therefore believe it imperative to subordinate all new struggles to its defence. This constitutes a fundamentally conservative world outlook.

The famous sentence in the **Communist Manifesto** which says that the proletariat has nothing to lose but its chains puts forward a very profound thesis, which should be taken as one of the fundamentals of Marxism: the proletariat is given the historic task of transforming the capitalist society into a communist one precisely because it possesses nothing to defend.

But at the moment this is not absolutely the case, i.e. as soon as a part of the proletariat (the working class bureaucracy, the labour aristocracy which forms within the proletariat in the imperialist countries) acquires an organization or a superior standard of living in place of its original state of total deprivation, there emerges the danger of a new frame of mind. The pros and cons of every new action now come to be weighed and balanced: might not the projected move forward, instead of achieving something new, result in the loss of what has already been gained?

This is a fundamental root of bureaucratic conservatism, found already in the social-democratic movement before the First World War and in the bureaucracy of the Soviet Union even prior to the extreme peak of the Stalinist era.

The dialectic of partial conquests is a dialectic reflecting real problems and not a false contradiction that can be resolved by a formula.

While bureaucratic conservatism clearly harms the interests of the proletariat and therefore socialism, because it refuses to wage and support revolutionary struggle in the capitalist countries and the world as a whole, the initial cause of this attitude (the need to defend working-class achievements) reflects a real dilemma. The reason why we call this attitude conservative is because it assumes *a priori* that any revolutionary leap forward, whether on a national or an international level, threatens the gains of the working class. It is this assumption which underlines the deep and permanent conservatism of both the reformist and Stalinist bureaucracies.

The dialectic of partial conquests, linked to the phenomenon of fetishization characteristic for a society of generalized commodity production organised around an extreme division of labour, expresses an important aspect of the process of bureaucratization. As such it is inherent in the development of the working-class movement in the historical stage of the decay of capitalism and transition towards a socialist society.

The real solution to the problem of bureaucracy lies not in trying to abolish it through decrees or magical formulas, but in creating the best subjective and objective conditions for it to wither away.

III BUREAUCRATIC PRIVILEGES

As materialists we cannot, of course, separate the problem of the bureaucracy from that of its material interests: this bureaucracy enjoys material privileges and is determined to defend them. However, to reduce the problem of bureaucracy solely to this particular aspect would not help us to understand its origin and

subsequent development. For example, the degree of bureaucratization of the communist parties that are not in power (e.g. PCF, PCI) or of the communist parties in semi-colonial countries (e.g. Brazil) could not be explained with this simple model. On the other hand, we see in these cases the ideology of partial conquests clearly at work: identification of the aims with the means, of the bureaucrat with the organisation. This identification, as we have said, gives rise to deep conservatism and this conservatism often comes into violent opposition with the interests of the working class movement.

Just as we should avoid a vulgar materialist explanation, we should equally avoid the opposite, psychologistic error. The psychological tendency to conservatism on the part of leaders and other functionaries is clearly related to both the material advantages and privileges and the power and authority which their status bestows upon them. When we look at the nature of bureaucratic privileges as manifested in the first organisations of the working class, the trade unions and social-democratic parties, we can note two different aspects:

1. Leaving the place of production, especially in the conditions prevailing at that time (twelve-hour working day, total absence of social security, etc.), in order to become a full-timer represented for a worker an unquestionable social promotion, a certain degree of individual self-emancipation. It would be wrong to equate this with 'bourgeoisification' or the creation of a privileged social layer. The early secretaries of working-class organizations spent a considerable part of their lives in prison and lived in more than modest material circumstances. All the same, from an economic and social point of view, they lived better than the rest of the workers at the time.

2. At the psychological level, it is obviously infinitely more satisfying for a socialist or communist militant to spend all his time fighting for his ideas than to spend his days performing mechanical work in some factory, knowing that the results of his labour will only serve to enrich the class enemy.

The phenomenon of social and personal promotion unquestionably contains the potential seeds of bureaucratization. Those who occupy such positions quite simply want to carry on occupying them; they will defend their status against anybody who wants to establish instead a rota system, whereby each member of the organisation would at some time fill these posts.

While social privileges are not very tangible at the beginning, they become considerable once the mass organisations gain a position of strength within capitalist society. There is then the question of electing advisers, MPs and trade-union secretaries who are capable of negotiating directly with the bosses — and thus, to some extent, of

co-existing with them. Similar considerations apply when appointing newspaper editors or representatives to take part in the additional activities through which the organization intervenes at all social levels.

This produces a genuine dialectic which cannot be reduced to a trivial contradiction. For example, when the movement starts producing a paper and therefore needs an editor, it faces a real dilemma. If it applies the rule designed by Marx to prevent the formation of a bureaucracy — that the salary of a full-timer should be equal to that of a skilled worker — it risks a process of professional selection in reverse. The most politically conscious militants will accept the logic of this rule, but many talented journalists who are in a position to earn a lot more elsewhere will be continuously tempted to take up the more lucrative option. So long as they are not sufficiently committed they will be in danger of getting re-absorbed into the bourgeois milieu and thus being lost to the workers' movement.

This holds true for other professions as well. For example, in towns administered by the labour movement the same problem holds in relation to architects, engineers or doctors. A strict application of Marx's rule would in most cases lead to the elimination of all those whose political consciousness is insufficiently developed, but who might be professionally better skilled.

It is impossible inside a capitalist society, with its prevalent norms and values, to build a perfect communist system of human relations even within the workers' movement. This may just be possible for a nucleus of highly conscious revolutionaries, but a large workers' movement is much more firmly integrated into capitalist society and communist principles are thus much more difficult to put into practice within it. Consequently there is a tendency for the obstacles specifically erected against the danger of bureaucratization to be gradually abandoned.

In this historic phase of capitalist decay, the dialectic of partial conquests assumes its fully developed form of conscious integration into bourgeois society together with the politics and logic of class collaboration. All obstacles to bureaucratization disappear, privileges multiply, the social-democratic leaders no longer give a part of their parliamentary salary to the organization — indeed, these functionaries come to represent a client layer inside the working class. From this point on, bureaucratic deformation can only leap forward towards bureaucratic degeneration.

IV THE BUREAUCRATIZATION OF THE WORKERS' STATES

A similar three-phase process can be found at work in the bureaucratization of the workers' states during the period of transition from capitalism to socialism. At first there are only the privileges of authority and the political advantages stemming from the monopoly of power over the state apparatus. Then follow the bureaucratic privileges of a material and cultural nature. Finally, complete degeneration takes place: the political leadership no attempts to check the growth of bureaucracy, consciously integrates itself into it and becomes a motor, striving for further increase of privileges. This process leads to the monstrous excesses of the Stalinist era.

Here are some examples to illustrate the scope of these privileges. At the peak of the Stalinist era, a system of 'fixed bank accounts' was instituted whereby a certain number of top bureaucrats could claim unlimited credit while their bank balances remained always the same. The only limit to spending was the relative lack of goods. For these people, communism really existed in the midst of a still poor society. Post-Stalin literature is full of concrete examples of top artists and party leaders who owned such accounts. Then there is the case of 'special shops' which sold goods generally unavailable to the "normal" consumer. These shops appeared in Stalin's time and continued to exist in most workers' states up to 1956-7. Patronized by party and state officials, their existence was kept carefully hidden from the rest of the population — their fronts were disguised to look like ordinary houses. There existed a real hierarchy among these functionaries: the lowest on the bureaucratic ladder had to pay the full price of goods, those higher up only half the price while the top bureaucrats — those with 'fixed bank accounts' — could take anything they fancied without having to pay at all.

During 1947-8, which was a time of want and misery in the workers' states, CP bureaucrats in countries like Germany used to receive parcels from the Soviet Union containing silk or wool stockings, butter, sugar, etc. The care with which the hierarchy was respected is quite amusing: the size and content of the parcels strictly reflected the rank of the receiver. It would be comic, were it not really tragic, to find in a situation of generalized famine such a application of the bureaucratic mind, which elevates the hierarchy into a sacred principle. However, it is only logical to find even in such petty instances all the paraphernalia of bureaucratic degeneration.

V SOME WRONG SOLUTIONS

The most important lesson that should be drawn from this brief study of the problem of the origin of bureaucracy in the working-class movement is that one must carefully distinguish between the following:

1. the germs of bureaucratization which are inherent in the development of the working-class mass organisations;
2. full and complete bureaucratization, as found in the various reformist and Stalinist parties and in the Soviet state.

If one does not make a distinction between the two and consequently rejects any form of mass organisation for the movement, on the assumption that it will inevitably degenerate, then one is forced to conclude that the self-emancipation of the proletariat is impossible. By refusing to recognise the dialectic between spontaneity and organization, such a procedure is defeatist from the outset.

This confusion of the two poles of the bureaucratic phenomenon characterizes various 'ultra-left' groups. Some of them argue that, because of the danger inherent in the very presence of an apparatus and full-timers, one should therefore rule out any role for 'professional revolutionaries'. Their thesis could be summarized by the phrase: the first professional revolutionary who appeared within the working-class movement pre-figured the future Stalin. The real question, however, is whether a workers' emancipation movement is possible at all without some permanent organisational structures — not in some imagined ideal situation but in capitalist society such as it is.

