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Letter to our readers

ELECTIONS AND THE MASSES

Recent developments in different parts of the world have once again provided a novel vindication of the inter-relationship between mass upheavals or discontent and bourgeois politics. Elections to national parliaments have brought turmoil in Pakistan, resulted in the displacement of the Congress Party in India, and are likely to threaten the existence of the Bandaranaike administration in Sri Lanka. Nearer home the workers parties have registered further gains in local elections in France. Labour has lost two solid working class seats to the Tories in parliamentary by-elections in England (Stechford and Ashfield) and has been confronted with the growing power of the Scottish National Party in local elections in Scotland. [The fascists, too, have grown in electoral terms.] Elections are due to be held this summer in Spain, the results of which could well create a further polarisation between the Francoist state apparatus and the working class movement and its parties.

A positive feature in the French local elections was the united slate presented by three far left organisations: the LCR (Revolutionary Communist League, French section of the Fourth International), LO (Workers Struggle) and the OCT (Communist Workers Organisation). This slate did remarkably well in a number of important working class areas. In Britain, too, the far left has begun to take electoral work more seriously. Although the Stechford intervention was marred by the refusal of the Socialist Workers Party [formerly IS] to discuss a joint candidate, the vote received by both the IMG and the SWP candidate was positive. In the local elections the IMG candidates received good votes in a number of areas, and in Saitley in Birmingham a member of the IMG standing as a candidate for the Asian Socialist League polled 620 votes, which was 11.4 per cent of the total and double the vote received by the fascists. The fact that the far left is doing relatively better than the Communist Party in local and national elections indicates the mood among those layers looking for socialist solutions to the crisis, though the lack of unity remains a crippling factor.

The whole question of revolutionary strategy in a bourgeois democracy dominates this issue of our journal. Mandel's vigorous defence of Luxemburg against Kautsky is relevant to the debate we have with the 'Eurocommunists'; the Roberts-Blackburn exchange continues this discussion further. Jairus Banaji's critique of the Comintern's positions on India is an original attempt to grapple with the specific nature of the Indian social formation and its political structures — a timely undertaking which will help many Marxists to understand the significance of the Congress defeat in India.

Continued on page 2

We take this opportunity to congratulate the comrades of New Left Review on the publication of their hundredth issue. The two pillars which sustain NLR 100 are the important text by Perry Anderson on Gramsci and the detailed and searching interview conducted with Ernest Mandel. Both represent a serious, well thought out assault on the strategic and theoretical positions of the European Communist Parties. Both are written in the style and spirit of classical Marxism and represent an extremely creative attempt to develop Leninism. It is to be hoped that both articles will provoke a serious debate within the pages of the Review, which remains the only journal of Marxist theory and politics with a worldwide readership. This enables it to serve as a forum for debate between Marxists representing different political traditions from all the five continents. As long as it continues to fulfill this vital task, the NLR will remain indispensable both for those who agree with it and those who view it with hostility, and envy its successes, but cannot ignore its existence.

SOCIALISTS AND EASTERN EUROPE

We would also like to bring to your attention a new journal which specialises in providing information on the USSR and Eastern Europe which is not readily available elsewhere. The second issue of Labour Focus on Eastern Europe has just been published. The journal is an attempt to fill a vacuum which has made socialists who are opponents of the bureaucratic regimes of the Eastern part of Europe dependent on the bourgeois mass media. LFEE breaks the bourgeois monopoly of information on these states. It is also a concrete demonstration of our political hostility to the regimes in the USSR and Eastern Europe, but it is a hostility which has nothing in common with the hypocritical campaigns

of the Western press. Some of the sponsors of LFEE include Tamara Deutscher, Edmund Baluka, Jan Kavan and Leonid Plyushch. It is a magazine which should be utilised extensively within the labour movement to build support for victims of bureaucratic repression and in particular those who are not favoured in the West because they are Marxists. LFEE can be obtained by writing to: Bottom Flat, 116 Cazenove Road, London N16. The subscription rate is £3.50 for nine issues per year [Europe: 40 French francs or equivalent; US: \$10 surface, \$15 air].

AN APOLOGY

We publish in this issue an angry letter from Monty Johnstone complaining about the strong language used in the concluding paragraph of Patrick Camiller's article on the Popular Fronts in our last issue. While standing by the political arguments in the text, we regret the use of personal abuse. It is certainly not unknown within the polemical tradition of the workers movement but it is something which should be avoided. We apologise to Monty Johnstone and assure him that we would have done so even if he had not threatened us with legal action.

