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Lessons of the General Strike

Denise Avenas

Trotsky's Marxism

PART 1



**NATIONAL
QUESTION
IN SPAIN**

**REVOLT IN
SOUTHERN
AFRICA**

*'THE PROGRAMME WE NEED'
- IMG CONFERENCE DOCUMENT*

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EDITORIAL

REVOLT IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

The mass struggles that have erupted inside the Republic of South Africa represent the extension of the revolutionary process that has been sweeping through southern Africa, inflicting heavy blows on the Portuguese African colonies and threatening today to topple the entire political strategy of the South African regime and that of world imperialism for southern Africa.

On 16 June this year a spontaneous uprising took place in Soweto, initially focussed on the Vorster regime's attempts to impose the teaching of Afrikaans in the schools of Soweto. In spite of the extreme brutality with which this and subsequent mobilisations were met, the confidence of the masses entering into struggle has not been abated. On the contrary, the struggles have extended themselves to other parts of the Republic, involving for the most part the urban population of the townships from Pretoria to Cape Town.

In the face of these events there have been attempts by imperialism to stave off this revolutionary process by accelerating the transfer of Zimbabwe and Namibia to neo-colonialist rule. The idea is to make some form of 'concessions' both to the masses and to the neo-colonial regimes of black Africa in order to provide a breathing space for dealing with the internal situation of the Republic. Kissinger's current moves (at the time of writing) are clearly aimed at this strategy. But this also involves the need to find a means of bringing the Vorster regime more into line with imperialist policies for southern Africa, which in turn means a certain 'liberalisation' of the South African state itself. As *The Economist* (11 September, 1976) recently commented: 'This only underlines the truism that the key to southern Africa is South Africa, and although Mr. Vorster may be ready to tolerate black rule in South West Africa and Rhodesia the pressure on him will not abate until South Africa itself is transformed.' The regime, however, remains intransigent about making anything more than the most superficial concessions to the masses — legalising of inter-racial sport, multiracial toilets etc. The only political concessions which it is prepared to make are those which fall within the bounds of apartheid — that is, within the homelands only.

The present policies of the South African regime grow out of a long chain of oppressive and racist legislation, which stretches back to the colonial era and was systematised and theorised following the election of the first Nationalist Government in 1948. However, the history of apartheid as a coherent ruling class strategy dates back essentially to the 1950's and early 1960's — a period that coincided with the rapid growth of the South African economy based on a shift from the extractive to the secondary manufacturing industries. Thus in 1950 the sectoral contributions (as a percentage of the GDP) of the mining and manufacturing industries were 13 and 23 per cent respectively, while in 1971 they were 10 and 30 per cent, showing a substantial shift to the latter sector. The period was also marked by a general strengthening of the Afrikaaner capital against imperialist capital. Between 1950 and 1960 there was a seven-

fold increase of the total assets held by Afrikaans companies, and between 1946 and 1960 the ratio between Afrikaaner and British income changed from 100:180 to 100:125.

This shift to secondary industrialisation intensified the demand for cheap African labour at various levels of skills, and therefore produced new problems of control of the labour power by the state. Thus a system was developed by which cheap labour could be produced and reproduced within the allocated 'homelands'; this meant that the wages of the African worker could be kept to a minimum while the state was relieved of the cost of the reproduction of labour. For the greater part, the skilled jobs were filled by white workers whose privileged position (earning on average five times the wage of black workers, as well as numerous other benefits) ensured that the regime was able to maintain a solid block against any advancement of the black worker.

Thus the primary function of the apartheid 'theory' was that of the control and reproduction of cheap labour power. The shape it therefore assumed was that of regulating the relations between racial/ethnic groupings — and thereby classes. Intertwined with this was a policy to regulate the relations between South Africa and the black neo-colonial world to the north — necessary to allow the now expanding South African economy to find new markets. Thirdly, the new apartheid policy enabled the South African ruling block to strengthen itself, allowing it to go on the counter-offensive against its critics overseas.

The essential rationale for this system was that there existed within the boundaries of South Africa a number of different racial groupings, each with its own claim to territory, each with its own history, and each with its own projected 'development'. Thus 'homelands' were granted to each ethnic grouping, while the remainder of the land was designated the territory of the white population. This 'remainder' consists of about 83 per cent of the land — including the urban and industrialised centres, ports, fertile agricultural land, and the main repositories of economically significant minerals. In contrast, the 'homelands' (essentially no more than modified versions of the long-standing 'native reserves') are economically unviable, geographically incapable of self-sufficiency as they are surrounded by 'white land', and are often fragmented: KwaZulu, for instance, consists of twenty nine separate territories.

While millions of blacks are assigned to these homelands, large numbers of the population have never seen the homelands and many are considered 'temporarily absent'. This number varies with the homeland and its geographical relation to those areas with varying demands for labour power. Thus, for instance, 67.2 per cent of the total Venda population of South Africa live in the homeland, while only 35.5 per cent of the Tswana and Shangaan are found in the homeland. The blacks in the 'white' areas (both rural and urban) are thus treated as foreign immigrant workers with no political and very few legal rights. The only place that blacks are able to exercise their political rights — limited as they are — is in the homelands. Here it was

intended that the blacks would gradually (and 'separately') develop, under white tutelage, towards self-government and eventually to independence.

Thus an attempt was being made under the flimsy cover of 'separate development' and 'independence' to convert the question of the brutal racial oppression of blacks in South Africa into the question of *migrant labour*. By this means the regime hoped to defend itself against critics from the western capitalist countries whose arguments on this question are somewhat feeble. Furthermore, by treating the South African question as a whole as a 'national question', they prepared to meet the black neo-colonial world on grounds where its criticisms are equally shaky. This was the essential foundation of South Africa's ideological counter-offensive and the whole 'detente' drive towards black Africa during the last year.

No less a part was played, of course, by the development of South Africa's foreign policy with regard to Zimbabwe. The tactical move towards participation in an attempt to bring about a 'peaceful settlement' in Rhodesia was intended to play an important role in 'normalising' the apartheid regime's relations with imperialism and the black neo-colonial bourgeoisie. The success of this manoeuvre could be gauged from the reaction of the Western capitalist press which dubbed Vorster as a possible 'Kissinger of Africa'. There was also a certain response from the neo-colonial world, with President Kaunda of Zambia announcing that 'Rhodesia is the last bastion of white supremacy in Africa'.

Apartheid in its most complete form — the bantustans — was thus an attempt to construct a system, which while not seriously undermining white domination or racial oppression, would provide a facade necessary for the manoeuvres of 'detente'. To accomplish this did not seem to require a great deal, since both imperialism and the black neo-colonial bourgeoisie were only too willing to accommodate South Africa and reach an agreement with it against the African masses. The problem lay in the fact that this whole policy flew in the face of the actual social and economic development of South Africa itself. The emergence of the apartheid system in the 1950's coincided, as we have said, with the rapid growth of the economy based on a shift from the extractive to the secondary manufacturing industries. However, this shift required the rapid expansion of skilled and semi-skilled labour beyond that which could be provided by the indigenous white population or indeed by immigration.

Secondly, the development of secondary manufacturing industries brought about a demand for a more stabilised and permanent workforce—in contrast to the demands of the agricultural and to some extent mining sectors, which benefited from a cheap labour force (although the development of South African agriculture has led to a situation where 50 per cent of farm labourers in the 'white' rural areas are regularly employed and therefore permanently settled there). Ironically, therefore, the supposed exclusion of blacks from the white areas actually coincided with a massive and permanent settlement of black labour in the 'white' urban areas, who were technically assigned 'homelands' from which they were classed as 'temporarily absent'. Thus one finds that in Soweto 92.9 per cent of adults aged between 18 and 25 years were actually born in Johannesburg (that is, including its associated townships), and 46.6 per cent of the adult population of all ages were born in Johannesburg. On a broader scale, the picture is much the same: of the 17.75 million blacks (in 1970) less than 47 per cent actually resided in the homelands. There were more than 4.5 million blacks living in the cities alone — compared with a *total* white population of just over 4 million.

But these figures considerably overstate the importance of the homelands as centres of black population. They ignore the fact that many of those living in the homelands are wives, children, dependents of the city-dwellers; and that many listed as resident in the homelands are actually migrant workers who earn their livelihood by occasional forays into the mines or farms. Over 70 per cent of the economically active population of the bantustans are involved in the migrant labour system. In Venda, for example, the population between the ages of 30-39 is 84 per cent women (who cannot readily find employment outside). Most of the jobs in the bantustans are taken by women who have little or no prospect of leaving the reserves, and therefore have no alternative to these

extremely low-paying jobs. In those homelands where mines exist, only a small proportion of the local population is employed there. For example, only 20 per cent of the labour force in one of the Bophutha Tswana platinum mines are local Tswanas, and as many as 75 per cent are from *outside* South Africa itself.

In fact then, South African capitalism has spawned a massive black proletariat living on the fringes of its urban centres. They are totally without political rights, yet at the same time the economy is utterly dependent on them.

Brutal repression

Needless to say, the apartheid strategy of the South African regime was not born and developed without the use of brutal repression and the systematic destruction of all coherent opposition within the Republic. With the introduction of the Suppression of Communism Act of 1950, an offensive was launched to quell all opposition. In the countryside, armed resistance by 'peasants' in Sekhukhuniland and Zululand was crushed; so too were other forms of protest and resistance in the cities. Strikes by workers in the industrial centres were smashed, and boycotts of buses and mass burning of passbooks throughout the Republic received the same treatment. Several attempts were made in this period to form trade unions, but the majority were banned or broken up after meeting with violent opposition — particularly from the white trade unions. Thus in 1954 the Trades Union Council of South Africa (TUCSA) decided to exclude all black workers from the union. One of the results of this was the formation of SACTU (South African Congress of Trades Unions), which had a consultative status in the African National Congress (ANC), and was made up of unions that objected to discriminatory unions. By 1961 the membership of SACTU was in the region of 53,300, of whom 38,791 were blacks. By 1966 the harassment and repression meted out to its members forced it to go underground.

The Sharpeville massacre of March 1960 largely smashed the urban resistance movement. A mass protest was organised by various political organisations calling for a 'stay away from work'. A peaceful demonstration of 10,000 was organised to march to the police station to hand in their passbooks. The resultant massacre claimed 67 dead and 186 wounded, and post-mortem evidence discovered that 70 per cent of the bullets had struck the back of the bodies as people had tried to escape. Once again the masses had found themselves in a situation in which they were unable to defend themselves against the predictable brutal repression that has characterised the regime's attitude to protest. We shall comment again on the inadequacies of the 'stay-at-home' protests organised in the present struggles in South Africa.

Following the massacre, the South African Communist Party (SACP), turned towards a desperate ultra-leftist policy of sabotage which was in turn crushed by the security forces in 1963, with the arrest of the most important CP/ANC leaders and underground units. In the bantustans this led to a significant increase in the credibility of the traditional chiefs, who were drawn into collaboration with the Government's policies. In the urban townships, where no such outlet was available, it resulted in the frustration of the blacks being turned inwards, leading to a dramatic increase in the incidence of violent crime within the communities.

Both these factors led to a situation in which the regime adopted a certain degree of *laissez-faire* towards the black communities. Since the violence in the townships was fulfilling a certain role as a safety valve for the frustrations of the blacks, little or nothing was done about it. Despite an average of 13 murders and up to 40 robberies with violence per week in Soweto, for instance, less than one third of the crimes were reported or ended in convictions. Periodic forays into the township to arrest those living there illegally were made by the police, but although the official legal population of the township was supposed to be 587,970 in 1970, it was actually nearing one million at that time.

Urban Bantu Councils have been established in the townships with a proportion of elected representatives from

the different ethnic groupings to provide a minimal veneer of credibility to the 'self-government' notion. These bodies, commonly termed 'castrated bulls', in fact have no function but merely act as bodies for channelling minor complaints. Similar bodies — the Bantu Assemblies — have been established in the 'homelands' and on average contain about 45 per cent elected members, the remainder being appointed by the state. Such innovations as Bantu Education, which carved out special schools, teachers (often black), and curriculum (designed to avoid giving the black population ideas beyond the possibilities designated for them by the regime), also introduced a new degree of autonomy in the operation of the black communities.

The new 'breathing space in this period, combined with the political developments in the Portuguese colonies, resulted in the embryonic development of a new vanguard in the black communities together with some elementary forms of organisation. In the early 1970's the new black industrial proletariat began to find its feet in a series of major strikes, largely spontaneous. In the first six months of 1973 alone there were 511 recorded strikes which led to the arrest of 834 people. In 1974-75 there were 317 illegal strikes involving 51,412 workers. Coinciding with this was the emergence of the 'black consciousness' movement, which was organised by the black college student organisation (SASO), the school student movement (SASM), and co-ordinated more widely by the Black People's Convention (BPC). Combining with both of these was the emergence of a permanently urbanised sector of the black population who have no identification with the homelands, who do not suffer from the demoralisation implanted by the repression of the early 1960's, and who are largely free of the ethnic divisions so assiduously sown among the black population by the regime.

The decisive turning point for this new vanguard was the advance of the revolutionary process in southern Africa. The victory of FRELIMO in Mozambique was greeted with mass rallies organised by SASO and the BPC, proclaiming their solidarity. Throughout the Angolan war, demonstrations in support of the MPLA were organised. Above all, the defeat suffered by South Africa in Angola was to inspire enormous confidence in the new vanguard. The South African state, once thought of as invincible, with its massive machinery of arms, was defeated and humiliated by the black masses of Angola.

The demonstrations that began in Soweto and have since spread across the country thus represent the first stages of a link up between this new vanguard and the urbanised proletariat in a new movement of opposition to the regime. The miserable conditions of life and the intense oppression which they have suffered make their resistance a ferocious one indeed. Moreover, it is now reinforced by a stronger internationalist consciousness of the developments in the anti-imperialist struggles to the north. But in spite of the fact that the struggles have become widespread, they have by no means fused a unity within the black population. The impressive mobilisations of the 'coloured' population in some areas, combining with those of the black population, of course mark an important development — since in general the coloured population have maintained a more privileged status relative to the blacks, and for the greater part have been assured of a more secure livelihood than their black counterparts. But the ability of the South African police to manipulate the Zulu workers against the workers of Soweto is, however, a testimony to the fact that serious divisions exist between the urban layers and those who have roots in the homelands — as is the capacity of the homeland leaders to back up the Government without any real opposition from their base. The roots of these divisions lie in the fact that the latter are considerably more susceptible to the ideology of the 'homelands'. They are housed away from the rest of the population in single-sex hostels to which they are strictly confined and they are in general riddled with the insecurity about their jobs inherent to the nature of migrant labour. Furthermore, their wages are in general lower than those of their urban counterparts.

Nevertheless, the mobilisations that have taken place over the past three months have been widespread and ferocious. These struggles can only be dealt with by extreme repression, which in effect, explodes all the regime's careful moves towards detente with black Africa and the normalisation with imperialism, and also strengthens the international opposition to the racist regime.

Moreover, it comes at a time when the international isolation of South Africa would have great economic consequences, for the new industrial economy is desperately in need of new markets which it can only hope to develop through northward expansion into black Africa.

General strikes

The recent calls for general strikes focused primarily in Johannesburg and Cape Town have met with a widespread response from the workers. There have been reports that in Johannesburg there was a 90 per cent boycott, while in Cape Town 70 per cent stayed away from work. However, as in the Sharpeville call for a 'stay-at-home' strike, the workers have left themselves open to the most brutal repression, with few means of defending themselves against the inevitable attack that is launched by the state. Thus, on the first day of the three day general strike the police marched into Soweto and Alexandra and quickly arrested some 1,800 people, mostly from Soweto, without great difficulties. Against this predictable attack from the state the masses were unable to make any decisive gains (save for the impact it had on the economy) since they were in no real position to effect a bargain.

A 'stay-at-home' strike removes the workers from the point of production where they would be able to seize the factories and industries in a sit down strike or occupation. Any attempts by the forces of repression to break up such strikes would necessarily pose the question of imposing severe damage to private property and the machinery of the industries. Such a tactic would immediately place the workers at an advantage and in a position to press for gains on other fronts. It would also open the way towards coordinating actions between workers from different townships or areas, as well as laying a viable basis upon which democratic 'councils of action' and workers' self defence militias could be formed. For revolutionary Marxists it is crucial to fight for such an orientation inside South Africa today.

However, in spite of the unity that has been forged, and in spite of the indisputable upsurge of the revolutionary process that is taking place in southern Africa, we should not be over optimistic about the developments there. Against the most positive aspects must be balanced the massive accumulation of military technology by the South African state and its virtual monopoly by the whites. South Africa is today virtually self-sufficient in the manufacture of low and middle-level military weaponry. In 1973-74 the apartheid regime spent over 481 million Rands on defence. By 1967, it was capable of producing 140 different types of munitions and could manufacture wide ranges of infantry weapons and armoured plating — for instance, the FN7.36mm automatic rifle produced under licence from Fabrique Nationale of Belgium. South Africa is also capable of producing Mirage III and F-1 jet fighters and vast numbers of other weapons.

Furthermore, there is little prospect of serious differentiation within the ranks of the white ruling block at present — the entire white population benefits massively from the exploitation and oppression of the non-white masses. Insofar as there is a 'liberal' element, it rests upon the big bourgeoisie and its political wing in the Progressive Reform Party, for whom a neo-colonial solution is at least conceivable. But the white masses have nothing to gain from a victorious South African revolution except the loss of their privileges.

The dimensions of the political crisis that has now exploded in the face of the South African bourgeoisie are only too clear. All the good will in the world of imperialism and the black neo-colonial states cannot bail it out of the present dilemma. In fact the prospect is that of an even greater discrediting of imperialism and the neo-colonial bourgeoisie throughout the continent as a result of their collaboration with, or failure to take decisive action against the apartheid regime. In this sense the struggle in South Africa will rapidly become a struggle of continental dimensions, with a decisive impact on the world relation of forces.

There can be no doubt that the perspective is of a long drawn out and bloody conflict in South Africa, running parallel to and intertwining with the struggles now under way in Namibia and Zimbabwe. The stakes are immense: South Africa is the major centre of imperialist economic interests, and a central factor in imperialist political strategy for the continent as a whole. An economically expansionist South Africa able to base itself on an accord with the neo-colonial bourgeoisies of the black African states would immensely strengthen the imperialist stranglehold on the continent, and more than outweigh the defeats it has suffered in Mozambique, Angola and Guinea-Bissau. But the downfall of the South African regime would throw into the scales the mighty weight of a uniquely

powerful proletariat, and an industrialised economy which would pose a real political alternative to imperialism and neo-colonialism for the continent as a whole.

For the Fourth International this poses two important tasks. The first and most urgent task is that of building a world wide campaign of solidarity — in particular in Britain — with the struggles in southern Africa. This must above all involve an international workers' boycott of all trade and other links with the racist state. The second and more long term task is the building of the nucleus of a revolutionary party in South Africa and in the southern African countries. Only with the achievement of these tasks can the full potential of the struggles which have opened up be realised.

Lessons of the GENERAL STRIKE

Mike Holbrook-Jones

Introduction

Fifty years ago, the British working class responded to a capitalist onslaught on its living standards with the biggest class-wide united action in its long and chequered history — the General Strike. Today, 50 years later, the working class again faces a deepening capitalist crisis and increasing ruling class attacks on its greatest historic gains — the welfare state, full employment and its trade union and political rights. In this article, we attempt to draw out the central lessons of those momentous days in May 1926 and the monumental betrayal and defeat in which they culminated.

There are two central questions which revolutionary Marxists must answer today when assessing the General Strike. First, the reason for the emergence and consolidation of a trade union bureaucracy which was apparently so easily able to call off the Strike, without any of its aims achieved, and yet retain its position with the membership whom it had so cruelly betrayed. And, secondly, the character and extent of the action of the rank and file. How far did the councils of action establish 'dual power'? To what extent was this matched by a development in political consciousness? And, in the light of this, what assessment can be made of the intervention of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB)?

By 1926 the trade union movement had assumed many of the features which still, today, characterise it. Of particular importance was the emergence of a layer of professional full-time officials, who in addition to day-to-day administration, took charge of the negotiations with the employers. Moreover, this body of men and women had been studiously courted by the government; trade union officials joined numerous committees, ministry commissions and governmental inquiries. The more astute of the ruling class realised this process could weaken the power of the unions from the 'inside', and succeed where straight-forward repression had failed. An observer of the unions at this time wrote: "Nowadays the salaried official of a great union is courted and flattered by the middle class. He is asked to dine with them, and will admire their well-appointed houses.... He goes to live in a little villa in a lower middle class suburb. The move leads to dropping his workmen friends A great strike threatens his Society in desperate war. Unconsciously biased by the distaste for the hard and unthankful work which a strike entails, he finds himself in small sympathy with the men's demands and eventually arranges a compromise on terms distasteful to a large section of the membership."

Obviously, every large scale working class organisation

must evolve a full time staff, the complexities and scale of modern industrial capitalism demands it. However, the values and attitudes inculcated in the course of building such a body (caution, stability, constitutionalism) are not those best suited to struggle, to mass action, and other 'interruptions' from orderly routine. In launching a fight of national proportions the trade union official has more to lose than his members have. His job, social status and freedom from the menial and repetitive work of those he represents is dependent on the continued existence and strength of the organisation. So it is that the decision to commit the union to struggle becomes based less and less on the interests of the members, and more and more upon the assumed need for stability of the organisation. The more the leaders come to regard the union as an end in itself, the less it is responsive to the needs of the membership, particularly in crucial moments of conflict.

It is this phenomenon to which we refer when we use the term 'bureaucracy'; trade union officialdom is, however, a **working class** bureaucracy and cannot totally detach itself from its origins. Thus, the General Council of the Trade Union Congress (TUC) was forced in the first place to call the strike, which later, without recourse to the membership, it was to call off.

It would seem reasonable to suppose that such a massive defeat as the General Strike would result in the weakening of the leadership that had led it so badly. Although considerable recriminations took place, these were not sufficient to cause the replacement of the leadership which, in fact, emerged from the whole debacle relatively unscathed. Paradoxically, it was the very defeat of the General Strike and the consequent weakening of the working class in relation to the capitalist class which permitted such an outcome. The ensuing demoralisation of the working class in fact led to a decline in the influence of revolutionaries in the trade unions while the General Council, despite leading the trade union movement into a defeat from which it took decades to recover, emerged in 1927 as a consolidated force.

Not all the lessons of the General Strike, however, are negative ones. The organisation of the rank and file into 'councils of action' was the first, and so far, the only foretaste of 'dual power' experienced by the British working class. The concept of 'dual power' is most fully developed in the writings of Lenin and Trotsky on the Russian Revolution. Here it is described as a situation of balance between two contending state forms: "Alongside the Provisional Government, the government of the **bourgeoisie**, **another government** has arisen, so far weak and incipient, but undoubtedly a government that actually exists and is growing — the Soviets of Workers and Soldiers Deputies."

Of course, such a state of affairs does not arise overnight,

and in the form presented by Lenin it obviously did not occur in the British General Strike. However, in so far as soviets are an alternative **state** organisation of the workers against the capitalist state, we can assess the extent to which the 'councils of action' were a step on the road towards the conquest of power. As we shall see, the activity of the councils went well beyond that of simple strike committees, and particularly towards the end of the Strike almost all were involved in some form of administration of transport and supplies.

In this way the labour movement experienced, in the space of only a few years, both the zenith and the nadir of its power. Concentrated into these years are a wealth of lessons for revolutionaries and socialists today; our strategy for socialism can never be complete unless these are known and fully understood.

The Generals' "General Strike"

"The General Strike is a challenge to Parliament and is the road to anarchy and ruin" (Stanley Baldwin, Prime Minister, 6th May 1926).

"The General Council does not challenge the constitution. The sole aim of the Council is to secure for the miners a decent standard of life. The Council is engaged in an industrial dispute". (TUC statement 7th May, 1926)

On Saturday, 1st May 1926, miners throughout Britain found themselves locked out of their pits until they could agree to substantial wage reductions. Baldwin and the mineowners made no secret of the fact that the negotiations with the miners were a prelude to a general cut in wages for all workers. This was revealed by a report of a discussion between the Miners' Federation and the Prime Minister published in the **Daily Herald** on July 31st 1925.

Miners: "But what you propose means a reduction of wages."

Prime Minister: "Yes. All workers in this country have got to face a reduction in wages."

Miners: "What do you mean?"

Prime Minister: "I mean all the workers of this country have got to take reductions in wages to help put industry on its feet."

Five days after this conversation the Government offered a nine month subsidy to the coal owners and a Royal Commission was set up to report on the condition of the industry as a whole. The subsidy was timed to expire on 30th April 1926. Early in March the Commission, under the chairmanship of Sir Herbert Samuel, produced its proposals; in the short term the Report supported the mineowners' demand for a reduction in wages but also called for reorganisation of the mines. The result was that neither side accepted the proposals, and Government intervention throughout a whole series of flurried last-minute negotiations between the 22nd and 30th April could not cobble together any compromise. In the late afternoon of 30th April a Privy Council meeting was called to declare a state of emergency under the 1920 Emergency Powers Act. Simultaneously, lock-out notices were posted at pits up and down the country and the Government's Supply and Transport Organisation (known as the Organisation for the Maintenance of Supplies, O.M.S.) was activated at midnight of the same day.

The contrast with the capitulation of the Government in July 1925 is clear: in the face of united opposition to wage cuts for the miners from the labour movement the Government bought itself nine months in which to prepare; the TUC however had been less than enthusiastic in its response to the challenge. J.H. Thomas the leader of the Railway Workers proclaimed 12 days before the strike began that, "... instead of organising, mobilising and encouraging the feeling that war was inevitable, let them concentrate on

finding a solution, honourable and satisfactory to all sides". As the intransigence of the coalowners and the Government became apparent the TUC convened a conference of trade union executives, over 800 strong, to give the TUC power to call 'coordinated action' (the term 'General Strike' was studiously avoided because of its revolutionary overtones). This conference voted overwhelmingly (3,653,527 to 49,911) on 1st May 1926 to give such powers to the General Council. Such was the vigour and solidarity of the hour that even bureaucrats such as Bevin, the leader of the Transport Workers' Union, rose to the occasion. "History", he declared, "will ultimately write up that it was a magnificent generation that was prepared to do it rather than see the miners driven down like slaves".

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COUNCIL DIRECT ALL TRAM AND BUS MEMBERS NOT TO COMBINE

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LETTER FOLLOWS ALL INSTRUCTIONS WILL BE ISSUED OVER MY
NAME

BEVIN TRANSMISSION

Telegram sent out by Ernest Bevin, leader of the Transport & General Workers Union, on the even of the General Strike

But it was not all over. Drama turned to farce as the General Council once again informed Baldwin that they were prepared to continue discussion. A 'formula' was in fact arrived at, without the consent (or even knowledge) of the miners which specified 'some reduction' in wages. The trade union committee which negotiated this included Swales, a well-known 'left'; he said nothing though Birkenhead, one of the hard-liners in the Cabinet, was happy with the formula. Whether or not the TUC would have got away with this was never put to the test for they were summoned to Baldwin's office where he handed them a curt note informing them that all negotiations were terminated. The note said that "overt acts have already taken place including gross interference with the freedom of the press"; this referred to decision of printers on the **Daily Mail** not to print an anti-strike editorial. The note seemed to imply an answer so the TUC committee trooped off to another room at No. 10 and discussed its implications at great length. At about 2.30 a.m. a deputation went to see the Prime Minister. To their astonishment they found the Cabinet Room and indeed the whole house in darkness. A servant informed them Baldwin had gone to bed. Incredulous the TUC dispersed, and its report rather forlornly described the position: "the General Council had no option but to proceed with the strike programme on which the Conference had decided." It was not an auspicious start, and it was to be crowned by an even more disastrous finale.

Nine days after the Strike began, at noon on Wednesday 12th May, the General Council submitted to the Government's demand for unconditional surrender. The strike was called off without any commitment on the Government's part and without even the customary assurance that there would be no victimisation of the returning strikers. The decision was taken after discussions with Samuel, the convenor of the Royal Commission. He, as the TUC knew, held no brief from the Government; yet the formula arrived at by 11th May was handed to the miners as an ultimatum: either accept the Samuel proposals or the TUC will call off the strike. J.H. Thomas even implied that a secret promise had been obtained from the Government to honour this agreement, despite its public pronouncement that no

negotiations could begin until the strike was unconditionally withdrawn. The miners' attitude, however, had not changed: any agreement involving wage cuts was unacceptable. The General Council then resolved to call off the strike on the understanding received from Samuel that the lock-out notices could be withdrawn and the men to resume work at old wages and hours. Of course, in the event the Government accepted no conditions for ending the strike; when the General Council arrived at Downing Street on the morning of the 12th no discussion took place at all. Baldwin merely noted the termination of the strike and the Samuel formula was not even mentioned. A participant recorded: "G.C. flabbergasted at nothing settled about miners' lock-out notices. Retired and felt dismayed left at 1.10 disappointed and disgusted. Papers soon out about TUC surrender."

Reading the debate at the TUC 'Inquest' conference on the General Strike held in January 1927 makes one think of a group of film makers who, having made a bad film, run it through frame by frame, trying to spot the exact moment where they went wrong. The miners singled out a statement made by the TUC on April 8th which failed to condemn all wage cuts. The General Council, on the other hand, claimed it was the miners' failure to abide by their agreement to hand over the conduct of the dispute to the Council (in fact no such agreement had existed: Smith, the miners' leader, referred only to a 'share' in negotiations); and further implied that their slogan 'Not a penny off the pay, not a minute on the day' had been obdurate and pigheaded. J.H. Thomas had a simple answer: the root of the problem, he declared, had been that A.J. Cook was a "wild and woolly" socialist!

In fact virtually no section of the official leadership of the Strike had their hearts in it. On 2nd May, even after the Government called off negotiations, Bevin had taken the lead in devising a new and more comprehensive plan which was accepted by Cook and Smith; the miners executive, however, voted by twelve to six to reject it. During the strike itself the TUC devoted more energy to finding a pretext for calling it off than to ensuring its success. Whilst the Government had spent nine months preparing for the confrontation, the TUC spent the first days of the strike ensuring that only certain sections of workers came out, and that regional control of the movement remained under the control of individual unions, strike committees, and not 'Councils of Action'.

What of the Samuel Memorandum? At the first meeting of the miners with Baldwin the day after the strike was called off, the Prime Minister played cat and mouse with Smith and Cook until the latter furiously denounced the memorandum. From then on Baldwin was able to claim, when the question of its acceptance by the Government was raised, that the miners themselves had rejected it. By June he was strong enough to present his true position. In a reply to a Parliamentary question he said he had never accepted the Samuel Memorandum as a basis of settlement.

As the weeks became months after the general strike the miners executive retreated to Samuel once again, but by this time the coalowners — sensing outright victory — would tolerate no interference in the industry from the Government. Evan Williams, their negotiator, stated: "We want a reduction in wages, an increase in hours and the abandonment of the national agreement"; nothing else, he declared, "would be considered". Six months after the General Strike, the miners were forced to return to work under these conditions, after a quarter of them had already been driven back by hunger and despair.

The failure of the General Strike, and the subsequent defeat of the miners, was a disaster for the British trade union movement. In 1927 trade union membership fell below the 5 million mark for the first time since 1916, and did not recover for many years; the number affiliated to the TUC fell even more steeply. Confusion and demoralisation took a deep root in the rank and file: in the four years up to 1926 an average 500,000 workers had been involved in strikes; in 1927 the figures were little over 100,000. The Government and employers' victory was consummated by the passing of the Trades Disputes Act in 1927, which among

other things, made sympathy strikes illegal, severely limited the right to picket, made union members 'contract in' rather than 'contract out' of the political fund, and made it an offence for a worker to refuse employment when it was offered by an employer during an illegal strike. This savage piece of legislation was the prelude to a 'long hard winter' for the labour movement during the late 1920's and 30's.

In themselves these events graphically illustrate the extent to which the trade union leadership were separated from the direct control of the rank and file. The secret deals, the 'chats' with Government Ministers, and the rush to find 'formulas' without reference to those they commit, is typical of this. The lack of workers' democracy, so crippling even in normal times, proved in the emergency to be absolutely fatal.

Throughout the 1920's, bureaucracy in the unions was on the increase. This was due to two factors: the tremendous growth in absolute size coupled with a decline in rank and file activity, and the growth of national collective bargaining. This latter development, in removing the emphasis from the district to the national leadership and thereby greatly increasing the complexity and nature of the issues involved, undermined the ability of local rank and file leaderships to influence the course of negotiations. This more and more became the sole province of trained professional union officials, who were insulated from rank-and-file pressure by many layers of officialdom. The end result of this process was the emergence of an institutionalised method of approaching industrial conflict. Within the unions there emerged a layer of administrators whose interests became increasingly identified with those of the organisation as the organisation detached itself from the aspirations and will of the membership.

Bureaucratic consolidation affected not only individual unions but also the central body of the trade union movement. From its formation up to 1914 the Trades Union Congress had been little more than a talking shop, an arena for speech-making and the lobbying of MP's about proposed legislation. Moreover, it had avoided any involvement in industrial disputes, which were the concern of individual unions; the function of its central committee had been entirely parliamentary. However, during the War both the size and activity of the committee (now re-named the General Council) expanded. It was the role of the General Council as the spokesman of the unions in the War that established the precedent of its involvement in industrial disputes as a coordinator of the trade union movement as a whole.

This process had a contradictory effect. On the one hand, it was welcomed and encouraged by socialists as part of the process of weakening sectoral and craft differences, and the creation of a 'General Staff of Labour' to lead the workers as one. Yet also, in the context of declining rank and file activity and the massive expansion of the unions, its result was the creation of a 'super-bureaucracy', of the General Council, even more remote than the officialdom of the individual unions.

This is no better shown than by the events we have described. By taking upon themselves the power to run the whole dispute the Council were in a position to lead a four million-strong proletarian army against the class enemy. But they were also in a position to betray that army to the enemy as a whole.

The Rank & File's General Strike

Despite the weakness and vacillation of their leadership up to and including the strike, the rank and file response to the belated call from the General Council was immediate and by midnight on 3rd May only three unions out of some 1,000 had refused to respond. The Council had planned two stages of the withdrawal of labour, leaving many 'vital sectors' at work. But the enthusiasm from below ensured the virtual paralysis of industry from the first day. "We have had from all over the country reports that have surpassed all our expectations" recorded their first communique.



The Miners' leaders in 1926 (left to right): Herbert Smith, A.J. Cook and W.P. Richardson

At a local level the Council had instructed Trades Councils to work "in conjunction" with local union officials in order to organise the dispute "in the most effective manner for the preservation of peace and order". In practice, this unworkable formula gave way in many cases to the involvement of direct representatives of workers of an area and not simply local union officials. Many of these improvised bodies assumed the title of joint or central strike committees, though in at least fifty-four towns they touched on raw nerves at Eccleston Square (the TUC Headquarters), by calling themselves 'Councils of Action'. It is indicative of the support the strike call received that many such organisations spent considerable time trying to persuade workers in so-called 'vital sectors' not to come out.

The extent and complexity of coordination at a local level contrasted starkly with the timidity and confusion in London. In spite of their limited mandate the strike committees undertook a wide range of activities, including the issue of permits, picketing, meetings, entertainment, relief of financial distress, communications and publicity. Several defied the Council's explicit instructions in one respect by forming workers defence corps to protect meetings and pickets from police and Fascists. At Methil, strike centre of the East Fife coalfields, an already enrolled defence corps of 150 was increased by the Council of Action to 700 after a "brutal assault" by police and pickets, "and there was no further interference by the police with pickets". This, however, was exceptional; in the main the movement relied upon the traditional method of picketing, albeit on a huge scale, to deter strike-breakers. The nature and effectiveness of local activities naturally tended to reflect the strength or weaknesses of the local labour movement. In Bolton, where the Council of Action was "the sole authoritative body all through", nine separate committees were set up to handle office staff, organisation, transport, publicity, finance, public representatives, picketing, vital services and messengers. By the second day of the strike, 2,280 pickets had volunteered for duty. The transport committee mobilised 29 cyclists and 57 motor-cyclists which maintained daily contact with practically every town in Lancashire. In the Labour controlled borough of Stepney the town hall was placed at the disposal of the Council of Action and meetings and concerts were held every night of the strike.

In areas where communist influence was strong, elementary planning and organisation transformed the spontaneous enthusiasm of the workers into an efficient militant body capable of challenging the Government

arrangements in the region. At Newcastle R. Page Arnot, a prominent CP member, drew up a detailed plan whose object was "to defeat the civil commissioner appointed for this region". The commissioner it was noted "is appointed by the government armed with the Emergency Powers Act in order to break our strike. Our immediate aim is to prevent him doing that in this town. But in order to do that effectively we must offer a resistance throughout the whole region over which he has been given plenary powers. That is we must defeat the civil commissioner and all his strike breaking apparatus." Harry Bolton, chairman of Blayden Urban District Council, carried out his role under the plan by ordering all council staff suspected of being unsympathetic to the strike to take two weeks holiday. Those who remained were placed together with the council offices at the disposal of the strike committee. Page Arnot recalled that communications were maintained by a courier service of young miners on motor-cycles: "The bike-less lads and lasses enrolled themselves in the mass pickets (200 strong at each of the two roads into Chopwell)...Pickets used often to come and see me in Burt Hall with their problems (e.g. apparently unshatterable windscreens)." The organisation became so effective that the civil commissioners had to approach the unions to ask them to take over essential services due to the complete breakdown of the O.M.S.

From the surviving minutes and personal accounts one can perhaps capture best the flavour of the strike. In Darlington from the Recorded Rota Committee No.12 on Friday May 7th '8p.m. to 12p.m.' we read, "Mrs. Simpson has walked here from Trimdon, and wishes to be forwarded to Kirby; Permission granted by full Committee. Smiths Bus Service asked for permission to convey passengers to Coniscliffe. Not granted." An Ashton sheet-metal worker recalled the attitude of the employers towards the local strike committee: they, "...came cap in hand begging permission...to allow their workers to return to perform customary functions ... Most of them were turned away after a most humiliating experience ... I thought of the many occasions when I had been turned away from the door of some workshop in a weary struggle to get the means to purchase the essentials of life"

A distinctive and relatively innovatory feature of the strike were the numerous bulletins and newsheets which sprang up to counter the propaganda of the Government's paper, *The British Gazette*. At least 70 local sheets were created, most within the first day or two of the strike; some had a circulation of as many as 10,000 copies daily and their

effectiveness was evidenced by the vigour with which the authorities tried to suppress them. What is more, despite the TUC's instruction of May 5 that local committees were to "confine their statements on the situation to the material supplied by the (TUC publicity) committee and add nothing in the way of comment and interpretation", the local bulletins varied widely in political content with many of those in industrial areas transcending the timorous and deferential attitude of the TUC's national broadsheet, **The British Worker**.