A movement which did not seek to create professional revolutionaries — from, and linked to, the working class — would be incapable of moving beyond the most primitive workers' defence groups. Such a movement would be incapable of carrying the class struggle beyond the most spontaneous and immediate demands. It would certainly not be able to overthrow capitalism and liberate the proletariat, thus opening the way for socialism. History shows that this option is never taken and that there is not a single country where the working class, out of fear of bureaucratization, continues to cling to organisational primitivism after some experience of the class struggle. On the contrary, historical practice shows that a workers' movement which refuses to organise and does not select and systematically educate its cadres, only falls under the ideological and organisational domination of bourgeois and petty-bourgeois intellectuals, who reproduce within the movement the pattern of cultural monopoly which they already exercise in capitalist society

at large. So there is really no choice at all: wanting to avoid the pitfalls of "incipient" bureaucratization, one falls into even worse pitfalls.

These 'ultra-left' groups do not understand that the choice is not between an organisational form which is totally free from the bureaucratic danger and one that contains it in embryo. The only real choice is between developing real organised working-class autonomy (involving the potential danger of bureaucracy) and leaving the workers' organisations under the ideological sway of the bourgeoisie. A working-class organisation whose members are only manual workers engaged full-time in the productive process is far more easily conquered by bourgeois politics and ideology than an organisation which makes a conscious effort to educate and select the most conscious workers and form them into professional revolutionists.

Another false solution, which stems again from not seeing the problem as a dialectical one, was produced by the 'Socialisme ou Barbarie' group.² They argued that the way to prevent bureaucratization in the workers' states was to abolish all wage differentials. But what would be the objective result of this measure? Eliminating overnight all differences in wages in a society dominated by material scarcity would mean eliminating those incentives that make people want to learn new skills. Once the possession of a professional skill no longer guarantees even a modestly improved standard of living, then only the most politically conscious elements, who understand the objective social necessity of raising professional skills, would make the effort to acquire them. Consequently the development of the productive forces would be slower and the state of scarcity would last longer. The objective causes for the growth of bureaucracy (low development of productive forces, cultural underdevelopment of the proletariat) would last longer and the result would be exactly the opposite of that hoped for. By maintaining some modest difference in wages, skills increase and so does the material basis favourable to the withering away of bureaucratization and privileges. Once again one is faced with a dialectical process requiring a dialectical solution.

VI THE REVOLUTIONARY MARXIST SOLUTION

Marx did not see clearly all the aspects of the bureaucratic problem, because there had not been sufficient historical precedents. Nevertheless, armed solely with the experience of the Paris Commune, he drew up two very simple but fundamental rules which

contain nearly all the safeguards against bureaucratization developed to this day by the workers' movement:

1. **The political functionaries of a workers' state must have wages on a par with those of skilled workers.** For Marx the aim of this rule was to prevent careerism, that is, seeking public office for the sake of personal advancement.

2. **All officials should be elected and subject to the right to recall at any time by those who elected them.** This principle (supplemented by Lenin's rota system rule) will further the withering away of the state, as classes disappear and each citizen gains concrete experience in carrying out administrative functions.

The revolutionary Marxist solution to the problem of bureaucracy is to be found in Lenin's theory of the revolutionary party, and in Trotsky's theory of the workers' state and the vanguard's role in the struggle against its bureaucratization. This solution is based on a clear understanding of the objective nature of the tendency in the working-class movement towards bureaucratization and provides the movement with effective means to combat this tendency.

Lenin's theory of the party was first developed in **What is to be done?** But after the Russian working class underwent its first revolutionary experiences of large-scale mass action — in 1905 — Lenin himself found it necessary to deepen his analysis. The true Leninist theory of the party thus includes two elements. In the first place, what he wrote at the beginning of the century, in **What is to be done?**, about the creation of the nucleus of the revolutionary party in conditions of clandestinity. Secondly, what he wrote after the Russian proletariat's first mass revolutionary experience — the experience of mass parties, trade unions and soviets. To understand Lenin's theory of the party is to understand both the need for vanguard detachments and parties, which can only organise a small minority of the working class, and at the same time the need for the vanguard party to be integrated into the masses and not substitute itself for them or take upon itself tasks which can only be executed by the masses themselves. The thesis that the emancipation of the proletariat can only be accomplished **by the proletariat itself** must be modified, either in theory or in practice, to mean that it is the revolutionary party's task to emancipate the proletariat and to establish the workers' state on behalf of the proletariat — first in the latter's name and then, in certain historical situations, against it.

In this dialectic between the vanguard and the masses, it is necessary to insist on the fact that the party can accomplish its historical tasks **only if it is actively supported by the majority of the proletariat.** But this active support of the masses for a revolutionary party can only occur at **exceptional though historically determined**

moments, which means that the party must remain a minority party as long as there is not a revolutionary situation.³

The true Leninist theory of the party lies in its global understanding of the dialectical relationship between the party and the masses. This dialectic implies a definite type of organisation and a definite conception of the professional revolutionary. The latter must never be separated permanently from the masses; he must always be ready to return to the factory floor and cede his place to another comrade, in order that he too can acquire the necessary experience. This is the theory of the rota system, which establishes a real 'circulation of life-blood' between the proletariat and its vanguard.

The same fundamental principles apply for the workers' states in transition from capitalism to socialism. Here, although Lenin initially developed a number of important observations and theses on the problem of bureaucratization of workers' states (indeed, in 1921-2 he was much more aware of the danger than Trotsky), it has mainly been Trotsky and the Trotskyist movement who have provided the revolutionary Marxist solution to the problem.

While a tendency to bureaucratic deformation is inevitable in a backward and isolated society, it is not inevitable that this tendency should lead to the monstrous degeneration of the Stalinist era. In these conditions, the role of the subjective factor is once again decisive. The revolutionary vanguard must fight against the danger of bureaucratization at all levels:

at the level of the political organisation of the state, it must foster workers' democracy and encourage direct intervention of the masses in the running of the state;

at the international level, it must support the development of the world revolution which, by breaking the isolation of the workers' states, will be the most effective antidote to bureaucratization. If a proletarian vanguard free from moral and physical exhaustion succeeded in taking power, it would be able to take over the leading role in the spread of the world revolution: this is what Trotsky called the third aspect of the theory of Permanent Revolution.

at the economic level: any radical separation of the function of accumulation from the function of production, any radical separation of the real, living working class from control over the social surplus product — whether through an ultra-centralized state bureaucracy or whether through free functioning of 'market laws' — must be avoided at all costs. Democratically centralized, planned workers' management of the economy is the historical answer to this problem.

THE PROBLEM OF BUREAUCRACY:

Stages in the development of a scientific analysis

I MARX'S ANALYSIS OF THE EXPERIENCE OF THE PARIS COMMUNE

Perhaps the best way to introduce this topic is to consider the lessons drawn by Marx from his study of the Paris Commune. The most striking feature of this first attempt at building a workers' state was the effort made (more instinctively than consciously) by the Commune leaders to **destroy** the permanent state apparatus bequeathed by the previous ruling classes (the absolute monarchy and the successive bourgeois regimes). In his analysis Marx isolated three main preconditions for the success of this project (two of which have already been mentioned):

1. The salaries of the Commune functionaries were not higher than those of skilled workers;
2. These functionaries were elected and could be recalled at any time by those who elected them;
3. The third requirement was alluded to by Marx and subsequently made explicit by Lenin: **an end to the separation of the legislative and executive functions**. This separation, which is the fundamental characteristic of the bourgeois state, was suppressed in this new state which was already not quite a state — i.e. the creation of the workers' state marked the beginning of the withering away of the state. Right from the beginning, workers were involved not only in the legislative functions of the state but also in

the execution of laws — right from the beginning the proletariat was involved in the exercise of power.

This first experiment in the creation of a workers' state also produced the first effective measures against bureaucratization: the withering away of the state must coincide with the withering away of the state apparatus. The three rules drawn up by Marx should be seen as the basic safeguard against the bureaucratization of any democratic structure — whether of state, trade union or party. While Marx did not live to see the bureaucratic deformation of mass working-class parties and of workers' states and thus could not provide a full analysis of the problem, the passage he wrote nevertheless constituted for long the key weapons for the struggle against bureaucracy.

II KAUTSKY'S PARALLEL

The next major contribution to the analysis of the bureaucratic phenomenon we owe to Kautsky. At the end of the last century Kautsky wrote a book called *The Origins of Christianity*, in which he raised the following question: after the working-class seizure of power, is there not a danger that this power may be surrendered into the hands of a bureaucracy? This was the first time that the problem was posed so clearly (though it is true that anarchists had previously alluded to it). Kautsky asked: is there not a possibility that the working-class movement could undergo a process of bureaucratization similar to that which the Catholic Church underwent after its consolidation as a dominant force in society? Kautsky went on to compare what had happened to the Catholic Church after it became a state church (in the 4th century A.D., under Constantine the Great) with what could happen to the workers' party and state after the victory of the working class movement.

This comparison was not the fruit of Kautsky's theoretical labour alone. He drew inspiration from two sources. Engels, in his introduction to *The Class Struggles in France*, had already compared the persecution suffered by the working-class movement to that of another movement sixteen hundred years earlier. In spite of harsh repression, Christianity had gone from strength to strength until the movement of the oppressed, bitterly fought by the ruling class, progressively reached all social classes and ended victorious.