HOW YOU CAN HELP US

The response to the last issue of International has been extremely gratifying for all of us who have worked on it. The best way you can help us is by taking a subscription yourself and introducing the magazine to other individuals, as well as to bookshops and libraries. This is essential if we are going to sustain the journal on a self-sufficient basis. Every issue has between 65,000 and 75,000 words. It is a small book in many ways, and is therefore very reasonably priced. Its content, in our opinion, is steadily improving. So should its circulation.

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The Crisis in Education:

A reply to Ken Jones

Clara Mulhern

It is remarkable, given the relatively high level of teacher militancy in England in the late Sixties and early Seventies, that the current ideological attack on education has caught left-wing teachers so unawares. So far the left's contribution to 'the Great Debate' initiated by Callaghan last October has been negligible. Only now is it possible to appreciate fully the limitations of the purely economist campaigns fought by Rank & File for the London Allowance and Houghton awards. Ken Jones's contribution to the last issue of *International* must therefore be welcomed as timely and important: it represents one of the very few serious attempts made by Marxists to analyse the current crisis of British education in the context of the history of educational development since the Second World War. And for this very reason, it is all the more important to examine his arguments with care.

The substance of Ken Jones's position seems to be this: the English educational system, at present under attack from the bourgeoisie, is essentially the product of thirty years of working class gains. The bourgeoisie can no longer fulfil working class demands for educational expansion, because of the current economic crisis and also because it fears a crisis of ideological legitimacy in the schools. It is in this context that we are invited to see the William Tyndale debacle: the school offered a good example of the exploitation and extension of working class educational gains, and so was selected by the bourgeoisie for target-practice, prior to a generalised attack on the existing educational system.

However, this straightforward thesis is qualified by the following observations, among others: the working class too is aware of a crisis in education, and sections of it have responded not by defending their historic 'gains' but by drifting into a 'thoroughly retrogressive' movement attack-

ing them; the post-war movement for educational reform was in any case inspired by social democratic ideals of inter-class unity, so much so that it won support even from the Bow Group; furthermore, progressive educational ideas failed to win any significant audience in the working class.

After these qualifications, what is left of the substantive thesis? Little enough, it appears. We are presented with the enigma of a bourgeois attack on an educational system largely devised by the bourgeoisie itself; a system which at the same time represents thirty years of 'working class gains', but which the working class still shows little or no inclination to defend. What his thesis seems to come down to is the unexceptionable but limited observation that the increased political weight of the working class after 1945 was a major factor in post-war educational development; what his qualifications demonstrate is that the actual history of educational debate, policy and practice cannot be explained away by that alone.

The Logic of Jones's Argument

However, the problem is not merely one of analytical 'balance'. What is at issue is a definite political logic that determines the peculiar emphases and oversights of the article as a whole. The net effect of the argument summarised above is to suggest that 'the working class' exists as a social force taking positions and making demands, somehow apart from or even in spite of the political and trade union organisations that represent it at any given time. Dubious as a general principle, this view is quite untenable in a situation such as ours, where social democracy and a reformist trade union movement enjoy a monopoly of working class representation. How does comrade Jones imagine that the working class is collectively to define its views on education or anything else, except through these

organisations? How does he know that 'the masses perceive a crisis in education' other than that which their leaderships have defined for them? The available evidence suggests otherwise. As he himself would agree, the manifestations of working class unease have so far been purely negative — the Tyndale crisis could not have ended, as it now has, in disaster, had the local working class come to the teachers' defence.

But the logic of his article makes it difficult even to focus this crucial aspect of the educational crisis with any precision. For the effect of these appeals to an abstract 'working class' is actually to place the educational issues themselves beyond the pale of discussion. If, in spite of social democratic dilution, the CP's supra-class progressivism, and a quarter-century of capitalist recuperation, the educational reforms of the post-war years remain essentially 'working class gains', then there is no need to evaluate them afresh; the business of militants is quite simply to defend them. The list of IMG demands with which Jones concludes presupposes all this. If it were really the case that the working class perceived the educational system as a precious gain, then these trade union and community-control initiatives might well be powerful means of struggle. But as he himself admits, the working class is not content with the educational status quo, much less eager to defend it. The fact is that the educational system itself is now being called into question, at every level of British society. Any socialist plan of action that fails to take this into account is doomed from the outset to complete inconsequence.