In contrast with the studied conservatism and evasiveness of **The British Worker**, these bulletins took up the decisive questions of the day in a forthright and positive way: "Therefore let the workers answer the bosses", declared the **Workers' Chronicle** of the Newcastle Council of Action, "with a challenge of their own: NATIONALISATION OF THE MINES WITHOUT COMPENSATION UNDER WORKERS CONTROL THROUGH PIT COMMITTEES". This form of political counter-attack, unfortunately, was not typical: satire was a much more common weapon. "We understand", announced the **Westminster Worker** of May 12, "that luncheon cars are to be put on trains running between Westminster and Blackfriars". Others were less subtle. The Monmouthshire bulletin published an imaginary conversation between a striker and his young son:

"What is a BLACKLEG Daddy?" "A BLACKLEG is a TRAITOR, my boy: He is a man who knows not Honour or Shame!" "Were there many BLACKLEGS in the valley Daddy?" "No, my boy. Only the Station Master at Abersychan, and two clerks at Crane Street Station."

Another and potentially more explosive feature of the strike was the employment on a wide scale of large numbers of pickets, in a minority of instances "armed" with clubs and stones. These became the basis of the workers defence corps, at least eleven of which came into existence. On 7th May the National Transport Committee of the TUC issued a circular noting the widespread abuse of permits and requested local organisations to 'review' all permits which had been issued. 'Review' was generally taken to be a euphemism for 'revoke' and in militant areas the committee attempted to enforce a total embargo on commercial road traffic through mass picketing. It was after this that most of the serious confrontations occurred between the police and O.M.S. and the strikers. In the Newcastle area a participant recalled the pickets were organised in 'military' style and the police completely out-manoeuvred. "Their mobile squad raced up and down long stretches of road, but never seemed to be on the spot when required. The offending vehicle would have been dealt with, the picket would have melted away over fields and woodland, to reassemble at some pre-arranged spot; the police must have felt as if they were fighting a shadow". Of course, the extent to which all this organisational self-activity and innovatory tactics were translated into a clear increase in political consciousness is debatable. Not all facets of the strike can be treated in such a celebratory manner, not least the fact that it could be called off by the TUC with so little organised resistance. If the content of the strike bulletins are any guide, it is certain that for sections of workers the dispute remained industrial and defensive in character. The notion of passive resistance was widespread in the bulletins: "Keep smiling. Refuse to be provoked. Get into the garden. Look after the wife and kiddies ..." advised the **Cardiff Strike Sheet**. There was a religious rather than revolutionary fervour about some of the bulletins; a blend which produced rather comical results. On Sunday 9th May the **Wigan Strike Bulletin** had the following message: "My Dear Public, Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it Holy. Thou Shalt Love the Lord thy God, with all thy Heart, soul, mind and strength and thy neighbours as thyself. Daily Bulletin. News from all points. Situation magnificent. Everywhere solid."

The national leadership pronouncements were profoundly deferential and the so-called 'left' on the General Council were impotent to change this. On 9th May the **British Worker** declared: "The Prime Minister pleads for peace, but insists that the General Council is challenging the con-

stitution. This is untrue the General Council does not challenge one rule, law, or custom of the constitution..." All this was very true. But just as the Government's insistence that the General Council was organising a revolutionary movement carried very little conviction, so, at the other end of the spectrum, did the latter's attempt to reduce it to the level of an almost routine industrial dispute. Standing at the head of the biggest industrial movement of labour in world history to date, the General Council defended itself on its knees and pleaded for 'understanding' from the Government.

One of the points made at the 'inquest' conference in January 1927 by the Council was that the Strike could not have been greatly prolonged, that it was on the slippery slope, and within a few days would have disintegrated. Their own Intelligence Committee report of Wednesday 12th May however specifically contradicts this: "... many reports show that the strike is extending and that factories and workshops not directly involved are slowing or shutting down". In fact, it was not fear of failure which motivated the General Council, but fear of success. The day after the capitulation J.H. Thomas said frankly in the House of Commons: "What I dreaded about this strike more than anything else was this: if by any chance it should have got out of the hands of those who would be able to exercise some control, every sane man knows what would have happened." As the news of the surrender slowly reached the rank-and-file, bewilderment quickly turned to anger. A striker at Sheffield records: "When the news arrived it could hardly be believed, and the departure from the sheds of the first tramcars was regarded as the action of blacklegs." In many places, it was felt that the only possible interpretation could be that the strikers had won; the telegrams from the General Council had read 'The General Strike has ended, it has not failed' and **The British Worker** in its account of 'How Peace Came' made no mention of the General Council's split with the miners.

When the local Strike Committees discovered the real situation, their anger erupted into fury. Swansea forbade the distribution of Friday's issue, and in London, some of the voluntary drivers threw the parcels back into officials' faces. In Glasgow men marched in procession carrying placards which said 'Down with Thomas'. "Alarm-fear-despair-a victorious army disarmed and handed over to its enemies", said the Hull Strike Committee and scores of similar telegrams poured into Ecclestone Square. At the eleventh hour, contemptuous of the sell-out of their national leaders and confronted with a variety of humiliating conditions when they tried to return to work, strikers turned en masse to their local leaderships; all over the country they pledged themselves not to return until all strikers in their own groups gained reinstatement without conditions. Twenty-four hours after the strike had been 'terminated', the number of strikers had increased by 100,000.

Undoubtedly, the very existence of trade unionism as an organised force in Britain was at stake in the three or four days following the strike. Had any considerable proportion of railwaymen, transport workers or dockers gone back on the terms originally offered them, the remainder could have hardly resisted. But they did not go back. In several places they showed that they had remembered what their leaders had forgotten, that unity was their only strength. In Hull the rail and tram workers refused to return because 150 tramway employees were threatened with the sack. In Manchester 30,000 rail workers held a demonstration to demand unconditional reinstatement. The terms eventually negotiated for the return to work were hard enough compared with the expectations of the men and women who had felt that victory was in their hands: but only the extraordinary unity shown by the rank and file prevented them from being much worse. What then, was the significance of the Councils of Action and the other organisational forms of mass activity in the General Strike? Certainly, they played an indispensable role in minimising the effects of the betrayal and preventing the ruling class from carrying forward its victory into an all-out attack on organised trade unionism. But did the Councils of Action carry within them the germs of British

Soviets? Had they the potential to develop into organs of workers' power counterposed to the power of the bourgeois state? Or was the whole General Strike really just another, larger industrial dispute which gave rise to what were simply the most efficient organisational forms for its pursuance?

To a certain extent all these questions can be answered in the affirmative. A general strike which pits the whole of the working class against the policies of the capitalist class, its government and the state apparatus at its disposal of necessity contains within it a dynamic towards the posing of the question: which class will rule? Although it may start out from the most down-to-earth trade union demands, a general strike gives the masses a taste of their power as a class and lays the basis for them to undergo a whole series of radicalising experiences which flow from the internal dynamic of the General Strike tactic, irrespective of its initial political basis.

Why were the Councils of Action formed? Not because the masses **wanted** to form organs of dual power, but because they were regarded as efficient, useful ways of organising the strike and involving the maximum numbers of workers. Does this mean that the formation of Councils of Action had no potential to develop beyond forms of trade union struggle into organs of workers' power? Not at all; even within the period of nine days, the workers in the Councils of Action learned that if they were going to exist, they had to be able to defend themselves from the fascists and the police; if they were going to make decisions, they needed the coercive force to implement them. In order to organise effectively, they needed their own press and transport systems to maintain communication and counter the government's propaganda. In all these respects, the Councils of Action very rapidly began to assume certain important functions generally performed by the state; what is more, all these functions flowed directly from the character of the Councils themselves as independent organisations of the working class based on the self-activity of the masses. The experiences of the most advanced and strongest Councils, like Newcastle, and of the Italian Workers' Councils during 1919-21 shows very clearly how the unfolding of this sort of dynamic can lead to the complete collapse of the state machine thus imposing on the Councils themselves more and more of the functions previously performed by the state — distribution of food, complete control over transport, communications and so forth.

It does not follow, however, that just because a General Strike opens up a dynamic towards the development of organs of dual power, that these organs will necessarily develop to fruition. Already in 1893, with remarkable perspicacity, Engels wrote to Kautsky (on November 3rd) of three quite distinct possible outcomes of a General Strike: Firstly, the ruling class can give way to the initial limited demands of the strike as it did in Belgium in 1893; this, of course, will only happen when the state apparatus is in exceptional disarray in order to postpone a decisive confrontation until a more auspicious moment. Secondly, the relationship of forces can be so favourable to the bourgeoisie, that it can drown an ill-conceived, adventurist strike in the workers' blood. Finally, the strike can develop its inexorable dynamic towards the paralysis of the state machine, the widespread use of troops under increasingly unfavourable circumstances for the ruling class, the defection of sections of the bourgeois army to the workers' barricades and the successful seizure of power. With the experience of Britain in 1926 and France in 1934 behind him, Trotsky was able to write in polemic with the British centrists of the Independent Labour Party (ILP) in 1935 that "The world experience of the struggle during the last forty years has been **fundamentally** a confirmation of what Engels had to say about the general strike towards the close of the last century." (*Writings on Britain*, Vol.3., New Park, 1975, p101); an extra category had, however, been added to history by the TUC General Council in 1926 and the French reformists in 1934 — the general strike called from above without adequate preparation in order to head off the



Glynneath Soviet Level supplied strikers with coal in 1926
(Photo: South Wales Miners Library)

development of the mass struggle.

"The parliamentarians and the trade unionists," writes Trotsky, "perceive at a given moment the need to provide an outlet for the accumulated ire of the masses, or they are simply compelled to jump in step with a movement that has flared over their heads. In such cases they come scurrying through the backstairs to the government and obtain the permission to head the general strike, this with the obligation to conclude it as soon as possible, without any damage being done to the state crockery." (p104-5). The fundamental lesson of general strikes in the history of the international labour movement can be summarised thus: a 'pre-revolutionary' situation can only come to fruition when there exists a powerful vanguard organisation able to reinforce and accelerate the tendency of sections of the masses to break, not just in practice, but also ideologically, from the hold of their traditional leaderships. Only when this task has been accomplished and the hold of the revolutionary party established amongst millions, can the logic of the struggle take on the character of a fight for state power.

It is to the problems of the Marxist vanguard in Britain in forging such an organisation in the period up to 1926 that we now turn.

Background to the Strike

We can only understand a complex and decisive event like the General Strike by setting it clearly in the specific conjuncture of British society and of the class struggle from which it arose; then we can see that the General Strike was not, as the reformist myth makers would have it, a dramatic interlude in an era of otherwise peaceful development, but the logical culmination of two preceding decades of economic crisis and social upheaval.

By virtue of being the first industrial capitalist economy Britain had been the first to evolve into a major imperialist power with an empire upon which 'the sun never set' of 400 million, with overseas investments of £4,000 million (almost half the world's total by 1914), dominating the development of the world economy. Yet this unchallenged strength was also a weakness: the super-profits to be gained in the colonies left little for capital investments at home in new machinery and technological improvements. The amount of capital invested per worker in Britain remained static between 1870 and 1913, whilst in Germany and the USA it was rising very fast. Consequently there was virtually no rise in the productivity of labour from 1900 onwards.

Moreover, from 1870 the relations between capital and labour had been increasingly strained by the growth in power and organisation of the working class. In the late 1880's the growth of trade unionism began among the mass of unskilled workers. By 1890 Britain, with 8 per cent of its industrial workers in unions, had the most organised labour force of any major capitalist country. Trade union membership rose from 2 million in 1906 to 4 million (27 per cent of industrial workers) in 1914. Thus as the competition from other imperialist countries with a more sound technological base began to squeeze the economy at home, the employers found themselves confronted by a labour force well equipped to defend itself.

The available statistics point to a significant increase in strikes between 1900-1914, particularly in the latter four years. In 1911, 9 per cent of the total industrial population was involved in strikes, as compared with 2.6 per cent in 1902. The number of persons directly involved in strikes beginning in 1912 was 1.2 million compared with under 70,000 in 1905 and some 230,000 in 1908.

These strikes were important not only in their breadth but increasingly because they represented a revulsion against 'political' parliamentary channels as a method of social change. As the timidity of the Labour Party increased so it seemed did the combativity of the workers. Syndicalism, or as it was widely called 'direct actionism', extolled the simple creed of immediate industrial action to secure the improvement of workers' living standards. It achieved widespread

influence for two major reasons: the chaotic craft-based structure of the existing unions and the weakness of the Marxist left in the workers movement. By 1909 there were no less than 1,168 union societies in Britain. Such in-built sectoralism and disunity was woefully inadequate for waging the wider national type of industrial struggle required to beat the employers. Thus one of the main demands of the syndicalists became amalgamation of unions, and the subordination of all craft and sectional interests to the needs of the workers as a whole, with one union for each industry. As an organised tendency or a political current syndicalism constituted only a small militant wing in the unions, but sympathy towards the practical elements of their creed — amalgamation, direct action and distrust of officials — spread far wider. (Perhaps the strongest evidence of the threat the movement posed, at least to the hegemony of the Labour Party, was that in 1912 two party leaders MacDonald and Snowden felt compelled to publish polemical attacks upon it.)

The spirit and temper of syndicalism is best expressed in the recollections of J.T. Murphy a future leader of the Shop Stewards and Workers Control Movement (SSM) and the British Communist Party who, in 1912, was secretary of the Sheffield Amalgamation Committee: "I remembered that half the people had no work and we were called upon to vote only once in seven years or thereabouts. And I was not sure of how Labour would organise production if they did get a majority ... I thought that this idea of handing over ourselves to state officials was hardly the way to make the individual stand on his own feet ... the idea of industrial democracy seemed to me to give the right answer to the question of the self-development of the individual in cooperation with his fellow men."

The rejection of the Labour Party's parliamentary reformism by people like Murphy was a healthy response to the efforts of the developing Labour bureaucracy to restrict the horizon of the workers' movement to seeking reforms within the framework of the capitalist system. However, because there was no Marxist party of any size rooted in the unions, many militants, in rejecting parliamentary reformism, also rejected political action as a whole. 'Politics' was equated with parliament and parties with reformism: thus syndicalism **parodied** the social democratic distinction between 'political action' (in parliament) and 'industrial action' (in the unions), but could not challenge it. A generation of working class leaders emerged from the pre-war struggles with a political outlook which reflected this contradiction.

In the turbulent years directly after the war the SSM was to find itself increasingly hamstrung by the syndicalist and propagandist basis of its political positions. It was the de facto leadership of the most advanced sections of the working class and yet it could not answer the two great problems of the immediate post-war years — the nationalisation of the mines and the threatened intervention of British troops in Soviet Russia. A major weakness of this body was its inability to reflect at a national level the strength of the movement locally. This lack of centralisation was exemplified by the action of the Clyde Workers' Committee (CWC) in January 1919, in launching the '40 hours' strike without consulting the English section of the movement. Despite the militancy and intensity of this struggle, involving mass picketing and confrontations with the police on a large scale, it was not generalised beyond a few areas in Scotland, and no equivalent national campaign against unemployment and for a reduction in hours got underway.

On 13th February 1919 the miners voted by a six to one majority to strike unless their demands — for State ownership of the mines under democratic control, higher wages and shorter hours — were met. This decision was backed by the formal support of the railwaymen and transport workers, with whom the miners had formed a common front, the 'Triple Alliance'. Expert government prevarication succeeded in removing the strike threat on the promise of a 'full' enquiry. There seems little doubt that the alliance could have won if they had chosen to fight. Aneurin Bevan recalls a conversation between the leaders of

the Alliance and Lloyd George in which the Prime Minister stated: "We are at your mercy. The Army is disaffected and cannot be relied upon. Trouble has already occurred in a number of camps ... if you strike, then you will defeat us."

But they did not strike. By the time the promised report (which recommended a form of nationalisation) was published in mid-August of 1919, the Government felt the situation had improved sufficiently to risk rejecting the findings of its own commission. The miners' response was to launch a 'Mines for the Nation' campaign and demand that the TUC call a general strike to force the issue. However, having marched the rank and file 'up the hill' to the verge of offensive action, the leadership then proceeded to fritter away its energy, until by 1921 they found themselves struggling defensively against a national lock-out by the coal-owners.

The attitude of the unofficial movement in the mines linked to the SSM was highly coloured by syndicalist sentiments. In particular, no firm stance was taken on the issue of nationalisation. Whilst militants were, of course, generally in favour, their attitude is accurately summed up by this rank and file miner writing of the strong position obtained in local areas by trade union control: "whether the official scheme for nationalisation and joint control is granted or not, the South Wales Miners are going on quietly with the work of taking control." Such attitudes were, of course, only viable in periods of economic stability when the bargaining power of the miners was at its strongest. By the end of 1920 the slump in the coal industry had completely undermined this power and paved the way for the lock-out of the following year.

Unemployment had begun to increase rapidly by 1921, particularly in those heavy industries with a large export trade (in particular coal and engineering). This was combined with a steady drop in the relative position and living standard of workers in these industries. By 1924 real wages in the coal mines were 26% below their 1920 levels; and in iron and steel and shipbuilding they were down 20% and 14% respectively. In 1926, up to 48% of engineers were without work, and similar high figures were recorded for ship and cotton workers. Naturally the employers took this opportunity to weed out the militants and emasculate the power of the Workers' Committees. Already in June 1922 Murphy was asking: "How can you build factory organisations when you have 1,750,000 workers walking the streets? You cannot build factory organisation in empty and depleted workshops."

On April 1st 1921 the Government — having rejected the findings of the committee it had set up to avert the threat of a miners' strike — decided to return the mines to private ownership after the years of control during and after the War. The terms offered to the miners involved massive wage reductions and the Miners' Federation executive appealed to their allies in the Triple Alliance for support. On the 8th, both the railway and transport unions promised support for a strike beginning on the 12th. However, at a hastily convened conference on April 11th — involving the Government, mine-owners and the miners — the miners agreed to postpone the strike pending further negotiations.

Round one to the Government! With sombre predictability, the negotiations failed, and on the 13th the Alliance again set a date for strike action — this time for the 15th. On the evening of the 14th, however, the then Secretary of the Miners' Federation, Frank Hodges, speaking at a meeting in the House of Commons, appeared to suggest that concessions could be made. Although Hodges was promptly repudiated by his executive the next day the damage had been done. The leaders of the railway and transport workers, anxious for an excuse to get off the hook, used Hodges' speech as a pretext to claim that the miners were avoiding an opportunity to open discussions and withdrew their strike notice. Thus died the Triple Alliance, and was born "Black Friday".

In the event the miners were locked-out by the owners (an action which was followed by employers' offensives against the engineers and dockers in 1923). After a

bitter and violent struggle the miners were defeated. These developments heralded a major drive by the employers to destroy the gains made by the working class in the period since the beginning of the war; they also saw the first important industrial intervention of the newly-formed Communist Party of Great Britain.

Origins of British Communism

Of all the socialist organisations in existence in 1914 only one had unequivocally declared itself to be opposed to the First World War from the day it was declared: the tiny Socialist Party of Great Britain. In the British Socialist Party (BSP), the Independent Labour Party (ILP) and the Socialist Labour Party (SLP), a majority eventually came to adopt a pacifist or revolutionary attitude to the war; but it is evidence enough of the extent to which chauvinist attitudes had permeated the Left, that such a position was not adopted immediately. On the extreme jingoist wing of the British Socialist Party, its founder H.M. Hyndman, a pioneer of Marxism in Britain, could declare: "Everybody must eagerly desire the defeat of Germany ... Prussia-ridden Germany is also the enemy not only of democracy and Socialism but of the entire human race."

Nor were the syndicalists clear on their attitude to the war. The syndicalist-inspired Clyde Workers' Committee paper, *The Worker* veered towards the jingoism of Hyndman when they wrote that: "Thousands of our fellows have sacrificed their lives fighting against the very Prussianism they now propose to foist on us here". Their opposition to the war was — in common with many other syndicalists — based rather on the extent to which war production impinged upon the status and conditions of the skilled workers in the factories, than on any questions of political principle. On the Clyde, only John MacLean of the revolutionary wing of the BSP took a clear political stand against the slaughter and promptly received a three year prison sentence for his anti-war activities.

The wartime industrial struggles exactly pin-pointed the contradictions of syndicalism; however big and militant the strikes were, unless they were limited to a clear opposition to the war, the political significance of the syndicalists' actions were at best confused and at worst reactionary. Even in 1917 when 'war weariness' had spread and disillusion with the war aims had become general, the campaigns of the



Bus with scab driver and police escort



The Government prepared for the General Strike by imprisoning twelve leading members of the Communist Party in October 1925, (left to right): T.A. Jackson, J.T. Murphy, Harry Pollitt, William Rust, Tom Wintringham, J.R. Campbell, Arthur MacManus, Wal Hannington, Tom Bell, Willie Gallacher

engineers remained craft-based and non-political. The struggle against the conscription of more industrial workers into the Army was fought under the slogan 'Don't take me — I'm in the A.S.E.' (Amalgamated Society of Engineers). To quote Murphy: "None of the strikes that took place during the course of the war were anti-war strikes. They were frequently led by men such as myself who wanted to stop the war, but that was not the actual motive."

It is paradoxical that in the midst of this political confusion over the war, the syndicalist left took a decisive step forward in organisational terms. Up to 1915 syndicalist influence had been primarily based on the call for the fusion of existing unions 'from the top' into one union for each industry. As Murphy, the theoretician of the workers committees put it, amalgamationists "had sought for a fusion of officialdom as a means to the fusion of the rank and file. We propose to reverse this procedure ... to make the amalgamation of the unions incidental and the amalgamation of the workers fundamental." Henceforth each workshop should elect a shop steward who would sit on a stewards committee representing the whole factory and linked to similar bodies in other factories.

It was these organisations which fought so successfully to defend the craft privileges of workers (particularly engineers) during the war, and propelled many previously unknown socialists into the leadership of mass movements against the trade union officials. A roll call of these men — MacManus, Gallacher, Bell, Murphy, Campbell — closely resembles the first Political Committee of the Communist Party after its formation in 1921. The failures and successes of this movement during the war left an indelible print on the character of the British Left in the post war years.

The Russian revolution of 1917 had a major impact on the political thinking of the vanguard of the British workers' movement. The experience of the Soviets seemed to embody the concrete organisational forms through which the working class could seize state power and, at the same time, seemed to bear a clear similarity to the methods and institutions forged by the British working class in its own struggles of the time. The Workers Committees, it seemed to British revolutionaries, were 'embryonic soviets'; the task was simply to extend these committees to embrace the whole working class. In 1919 Gallacher and Campbell wrote a pamphlet urging the formation of 'social committees' to complement the committees formed at the point of production, by organising in the neighborhoods.

It was around the notion of soviets that the debate over the programme of the British Communist Party was to revolve. The understanding of exactly what constituted such a body and the task it should perform was sadly lacking.

Systematic confusion existed between the united front of the whole working class and that of revolutionaries and

socialists. By 1920, Gallacher was calling for a Communist Party, based on 'social committees' i.e. 'soviets', as a first step to uniting the existing Marxist organisations in Britain.

But this was in the future; for the moment, British revolutionaries saw the creation of soviets as a natural extension of the most militant experiences of the domestic class struggle. Ironically these notions gained most influence amongst the left at precisely the moment that their power to actually implement them began to wane under the successive hammer blows of the employers' post war offensives.

It was at this point that the failure of the British left to understand and assimilate the other great lessons of the Bolshevik revolution came to the fore: in particular, the nature of the organisation required to lead the working class to power (a democratic centralist party) and the necessity for such an organisation to combine absolute intransigence on questions of principle with the utmost flexibility of tactical orientation corresponding to the precise nature of the conjuncture.

Nonetheless, the Russian Revolution gave immense prestige to the Bolshevik leaders and their project of creating a Communist International (CI) which would comprehensively break with the opportunist leaders of the Second International who had capitulated to their own ruling classes on the outbreak of the war. Despite this prestige, however, it was not until 1920 that the influence of the CI was able to unite the various currents of the left which had developed during the war into a united Communist Party. Even then, not all the forces of the far left were brought into the new party — John MacLean on the Clyde, the majority of the SLP in Scotland, and the SPGB all remained outside — and its political basis remained very confused. These problems were very closely linked with the political traditions from which British Communism developed and the conditions in which the new party was born.

The Struggle Against Sectarianism

What we look for when we analyse the developments leading to the General Strike and the events of the strike itself, are the lessons that can guide militants today. Inevitably, therefore, attention eventually focuses on the record of the CPGB in this period, unique as the only significant political organisation professing a revolutionary socialist programme. All of the bourgeois historians, whatever the merits of their scholarship in providing us today with valuable secondary sources, naturally tend to avoid this problem. Serious analyses of the CPGB in this period that place themselves firmly in the camp of the working class are all too few. (1) It's easy for all the commentators to agree that the General Strike marked a

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watershed in the class struggle, that it represents the most acute confrontation between the classes that has taken place in Britain, that it represented the most enormous defeat for the working class and a stunning victory for the ruling class, that the role of the trade union bureaucracy was one of outright betrayal and that from July 1925 (Red Friday), when the writing announcing an impending confrontation was clearly on the wall, the Conservative Government began carefully to prepare while the trade union leaders prepared nothing.

But for militants, it is here the problems start. The reasons for such a defeat are not the property of consensus that blames everything on the trade union bureaucracy and then cries over the spilt milk. There is no dispute about the role of Thomas, Bevin, Citrine and the rest in the majority of the TUC General Council. There is probably also agreement that the celebrated 'lefts', Cook, Swales, Hicks, Bromley and Tillett played a miserable and cowardly role for all that had been expected of them by thousands of militants. But the really important questions remain: what were the general tendencies at work in the class struggle leading to the strike that can define the political possibilities of the situation? No matter how puny the forces of the revolutionaries may have been, what were their tasks in these days? What is the record of the CPGB in this respect? What were the factors at work determining the character of the CPGB's political line? For all the defeat, what could have been salvaged by the work of militants to lay the basis for recovery to meet the increased offensive on living standards and trade union rights following the strike? We have already touched on the first aspect. We now have to look more closely at the background and political traditions of the CPGB.

Revolutionary Marxism in Britain has never been a mass political force. The party of the working class, the Labour Party, has no tradition of even a formal adherence to a revolutionary socialist programme, unlike some of its sister parties in Europe. So it was that the formation of the Communist Party of Great Britain occurred in total organisational and political separation from the mass party of the workers and not, as with the major CP's on the continent, from ruptures from within this party. In fact, the forces and political influences culminating in the formation of the CPGB in 1920 were distinct in important ways from those producing the Labour Representation Committee and what became the Labour Party, from 1900. Although much influenced by the sectarian and dogmatic 'pseudo-Marxist' propagandism of the Social Democratic Federation (formed by Hyndman in 1883), to which at various times many leading militants of the future CPGB belonged, the driving inspiration which moulded the political reflexes of the eventual working class cadre of the CPGB, particularly in the engineering industry, came from the problems and tactics of unofficial workshop organisation in the factories.

The rapidity of the development of British imperialism's mass production industries towards the end of the nineteenth century and up to the outbreak of the First World War, created powerful shop stewards local organisations that existed in uneasy relation to the nascent regional and national union administrative structures which housed the growing union bureaucracy. We have already mentioned the great role played by the shop stewards movement, particularly through the Shop Stewards and Workers' Committee Movement and decisively during the First World War. It was on the anvil of resistance to the efforts of wartime governments to smash conditions and agreements in the factories that the character of local mass leaders later to play a leading role in the CPGB was hammered out.

Certainly, such leaders as Gallacher, Campbell and Murphy were revolutionaries committed to the overthrow of capitalism and the fight for socialism. Even in their formative years they had clear political positions. But their tradition and experience blended often vague propaganda for socialism with the political strategy of revolutionary syndicalism, which in practice produced little political perspective beyond mass factory organisation and mass struggles for vital, but politically limited demands. On his own admission, Willie Gallacher, one of the leaders of the

Clyde Workers' Committee, could say of the Glasgow 40-hour strike in 1919: "We were carrying on a strike when we ought to have been making a revolution for those of us leading the strike, we were strike leaders, nothing more; we had forgotten we were revolutionary leaders of the working class We were all agreed on the importance of the strike for the 40-hour week, but we had never discussed a general line against capitalism, and never could have agreed on it, even if we had discussed it. (2)

The revolutionary potential of this strike is arguable, tragically isolated as it was in the West of Scotland, but of the political limitations of the strike leaders' perspectives, given its relation to national developments and the policies pursued by the Government, there can be no doubt. The consistent failure of many leading militants up to and through the First War, to see much beyond the pursuit of advanced trade union demands by the most developed trade union methods possible was a weakness which was to haunt the CPGB from its very inception.

Syndicalism involved an idealisation of local workshop and factory organisation which became for many militants the limit of their political horizon. Without belittling the importance of such heroic struggles, which made possible the working class gains from the tremendous class battles up to 1920, it imbued a political myopia in many of the workers leaders who came to form the CPGB in 1921. Certainly, the years from the end of the Great War to the watershed of the end of the short post-war economic boom by late 1920 and the setback of Black Friday in April 1921 were years of the most gigantic working class struggles. In these years from 1919-21 disputes lost an annual average of 49 million working days in a period when trade union membership averaged around 6½ million. But they gave workers leaders a definite political stamp which was absorbed into the CPGB.

It is small wonder, with such a formation and experience of directly leading mass factory struggles, that the core of militants from the trade unions later to play a leading role in the CP and Minority Movement were not over-impressed with the Labour Party. They tended to view the gradual growth of the Labour Party with a certain disdain, as the creature of intellectual reformers and trade union officialdom. It appeared to promise little of relevance to the local problems of factory organisation, with its leaders' concern for Parliamentary reform by which to reverse legal attacks on trade unions and for legislation that would finally legitimise the position and legal rights of unions in industrial relations procedures. Championing 'super trade unionism' and a healthy suspicion of political parties that often bred a dangerous cynicism, several leaders soon to be prominent in the CPGB ignored to their cost the influence and attraction of the Labour Party to many thousands of militants. Such an attitude, no matter that it was formally corrected through the intervention of the Comintern in the fusion process that led to the formation of the CPGB, probably cost the newly born organisation many early opportunities for growth.

It was all very well for the future CP leaders to have a correct objective appraisal of the bourgeois reformist programme of the Labour Party and the urgent need to form a revolutionary Communist party. But amongst the various currents that came to form the CPGB there was not even theoretical and political coherence about the exact role such a new political party should play. Against the arguments of the Comintern, the leadership of the shop stewards movement (now in decline from its wartime heyday) maintained a confusion right into 1921 about the exact relation to be worked for between the CP and the factory leaderships. Furthermore, the old traditions of propagandism from the SDF and to a lesser extent the SLP and the syndicalist tendency to counterpose the work in the factory to 'political' work in the Labour Party, or any other workers' political organisation, simply added to the confusion over what precise party-building conception the new CPGB was to have, and in particular, led to a sectarian orientation to the Labour Party.

This confusion had much to do with the near organisational chaos and paralysis of the CP for at least two years

after its formation. By the time of the celebrated 'Bolshevisation' urged on the CP by the Comintern, it was too late to rectify the damage caused by a wrong orientation to the Labour Party. The reorganisation was aimed principally at transforming and improving the industrial work. Nowhere in this period do we find the CPGB leadership grappling with the fact that for all the immensely positive gains made by the eventual recomposition of the several political groups (principally the BSP, SLP and ILP Left Wing) into the new CPGB by 1921, the established mass party of the class was not the CP but the Labour Party, and that it was impossible to ignore or 'go round' the Labour Party. Propaganda against its programme and record simply weren't enough. Definite tactics were vital to engage the thousands of militants in the Labour Party in joint work to win them to the CPGB.

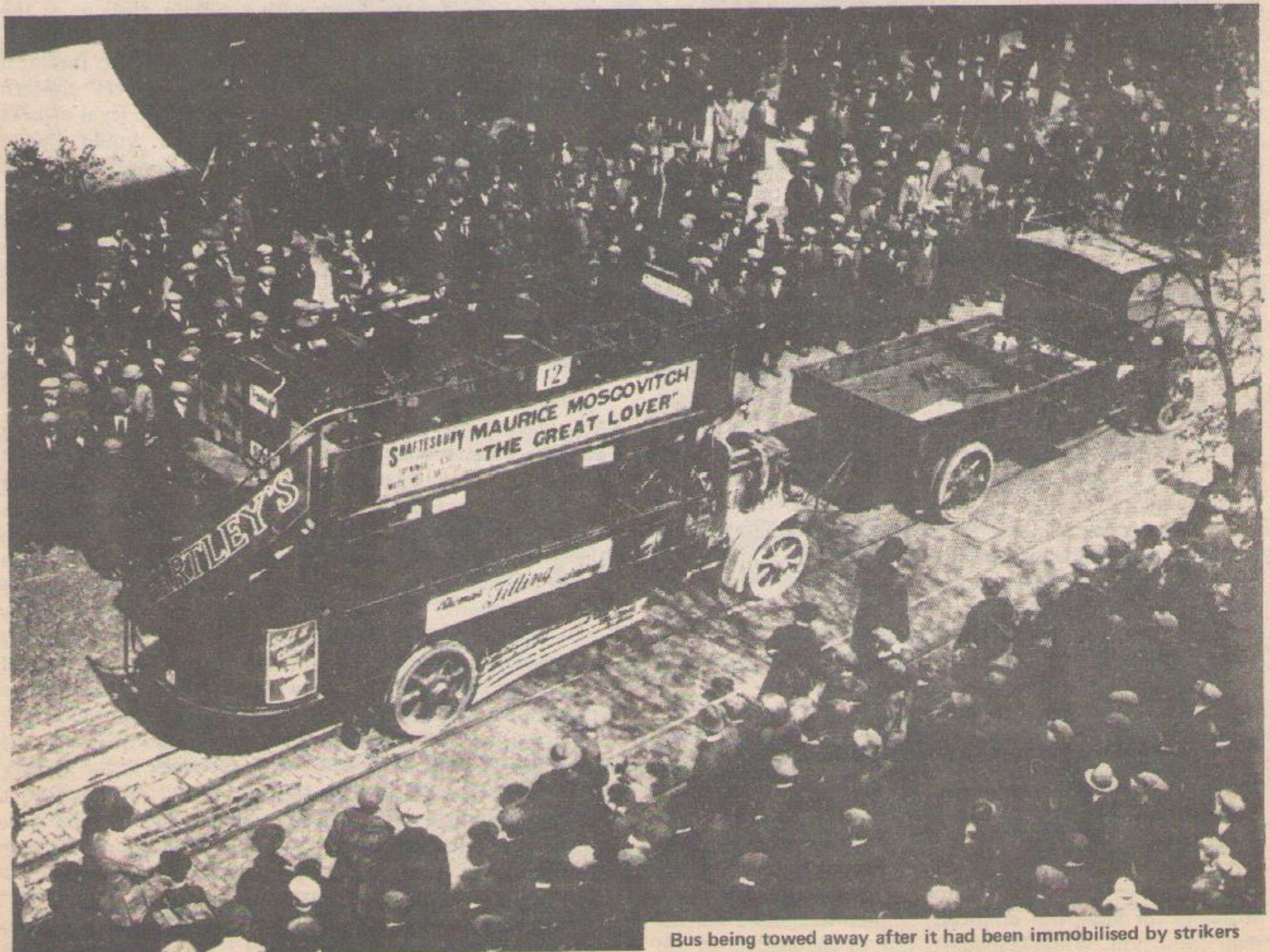
By 1920 the Labour Party had over 2,000 local organisations compared with 150 in 1914. But no preparations up to 1924 were made to organise fraction work in the LP or undertake definite initiatives towards the membership of the LP. In fact, the orientation of the CPGB to the LP was restricted to the leaders of the ILP 'Left Wing' and the long saga of formal applications for affiliation (and the refusals). After the first application was turned down in August 1920, the CPGB comment in *The Communist* was 'So be it. It's their funeral, not ours.' No matter how much individual actions and campaigns later on in the mid-twenties were a great improvement on the early record (such as much of the work engaged in by the CPGB in the National Left Wing Movement, and the campaigns for support for affiliation in the TUC) it could not rub out the initial record and orientation.

When the eventual fusion of the various currents came about, the vast majority of the members forming the new CPGB came out of the Labour Party (BSP and ILP Left Wing); the joining of these forces with sections of the SLP and Communist Labour Party, along with members of the shop stewards movement, did of course mark a major step forward in the political realignment of the vanguard of

militant workers. Naturally, the fact of the Russian Revolution and the formation of the Third International in 1919 acted as the political magnet and the catalyst which drew the various currents together. Without the role played by the Comintern and particularly the impact of the Second Congress of the C.I., the CPGB would never have been formed. At least, by the beginning of 1921, there existed the nucleus of an organisation that could proclaim the politics of revolutionary internationalism and the struggle for working class state organs of dual power, Soviets — the strategic linchpin of the victorious Russian Revolution — as the road to workers' power in Britain.

However, while the formation of the CPGB marked a major political realignment and the creation of new opportunities for revolutionary socialists, we have to be careful not to suggest that what had occurred marked a coherent **political recomposition** of the workers' vanguard. True, all the principal leaders of the party who attended the 2nd CI Congress reached broad agreement on tactics with the Comintern leadership and among themselves. On all the major aspects of theory where syndicalist strategy parted company with Leninism, the CPGB leaders fell into line with Leninism and the line of the Comintern. But their near sudden conversion looks, in some cases, too much like St. Paul on the Damascus road to be true. What welded the CPGB together was the prestige of the CI and enthusiasm at the prospect of a viable organisation in Britain linked to the Russian achievement.

When we refer to the 'syndicalist past' of many of the leaders of the new CPGB we are recognising something far more important than spontaneous syndicalist hangovers being lumped, warts and all, into the new party. Most of these leaders, particularly those who were recognised as mass workers' leaders, were not simply under the influence of the traditions of the shop stewards movement. They were seriously political and had consistently theorised and argued the politics of revolutionary syndicalism. The similarities in the political biographies of these militants up to the founding of the CPGB bears this out.



Bus being towed away after it had been immobilised by strikers

Gallacher had joined the BSP but then broke with its practice and linked up with the revolutionary syndicalists to form the Clyde Workers Committee. He had first come into contact with syndicalist theory as early as 1913 on a visit to Chicago.

J.R. Campbell's political record prior to the CPGB is similar — from the ILP to the SDF to the SLP. J.T. Murphy, recognised eventually with some justification by the Comintern as the foremost British exponent of Leninism (and later to provide sterling political support to the stalinised International) had met and was a great admirer of Connolly and was a member of the SLP prior to the creation of the CPGB. Harry Pollitt, eventually General Secretary of the Minority Movement, was also very heavily influenced by syndicalism and moved from the ILP to the BSP before the CPGB.