Another possible source of inspiration was the anarcho-syndicalist movement represented by Most.⁴ Starting from Engels' remarks, Most concluded that workers' organisations become bureaucratized as they develop in the same way that the Church had done in the course of its historical development.

Faced with the parallel, Kautsky grasped and posed the problem correctly. Of course, he knew that a complete parallel between the workers' movement and the Catholic Church was not possible, nevertheless he saw that the conquest of power would confront the working-class movement with a problem of bureaucracy analogous to that undergone by the Catholic Church after its arrival in power. Kautsky's answers are interesting, since they differ considerably from the ones given by Marx and remind us of those later produced by Trotsky.

Kautsky argued that the parallel would be perfectly tenable if the historical conditions under which the working class came to power resembled those under which the Church had triumphed. The Catholic Church had risen to power at a time when the forces of production were on the decline. Under similar conditions the workers' movement could not avoid bureaucratization either. But, in reality, the conditions would in its case be the exact opposite. For socialism means a tremendous development of productive forces which lays the foundation for the withering away of the division of labour and a revolution in the cultural level of the masses. Given these conditions, the victory of the bureaucracy is historically inconceivable.

Kautsky's answer is thus on the whole correct. But he overlooked the possibility, a possibility nobody considered at the time, that the working-class might take power not in an advanced capitalist country but in a country that had only begun in the last few decades to shake off the fetters of a semi-feudal social order. In this case the absence of the factors mentioned by Kautsky — material plenty, cultural revolution — that would act as a brake on the development of bureaucracy, coupled to the low cultural level of the masses and a numerically weak working-class might allow a temporary victory of the bureaucracy.

III TROTSKY'S POLEMIC AGAINST LENIN'S CONCEPTION OF THE PARTY

The third phase in the development of the analysis of the bureaucratic problem is rather 'delicate' for those communists who are both Leninists and Trotskyists, since it is marked by Trotsky's polemic against Lenin's theory of the revolutionary party. In this debate Trotsky was undoubtedly wrong, as he himself later acknowledged. However, while the internal logic of Trotsky's argument is far from perfect, his conclusions nevertheless appear as an acute premonition of subsequent events. In 1903 Trotsky wrote that a theory in which the party substitutes for the proletariat in

carrying out the fundamental tasks risks thereafter substituting the Central Committee for the party, the Secretariat for the Central Committee, and, finally, the General Secretary for the Secretariat, so that in the end one man alone is given the mission of realizing the great tasks of the revolution.

This argument represents a perfectly correct condemnation of all substitutionist theories — but has, of course, little to do with Lenin's real theory of the party.⁵

In Stalin's time, however, this substitutionist theory effectively became the official theory of the Russian Communist Party. Bureaucrats in the workers' state are always surprised when, if challenged, they cannot find a single line in Lenin's writings which says that the dictatorship of the proletariat is to be exercised by the party, that the party should nationalize the means of production, that the party should govern the workers' state, etc., etc. This is because they have been brought up in a political spirit which transfers to the party the tasks of the proletariat. Lenin, on the contrary, always envisaged these tasks as being accomplished **by the proletariat under the leadership of the party** - which is a very different matter.

The theory which allows the party to usurp the place of the proletariat leads in a natural way to situations in which the party comes to execute these tasks against the will of the great majority of the proletariat. For example, this theory justifies the Soviet intervention in Hungary in 1956 and the violent suppression of the general strike in which 95% of the Hungarian workers took part. In other words, 'dictatorship of the proletariat' was exercised against 95% of the proletariat!

In 1903 Trotsky's critique of the substitutionist theory, while absolutely correct, appeared an abstract exercise in polemic, because no one in particular — certainly not Lenin — held such substitutionist positions. Thirty years later, however, the substitutionist theory became the semi-official doctrine of the Soviet bureaucracy (semi-official only because the Stalinist bureaucracy never quite dared to reject openly and completely Lenin's theoretical heritage).

IV ROSA LUXEMBURG'S STRUGGLE AGAINST THE GERMAN TRADE UNION BUREAUCRACY

The fourth phase in the analysis of the bureaucratic phenomenon is very important, because for the first time it was applied to an already formed bureaucracy: that of the German trade unions. We owe this development to Rosa Luxemburg who, between 1907 and 1914,

waged an open struggle against the German trade-union bureaucracy and the growing bureaucratization of the German social-democratic mass movement.

Rosa Luxemburg drew on the experience of the revolution of 1905, particularly as it affected the most industrialized parts of Tsarist Russia: the industrial sectors of Poland, Lettonia, the Ukraine and Petrograd. She found in all these cases that the working class enters a political or trade union movement *en masse* only at times of revolutionary upheaval. Consequently, this indicates the need for a political strategy towards millions of workers who have never had the formative experience of belonging to an established working-class organisation. Given that the activity of these workers cannot be channelled via the usual organisational forms, new ones are required: forms of organisation which would have greater flexibility than a trade union or a party and which would unite in action a much larger mass of the proletariat.

History has supported Luxemburg's theory by showing in practice the usefulness of the soviet organisational form in times of revolutionary upheaval. Soviets constitute an extremely flexible form, since each Soviet is related to the specific local situation. It is sufficient to look at the first soviets in the 1905 Russian revolution, the workers' and soldiers' councils in the German revolution of 1918, or the committees formed during the Spanish revolution in order to realize their rich potential. Specific to a given situation, they were always formed in order to solve a practical task posed by the revolution at a given historical moment. Soviets are the only organisational form capable of uniting *all* workers, whether previously organised or unorganised, in action for a specific revolutionary task.

Consequently, they should not be seen as permanent institutional structures applicable to all historical situations. Similarly, if one has understood their real nature, then one can see how dogmatic it is to give them the same label in all countries and in all situations. One can then see the absurdity of Maoist groups which, repeating the Stalinist 'third-period' tactics, want to immediately set up soviets in countries like Belgium or the United States. Mesmerized by labels, they are blind to the real problem: what organisational form is best adapted to the aspirations of a given working class, in a given country, at a given time; to the possibilities of a decisive development of working class consciousness.

Rosa Luxemburg called attention to another aspect of the problem of bureaucracy. The trade-union bureaucracy, once its period of formation has been completed, tends to become an extremely conservative force which constitutes a growing obstacle to

the development of the class struggle. Her personal experience of the German trade-union movement enabled her to see this process more clearly and long before either Lenin or Trotsky; she was therefore able to predict the counter-revolutionary role this bureaucracy was to play a few years later. While other working-class militants stressed at the time only the most immediately visible aspect of this problem — the opportunistic nature of this bureaucracy — Luxemburg documented its process of integration into the bourgeois state, its identification with certain 'bourgeois-democratic' institutions and its concern with its own privileges, especially those of a material nature.

In 1914 Lenin used Luxemburg's theory of bureaucratic degeneration in order to explain the general state of degeneration of European social-democracy and the reasons for the treachery of the Second International in face of the imperialist war.

However, in her concern with the need to wage the anti-bureaucratic struggle, Luxemburg went too far in underestimating the objective importance of these organisations for maintaining a minimal level of class consciousness in the 'normal' periods of capitalism. Even in the most advanced capitalist countries, the alternatives are not a revolutionary working-class on the one hand and a working-class regimented by bureaucratic trade unions on the other. There is also the very real possibility of an atomized working-class without any organisation or any class consciousness. When criticizing the counter-revolutionary and bureaucratic aspects of trade unions, one must also bear in mind that they represent at the same time the guarantee of a minimal class combativity for the broad masses within capitalist society.

It is necessary to emphasize this point, because on the periphery of the Trotskyist movement there is an ultra-left current which does not distinguish between the two polar aspects of the problem and consequently draws the following equation: mass trade union movement = reactionary bureaucracy = betrayal, forgetting that the mass trade union movement is the objective expression of the collective force of the class during the period of social calm. When such people say that in the advanced capitalist countries trade unions have become institutions of 'social welfare', dealing mainly with pensions and family allowances, they are to a certain extent correct. But one must not forget that if the trade unions did not exist, workers would have to solve all these 'welfare' problems on an individual basis. The relationship of forces would then be much more unfavourable to them and they would not have any chance of winning against the employers. The function of trade unions is, in the last analysis, to bring the collective force of the working class to

bear in this day-to-day dialogue with the bosses. Furthermore, when the class struggle accelerates its pace, trade unions can become formidable class weapons.

It is necessary to start from this dual nature of the trade-union bureaucracy in order to understand why, after fifty years of repeated betrayals by the bureaucracy, the workers remain strongly attached to these organisations. The workers know very well that trade unions are crucial to their day-to-day struggle against the capitalist bosses and that therefore it is not in their interest to abandon them.

V LENIN'S THESES ON THE DEGENERATION OF SOCIAL DEMOCRACY

The fifth phase in the analysis of the bureaucratic phenomenon is constituted by Lenin's theses on the degeneration of the Second International and the betrayal of social democracy at the outbreak of the First World War. Lenin explained this by two factors:

1. The appearance of a bureaucracy inside the trade unions and social-democratic parties, which controls these organizations and is committed to the privileges it has acquired both within them and outside (MPs, mayors, journalists, etc.).

2. The sociological roots of this bureaucratic layer are to be found in the 'labour aristocracy', i.e. in that part of the working class inside the imperialist countries that has been won over to the bourgeoisie by means of colonial 'super-profits'.