For all that, specifically educational questions find very little space in Ken Jones's text. For example, the perplexing problems of the Tyndale affair are raised only to be dismissed. 'The Tyndale issue', he argues, 'allowed the bourgeoisie to pose as the defenders of a new layer of working class children, underprivileged as a result of progressivism.' But if the school represented, as he believes, 'a real extension of the gains previously made' in working class education, how could working class parents have seen the bourgeois attack as they did? In an attempt to deflect such questions, comrade Jones concedes only that the teachers may have made 'tactical' mistakes. One good reason why he cannot see the errors that they did make is because he shares at least some of them, as these sentiments reveal: 'the watchword of this campaign [against Tyndale] is "accountability", which signifies an obedience of teachers to the dictates of industry, sometimes disguised as popular control.' Jones fails, as the Tyndale teachers consistently did, to offer an alternative definition of 'accountability', thus laying himself open to serious charges of arrogance and irresponsibility. If teachers are not accountable to any outside authority, then they can only be accountable to their own corporate interest. This position, which can never be more than a radical variant on the old fetish of 'professionalism', is surely untenable for socialists. It was because the Tyndale teachers failed to clarify their responsibilities to the working class whose children they taught that their appeals for workers' solidarity in the face of victimisation had such faint resonance. Thus isolated, they stood little chance against the bureaucratic brutality of County Hall. The real question raised by the issue of accountability (to whom should teachers be accountable?) is not seriously broached in Jones's article; and the omission, as I have suggested, is no merely 'tactical' error.

His airy dismissal of accountability is matched by his inadequate characterisation of the critics of the educational status quo, and his failure to distinguish the two main currents that are involved. On the one hand there are the Black Paper supporters, an avowedly elitist offshoot of the humanist tradition fighting for the maintenance of different forms of education for the different social classes. On the other there are the social democrats who serve the general interests of advanced capitalism. Until recently this current favoured progressive methods and comprehensivisation, expecting thereby to achieve increased social mobility and an

adequate supply of the administrative and technical cadres required for social and economic 'modernisation'. Callaghan, in his October speech, took care to distinguish this tendency from 'those whose concern for standards conceals a defense of privilege'. The affinities and contrasts between these two tendencies require scrupulous examination, if the real character, strength and design of the bourgeois attack on education are to be assessed. To conflate them, as Ken Jones does, in the category 'reactionary' is to license an entirely uncritical defence of the educational status quo. The 'Great Debate' is not merely the creature of a monolithic bourgeoisie, manufacturing reactionary fantasies and slanders as a smokescreen for public expenditure cuts. To abstain from intervention in it, or to fail to explore the issues raised in it with the utmost seriousness, is in effect to grant the bourgeoisie an ideological monopoly in the public discussion of the most persistent and disabling contradictions of British capitalism (most notably its failure to modernise successfully).

Comprehensives and the Working Class: Notes for an Analysis

It is obviously impossible, in a short comment of this kind, to do more than indicate a few possible lines of inquiry and debate. The paragraphs that follow do not claim to be any more than that. It is of great importance, however, to emphasise the premise that unites them. Socialist analyses of education and the working class must never, it seems to me, lose sight of the distinction between the possible individual interests of individual working class children (that is, within a capitalist framework) and the historic interests of the class as a whole. There are very few socialist teachers who are not personally and practically aware of this distinction: it confronts them daily in the classroom. However, it has not often been borne in mind in theoretical discussions of education. It is relevant first of all to the capitalist rationality of comprehensivisation; secondly, to the working class experience of comprehensives as a social reform; and thirdly, to the perspectives of socialists in the classroom.

Within progressive education, three essential strands can be distinguished: (1) egalitarianism: the abolition of the tripartite secondary system and of 'eleven plus' selection; the dissolution of 'streamed' classes in favour of attempts to encourage children of all classes and abilities to learn together; (2) the movement away from authoritarian and uniform classrooms towards individualised and group-learning situations; pupils are offered limited opportunities to take decisions about their own work-pace, areas of study and collaborators; the teacher becomes a source of opportunities for learning; this encourages a more relaxed and informal relation between teacher and pupils; (3) an emphasis on the study of the social sciences, and the reorganisation of the traditional disciplines into an 'integrated' syllabus, so that children can use these disciplines for social rather than academic purposes.