Pollitt says of himself: 'I am afraid I was looked upon more as a militant trade unionist than as a Communist. There was a great deal of truth in this. All my activity had necessarily been in the workshop and trade unions, and naturally had influenced my outlook and way of looking at things.' Finally we can note that Tom Mann, with Pollitt and Murphy another major figure in the Minority Movement's CP leadership and President of the British Bureau of the RILU, had travelled from the ILP to the SDF and then the SLP before joining the CPGB. He also knew Connolly personally.

Such a listing of major figures from the leadership of the CPGB only serves to confirm the tenuous degree of political reorientation and integration from syndicalism to Leninism, given also that it was, in the main, these ex-SLPers who undertook the discussion on behalf of the CPGB on the political line of the Comintern. These material factors influencing the leadership of the CPGB — arising, in the main, from the political milieu of the CP leaders in the British situation — were to have profound consequences on the ability of the CPGB to meet the challenge of the early twenties and the General Strike.

The CPGB was eventually formed just as the advancing tide of working class struggle that had been rolling forwards from the end of the Great War came to an end, with the onset of the slump from 1921 to mid 1923. Unemployment rose to 14.1% of the employed population in mid 1921, or 2 million workers. In the engineering industry unemployment was as high as 27.9% in December 1921. Between 1921 and 1923 the trade unions lost 2 million members, more than the increase since 1918. The Government and the employers moved on to a massive offensive to take advantage of the unfavourable economic situation facing the working class. With the collapse of the Triple Alliance in April 1921, a defeat was sealed and the Government and mine owners could register a major victory in the decisive economic sector for the recovery of British imperialism — the coal industry. With decontrol, the mine owners moved in viciously to introduce wage cuts and local payment systems. The defeat of the miners was followed by a lock-out in the cotton industry and the defeat of the engineers in the lock-out at the beginning of 1922.

This was the context in which the CPGB had to begin the task of constructing an organisation that could not only rally the vanguard of worker militants in this dire situation, but could also become a powerful revolutionary instrument to combat the retreat and replace what many militants had hoped would be the spearhead of the fight-back — the Triple Alliance of the miners, engineers and transport unions. While the slump and the grave setbacks suffered principally by the miners but by other groups of workers as well marked a clear defeat, in no sense had the ruling class achieved its needs. Only a massive increase in the rate of exploitation through wage-cuts and a complete reorganisation of the mining industry could salvage the fortunes of British imperialism. In one sense, the retreat of the Triple Alliance postponed a real test of the relation of forces between the classes. Eventually, the confrontation would have to come in a naked contest of mass struggle. This test came in May 1926.

The record of the newly formed party as it set about its tasks in its first two years of existence was not particularly auspicious. The inexperience of its political leadership, coupled with their syndicalist prejudices and sectarian errors in relation to the Labour Party, all combined to dog the party with lack of clear perspectives and a plan of work. In particular, in response to the continual blandishments of the Comintern to apply a set of tactics aimed at rapidly and directly constructing a mass revolutionary party, the new CP moved at a snail's pace. Certainly it was true that there was a good deal of voluntarism in the Comintern's urgings to get on with the job. The failure of the revolutionary upsurges in Europe — Germany in particular in 1923 — provoked the Comintern to look too superficially for short-cuts in the toe-hold it had achieved in Britain with the formation of the CPGB.

The British situation in 1921-22 however was the last place to expect a breakthrough without the most detailed attention to tactics, initiatives and organisation. The new CPGB unfortunately lacked these. Formed in a period of working class defeat and retreat it never allowed itself a period of sober consolidation and the setting of perspectives. Its propaganda was broadly on the right note ('Stop the Retreat!' 'Back to the Unions!') but the planned disposition of its weak political resources was almost non-existent. The Comintern demanded from the CPGB an orientation to mass work, placing no barriers between itself and the workers, combined with the development of a centralised, disciplined organisation. Throughout the early '20's this twin notion informed all the discussion of the CI on Britain. Only vigorous mass work in the unions (organisational flexibility) combined with the maximum clarity and independence of line (political centralisation) could ensure the success of the 'cardinal task' of the British section to build a mass party.

Given the scope of its tasks, the first few years activity of the new party were not particularly encouraging. Organisationally the party adopted a federal structure, with members gathered in branches. Centralisation was non-existent. The second editor of their weekly paper Francis Meynell recalls that he only attended one meeting of the party leaders in his first six months during 1921. In industry the syndicalist prejudices continued. The much vaunted Miners Reform Movement, in which the CP had an important influence, remained a propaganda body throughout the 1921 lock-out, with an extremely loose organisational form quite unsuitable for rallying the membership independently of the officials. The reaction to 'Black Friday' was typical. It was one week until the party had any concrete advice for workers other than criticism of the leaders, and this only amounted to sending money to the Miners Fund and demanding the resignation of 'decent' officials in the Alliance. (3)

J.T. Murphy, now a leading member, writes of this period: "We had made our political declaration of adherence to its (the CP) principles, but it is one thing to accept a principle and another to apply it in life. The CP was supposed to be a Marxist party, but there were few in it who had more than a nodding acquaintance with the writings of Marx. We had accepted the principle of democratic centralism but had hardly begun to apply them to the general structure and work of the party". The party then underwent a fundamental reorganisation (the so-called 'Bolshevisation') electing proper leadership bodies, and forming the industrial membership into a cell structure. This undoubtedly improved the interventionist character of the CP, but again was not without its bad side effects. Centralisation is inevitably bureaucratic unless it is accompanied by the rigorous politicisation of the rank and file; the writers of the reorganisation report on the other hand saw the whole thing administratively. In reply to criticism they wrote: "The greatest hindrance to the growth of our party is not the lack of political training, it is the number of practical difficulties that our members are meeting with"



Soldiers delivering supplies to naval ratings guarding the Neasden power station during the strike

National Minority Movement

The failure of the CPGB to take the initiative and deliver the goods of the Minority Movement much earlier than 1924 caused great concern to the Comintern. In 1923 the RILU conducted a special investigation of the British situation to find out why the trade union work was apparently producing so few results. Following this and a visit of the British leadership to Russia to discuss the situation, the whole work was reorganised and the first conference of the Minority Movement took place in August 1924, with some 200,000 represented. This initiative was in line with the united front policy of the CI, adopted in 1922, the essence of which for Britain was summed up by Lozovsky as, "...to create, to marshal, to integrate the opposition forces (so) the Communist Party will itself grow concurrently with the growth of the opposition." The central question such an organisation of this type would have to answer was the extent it would attempt to independently lead the working class, bypassing their traditional leaders to give more militant direction to the established organisations. Formally the NMM was quite clear: "The NMM aims to organise the working masses of Great Britain for the overthrow of capitalism, the emancipation of the workers from oppressors and exploiters, and the establishment of a Socialist Commonwealth..." Yet in the practice of the NMM this distinction was blurred, particularly on the attitude of the organisation towards the Labour 'lefts'. In 1924 the party at least was relatively clear; in the *Communist Review* J.R. Campbell argued: "It would be suicidal to place too much reliance on what we have called the official left wing." Here the left amongst the rank and file influenced by social democracy is not confused with the leadership lefts on the General Council, and thus the emphasis of the NMM work was to give an independent lead to these elements for the official left to support or otherwise. It was this attitude which also informed the attitude of the CP to the trade union international unity. Commenting on the significance of the TUC lefts' support for the Anglo-Russian Trade Union Committee, the party's paper declared: "Unity that only means a polite agreement between leaders is useless unless it is backed up by mass pressure The class struggle cannot be limited to an exchange of diplomatic letters."

1924 was a year of partial recovery for the labour movement. Although unemployment remained high in the engineering industry it declined from a peak 28% in December 1921 to 14% in the same month of 1924; in the

spring the Miners had successfully sought a revision of the 1921 agreement, forced on them by the lock-out; whilst the following winter the Railwaymen, the Engineers, the Shipbuilders, the Postal Workers, and the Dockers all submitted wage claims.

The NMM encouraged and profited from these trends, slowly building up support, securing affiliations and individual members. It achieved substantial success. At the next annual conference the number of organisations represented grew from 271 to 443, reaching a peak in March 1926 of 574. Because of the party's undoubted fine work in defence of the miners, the strength of the NMM was particularly successful in the Federation, most spectacularly with the election of an NMM supporter, A.J. Cook, to the position of General Secretary. Other notable achievements were recorded in the Engineering and Railway unions, and virtual leadership won in a number of minor trade societies, such as the National Union of Packing Case Makers and the French Polishers Union.

The upturn of the economy, the resurgence of pro-Soviet sentiment, and the absence of important right wing union leaders like J.H. Thomas, Harry Gosling and Margaret Bondfield and their replacement by recognised left wingers like Alonzo Swales, A.A.Purcell and G.Hicks, all reinforced the general leftward developments. The right wingers had departed to join the first Labour Government, which took office on 22nd January, 1924, (after the Prime Minister on the 21st had assured the King he would do all in his power to stop LP gatherings from singing the **Red Flag!**). Clearly the Movement, guided by the CP, was in an excellent position to profit from this situation, by fighting for the maximum unity of the vanguard around a programme of concrete action for the masses, not premised on the support of the official left wing. As Campbell put it in the party's theoretical journal in the same year: "It would be suicide for the Communist Party and Minority Movement to place too much reliance on what we have called the official left wing It is the duty of our Party and Minority Movement to criticise its weakness relentlessly and endeavour to change the muddled and incomplete left wing viewpoint of the more progressive leaders into a real revolutionary viewpoint. But the revolutionary workers must never forget that their main activity must be devoted to capturing the masses." How was it that the March 1925 editorial of the same journal could declare that: "The immediate task before the whole trade union movement in this country is the realisation of the Anglo-Russian Trade Union Committee"? (4)

British Communism & the Comintern

The relation between the CI and its British section fluctuated sharply during the 1920's. From its early criticism of the 'vacillation' and 'ineffectiveness' of the party in 1921, the CI had, by 1924, come to regard Britain as something of a 'model' example of how the 'united front' policy was to be implemented. Unlike many of the CP's in Europe who were still caught in the aftermath of splits and divisions over affiliation to, and the current policy of the International, the British section remained from the 'bolshevisation' onwards a remarkably united party. This, combined with its numerical and ideological weakness, gave the authority of the CI over the CPGB a particular forcefulness in the early twenties; a position the CI did not achieve in relation to other sections (crucially, the German and Italian) until the mid twenties and later. Bourgeois historians have invariably portrayed this relation as one of total 'subservience'; a position which is parodied by the official version by the CP of its own history, where the CI is virtually ignored. In reality, the relations of the CI with its sections in the twenties were dominated by the complex relation between the internal power struggle in the Russian Party itself, and inter-penetration of the varying positions of the sections themselves. Just as the Russian Party was no monolith, so also its divergent influence had no one effect in each of the national parties. As the decade came to a close,

and the Left the Right oppositions were defeated, so this situation does become one of simple dominance of the Stalin faction in the Russian Party, and the activities of the CI more analogous to an extension of Soviet foreign policy. But to ascribe the conclusion of the process to all aspects of its development would be erroneous. It is therefore unfortunate that the most well known Trotskyist account of the CPGB in the early Twenties makes precisely this mistake. (5)

This latter approach is informed by exactly the same pre-suppositions as those of bourgeois historians: the victorious faction in the CI (by 1925) controls the line of the sections, as if they were extensions of the Soviet Party. The CPGB along with the rest of the sections are then dragged (at first reluctantly) down the path of counter-revolution. Specifically in Britain, this process was typified by the failure of the CP to prepare the workers for the betrayal of the 'left' on the General Council in the General Strike, because the former were too pre-occupied with ensuring the continuance of the Anglo-Russian Trade Union Committee, as a bulwark against reactionaries in Britain sabotaging the Soviet Union. The line of the British Party is thus seen as an extension of the Stalinist thesis of 'Socialism in One Country', the implication of which was that the continued existence of the Soviet Union was not dependent on international proletarian revolution but on the establishment of a series of diplomatic pacts with government or trade union leaders of a foreign power.

In the context of this article it is not possible definitively to outline the strengths and weaknesses of this case. Whilst it is possible to wholeheartedly endorse the result of such an approach, fundamental errors of analysis arise in ascribing to all periods of the process by which this occurred the same relative weight of the elements which constitute the conclusion, and this inevitably weakens the thesis as a whole. So it is if one is to ascribe to the line of the CI (specifically that of 'socialism in one country') the main role in explaining the opportunist politics of the CPGB in 1925-26. (6) On the contrary, it was the particular interpenetration of the "British" influences on the development of the CP with the **totality** of the internal struggle in the CI which produced the collapse of the party's independent political line, and its practical liquidation into the 'official left wing' in the events up to and during the General Strike.

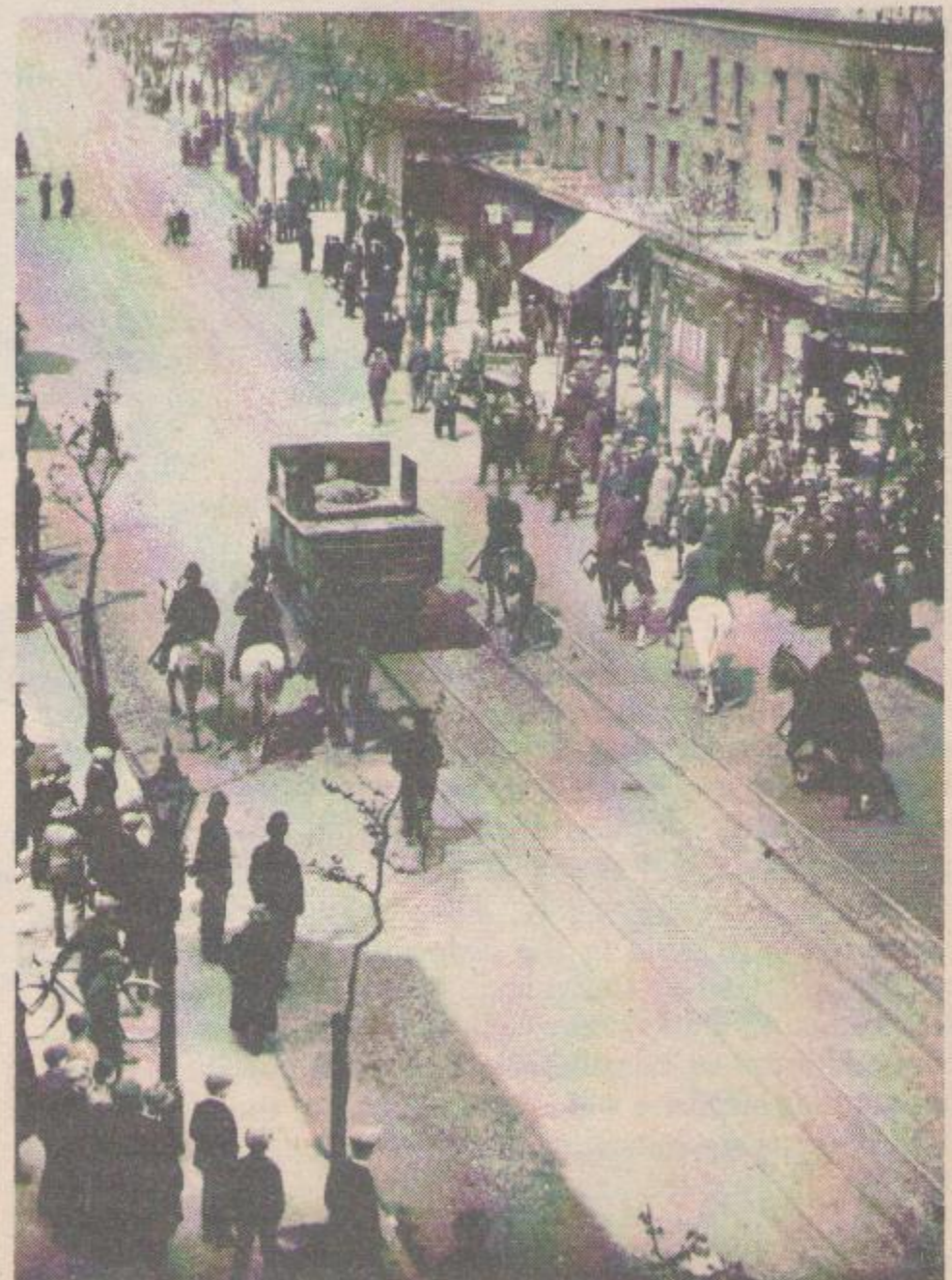
Whilst the trade union intervention of the CPGB had after 1924 been commended by the CI as a 'model' of the united front policy, in other respects the party had come in for considerable criticism, primarily for deviations to the right rather than the left. For example, in June 1923 the Executive Committee of the CI (ECCI) 'severely criticised' its British section for failing to propagandise on the colonial questions, and said that its attitude towards the Indian and Irish situations was 'reformist'. Again in 1924 the party was criticised for being too soft on MacDonald. A year later the ECCI sent a 20 page letter to the CPGB advising a series of organisational improvements, including a call to ensure that members elected to trade union office were responsible 'solely to the Party'. But it was in a discussion on the 'English Question' in March 1926 that the CPGB representatives most clearly outlined their differences with the CI. The CI resolution, they claimed, 'painted Britain's position in too gloomy colours'; the ruling class still had 'immense resources and powers of influence'. Hardy, Secretary of the NMM, went on to argue that CP members who were elected to trade union office should have 'a certain amount of freedom'.

These positions of the CP were developing from the early months of 1925. This stemmed from two quarters: on the one hand, the party wished to accelerate the leftward drift of the 'left' leaders, and vacillated between dragging and cajoling them; whilst on the other hand, it underestimated the factors leading towards a **decisive** clash of the classes in British society. Speaking of his fellow Political Committee members on their release from prison in April 1926, J.T. Murphy wrote: "Not one of us as we emerged from

Wandsworth thought there would be such an event . . . We did not expect a general strike because there was not the slightest evidence in existence of the trade unions having prepared for such". The confusion over the 'left' leaders was already present in the party in the aftermath of the euphoric events of 'Red Friday'. In July of 1925 the CP paper in the Labour Party ran a series of profiles of leading left-wingers uncritically extolling their virtues.

So, to what extent was all this a product of a CI theory of 'socialism in one country'? To answer this we must look at what was happening to the power struggle in the Russian party. To begin with, the theory of 'socialism in one country' was not originated by Stalin, but by Bukharin as early as November 1922. In the first stage of the struggle against Trotsky in 1923-4, Bukharin remained its principal exponent — yet he was not a member of the 'triumvirate' (Stalin, Zinoviev and Kamenev) that led the first period of the anti-Trotskyist campaign. And crucially, whilst this stage of the dispute **involved** the development and nature of Soviet socialism, and the relation of international revolution, the triumvirate at no time up to mid-1924 advanced 'socialism in one country' as the thesis of the Russian party. It was when Stalin in early 1925 began tentatively to introduce this theory that it became a serious issue. And it was paradoxically this that broke up the 'triumvirate' against Trotsky, and forced Stalin to ally with Bukharin and Tomsy, on the right of the party. This pushed the two powerful figures of Zinoviev and Kamenev into opposition, and it was only after months of furious internal struggle that the Stalinist thesis was adopted

at the December 1925 conference. After this, considerable opposition remained—not least with Zinoviev, who was President of the CI until October 1926. Thus the issue of 'socialism in one country' did not become a major issue of debate in the leadership of the **Russian** party until June and July of 1925, not its policy until December, and with dissent from important leaders including the President of the CI itself. Within the CP, as with the previous campaign against Trotsky, this debate raised little direct discussion. The March 1926 debate had revealed that the serious difference between the CI and its British section lay over the latter's belief in the non-revolutionary character of the situation in Britain, and the consequent prospects of challenging the



Petrol wagon escorted by mounted police in Southwark

hold of the traditional leaderships over the mass of workers.

Thus, whilst the drift towards a fully-fledged theory of 'socialism in one country' developed in the CI, influences from a domestic quarter of the CPGB drew it towards anticipating the international implications of the CI line. In his book **Where is Britain Going?** Trotsky to a degree foresaw these tendencies, stemming ultimately from the historical weaknesses of Marxism in Britain and the consequent pressure towards accommodation with the traditional left.

To a party of the CPGB's size, theoretical weakness and influence, combined with the accommodatory pressures of the class struggle in that period, any vacillation by the CI on the attitude towards the official 'left' wing would undoubtedly accelerate the reformist tendencies already present in its British section. Consistent intervention of the CI along the lines of Trotsky's book could have stemmed the tide and restored the independent practice of the CPGB, by stressing the need to prepare for the "... inevitability of major mass struggles" in order to 'sift out' the real 'active' left from 'official lefts', for they "fear the struggle more than anyone" (**Problems of the British Revolution**, p18). But no such intervention was forthcoming. It was increasingly passivity and reliance on the lefts in practice which informed the activities of the CPGB. This was motivated not so much as a denial of the party's independent role, but by reference to its present weakness as an independent force, and that therefore it could maximise its influence by ensuring that the existing 'left' leadership was pushed as far as possible. So it was that on the eve of the General Strike, J.T. Murphy wrote of the role of the CP: "It can only advise and place its forces at the service of the workers—led by others... To entertain any exaggerated views as to the revolutionary possibilities of this crisis and visions of new leadership 'arising spontaneously in the struggle', etc. is fantastic..."

The Party and the General Strike

There have been a number of examinations of the activities of the CPGB during the nine days of the strike; apart from those of the party itself, they are, from differing standpoints, uniformly critical. (7) Here we only concentrate on the attitude of the party towards the Strike and, by way of an example, the activities of CP militants in the North East.

The analysis of the CPGB was that the Strike was not a revolutionary movement, and the business of the party was to ensure the continuance of the solidarity of the workers in the face of a rapidly weakening leadership. Thus: "The Party entered the General Strike with political and organisational slogans that were inevitably defensive in character..." wrote J.T. Murphy in the Conference report of October 1926. Reflecting the belief that the role of the party was to shore up the 'left' on the TUC the NMM Conference of Action, in March 1926, while adopting a militant series of demands declared itself loyal to the General Council of the TUC. Similarly, George Hardy, then secretary of the NMM, recalled that he sent instructions on 2nd May for local groups to work for the establishment of Councils of Action which were "under no circumstances to take over work of the trade unions... The General Council and the union executives were carried out." The basic unpreparedness of the party is demonstrated by the quote from Murphy expressing his belief that none of the leaders of the CP believed a strike was likely, a 'surprise to everybody', a factor also expressed in the dislocation of the CP in the events themselves. Individual CP militants played an extraordinarily important role in the councils of action, and bore the brunt of considerable repression for their efforts (over 1,000 members were arrested during the strike). Yet this contrasts strongly with the minimal national impact of the party, whose slogans and activity reflected the analysis identifying the maintenance of the present struggle as central, rather than its escalation. This was nowhere more evident than in the North East, often cited as the high water mark of the CP's influence on the conduct of the strike. In

Chopwell, a Council of Action was formed, representing every important working class body, under the chairmanship of Will Lawther, a member of the LP National Executive. This body adopted a 'Plan of Campaign' drawn up by Page Arnot, a leading CP member. Its single object was: 'To defeat the civil commissioner appointed for this region,' who, it was noted, "is appointed by the Government and is armed by the Emergency Powers Act in order to break our strike... we must defeat the civil commissioner and all his strike-breaking apparatus."

The actual implementation of this, as we have recounted, involved the mass mobilisation of the workers in the area, and the virtual paralysing of the state administration, to the extent that the civil commissioner had to approach the Council of Action to ask them to run essential services — obviously a victory. Yet the basic political assumption is the same: that the object of the strike is defensive and industrial (summed up in the popular slogans 'Not a Penny off the Pay, Not a Minute on the Day' and 'Every Man Behind the Miners') and that the role of the CPGB was to be the best administrators and organisers of the strike in this limited framework. Of particular importance was the Party's failure to provide an independent line for the Councils of Action, either in their press or in those in which their membership had direct influence. To the CPGB, the sole role of the Councils of Action was that of the practical administration of the unusual problems created by the strike (food distribution, transport, etc.). They did not explain that it was in the extension and generalisation of these bodies from being merely bodies that coordinated the trade union action and took over some limited functions of the local state apparatus towards bodies of workers power on the Soviet model, that could mount an effective challenge to the state and not just take over some state functions, that the key to the political situation lay. This would have had the two-fold effect of limiting the room for manoeuvre of the TUC, and, in the context of a great mass movement, explaining in practice the communist notion of the soviet road to socialism. Of course, this line would not have been readily accepted by many workers, particularly during the first few days, but as the course of events progressed the status and authority of the CP's line would have undoubtedly improved. Moreover, this position would have to be identified as that of the Party, embodying a distinctive political prognosis of the situation.

In fact, for all the heroic work of its individual militants, it was this failure to identify and spell out the clear potential of the strike and the power that could be generated from the germs of real workers' democracy that lay in the Councils of Action, coupled with a clear programme of political demands (and not simply limiting the purpose of the strike to the winning of the Miners' demands) that makes the CPGB's orientation to the strike so tragic. With a clear and independent programme the CP should have specifically spelled out, at least from Red Friday onwards in 1925, that a General Strike was on the cards, what should be the specific demands of the strike, that the strike, if prepared, could lead to a revolutionary situation. None of these tasks were carried out.

Apart from failing to call for the armed self-defence of the Councils of Action (in some places, the workers, particularly in Methil and Newcastle, did this anyway without any bidding from the CP's line) and their extension into direct organs of workers' democracy functioning as political forums and deciding on how to maintain the initiative, the CP failed miserably to politically pinpoint the demand 'Down With the Baldwin Government!', except in a half-hearted way. Nor did the CPGB develop the national logic of these positions and call for a national conference of delegates from Councils of Action to decide on the conduct of the strike and break with the leaders of the TUC. Hamstrung already at the beginning of the strike by sheer lack of political and organisational preparation, the CPGB's actual line in the strike itself did nothing to improve matters. What is more, the Party failed to draw the correct conclusions over the role of the 'official left' on the TUC General Council; whilst the Right were castigated the 'left'



Mounted police clear road after a clash at the Elephant and Castle



Police attack strikers in Liverpool. This was the sort of thing that went on where there was no Workers' Defence Corps. In a town like Methil, Fife where 700 strikers, under the command of ex-army NCOs and armed with pick handles, regularly patrolled the streets the police were very cooperative and the strike went off without incident.

remained unmentioned: "This strike was broken not by the power of the capitalist class, but by the failure of the Right Wing leadership The Right Wing leaders refused to make working class counter-preparations The lesson of the General Strike is... that the Right Wing because of its anti-working class outlook is unable to wield any weapon against capitalism." (*Workers Weekly*, June 4th, 1926). Not only did the party fail to note the impotence of the 'lefts' in the General Council and the LP, but continued to call for "All power to the General Council" (although this was linked to the strengthening of local cross-union committees in the workshop and locality). George Hardy writing in 1956, commented: "... we did not clearly understand the part played by the so-called 'left' in the union leadership. In the main they turned out to be windbags and capitulated to the Right Wing. We were taught a major lesson: that while developing a move to the left officially, the main point in preparing for action must always be to develop a class-conscious leadership amongst the rank and file." However, the CPGB in its public pronouncements gave no evidence of having learned any such lesson, in fact if anything the majority of the party leadership came to the opposite conclusion. When the Soviet trade unions criticised their British counter-parts from within the Anglo-Russian Committee for their handling of the General Strike, a section of the CPGB leadership protested that this was 'interfering'. This appalling attitude produced an intervention by the ECCI supporting a minority on the Central Committee which charged that there had been 'vacillations to the right' in party line during 1925-6. (This is in itself further confirmation that ECCI influence at this time was not uniformly dragging its British section to the right.) This intervention produced a *volte face* by the Central Committee. And the theses adopted by the Party at its October conference talked of the 'sham' left wing who capitulated to the right. However, the ECCI also concluded that the "CPGB passed its test of political maturity... and attacked the left sharply". Once again the CPGB had become a football in the internal

struggle between Stalin and the Left Opposition, and the assessment of its activities by the ECCI consequently suffered. Rather than draw the logical conclusion from the differing accounts of the lessons of the strike (which would have supported Trotsky's position) the ECCI simultaneously congratulated the British section, whilst in fact drawing opposite conclusions.

This use of the CI as a weapon in the internal power struggle in Russia was to gradually dominate its activities, and the positions of the varying sections were to become mere fodder to the ascendant Stalin faction. In this way the leadership of the international workers movement eventually became an appendix of a bureaucratic clique.

FOOTNOTES

1. Willie Gallacher, *Revolt on the Clyde* (1936).
2. Harry Pollitt, *Serving My Time* (1940).
3. "The British Party . . . was reproved for its ineffectiveness during the Miners' strike . . ."—E.H. Carr on the proceedings of the 1921 CI Congress (*The Bolshevik Revolution*, III).
4. The Anglo-Russian Trade Union Committee was formed in 1924 as part of the Stalinist policy of seeking alliances with non-revolutionary forces to counter imperialist pressure on the Soviet Union. By sitting on this committee, all the 'lefts' on the General Council were able to greatly enhance their standing with socialist workers, **without taking one practical step to aid the class struggle in Britain**. This policy was carried to the extent of continuing with the Committee even after these same 'lefts' had failed in the General Strike. In the event it was the British unions which withdrew from the Committee in 1927.
5. A number of essays taking this line have been recently included in *Essays on the History of Communism in Britain* by M. Woodhouse and B. Pearce (London, 1975).
6. "... the adoption of this (opportunist) line by the CPGB flowed directly from this policy of Socialism in One Country...", Woodhouse and Pearce, *op. cit.*, p83.
7. Woodhouse and Pearce, *op. cit.*, pp66-103; C. Farman, *General Strike 1926*, (London, 1972), pp167-182; J. Symons, *The General Strike* (1957), pp130-160

Trotsky's Marxism

PART 1

Denise Avenas

This article is translated from the pamphlet Trotsky Marxiste published in Paris as No. 2 in the series Marx ou Crève (Maspero, 1971). Part II will appear in our next issue.

The aim of this essay is to provide an analysis of the dialectical relationship between economics and politics in Trotsky's thought. The starting point for such an analysis is contained in the basic tenet of Marxism laid down in the following lines from the preface to the **Critique of Political Economy**:

'No social order ever disappears before all the productive forces, for which there is room in it, have been developed; and new higher relations of production never appear before the material conditions of their existence have matured in the womb of the old society.'

This passage expresses the essence of historical materialism. Political developments cannot precede the 'blind', 'unconscious' movement of the laws of economics and the development of the contradiction between the growth of socialised forces of production and private relations of production. No social order can be overthrown before the contradiction governing the birth and rise of the given mode of production has brought it to breaking point, and the social formation must be torn apart to make room for the growth of the productive forces, and give the relations of production a qualitatively new structure. The 'iron necessity' of these 'tendencies', making the historical development of the economic foundations of society comparable to the advance of nature itself, is therefore an absolute constraint on the political struggle, and rules out any attempt to 'skip over' a stage. In economic determinism politics, in the sense of the 'subjective' preparation of the social revolution, occupies a very specific place. Revolutions are the 'locomotives' of history, and it is men who make them, but only in quite specific conditions which can never be disregarded.

This economic analysis was the basis of the theory of revolution by stages — according to which the development of the capitalist productive forces within the framework of feudalism had made a bourgeois revolution both possible and necessary, to bring the political superstructure into line with the level of economic development. The increasing socialisation of labour in the capitalist mode of production also called for the destruction of private ownership of the means of production and the kind of state which preserved it. But there could be no proletarian revolution as long as the political and social formation of a given country did not correspond to its economic infrastructure, as long as the bourgeoisie had economic power but not formal political power — as was the case in Germany in the second half of the nineteenth century. Marx went so far as to say that 'an industrially developed country shows a less developed one the image of its own future', a somewhat equivocal

transposition onto the **political** plane of what is rightly an element of **economic** analysis. The fact that Marx gave theoretical expression to the economic contradiction did not therefore automatically mean that he was able to go on to show how it could be resolved in concrete political terms in the various unevenly developed European nations.

Because Marx and Engels reduced the analysis of the revolutionary process to the development of the fundamental **economic** contradictions — **deducing** the process **theoretically** from the principles of economics rather than analysing it as a direct function of the relationship of forces between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat in a given country — they were unable to draw **clear theoretical conclusions** from the fact that revolution first appeared, not in England, the most advanced capitalist country of their time, but in France and Germany. They failed to draw from the impossibility of bourgeois revolution, the conclusion that the proletarian revolution was definitely on the agenda. On the one hand, their conception of the nature of the revolution was based on a transposition from prior economic theory. On the other, taking the overall level of development of capitalism in their time, they imposed their model of the economic and political evolution of humanity in general onto every single country, however backward or advanced.

Marx and Engels tried to conceive of the proletarian revolution in an epoch that did not yet permit it, as the events of 1848 in Europe taught them. The age of great bourgeois revolutions had come to an end, that of great proletarian revolutions was only just on the horizon. By the time of Marx and Engels the upper bourgeoisie was no longer equal to the task of overthrowing the feudal order still reigning in Germany and Austria, while throughout Europe the proletariat was still too weak to secure victory.

It had become impossible to repeat a bourgeois revolution like 1789. Not only had the French Revolution given an impulse to the development of the forces of production, it had stimulated a commensurate political advance by the proletariat which posed extreme dangers for the bourgeoisie. Though the proletariat in Germany and Austria was far less advanced than in France or England, the bourgeoisies of the two empires were conscious of the dangers they faced even from a bourgeois democratic revolution. They chose to come to terms with feudalism and the monarchy at the cost of impairing their own economic development, rather than be exposed to the threat from the proletariat. Trotsky wrote of the 'revolutionary' bourgeoisie of 1848 that 'its consciousness rose against the objective conditions for its own domination'. (1) The revolution could no longer be made by the bourgeoisie, but only against it. By taking up the fight, the proletariat was only preparing the ground for its own struggles.

Marx and Engels were well aware of this dialectic of the impossibility of further bourgeois revolutions and the

unreadiness of the proletarian revolution. In the 1848 insurrections Marx and Engels greeted the dawn of the proletarian revolution, but with the failure of the uprisings they fell back into a determinist conception of the relation between economics and political struggle, a conception particularly apparent in Engels. The main reason for the defeat of the German and Austrian revolutions, as for that of the French proletariat, was, they concluded, that the growth of the capitalist productive forces was still incomplete. Engels noted in his 1895 Preface to *The Class Struggles in France* that in 1850 history had given the lie to those who thought that the time for 'revolution of the majority' had arrived: 'It has made it clear that the state of economic development on the Continent at that time was not, by a long way, ripe for the removal of capitalist production.' The defeat of the 1848 revolutions, in other words, was economically determined.

The French Republic, bringing the industrial bourgeoisie into power, represented the political consummation of bourgeois rule and clarified class antagonisms. The development of the productive forces since 1789 was such that any future French revolution must take on a proletarian character, but capitalism had to realise its full potential before the antagonism between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat could become politically clear. Austria and Germany were only just breaking out of the fetters of feudalism, and capitalism was still insufficiently advanced to guarantee a proletarian revolution. Confronted with this incontestable fact, Marx and Engels still failed to weigh up all the theoretical implications of the difference between the Austrian and German revolutions and the French bourgeois revolution of 1789, and consequently to grasp how far the struggle of the French working class in 1848 was distinct from the struggles of the emerging German and Austrian proletariat. Above all, they failed to grasp their **complementary** nature.

Marx believed that the German bourgeois revolution would be carried out by the proletariat and the petty bourgeoisie, and that it could theoretically grow over into a proletarian revolution if the working class could somehow establish dual power, preventing the bourgeoisie, once in power, from crushing it. In his *Address to the Communist League of Germany*, he analysed the prospects for the German revolution, ending with the words, 'the battle-cry must be: The permanent revolution'. But this was not counterposed to Engels' theory that the German proletariat was as backward as the German bourgeoisie, and that before the proletariat could make a victorious revolution it would first have to be strengthened by the growth of industry.

The results of the uneven development of the European nations were not yet so apparent as to bring out the **combined** nature of this very development. Because of the low overall rate of growth of the forces of production, it was impossible to conceive of the revolutionary process being anything but a series of stages. Marx still had no theory of the dialectical relationship between national revolutions and the development of the productive forces internationally, and in the last analysis he drew national determinist conclusions from the uneven development of European capitalism requiring every country to pass through all the economic and political stages of the general model. The defeats of 1848 confirmed Marx and Engels in the theory of revolution by stages, the political counterpart of the conception of economic determinism as operating only at a national level, not at the level of the capitalist system as an international totality. To put it more precisely, they thought that within the general linear design of human evolution, economic determinism also operated at a **national** level in a similarly linear way. The theory of capitalism as the ante-chamber of socialism, valid for imperialism as a whole, was applied without modification to the individual European countries. It was with this perspective that Marx and Engels constructed a model of the revolution which the Russian Social Democrats took as the basis of their struggle, and which was first challenged by Trotsky, in his analysis of the concrete situation in Russia in the light of the development

of imperialism since Marx.

From the common core of the theory of absolute determinism, on which the Marxist analysis of historical evolution is based, widely divergent revolutionary perspectives emerged: perspectives as strongly opposed to each other as those of the Mensheviks and Trotsky. But I intend to bring out the specificity of Trotsky's theoretical contribution by comparing him with Lenin: their theories were quite dissimilar, but in both cases reflected the ambiguities in the political thought of Marx and Engels, and converged on the single goal of proletarian revolution. Founded though they are on a different understanding of Russian reality, their theories enrich and complement one another. Trotsky and Lenin each developed a different side of the theoretical advances made by Marx in understanding the relationship between economic determinism and the revolutionary struggle: Lenin working on the need to resolve the contradiction between feudalism and capitalism before there could be a proletarian revolution, Trotsky on the premonition of the complementarity of the different sectors of the world revolution which Marx developed towards the end of his life, on the basis of the latest developments in European capitalism. The two perspectives took the theoretical and political form of the conflicting theories of permanent revolution and revolution by stages, a conflict charged with historical significance. Lenin's stages theory of course had nothing to do with the strictly mechanistic view of the Mensheviks or of Stalin. In both of these an incorrect concept of determinism, which reduced it to fatalism, was mechanically applied to politics. Nevertheless, as long as Lenin thought it necessary to follow this model, he was unable to work out theoretically what was specific to his own epoch.