Lenin's theory has been a 'dogma' for revolutionary Marxists for nearly half a century. We must now re-examine it critically, for at least two reasons:

1. There are things that are difficult to explain by this theory. For example, it is difficult to explain the nature of the trade-union bureaucracy in the United States solely by the existence of a 'labour aristocracy' corrupted by colonial super-profits. True, American capital invested abroad brings home profits but these constitute a negligible sum compared to the total wage bill of the American working class, and certainly not a sufficiently large fraction to account for the existence of a trade-union bureaucracy that rules over more than seventeen million wage-earners. Present-day France has practically no colonies left and draws a very limited profit from its former colonial territories, and yet the bureaucratization of the French working-class movement has not correspondingly diminished.

2. The second reason is even more important. When we examine the economic conditions of existence of the working class throughout the world, we see that the real 'labour aristocracy' is no

longer constituted inside the proletariat of an imperialist country but rather by the proletariat of the imperialist countries as a whole in relation to that of the colonial and semi-colonial countries. For example, the wage of an English worker is ten times larger than the wage of a black South-African worker, while the wage differential of two English workers is 1:2 at most. Imperialist exploitation has produced a tremendous wage-differential between the workers of imperialist and under-developed countries and this factor plays a significant role in the political corruption of certain layers of the proletariat inside the advanced capitalist countries.

There are other reasons why we should use the concept of 'labour aristocracy' with great discretion. For example, in the history of the European working-class movement it is often the so-called 'labour aristocracy' i.e. the best-paid layers of the proletariat, that has acted as the spearhead of the Communist movement. The German Communist Party became a mass party in the early twenties by winning over the metal-workers, who were the best-paid section of the German working-class at the time. The same is true in the case of France: the growth of the PCF after 1934 was based on its growth among workers of large enterprises, where wages were among the highest in the country. Thus it was the Renault workers rather than the textile workers of the North of France who joined the Communist Party in large numbers; the latter have remained faithful to social democracy.

Rather than mechanically applying Lenin's concept of 'labour aristocracy', we should emphasize his global analysis of the increasing symbiosis of the trade-union bureaucracy and the bourgeois state.

VI TROTSKY'S THEORY OF THE DEGENERATION OF THE SOVIET WORKERS' STATE

Trotsky's theory of the degeneration of the Soviet workers' state, a society in transition from capitalism to socialism, constitutes the sixth phase in the development of an understanding of the bureaucratic phenomenon. Trotsky's main contribution was to transform the theories of bureaucratization of workers' organisations into a coherent theory of the bureaucracy in a workers' state. Through recognising the importance of objective factors in this bureaucratization process, Trotsky also recognised that degeneration was by no means inevitable.⁶ It should have and could have been combated, through a conscious effort by the Bolshevik party. The great tragedy of the development of the Soviet

Union was the total lack of understanding of the bureaucratic phenomenon by the majority of the Bolshevik party at the decisive moments in its history. If a concrete understanding of the problem had been reached by 1922-3, when preventive measures were still possible, the history of the Soviet Union could have followed quite another course. Industrialization could have started earlier, the proletariat could have become more numerous, the alliance between the proletariat and the poor peasants could have been based upon producers' cooperatives founded upon superior technology, and therefore higher productivity and income than those of the private peasants; proletarian democracy could have been extended; the international revolution could have been successful in a number of countries. If one disregards the subjective factors and considers the whole process to have been inevitable, then one certainly cannot understand what the Left Opposition's struggle against the rise of Stalinism was all about.⁷

Other important aspects of Trotsky's theory of the bureaucratization of the Soviet state are his positions on industrialization, planning and workers' self-management.

In the early twenties, a confrontation developed between the leadership of the Bolshevik party, led at the time by Lenin and Trotsky, and a tendency inside the party — the so-called workers' opposition led by Shylapnikov and Kollontai. The present-day supporters of this wing of the party maintain that if this tendency had won no bureaucratization would have taken place.⁷

But this conclusion is totally wrong and what Trotsky said at the time remains quite correct. One only needs to recall the state of Soviet factories in 1921. Three-quarters empty and manned by only a few of the 1917 veterans, they were producing practically nothing. This disastrous economic situation did not allow the Soviet worker much scope for combating the re-emergence of petty-commodity production, on the basis of barter between an extremely weak industrial sector and an increasingly discontented peasantry. To believe that in such conditions the answer to the problem of bureaucracy lay in giving power to the small groups of workers still working in the factories is to endow self-management with magic powers. Such a belief ignores fundamental realities: if the working-class is to manage factories, then these must be functioning; if the working-class is to direct the State and society, then it must exist in some strength and be employed; if this class is to show a minimum of political initiative, it must have a full stomach and some leisure time. Only on the basis of a minimal development of the productive forces and a functioning degree of workers' democracy can a struggle against bureaucracy be a real possibility.⁹

Though Trotsky under-rated the institutional aspect of the problem with which he hardly dealt, he saw quite clearly that the first imperative was to increase production, to set production back into motion with the maximum possible speed, in order to strengthen the proletariat numerically, to combat the tendency towards private accumulation, to provide the masses with basic food and shelter, and to create the minimum material basis for enough workers' democracy for the proletariat to begin to play a growing direct role in the direction of the economy and the state.

The invocation of a self-management and workers' control which were impossible in the social and economic reality of 1921 is simply so much rhetoric.

THE BUREAUCRACY IN THE WORKERS' STATES

Marxists studying Eastern Europe encounter difficulties which indicate a basic problem: the theoretical framework required to analyze societies in transition from capitalism to socialism does not yet fully exist.

We know Marx's ideas on socialism and, while it is difficult to define closely what socialism is, we know quite well what it is not. Any serious Marxist can see that socialism has not yet been achieved either in the Soviet Union or in any other of the workers' states. But this statement does not solve the problem, because between capitalism and socialism there is inevitably, as Marxists from Marx himself to Lenin and Trotsky have recognized, a period of transition. And given that we have only elements of a theory of transitional societies, it is extremely difficult to decide which developments are due to bureaucratic degeneration and which are historically inevitable.

Numerous bourgeois, social-democratic and 'ultra-left' ideologues argue that the survival of market categories (money, commodities, trade, etc.) in the Soviet Union automatically classifies the Soviet Union as a capitalist country, because a market economy implies a capitalist system of production. This is a serious mistake. While Marxists would agree that a fully developed socialist mode of production is one in which commodity production is no longer

present, they also realize that the overthrow of capitalism does not result in its immediate abolition. The existence of commodity production in the Soviet Union does not mean that the Soviet Union is a capitalist country but rather a country in which socialism has not yet been fully realized. One of the characteristics of all societies in transition from capitalism to socialism, however advanced they may be, will probably be the survival to a greater or lesser degree, of market categories. Capitalism is characterized not by **elements** of commodity production, but by **universal** commodity production which does not exist in the Soviet Union.

Anarchists argue, in similar vein, that the continued existence of the state (an instrument of class struggle) in the Soviet Union points to the continued existence of exploitation and therefore capitalism. Lenin has already dealt with these arguments in his **State and Revolution**. The fact that the existence of the state indicates the existence of classes and class conflict in these countries does not prove that they are capitalist. On the contrary, in the transitional period from capitalism to socialism the state, in so far, as it represents the dictatorship of the proletariat, is absolutely necessary to the building of socialism.

These arguments show that it is necessary to abstract from the historical specificities of the individual workers states and to investigate at a more general level the problematic of transitional societies.

I THE GENERAL PROBLEMATIC OF TRANSITIONAL SOCIETIES

From an economic point of view, a society in transition from capitalism to socialism is principally defined by the suppression of private ownership of the means of production (industry, land, transport, banks, etc.), the monopoly of external trade and the introduction of planning into the economy. Thereby, production is no longer fundamentally governed by the law of value. It is no longer market forces or competition between different capitals which basically distribute economic resources between various sectors of output. Consequently, there arises a fundamental contradiction between the mode of production, which is clearly no longer capitalist, and the mode of distribution, which basically remains a bourgeois one. In his **Critique of the Gotha Programme**, Marx analyzed at great length the continuing survival of social inequalities in the transitional period and even into the first stage of socialism. These inequalities he attributed to the survival of bourgeois norms of distribution (material incentives, the struggle to maximise wages,

inequality in consumption, etc.).¹⁰

This crucial contradiction of the transitional period derives from the fact that the socialist mode of production presupposes a much higher stage of development of the productive forces than exists today on a world scale — a stage of material plenty that would render unnecessary the bourgeois aspect of the norms of distribution. This means that the historical task of the transitional society is twofold: it has to destroy the ideological residues of the old society based on class division, money economy and the trend to individual enrichment and, at the same time, it has to bring about an important new growth of the productive forces, to a level which make possible a full development of plenty for all mankind.

It is the imperative necessity to realize these two tasks **simultaneously** which is the source of all the main contradictions of the transitional period, resulting in: 1) the partial survival of commodity production at the same time as it progressively withers away; 2) the survival of class divisions (peasantry, working class, urban petty bourgeoisie) at the same time as they too begin to wither away; 3) the survival of a state under the dictatorship of the proletariat, which at the same time starts to wither away — a state whose main function is to prevent a return of the old ruling class and to regulate the day-to-day economic activity which will ensure the socialist accumulation vital to the building of the new society. Clearly, the rapidity with which commodity production, social classes and the state wither away does not depend only on the domestic class struggle, but also on the international balance of forces, or the international class struggle.