Why have these forms of school structure, classroom organisation and curriculum been tolerated, indeed encouraged, by the bourgeois State? I believe it is because comprehensive schools were designed to facilitate the formation of a new petty bourgeois layer: the clerical, administrative and technical workers whose numbers have multiplied since 1945, in the conditions of late capitalism. The rigid, class-divided educational system of the pre-war period had to be reformed, because these new personnel could not be recruited entirely from the bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie: in order to produce them in sufficient quantity, it was necessary to develop the hitherto wasted potential of the working class. Educational provision for flexible upward mobility was therefore indispensable. This was the fundamental bourgeois logic of comprehensivisation. 'Selection' — final, lifelong, social selection — was not abolished in the new system; it was merely deferred to the

age of 14, 16 or 18.

This new social layer had to be capable of working under minimum supervision, as part of a team, of internalising the norms of the firm or organisation, and of making responsible decisions on the basis of information supplied. The more open forms of classroom organisation were much more conducive than their predecessors to the development of these skills and habits. This layer was required also to be able to relate its own functions to the needs of society as a whole, to understand at least some of the processes at work in society, and to identify, in one way or another, with the 'common weal' — this was provided by the new emphasis on the social sciences.

This is not to say that the educational system relates in a purely functional way to the capitalist economy. On the contrary, the insertion of nominally egalitarian and non-authoritarian forms into the capitalist educational system has given rise to a number of contradictions, of which two in particular may be mentioned here. The first is between the proclaimed social objectives of the system and the actual experience of the class for whom their appeal is strongest. The mechanism of social mobility promotes gifted individuals from the working class into the petty bourgeoisie, while making no perceptible improvement in the social situation of the class as a whole. Individual social mobility is moreover a much more limited phenomenon than social democratic apologists have ever allowed: the profound inequalities of capitalist society — many times more powerful than the 'countervailing' egalitarianism of the school — are reinforced by rooted cultural habits to ensure the generational self-reproduction of the working class. However, this contradiction, with all the bitterness and disillusionment that it brings, is intersected by a second, which can be made to work against it. For in the course of winnowing a small minority of working class children, the bourgeois State risks providing the remainder — the working class of tomorrow — with a certain surplus of educational possibilities. The characteristic norms and practices of progressive education, with all that they imply politically and ideologically, are instilled not only in the 'successful' ones who 'need' them, but also in the 'failures' who, in strictly capitalist terms, do not. Thus, if the comprehensive system cannot simply be entered as a 'working class gain', it is nevertheless rich in possibilities.

If we as revolutionary socialists ask what form of education will best prepare the working class for socialism, would it not be something along these lines? The working class needs the confidence to take its own decisions, needs to suspect and resist all forms of authoritarianism, and to perceive the needs of society as a whole, and not just its own sectional interests. Comprehensive education and progressive teaching methods approved by a capitalist system to serve its own needs may also be the best preparation for socialism. The bourgeoisie at present seems more aware of this contradiction than do left teachers, many of whom are becoming demoralised and sceptical about progressive principles.

I do not want to argue, in traditional Labour fashion, that comprehensivisation can serve the interests of all classes equally; I am simply trying to highlight some of the contradictions within it, in a preliminary attempt to outline a non-social democratic defence of comprehensives, and a

means whereby socialist teachers can function within them. Such a course involves a struggle against another strand within progressive education that renders it safely conservative: the emphasis on the development of each individual child to the limits of her/his ability, which neatly complements the ideology of equality of opportunity: individual working class children are told that they can 'make it'. There is a neglect of the class component of education: the fact that the working class as a whole is — necessarily — destined to 'failure', and that one of the functions of the educational system is to keep the working class in an economically and ideologically subordinate position, is not understood by many progressive teachers.

The possibilities of introducing children to the development of forms of collective struggle are extremely limited and hazardous. The truth is that teachers are faced with the collective strength of rebellious working class pupils — white and black — in their classrooms, and are often forced, however reluctantly, to break this solidarity by urging individual children to look to their own interests and 'get on'. The problem cannot be solved via the naive stratagems adopted sometimes by young teachers who protest, 'I am on your side, so do as I say even if you don't do what reactionary old Mr X says', or simply say, 'decide for yourselves what to do', thus abnegating their responsibilities.