In this essay I shall try to give some substance to what may seem to be the arbitrary assertion that for a long time Trotsky was the only person to understand the nature of the revolutionary possibilities opening up in Russia at the beginning of the twentieth century, because he based himself on Marxist method, not on the conclusions which Marx and Engels had come to in their own time. One of the apparent reasons for the disparity between Lenin's understanding of the revolutionary situation in Russia and Trotsky's is the time at which they developed their theories. Trotsky's views were formed nearly ten years later than Lenin's, at a time when the Populists (Narodniks) had been theoretically, if not politically, defeated. Lenin was obliged to take up Plekhanov's struggle against the claim of Populist ideology that communism could be built in Russia on the basis of the rural communal structure, at the very time when the commune was disintegrating and Russia taking the capitalist road. He had to establish Marxism in Russia, and show that only Marx's theories, worked out with reference to the western countries, could offer a correct revolutionary perspective. The Russian revolution would be proletarian, and capitalism, which made it possible for the proletariat to constitute itself as a revolutionary class, was a progressive historical force: but he concluded from this that the feudal structures would first have to be wiped out, and that a bourgeois revolution was therefore called for. In the heat of the polemic with the Populists, Lenin made his revolutionary perspectives hinge, as had those of Marx and Engels, on the development of the forces of production in Russia.

Trotsky's theoretical armoury was forged at a later period. Not having to conduct the same battle against the Populists that the older social democrats had waged for so long, he was free to go beyond them, separating Lenin's ideas from the relative dogmatism imposed on them by the bitterness of the ideological struggle, and extracting some of the Populists' theories from their reactionary mould. Working at a favourable moment in time he could develop Marx's theories beyond the point that Lenin had reached, and transcend the equivocation about whether a bourgeois stage was 'necessary'.

It is my intention to take up these points and show that the accusations levelled at Trotsky's theories both before and after the October revolution can only be understood in terms

of the differences between him and his opponents over economic determinism and the relationship between economics and politics — that is, between the state of the forces of production and the political struggle for the proletarian revolution. I shall define the recurring themes of Trotsky's polemics and other writings from the start to the finish of his political career, and the themes which constitute the unity of his thought; and in so doing, I hope to refute the distortion of Bolshevism and 'Trotskyism' which was the sole 'theoretical' concern of the Stalinist school.

PART ONE: THE FORMATION OF TROTSKY'S THEORETICAL OUTLOOK

1. The Law of Combined and Uneven Development as the Basis of the Theory of Permanent Revolution

In 1881, Vera Zasulich wrote to Marx: 'You see then, citizen, what a great service you would be doing if you set down your opinion on what the future might hold for our rural communities, and on the theory that insists that all the people of the world should be forced by historical necessity to go through all the stages of social production.' Marx replied: 'The historical inevitability of this tendency is expressly restricted to the countries of Western Europe.'

Historical inevitability had nevertheless suffered something of a setback even in Germany; but the rift between the development of the most advanced capitalist countries and the backwardness of Germany had not yet opened so wide that Marx could see the combined as well as the uneven nature of this development. He saw European capitalism not as an organic whole, with interlocking sectors, but rather as the sum total of the various national economies, which were bound to go through all the phases of capitalist growth he had discerned in the case of England. By the end of his lifetime, however, he came to believe that Western capitalism, as it developed into imperialism, now formed a bloc confronting backward states such as Russia. He had an inkling that in the late nineteenth century things might take a different course in Russia. 'The existence of contemporary western (capitalist) production and its domination of the world market permit Russia to assimilate all the positive gains of capitalism without going through its Caudine forks.' Only 'if Russia were isolated from the rest of the world' would it be necessary to 'achieve on her own the economic advances made in western Europe only in the course of long processes of evolution from the earliest primitive communities to the present.'

He believed it followed 'theoretically speaking' from this that the rural commune, which had survived in Russia, could be 'a direct point of departure for the economic system towards which modern society tends', for 'the life of the commune is threatened, not by historical inevitability nor by any theory, but by State oppression and exploitation by capitalist intruders, made powerful by the State purse.' Marx formed this view, which the Russian Populists turned into a dogma, because he could not see that elements of

capitalism were being produced by the disintegration he knew to be taking place in the socio-economic structure of the commune itself; and that the supposed 'intrusion' of capitalism in Russia was the inevitable consequence of capitalist development in the epoch of imperialism. It was therefore wrong to think that Russia's national peculiarities would simply allow her to by-pass the capitalist phase and its corollary, bourgeois society. For a whole period of his life, Lenin constantly denounced what was an understandable error in Marx, but had become a reactionary illusion with the Populists.

It was nonetheless true that the 'English' model of historical development of the economy was ruled out by the coexistence of the Western capitalist mode of production with Russian backwardness. In Russia, as a capitalist country, there could be no peasant socialist revolution; but by definition, there could be no bourgeois revolution either, even though the superstructure of the country was feudal. While Lenin formulated his economic analysis of Russia and his political perspectives within the framework laid down by Marx for the capitalist countries of his own time, Trotsky succeeded in taking up the perspectives sketched out in Marx's letters to Zasulich (though it is doubtful if he was acquainted with them), and the germ of the theory of **combined and uneven development** they contained.

Lenin maintained that Russia, like the western countries, was heading for a proletarian socialist revolution, and endeavoured to break with the Populist mystique that it was possible to move directly from the mythically-conceived rural commune to communism, via peasant revolution, by showing that Russia had irrevocably taken the capitalist road. He used an impressive array of statistics from every part of Russia to demonstrate that in the space of half a century Russia had gone through every phase in the gestation of the capitalist mode of production described by Marx in *Capital*. What this amounted to was an account of the movement of economic laws **nationally**, within which it was impossible to assess the theoretical and political implications of national peculiarities. Trotsky took the opposite course: he grasped the reality of Russian society as part of the world economy established by imperialism, and he shattered the classical view by showing that the specific features this produced in the Russian social formation demanded a radical re-evaluation both of the concept of economic determinism and of the perspectives for revolution deriving from it.

Basing himself on Marx's exposition of the genesis of the capitalist system, Lenin put forward a theory of the **organic, national** development of Russia, to which Trotsky (at first only implicitly) counterposed the **law of uneven and combined development**, involving a re-examination of the constraints imposed by the economic structure. The constant economic and political pressure of the western countries forced feudal Russia to advance by **leaps**, directly adopting the most advanced techniques so as not to succumb to the pressure of the surrounding capitalist countries. He was later to write: 'Although compelled to follow after the advanced countries, a backward country does not take things in the same order.' (2)

Lenin's **Development of Capitalism in Russia** was quite simply the **account of this course of development**. Capitalism gradually emerged from agriculture and in turn operated on it, its development following the three stages defined by Marx: pre-capitalist petty craft and petty commodity production; manufacturing; and finally industrial production, in which the break with the agricultural economy was completed. Lenin showed how the break-up of the rural socio-economic structure formed commercial capital, giving rise to industrial capital and later finance capital. But as Trotsky explains in the first few chapters of the **History of the Russian Revolution**, from the outset Russia had capital in its highest, most abstract form: finance capital, the fusion of banking and industrial capital.

In the course of his polemic against the Populists, to whom capitalism was no more than a malignant excrescence, Lenin wrote of peasant society: '... it is here, remote from all

“artificial” influences, and in spite of the institutions which restrict the development of capitalism, that we see the constant formation of the elements of capitalism within the “community” itself.’ (3) He wrongly concluded, however, that this development could take place, and lead to the creation of large-scale industry, in abstraction from foreign capital. Trotsky replies in 1905 that ‘capitalism in Russia did not develop out of the handicraft system’, for ‘manufacturing industry was never separated from agriculture’ and ‘the town handicrafts had no time to develop’ before foreign capital and technology took over. What Lenin took as the basis of **The Development of Capitalism in Russia** was in Trotsky’s eyes only an abortive move towards the autonomous development of the forces of production.

Trotsky took the peculiarities of Russia’s historical development as the economic and social basis of the Russian revolution. In the early chapters of 1905 and **Results and Prospects** he shows that the political requirements of international capitalist development obliged the Russian autocracy to play an extremely important part in the country’s economic evolution. It had stifled this for so long, drawing off almost the whole of the national surplus for military projects, that once all the European states had become capitalist it had to accelerate the development of the productive forces it had wrung so dry if it was not to founder under this pressure. ‘From this standpoint’, Trotsky concluded, ‘it could be said that all Russian science is the artificial product of government effort, an artificial grafting on the natural stem of national ignorance.’ In fact, ‘Western economics influenced Russian economics through the intermediary of the State’. This state of affairs, however, was far from being as artificial as the Populists believed. The skipping over of the intermediary stages effected by State intervention resulted on the one hand from the general development of capitalism, and on the other from the fact that ‘the national economy, which was naturally developing from natural economy to money-commodity economy, responded only to those measures of the Government which corresponded to its development and only to the extent that they corresponded to it.’ (4).

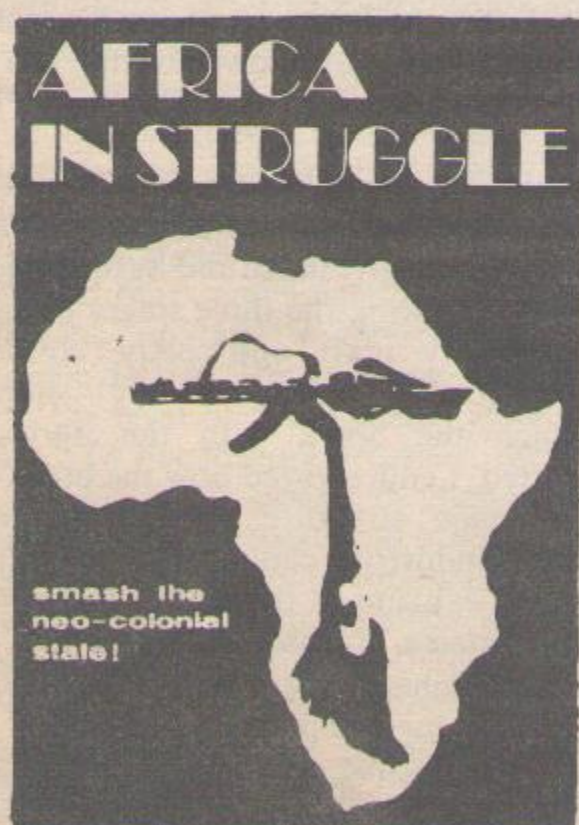
Trotsky was therefore well aware of the factors which Lenin took as his starting-point: he simply showed that the natural evolution of Russia was extremely slow, even embryonic, and that it was being short-circuited by the intervention of foreign capital. Lenin, by contrast, accorded only a secondary importance to foreign capital, and to the

fact that it had introduced the ‘American’ type of industry into Russia. But this intervention had consequences of basic importance for the revolution. Within their conflicting perspectives, Lenin and Trotsky each arrived at an appreciation of the essential importance of the two poles of the economic structure of capitalism in Russia; but while Lenin emphasised the factors for organic development, Trotsky stressed the effects of the world development of the capitalist system on Russia. Trotsky more correctly regarded the two poles of development as operating simultaneously; Lenin, aware that all the stages of capitalism overlapped in Russia, nonetheless tried to place them in a genetic order.

In 1905-1907 Trotsky made an analysis of the historical genesis of the Russian economic, social and political formation, for which later — for example, in his **History of the Russian Revolution** — he elucidated the theoretical basis in the law of uneven and combined development. ‘A backward country’, he wrote, ‘assimilates the material and intellectual conquests of the advanced countries. But this does not mean that it follows them slavishly, reproduces all the stages of their past.’ The capitalist mode of production, as an organic world-wide reality, did not allow of such repetitions. ‘From the universal law of unevenness thus derives another law which, for the lack of a better name, we may call the law of combined development — by which we mean a drawing together of the different stages of the journey, a combining of separate steps, an amalgam of archaic with more contemporary forms.’ It was because Lenin was unable to theorise this corollary of the law of uneven development that he continued to subscribe to a national and hence relatively mechanistic notion of economic determinism.

With the understanding he had of the law of combined and uneven development, Trotsky was able to grasp the dialectical articulation of politics and economics, and at once to define his political positions, whereas Lenin thought political perspectives should be deduced from a prior economic analysis. In the context of his analysis of the totality of the capitalist mode of production in his time, Trotsky’s exposition of the economic contradictions in Russia automatically grows over into a political theory of the **immediate actuality of the proletarian revolution**: the proletarian revolution is not simply the theoretical end product of the economic discussion. **Trotsky does not really discuss economics** except descriptively, through the application of the law of uneven and combined development — which is

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most clearly expressed on the economic plane, but can also be directly transposed onto the political plane without producing any gap in revolutionary perspectives. There is no separation of economics and politics in Trotsky's thought, because the capitalist system as a whole **has entered its period of decline, the stage in which the development of the forces of production internationally calls for conscious preparation of a reorganisation of the mode of production.** By the same token, the economic analysis of Russia in Trotsky's early works is directly political, presenting the essential factor as being the State. Lenin failed to grasp this completely, and therefore subordinated the proletarian revolution to the development of capitalism in Russia; whereas Trotsky showed that economic determinism could no longer operate in the same way as it did in Europe in 1848.

The following assertion from the preface to the second edition of *The Development of Capitalism in Russia* was written in 1907, at the very time Trotsky was developing his theory of permanent revolution: 'With this economic basis the revolution in Russia is, of course, inevitably a bourgeois revolution. This Marxist position is absolutely irrefutable. It must never be forgotten. It must always be applied to all the economic and political problems of the Russian Revolution.' Just as, according to Lenin, the development of capitalism in Russia had taken the classic course, if at an accelerated pace, the revolutionary process would also universally follow the model established by Marx and Engels. There was, as always, a lag between the state superstructure and the socio-economic formation: the new mode of production was growing in the womb of a social structure destined to disappear, and the gap had to be filled before it was possible to pass on to a new, higher order. Russia at the turn of the century was a country committed to the capitalist road, but that road was barred by Tsarism and feudal land tenure. These twin evils had to be cleared away and a democratic superstructure established in accordance with the needs of development of the forces of production, for 'society can neither leap over, nor abolish by decree, the stages of its natural development.'

Trotsky never denied that the qualitative leap of revolution was impossible so long as there was potential for developing the forces of production within a given mode of production. But the level of capitalist development as a whole made it impossible to go back to national economic determinism. The system as a totality had reached breaking point, and the Russian revolution would be proletarian from the outset **because the basic contradiction, there as in the rest of Europe, lay in the antagonism between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie.** In Russia, as in the advanced capitalist countries, rational economic growth could only come as the result of proletarian revolution. Russia was the first country to set out on this road: and this, though at first sight paradoxical, was precisely because of the backwardness which made it a weak link in the imperialist chain. To impose any kind of bourgeois limitation to the revolution was theoretically mistaken and politically dangerous, and demonstrated a failure to understand the nature of the period — a failure of a fundamental order in the case of the Mensheviks, though only relative in Lenin's.

Such an account of Lenin's perspectives may seem far too schematic, as what he meant by bourgeois revolution was something quite different from, for example, the Mensheviks. In his analysis of the Russian social formation the revolution acquired a very specific sociological content: it was to be a democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry. I shall come back to this analysis, which brought Lenin much closer than he thought to the theory of permanent revolution, and to an indirect recognition, in his treatment of social forces, of the law of uneven and combined development. It is nonetheless true that the whole Bolshevik Party clung to the stages model until 1917.

In this respect Trotsky notes that in the theoretical arsenal of the party, forged by Russian Marxists in the struggle against Populism, there was no questioning of this perspective, even in the hypothetical case of revolution in the

West: it was never changed, except insofar as development accelerated and lags between countries were reduced. There must first be a political solution of the agrarian problem, and the socialist revolution had to be put off into the indefinite future. That was why Lenin described the permanent revolution as an 'absurd theory'; and it is also why Trotsky did not understand the extent of the differences between Lenin and the proponents of bourgeois revolution as such.

In analysing these positions I have tried to show that for Trotsky there were no longer any insurmountable barriers to the proletarian revolution, even in backward countries. Theoretically, the self-development of the law of economics elucidated by Marx had led to the stage in which, as he put it, necessity gives way to freedom, or at least lays the ground for it. From this point on, in other words, all problems, even economic ones, can only be solved **politically**; and in backward as well as advanced countries, a quantitative and still more qualitative advance in the forces of production can only be brought about by the dictatorship of the proletariat. This did not imply that all countries were equally ripe for revolution, but only that there was no need to wait for or even create any further 'objective conditions' before preparing the proletariat for its historic tasks. That was the political meaning of the law of combined development. Uneven development, however, assigned quite different tasks to each revolution, such that the Russian revolution had to take on the immediate tasks of a bourgeois revolution.

The proletarian revolution was everywhere on the agenda. Internationalism, from which Trotsky never departed, was not just a principle but the political expression of the law of combined and uneven development. 'The international character of the socialist revolution, which constitutes the third aspect of the theory of permanent revolution, flows from the present state of economy and the social structure of humanity. Internationalism is no abstract principle but a theoretical and political reflection of the character of world economy, of the world development of productive forces and the world scale of the class struggle.' (5) It was on a world scale that economic determinism operated to prevent the 'skipping of a stage', and it was because he understood this that Trotsky opposed the alleged necessity for a democratic stage in Russia. This is also why the allegations against him do not stand up to analysis and are not in the least borne out by the potentialities of the period.

The theory of capitalism as the ante-chamber of socialism, and the theory of revolution by stages, are in the last analysis valid for the development of humanity only on a world scale. Genuine bourgeois revolutions occurred only during the emergence of western capitalism. From 1848 they were in a sense bastardised, and in the subsequent period, as Lenin said, it was the proletariat which fought while the bourgeoisie sneaked into power.

In 1905, or even, according to Marx, with the Paris Commune, the age of proletarian revolutions began. They failed only because the working class was unprepared for taking power: but clearly no bourgeois revolution of any kind was now possible. The Russian Revolution of 1917 was the first step in the world proletarian revolution. No theoretical understanding of the nature of the coming revolution could be gained by attempting to fit the economic and political evolution of a country into a straitjacket of abstract possibilities, without taking into account that country's dependence on the world situation. The theory of permanent revolution, implying the fusion of the democratic stage with the dictatorship of the proletariat, is in the last analysis merely the expression of a fresh understanding of the theory of revolution by stages, in terms of the general historical progress of mankind. The accusation that Trotsky did not have a clear conception of the transition from the bourgeois to the proletarian revolution reveals a complete failure to understand this. The theory of permanent revolution was not in conflict with economic determinism: it was simply the direct political expression given by Trotsky to the analysis of capitalism as a world-wide reality, which had

throughout the world created the objective conditions for a **proletarian**, and even directly socialist, revolution.

2. The Driving Forces of the Russian Revolution: Permanent Revolution and 'Growing Over'

The ideas described in the previous chapter were developed and clarified in the process of analysing the Russian social formation. According to Lenin, the feudal structure weighed so heavily on the development of capitalism and on the resulting social differentiation that a bourgeois revolution was called for in Russia. But as soon as the basic contradiction of capitalism, expressed in the struggle of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie, appeared alongside this contradiction, it fell to the proletariat to be the driving force of the entire revolutionary process, and to transform the bourgeois democratic stage into the first step towards socialism.

By conceiving revolution by stages in terms of a **growing over** of the bourgeois phase into the proletarian revolution, Lenin was always able to act in the interests of the final goal of the struggle. The fact remains that with this model he was unable to grasp the nature of the revolutionary process except in a very approximate and unsatisfactory way, as is evident in his vagueness about the political form of the democratic stage (Constituent Assembly, bourgeois Republic, provisional revolutionary government or whatever). The extreme complexity of the Russian social formation — the result of two different interpenetrating modes of production — obscured the revolutionary perspectives of the proletariat, but it was incorrect to say that the two overlapping contradictions of pre-revolutionary Russia could be resolved only one after the other. This is what Trotsky meant by asserting that the democratic stage could only come with the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Trotsky reminds us that 'Marxism teaches that the development of the forces of production determines the socio-historical process' (6); and both he and Lenin gave an account of the genesis of the Russian capitalist social formation in accordance with their respective understanding of the origins of the capitalist mode of production in Russia. Thus in Lenin's view social classes were formed within the old peasant society which 'is being completely dissolved', '... it is ceasing to exist, it is being ousted by completely new types of rural inhabitants — types that are the basis of a society in which commodity economy and capitalist production prevail.' According to Trotsky, however, this development was very slow in Russia, and still at a low level; the role of the State, not only in the economy but in capitalist social differentiation, had also to be taken into consideration. The autocracy at first hindered and then fostered the formation of dominant economic groups as an indispensable 'buffer' between the masses and the State; but they tried to subordinate this development to their own economic and military interests. Through this complex relationship between the State and the 'natural' development of social forces, the autocracy became an absolute power which could use all the material and military power of the European

states to remain in being long after it had ceased to satisfy the most elementary needs of social development: the more so since the dominant economic groups were in turn occupied with using the State to consolidate their own positions.

Taking rural society as the point of departure for the capitalist social formation, Lenin thought that for capitalist development to progress freely the problem of development in the rural sphere must first be solved. He did see the Tsarist State as one possible form of dictatorship of big capital, since it tended to give way to the pressure of the dominant economic groups, but he saw it much more as a barrier to the development of the capitalist productive forces in agriculture. This is why he thought a bourgeois **political** revolution was necessary before the capitalist mode of production could be destroyed: and why he thought that Trotsky, in calling for the immediate establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat, underestimated the democratic aspirations of the peasantry, and the importance of demands based on the need to overthrow the remaining feudal structures so that the capitalist transformation of the agricultural economy could be carried out. Though Trotsky repeatedly denounced this as a one-sided perspective, his estimate of the revolutionary capacities of the various social forces appears to have been rather similar. But while Lenin's explanation of this was in terms of the co-existence within Russia of two contradictions, one between the dominant economic structure and the political superstructure, and the other within the economic structure, Trotsky went to the **international** roots of such a co-existence. Hence the importance of what at first sight might appear as no more than a difference of emphasis in the understanding of the revolutionary process.

In the social classes caught between the two contradictions — the bourgeoisie and the mass of the peasantry — the close interpenetration of the two social structures opened up a rift between the ideology of which they were the bearers and their real political aspirations. Only the classes at the two extremes of the whole social formation — the nobility and the proletariat — developed a firm, open and consistent class line. There was no disagreement between Lenin and Trotsky on that score. The nobility was the the **reactionary class par excellence**, doomed by either the proletarian revolution or any hypothetical bourgeois democratic stage. After the 1905 revolution they closed ranks around the tottering autocracy, taking up the reins of power, for although they had been kept under by the monarchy much more than had the Western nobility, it was still the instrument of their rule. They refused to give up the smallest plot of land, even at the high price the Cadets proposed in the Duma after 1905, knowing full well that the least attack on landownership would mean the liquidation of their political role as the dominant class. Dragged along despite themselves by the irreversible development of capitalism, they would take this road only from above — by transforming their estates into capitalist enterprises so that they could maintain the political status quo.

Whilst the nobility took the first timid steps down the bourgeois road, the upper bourgeoisie, knowing that revolution of any kind would prove fatal to them, supported reaction. Financially the autocracy was enslaved to the western countries. The economic base of the upper bourgeoisie was not therefore strongly developed, and their political influence was almost nil. Furthermore, they were dependent on state orders, and were directly exposed to the hostility of the masses. Once they had acquired landed property, they preferred to secure the services of a strong centralised power which, despite the restrictions it imposed on them, would guarantee their existence as a class, rather than face the threat of even democratic revolution, which would strip them of their economic and political power.

The upper bourgeoisie, then, were in no position to constitute a revolutionary class. There remained the liberal bourgeoisie which was more than ready to declare its democratic aspirations. The Mensheviks even went so far as to argue that if there had to be a bourgeois revolution, power



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would by right fall to them. But they had no economic base. Trotsky wrote in 1905 that by stifling the development of the Russian artisan class, European capital removed the ground from under the feet of bourgeois democracy; and the European petty bourgeoisie of 1848 was replaced by a new middle class, the product of the most modern capitalist development — professionally trained and educated lawyers, doctors, journalists, lecturers and school teachers.

This class, being economically dependent, attempted to attach itself to one or other of the great classes according to the relationship of forces. Eager for democracy before 1905, they were allowed by the revolutionary forces to insinuate their way into power, and then quickly cast aside the mask and turned on those same forces whose struggle, as they well knew, was not yet over. Lenin constantly denounced their duplicity and the constitutional illusions they propagated. It had to be understood that behind the democratic facade stood a **monarchist party**, and that 'the class position of the bourgeoisie inevitably gives rise to an inherent instability and falsity in the very formulation of its basic political tasks'. Needing the people to gain the political 'freedom' to take power, they deceived them: they would not allow any further assault on the new political status quo. 'The Constitutional-*"Democrat"* (read constitutional-monarchist) will strike a bargain with Tsarism at a cheaper price than its present programme... the class conscious proletariat should have no illusions on that score.' (7)

Once it had become a force in the eyes of the autocracy, the Cadet party was bound to turn against the working class and the peasantry, whatever the price of the transaction. Immediately following the 1905 revolution, Lenin wrote: 'The times have long since gone when it was **necessary** for us to rouse the bourgeoisie to political awareness... when it was **necessary** for us to help the bourgeoisie to organise itself into a political opposition.' (8) Lenin had never seen the bourgeoisie as anything but a conjunctural ally to be deeply mistrusted. The liberal bourgeoisie had brought out the real nature of its demands during the revolutionary period, and had taken the side of law and order: and from then on the Cadets were nothing but 'the worms in the grave of the revolution'. (9) The revolution would, then, be made against the bourgeoisie, including the liberal bourgeoisie which Lenin had only ever seen as a supporting force for the struggle of the proletariat and the peasantry against the monarchy. But what Lenin theorised in terms of the struggle of the proletariat and peasantry for democratic emancipation, Trotsky saw as the negation of the bourgeois state as such. Lenin re-drew the classic model of revolution in accordance with the fact that Russia was still essentially a peasant country, and that it would be sheer philistinism to keep to the exact plan drawn up by Marx and Engels. It was still valid in general terms, but in Russia the democratic stage would not be a republic under the aegis of the bourgeoisie, but a **revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry**. Trotsky claimed that such a stage was actually impossible. The political maturity of the proletariat and objective international conditions made it impossible to impose such a limitation, even on a temporary basis. Though Lenin and Trotsky had, admittedly from different standpoints, come to share a similar estimation of the role of the bourgeoisie, they were in violent disagreement on the revolutionary potential of the peasantry, and therefore of the proletariat too. Underlying the dispute was always their differing concepts of economic determinism. It was because the peasantry was a force of overwhelming economic and political importance that the polemic between the theory of permanent revolution and the theory of revolution by stages crystallised around this problem.

It fell to the proletariat and the peasantry to assume the historical role of the bourgeoisie. How would they come into alliance, given that the peasantry wished to make a democratic revolution, while the proletariat struggled for the goal of the socialist revolution? The leading political force in the whole process was the proletariat. What kind of political power would then result from this revolution? Lenin and Trotsky gave different answers to these questions, according

to their respective views of the revolutionary potential of the two classes. The questions at issue were what the proletariat represented as compared to the peasantry; the relationship between its political strength and its economic weakness; and whether it needed to be strengthened by a growth of the capitalist productive forces before it could embark on a relentless struggle against the new bourgeoisie which would emerge out of the peasantry after its final liberation from serfdom. Although Lenin's theories appeared internally coherent, at the concrete political level they produced a degree of equivocation absent from Trotsky's perspectives.

This discussion can usefully take as its point of departure a passage Trotsky quotes from the collection of articles Engels wrote for Marx in the *New York Tribune*, subsequently published as **Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Germany**.

'The working class in Germany', wrote Engels, 'is, in its social and political development, as far behind that of England and France as the German bourgeoisie is behind the bourgeoisie of those countries. **Like master, like man**. The evolution of the conditions of existence for a numerous, strong, concentrated and intelligent proletarian class goes hand in hand with the development of the conditions of existence for a numerous, wealthy, concentrated and powerful middle class. The working class movement itself never is independent, never is of an exclusively proletarian character until all the different factions of the middle class, and particularly its most progressive faction, the large manufacturers, have conquered political power and remodelled the State according to their wants. It is then that the inevitable conflict between the employer and the employed becomes imminent and cannot be adjourned any longer.'

Most Russian Marxists made a dogma out of the conclusions Engels drew from the defeat of the German revolution, and which, since they had been confirmed by the French events of 1848, he thought would have to be the basis of revolutionary perspectives in all countries where capitalism was not fully developed. But the conception of economic determinism underlying this analysis, though it was understandable in the Europe of 1848, was completely out of place for Russia at the turn of the century. In 1848 there might still have been room for the growth of the productive forces and of the proletariat such as to prevent the victory of a proletarian revolution — and in this respect, Engels' analysis was well-founded. But since 1848, the relationship between the advanced capitalist countries and the backward countries had changed not just quantitatively but **qualitatively**. Russia in 1905 was not to the western countries what Germany had been to England and France in 1848. The uneven development of capitalist countries had not simply been copied in the East. It followed that the axiom 'like master, like man' was no longer meaningful in Russia. Once the proletariat was understood to be a section of the world proletariat struggling against a section of the international bourgeoisie, there was no longer a **direct** correlation between the degree of development of the productive forces and of the bourgeoisie in a given country, and the strength and political maturity of its proletariat. 'Between the productive forces of a country and the political strength of its classes, there cut across at any given moment various social and political factors of a national and international character, and these displace and even sometimes completely alter the political expression of economic relations.'

In **Results and Prospects**, Trotsky used Kautsky's analysis of the American and Russian working classes to show that if the political force of the proletariat depended on the strength of the bourgeoisie, i.e. on the development of the productive forces, then the country most likely to see the upsurge of proletarian revolution would be the United States, as the nation where capitalism was the most advanced and the proletariat most numerous and concentrated. But it was here that the proletariat was the least influential politically **precisely because its bourgeoisie was all-powerful economically, politically and ideologically**. On the other hand, while the Russian proletariat was still not very numerous, since

industry was not yet far advanced, the same applied to the exploiting class, which as we have already seen was not very important politically. As Kautsky wrote:

'in no other country than America is there so much basis for speaking of the dictatorship of capital, while the militant proletariat has nowhere acquired such importance as in Russia.'

This was the fundamental fact from which the nature of the coming revolution stemmed, and **not the agrarian question**. Kautsky added:

'... the struggle for the emancipation of Russia from the incubus of absolutism which is stifling it has become converted into a **single combat between absolutism and the industrial proletariat**, a single combat in which the peasants may render considerable support but cannot play a leading role.' (10)

Any other perspective derived from a mechanistic caricature of Marxism, from the substitution of a ready-made schema for analysis of the social formation.

The Russian proletariat, emanating directly from the peasantry, was in fact thrust straight into the most modern, intensive industries. Trotsky wrote that as soon as the Russian proletariat emerged it was confronted with a highly centralised state power and equally centralised capital. It had no experience of the prejudices and corporative traditions of the crafts, and was from the outset engaged in the most relentless struggle. Its situation was quite unlike that of the Western proletariat, and had the advantage of making it open to accepting the Marxist view of its historical tasks, as the bourgeoisie had neither the means nor the time to corrupt it and divert it from its goal. This is why Lenin said after October that revolution could be begun more easily in Russia than in the West. He always opposed vulgar Marxists over the revolutionary potential of the proletariat, struggling to organise from the late 19th century. But given that the 'nub of the Russian revolution' was the agrarian question, he tended to subscribe to Engels' analysis, or at least to its theoretical basis if not its concrete content.

In 1906, in an article entitled **The Proletariat and its Ally in the Russian Revolution**, he also cited Kautsky to show that in Russia the revolution would not be strictly speaking bourgeois, because 'the bourgeoisie is not one of the driving forces of the present revolutionary movement in Russia.' (11). Yet it would not be socialist either, because of the existence of the autocracy and serfdom... This was a correct way of posing the problem: Trotsky did not challenge the need to carry out bourgeois agrarian tasks. He knew the importance of the peasant question in the Russian revolutionary process. He nonetheless always held that the theoretical and political conclusions Lenin drew before the revolution were wrong, and that he subordinated the proletarian revolution to an ill-conceived kind of determinism. The importance he gave to the agrarian revolution led him to underestimate the possibilities of extending the struggle of the proletariat, which had in 1905 fought for the first time under its own banner. He never clearly defined the nature of the democratic stage, nor what would hold it back from growing over into a socialist revolution, because his understanding of the period was based on **a priori** positions which he thought needed only to be adapted to the period and the concrete situation, without seeing that they prevented him from grasping its essential features.

The peasant question therefore became the crux of the polemic in which Trotsky set out to refute the theory of revolution by stages. 'That revolution', Lenin wrote, 'marks the period in the development of society in which the mass of society virtually stands between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie and constitutes an immense petty-bourgeois, peasant stratum.' This determined the nature of the future regime. Any underestimation of its importance would put the proletariat in a false position. Had Engels not written in **The Peasant War** that a social class coming into power before conditions were ripe was obliged to 'advance the interests of an alien class, and to feed its own class with phrases and promises, and with the assurances that the interests of that alien class are its own interests', and that anyone put in such a situation was 'irremediably lost'? This was the trap which awaited those who did not understand the non-proletarian nature of the coming revolution. Trotsky for his part was nothing but a windbag who refused to recognise that 'the objective logic of historical development confronts them at the present time with the tasks, not of a socialist, but of a democratic revolution'. (12) To confuse the overthrow of the autocracy by an alliance including the whole of the peasantry with the socialist overthrow of the bourgeoisie and the introduction of the class struggle into the village not only betrayed a theoretical error, but represented a disastrous attempt to move faster than economic and social conditions would permit. It would in practice foster illusions in the working class which could only end in a long period of demoralisation.

The Menshevik Martynov made the same mistake when he said that if the proletariat gained political hegemony in the democratic dictatorship, this would represent the immediate establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat, arguing that such a prospect would scare off the petty bourgeoisie. The Mensheviks understood the implications of Lenin's concept of a democratic stage, but used it to postpone proletarian power to a safe distance in the future for the petty bourgeois forces; whereas Trotsky saw it as creating the need to move directly into the dictatorship of the proletariat. But Lenin considered that these attitudes had a common basis, and he lumped Trotsky with the Mensheviks because he took objectively the same political line, while Trotsky regarded Lenin as belonging in the ranks of the Mensheviks for maintaining the distinction between the democratic and proletarian stages.

Where Lenin parted company with the Mensheviks was in stressing the need to understand that the only purpose of the democratic stage was for the proletariat to equip itself for its own struggle. The agrarian programme of Social Democracy advanced by Lenin therefore had a dual purpose: to support the whole of the peasantry against serfdom and landownership, which were to be completely abolished; and to organise



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separately, developing mistrust of the peasantry wherever it
acted in cooperation with the proletariat. In other words, the
struggle against feudalism had to be waged inseparably from
the work of organising the rural proletariat with the aim of
this fight growing over into a socialist revolution. Lenin
wrote:

'... we must organise the rural proletariat, like the urban
proletariat, and together with it, into an independent class
party; we must explain to it that its interests are antagonistic
to those of the bourgeois peasantry; we must call upon it to
fight for the socialist revolution, and to point out to it that
liberation from oppression and poverty lies not in turning
several sections of the peasantry into petty bourgeois, but
only in replacing the entire bourgeois system by the socialist
system.' (13)

Lenin never lost sight of the fact that this second plank of the
programme was more important than the first, and that they
must constantly be on their guard against the treacherous
instability of the peasantry as a petty bourgeois layer. But
the theories from which he worked prevented his perspec-
tives from growing over to abrogate the distinction between
the minimum programme to be realised within capitalism,
and the maximum programme, which could only be put
forward after the beginning of the first stage.

In 1907 he re-wrote his agrarian programme in the light of
the events of 1905. While Trotsky took this revolution as
factual confirmation of the theory of permanent revolution,
Lenin's determinist concept of the revolutionary process was
reinforced. There were two possible ways for agriculture to
develop in Russia: the Prussian way, by transforming feudal
serfdom into capitalist slavery; or the peasant way, on the
basis of capitalist differentiation of the peasantry. Both ways
were bourgeois: but the Social Democrats had to support the
peasant way, if only to wipe out all previous rural
landowning forces, including the commune, to prepare the
way, economically and politically, for the final struggle.
Lenin added that the previous programme had under-
estimated the importance of feudal institutions, for capital-
ism proved to be much less developed in the countryside than
he had at first thought. The coming revolution would, more
than ever, be bourgeois, and the feudal structure would have
to be completely demolished to make room for growth, while
the better off class of peasants would become a new
ascendant bourgeoisie whose fight would have to be
supported and even stimulated. The 'trudoviks' in the Duma
who demanded land nationalisation were only asking for
the chance to carry out a capitalist transformation of
agriculture. That meant a new democratic political structure,
to meet the needs of such development.

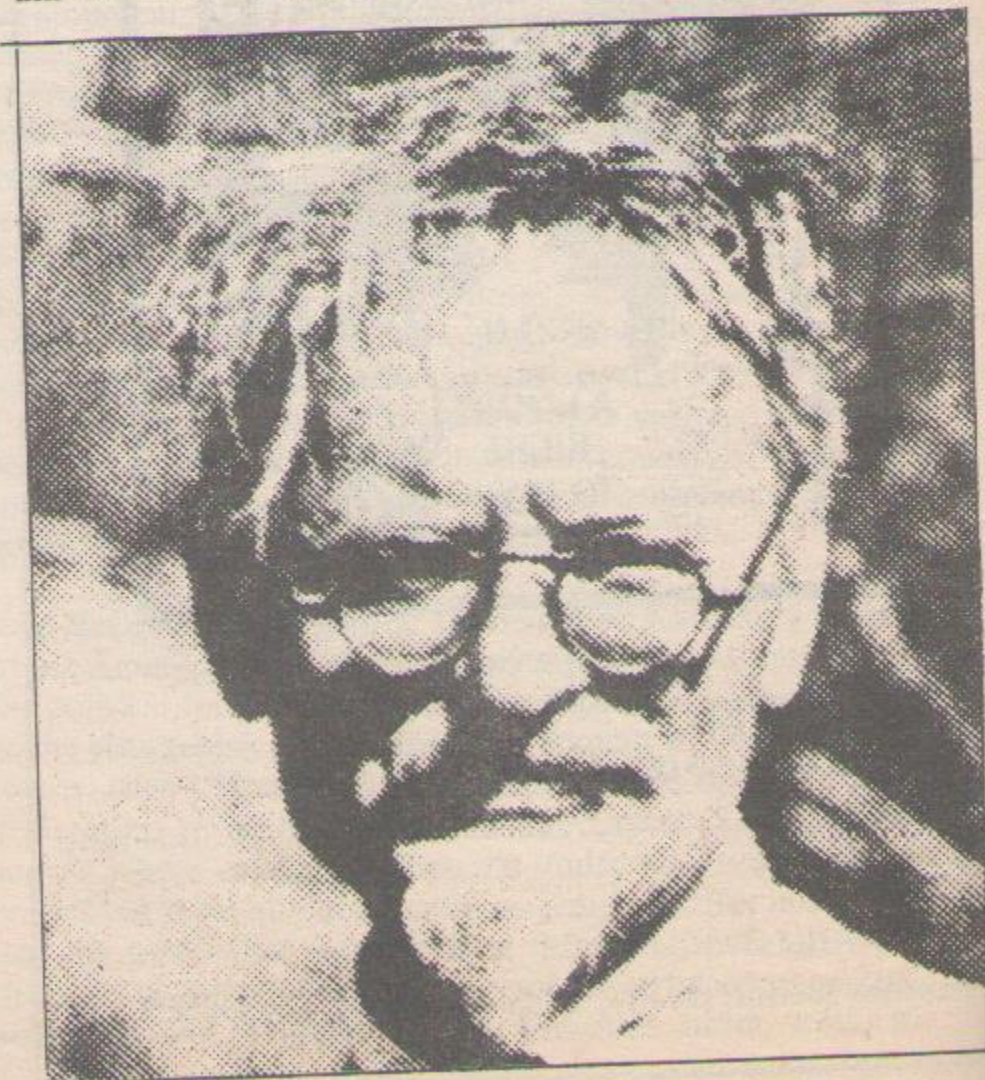
Trotsky in no way 'underestimated' the peasantry, but
apart from opposing Lenin together with all the Bolsheviks
over their subordination of the proletarian revolution to
some hypothetical development of the productive forces
within capitalism, he laid bare, as early as 1905, the
ambiguities concealed by Lenin's formula of the democratic
dictatorship. After the debate had been cut short by history,
he wrote in *Permanent Revolution* that the argument had
never been about the need for an alliance of the proletariat
and peasantry, but on the political mechanism of their
collaboration. 'The theoretical as well as the political dispute
among us was... over the programme of this collaboration,
its party forms and political methods.' (14) Though this was
an important qualification, and one which throws light on
the debate reaching its height around 1905, it did not
dissuade him from thinking that Lenin's position on the
question was rather unclear, and moreover politically
dangerous: apart from the fact that imperialism put the
proletarian revolution on the order of the day the world
over, if the demands of the peasantry could be satisfied by a
'democratic' stage of any kind, they would at once become a
pillar of reaction. To preserve their gains they would take the
side of the bourgeois order, and set back the proletarian
challenge.