The withering away of the state co-exists, therefore, with the need for coercive direction of the economic process. Hence — a point most difficult to accept — certain bureaucratic deformations are inevitable.

These bureaucratic deformations would not be inevitable were the proletariat as a whole in a position, as soon as it takes power, to direct collectively, as a class, all spheres of social life. Unfortunately this is not the case. Those who refuse to acknowledge this fact only give undue historical credit to capitalism. For capitalism (which precedes the transitional period) alienates workers in all domains and, by subjecting them to an eight — nine — or ten — hour working day (including time lost in going to and from the work place) denies them the systematic cultural development that would enable them to take on immediately the running of society as a whole. As long as the working day is not drastically reduced, the most elementary material conditions for workers' management of society

do not exist, so that a certain delegation of power is inevitable — which in turn leads to partial bureaucratic deformations. What a transitional society needs is to find an ideal rhythm for the growth of its productive potential — one that will reduce the amount of social tension and at the same time will allow the progressive withering away of all the negative features inherited from the old society.

The problem of analyzing the bureaucratically degenerated workers' states can now be posed in the following way. Fifty years after the creation of the Soviet Union, there are no signs whatsoever of the withering away of the features of class society. On the contrary, they are being progressively reinforced. The state dominates all spheres of social life. Partial commodity production and growing social inequality have been consolidated. Bureaucratic deformations, culminating in the total political expropriation of the working class, have become institutionalized.

If the problem is posed in this light, then one can proceed to a structural analysis of the historical origins, the inner logic and the unfolding of bureaucratic degeneration in the Soviet Union.

II THE ORIGIN OF BUREAUCRATIC DEGENERATION IN THE WORKERS' STATES

As indicated above, the inevitability of bureaucratic deformation in the transitional societies is linked, in the last analysis, to two fundamental factors: insufficient development of productive forces, and the survival of capitalist features in the post-revolutionary society. To these two we should now add two more factors that lie at the roots of Stalinist degeneration. In the countries in which capitalism has been smashed, we find not only that the level of economic development was too low to ensure a rapid achievement of the state of abundance required for socialism, but also that this level was much lower than that of the industrialized capitalist countries. Hence the transitional societies were forced to accomplish the tasks of socialist accumulation **at the same time** as those of 'primitive accumulation' — notably industrialization. (This is what Preobrazhensky called 'primitive socialist accumulation'). It was foreseen neither by Marx nor by other Marxists that the revolution would triumph first in a backward country, while the advanced countries would remain capitalist for a whole historical epoch. The fact that this is what in reality occurred has had a whole series of disastrous results in the last fifty years.

The revolution, it was believed prior to 1917, would either take place simultaneously throughout an important part of the world or, failing that, it would at least capture the most advanced capitalist

countries first. In the latter case, the non-socialist sector of the world would not significantly influence the development of the new social order, whether through military pressure, through ideological pull, or through a higher standard of living.

But the isolated victory of the revolution in a backward country meant that this country had to defend itself against the military aggression or threat of aggression of all the advanced capitalist countries and to spend an important part of its national social surplus product for this purpose. At the same time, the higher standard of living in industrialized capitalist countries exerted a strong ideological attraction upon significant sections of the population. These two 'unforeseen factors', supplementing those which had already been foreseen by Marxists as 'normal' for a transitional society, lie at the roots of the bureaucratic degeneration. This is the fundamental historical explanation for developments in the Soviet Union after October. No Bolshevik leader in the period from 1917 to 1923 foresaw this evolution. And yet Lenin and Trotsky, and other leaders at various periods in their lives, understood well how the isolation of the revolution in a backward country could provoke dangers unpredicted by Marxist theory.

The historical genesis of the Soviet bureaucracy therefore cannot be viewed either as a wicked plot or as the inevitable outcome of the specific socio-economic formation." These two poles are mediated by an increasing political passivity of the Soviet proletariat during the 1920s. It is this decisive **mediation** that explains how the intense political and economic activity of the Soviet proletariat in 1917-1919 became gradually transformed into its total political expropriation ten or fifteen years later. The increasing political passivity of the Soviet proletariat was determined by a whole series of historical factors: the physical elimination of a great part of the workers' vanguard during the civil war; disappointment following the failure of the world revolution; generalized hunger and misery; weakening of the institutions of workers' power, etc. Lenin saw the danger during the last years of his life and started to fight them. From 1923 on, Trotsky and the Left Opposition argued for an economic policy at home and an internationalist strategy abroad that would objectively help the Soviet proletariat to resume its political activity. These proposals, which contained no illusions about some miraculous quick solution, were designed to create a situation where a faster development of productive forces would go hand in hand with the revival of the political climate of the first post-revolutionary years, in which soviets were actually functioning and the proletariat had a direct role in the management of enterprises.

The strategy of the Left Opposition, squarely based on a Marxist

analysis of the epoch, took into account (as Lenin had done from 1920 on) the growing danger of a dictatorship of the bureaucracy. It was a tragedy that the majority of the Bolshevik cadres, despite all their experience, failed to understand the correctness of the Opposition's proposals. Such a catastrophic ideological breakdown is unfortunately not infrequent in the history of the working-class movement.¹² True, between 1923 and 1936 most of the old Bolshevik leaders came to realize the monstrous nature of bureaucratic power; but this realization came too late. Their failure to perceive the real danger in time, coupled with their inability to see the historical significance of the factional struggles in which they took part, meant that the process of bureaucratic degeneration proceeded uninterrupted.

However, to rest content with this explanation only would mean falling into subjectivism: it is necessary first to find the historical causes of this tragic failure. The Bolshevik party apparatus became the unconscious instrument of a bureaucratic social stratum; this was made possible only because the party itself had become bureaucratized. The party apparatus, which was heavily integrated into the state apparatus, had already gone through the first phase of bureaucratic degeneration. It was thus against both its ideological and its material interests to combat a process in which it was to a considerable degree itself implicated.

One can go on at great length — as many analysts, from Souvarine to Deutscher, have done — about how Stalin's victory was historically inevitable or about the tactical errors committed by Trotsky.¹³ But it is much more important to recognize how a whole series of **political and institutional errors** committed by the Bolshevik party aided the process of integration of party and state apparatuses and their simultaneous bureaucratization, so that the party became sociologically incapable of acting as a brake on this process.

1. **The ban on factions inside the party.** The prohibition of factions inside the party meant the beginning of the end of internal party democracy. Freedom of expression inevitably implies the right to the formation of tendencies: these equally inevitably can turn into factions, particularly when bureaucratization is under way, since this results in a systematic generalization of political differences.

2. **The introduction of the single-party practice.** Contrary to a widespread belief, nothing in Lenin's writings suggest that the period of the dictatorship of the proletariat allows for only one party. Nor is such a principle to be found in the Soviet constitution. Up to 1921 a number of parties (Left-Menshevik, Social-Revolutionaries, Anarchists) enjoyed legal existence, so long as they did not align

themselves openly with military counter-revolution. A number of soviets were led by these parties (e.g. the Rubber factory in Moscow was under Menshevik leadership) and elections were carried out on the basis of different slates representing different parties. However, from 1920 onwards, although no law was passed to that effect, the single-party principle became a practice. The banning of factions within the Bolshevik party logically led to the suppression of other tendencies in the working-class movement. The fact that the single-party principle is entirely absent from Lenin's writings has been completely obliterated by the ideology of Stalinism. What Lenin did say was that the dictatorship of the proletariat was impossible without a Bolshevik party, but that is something quite different.

The Bolshevik party made the mistake of believing that, although the civil war was over and social tensions were beginning to diminish, the introduction of NEP with its attendant dangers required an accentuation of political repression and more centralization. The ban on other parties was based on the fear that they might be used by the bourgeoisie and the peasantry to overthrow the new social order. However, history shows that the best way to combat the danger of capitalist restoration is the continuous political activity of the proletariat. Therefore it was absolutely vital to create conditions favourable to the political re-activation of the proletariat — whereas the suppression of proletarian democracy encouraged the bureaucratization that Lenin wanted above all to avoid.

3. The third, and perhaps the most serious, institutional error was **the failure to understand the organic links between Soviet power, collective ownership and the need for 'primitive socialist accumulation'** (i.e. for competition with the private sector of the economy).¹⁴ The party believed that this competition would be won by the state enterprises through their higher economic productivity. Consequently, great emphasis was placed on individual productivity, which demanded a high degree of centralization at the level of the enterprise, leading to the principle of one-man management. Aware of the possibilities for bureaucratic misuse inherent in this principle, the Bolsheviks provided a number of safeguards: a) a high degree of trade-union autonomy; b) the 'troika' system within the factory, whereby the powers of the factory manager were strictly controlled by the party and the trade-unions (this in practice often turned into control by the party secretary and the trade-union secretary); c) a very advanced social legislation designed to prevent abuses by the managers. In this last domain, the Soviet Union in the twenties was a model; workers could not be

sacked by the managers, overtime could not be imposed, etc.