What can be done is to provide examples of working class forms of struggle from history, as Chris Searle has done with considerable success, in order to encourage a sense of class solidarity. Teachers can encourage the growth of the National Union of School Students, and offer support and cooperation from the National Union of Teachers. They can attempt to subvert prevailing ideologies — racist, sexist, class-collaborationist — but it must be recognised that a developing class consciousness can only come from the experience of struggle in the class as a whole. The educational system will not become a significant arena of class conflict until the class struggle in society is much more intense than it is now. The educational system in any society is structurally conservative; its function is to reproduce existing social and economic relations. This is not an excuse for pessimism or inactivity but a realistic assessment of the possibilities open to us. We should not be seduced into the belief that significant working class gains have been or will be made at the expense of the capitalist class. What gains there have been — and I agree with Ken Jones that there have been some, though he has not defined them — we should defend before the working class. Only when the working class recognises them as gains will it be ready to defend them.

Ken Jones's thesis, and the tactics he devises, are an uncritical defence of the 'gains' of the last thirty years, and therefore do not challenge the working class to go beyond the reformist illusions which maintain its economic and political subordination. An argument based rather on a critical examination of the issues involved in progressive education, while recognising the limitations of action based solely on educational issues, will form a part of the process of winning the working class from reformism to the struggle for socialism.

Rosa & German Social Democracy

Ernest Mandel

The real place of Rosa Luxemburg has still to be located precisely in the history of the revolutionary movement. The disintegration of the Stalinist monolith has meant that, while many have acknowledged her merits, they have hastened to add that 'she belongs to the pre-1914 epoch'.¹ Those writers who pigeon-hole her in this fashion create an impediment for themselves by approaching the history of the workers movement with essentially subjective criteria. In this way the merits of Rosa become — depending on the whim of the author in question — her uncompromising defence of Marxism against the revisionism of Eduard Bernstein, her deep attachment to the principles of mass action and spontaneity, or even her defence of workers democracy against Bolshevik 'excesses'.

The difficulty disappears as soon as we approach the history of the workers movement with objective criteria and apply the golden rule of historical materialism to Marxism itself: in the final analysis it is material existence which determines consciousness and not the reverse. We must start from the changing social reality in order to interpret the modifications which have taken place in the thought of the international workers movement, including successive contributions which have enriched or impoverished Marxism itself. With this method, Rosa's part in the evolution of the workers movement before 1914 (if not before 1919), instead of appearing atomised and fragmented, retains its unity. Only through such a method rather than the empirical approaches of narrative history and specialised research is the crucial importance of Rosa's theoretical and practical activity fully revealed.

'The Tried and Tested Tactic' in Crisis

For thirty years the tactics of German Social Democracy, 'die alte bewährte Taktik' ('the tried and tested tactic'), had completely dominated the international proletarian movement. In fact, apart from the splendid isolation of the Paris Commune and the experiences of certain, mainly anarchist, sections of the international workers movement, the history of the class struggle had borne the social democratic stamp for half a century. Its influence was so preponderant that even those like Lenin and the Bolsheviks, who had broken in practice with this tradition at a national level, continued to regard the German model religiously as a model which was universally applicable.

'The tried and tested tactic' had a first class pedigree. During the last fifteen years of his life, despite significant vacillations², Frederick Engels had become its champion even to the extent of making it a veritable deed in his 'political testament': the 'Introduction' that he wrote in 1895 to the new German edition of Karl Marx's *The Class Struggles in France 1848-50*. The most famous extracts from this 'Introduction' were cited innumerable times in every

European language between 1895 and 1914. And it was this path which social democracy followed from 1918 to 1929, when the world economic crisis and the crisis of social democracy itself combined to put an end to this sterile exercise:

1. This is particularly the judgement of J.P. Nettl, who has written the fullest biography of Rosa to date (*Rosa Luxemburg*, London, 1966). Nettl combines a wealth of detail and an often impressive judgement on partial events with a complete lack of comprehension of the general problems of proletarian strategy, the mass movement and revolutionary perspectives: precisely the problems that preoccupied Rosa throughout her life.

2. Therefore, when the danger of war was posed for the first time in the 1890s, Engels asserted that, in the event of a war, social democracy would be forced to take power and expressed the fear that this could end disastrously. In the same letter to Bebel he expressed his conviction that, 'we would be in power by the end of the century' (letter to Bebel, 24 October 1891.) In a previous letter (dated 1 May 1891) he attacked Bebel's plan to censor the publication of the *Critique of the Gotha Programme* and denounced the attack on the freedom of criticism and discussion within the party (August Bebel, *Briefwechsel mit Friedrich Engels*, Mouton & Co., 1965, pp. 417, 465.)