Because its social composition was so heterogeneous, and
because it occupied an intermediate position between the
bourgeoisie and the proletariat, the peasantry was incapable

Lenin had not
of taking on an independent political role. His formulation did not make it
draw the full conclusions. His formulation did not make it
clear whether it was the proletariat or the peasantry which
would have political hegemony in the coalition of the
democratic stage. If it was the proletariat, as Lenin
constantly claimed, why should this be a 'bourgeois' stage?
And if it was really a bourgeois stage, there might be reason
to think that the proletariat and the peasantry would share
power equally. In 1909 Lenin wrote that he could not see
why the two formulations — the revolutionary **democratic**
dictatorship of the proletariat **and** the peasantry, and the
dictatorship of the proletariat **supported by** the peasantry —
should be mutually exclusive, as it was clear that in the
revolutionary process the proletariat would **draw the**
peasantry behind it. It was therefore absurd to raise a
question of terminology into a matter of principle. But in
fact, the debate between Lenin's 'and' and Trotsky's
'supported by' was only meaningful by virtue of the contrast
between **democratic** dictatorship and dictatorship of the
proletariat. Moreover, according to Trotsky, Lenin's
formulation concealed a further ambiguity: the proposal for
a coalition government pre-supposed that the protagonists
should have formed political parties. Now, the peasantry
could only follow the bourgeoisie or the proletariat. Being
organically incapable of creating a powerful autonomous
party, it was therefore bound to fall under the control of the
bourgeoisie.

Lenin replied that on the one hand a coalition government
could rest on an alliance of classes and not of parties, and
that on the other hand the peasantry had after 1905 begun to
build an independent political organisation: 'There is not the
slightest doubt that a revolution which reaches so high a
degree of development as the revolutionary dictatorship will
create a more firmly-formed and more powerful revolution-
ary peasant party.' What Lenin did not see was that if it were
possible to build such a party (in which case Russia would be
the most suitable country for it), there could be no growing
over from the democratic stage to the proletarian revolution,
for the proletariat could only appear as the liberator of the
peasantry if the latter were unable to advance its own
struggles. It followed from the very nature of the peasantry
that democracy could not be established in Russia before the
dictatorship of the proletariat. As Trotsky wrote later, when
his prognosis had been confirmed by history, the tasks of the
bourgeois revolution in Russia could only really be carried
out if the proletariat, with the support of millions of
peasants, had the revolutionary dictatorship in its hands.

'The theory of historical materialism', Lukacs writes at
the beginning of his book on Lenin, '... presupposes the
universal actuality of the proletarian revolution.' (15) I have



argued that in this respect Trotsky was in some ways right as against Lenin, and that for him the perspective of the proletarian revolution was not only a theoretical perspective but concrete and immediate. Lenin, viewing the revolutionary process as a totality, **but from a national standpoint**, could only imagine the dialectical transformation of the democratic stage into the dictatorship of the proletariat taking place by means of a resolution of the agrarian question. Paradoxically, this perspective was in a sense confirmed around 1920, when the peasantry took its stand **en bloc** against a regime in which it no longer saw any guarantee of its own economic development. But the peasant question only became dominant **to the extent that the European proletariat was defeated**. In that respect Trotsky was right not to subordinate the working class struggle to it. This has to be qualified by grasping **what is essential to Leninism**, as Lukacs does: in synthesis, and in the light of October, it does seem that despite his adherence to the theory of revolution by stages, Lenin stood out from all the Marxists of his time, as 'the first and for a long time the only important leader and theoretician who tackled this problem at its theoretical roots and therefore at its decisive, practical point: **that of organisation**'. (16)

As Trotsky later recognised, in terms of revolutionary outlook, and taking into account that Lenin in theory saw the democratic stage only as the period of economic and political preparation of the socialist revolution, strict organisational principles were more effective than the best of general perspectives. The basic feature of Leninism, and Trotsky could not see this until 1917, was not support for the theory of revolution by stages, but the forging of the political weapons of the class struggle. The theory of organisation casts a new light on Lenin's and Trotsky's theories, and makes the difference between their respective concepts of the relationship between politics and economics much clearer. While Trotsky fought the vulgarisers of materialism for the recognition that the Russian proletariat was capable of defeating both feudalism and capitalism, Lenin made it the political subject of revolution. (17)

3. Building the Revolutionary Party

It might at first sight seem that Lenin's organisational policy found its theoretical justification in the theory of permanent revolution, expressing the fusion of the democratic stage and the dictatorship of the proletariat in a backward country, as a result of the decline of the world capitalist system; while on the other hand, his struggle to build the party of the proletariat was the indispensable practical corollary of Trotsky's perspective of the revolution. It is true that Leninism and Trotskyism are in this sense complementary: but according to the positions analysed above, Lenin was not theoretically inconsistent. By stressing the **growing over** of the 'bourgeois' democratic stage into the proletarian revolution, and the role of the proletariat in the process as a whole, he showed that the very policy of alliances imposed on the proletariat by the 'objective course of history' required the latter to take up a class line and organise intransigently for it, so as not to be dependent on the social layers following it. The equivocation lay elsewhere, in the

fact that his perspectives for revolution did not match up to the reality of the social conflict shaking the foundations of Tsarism and capitalism in early twentieth century Russia. It was Lenin's organisational principles that prevented him, and indeed many others, from lapsing into dogmatism. Trotsky never challenged the basic principles of Lenin's organisational policy, but by rejecting the means he proposed for putting them into practice, he renounced the successful conduct of the political struggle required by his theory of revolution, and it was therefore he, not Lenin, who failed to achieve the basic unity of theory and praxis of which Lukacs speaks.

Lenin came to the 1903 Congress, where the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party was to be reorganised, armed with a minutely worked out series of statutes based on the principles on which the Social Democrats had until then been unanimous: the two basic ideas of democratic centralism — though it was not yet known by that name — and the selection of members. Lenin's proposals for the first time gave life to what had previously been abstract principles, but they aroused a wave of indignation among the participants. Lenin's plan seemed monstrous. But they did not believe that by rejecting it they were negating these principles, and failed to see that there was no middle way between the kind of organisation Lenin advocated and opportunism pure and simple.

When Lenin laid down the clause, 'A member of the Party is one who accepts its programme and who supports the Party both financially and by personal participation in one of the Party organisations', he was at a loss to understand the virulence of the accusations hurled against him. The need for a party of 'professional revolutionaries', described by Lukacs in *Lenin* as 'the strictly centralised organisation of the proletariat's most conscious elements — and only as such' (18) was based on the nature of the coming revolution and of the Russian social formation. In the course of his polemics against the Populists, Lenin had argued that Russian society was a predominantly **capitalist** social formation, though it was marked by the survival of the feudal mode of production. The fact that a democratic revolution was called for did not mean that this could be neglected. The proletariat faced a strongly centralised power, one of the **possible** forms of the political rule of capital. It therefore had to build an equally centralised organisation, all the stricter because it would have to push the petty bourgeoisie into fighting for democracy without allowing their influence to divert it from the final goal. By giving a precise definition of the previously vague notion of 'party membership', Lenin was not closing the door of what should be the organisation of the proletariat, as the Mensheviks, Trotsky and Rosa Luxemburg thought. He was only forging the indispensable political instrument for carrying out the immense tasks facing the class without deviating from a class position.

The general charge of **substitutionism** covers all the accusations against Lenin by both Trotsky and Rosa Luxemburg. Rosa Luxemburg denounced Lenin for 'Blanquism' because he was trying to build a European type of party in advance of the social and political development of the Russian working class. In *Marxism versus Dictatorship* she wrote that the kind of organisation Lenin was proposing had nothing to do with the needs of the Russian situation, since the Social Democrats did not have the political raw materials which would only be produced by bourgeois society. The unification of the working masses would come not from their own aspirations for unity, but initially as a response to the unification of the bourgeoisie: it was as a result of the actual capitalist relations of production that it formed into a class conscious of its own interests. Because of the backwardness of the country, the Russian proletariat had not developed fully. She added that the revolution, which was certain to break out in Russia, was not a proletarian but a bourgeois revolution, and this made a radical difference to the conditions of social struggle. As the Social Democratic party had been established in Russia before the bourgeoisie had control of government, the

problem of organisation was radically different from that in an advanced capitalist country. Lenin was in a sense doing away with stages, going too fast for the self maturation of the working class by preparing and organising for its socialist tasks before the economic tasks were carried out. Lenin's reply was that they must not erect a Chinese Wall between the two stages, and that the revolutionary process, seen as a totality, made it imperative to keep in view the final objective: the establishment of proletarian power.

In **Permanent Revolution**, Trotsky states that by 1903 he had developed the main elements of his theory and already saw the coming revolution as proletarian. But this was precisely why he thought Lenin's plan a dangerous aberration, and his 'substitutionism' the more intolerable as the proletariat had already, in the course of a powerful strike wave, given proof of its political maturity. The 1905 revolution was to confirm him in his opinion. The Russian working class already had a highly developed class consciousness, and the type of organisation proposed by Lenin could only paralyse it. For different reasons, then, and with a different perspective, both Trotsky and Rosa Luxemburg extolled the spontaneity of the masses — he on the grounds that their level of consciousness made such an outrageously sectarian type of organisation superfluous, and she with the argument that the working class could not yet support such a party. Both found this type of organisation abhorrent, and from their differing standpoints came to similar conclusions. According to Rosa Luxemburg, Lenin's ultra-centralist tendencies were dangerous, for he forgot that organisation, advances in consciousness and the struggle itself were not distinct phases mechanically separated from each other, as in the Blanquist movement, but the various aspects of a single process. By putting up barriers between the party and the proletariat and subjecting party members to blind obedience, Lenin could only stifle the movement of the working class itself, as long as the conditions were not right for the formation of a strongly centralised party; and even apart from this, centralism was only a **tendency**, which became reality only in step with the development and political education of the masses in struggle. The strikes of 1896, 1901 and 1903 had been stages in the spontaneous political development of the masses, and showed that they did not need the kind of party conceived of by Lenin, which ran the grave risk of going beyond the control of its base and degenerating like German social democracy.

Rosa Luxemburg believed it was wrong to think that the absolute power of a central committee acting under some kind of mandate could be 'temporarily' substituted for the still unrealisable control of the majority of workers in the party, or that the public control of the working masses over the party organisations could be replaced by the control of the central committee over the activities of the proletariat. Trotsky for his part thought that the Russian workers were conscious enough to control their leaderships. But he took Rosa Luxemburg's position a stage further in warning against the dangers of refusing to build a broadly based organisation: 'Lenin's method', he said, 'led to the organisation of the party (in a small committee) beginning to substitute for the party as a whole; then the central committee is substituted for the whole organisation, and finally a "dictator" is substituted for the central committee.' Both the 1904 pamphlet from which this quotation comes, and Rosa Luxemburg's attack, show that the two revolutionary leaders failed to understand the relationship between the vanguard and the masses that Lenin had analysed in **What is to be Done?** Moreover, because they rejected not centralism itself but too much centralism, they could only attack Lenin's ideas at a sub-theoretical level, denouncing him for thirsting after personal power and for throwing out the most venerable collaborators on **Iskra**.

In **What is to be Done?**, Lenin argued that the spontaneity of the masses 'in essence, represents nothing more nor less than consciousness in an **embyonic form**'; but that the working class cannot on its own become conscious of the irreconcilable opposition between its own interests and the whole social and political order, and that 'Social Democratic

consciousness' has to be brought **from the outside**. The proletariat is 'spontaneously' trade unionist, not able to transform its own economic struggles into political struggles, and therefore any 'cult of spontaneity' would reinforce the hold of bourgeois ideology. 'Social democratic consciousness... would have to be brought from without' (19) to the proletariat. In that sense, as Lukacs says, the party is 'the tangible embodiment of proletarian class consciousness.' (20)

One of the party's main tasks was to educate the proletariat, to take it beyond the economic limitations of economist 'spontaneity', and raise the political consciousness of the masses, not lower the party's ideological level to theirs. This required the party to be powerful, coherent and politically stable, to carry out both the Social Democratic and trade union tasks. Not only was the proletariat unable, even in the sharpest revolutionary struggles, to formulate clearly the political objectives it fought for, but it 'forgot' in periods of ebb what had been gained in a few months or days. In this sense the party was also the memory of the proletariat. Only a highly disciplined party could maintain a revolutionary perspective through all the ebbs and flows of history, without foundering in the deviations opened up by the influence of classes in alliance with or opposed to the proletariat.

Not only had Trotsky failed to grasp the basic idea of **What is to be Done?**, he had failed to understand the nature of the organisation Lenin proposed to establish. This is why his accusations at the 1903 congress were quite beside the point. In **A Letter to a Comrade on our Organisational Tasks** in 1902 (21), Lenin had described in the greatest detail how the working class must organise going from the formation of the party to its ultimate victory. It was clear that such organisation had nothing to do with conspiracy. Trotsky had forgotten the diversity of the organisms which had to be set up to encompass the working class, and in particular that 'the Party must be only the vanguard, the leader of the vast masses of the working class, the whole (or nearly the whole) of which works "under the control and direction" of the Party organisations, but the whole of which does not and should not belong to a "party"'. (22)

Trotsky did not take into consideration the dangers of opportunism which flowed from the Mensheviks' theory that anyone on strike could declare themselves a member of the party. He thereby confused the revolutionary instinct driving the proletariat into strikes, and even insurrections, with clear political consciousness; and the class consciousness the proletariat could gain through struggle, with socialist consciousness. It was not that he denied the role of the party: this is apparent in the analysis he made after 1905 of the relationship between the St. Petersburg Soviet and the RSDLP. The Soviet was an assembly which emerged organically from the proletariat in the course of the struggle for power. This embryo of the revolutionary government was the fruit quite simply of the class instinct of the proletariat, and the focus in which all revolutionary forces were concentrated. But it was only able to take the struggle as far as it did because from the beginning it felt the all-powerful influence of the Social Democracy. It was in the Soviet that the Social Democratic organisation, which could now put into practice all the advantages that Marxism taught it, met up with the revolutionary instincts of the working class.

It was not therefore over a question of principle that Trotsky opposed Lenin: in demanding that the party should have a broader, more elastic base he simply put forward a different view of where revolutionary theory, of which the party was the bearer, joined up with the 'spontaneous' consciousness of the working masses. Theoretically, he did not reject political organisation or believe that social forces could shape history directly, but in practical terms the consequences of his view of organisation were very dangerous and worked against his principles. Rejecting what he thought on Lenin's part was an over-exaggeration of centralism at the expense of democracy in practice, he could not see that his own organisational perspectives, in reality if not in intention, went against the Bolshevik theory of



party-building.

After the 1903 congress neither Lenin nor Trotsky could understand how the debate around the first paragraph of the statutes had become so important as to threaten to split the party. Since Lenin's opponents could not deny that the main tasks of the party were to educate the proletariat, show it the real goal of its struggles and organise it for the final battle, he believed that the conflict would die down of its own accord once the Mensheviks realised the practical implications of these tasks. If, however, the theories of the Mensheviks did not remain a dead letter, if they persevered in error, they would open wide the gates of the party to petty bourgeois opportunists who were happy to be sympathisers of the Social Democratic Party, but not to work in one of its organisations. They could then only move further and further away from a proletarian political line, and from the theoretical ideas underlying it. The subsequent evolution of the Mensheviks was an overwhelming proof — were any needed — of Lenin's political clear-sightedness, and of the good grounds he had for intransigence on organisational questions.

The factional struggle over organisational questions at this point cut across the polemic over whether there was to be a bourgeois revolution or the dictatorship of the proletariat. Refusing to build a revolutionary party such as Lenin conceived of meant pushing the socialist revolution back into the indefinite future. The Mensheviks turned to the theory of revolution by stages to justify their opportunist slide towards the liberal bourgeoisie. **They were unable to raise themselves above the political horizon of the radicalised petty bourgeoisie.** Their mechanistic counter-position of centralism and democracy within the party was paralleled by their counter-position of democratic and socialist tasks, which in this particular situation would have to be carried out simultaneously. Stretching out a hand to the liberal bourgeoisie, their organisational opportunism merged into political opportunism. Under cover of the stages theory of revolution, they made every effort to get the Cadets into power.

Trotsky refused to follow them in this, and constantly argued that the coming revolution must be proletarian. But he would not join the Bolsheviks either, convinced as he was that Leninism was 'incompatible with the organisation of workers into a political party.' (23) His view of the party, based on Martov's document to the 1903 congress at which

the RSDLP split, led him to think that Lenin (against whom he used harsh language) was quite wrong, and to **pose as the champion of unity** — the more so because after all the Bolsheviks also supported the theory of revolution by stages. Later, in 1921, when Olmsky hypocritically asked him if he thought it would be a good thing to publish certain documents on his opposition to Lenin, he wrote back: 'I was quite wrong in my assessment of the Menshevik faction: I overestimated their revolutionary potential and thought it possible to isolate and defeat the right wing. But I made this basic error because I assessed both the Menshevik and Bolshevik factions from the standpoint of permanent revolution and the dictatorship of the proletariat, while at that period both Bolsheviks and Mensheviks held the position of bourgeois revolution and democratic dictatorship. I did not believe the differences separating the factions to be so deep and hoped... that the advance of the revolution itself would lead them to accept the platform of permanent revolution and the conquest of power by the working class, and this did happen in part in 1905.' The main reason, however, that Trotsky went on reiterating his vain appeals for reunification, was that before 1917 he was unable to see that the debate over bourgeois or proletarian revolution was fading in significance compared to the concrete preparation of the latter, and that **in this respect Lenin was right to say he belonged with the Mensheviks, and to see only empty phrase-mongering in his revolutionary proclamations.** It was pointless to repeat that the dictatorship of the proletariat was in sight if he refused to break with those who regarded this perspective as a bogey to be carefully concealed from the bourgeois 'democratic' forces.

In the pages of the Vienna *Pravda*, Trotsky went on and on publishing appeals for unity. *Pravda* pledged itself 'in all its activity **constantly to respect** above factional differences, the general principle of the **unity of the class struggle** which is obligatory on all of us. We have nothing but our revolutionary unity to oppose to the power of the blood-thirsty enemy.' Holding such a view, he was again unable to understand Lenin's organisational principles when, in 1907-8, the problem of party unity was raised in a new, acute form. The period could only be described as 'inter-revolutionary', a phase of transition to a new wave of revolution still stronger than that of 1905. There were important political conclusions to be drawn from this period of relative calm in the class struggle, in which the proletariat had still

not recovered from the defeat and the revolutionary forces and their vanguard had suffered brutal repression.

The autocracy had been forced to take a constitutional form, if of a limited kind, and the right wing of the Mensheviks claimed that the hour had come to liquidate the clandestine organisation. The left of the Bolshevik faction, on the other hand, thought it more than ever necessary to concentrate on clandestine activity. Lenin, and also Trotsky, thought that the time had come to combine legal and illegal action. But while Lenin was under attack from both the left 'Otzovists' and the right liquidationists, Trotsky attempted once more to resolve the crisis without expulsions or splits. He claimed that unification could come about through the political struggle, that 'both deviations must be defeated by broadening and deepening the work of Social Democracy in every field of the proletarian class struggle, and by denouncing the danger of either deviation' (*Pravda* no. 12, 1910). Lenin replied that it was not a matter of reconciling persons, groups or institutions, but of having a party line, a political and ideological orientation, and a content to the work.

For Lenin once again what was at issue was the class line, the effectiveness of the revolutionary struggle. The only way of reunifying the party was to carry through the debate, not to hold back from it for fear of breaking a unity which in fact no longer existed. Trotsky's conciliationist stand, whether he liked it or not, put him in the same camp as the deviationists. 'Otzovism' and liquidationism alike had to be wiped out, leaving aside people, groups and institutions 'which disagree with that policy or do not carry it out.' Trotsky took the 'standpoint of a matchmaker' (24) by attempting to make reconciliations without looking for the roots of their deviations in the nature of the period. Deep changes both in the workers movement and in the composition of the vanguard were brought about by the objective conditions, which inevitably resulted in deviations, the new influence of the bourgeoisie producing a kind of semi-liberalism in some and semi-anarchism in others. The party had to struggle on both fronts if it was not to be diverted from its final goal. Trotsky's eleventh hour diplomacy, his attempt to preserve party unity at all costs, in order, as he thought, not to compromise the proletarian perspective, only weakened the position of the organisation: by trying to avoid the exclusion of the liquidators at any price, he was objectively working for their policies. He failed to see that if Lenin got rid of the Otzovists, the Mensheviks could not expel the liquidationists without consigning themselves to oblivion.

Lenin regarded the immediate task of the party as being the organisation of much apparently uninspiring work, using all the legal and semi-legal institutions which were the property of the Duma, while maintaining, even in this field, all the revolutionary traditions of Social Democracy, the watchwords of its heroic recent past, its spirit of intransigence towards opportunists and reformists. It would be a dangerous time in which firm organisational principles were more than ever necessary, and if Trotsky would not recognise the correctness of Lenin's position, which was no more than resolute class politics, he would quite simply be a traitor to the party. The 'crisis of party unity' had confirmed Trotsky's political inconsistency, and he had become 'the hero and sworn advocate of the liquidators and Otzovists, with whom he agrees on nothing theoretically, but in everything practically'. (25) He did not see that no concessions were possible without compromising the party line, and by taking up conciliationism he became the prisoner of the Mensheviks in the unhappy experience of the August 1912 bloc — the last attempt at reconciliation, in which the Bolsheviks refused to participate.

Lenin's 'hardness' was based on the same considerations of political effectiveness as his writing of the 1903 statutes, which alone made the party 'capable of immediately adjusting its interpretation to the ever-changing situation'. Otherwise it would have lagged behind events, followed instead of led, lost contact with the masses and disintegrated. The only way for the party to 'become an instrument of this totality' was 'the strictest party discipline and the strictest

ideological cohesion'. (26) Trotsky later admitted that Lenin was 'completely right' on this score.

It is the theory of organisation that puts any set of theories claiming to be based on Marxism to the test. Once again it was Lukacs who wrote that it fell to Lenin to take the step over the threshold between theory and practice, which also, it must be remembered, represented a theoretical advance, from the abstract to the concrete. The building of the revolutionary party was the immediate corollary of his theoretical and political perspectives. Trotsky failed in this respect. He refused to recognise that Lenin was organising the party of revolution, while he, by refusing to break with the Mensheviks, was helping to build the reformist party. As Deutscher has shown, his policy of conciliation merely made him a treacherous enemy in the eyes of the Bolsheviks and a dubious ally for the Mensheviks.

Lukacs wrote, again in his *Lenin*, that the Leninist conception of the party marked a violent break with the fatalistic and mechanistic vulgarisation of Marxism. Just as socialist consciousness was not the mechanical product of the class situation of the proletariat, of its position in the relations of production, so the revolution was not the inevitable consequence of the ripening of objective conditions. If the revolutionary forces were unprepared, the revolutionary situation could hang fire for a whole period. But the ambiguity of the period appeared to Lenin to justify the separation, from a theoretical point of view, of the revolution into two distinct stages; and in this respect Trotsky went further in breaking with the mechanical relationship established between economy and politics. But his attitude on the question of organisation was based paradoxically on this 'fatalism' which bred spontaneism, and which expressed itself with him in an overestimation of the class consciousness of the proletariat. It is therefore clear that there were gaps in the theoretical schemas of both Trotsky and Lenin; and that while both of them broke with an economic conception of Marxism, they were working on very different — though in the last analysis, complementary — terrains. It is absolutely necessary to understand this if one is to analyse Trotsky's position after the revolution, and especially after the death of Lenin, when Stalin and his 'theoreticians' were to give a purely Menshevik interpretation to Leninism.

To be concluded

1. *Results and Prospects*, in *Permanent Revolution and Results and Prospects*, London (New Park), 1962, p188
2. *History of the Russian Revolution*, London, 1965, p26.
3. *The Development of Capitalism in Russia*, Moscow, 1956, p173.
4. *Results and Prospects*, pp173 and 174.
5. *Permanent Revolution*, London (New Park), 1962, p9.
6. *Results and Prospects*, p169.
7. *Revolutionary Struggle and Liberal Brokerage*, *Collected Works*, vol. 8, Moscow ed., pp489 and 493.
8. *The Victory of the Cadets and the Tasks of the Workers Party*, *ibid.*, vol 10, p219.
10. *Results and Prospects*, pp 197-198.
11. *Collected Works*, vol. 11, p372.
12. *ibid.*, vol. 8, *Social Democracy and the Provisional Revolutionary Government*, pp 283, 280 and 292.
13. *ibid.*, vol. 8, *The Proletariat and the Peasantry*, p231.
14. p66.
15. London (NLB), 1970, pp11-12.
16. *ibid.*, p25.
17. See Ernest Mandel, *The Leninist Theory of Organisation*, (IMG).
18. *op. cit.* p26.
19. Moscow ed., p30.
20. *op. cit.*, p27.
21. *Collected Works*, vol. 6.
22. *ibid.*, vol. 6, *Second Speech in the Discussion on the Party Rules*, p502.
23. Letter from Trotsky to Cheidze, April 1913.
24. *Op. cit.*, vol. 16, *Notes of a Publicist*, p.213.
25. *ibid.*, vol. 16, *An Open Letter to all pro-Party Social-Democrats*, p339.
26. Lukacs, *op. cit.*, p35.

The National Movements in Euskadi and Catalonia

by RICHARD CARVER

Euskadi (the Basque Country) and Catalonia have been in the vanguard of the recent upsurge of struggles by the minority nationalities of Western Europe. As yet, however, no analysis has appeared in English, either of the history of these national struggles or of their theoretical implications. This article is an attempt to begin such an analysis within the context of the debate on nationalism opened by Alan Freeman's article in the last issue of *International*. As such it has a dual focus: firstly to provide information and analysis on the specific history of Euskadi and Catalonia (unfortunately only of the national movements themselves — a history of the workers' movement would require another article in itself); and secondly to situate them in the context of the theoretical questions raised by Freeman's article.

Freeman's article was a welcome start to a debate on the question of the Western European national minorities. Quite

apart from the excellent material on the relationship of the democratic and socialist tasks of the revolution and on workers' democracy, he presents an analysis of the formation of the European states with which I largely agree. I wish to emphasise this **general** area of agreement because I nevertheless believe that the formation of the Spanish state falls outside the schema which Freeman constructs.

One final note: this article deals not with the national question within the Spanish state as a whole but specifically with Catalonia and Euskadi. This is because I consider that the national movement in Galicia and national/regional aspirations in Valencia, the Balearic Islands, Andalusia and an increasing number of regions are **typologically distinct** from the movements in Euskadi and Catalonia. Consequently they fall more readily into the general pattern of Western European national and regional movements.

1. The National Question and the Spanish State

Marxists and the nation

In his pamphlet *Marxism and the National and Colonial Question*, written in 1913, Stalin made his celebrated definition of the nation as: 'A historically evolved, stable community of language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up, manifested in a community of culture.'

This pamphlet — and this definition of the nation — has generally been accepted as a definitive statement of the Bolshevik position. In his biography of Stalin, Trotsky suggested that the work had been ghosted by Lenin since it was 'the only piece of serious Marxist writing Stalin had ever contributed to the arsenal of Bolshevik theory'. [1] Even today Stalin's work is quoted approvingly in the literature of the Fourth International. [2] In several crucial respects, however, this pamphlet does **not** correspond to the Leninist position. For example, there is no distinction made between the nationalism of the oppressed and oppressor nations, the right to unification of 'non-territorial' nations is denied, and so on. [3] For the purpose of this article I will confine my critique to some comments on the question of the definition of the nation to show that it is from the Leninist, rather than

the Stalinist position that the correct tactics for the national struggle can be deduced.

Lenin never laid down any dogmatic criteria for the formation of a national state. He specifically distanced himself from Engels' conception of 'non-historic' nations which is mirrored in the quotation from Stalin. He criticised Rosa Luxemburg for her economism in maintaining that because Poland was economically unified with Russia no political independence was possible. He polemicalised most fiercely against the Austro-Marxists' psychological conception of the national character which substituted 'cultural-national autonomy' for the right to self-determination. Yet all these errors appear in Stalin's formulation which has been maintained by much of the Trotskyist movement.

For Stalin — as for Engels — there are a series of characteristics which have to have been 'historically evolved' before a nation qualifies for self-determination. Otto Bauer, in one of his more enlightened moments, remarked to the effect that a nation (like the Czechs) which had not had a history did not necessarily have no future. Stalin's definition, on the other hand, encompasses the positions of both Luxemburg and the Austro-Marxists by laying down economic and 'psychological' criteria for self-determination and establishing a territorial criterion which Lenin specifically argued against. [4] The irony is that not only do the Western European minorities not match up to Stalin's criteria, but neither do many of the Eastern European nations with which he was concerned!

The crucial point is that national oppression, which is primarily **political** in character, is designed precisely to

prevent the evolution of a 'stable community' of national activity. What differentiated Lenin from all his critics, both left and right, prior to 1917 was that he situated national oppression at a relatively autonomous political level and saw the central question as the denial of the right to form a state. To erect a set of inflexible, ahistorical criteria, and thus deny the relative autonomy of this question from considerations of economic dependence, cultural aspiration and so on, is to run directly counter to the positions developed by Lenin.

Ortzi, in his book on Basque nationalism, argues that 'the nation is not an essence but . . . a social praxis'. [5] Although I do not accept Ortzi's argument in its totality, this would seem to be a good working definition. It is necessary to avoid the subjectivism of the Catalan, Ventura Gassol — 'We are Catalans because we want to be' [6] — but at the same time we must supplement long-term historical criteria with considerations such as the existence of a national political movement and a national political consciousness. To take a concrete example, Euskadi has a clear territorial identity but its language is spoken by less than half the population and its entire economic life is bound up with the Spanish state as a whole. Yet Euskadi exists as a social praxis, as a political framework for the activities of various classes whether or not they adhere to the nationalist movement. It is **this** which leads socialists to defend the **political-democratic** right to self-determination of the Basque people, completely distinctly from any question of cultural or economic autonomy.

Finally, a point which will be developed later. It is only by maintaining such a flexible definition of the nation and by insisting on the relatively autonomous political character of the right to self-determination that a distinction can be made between support for that right and support for the ideology and political formations of **nationalism**. Any 'psychological' definition of the nation, like Stalin's, must eventually return to the problematic of Bauer and the Austro-Marxists (and, curiously, of Luxemburg) who defined the nation in cultural terms and were thus able to sacrifice the right to self-determination on the altar of cultural-national autonomy. It is a paradox, but nevertheless true, that this apparently complete understanding of the character of national oppression should entail the denial of the democratic rights of the oppressed nation.

Euskadi, Catalonia & the Spanish State.

The first bourgeoisies to establish national market states — the British and the French — had a clear relationship to the small and generally underdeveloped minority nationalities which stood in their way. Alan Freeman quite correctly points to 'the brutal suppression of minority languages and culture'. Thus the integration of Scotland into the United Kingdom followed closely upon the revolution of 1688, while the capture of state power in France in 1789 heralded a period of the suppression of national minorities. This was greatly assisted by the defection of the incipient minority national bourgeoisies to the side of the state. Yet these national unifications took place in a qualitatively earlier period than the formation of the other large European bourgeois states. Germany, Italy and Spain only consummated their union in the second half of the nineteenth century when the ascent of the industrial bourgeoisie was well under way. In Germany and Italy this was achieved under the impetus of the most dynamic sections of the bourgeoisie forcing unification: in Germany the military-agrarian capitalism of Prussia, in Italy the industrial capitalism of Piedmont.

In Spain, however, the situation was more complex. Unlike Germany and Italy the differences within the state were of a more national than regional character. For example, there was no language common to all the Iberian peoples. Most importantly, the driving force in the bourgeois revolution in Spain did not correspond to the political and administrative centre of the old absolutist state. In the first half of the nineteenth century it was only Catalonia which had an industrial bourgeoisie on the European model. By the

second half of the century it was joined by the Basque bourgeoisie. As Freeman points out, the formation of the minority nationalities was primarily a function of mercantile capital. [7] However, in Spain, unlike most other countries of Western Europe, the formation of industrial capital corresponds **geographically** to the centres of mercantile capital. For example, in Euskadi the early stages of the accumulation of capital were based upon land rents and seaborne trade (primarily with Britain) subsequently augmented by the export of iron ore. The economy built upon this accumulation was entirely externally oriented. Thus the iron and steel industry was developed through the import of English carbon rather than that of neighbouring Oviedo, Leon and Palencia. From the beginning, the Basque industrialisation was characterised by the partnership of native and foreign companies in mining, iron and steel, railways and shipbuilding.

The Spanish state was therefore distinguished by the existence of at least three distinct industrial bourgeoisies within its boundaries — Euskadi, Catalonia and Madrid in an incipient form — each with its distinct rhythm of development. The Catalan bourgeoisie was built upon a manufacturing textile industry with aspirations which did not, for the moment, extend beyond its own borders, the Basque was expansive and potentially imperialist, while the Madrid bourgeoisie found its development closely tied to political vicissitudes and financial speculation at the administrative centre.

According to Freeman:

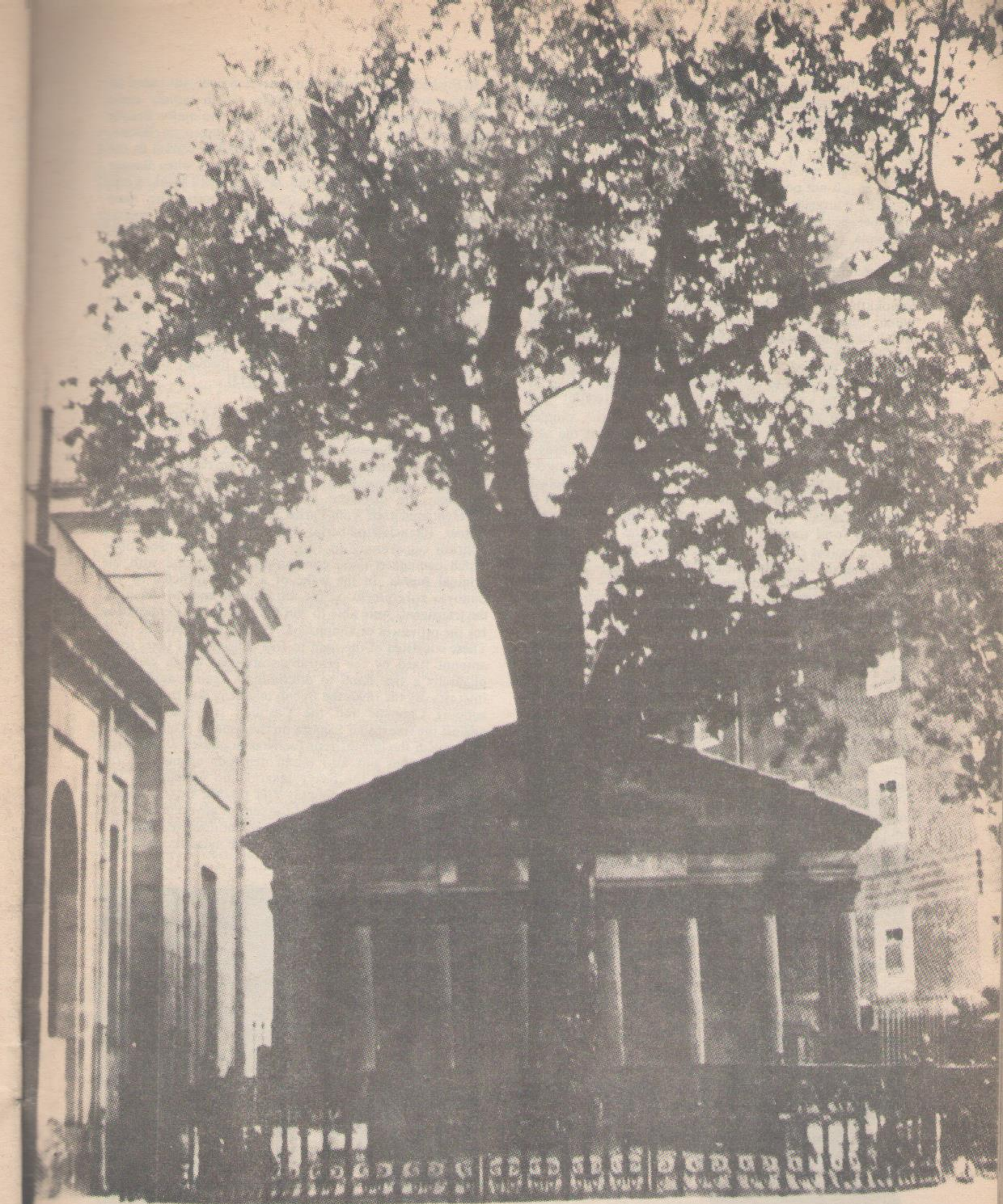
'Where the bourgeoisie faced an absolutist state, it prolonged its autonomous role for as long as it could and developed projects for separation and political autonomy: as with Catalonia, the Basque country, many nations of Great Russia and so on.' [8]

However the crucial question is not the **absolutist** character of the state, but the internal differentiation of the bourgeoisie on national lines and the central role played by the peripheral bourgeoisies in the execution of the bourgeois revolution. Thus the important question concerns the relative level of development of the bourgeois revolution in the minority nationality, although it must be admitted that this is at least partially connected with the entrenchment of an aristocracy and its ideology at the centre. But the comparison with Great Russia is an apt one, since, like the Ukraine, Catalonia and Euskadi are nations of a very different formation from Brittany, Occitanie, Wales and so on. In the latter cases the national struggle of recent years has been primarily a product of the contradiction between the level of wealth which they create for the central bourgeoisie and the relative impoverishment of the nation itself. In Catalonia and Euskadi, on the other hand, the national movement is rooted in their **dominant** role in the bourgeois revolution.