What Lenin and the other party leaders did not realize was that all these safeguards depended, in the last instance, on the health of the political power. As the party and the state came ever more under the control of the bureaucracy, the struggle of the workers — already extremely passive — to maintain these safeguards against the increasingly exorbitant power of the bureaucracy became more and more difficult. In the period after 1927, Stalin in fact removed all the various safeguards without meeting any significant resistance from the Soviet working class. First he got rid of the 'troika' system and instituted absolute powers for the manager. Then he suppressed all trade-union autonomy. Lastly he even abolished much of the progressive social legislation, introducing piece-work, overtime, Stakhanovism, and all the other aspects of abusive practices against the labour force.

If the Bolshevik party had understood the problem in time, at the beginning of the twenties — if it had allowed the existence of factions within the party and other Soviet parties and at the same time had encouraged in a systematic fashion the growth of workers' self-management — then the resistance to bureaucratization would have been immeasurably greater. There can be no doubt that these historical factors played a far more important role than the tactical errors made by Trotsky and the Left Opposition. But even if both these factors — Soviet democracy and workers' self-management — had been present, this in itself would not in the long run have prevented the victory of the bureaucracy, if working-class passivity had continued as a result of failure to achieve a correct orientation of economic and international policies. Only the conjunction of these institutional reforms with a more rapid industrialization, a step-by-step collectivization of agriculture, and a conduct of the international revolution which permitted victory in countries like Germany and China would have effectively and lastingly prevented the triumph of the bureaucracy. Then the historical evolution would have been different: internal democracy within the party would have survived, multi-party political life would have been maintained, workers' management of the economy would have been institutionalized and strengthened. A Congress of Workers' Councils and not a handful of bureaucrats would have taken all the great decisions determining the basic orientation of the planned economy.

The conclusions of this brief historical study can be summarized as follows: in order to prevent the unavoidable tendency to bureaucratization in a workers' state (especially a backward one) from being transformed into institutional bureaucratic

degeneration, a combination of three fundamental factors are necessary: 1) state institutions of soviet power, i.e. genuine workers' democracy; 2) economic and social policies designed with a view to increasing the socio-economic weight, the 'self-activity' and the consciousness of the proletariat at all levels, i.e. with a view to improving the balance of forces between the proletariat and the other social classes (this includes a development of the productive forces and of the standard of living of the proletariat); 3) an international extension of the socialist revolution.

III THE NATURE OF THE BUREAUCRACY IN THE WORKERS' STATES

Under certain historical conditions, when the balance of forces is very unfavourable to the proletariat, the bureaucracy may acquire a considerable autonomy — at first sight a quasi-total one. **But this autonomy can never be complete.** The bureaucracy can never separate itself completely from the mode of production which gives it birth and create a qualitatively new mode of production. The autonomy of the bureaucracy is limited by the mode of production into which it is inserted and it is this mode of production rather than its own sectoral interests that dictates its priorities.¹⁵ One should distinguish very carefully between the demands of the historically objective socio-economic system within which this bureaucracy functions and its interests as a socially privileged layer.¹⁶

For a long period, Trotsky characterised the overall policy of the bureaucracy by the notion of **bureaucratic centrism**: the social nature of the bureaucracy leads it to move from one extreme to another, so that the internal logic of this centrism can only be grasped by an overall analysis of the conjunctural oscillations.¹⁷

Bureaucratic rule in general, even after the degeneration has gone to the point where a hardened bureaucratic social layer has appeared, is characterized by **the dual nature of the bureaucracy.**

The first aspect reflects its relation to a society and mode of production that is no longer capitalist, that is indeed radically opposed to capitalism. This aspect explains the forced collectivization of the Soviet peasantry, the heroic resistance against Nazism and the destruction of capitalism in the countries occupied by the Red Army on a permanent basis.¹⁸

This first aspect of the dual nature of the bureaucracy is related to the fact that this social stratum has acquired its privileges on the basis of the previous destruction of the old ruling class. These privileges can develop only within the framework of a non-capitalist mode of production. They are incompatible with the victory of

private property of the means of production. The restoration of capitalism in the Soviet Union (which, for those who do not believe in 'peaceful roads' in reverse, cannot happen unless a violent class war is unleashed and won by counter-revolution), could allow some bureaucrats to own factories. But this act would also signify an end to their existence as bureaucrats and their transformation into capitalist with quite different social attitudes. The economic attitude of the bureaucracy as a social layer is not dictated by the laws of competition, of profit maximization and of accumulation of capital, but by quite different motivations related to their role in the transitional period.¹⁹

The second aspect of the dual nature of the bureaucracy is its fundamentally conservative social outlook: its desire to maintain the *status quo* in the international arena and hold back the advance of the world revolution. Indeed, the advance of the world revolution spells the end of the historical usurpation by the bureaucracy of the economic and political power of the proletariat. The reactivation of the international proletariat poses a threat to the bureaucratic hegemony.

The dual nature of the bureaucracy represents a permanent combination of these two contradictory aspects characteristic of the bureaucracy in power in the workers states; it defends the non-capitalist nature of the workers' states and at the same time it fears and fights world revolution and thereby undermines the socio-economic basis of the workers' state.

Its fundamental conservatism should not be interpreted narrowly: when necessary this bureaucracy does not hesitate to cross national boundaries and extend its power over other countries — provided this can be accomplished without the proletariat becoming re-politicized on a dangerous scale in the process.²⁰

IV THE NEED FOR A POLITICAL REVOLUTION IN THE WORKERS' STATES

What revolutionary strategy follows from the contradictory nature of the bureaucracy in power in the workers' states?

This social layer, conscious of its interests and privileges, will not simply abandon them under the pressure of an objective evolution — the development of productive forces and the growth of the numerical and cultural strength of the world proletariat — that continuously modifies the balance of forces at its expense and make its hegemony increasingly difficult to maintain. Only a political revolution will smash the power of the bureaucracy and institute the power of the proletariat. This does not mean that such a revolution

will necessarily have to be long and violent. The historical examples available (Berlin 1953, Budapest 1956, Czechoslovakia 1968) show that when a process of political revolution is initiated, and a growing mobilization of the working-class takes place, with factory occupations, the election of workers' councils etc., then the local bureaucracy virtually melts away. Only military intervention from outside is capable of halting such a political revolution. And in the case of the USSR itself, of course, there could be no such outside intervention. One may thus be rather optimistic about the way in which the political revolution will be achieved. After all, what social base could the bureaucracy call on to defend it? Who would be prepared in the long run to fight at its side against the proletariat?

This vulnerability of the bureaucracy is an indication of what is meant by a **political** revolution in contradistinction to a **social** one. In a social revolution, the mode of production is changed and power passes from one class to another. 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.²¹

The effect of a political revolution in the workers' states would be to give the existing mode of production a new content: bureaucratized management of production is incompatible with the exercise of proletarian democracy. But the main framework of the economy — collective property, planning, the survival of some market mechanisms, etc. — would not be transformed. They would acquire a new meaning, but would not be destroyed and replaced by others. Consequently the form of the state would undergo a transformation but its social nature would remain the same.²²

THE BUREAUCRACY: A SOCIAL LAYER OR A CLASS?

The conclusion that the power of the bureaucracy will be smashed through a political rather than a social revolution stems from the fact that it is not a class rooted in the production process but a social layer growing out of the proletariat. This definition is not a question of a play on words: it is of crucial importance in formulating the correct strategy for the international working class movement.

The widespread confusion regarding the nature of this social layer is caused by its social mode of existence, which resembles in certain outward characteristics that of a class: the monopoly of power, material privileges, collective identity, etc.²³ To call this bureaucracy a class does not allow a correct understanding of the reality of the world revolution and leads to insoluble contradictions on the

theoretical and methodological plane. If the bureaucracy is a class, then either this class constituted itself as a class and took power only after the revolution, or it existed as a class before the revolution and the revolution was in fact its seizure of power.

The implications of these alternatives are quite different and have to be carefully distinguished. Take the argument that the bureaucracy exists as a class before it takes power and that in the capitalist countries it consists of the leadership of the communist parties. To Marxists this proposition is a theoretical monstrosity: what is the relationship of the Communist leadership in capitalist countries to the process of production? But this simple 'mistake' can have extremely damaging political consequences. For example, according to this theory, a strike led by the PCI or PCF would no longer be an instance of the class struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie but between the bureaucracy and the bourgeoisie — in this case the proletariat would have to adopt a "class alliance", or ever worse. Similarly, any national liberation struggle — the struggle in Vietnam, for example — would no longer be seen as a struggle between imperialism and the masses but between the bureaucracy and the imperialist bourgeoisie. This theoretical position, we see, totally distorts actual reality. For Marxists, a strike led by the Italian or French Communist party is an instance of the class struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. True, the CP bureaucracy attempts to bend the strike to its own aims, but thereby the struggle does not become a three-cornered struggle between three classes; it is still a struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie.

The logic of this position (the position that the leaderships of the Western communist parties form classes in embryo) is, in the last instance, the logic of abstention from the class struggle; in essence it is a counter-revolutionary position. There are groups who argue that the war in Vietnam is a war between two imperialist camps (likewise the Korean war in the early fifties); that the Cuban revolution is of no interest to revolutionaries because it is led by a new exploiting class, so that the conflict between Cuba and USA imperialism is one between two exploiting classes, in which the proletariat should take no sides; and so on. Now, whether we like it or not, anti-imperialist and class struggles in many countries are led by communist parties and it is our duty to support those struggles (which does not mean that we abstain from pointing out that as long as these struggles are led exclusively by Stalinists they have a slim chance of success; that we do not have to fight against Stalinism, etc.)