Freeman continues:

.....what went on was a more or less convergent historical process, whose end result was a settled system of bourgeois states, but a system stabilised by the desertion of the bourgeoisies of the small nations and their fusion to form large, unified national blocks operating within the state boundaries of the West European powers, each containing within itself suppressed but not destroyed national communities and institutions.' (emphasis in original) [9]

But this is precisely what did **not** happen in the Spanish state. Freeman fails to distinguish between the different periods of the formation of bourgeois states and consequently ignores the fact that a 'settled bourgeois state' has never been established in Spain. The relative underdevelopment of Spain and the industrial development of its peripheral nations posed an insuperable obstacle to this unification in anything other than a formal sense. It is true that Basque finance capital was subsequently integrated into the Spanish bourgeoisie and that the Catalan industrial bourgeoisie was prepared to acquiesce in the rigidly unitary dictatorships of Primo de Rivera and Franco. It is also true that the Lliga Regionalista, the party of the Catalan bourgeoisie, long held aspirations towards becoming the



The tree of Gernika, traditional symbol of the Basque nation

Spanish Piedmont and subordinating the Spanish state to itself. Nevertheless, during the period of the formation of the Spanish bourgeois state, there were irreconcilable contradictions within the bourgeoisie itself which guaranteed the impossibility of creating anything other than a multinational state, not just in a latent, but in an actual sense.

Just as it is not possible to talk about an undifferentiated 'Spanish' bourgeoisie, so too important distinctions must be made between the bourgeoisies of Euskadi and Catalonia. In Catalonia, as was pointed out, industrialisation came earlier than in Euskadi and on the basis of a textile industry organised primarily on manufacturing, as distinct from industrial, productive relations. The significance of this is that it provided a lasting impediment to the formation of a native Catalan finance capital. This is the central problem which faces the Catalan bourgeoisie up to the present day. At the turn of the century the dominance of the textile industry — 70% both of production and of capital invested — made it particularly vulnerable to the colonial defeats of 1898 and the crises of overproduction of 1900-01 and 1908-09. [10] The repatriation of capital from the colonies led to a diversification, but the most important of the new industries, for example hydro-electric power and railways, were owned by external capital. Under the Primo dictatorship of the 1920s, when the important Suria-Cardona potash deposits were opened up, this too was under the control of external capital. [11] Again, under Franco, credit was withheld from Catalan companies and the weak Catalan banking system crushed. The Borsi (Free Stock Market) in Barcelona was closed and the big Madrid banks — Hispano-Americano, Central and Espanol de Credito — took over about twenty Catalan banks. In 1970 Barcelona only constituted 18% of the Spanish stock market and all control of credit to Catalan industry lay in Madrid. [12]

In the years prior to 1936 this central problem of the non-formation of Catalan finance capital expressed itself firstly as regionalism, with protectionism as its main plank, and subsequently, through the Lliga Regionalista (later Lliga Catalana), as 'regenerationism', the moulding of the Spanish state to meet its requirements. Federalism was incorporated as a means of mobilising popular support for this project. Prat de la Riba, the principal theoretician of the Lliga, argued for the need to make Catalonia the Spanish Piedmont. This involved the expansion of the Catalan market to encompass firstly the Aragonese Confederation and later the entire Spanish state. Here was another attempt to set up the Spanish national market/state, but on the Italian model based in Barcelona rather than Madrid.

In Euskadi, on the other hand, development was based on an expansive capital goods industry which rapidly came under the control of finance capital. The two major Basque banks, the Banco de Vizcaya and the Banco de Bilbao, evolved into the strongest section of finance capital in the Spanish state. From the turn of the century, when Basque iron ore production was 13.25% of the total world production with 6 million tons in exports, the main characteristic of Basque capitalism was the export of capital both inside and outside the Spanish state. By the 1930s Basque finance capital owned 48% of all hydro-electric plants and 57% of production, all the big railways, the municipal transport of Madrid, Barcelona and other big cities, a controlling interest in the Valencia metal industries and so on, as well as a monopoly control of all Basque industry. Even when England cut down its imports of iron ore from Euskadi (from 65% in 1913) in favour of African deposits, the Basque banks benefited through their controlling interest in the African mines! [13]

This domination of finance capital found a direct political reflection which diverged significantly from the Catalan experience. Following the Carlist wars, the *fueros*, the traditional regional rights of Euskadi, were removed in 1876. This led to the formation of a *fuera* party based upon the *jauntxos*, the displaced rural petty bourgeoisie, which differentiated itself from Carlist Traditionalism. The nascent Bilbao financial/industrial oligarchy latched onto this political opportunity to form a transigent *fuera* lobby which demanded fiscal concessions unconnected with the original *fueros*. In the wake of a defeat inflicted by the Cánovas government on the intransigent *jauntxo* deputies, the transigents were able to win the *Conciertos Económicos* for the provinces of Guipúzcoa, Vizcaya and Alava in 1878. These consisted of the right to free collection of taxes to an amount fixed by the central government which gave the oligarchy a free hand to discriminate against agricultural interests. By the 1890s the Bilbao oligarchy had moved on to support Cánovas and the Castilian latifundist interest against the free trader Sagasta on the issue of protectionism. In Euskadi the intransigent *fuera* organised anti-Sagasta demonstrations but also raised demands against the oligarchy to relieve the heavy taxation on agriculture. [14] Henceforth Basque monopoly and finance capital aligned itself fully with the politics of the central government, while the leadership of the national movement devolved upon the displaced, non-monopoly section of the industrial and rural bourgeoisie.



2. The National Movements in Euskadi and Catalonia

The Formation of the National Movements.

The first theoretical statement of Basque nationalism was made by Sabino Arana Goiri, the son of a wooden-ship builder and Carlist, displaced by the development of the steel industry. His politics coincided completely with Carlism except in his opposition to their *fuera* position. For Sabino Arana, the Carlist *fueros* were not traditional but a liberal Spanish concession. Instead he advocated a return to the pre-1839 ancient laws which applied to each of the four 'Spanish' Basque provinces. Race was the crucial component of the nation (the Basques were racially superior to the Spanish) and language the essential preservative factor. The class struggle was an unpleasant Spanish invention not native to Euskadi. His religious position was Traditionalist (Carlist) but he argued for the separation of Church and State with the ultimate subordination of the latter to the former: 'Nosotros para Euskadi, y Euskadi para Dios.' [15] ('We are for Euskadi and Euskadi for God.') It was Sabino Arana who invented the Basque flag. It was even he who invented the name *Euskadi* in preference to *Euskal-herria* (the Basque people) used by the Carlists. He set his face against the unholy trinity of Catalanism, which he denounced as *espanolista*, big capital and socialism.

In Catalonia the initial impulse for the national movement came from the dominant, non-monopoly section of the bourgeoisie, for the reasons already discussed. The ideology of the Lliga was sharply distinguished from that of Sabinian Basque nationalism by its regenerationist aspirations. Although the Lliga itself never fully discarded Traditionalism, the Catalan movement outgrew its Carlist origins more easily than the Basque. In Euskadi Carlism was the political expression of a wealthy, conservative peasantry. In Catalonia it was far more related to radical peasant unrest in the impoverished inland areas, which bore little correspondence with a movement of the bourgeoisie and landlords. [16]

A position which situated the national question on the level of the Spanish state was alien to pure Sabinian nationalism. But 1898 had its effects in Euskadi as well. It signalled the turn of a significant proportion of the industrial non-monopoly bourgeoisie towards Basque nationalism. This required a re-orientation on the part of the nationalists, consummated by Sabino Arana's last theoretical contribution before his death in 1903. He called for the formation of a nationalist party (Partido Nacionalista Vasco — PNV) to fight for autonomy **within the Spanish state**: 'The fatherland demands that we become *espanolistas*'. [17] Nevertheless, the formation of the PNV did not end the antagonisms of these two distinct social strata: the petty rural aristocracy and the middle bourgeoisie. Increasingly a distinction arose between the *pueros* — the separatist *jauntxos* — and the collaborationists—the regenerationist bourgeoisie. The latter, like the Lliga, supported the regenerationist government of Maura and grew closer to the liberal section of the financial oligarchy.

The boom of the war years benefitted both Basque and Catalan capital. The auxiliary industries of Euskadi upon which Basque nationalism was based shared in the profits of increased iron and steel exports. The Catalan export of cotton fabrics increased from 5,400 tons in 1914 to 17,300 tons the following year [19] This gave a corresponding boost to the regenerationist tendency in each country. The Lliga won the Mancomunitat in 1914. This was nothing more than the amalgamation of the four provincial councils of Catalonia, but represented the full extent of the Lliga's

autonomist aspirations. Similarly the Basque collaborationists (Comuni3n Nacionalista) formulated a minimum programme modelled on the Mancomunitat, which precipitated the split of the *pueros*, led by Sabino Arana's brother Luis.

However, two major factors led to the demise of regenerationism as the central thrust of the national movements. The first was the crisis of 1917. The massive price rises on the world market which had facilitated the boom in industrial exports also found a reflection within Spanish agriculture, giving rise to a sharp inflationary spiral. The crisis came to a head in 1917 under the dual pressure of the German blockade and the impact of the Russian Revolution on the working class. The military Juntas de Defensa threatened a right-wing coup and their demands were accepted by the government. The Lliga supported demands from an Assembly of Parliamentarians for a Constituent Cortes and Catalan autonomy. Similarly the Comuni3n Nacionalista broke with its regenerationism and put forward its maximum programme of separation. But the Lliga pulled back from the brink when the united front of the anarchists (CNT) and the socialists (UGT) mounted a general strike on the demand for a Constituent Cortes. Camb3, the Lliga leader, took the unprecedented step of entering the government and supporting the repression. Another general strike in 1919 brought about a three year state of exception in Barcelona. The Lliga participated in the Somatent, a scab militia, and formed a yellow union, the Sindicato Libre, to perform strike-breaking functions.

The reaction of the Basque movement differed in that its break with regenerationism was permanent. Its attitude to the working class was more ambiguous since it, unlike the Lliga, counted on a significant proletarian vote. In Catalonia the immigration was easily integrated into the native working class for a number of reasons. Catalan is more widely spoken than Euskera and is relatively easy to learn. Indeed, the ideology of Catalan nationalism was a more genuine popular development than Basque nationalism, which went to great pains to invent the traditions which it supposedly represented. [19] But above all, in the anarcho-sindicalist CNT the Catalan and immigrant working class had an organisation which corresponded exactly to the needs of workers in small units of production and which was able to integrate the aspirations of the two sectors. Hence the Lliga was never able to mobilise significant working class support.

The PNV/Comuni3n Nacionalista, on the other hand, was able to capitalise on the rapid formation of the Basque working class from the native peasantry and Spanish immigrants, through its yellow union, the Solidaridad de Obreros Vascos (SOV). A section of the native working class, recently uprooted from its Carlist peasant origins, was very susceptible to an ideology which transposed its traditional beliefs onto a modern, industrial setting, via support for the medium and petty bourgeoisie. Although the PSOE (Socialist Party) maintained its hegemony in the Basque working class as a whole, the exacerbation of this racial division, particularly among tenant farmers who became day workers, frustrated unity at the base of the workers' movement for a long period. Indeed the failure of the PSOE to recognise the democratic national demands of the Basque workers left the way open for the PNV to capitalise on this aristocracy of labour mentality.

The second factor which pushed the nationalist movements decisively away from regenerationism was the emergence of a new social stratum which provided a base for those movements. In Euskadi in particular, the need for increased consumption led to the growth of the tertiary sector and of the bureaucracies of the state and of the monopolies. The functionaries of these sectors, the new middle classes, constituted a significant new base for the nationalist parties. Whereas in Italy and Germany, and in Spain itself, the intermediate layers of the peasantry, petty bourgeoisie and white-collar workers provided the mass base for radical reaction on a nationalist programme, in Euskadi and Catalonia such layers evolved a nationalism which was forced to differentiate itself from the reactionary aspirations of the central bourgeoisie, and ultimately to align itself with

the anti-fascist forces. The impetus for such a radicalisation came primarily not from the traditionally conservative peasantry and petty bourgeoisie but from the new middle class. In Euskadi the PNV regrouped around a separatist programme in 1921. In 1930 it fused with the *Comuni3n Nacionalista* again on a compromise programme which abandoned both regenerationism and immediate separatism, adopting a gradualist, autonomist line.

In Catalonia similar developments took place, but the role of the *Lliga* as the representative of the dominant fraction of the bourgeoisie necessitated an organisational break. The *Lliga* continued its orientation towards the Spanish state. Following its participation in the governments of 1917 and 1919, it supported the Primo de Rivera dictatorship, participated in the right-wing governments of 1931 and 1935 and ended up giving almost unanimous support to Franco in 1936. In 1921 *Acci3n Catalana* and *Estat Catal3* were formed, corresponding roughly to the political and military wings of radical Catalanism. [20] Both were petty bourgeois/middle class in composition and programme, though *Estat Catal3* had aspirations to a working class intervention. In 1931 they fused with a number of other radical Catalan groups to form the *Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya* (Republican Left of Catalonia). The *Esquerra* was never able to establish an organic link with the working class but it could count on the tacit support of the Workers' and Peasants' Bloc (Catalan Federation), the forerunner of the POUM, and, most importantly, the votes of the base of the abstentionist CNT. Its genuine mass base lay in the radical middle class and the poor peasantry, the *rabassaires*. It was with the support of these diverse strata that the *Esquerra* was able to sweep the board in the municipal elections of 1931 and win a 75% poll in the plebiscite for the Catalan autonomy statute in 1932.

The Spanish Revolution 1931-1939

It is necessary to differentiate strongly between the *Esquerra* and the PNV in the early years of the Second Republic. Despite the declaration of an independent Catalan Republic on April 14 1931, the *Esquerra* was always a Spanish republican party. Unlike the PNV it participated in the San Sebastian pact to set up the Republic and the granting of the autonomy statute in 1932 sealed its support. The PNV, on the other hand, seeking any alliance which would win autonomy, initially aligned itself with the Catholic right. It formed the Basque-Navarrese bloc of Cortes deputies with the Carlists specifically on the basis of winning such a statute. For the latter, however, the crucial issue was religious independence from the anti-clerical Madrid government. Carlist *fueros* was guided by the assumption that 'Africa begins in Madrid'. [21] The PNV, however, despite its clericalism and its continued support for the right in the Cortes, was prepared to compromise with the right wing of the PSOE and the republican government to produce a statute which decisively broke with the Integrist conceptions of Carlism. This statute, for the three provinces of Vizcaya, Guipuzcoa and Alava, was approved by a plebiscite in 1933, but the arrival of a right-wing government in the same year prevented its enactment on the grounds that in Alava, a Carlist stronghold, only 46% of the poll had been in favour of the statute. The effect of this was for the PNV to align itself increasingly with the opposition parties, particularly the *Esquerra*.

An important turning point came with the October movement of 1934, organised by the PSOE/UGT dominated *Alianza Obrera* against the entry of the crypto fascist CEDA into the government. The only success of the rising campaign came in Asturias, where the miners battled for weeks against the army before finally succumbing to brutal repression. The *Esquerra*, too, supported the rising and once more declared an independent Republic. But the abstention of the CNT doomed the rising in Catalonia to failure. The attitude of the PNV is less clear. The POUMist Arenillas claims that the PNV did support the October movement on the basis that the PSOE would grant the autonomy statute in return. [22] Ortz, on the other hand, quotes a PNV statement of October 4 calling for abstention. [23] What is clear is that the STV (formerly the SOV) did participate and that the strike

was 100% solid, though completely passive, in Euskadi. It is also clear that, after the defeat of Asturias, repression was directed not just at the STV and the *Alianza Obrera*, but at the PNV as well. The PNV took this opportunity to step up its attacks on the left and to dissociate itself from any subversive intentions.

The PNV, still not satisfied that the left would agree to the statute, did not join the Popular Front which came to power in 1936. It was only when the Cortes finally agreed to the implementation of the statute (enacted in October 1936) that the links between the PNV and the Popular Front grew closer. But this did not guarantee the automatic support of the PNV for the Republic when the army rose up in July. In Navarra the PNV attempted to maintain a neutral position, while in Alava the bulk of the party and the radical separatist *mendigoizales* went over to the fascist camp, enlisting in the Carlist *Requet3*. In Vizcaya and Guipuzcoa, the PNV stronghold, the ultimate support of the Basque nationalists for the Republic was not in doubt, since this was Republican held territory. Yet for a crucial few weeks the PNV refused to participate in the Popular Front committees which governed the provinces. It is unclear to what extent dual power existed in Euskadi in the summer of 1936, [24] but it is certain that the PNV played no part in the struggle until the formation of the *Juntas de Defensa* which supplanted the Popular Front committees, guaranteeing the maintenance of private property, an end to popular justice and the establishment of a militia system in which the PNV had overwhelming preponderance. For the sake of PNV support, the Popular Front parties were only too ready to accede to this reduction in their own power.

It is not possible here to analyse the regime which was initiated by the formation of the Provisional Government of the autonomous Basque Republic in October 1936. A few observations must suffice. The government, headed by PNV leader Aguirre, was dominated by the PNV, with junior posts held by representatives of the Popular Front organisations chosen by Aguirre rather than their own parties. The attitude of the central government was ambivalent since it mistrusted the intentions of the PNV (rightly as it turned out), but the 'tolerant' Basque Catholic Republic was the showcase of Republican Spain, intended to entice France and Britain into breaking with non-intervention. Moves towards collectivisation were immediately reversed and confiscations from Franco supporters returned. Trade was completely free, with free export of capital and all losses guaranteed by the government at a nominal premium. Military equipment, on the other hand, was carefully channelled into the PNV battalions. Worker participation schemes demonstrated the socially concerned, paternalistic, Christian Democratic face of the regime.

The final demonstration of the PNV's commitment to the defence even of bourgeois democracy came after the fall of Guipuzcoa and Vizcaya. For some time the Basque leaders had been attempting to negotiate a surrender which would establish Italy as the guarantor of an autonomous Euskadi within fascist Spain. Finally an agreement was arrived at by the Basque and Italian troops in which the Basques surrendered their arms and themselves at Santona, refusing to continue the fight in Asturias. The Italians, of course, reneged on this agreement and delivered the Basque troops up to Franco.

The role of the *Esquerra* differed considerably from that of Basque nationalism by virtue of the more radical character of the party itself and the strength of the working class upsurge. Where the PNV was able to force the Popular Front to fall in behind its demands, the *Esquerra* found itself tail-ending the revolutionary process. For months the de facto government of Catalonia was in the hands of the Central Committee of Anti-fascist Militias, and the *Generalitat* (Catalan government) was powerless to say otherwise. Companys, the *Esquerra* leader and president of the *Generalitat*, told the CNT-FAI leaders Garcia Oliver and Durrutti: 'If you do not wish me to remain as President ... I shall become one soldier more in the struggle against fascism'. [25] The anarchists, unfortunately, declined the

offer. The Esquerra's non-committal approach paid dividends. In September the Central Committee of Anti-fascist Militias was dissolved and dual power ended with the agreement of those organisations theoretically committed to workers' power, the CNT and the POUM, which now entered an Esquerra dominated government. The Esquerra got crucial support from the PSUC, the nominally autonomous Catalan section of the Third International, which now controlled the Unió de Rabassaires and the UGT, the latter based almost exclusively on the petty bourgeoisie. While the strength of the workers movement was sufficient to push through a collectivisation decree, the Esquerra and the PSUC had enough weight to emasculate it. Only large industries were collectivised, the medium and petty bourgeoisie — the Esquerra base — remaining almost untouched. Decisively, the banks were not nationalised so credit was controlled entirely from the exterior, leading to a dramatic fall in the productive capacity of Catalan industry. The collective monopoly of agricultural distribution was deliberately undermined by the PSUC and Unió de Rabassaires, leading to independent distribution and speculation. [26]

However, the Esquerra's decisive turn came in May 1937. The Civil Guard, with the connivance of the Catalan government, provoked a working class upsurge which served as a pretext for the suppression of the POUM and the removal of the CNT from the central government. Ironically the Esquerra's defence of its class interests entailed an apostasy on the Catalan question. Companys' call for central government troops to put down the rising was the first reduction in Catalan autonomy. Within months the Esquerra was out of the Negrín government, which now resided in Barcelona, and the Generalitat, and with it the Esquerra, was reduced to a shadow.

The national question under Franco

The details of the Francoist oppression of the minority nations need not be recorded here, [27] except to note that the character of the repression to a great extent determined the character of the opposition. The atomisation of all workers' organisations meant that a collective opposition did not emerge for some years. When such an opposition did emerge it was not primarily concerned with national oppression. The suppression of Basque and Catalan language and culture meant that until the 1960s opposition was mainly centred in the sphere of individual action on cultural questions. Slogan painting and the displaying of the national flag were the main forms of external activity. The Catalans later mounted some more adventurous actions:

singing the Catalan national hymn at a concert attended by Franco, and successfully boycotting the anti-Catalan *Vanguardia* newspaper. [28]

The Basques managed to mount demonstrations on Aberri Eguna, the national day, from 1947, but the salient feature of both national struggles until the 1970s has been the eclipse of the traditional nationalist organisations. Christian Democratic parties, like the Social Democratic, cannot exist outside the framework of a pluralist bourgeois democracy which allows them to exercise their electoral weight. Both the PNV and the Esquerra devoted their energies to intrigues and manoeuvres in their respective governments-in-exile which bore little relation to events in the interior. The PNV evolved from a fanatical pro-Americanism ('The interests of America are those of Humanity') [29] to a European federalism after the reintegration of Spain by the imperialist powers during the Cold War. The Bayonne Pact of 1945 reaffirmed support for the autonomy statute and the 1936 programme of the Basque government. The Communist Party was specifically excluded from this, as the PNV, like the PSOE, carefully cultivated a rabid cold war anti-communism. The only further action it undertook in the interior was sporadic CIA-financed guerilla activity in 1946.

The Catalans, too, organised the Generalitat-in-exile with the National Council of Catalan Democracy acting fairly independently in the interior. But only the PSUC retained its organisational structures intact and was able to capitalise upon the simultaneous demise of the Esquerra and the CNT to embark upon building the mass organisation which it has today. Petty-bourgeois Catalanism, with a perspective which did not extend far beyond cultural activities, was nevertheless able to build a base in the University of Barcelona through the evolution of *Catòlics Catalans* led by Jordi Pujol. Pujol and his organisation played a central role in the middle class Catalan movement. Pujol's political education ranges from torture at the hands of Franco's police to successful ventures into Catalan banking. In 1964, for the first time, a mass Catalan demonstration was mounted in Barcelona, since when overt activity has increased. This, combined with Pujol's successful financial ventures and the emergence of legal Catalan newspapers, has assisted in the formation of a new middle class Catalan current, the *Catalan Democratic Convergence*. It is this organisation which is the main Catalanist representative in the Catalan Assembly formed by the PSUC in 1971 as an embryo Popular Front. The CDC differs from the Catalan nationalism of the 1930s in its specifically Christian Democratic content, yet it still remains to the left of the



The scene after one of the most dramatic operations carried out by ETA-V — the assassination of Spanish premier Carrero Blanco

PNV in its readiness to enter into a front with the workers parties. But at the same time it, and the Catalan Assembly, are tied to the perspective of the '30s — autonomy rather than self-determination.

Another current has re-emerged which has to be situated in the Catalanist context, although it plays no part in the Assembly. This is the regenerationism of the big Catalan bourgeoisie. It even seems possible that the Lliga or some equivalent will be revived. This development began at the end of the immediate post-war boom when the index of Catalan cotton exports (85% of Spain's total cotton cloth production) dropped from 100 in the period 1946-50 to 31.1 in 1951-55. In 1955 Catalan industrialists met in Gerona to formulate a programme of demands including import controls, free export and subsidies for Catalan industry. The only concession they won from Franco was his admission that 'Catalonia is an important factor in Spain's greatness.' [30] The continued discrimination against Catalan industry and the pressure of a growing mass Catalan movement led to the formation by the big bourgeoisie of *Omnium Cultural*, an umbrella organisation which sponsored a vigorous Catalan language campaign, leading to its closure. In the late 1960s there emerged a 'Barcelona School' of economists which analysed the conversion of a 20,000 million peseta Catalan trade surplus into a balance of payments deficit by the Madrid government and criticised the reduction in infrastructure spending. [31] Thus in recent years there has been cultivated a '*Catalanismo domesticado*' which fits happily into the regime's liberalisation project.

Euskadi ta Askatasuna [32]

The principal differential factor between contemporary Basque and Catalan nationalism is clearly ETA. Whereas in Catalonia a reconstituted Christian Democratic movement is gaining ground with the loyal support of the Stalinists, in Euskadi the traditional Christian Democratic party remains marginal, at least until legalisation. One central reason for this is that the layers traditionally hegemonised by the PNV have now transferred their allegiance to ETA.

The formation of ETA in 1959 coincided with the period of the Stabilisation Plan. Non-monopoly industry was hard hit by the increased role of finance capital and foreign investment, a crisis which was accentuated by the government's anti-inflationary measures, particularly credit restrictions and increased interest rates. [33] Those industries which were more closely tied to the monopolies, for example in metallurgy, were generally rendered completely dependent upon them or absorbed by them. These developments had a very direct effect in radicalising a new layer of the industrial bourgeoisie. But even more importantly, the economic turn by the regime brought a further growth in the state and monopoly bureaucracies, qualitatively as important as that of 1900-1930, from which the Basque administrative layers were systematically excluded. It was from these strata that the early membership of ETA was drawn. The Basque countryside had experienced a process of re-ruralisation since 1939, with many industrial workers returning to the fields. From the late 1950's this trend was reversed. This re-proletarianisation was facilitated by the severe credit problems of the small peasantry and the rapid monopolisation of the processing industries.

It would be mistaken to draw too mechanical a relation between these developments and the evolution of ETA. The internalised accounts of Ortzi and Txabi tend to ignore the fact that until the late 1960s the organisation could not be said to be actively representative of any social stratum. Nevertheless it remains a useful generalisation to say that the political development of ETA should be seen primarily as an expression of this process of displacement within the bourgeoisie and proletarianisation within the intermediate strata.

ETA was formed out of the Ekin (Action) faction within the PNV. The original name is a good indication of the basis on which the split took place. Apart from the issue of religion, where ETA defined itself as aconfessional, the

principal difference with the PNV was over the latter's passivity and pacifism. With the example of Cuba and the all-pervading state violence before them, the early ETA leaders based their organisation on the need for patriotic violence against the principal manifestations of the Spanish state in Euskadi. The early actions mounted by ETA were almost uniformly unsuccessful and invited massive police repression. Ortzi suggests that the mere fact of ETA's existence was an important spur to mass resistance. In fact, that mass action was centred entirely on the organised working class for whom ETA was, at best, an irrelevance.

The new organisation soon found a theorist in Federico Krutwig, who developed an uneasy synthesis between third-worldist guerilla theory and the radical Sabinian nationalism of the 1920s and '30s. Equally importantly, José Echevarrieta further developed Mao's identification between national liberation and social liberation. By the Third Assembly in 1964, ETA had a more or less coherent body of theory defining it as an anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist organisation, in contradistinction to the bourgeois PNV, and had adopted Krutwig's theory of the revolutionary war and the identification of national and social liberation. The role of ETA within this strategy was nevertheless as a catalyst rather than a mass organisation. Also established at the Third Assembly was a parallel sympathisers organisation (OPA), whose main purpose was fund-raising. Workers were exhorted to join this rather than ETA. But despite these theoretical positions, the leadership which supported them remained largely in the exterior.

The interior leadership increasingly devolved upon a tendency which closely aligned itself to ESBA, the Basque section of the 'New Left' Popular Liberation Front (FLP). The '*felipes*' argued for a mass orientation, and, along with the PCE, favoured participation in the *sindicato* elections which was anathema to the ETA old guard. ETA's intervention was increasingly centred on the Workers Commissions, particularly the Guipuzcoa Provincial Workers Commission (COPG) which was won to a position of support for the right of self determination. Two tendencies evolved in opposition to the interior leadership. One was grouped around Krutwig on the basis of Third World 'revolutionary nationalism', the other led by Txillardegui, with a position of anti-Marxist culturalism. These tendencies allied at the Fifth Assembly (1967) to expel the leadership for its '*españolista liquidationism*.' This latter group called itself *ETA-berri* (subsequently *Komunistak*, and then MCE. It is now known as the *Movimiento Comunista*). It was the left tendency which dominated the remainder of the Assembly, with the culturalists subsequently splitting from the organisation.

The Fifth Assembly attempted to formulate a 'Basque revolutionary theory'. The central concept was '*el Pueblo Trabajador Vasco*' (Basque working people). This was defined as all those who suffered the double oppression of nationality and exploitation at the point of production. ETA saw its function as a structured nucleus which could synthesise the unformulated aspirations of the Basque working people into a 'national class consciousness' which would overcome the false duality of national liberation/social liberation. But more importantly, Krutwig borrowed from Truong Chinh the concept of the struggle on four fronts — political, economic, cultural and military — which initiated, for the first time, a structure which was capable of projecting guerrilla activity. Yet within these developments the contradictions of the organisation's class origins were becoming manifest. The Fifth Assembly represented a turn away from the socialist positions — albeit crudely formulated — of the former interior leadership. The prime enemy was still seen as the principal visible manifestations of the Spanish state — its repressive apparatus — rather than the Spanish bourgeoisie. Hence the instrumental role of the working class in resolving the question of national oppression was rejected, and with it the need for a revolutionary party to crystallise that movement. It was more the elemental upsurge of the Basque working class in the late 1960s than ETA's actions themselves which brought

about the spectacular gains made by the organisation.

The first period of successful guerilla activity, from 1967 to 1968, culminating in the execution of the police chief Manzanos in Irún, coincided with a period of intense activity by the working class (see below). It was principally for this reason that there was a mass response to the threats of death sentences on ETA militants in 1969 and at Burgos in 1970. If this was the apparent zenith of ETA's success, the period in which its stated role as catalyst of the mass movement appeared to be verified, nevertheless the mass upsurge had very direct effects on the organisation itself. José Echevarrieta initiated a workers front and the direction of the interior leadership again began to diverge from that of the 'milis' in the exterior. After the collapse of the COPG, the intervention was centred on the *Comités de Empresa*. These bodies took an abstentionist line in the *sindicatos*, and succeeded in outflanking the PCE, which was forced to join them.

This development became accentuated as arrests in 1969-70 depleted the leadership, which fell increasingly into the hands of Workers Front militants. 'La Carta a los Makos' in May 1970 crystallised the new orientation, arguing for the need to build the proletarian party across national lines, but still identifying the interests of the *abertzale* (patriotic) bourgeoisie with those of the proletariat. Hence the need to construct a National Front across class lines. Again this encountered two opposition tendencies, one composed of a network of Marxist discussion groups in the exterior — the *Células Rojas* — the other comprising the old Krutwig tendency, also in the exterior. At the Sixth Assembly that year, the interior leadership and the *Células Rojas* united to expel the old Fifth Assembly leadership:

'...for plotting and factional activity, putting the organisation in danger and holding petty bourgeois and liquidationist... positions which run counter to the interests of the working class and the Basque liberation struggle.' [34] The *Células Rojas* in their turn split from the Sixth Assembly, criticising (with justification) the petty bourgeois policy of the National Front.

ETA-V had a new embarrassment awaiting them when, during the Burgos trials, a group of leading ETA militants in Burgos prison produced a manifesto supporting ETA-VI. It argued for a class struggle orientation on the basis of solidarity with the peoples of the Spanish state, and the building of an anti-monopoly alliance against the Spanish oligarchy. Ironically though, it is ETA-V which has adopted these positions as its basic political programme, while still maintaining the need for guerrilla activity. The evolution of ETA-VI was away from the national front/anti-monopoly alliance, towards a break with class collaborationism and an understanding of the need to build the proletarian party on the level of the state. This was consummated by the victory of the Trotskyist tendency within the organisation and its fusion with the *Liga Comunista Revolucionaria* in 1973. The following quotation from the LCR/ETA-VI programme serves to demonstrate the distance which the ETA majority has travelled from petty bourgeois nationalism:

'On the one hand (the existence of national minorities) has contributed to the radicalisation of the masses against reactionary, centralist state power. But on the other hand, it has been used by the peripheral nationalist bourgeoisies to conceal, in the name of "national solidarity", its character as an exploiting class, and to divide the working class in the name of nationalist ideology.' [35]



During the general strike in Pamplona, June 1973

ETA and the workers' movement

A final question of central importance needs to be resolved in any discussion of the role of the national movements. Why are Euskadi and Catalonia in the forefront of the struggle against the Spanish state? Here it is necessary to depart from the conventional wisdom, strongly influenced by the nationalist organisations. The vanguard role of the Basque and Catalan proletariat is not primarily the product of national oppression or the national movement but of the **more advanced productive relations and levels of organisation of the working class** in those nations.

In Catalonia, until 1964, the only form of collective opposition was that of the organised working class. Throughout the 1950s there was a series of general strikes. These were either economic in character, like the transport boycotts of 1951 and 1956, or solidarity actions such as the 1958 strike. Significantly the PSUC could mobilise no support for political general strikes in 1958 and 1959. The crucial turning point was not 1964 when Catalanism began to re-emerge as a mass phenomenon, but 1962 with the organisation of the first Workers Commissions.

The Basque working class was, and is, more advanced in its level of activity and political consciousness than the Catalan. Here again the explanation is primarily concerned with the internal evolution of the workers' organisations themselves. The smashing of the CNT, an organisation which was ideologically adjusted to work in small manufacturing industry, and the growing hegemony of the PSUC has entailed the relative weakening of the Catalan working class. Linked to the rise of the PSUC is the fact that, contrary to popular mythology, traditional Catalanism, which has re-emerged as a stronger force than the PNV, has played its part in dampening working class activity. The threat of the working class being won behind such an anti-proletarian political perspective is growing in Catalonia.

Euskadi also saw a continuous wave of mass strikes, beginning with the seven day general strike in May 1947. It is worth bearing in mind that all the solidarity strikes in Catalonia during this period were initiated in Euskadi (with the exception of the 1958 and 1962 Asturias strikes). Not even ETA was instrumental in the development of these struggles. For example, the adoption of the boycott tactic in syndical elections in Vizcaya and Guipúzcoa, which ETA claims as a victory for its positions, was in fact initiated in the early 1970s from the example of the young Navarrese proletariat, and in particular from the lessons of the 1971

Eaton Ibérica strike in Pamplona. Similarly the Vitoria general strike earlier this year, which embodied qualitatively higher forms of struggle than any seen since the 1930s, was organised outside the aegis of the nationalist organisations, primarily by the ORT, an organisation with its roots in the Navarrese working class.

In 1965 an ETA leader was captured carrying out an armed action. ETA organised two 'mass' demonstrations to demand his release — of sixty and 150 people! The following year, after the triumph of the Workers Commission candidates in the syndical elections, genuinely mass demonstrations supported the Laminación de Bandas strike in Basauri, the biggest strike in an individual factory since the Civil War. The factory was occupied, leading to confrontations with the police. In March 1967 a mass Workers Commission meeting was broken up by the Civil Guard and a State of Exception declared. It was in this context that ETA was able to mount the successful defence of its comrades in the Burgos trials.

Burgos clearly represented a watershed. It was a spectacular demonstration of the **politicisation** of the workers' movement in the Spanish state as a whole, on a par with May 1968 in France. But the fact that the **occasion** for this demonstration was solidarity with ETA members should not be taken as an indication that it was ETA which **caused** that radicalisation. This bald statement of the primacy of factors **internal** to the workers' movement does admit some qualification. It is true that national oppression in Euskadi did converge with economic struggles to contribute towards the politicisation of the workers' movement. The effect of this can be seen by the fact that the strikes of December 1974 and March 1976 clearly raised the demand for self-determination. But the relation of ETA (and still less the PNV) to these phenomena was only in limited cases a causal one. It is far more useful to see the evolution of ETA as another **expression** of the same developments. As I indicated earlier, its trajectory away from traditional nationalism towards revolutionary positions should be seen as a manifestation of the growing contradictions of a re-industrialising and proletarianising Basque society. However it had in common with traditional nationalism its lack of any sustained organic link with the workers' movement. A revolutionary party, with such an organic link, has a reciprocal relation to these basic contradictions: it is both a product of them and the seed of their resolution. ETA was not, and is not, such an organisation.

ZUTIK, the organ of the LCR/ETA-VI in Euskadi



Catalan demonstrators raise the flag of the Republic, under which their right to autonomy was temporarily recognised



3. The National Question and the Class Struggle in Spain

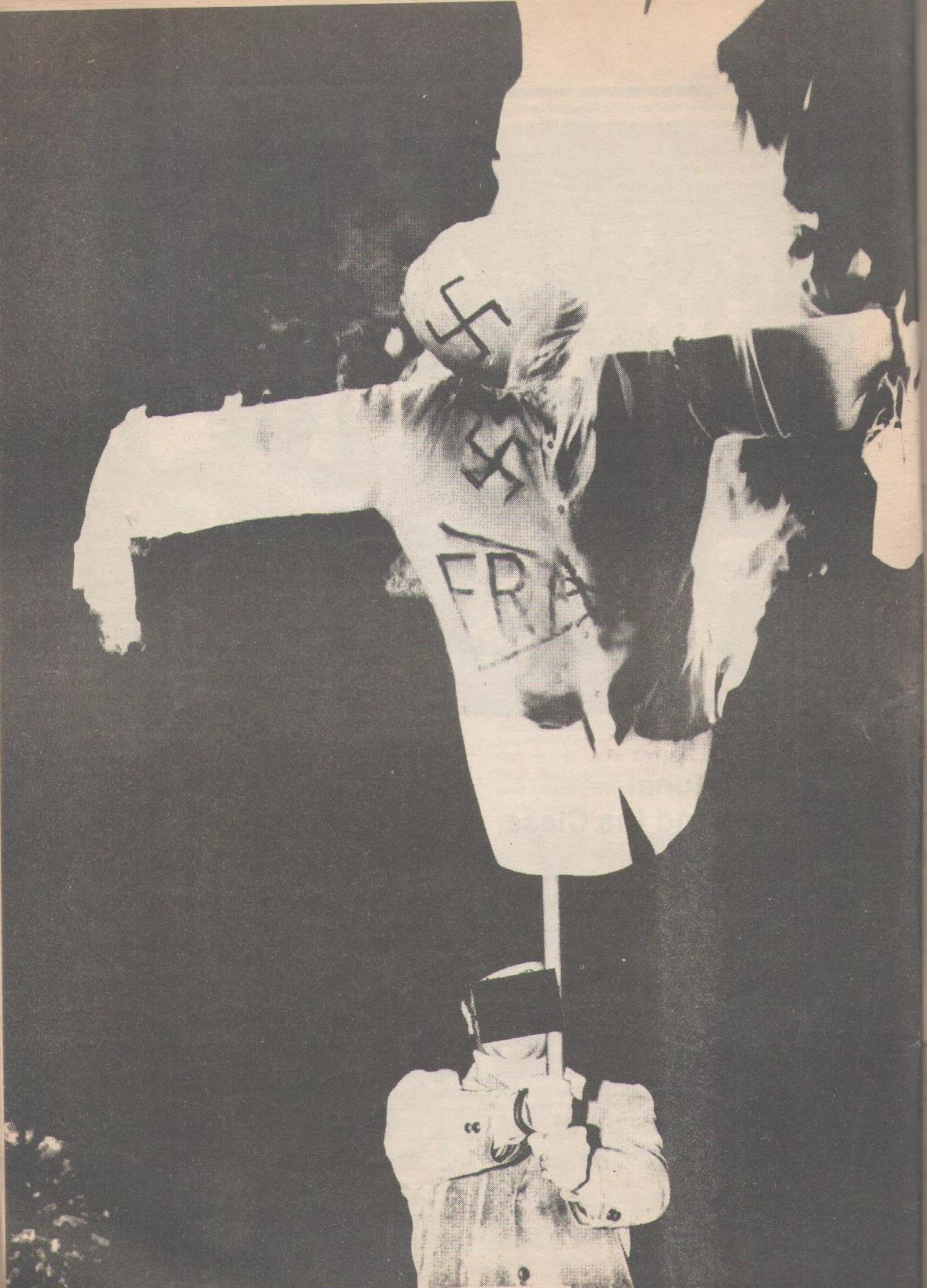
Nationalist organisations and the class struggle

The traditional organisations of Basque nationalism, the PNV and the Government-in-exile (PNV, PSOE, STV, UGT, CNT) are as isolated as ever from the realities of the struggle in the interior. The PSOE has always been the major force in the Basque workers' movement, but this does not mean that the Basque working class is integrated into the aspirations of bourgeois nationalism. The attempts of the PC de Euskadi to set up a Democratic Assembly of Euskadi along the lines of the Catalan Assembly have been frustrated by the traditional desire of the PNV to distance itself from 'communism'. The PNV even baulks at the idea of a 'democratic rupture' by a section of the bourgeoisie since this suggests violence. [36] More accurately, a 'rupture' might present a threat to the interests of small Basque capital. [37] Hence the PNV situates its perspective entirely within the framework of Spanish — and European — Christian Democracy.

However, the apparent irrelevance of the PNV does not preclude its resurgence on a future electoral terrain. While it is clear that ETA-V now hegemonises the non-proletarian strata which once formed the base of the PNV, in an election the PNV could hope to pick up the ETA vote in the way that the Esquerra was carried to power on the CNT vote in the

1930s. But ETA-V itself bears increasingly less relation to the crucial — that is, working class — struggles. It is no coincidence that ETA-V has become more isolated and inactive since Franco's death opened up a new phase of mass struggles. Its politics are still predicated upon a number of assumptions whose bankruptcy is becoming increasingly apparent. The basic assumption is of the popular-national and anti-monopoly character of the Basque revolution. In other words, stagism is used to justify the formation of a National Front across class lines. All attempts to construct this, including the latest, the Popular Assembly of Euskadi, have failed, but it still remains as theoretical justification for building a guerrilla organisation rather than a proletarian party.

In Catalonia on the other hand, the picture is increasingly one of cohesion between all anti-Francoist forces, grouped in the Catalan Assembly and the Council of Political Forces. The leading Catalan nationalist organisation, Pujol's CDC, is exclusively a party of the medium and petty bourgeoisie. However, as always, the cement in the alliance is the PSUC. The participation of the PSUC and the Workers Commissions in the Assembly means that the Catalan working class finds itself organisationally tied to nationalism. Whereas the Basque workers movement has been increasingly characterised by its readiness to break with nationalist perspectives and assert its organisational independence, in Catalonia the movement seems to be away from the independent class mobilisations of the 1950s and '60s to actions which accommodate to the lowest common denominator of their bourgeois 'allies'. It is not accidental that two massive demonstrations in Barcelona this February, whilst overwhelmingly proletarian in composition, were nevertheless Catalanist in political content. This is not, of course, to write off the Catalan working class as an independent political force, but to recognise inevitable



Basque carrying burning effigy of Franco through the streets

effects on proletarian organisation in an area where the Popular Front is most developed.

Workers organisations and the national struggle

For Maurin, a leader of the centrist POUM, 'the national movement is beginning to move from the field of the petty-bourgeoisie to that of the working class.' [38] This could be taken as a text for most of the Spanish left. To the POUM this meant both a negation of the necessity to fight for working class leadership of the national struggle, and support for the Catalan autonomy statute. Indeed, the Spanish left, where it has not been in outright opposition to the national struggle, has tended to assume that it had an automatically progressive character. It shares this assumption with ETA-V and with many Catalan nationalists. One Catalan writer argues that the bourgeois revolution in Spain was consummated in 1837. Since then any movement against the Spanish state must automatically be of a 'popular' and 'progressive' complexion. [39] At a stroke, the role of the Lliga is written out of history. The PSOE has passed from virulent centralism, through support for the Basque autonomy statute to the position of putting the right to self-determination into the programme of the Plataforma. Even the anarcho-syndicalists evolved from Bakunin's judgement on the national question—'a movement which is backward, disastrous and counter-revolutionary'—to a resolution to 'defend the autonomist claims of the Iberian peoples, **protect the autonomy statutes** and struggle against centralism'. [40]

All these positions manifest the characteristics discussed at the beginning of this article: a failure to distinguish the political demand for self-determination from nationalist ideology, leading to a capitulation to autonomism. This tendency is most marked in the politics of the Communist parties. The PCE made its turn towards the national question in 1935, primarily because the non-monopoly bourgeoisies of Euskadi and Catalonia, particularly the latter, would be exceptionally receptive to the new Popular Front tactic. Hence the decision to set up the nominally autonomous PSUC and PC de Euskadi. José Díaz, the general secretary of the PCE announced his desire to recognise 'the right of Catalonia, Euskadi, Galicia and such nationalities as are oppressed by Spanish imperialism the right freely to decide their own destinies'. This was not realised in practice. In fact Negrín was probably acting on PCE orders when he cracked down on Catalan autonomy in 1937. [41] In 1945 the PCE hit upon a far happier formulation which has survived in the programme of the Junta Democrática: 'recognition of the **national personality** of the peoples of Catalonia, the Basque country and Galicia.' [42]

It is this return to a **psychological** style of definition which creates a suitable vagueness to cover up for the failure to recognise the right to self-determination. [43] A recent article by PCE leader Santiago Alvarez attempts to theorise this. Here we find that the recognition of the 'personalities' of the minority nations is meant to accommodate both to autonomist sentiment and to those allies of the PCE (the 'progressive' bourgeoisie) who will not break with the unitary Spanish state:

'In today's conditions (the unity of the state)...is also an **unavoidable political necessity** (emphasis in original) because without the support of those forces which are especially sensitive to this unity, it is impossible either to win liberty or to **consolidate this state**' (my emphasis). [44] or further:

'Our proletariat is already very conscious that under capitalism belonging to a large state offers greater possibilities of struggle against capital than being a part of small states...But these advantages, emphasised in their time by the great teachers and later by Lenin, do not end with the rule of capitalism as a social system. **They anticipate a future socialist perspective.** (emphasis in original). [45]

The proletariat is at an advantage when the capitalist state is strong and centralised? Poor old Lenin was completely

wrong on the question of the **voluntary integration** of states! There is not even the barest pretension of recognition of the right to self-determination. Instead we have a return to Austro-Marxism and cultural-national autonomy. However, it is perhaps too kind to read even this semblance of theoretical coherence into the positions of the PCE. Underlying the entire perspective of 'national personalities' is the fact that the non-monopoly bourgeoisies of the **minority nationalities** still offer the best prospects for the formation of a Popular Front.

Towards a revolutionary perspective for the national struggle

The reformist perspective on the national question in its various forms is characterised simultaneously by a capitulation to the ideology of nationalism and the practical denial of the right to self-determination. A revolutionary position must embody precisely the opposite: resolute opposition to nationalism combined with equally vigorous support for the right to self-determination. However, in order to concretise such a position it is necessary to dispel one of the fondest illusions of the Trotskyist movement with regard to Spain: namely that the task of revolutionaries is the realisation of the theory of Permanent Revolution.

Of course there is a sense in which the theory applies to Spain: it is not possible for socialism to be realised within its national boundaries. But it is incorrect to say that the role of the Spanish revolution is the realisation of the tasks of the bourgeois-democratic revolution under the dictatorship of the proletariat. This aspect of permanent revolution relates **exclusively** to colonial and semi-colonial countries. In these countries the proletariat is both numerically and qualitatively in a subordinate position and the burning tasks are those of the bourgeois-democratic revolution: the agrarian question, the national question and so on. There is an extent to which these problems have to be resolved within the Spanish revolution but the crucial difference is the **overwhelming predominance** of capitalist productive relations which places the socialist tasks of the revolution on the immediate agenda. Neither is it true to say that the Spanish bourgeoisie is historically incapable of resolving the outstanding tasks of the bourgeois-democratic revolution. For a whole period that bourgeoisie has adopted a form of government which has rendered unnecessary, indeed is itself structurally incapable of, the resolution of the national question (though it has significantly capitalised agrarian productive relations). This is the preferred political solution of the Spanish bourgeoisie, but it does not exclude the possibility that, in a revolutionary or pre-revolutionary situation, when its class rule was at stake, it could acquiesce in the secession of the minority nationalities. From this we conclude that the tasks of revolutionaries in Euskadi and Catalonia are decisively different from those in colonial and semi-colonial countries. They must be situated within the framework, not of winning proletarian hegemony over those layers (primarily the peasantry) struggling for democratic demands, but of unifying the proletarian programme of demands flowing from the principal class contradictions between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie.

Trotsky's remarks in the section of the Transitional Programme concerned with fascist countries are worth noting in this context. After stressing the importance of democratic demands in mobilising the masses he comments that:

'...the formulas of democracy...mean for us only incidental or episodic slogans in the independent movement of the proletariat and not a democratic noose fastened to the neck of the proletariat by the bourgeoisie's agents. (Spain!)' [46]

Algebraically, revolutionaries approach the national question along the dual axis of support for the right to self-determination and the fiercest struggle against the ideology of nationalism. The specific application of this orientation, the admixture of these two elements appropriate to a

concrete intervention, are determined by a 'precise appraisal of the specific historical situation'. While it is correct to support the demand for separatism **within an Iberian Socialist Federation**, the prime task of revolutionaries in Euskadi and Catalonia is the fight against nationalism on the basis of an **integral programme** of demands for the overthrow of capitalism.

Although the proletariat is overwhelming predominant among the oppressed layers in Euskadi and Catalonia, and has played a de facto leadership role in the struggle for self-determination, the dangers of it being integrated into a Popular Frontist perspective for the preservation of the bourgeois state are actually greater than in the rest of the Spanish state. This is because the bourgeoisies of Euskadi and Catalonia do still, to a greater or lesser extent, distance themselves from the positions of the Spanish bourgeoisie. Hence their capacity to restore political hegemony over the proletariat, through the ministrations of the Stalinist and reformist parties, is proportionately greater. Such a possibility is already being realised through the Catalan Assembly and will become even greater if, as seems likely, some form of autonomy statute, however miserable, is granted.

For these reasons the utmost clarity is required of Basque and Catalan revolutionaries on the question of the Popular Front. Tariq Ali's position that 'the Popular Fronts of the Thirties were pledged essentially to combat fascism together with important sections of the bourgeoisie'[47] is simply not adequate. The main characteristic of the Spanish Popular Front of the 1930s was that **no** significant section of the bourgeoisie participated. There was only what Trotsky called the 'shadow of the bourgeoisie'. The **essence** of the Popular Front is not specifically concerned with fascism but with the defence or conquest of bourgeois democracy. It is most usefully seen as a tactic flowing from the stagist conceptions of Stalinism rather than a tactic utilised by the bourgeoisie (though it may be that too).

The Popular Front is defined by two criteria, **each of**

which, in itself, is sufficient. The first is the programmatic formulation of demands, not just for the content of bourgeois democracy, but for the retention or establishment of the specific institutions in which that democracy is held to be embodied, with the declared aim of winning an alliance with the bourgeoisie. The second is the actual participation of the bourgeoisie in a front with workers organisations. The former negates the possibility of a proletarian United Front, the latter consummates the destruction of the organisational independence of the working class. Thus we can define the Pacto por la Libertad, the Junta Democrática, the Plataforma de Convergencia Democrática and the Coordinadora Democrática as **all** Popular Frontist on a programmatic basis even though none has actually succeeded in winning a significant section of the bourgeoisie to its platform. In the case of Catalonia and Euskadi we can be equally categorical. The LCR/ETA-VI refuses to participate in the Catalan Assembly on the basis that it both has a bourgeois programme and includes bourgeois parties. The same can be said with equal certainty of any 'national front' or 'democratic assembly' which ETA-V or the PCE might set up in Euskadi, as it can be said of the present Basque government-in-exile.

It is generally considered that, in Spanish politics, issues are resolved at the centre and the peripheral regions fall into line behind this resolution. This was certainly the case in the 1930s when the Catalan working class, the most politically advanced in the Spanish state, was unable decisively to affect the course of events. In the 1970s, however, the reverse may well be true. For revolutionaries Catalonia and Euskadi (the latter in particular) are crucial because they contain, at the same time, the most advanced sections of the proletariat and the fractions of the bourgeoisie most capable of sinking the Spanish revolution on the rocks of Popular Frontism. Perhaps the greatest danger is that the national question will be the democratic noose fastened to the neck of the Spanish proletariat.

FOOTNOTES

1. Trotsky, *Stalin* (Panther edition), vol.1, p233; vol.2, p168.
2. Cf. for example Robert Dorn, *Irish nationalism and British imperialism*, p3 and pp 32-33.
3. Cf. Michel Lowy, 'Le Probleme de l'histoire' in *Les Marxistes et la question nationale* (Paris, 1974), pp386-88 for such a critique.
4. Cf. for example his remarks on the Germans in the Russian Empire.
5. Ortiz, *Historia de Euskadi: el nacionalismo vasco y ETA* (Paris, 1975), p142.
6. Josep Termes, 'Interpretacion del nacionalismo catalan', (*Cuadernos de Ruedo Iberico* 48-49), p57.
7. Alan Freeman, 'The Nation in the Transitional Epoch', in *International*, vol.3, no.1, p44.
8. *Ibid.*, p45.
9. *Ibid.*, p45.
10. Albert Balcells, *Cataluna Contemporanea II 1900-1936* (Madrid, 1974), Ch.1.
11. *Ibid.*, Ch.3.
12. Norman L. Jones, 'The Catalan Question since the Civil War', in *Spain in Crisis* (London, 1976), p238.
13. Cf. José Maria Arenillas, *The Basque Country—the National Question and the Socialist Revolution* (1937), pp7-8.
14. Ortiz, *op. cit.*, p123.
15. *Ibid.*, p133.
16. Martin Blinkhorn, *Carlism and Crisis in Spain 1931-1939* (Cambridge, 1975), pp13 and 17. Cf. also Isidre Molas, *El sistema de partidos politicos en Cataluna 1931-36*.
17. Ortiz, *op. cit.*, p140.
18. Balcells, *op. cit.*, Ch.2.
19. Cf. Ronald Fraser's report from Spain in *NLR* 97.
20. Stanley G. Payne, *The Spanish Revolution* (London, 1970), p114.
21. José Antonio Aguirre, *Entre la libertad y la revolución* (Bilbao, 1935), p105.
22. Arenillas, *op. cit.*, p11.
23. Ortiz, *op. cit.*, p200.

24. Cf. Arenillas and Ortiz for the opposing views.
25. Hugh Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War* (Pelican, 1965), p210.
26. Balcells, *op. cit.*, Ch.5.
27. Cf. Kenneth Medhurst, *The Basques* (Minority Rights Group, 1972) for details.
28. Joan Roig, 'Veinticinco años de movimiento nacional en Cataluna', in *Horizonte Espanol*, 1966 II (Paris), pp123 and 127.
29. Aguirre, *De Guernica a Nueva York....*, p376.
30. Roig, *op. cit.*, p120.
31. Jones, *op. cit.*, p259.
32. It is impossible to do justice to this subject in so short a space. Interested readers are referred to Chapter 6 of Ortiz, *op. cit.*, and to Txabi, 'ETA y la cuestion nacional vasca', in *Horizonte Espanol*, 1972 II, on which this section is based.
33. Cf. Ortiz, *op. cit.*, pp285-89.
34. Txabi, *op. cit.*, p85.
35. LCR/ETA-VI, *Un programa de combate*, p30.
36. Statement by PNV president Ajuriaguerra.
37. Cf. Fraser's report from Spain in *NLR* 97.
38. Ortiz, *op. cit.*, p205.
39. Termes, *op. cit.*, pp44-45.
40. Paris Congress of the Spanish Libertarian Movement (MLE), quoted by Jones, *op. cit.*, p246 (my emphasis).
41. Ortiz, *op. cit.*, p205.
42. Guy Hermet, *Les communistes en Espagne* (Paris, 1971), p54 (my emphasis).
43. The original Point 9 of the Junta programme read: 'The recognition, within the unity of the Spanish state, of the personality of the Catalan, Basque and Galician peoples and the regional communities which so decide democratically.'
44. Santiago Alvarez, 'El problema nacional en Espana...' (*Nuestra Bandera* 76, Sept-Oct 1974), p19.
45. *Ibid.*, p20.
46. Trotsky, *The Transitional Programme* (Pathfinder edition), p101.
47. Tariq Ali, *Chile—Lessons of the Coup* (IMG), p3.

DOCUMENT

'THE PROGRAMME WE NEED'

At its spring 1976 conference, the International Marxist Group adopted two documents — the United Secretariat Theses on Britain published in *International*, vol.3, no.1, and a resolution submitted by the National Committee entitled 'Implementing the United Secretariat Theses on Britain'. We print here the section on the action programme of the IMG which was contained in that second document.

Introduction- the line of the USEC Theses.

The United Secretariat Theses on Britain (printed in *International* Vol. 3, No. 1) represent an important deepening and clarification of the line pursued by the IMG in the past period...The fundamentals of the line of the Theses can be summarised in five points:

*The economic and social crisis of British imperialism in the context of the world recession leaves the British ruling class compelled to mount a generalised attack against a working class which has been undefeated for forty years. Despite all the set-backs since last summer no qualitative defeat has occurred. The underlying tendency in Britain continues to be towards a test of strength between the classes.

*The basic precondition in determining the outcome of the test of strength between the classes in favour of the working class is the systematic mobilisation of the working class and its allies in extra-parliamentary struggle against the capitalist class, against the opposition of its labour lieutenants. While success in the struggle will require far more than the power of the mass struggle alone, without that power none of the conditions can be created in this period to create a conscious political alternative for the working class. All those, such as the Labour left, who do not understand this cannot take the first step along the road to the solution of the crisis.

*Any major struggles launched by the working class in this period will, in the context of a Labour Government in power, create a massive crisis in the mass organisations of the working class. Not only the mass vanguard but many layers of workers still under the influence of reformism and labourism will be thrown into conflict with the leadership of these mass organisations, particularly in the trade unions. This brings to the fore the question of the construction of an alternative leadership for the working class in the labour movement to that of Callaghan, Healey, Murray and Jones.

The chief goal and instrument in the creation of an alternative leadership is the struggle for the creation of a class struggle left wing in the labour movement. Such a class struggle left wing will fight to include all those elements who, no matter what their present illusions, are prepared to engage in a real struggle on the most burning issues facing the working class. In the first case this will be against the policies of the Labour Government.

*Within this struggle for the class struggle left wing, revolutionaries must find the means to strengthen the forces of the vanguard, and through this process build the revolutionary organisation. In this period of crisis on the far left, an important part of this task is the struggle for regroupment and unification of the revolutionary left.

[Part 1 of the Perspectives Document dealt with the international crisis of imperialism—in particular, the developing revolutionary crisis in Southern Europe. This analysis may be found in the various documents passed by the World Congresses, International Executive Committees and United Secretariats of the Fourth International. The first sections we print deal with the crisis of British imperialism and the economic, social and political institutions based within it.]

6. Within the generalised recession of the international capitalist economy, the position of Britain is the worst of any major imperialist power. Despite the decreases in the living standard of the working class in the last period, the bourgeoisie has succeeded in gaining no major recomposition of the rate of profit sufficient to launch a serious new expansion of production. The general perspective for the economy is for a recovery from the present depressed levels starting from spring 1976, but with this expansion quite insufficient to seriously reduce unemployment; with production scarcely exceeding and in certain sectors not attaining previously reached levels; with even this increase in production gained through a sustained attempt to rationalise production and increase the exploitation of the working class; with a new wave of inflation starting even earlier than in the expansion of 1972-73; with no possibility of any serious improvement in the living standards of the working class; and with no expansion of social expenditure but rather a severe assault on the welfare state. Only a sustained expansion of the economy with no serious attempt by the working class to make up the loss in its living standards or prevent the attacks launched against it—something which would imply a qualitative defeat, of which there is no sign—would allow a significant recomposition in the rate of profit. It is this which the British ruling class is now seeking. Its chief means of fighting for this are the reduction of the living standards of the working class, a major campaign of speed-up and productivity, and increasingly attempts to transfer resources to the capitalist class through a cutback in public expenditure and the welfare state.

7. The chief conclusion which revolutionary Marxists and the working class must draw from this situation is not merely the utmost importance of the present situation but that the present period is one in which **the crisis of the economy is no longer merely cyclical but one in which an expansion of production on a capitalist basis can take place only on the basis of an important defeat of the working class allowing a serious increase in the rate of exploitation and rate of profit.** The gaining of even the most elementary economic demands of the working class—maintenance of living standards, full employment, continuation of the welfare state—cannot be achieved on the basis of capitalist economy. No serious defence of the conditions of the working class is possible without the beginning of the breaking up of the capitalist domination of the economy and capitalist relations of production.

While being the most indomitable fighters for even the most partial demands of the working class, the revolutionary Marxists have to grasp this situation by attempting consistently to win the working class and oppressed masses to united action on the only demands which can begin to meet the present situation—qualitative demands, hinged on workers control and leading to the expropriation of the capitalist class, which start from the urgent tasks of defence of the working class and which lead to the breaking of the capitalist domination of the economy.

—against the erosion of living standards by inflation: rejection of the Healey measures and all forms of incomes policy under capitalism; sliding scale of wages, pensions, unemployment pay, grants and state benefits based on a trade union controlled cost of living index; £40 minimum wage; an immediate freeze, policed by committees of housewives and trade unionists, of the price of all basic goods in working class living standards; total freeze of rents; immediate nationalisation of food, oil and all other industries supplying the basic necessities of working class life.

—for the defence and extension of the social services: rejection of all social expenditure cuts; sliding scale of public expenditure; immediate injection of £1,000 million into the health service; immediate target of building 500,000 houses a year; for the integration of all private medical practice, all grammar and private schools, and all private child care provision into the public sector; nationalisation of the drugs, health supply and construction industries.

—against unemployment: workers control to impose work-sharing with no loss of pay; an emergency programme of useful public works; nationalisation without compensation and under workers control of all firms creating redundancy; for the right of women to work.

—for the development of a socialist plan for the reorganisation of the economy to ensure full employment and halt the decline in living standards: opening of the books of all capitalist firms, local government and economic departments of the state; immediate nationalisation of the banks, insurance and finance institutions; abolition of capitalist defence expenditure—not a programme of armaments but a programme of public works; penal taxation of all incomes over £10,000 a year and on capital and inherited wealth; take-over of all external portfolios and ban on the export of capital; full workers control of industry; drawing up of a plan for the expansion of the economy on the basis of nationalised industry; nationalisation under workers control of all basic industry.

The chief task is the creation of the united front action of the working class to fight for the most important and central of these demands.

8. The tremendous historical and conjunctural decline of British capitalism, and the inability to date of the bourgeoisie to arrest it by imposing a major defeat on the working class, provides the background for a major exacerbation of all the crises of social relations of British society and the break up of the traditional cohesion and stability of society. The 'middle classes' have suffered very serious erosion of their living standards, even greater than those of the workers, under the impact of inflation, rising interest rates, dividend restraint and soaring mortgage rates. The position of oppressed racial minorities, both directly economically and through the pressures towards increased racism, has sharply deteriorated. The economic crisis in its aspects of inflation, unemployment and cuts has exacerbated the oppression of women under conditions in which the political products of the crisis simultaneously produce reactionary mobilisations against even the limited rights on issues such as abortion which women have won in the last period. Shedding of the reserve army of labour has produced a rate of increased unemployment among women and youth double that of the adult male work force. The cutting back in social services is part of this process (particularly evident in nursery care) and reinforces it as the burden for social care is thrown onto the family unit and hence women. The crisis of social expenditure powerfully exacerbates the already acute crisis in education, creating a social ferment and political divisions which penetrate into deeper layers of the student mass even than previously, and an offensive by the right wing in secondary education through the Black Papers and the de facto closure of William Tyndale school. The traditional social bloc which has dominated the situation in Britain for a century is thrown into ferment, providing simultaneously an historic possibility for the working class and, if it does not seize this opportunity, the potential for a new ruling class reaction.....

9. While in the past period mobilisations of the

oppressed strata of society—women struggling for the right to abortion, students, newly proletarianised layers, etc. — have tended objectively to the side of the proletariat, this is by no means an inevitable development or one that can continue indefinitely without the proletariat consciously advancing a programme capable of welding the oppressed layers of society under its banner. In the past period, the fascists, racists, religious reactionaries and others have attempted to utilise the social ferment to mobilise confused and backward layers of society. Since the crisis of winter 1973/74 and the February and October elections, however, this has taken a more organised and systematic form as the Tory Party attempts to recompose its support amongst intermediate strata and backward layers of the working class through launching or taking up a series of reactionary campaigns aimed against the vanguard and particularly oppressed or isolated layers of society. The assaults of the Tory leaders or spokespersons on the 'Soviet threat', 'terrorism', the restoration of the death penalty, abortion, against pickets, are not isolated phenomena, but part of a concerted push by a ruling class apparatus, designed to recompose layers of society around a reactionary project. Such developments will be a continuing characteristic of the coming period.

The struggle for the liberation of women, against racism and fascism, to take up the crisis of education, to struggle against chauvinism, to come forward as the chief defenders of democratic rights are tasks which are not in the slightest sense luxuries, but a burning task for the working class. They are the only way to ensure the basis for working class unity, defeat attempts to recompose the ruling class bloc, and assemble the ranks of the oppressed around the proletariat.

—towards the liberation of women: free abortion and contraception on demand; equal pay for equal work; free 24 hour community controlled state nurseries; implementation in full of the demands of the Working Women's Charter; freedom of sexual preference.

—sliding scale of grants and pensions; full state system of free comprehensive education; immediate expansion of teacher training; all grants to be independent of parents' income; married women to receive full grant; minimum grant of £1,000 per year.

—against the scourge of racism and fascism: abolition of the Immigration, Pakistan and Aliens Acts; right of black and other oppressed minorities to form caucuses within the labour movement and to organise to defend their communities; rejection of the right of organisation for fascists and racists.

—for the defence of democratic rights: abolition of the crime of conspiracy; repeal of the Prevention of Terrorism and Incitement to Disaffection Acts; against the proposed Criminal Trespass law; immediate release of Des Warren and all other political prisoners; defence of working class struggles through the organisation of mass and flying pickets; disbanding of the SAS and the Special Patrol Group; ending of joint police-army exercises; full trade union and political rights in the armed forces.

—for an end to the oppression of homosexuals; an end to discrimination in jobs or facilities on the grounds of sexual orientation.

10. The increasing economic and social crisis of British imperialism and the inability of the ruling class to find a solution through the defeat of the masses has been reflected in a severe weakening of the position of the traditional party of the ruling class—the Tory Party. While the relatively autonomous crises of the North of Ireland and Scotland undoubtedly exacerbated the crisis of the Tory Party at the February and October elections, there is no doubt that it was the defeat of the ruling class at the hands of the miners, and the relation of class forces which this demonstrated, that was the primary reason for the crisis of the Tory Party and the two phenomena which lost it the election—the departure of a large number of 'middle class' voters to the Liberals and the Nationalists, and a qualitative (around 50%) fall in its vote in the working class. **The last elections were lost by the Tory Party not because of a move to Labour [on the contrary, the Labour proportion of the vote was the lowest since 1931] but because the crisis of**



Photo: CHRIS DAVIES (Report)

the Tory Party, and its loss of votes, was even worse than that of Labour—reducing the Tory proportion of the vote to the lowest this century.

11. Despite the limited gains made by the Tory Party in the past period through its reactionary initiatives and through the demoralising impact of the treachery of the Labour bureaucracy, the Tory Party has not succeeded in developing any project or relation of forces which can in this period constitute a strategy for the ruling class. The central problem confronting the ruling class is not the mobilisation of petty-bourgeois forces and backward layers of the working class, which would correspond to a fascist or strong state solution, but of finding a way to deal with the problem presented by the organisational strength and combativity of the labour movement within bourgeois democracy. In the immediate past months, the Tory Party has itself attempted to orient towards an integrationist perspective through discussions and overtures to the union bureaucracy. This policy, however, cannot provide a solution to the problems of this party—if the ruling class needs a policy of integration, the Labour Party is the logical option—and can cut across the other projects of the Tory Party. To win over the intermediate strata and backward workers is not merely a question of promising reactionary solutions, but of actual ability to take on and defeat the labour movement. It is this which the Tory Party is unable to offer any prospect of achieving at present—indeed, the very moves by Thatcher towards the trade union bureaucracy are a sign of weakness and not of strength.

12. The crisis within the bounds of the British state, which goes beyond that of a crisis of political parties, is fuelled by the struggle of an oppressed nationality in the North of Ireland. There have been small gains by British imperialism in the last period—Craig's split from the UUUC; the establishment of close collaboration with repressive forces in the South; the utilisation of absurd tactical mistakes by the Provisionals (their retaliation against sectarian attacks by the Loyalists and the fratricidal war against the Officials) to drive a wedge between the Republicans and the masses in the ghettos; the ability, flowing from the Provisionals' errors, to begin to make the label 'criminal' stick against the nationalist fight; the consequent increasing weight of the SDLP amongst the minority population. Despite this, no qualitative change in the relation of forces has occurred—the weight of the paramilitaries on the ground has resulted in the isolation of Craig, and the Convention has proved a total flop in its aims to recreate some middle ground and re-embark on the Sunningdale project. This latter is still not possible in the present relation of forces. And so, despite the increasing bankruptcy of the Provisionals' political strategy, it is only the continuing treacherous role of the labour bureaucracy, and the chauvinism of the British labour movement on Ireland, which prevents the situation in the North of Ireland developing as one of the major elements of the political crisis in Britain.

13. Even without a major upsurge of solidarity between the British proletariat and its strategic ally of the

Republican masses of the North of Ireland, the situation in the North continues to be a problem of extreme intractability for the ruling class, which exacerbates all other political crises. In addition to its general characteristic of demonstrating the weakness of the ruling class, it is a feature which plays a direct role in exacerbating the crisis of the political bloc of the parties of the ruling class. An alliance of the Tories with the Loyalists, despite the desires of the Neave wing of the Tory Party, is ruled out as long as the resistance of the minority in the North continues and the British labour movement, despite its chauvinism, is not prepared to accept a policy of naked, bloody repression in the North. However, the recreation of an acceptable partner in the ruling class bloc, that is, a remodelled Taylor-Craig Unionism, cannot be achieved in the present relation of forces. Despite setbacks, the situation in the North of Ireland continues to be one of weakening the ruling class and a great strategic lever which could be seized by the British labour movement in the interests of both the Irish and its own working class.

To achieve this requires the advancing of a clear programme against British imperialist domination of Ireland. Such a programme at present must centre on:

—immediate withdrawal of British troops from Ireland; release of all Irish political prisoners; self-determination for the Irish people.

14. The crisis of the traditional political blocs of the British ruling class under the combination of imperialist decline and an undefeated working class is particularly vividly demonstrated in Scotland—where under the combined impact of social crises, the Scottish national question, and a split in the ruling class, a real crisis of state structures is developing. The roots of this crisis lie in the combination of three elements which distinguishes the situation from that of, for example, Wales—let alone a region of England.

The first condition is the social and regional oppression of Scotland—a structural phenomenon not merely of the development of British but also of European capitalism. It has been a primary factor throughout this century, and before, in making the Scottish working class the most advanced section of the working class in Britain. Furthermore, today it gives a particularly sharp edge to every struggle, especially on jobs and cuts. However, a regional and social oppression alone does not produce the type of relatively autonomous political development seen in Scotland today. Severe regional and social oppression leads to exceptional mobilisation for social and economic demands, not to demands of the type seen in Scotland today.

The second element is the Scottish national question. While not suffering a specific national oppression in a form analogous to Quebec, Catalonia, or the Basque country etc.—i.e. attempts to eradicate language, specific national institutions, culture—Scotland still retains undoubted elements of specific national institutions capable of giving a national coloration to a social radicalisation.

The third development is the split within the ruling class, between sections of finance capital based in Scotland and

the main bulk of the British ruling class, over control of the financial offshoots of the North Sea oil revenues. Given untrammelled operation of the market, the institutions of the City of London would take these against the local Scottish financiers. The only way that this can be prevented is through these elements finding a **political** mechanism to prevent this — at a pinch even total separation from Britain, but preferably just control of oil revenues through some less drastic Assembly or other mechanism. The SNP represents the ability of this section of the bourgeoisie, in conditions where their belief in the viability of bourgeois strategy as a whole is eroded, to attempt to gain at the expense of their British bourgeois cousins through using oil finance to make a certain number of bribes to layers of society in Scotland. The aim of the operation, in the phrase of the SNP, is to produce a state more like Switzerland than an industrial state.

15. While the SNP represents a dangerous development for the working class in Scotland, the split within the ruling class in Britain which it reflects and consolidates creates another intractable crisis for the ruling class. Particularly in relation to some of the main pillars of the Tory Party there is a real contradiction in **economic** interests between important sections of the British bourgeoisie and finance capital in Scotland represented by the SNP. This makes the Tory Party even more strongly resistant to devolution — despite the fact that it is the party which has so far lost most to the nationalists — than the Labour Party, and creates great obstacles to a Tory-SNP alliance for an alternative government to Labour. Furthermore, **politically** the ruling class considers that the game of the SNP is a very dangerous one — that the section of the ruling class they represent is too weak, the social contradictions in Scotland too acute, and the working class too strong for the SNP to mount any serious Bonapartist type operation, and that its development weakens the position of the ruling class as a whole.

While there is no class contradiction between the SNP and the Tory Party, or the ruling class as a whole, there are extremely acute problems in any SNP-Tory alliance. Furthermore, a Tory government in Britain would be without any serious base of support in Scotland — perhaps with as little as 20-25 per cent of the population supporting it. There is a real danger that it would not be regarded as a legitimate or authoritative government and that demands for devolution of powers could become a source of real mobilisations of the class, with radical schemes being propounded for what should be done with these powers.

The crisis in Scotland is both profoundly intractable for the ruling class and further weakens its potential to create a

credible alternative government to the present Labour one.

For the working class it offers an historic opportunity to realise the more advanced nature of the crisis in Scotland and turn the country's labour movement into one of the essential leverage points for the creation of class struggle policies in Britain as a whole. For the labour movement in Scotland it means advancing and fighting for a clear social programme against the bourgeois nationalist policies of the SNP and the treacherous right wing line of the labour bureaucracy. For the working class in England it means joining the struggle for demands capable of resolving the crisis in Scotland while simultaneously making absolutely clear its recognition of the right to self-determination, if it ever wishes to exercise it, of the Scottish working class. It means advancing the clear perspective of a Socialist Federal Britain.

— against the social, economic and political oppression of Scotland; the right of self-determination for Scotland; immediate elections to the Scottish Assembly open to all political parties in Scotland; rejection of all the limitations of the powers of the Assembly; nationalisation of North Sea oil; nationalisation of all banks, trusts and financial capital in Scotland; a programme of useful public works to tackle the urban squalor of Scotland; drawing up of a social and economic plan for Scotland.

16. The inability of the ruling class in the present relation of class forces either to confront the working class or to create a viable alternative government to Labour has in the last period left the capitalist class with no option but to rest its rule directly upon the labour bureaucracy through the medium of the Labour Government. This Government, composed of part of the bureaucracy of a workers party, is by its very nature not suited to confronting the working class in head-on struggle. Its role is to attempt to repress the vanguard, confuse and mystify the masses, and strengthen the position of the bureaucracy at the expense of the working class. In the past period, where large-scale mobilisations of the working class have declined under the combined influence of rising unemployment and illusions in a Labour Government, the ruling class has gained certain undoubted successes through this government.

This government has retreated before every reactionary assault on the international and domestic social and political crisis: membership of the EEC has been affirmed, unemployment moved over 1¼ million without mass resistance from the working class, the living standard of the working class has fallen 6% in six months, the last TUC and Labour Party conferences saw the endorsement of some of the most anti-working class measures since the Second



Photo: CHRIS DAVIES (Report)

World War, the revolutionary left outside the Labour Party has, for the most part, not merely stagnated but declined; there are small signs of recomposition and a new confidence within the Tory party, and with the acquiescence so far of the working class in huge wage cuts and unemployment there are even tentative signs of an amelioration of the economic crisis. Most importantly, despite the six years of working class mobilisation after 1968, the essential state structures of British imperialism outside of the North of Ireland and potentially Scotland, remain as yet unchallenged in any way comparable with the situation in Portugal, Spain, Italy and France.