Then there are those who see in the bureaucracy of the workers' states a new social class historically progressive in relation to the

bourgeoisie. This position would lead the proletariat to support another class, the bureaucracy, in its struggle against the bourgeoisie and imperialism, i.e. it denies the proletariat the leading role in the world revolution.²⁴ Consequently the political groups which start off with this premise entertain serious illusions about the revolutionary potential of the bureaucracy. But who can really believe that the present policy of, for example, the French Communist Party, is directed towards the conquest of power?

Let us now turn to the position which claims that the bureaucracy constituted itself as a class after the revolution and let us examine what kind of politics flows from this. When one looks at the theoreticians of the 'new exploiting class' (people like Djilas, Burnham, etc.) one finds that in most cases their revolt against Stalin and the post-Stalin Stalinists has resulted in scepticism towards the working class, adulation of bourgeois democracy, denial of Marxism. Their denunciation of the Kremlin has only turned them towards Washington.²⁵ These people have in effect crossed the class lines and joined the bourgeoisie. Nothing more needs to be said about this thesis.

There are others — most notably the Polish comrades Kuron and Modzelewski — who also characterize the bureaucracy as a social class but do so within the framework of a Marxist analysis denouncing capitalism and bourgeois democracy and expressing a firm belief in the historical role of the proletariat. In the case of these comrades the problem is more one of terminology than of politics. In 1939 Trotsky wrote on this problem:

'Let us begin by posing the question of the nature of the Soviet state, not on the abstract-sociological plane but on the plane of concrete-political tasks. Let us concede for the moment that the bureaucracy is a new "class" and that the present regime in the USSR is a special system of class exploitation. What new political conclusions follow for us from these definitions? The Fourth International long ago recognized the necessity of overthrowing the bureaucracy by means of a revolutionary uprising of the toilers. Nothing else is proposed or can be proposed by those who proclaim the bureaucracy to be an exploiting "class". The goal to be attained by the overthrow of the bureaucracy is the re-establishment of the rule of the soviets, expelling from them the present bureaucracy. Nothing different can be proposed or is proposed by the leftist critics. It is the task of the regenerated soviets to collaborate with the world revolution and the building of a socialist society. The overthrow of the bureaucracy presupposes the preservation of state property and planned economy. Herein is the nub of the whole problem.

Needless to say, the distribution of productive forces among the various branches of the economy and generally the entire content of the plan will be drastically changed when this plan is determined by the interests not of the bureaucracy but of the producers themselves. But inasmuch as the question of overthrowing the parasitic oligarchy still remains linked with that of preserving the nationalized (state) property, we call the future revolution political. Certain of our critics (Ciliga, Bruno and others) want, come what may, to call the future revolution social. Let us grant this definition. What does it alter in essence? To those tasks of the revolution which we have enumerated it adds nothing whatsoever.

Our critics as a rule take the facts as we long ago established them. They add absolutely nothing essential to the appraisal either of the position of the bureaucracy and the toilers, or of the role of the Kremlin in the international arena. In all these spheres, not only do they fail to challenge our analysis, but on the contrary they base themselves completely upon it and even restrict themselves entirely to it. The sole accusation they bring against us is that we do not draw the necessary "conclusions". Upon analysis it turns out, however, that these conclusions are of a purely terminological character. Our critics refuse to call the degenerated workers' state — a workers' state. They demand that the totalitarian bureaucracy be called a ruling class. The revolution against this bureaucracy they propose to consider not political but social. Were we to make them these terminological concessions, we would place our critics in a very difficult position, inasmuch as they themselves would not know what to do with their purely verbal victory. It would therefore be a piece of monstrous nonsense to split with comrades who on the question of the sociological nature of the USSR have an opinion different from ours, insofar as they solidarize with us in regard to the political tasks.²⁶

The difference is, however, not purely terminological, because Kuron and Modzelewski are led by their analysis to a number of incorrect conclusions:

1. They are forced to introduce a qualitative difference between the central political bureaucracy and the so-called technocracy; these two become for them distinct classes.

2. They are led to attribute to the bureaucracy a class aim (production for production's sake) which has in fact already been partially abandoned (see footnote 10 above).

3. They are led to adopt a 'national' analysis of the bureaucratic phenomenon and fail to understand the international role of the Russian bureaucracy.

These three factors put together lead them to underestimate the

capacity of the bureaucracy for further adaptation and repression.

VI Conclusion

In conclusion, let us stress that the one basic truth that must never be lost sight of is that the fundamental struggle in the world today is the struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. The bureaucracy intervenes in this struggle only to distort it. The only way to eliminate both the bureaucracy and the bourgeoisie is to lead to its logical conclusion both the working-class and the anti-imperialist revolutionary struggle. Only the widest possible spread of the world revolution can ultimately guarantee the destruction of the bureaucracy's power.

The problem of bureaucracy has already been partially answered by history. All the victorious revolutions since 1945 have posed more or less directly the problem of bureaucracy: the Yugoslav revolution by its attempt at self-management; the Chinese revolution in the distorted form of the 'cultural revolution'; the Cuban revolution most explicitly and deliberately in its attacks against bureaucracy. As Marx said: history poses only those problems it can solve. Today both the objective and subjective conditions seem to be ripe for solving the problem of bureaucracy. On the one hand, we are witnessing a widespread expansion of the world revolution and a tremendous development of the world productive forces. On the other hand, revolutionary militants in both capitalist and workers' states have become aware of the fundamental importance of this problem for the socialist revolution. There is thus no doubt that any new proletarian revolution will have consciously to confront the problem of bureaucracy and to solve it in the most effective way.

NOTES

1. The absence of organizational structures would condemn the working-class movement to a level of mediocrity that would make its victory appear as a historical regression from the advances made by the capitalist system of production. Indeed, if in the aftermath of a successful revolution the new society were to do away with all specialists and technicians not directly involved in the material sphere of production, it would regress to a level of primitive communism which would in turn quickly disintegrate through a new process of social differentiation. Instead of eliminating the danger of bureaucratization, this procedure would revive it — only under more insidious conditions. The creation of an apparatus is indispensable even for reasons of simple efficiency; it is impossible to organize, say, 50,000 people without a minimal infrastructure.
2. This group broke from the French section of the Fourth International in 1949, and published the review *Socialisme ou Barbarie* until the mid sixties. They were the ideological mentors of the Solidarity group in Britain.
3. The numerical size of social-democratic parties, far from being an obstacle to their bureaucratization, is in fact a major cause of it. It is far easier to prevent the bureaucratization of an organization which only recruits members who already have a basic minimum of political consciousness, experience and activity, since this makes it impossible for the phenomenon of 'clientelism' to appear on any large scale.
4. Around 1891-2 a number of ultra-left groups of more or less anarchist orientation developed inside the German social-democratic movement. This 'Berlin left' is little known in the working-class movement. No black-and-white judgement on it is possible: Lenin himself was forced after 1914 to change his previously uncomplimentary assessment and came to view in these oppositional groupings a first semi-conscious reaction against the growing reformism and corruption of the social-democratic movement.
5. In the preface to the second edition of *What is to be done?*, Lenin specifically emphasizes this point: the moment the vanguard detaches itself from the proletariat it falls into complete adventurism and arbitrariness. A small group of bureaucrats sit around a table and decide how, in a given historical moment, the proletariat ought to act. Such procedure banishes the basic objective criterion of revolutionary socialist practice: the class consciousness of the proletariat and what it is in fact prepared to do.
6. These objective factors could be summarized as: insufficient level of development of the productive forces; cultural and numerical under-development of the proletariat; isolation of the victorious revolution with the retreat of the world revolution; the general state of scarcity prevailing in the country, etc.
7. Deutscher never quite grasped this point: for him the men who made up the Left Opposition were heroes condemned to lose and whose destiny was to prepare a very distant future.
8. Recent attempts to rehabilitate this tendency have come from various quarters:
 1. 'ultra-left' groups (e.g. *Socialism ou Barbarie*), who cherish a 'Prophetic'

text published by Kollontai in 1921.

2. Yugoslav ideologues, who defend its struggle against Lenin's democratic centralism — a somewhat surprising position given the hyper-centralization of the political power structure in that country.
 3. Some members of the 'Pabloite' tendency, which is not surprising given their belief in self-management as a universal panacea for all problems in the society of transition from capitalism to socialism especially bureaucracy.
9. The example of Yugoslavia shows that a purely formal system of self-management limited to the factory level, is insufficient for fighting bureaucracy.
10. In pre-capitalist societies, these norms of distribution either do not apply or are present only in embryonic form. In feudal society, for example, the quantity of goods at the disposal of an individual is not so much a function of his income as of his social status.
11. From a subjective point of view the actors in this drama were to a great extent unaware of what was at stake. Trotsky once suggested that if someone in 1920 had been able to show Stalin that he was going to suppress all forms of workers' power, and to destroy the Bolshevik Party and the Communist International, it is quite possible that Stalin would have committed suicide. The same is true of the other party leaders who rejected the Left Opposition platform and allied themselves with Stalin.
12. Every time the working class is confronted with a new and unforeseen major problem, a considerable section of its best cadres fail to respond to it correctly. One example was the failure, after 1909-10, to understand the nature of the coming imperialist war and the period of revolution and the underlying causes of the imminent social-democratic betrayal. This inability to come to grips with the new situation lasted for a number of years even among those who later came to constitute the new communist parties.
13. Those who go in for analyses of this type generally try to prove two mutually exclusive theses: 1. that Trotsky's mistakes allowed Stalin's victory; 2. that Stalin's victory was inevitable due to objective conditions in the Soviet Union at the time. This was particularly clear in the case of Isaac Deutscher, in whose works we find the two theses systematically interlinked.
14. This failure derives from the opposition between the need to accumulate and the need to defend the producers as 'consumers' characteristic of the transitional period. Within the framework of 'market socialism', the immediate economic interests of the producers may come into conflict with the fundamental principles of a socialist economy, even in democratically managed enterprises. Examples of this can be found in Yugoslavia, where a democratically elected workers' council can vote to lay off 25% of the labour force in order to improve the wages of the rest of the workers. This shows that the coincidence of interests between individual groups of workers and the proletariat as a whole is not automatic.
15. One cannot attribute all the monstrous errors committed by the bureaucracy to its desire to defend its privileges. Thus it was clearly not in the interest of Stalin and the Soviet bureaucracy to decrease agricultural production for 25 years. In other countries, e.g. Yugoslavia, the bureaucracy has shown itself perfectly capable of maintaining relatively friendly relations with the peasantry.
16. The Polish comrades Kuron and Modzelewski make a theoretical mistake by

arguing that giving priority to heavy industry is a fundamental feature of the bureaucracy. It in fact merely represents one particular phase of bureaucratic rule — a phase which has already been left behind in some countries, e.g. the Soviet Union. This mistake is dangerous, because it can lead to the belief that the bureaucracy will have no material basis once heavy industry loses its preferential position in the national economy.

17. Many people in the twenties attempted to characterize the bureaucracy on the basis of its right-wing policy of concessions to the peasantry and were consequently quite unable to explain the turn of 1928 and the brutal elimination of the kulaks. Similarly, those who identified the bureaucracy with violent police dictatorship and large-scale concentration camps could hardly explain Yugoslavia in the sixties.

18. The theory according to which the Soviet Union is a workers' state while the 'people's democracies' are capitalist gives a completely incomprehensible view of reality: how can one reasonably maintain that the Czechoslovak economic system is qualitatively different from the one in the Soviet Union but identical to that of the capitalist countries? That the East German economy is qualitatively different from that of the USSR but of the same social nature as that of West Germany?

19. For Marx the notion of 'state capitalism', i.e. the complete suppression of intra-capitalist competition, was inconceivable: capitalism cannot exist except as different capitals. The total suppression of competition would put an end to the accumulation of capital and economic growth under capitalism, as its motor would have disappeared.

20. Stalinists justify the USSR's refusal to extend the revolution into countries like France, Italy, Greece or Yugoslavia by reference to the Yalta agreement, which the USSR allegedly had to respect under the American threat of unleashing another world war. This justification 'forgets' that the revolution did not respect the division of the world into power blocs and was successful in Yugoslavia, China and Cuba. Each success of the revolution provoked an international tension but in the end imperialism had to accept the *fait accompli*.

21. To Marx, the years of 1830 and 1848 in France were examples of political revolutions: state power changed hands between various layers of the same class (financial bourgeoisie, industrial bourgeoisie). The industrial bourgeoisie had to fight arms in hand to wrench political power from the financial bourgeoisie — hence the revolution of February 1848. But the 1848 revolution was fundamentally different from that which brought the Paris Commune into existence: in the latter case, state power passed temporarily out of the hands of the bourgeoisie and into the hands of the proletariat.

22. The definition of the nature of the state rests, in the last analysis, exclusively on its relationship to a given mode of production. The change from fascism to bourgeois democracy in Germany in 1945 involved a considerable change in the form of the state without any change in the mode of production. So did the change between the Second Empire and the Third Republic in France. The fact that many forms of state power are possible within a given economic formation does not mean that the change from one to another can necessarily be made in a reformist or gradual fashion.

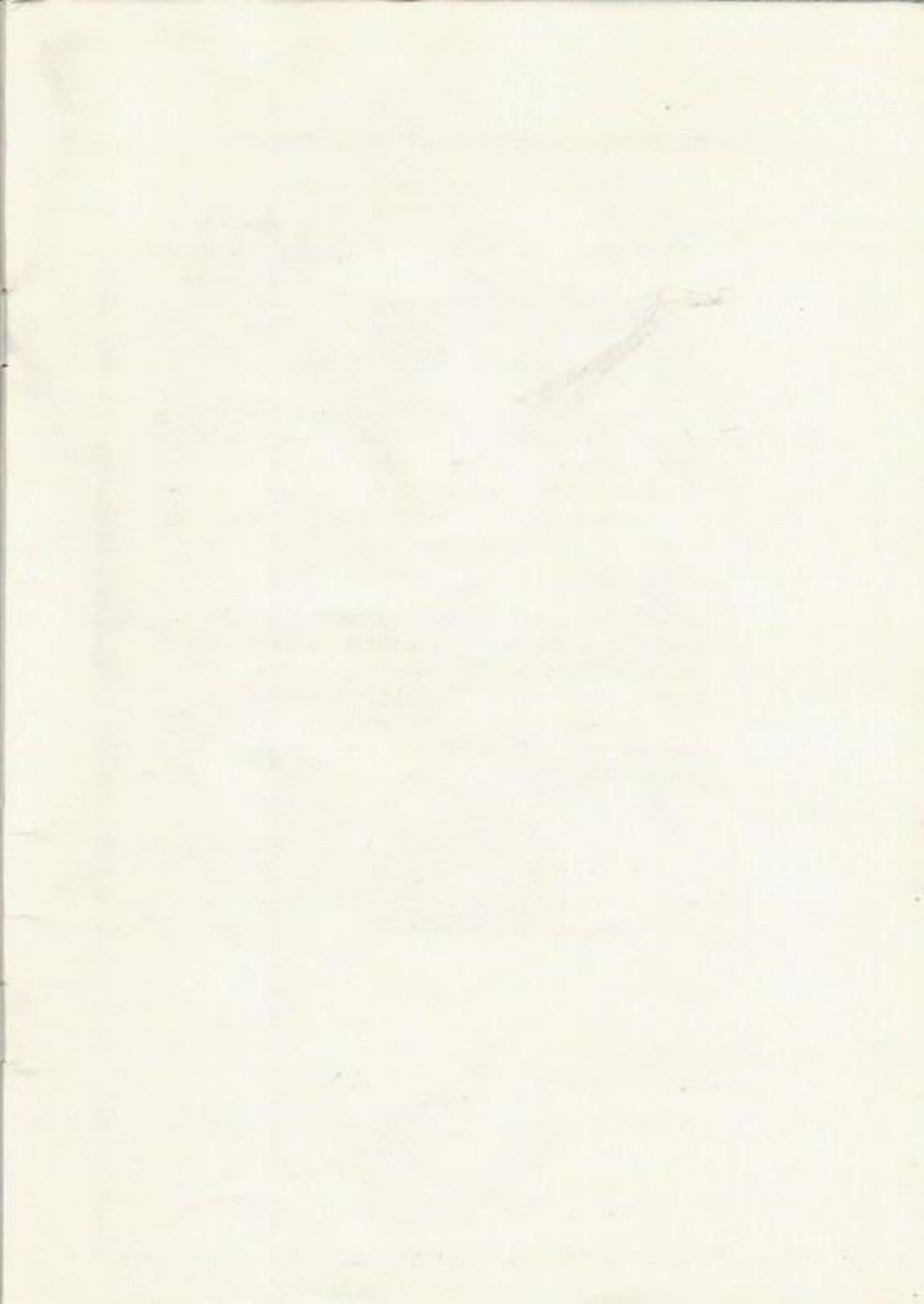
23. The tendency among certain Marxists in Eastern Europe to characterize the bureaucracy as a class springs from the desire to draw a line of demarcation between

themselves and the reformist currents which believe in the strategy of alliance with one wing of the bureaucracy against another.

24. This theory is based on the refusal to recognize what Lukacs called the fundamental idea of Leninism: the actuality of the revolution. In the last century, the proletariat could play a secondary role, supporting the progressive classes against the reactionary ones. But what is on the agenda today is a **proletarian revolution**, carried out by the working class itself.

25. See Pierre Frank's introduction to 'An Open Letter to Communist Party Members' by Kuron and Modzelewski in **Revolutionary Marxist Students in Poland Speak Out**, Merit 1968.

26. Leon Trotsky, **In Defense of Marxism**, p.4, Merit 1965.



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Bureaucracy in the working class movement has been a major problem for socialists. Successful revolutions have confronted bureaucracy in state and party. In the advanced capitalist countries, the bureaucracy of the trade unions and mass workers parties has dominated the political life of the working class.

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ERNEST MANDEL is a well known Marxist theoretician and activist. His numerous books include MARXIST ECONOMIC THEORY, LATE CAPITALISM, and FROM STALINISM TO EUROCOMMUNISM.

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