17. In the past months, the labour bureaucracy has passed to an offensive on a real institutionalisation of the 'integration' approach to coupling the working class to the 'planning' needs of capitalism, i.e. the project which the Labour Government attempted, and failed in, during 1964-70. The agreement concluded at Chequers in November 1975 is not merely a paper pact, but has spawned a number of bodies where the trade union leadership collaborates on a permanent basis with the employers. This is particularly clear in the case of the car industry, where Jones and Scanlon are now members of a committee along with the British bosses of the 'Big Four', which aims to police that agreement. The same process has been initiated with the Ryder proposals on participation in British Leyland at local level. These developments are part and parcel of the recognition by the ruling class of the need for state intervention to restructure British capitalism. Under the Labour Government the necessary precondition of the involvement of the trade unions at every level has been hastened.

18. Such a process of integration has necessarily been accompanied by a series of assaults against the democracy of the workers movement (for example TUC new Rule 14, forbidding trades councils to enter into political activity against TUC or Labour Party policy or to form alliances with any parties other than the Labour Party) and support for laws aimed directly against the working class vanguard—for example the Criminal Trespass law. The most right-wing sections of the bureaucracy are undoubtedly prepared to consider moves for compulsory postal ballots and other moves for a further institutionalised eroding of democracy in the workers' movement. Despite these attacks however, and despite an undoubted swing to the right in certain unions, it is equally clear that the bureaucracy has not succeeded either in qualitatively undermining democracy within the mass organisations themselves, or eliminating major opposition to their policies. In addition to the continuing mobilisation of a vanguard on abortion, the oppression of women, Portugal, Ireland, private practice and other questions, mass resistance and struggles continue on the most basic questions to confront the masses. The contrary examples of the 26 November demonstrations, the steel strikes, the rapid development of the rail strikes, the struggle at Linwood, the 40% vote in the NUM against the £6 limit and the calling off of the overtime ban on Langwith—all struggles starting without or against the bureaucracy or rapidly going beyond the limited mobilisation it had summoned—all show that despite the downturn since last summer, the basic strength of the working class and its capacity for resistance continues. Furthermore, despite localised disasters such as that of the Chrysler leadership in Coventry, the basic rank and file membership of the working class of the last six years remains intact. The working class and oppressed masses are more cautious, more aware of the need to win over and utilise the mass organisations, and more inclined to seek generalised movements than to take part in isolated clashes, but it has suffered no basic defeat.

In these conditions, and in particular with an industrial upturn from the spring and a growing disenchantment with the government's measures as the working class standard of living continues to decline, the preconditions clearly exist for a further upturn in the struggle of the working class against the integrative and other attacks of the ruling class and the government.

—for workers democracy: democratic election of strike committees; all major decisions to be taken by mass meetings; annual election, with right of recall, of all union officials; no official to receive more than the average wages of a skilled worker; automatic resubmission to selection at elections of all MP's; election of party leader, Prime



Minister and Cabinet by the Labour Party Conference; subordination of the Parliamentary Labour Party to the decisions of the Party Conference and the National Executive Committee; for the abolition of all bans and proscriptions in the trade unions and the Labour Party.

—for the right of women and oppressed minorities to self-organisation within the organisations of the working class.

19. As in Britain as a whole, the mass organisations of the working class in Scotland are increasingly polarised between the policies of Callaghan/Healey and the protest opposition of the Labour left. The weight (and consequent contradictions) of the CP inside the apparatus of the movement, above all in the STUC and in local trades councils, only accentuates a running crisis of perspective (debate/discussion) inside the institutions of the labour movement. But the growing political crisis introduces a series of distinct elements into Scottish working class life which result in a more dramatic and spectacular explosion of social democracy.

The continued identification of the LP in Scotland with decades of social deprivation (higher unemployment, migration, housing, etc.) and the absence of any real challenge to the right-wing policies from inside the ranks of the LP allows the radical national populism of the SNP to make sweeping gains into the traditional electoral base of the LP.

The labour bureaucracy has responded to this in different ways, but unlike a party solidly linked into the ruling class, the Labour Party comes up against no structural barriers in making an opportunist/electoralist capitulation to this political pressure (e.g. the hurriedly proposed Assembly). In the absence of any real coherent alternative inside social democracy to the right-wing policies, the bureaucracy has split essentially on the terrain of the nationalists themselves (how much devolution) with the formation of the SLP as the most dramatic illustration of this. This is not to say that there is no link-up between opposition to the Government on cuts/unemployment, etc. and opposition on devolution. The SLP clearly contains a partial fusion of both elements (as the STUC does). However, the pressures which are producing the crisis inside Scottish social democracy come from two distinct directions: from the emergence of a national left social democratic current, and secondly from a Scottish radical populist movement. It is this twin pressure which tears the atrophied corrupt LP apparatus in Scotland apart — with spectacular losses at the polls, and open public splits in the previously monolithic leadership. It is clear that the acute political paralysis of the leadership of both major classes in Scotland cannot continue indefinitely, and the present dynamic electoral success of the petty bourgeois/finance capital layers in the SNP only conceals the basic stalemate of class forces in the post-UCS period.



Photo: CHRIS DAVIES (Report)

20. The combination of economic, social and political crisis, together with an undefeated working class, defines clearly the far more explosive potential of the present situation compared to the previous integrative attack carried out by the 1964-70 Labour Government. At that period, the policy of integration could be presented as promising considerable gains in the medium term for the working class, and even in its direct effects involved neither significant falls in living standards nor serious attacks on the welfare state or full employment; the working class had passed through no period of mass extra-parliamentary struggles for 40 years; no serious large vanguard breaking with the reformist bureaucracy at that time existed in the working class; and in the event of a Labour failure, a clear potential government existed in a reorganised Tory Party.

Today, none of these conditions exist: far from promising substantial gains for the working class, the policies of the Government already substantially cut living standards, destroy full employment and promise the severe curtailing or even destruction of sections of the welfare state, and are unable to hold out serious prospects of improvement even in the intermediate or long term. The working class since 1968, far from passivity, has passed through six years of the highest level of struggles since the early 1920s—including the experience, for the first time in history, of bringing down a government by essentially extra-parliamentary activity. A definite number of workers has been created within the working class who either have decreasing illusions in all sections of the bureaucracy or who consider that at least a powerful left trend in opposition to the present open right-wing bankruptcy must be advanced. Finally, it is clear that, in the event of the integration tactic falling, the ruling class possesses at present no clear authoritative or credible government with which it can replace Labour and stem a mass upsurge.

While undoubtedly the fight back against the policies of this Government will start with localised or partial expressions, and proceed by uneven routes, nevertheless the explosive potential of the situation is clear. The task of revolutionary Marxists is to develop this resistance; clarify, centralise and homogenise it; lay before it the objective tasks which confront it, and render conscious the objective process of its development.

21. The conditions under which the class struggle unfolds in the present period bring sharply to the fore the contradictory role of the mass organisations of the working class. Dominated by a bureaucracy totally tied to the defence of the capitalist state and the capitalist mode of production, these organisations nevertheless remain firmly rooted within the proletariat and are regarded by the masses not as instruments of capitalist domination, but as the vehicle for defending the fundamental interests of the proletariat. This applies as yet, except for a vanguard of some thousands, not merely to the trade unions, but also to the Labour Party which, despite the constant betrayals of its leadership, is regarded as a party capable of being converted in an historic sense to the needs of the working class. While in relation to the Labour Party this belief is wrong, and in relation to the labour movement as a whole, the lack of understanding of the difference between the interests of the mass organisations of the working class and the interests of the bureaucracy lays the ground for several defeats, nevertheless there are no indications whatever that the working class is prepared to see this movement and its organisations transformed into instruments for policing the working class in the needs of capital in the manner of the present government. On the contrary, any fight back by the working class will transform itself into a crisis of these organisations from top to bottom.

22. Today, under conditions of deep economic crisis, dislocation of the parties of the bourgeoisie, and with a working class which has not suffered any major defeats in a direct clash of strength with the ruling class, every serious social and political struggle is accompanied by a profound struggle within the labour movement.

It is only through resolving this crisis of the mass organisations in its favour that in this period the capitalist class can hope to secure the goals it has set itself and defeat the working class. For the working class to prevent this outcome and instead utilise the mass organisations to launch a renewed fight against the ruling class is the only way in which sufficient forces can be gained to resolve the crisis in favour of the working class. The most vital task confronting the working class and oppressed masses is

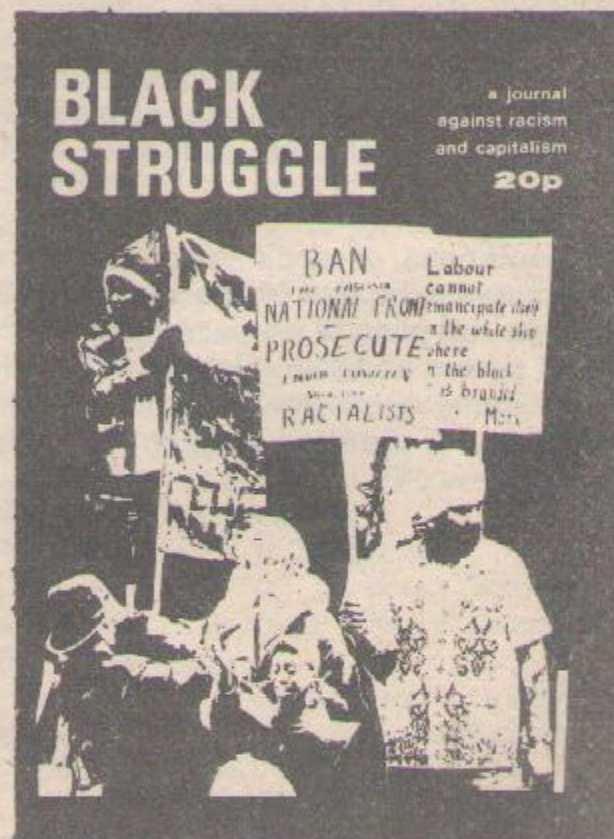
precisely to tear these organisations away from their collaboration with the bourgeoisie, to resolve the crisis of the mass organisations not in favour of the capitalists but in favour of the working class, and to begin on the course of class independence and class struggle against the bourgeoisie.

The fight for class independence and class struggle against the bourgeoisie by the working class and oppressed masses can only be achieved in this period through the struggle for a mass class struggle left wing in the labour movement—a movement which involves in a united front based on united action many different political currents in the labour movement, but which is united in its opposition and action against the decisive forms of bourgeois attack and class collaboration of the day.

In the formula of the Transitional Programme, the position we advance in all struggles and address to all those who claim to lead the working class is **BREAK WITH THE BOURGEOISIE.**

The crucial task in revolutionary tactics in fighting for the building of a class struggle left wing, a current which applies this policy systematically to every field, is to clearly identify these class collaborationist links and to organise the maximum forces to smash them and embark on a course which meets the needs of the working class.

23. In fighting for such a class struggle left wing, revolutionary Marxists clearly understand that in this period the forces which will fight against the decisive forms of class collaboration will not at all be confined to those forces which have broken with all illusions in reformism and in all sections of the reformist bureaucracy. In this period, two currents find themselves clashing with the policies of this government. The first is precisely the mass vanguard which has emerged in the past years, a current which has broken or is breaking with illusions in all sections of the bureaucracy. The second is those sections of the masses and the base of the mass organisations which, without at all having lost all illusions in reformism and the bureaucrats, are nevertheless propelled by the impact of the economic, social and political crisis into the struggle against the capitalist class and the class collaboration carried on by the Callaghan Government and its supporters. Between the struggle of these masses and the immediate forms of class collaboration vacillates the left bureaucracy—attempting to serve the ruling class in every way it can, completely incapable of breaking with the historic interests of the capitalist class but forced on occasion, in order to maintain the base from which it derives its position, to timidly embark on the road of opposition to the immediate interests of the ruling class.



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The task of the IMG in fighting for a class struggle left wing is to organise into a united front all those prepared to fight, taking all measures to strengthen the position of the vanguard within this and to force all elements attempting to straddle the two positions to define themselves. It is around this axis that the core of those forces opposed to class collaboration can be hammered out, the labour movement polarised, and all the currents within that movement forced into a clear relation for or against the needs of the class struggle.

24. It is this crisis of the mass organisations, driven by the economic, social and political crisis, which begins to lay the basis for the construction of an alternative leadership in the labour movement and the defeat and removal of the Callaghan-Healey leadership.

In laying down such a task as the chief one confronting the working class we once again do not derive artificial schemas, but show the conscious logic of the contradictions of the objective situation and the struggles which the working class and oppressed masses are already engaged in. Every section of the working class or oppressed masses which goes into struggle to defend itself or gain its interests today collides centrally with the Callaghan leadership and its supporters. Any attempt to defend living standards; to defend jobs in Chrysler, Leyland or any other major company; any attempt to defeat the cuts; to withdraw troops from Ireland; the fight for the right to abortion; to defend democratic rights, collides with the government.

This process therefore has not been blocked, but expresses itself through the conflict at every level in the labour movement between those who oppose the policies of this government, however confusedly, and those who remain the faithful servants of the bureaucracy. The question of who should lead in the labour movement is posed at every level, and the touchstone remains, whether the leaders support the central leadership of the social democratic bureaucracy both in the trade unions and in Parliament. This evidently is because the Labour Government and its backers in the TUC remain the principal executors of the bourgeoisie's strategy at the present time.

It is for this reason that the slogan 'Unite to fight the policies of this government and to remove the Callaghan-Healey leadership' is central, not only because matters previously dealt with on the level of economic matters now become the business of governments, but because the crisis of leadership of the class is revealed at every level in the working class, from the shop steward and ward secretary to the leadership of the trade unions and the Labour Party. The touchstone of that crisis is the attitude to this Labour Government and what alternatives there are to its policies.

The project of fighting for such a class struggle left wing corresponds to the whole basic thrust of class polarisation and working class advance in this period.

Today the acuteness of social and political contradictions and the increase in size of the vanguard is such that the class struggle left wing is not a concept of a current led for a prolonged period and in a relatively unchallenged way by left bureaucrats, whether social democrats or Stalinists, but on the contrary of a **united front** driven right from the

beginning by struggles for leadership within the united action. While revolutionaries will initially undoubtedly be a definite **minority**, nevertheless, right from the beginning they will be a part of and challenging for the leadership of such a movement. Indeed, precisely one of the most important aspects of the interventions such as the National Coordinating Committee Against Cuts in the NHS, the Troops Out Movement, the National Abortion Campaign, the Working Women's Charter etc. is precisely that they show that even on a national scale the revolutionaries are not an insignificant force; on the contrary, they are capable of taking a leading role in actions by sections of workers and oppressed masses, and they constitute a powerful lever through which we are able to project ourselves into being a component, if minority, part of the leadership of such a development of a class struggle left wing. Our task is not to be merely an opposition in the base but an opposition within the leadership of such a current. In that sense, the analogy in our line is that of the Minority Movement or of the SWP in the 1930s, not that of entryism as practised in the 1950s and '60s.

Right from the beginning of the construction of such a class struggle left wing there will be the sharpest clashes with the bureaucracy, and every lever must be grasped to increase the weight of revolutionary forces within such united action and united front. This means a confrontation with the bureaucracy, and projection of an independent revolutionary presence, right down the line and on every field and aspect of the class struggle.

25. The starting point for the struggle for a class struggle left wing must be a programme which, starting from the objective task of resolving the crisis facing society and the masses, provides the links to the consciousness of the working class and oppressed layers of society, and is therefore capable of mobilising them ever more clearly against the bases of capitalist power.

Such a programme in the entire period leading to the revolutionary crisis and working class seizure of power can only be the full Transitional Programme of the Fourth International. Explanation of this programme in full, and of the theoretical conquests of Marxism which underlie it, is at all times a chief task of the revolutionary organisation and one whose importance is in general continuously underestimated. However, in the method taught by Trotsky in his theses of the first four Congresses of the Comintern, **Strategy and Tactics in the Imperialist Epoch**, and his many writings and analyses, it is also necessary to concretise this programme in every conjuncture so as to encapsulate the chief and most central tasks which confront the working class and its allies in any particular conjuncture.

Such a programme constitutes the programme of action in a conjuncture. The demands which we have outlined above, flowing from our analysis of the objective situation and relations between the classes, thus constitute the **Action Programme** of the IMG which we lay before the working class and oppressed masses and the vanguard in the present conjuncture. The chief task of the IMG in the present period in the fight for a class struggle left wing is to find the ways to force united action of the class and oppressed masses around the demands of this programme of action.

Letter to the Editors

CORRECTIONS TO ' MEMOIRS OF A CHINESE TROTSKYIST '

Only very recently did I see the issue of *International* (Vol.2, no.3) in which my 'memoirs' were published. I was glad to see its publication, but I was rather disappointed to find that there were a lot of inaccuracies—both in factual terms and in the explanation of controversial opinions. I am therefore sending you a table of errata for publication in the next issue of *International*.

In fact, it was not an article written by me, but the transcription of an interview I gave to a Japanese friend three years ago. It was tape-recorded and then he himself transcribed it in Japan. As my English is inadequate, many points in my talk were not correctly understood and therefore not correctly transcribed by my visitor. Basing himself on the original manuscript which I had not yet checked or corrected, Comrade A. edited the 'Memoirs of a Chinese Trotskyist' for *International*. Hence the numerous inaccuracies.

The following are some mistakes of importance:

1. P.27, 2nd col.

(a) 4th and 5th lines from the top, 'One of the leading members of the Trotskyist tendency in the Soviet Union' should read: 'One of the leading members of the Trotskyist tendency of Chinese communists in the Soviet Union.'

(b) 14th line from the bottom: 'Kiangsi' should be 'Kiangsu'.

2. P. 28, 1st col.

(a) 4th line from the top, 'One Voice' should be 'Our Word'.

(b) 10th and 11th lines from the top, 'and I was once arrested during that time' should be deleted.

(c) 14th and 15th lines from the bottom, '.... some members of the Proletariat Group asked me to join it, but' should be deleted.

(d) The whole section under the subtitle 'Trotskyism in China' should be replaced by the following:

'At that time, three Trotskyist groups were being formed in Shanghai alongside the group "Our Word", which had already existed for at least one year. One of the three groups was led by Chen Tu-hsiu, founder of the CCP and the General Secretary of the CC of the party during the revolution of 1925-1927, who had got the documents of the Left Opposition of the Russian Communist Party

from the returned students from Moscow and became a Trotskyist after he had read them. When he was convinced of the correctness of the Left Opposition, he determined to struggle for it in China and so he wrote the "Open Letter to All Comrades of the CCP", and a collective document called "our collective positions", which was signed by 81 people, most of whom were old cadres who had held positions of responsibility in the CCP. The "Open Letter" is one of the most important documents of the Trotskyist movement in China. It was a criticism of the party and its policies made by the former prominent leading members of the party themselves. After putting out this statement, they began to publish an organ called *Proletariat* and all the signatories of the "Open Letter" were organised into the "Proletariat Group".

'When I was expelled from the CCP and recovered from my illness, I began to openly work for the Trotskyist tendency. I considered myself as a member of the "Our Word" group, because one year earlier in Moscow we had reached a decision not to establish any separate organisation when we returned to China but to join the organisation which already existed, that is, the "Our Word" group. During the winter of 1930, however, when I actually wanted to take part in the work of the group, "Our Word" had split into two grouplets. One grouplet consisting of those comrades from Peking, in co-operation with Liu Jen-ching, was going to form a new group. As I, like all young Trotskyists of that time, did not quite believe the sincerity of the conversion of Chen Tu-hsiu and his followers to Trotskyism, I did not want to join Chen's group. After some discussion with the Peking comrades and Liu, I decided to work with them by organising ourselves into a separate group and publishing an organ called *October*.

'Liu Jen-ching was one of the twelve members who attended the Founding Congress of the CCP and once was the General Secretary of the League of the Socialist Youth of China. He returned to China a little earlier than I after he had studied for a few years at the Lenin Institute in Moscow. He returned by the way of Europe and stayed with Trotsky in Turkey for several days. In consultation with Liu, Trotsky drafted the first platform for the Chinese Bolshevik-

Leninists, which Liu brought with him to China and with which he contacted Chen Tu-hsiu, trying to win him to the position of the Left Opposition. But Liu did not join Chen's group when it was organised.

'Now we had three groups in China, each claiming to be Trotskyist. They were: "Our Word", "Proletariat" and "October". The fourth and the least important was called "Struggle"; it consisted of a few students returned from Moscow, with Chao Chi and Liu Ying as their leaders.'

(e) 2nd para. from the top, 10th and 11th lines, 'Chen Tu-hsiu himself walked out of the council and withdrew the Proletariat representative', should read: 'Chen Tu-hsiu became impatient, recalled the two representatives, and he and Ying Kuan were sent the Council as new representatives of the Proletariat group.'

(f) 3rd para. from the top, 2nd line, 'In his Open Letter', should read: 'In his letter to Chinese comrades.'

(g) 1st line from the bottom: 'Chung Chao-lin' should be 'Cheng Chao-lin'.

3. P. 29, 1st col.

(a) 1st line from the top, 'Wo Tak' should be 'Chang Chiu (a Hong Kong worker)'.
(b) 2nd para. from the bottom, the last sentence 'Now at last, Chen Tu-hsiu expelled him', should be deleted.

(c) 2nd para. from the bottom, 5th and 6th lines, 'Po Si-ao, who later quit the party' should read: 'Po Si-liu, who got two and a half years.'

4. P.29, 2nd col.

(a) 1st para., 10th line from the top, 'People's Tribune' should be 'People's Forum'.
(b) 12th and 13th lines from the bottom, 'Liu Jen-ching came south to Shanghai with four young comrades' should read: 'Liu Jen-ching's four young comrades came south to Shanghai'.

(c) 7th line from bottom, 'Liu and the others were sent to' should read: 'Liu, who had been arrested in Peking, and the others'

5. P. 30, 2nd col., 2nd para. from the top, 5th line 'Wangsi' should be 'Kwangsi'.

6. P.31, 1st col.

(a) 2nd para. from the top, 5th and 6th lines, 'Chen had by now become spiritually dull, but still had sound political opinions',



should read: 'Chen had by now become spiritually depressed, but still....'

(b) 2nd para., at the end of it, 'One very ridiculous thing he said was that I should go into the army but should take care always to stand in a safe place', should read: 'He said it would be absurd to want to take part in and support the War of Resistance, but in practice to stand outside it.'

(c) 3rd para. from the top, 4th line, 'Hupeh province under Song Cha-kyui' should be 'Hopeh province under Soong Che-yuan...'

7. P.31, 2nd col. 2nd para., 5th line from the bottom, 'Chen Tu-hsiu himself finally attended the meeting' should read: 'Chen Tu-hsiu got Comrade Lu Han to attend the meeting....'

8. P.32, 1st col. 2nd para. from the bottom, in the later part of the para., beginning with 'But think of the situation, if we' to the last sentence '.... for which we had to prepare ourselves' should be replaced by the following:

'In short, just think of such a situation, if we are on the war front against the invading Japanese army and if an anti-Kuomintang revolutionary situation arises in the areas under Kuomintang rule, what should we Chinese Trotskyists do then? In my opinion, we only had one alternative: either to abandon our revolutionary programme, and persuade the revolutionary masses to refrain

from committing "excesses", to postpone their struggle until the external enemies were defeated and thus help the KMT to suppress the revolution in the name of achieving victory over the Japanese invaders; or to continue the fight for our revolutionary programme by actually standing shoulder to shoulder with and giving a lead to the revolutionary masses in spite of the risk of temporary set-back on the anti-Japanese front.

'It was my opinion that if we really meant to continue our revolutionary struggle during the war, not in words but in deeds, we should prepare ourselves to adopt such a position of "revolutionary defeatism", which might in any case be forced on us by objective developments. Needless to say, "revolutionary defeatism" in this sense is not the same as Lenin's concept of "revolutionary defeatism" which can only be applied to wars of an imperialist character. It would be more precise to call the "revolutionary defeatism" I talked about above "revolutionary victory-ism". This was because we believed that the war against the Japanese invaders could only be won under a revolutionary leadership. Thus our formula was and should have been: to continue the revolutionary struggle during the war. We opposed the treacherous formula: victory first and then revolution.'

9. P. 32, 2nd col., the last sentence of the 2nd para. from the top: 'On the editorial board too, the majority swung to Peng's

position and Chen Chao-lin and I were put in a minority' should read: 'Although on the Editorial Board, Peng's position still remained the minority (2:4).'

10. P.33, 1st col., 2nd para. from the bottom, 9th line, 'Internationalist Communist Party' should be 'Internationalist Workers Party'.

11. P.33, 2nd col.

(a) 1st para., the last sentence, 'This last insurrection was organised by Chou En-lai and Chang Cheng-tong . . . Chang Cheng-tong was of course one of our comrades, he is in one of Mao's prisons today', should read: 'This insurrection was organised by Chou En-lai. One of our comrades, Chiang Cheng-tung, who is in one of Mao's prisons today, was one of its second rank leaders.'

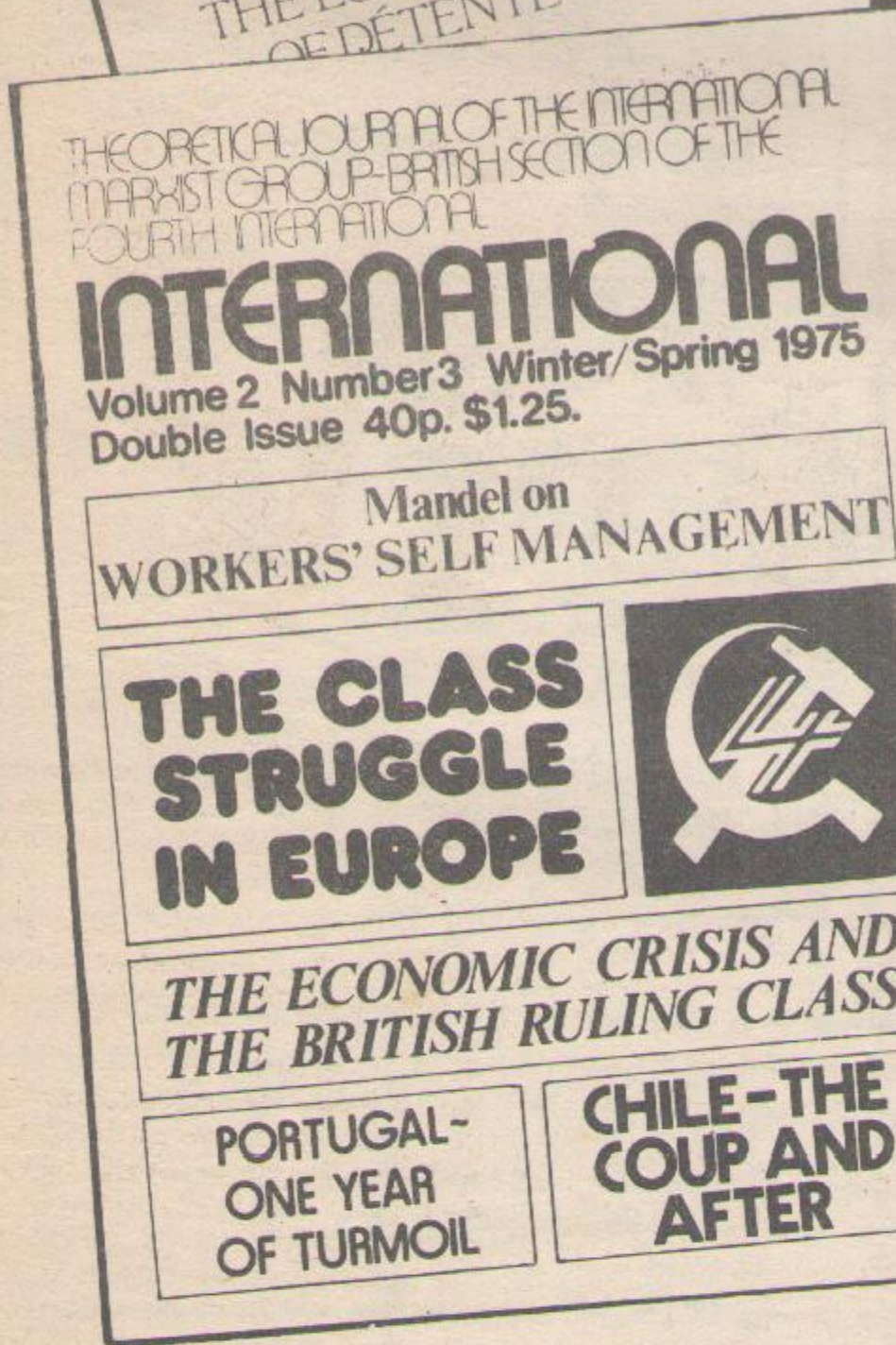
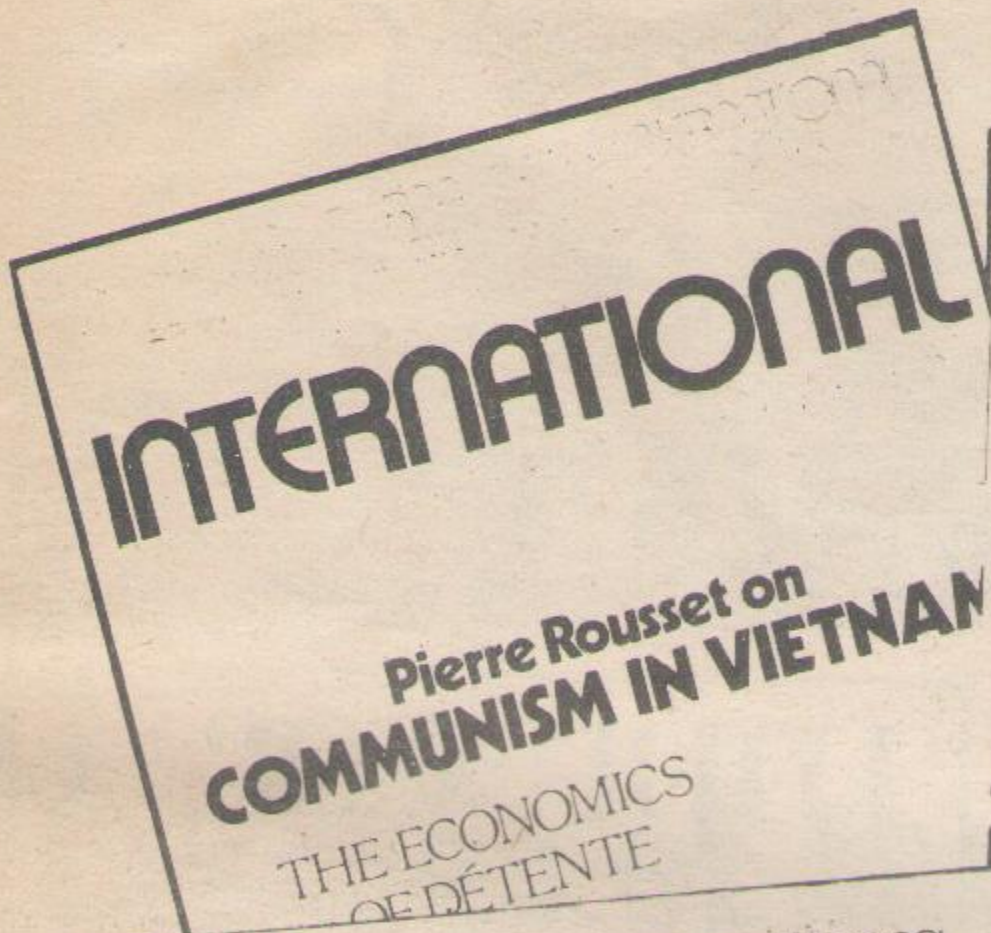
(b) 2nd para., 2nd sentence, 'Peng's group decided to move the leadership of their party to Hong Kong...', should read: 'Peng's group had already moved the leadership of their party to Hong Kong six months earlier...'

Fraternally,
F. Wang

15 March 1975.

We apologise to comrade Wang for the long delay in rectifying these mistakes, which resulted both from our previous irregularity of production and the inadvertent omission of his letter from our last issue.—EDS.

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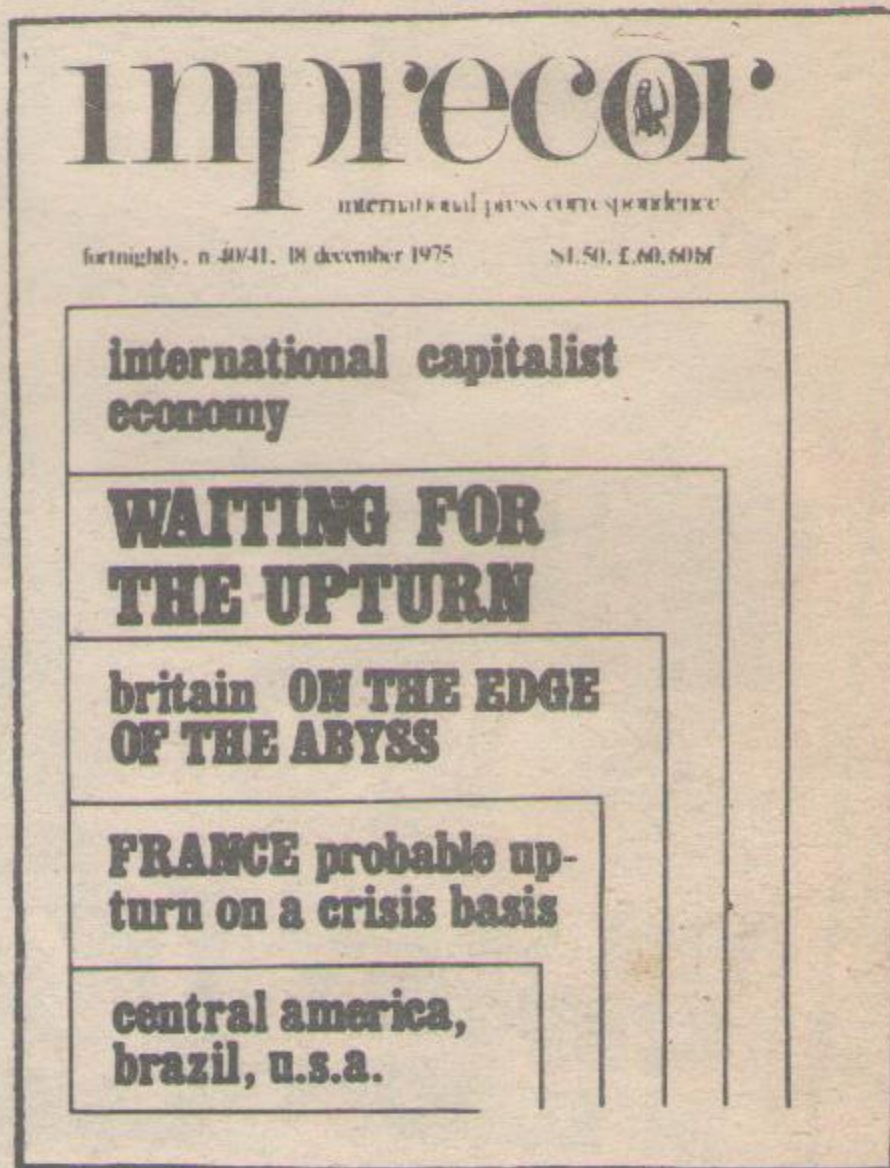
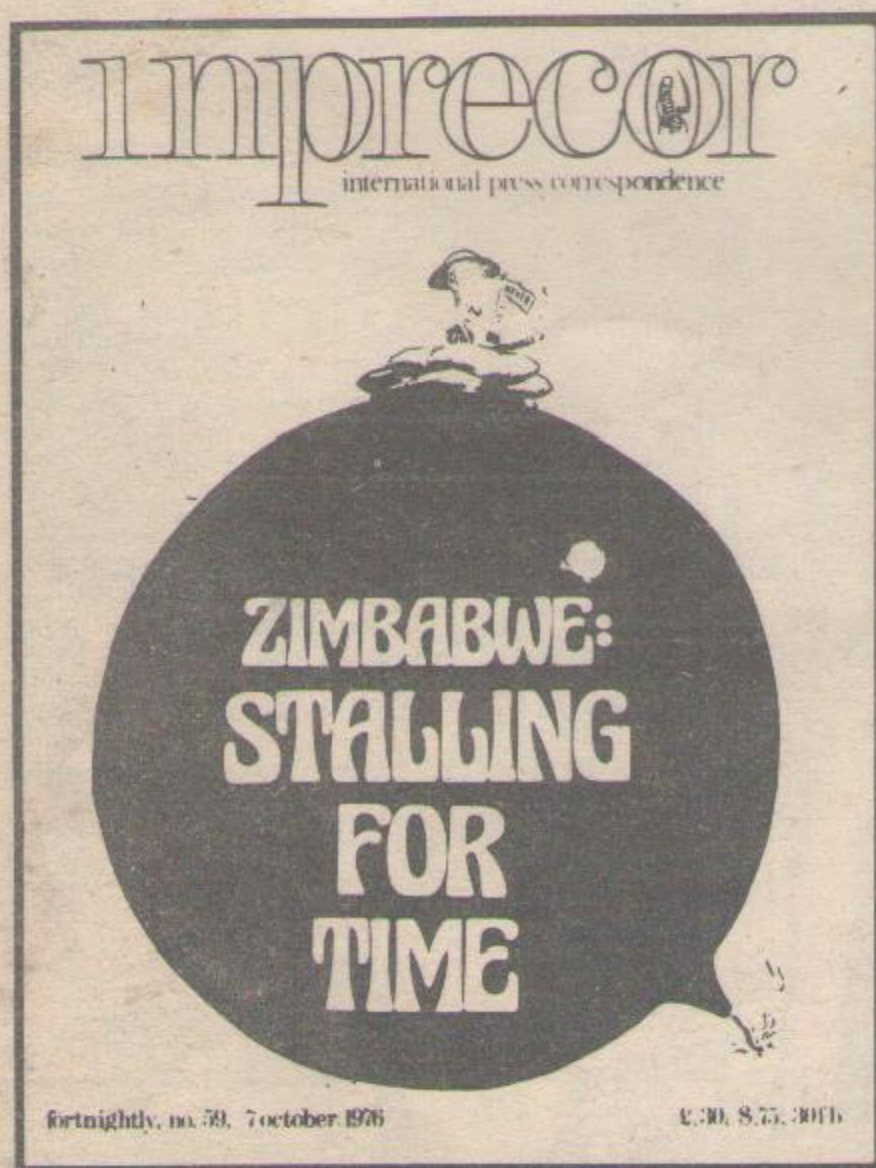


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