'Everywhere the German example of utilising the suffrage, of winning all the posts accessible to us, has been imitated. Everywhere the spontaneous unleashing of the attack has retreated into the background... The two million voters whom it sends to the ballot box, together with the young men and women who stand behind...them as non-voters, form the most numerous, most compact mass, the decisive "shock force" of the international proletarian army. This mass already supplies over a fourth of the recorded votes...Its growth proceeds as spontaneously, as steadily, as irresistibly, and at the same time as tranquilly as a natural process. All government interventions have proved powerless against it. We can count even today on two and a quarter million voters. If it continues in this fashion, by the end of the century we shall conquer the greater part of the middle section of society, petty bourgeois and small peasants, and grow into the decisive power in the land, before which all other powers will have to bow, whether they like it or not. To keep this growth without interruption until of itself it gets beyond the control of the ruling governmental system, not to fritter away this daily increasing shock force in advance guard fighting, but to keep it intact until the decisive day, that is our main task.' (Engels: Selected Writings, edited by W. O. Henderson, pp 294-296. Our emphasis.) *

Of course, we now know that the German Social Democratic leaders had scandalously censored Engels' text and had twisted its meaning, removing everything that remained fundamentally revolutionary in the words of this old fighter and lifelong companion of Marx. ³ But all that is by the way. The above quotation is authentic. It completely justifies 'the tried and tested tactic': recruit as many members as possible, educate as many workers as possible, gain as many votes as possible in elections, and put new social legislation on the statute book (above all the reduction of the working week) — everything else will follow automatically: 'All other powers will have (sic) to bow before us'; our growth is 'irresistible'; we must 'keep our shock force intact until the decisive day' (sic)...

Even more convincing than the blessing of the venerable doyen of international socialism was the verdict of the facts. The facts gave credence to Bebel, Vandervelde, Victor Adler and the other pragmatists who were content to plod this

path, thereafter elevated to the status of holy writ. At each election the votes grew. If sometimes there was an unexpected reversal (the 'Hottentot elections' in Germany in 1907*) it was followed by a particularly brilliant riposte: the Reichstag elections in 1912, when the German Social Democracy won a third of the votes. The workers' organisations were continually gathering strength, extending into every sphere of social life and becoming bastions of what was truly a 'counter society' stimulating a sustained development of class consciousness. There were wage rises, there was increasing legislation to protect the workers, and poverty was declining (even if it had not disappeared entirely). The tide seemed so irresistible that not only the faithful but even their adversaries were heady with it.

But, as always, consciousness lagged behind reality. All this 'irresistible tide' amounted to was a reflection of the international capitalist boom, a secular reduction in the 'industrial reserve army' in Europe, notably through emigration, and the increasing super-exploitation of the colonial and semi-colonial countries by imperialism. By the beginning of the 20th century the resources that had fuelled this temporary easing of socio-economic contradictions in the West were beginning to run out. Thenceforth the aggravation and not the easing of social contradictions was on the agenda. Waiting to take the stage was not an epoch of peaceful progress but an epoch of imperialist wars, national liberation struggles and civil war. The long period of amelioration would be followed by twenty years when real wages stagnated or even fell. The epoch of evolution was at an end; the epoch of revolutions was about to begin.

In this new epoch 'the tried and tested tactic' lost all justification; from an organisational principle it was to be transformed into a death trap for the European working class. The vast majority of contemporaries did not grasp this before 4 August 1914. Even Lenin had not understood it for the countries which lay to the west of the Tsarist Empire; Trotsky was hesitant. Rosa's merit was that she was the first to grasp clearly and systematically the necessity for a fundamental change in the strategy and tactics of the workers movement in the West, confronted by a changed objective situation: the dawning of the imperialist epoch. *

* Translators' note — In seeking the source of this quotation most easily accessible to the English audience we turned to the Pelican edition of Engels' writings edited by Henderson. This has probably been one of the most widely-read translations of Engels to appear in English. Yet even in the 1967 edition a translation is used which dates from 1937 and was made by E. Burns. This translation completely omits a crucial passage: 'Everywhere the spontaneous unleashing of the attack has retreated into the background'. Obviously, Ernest Mandel is too generous to the reformists — even in 1937 it was still necessary to falsify and bowdlerise this 'old fighter and companion of Marx'.

3. Engels wrote to Kautsky on 1 April 1895: 'I see an extract from my "Introduction" has appeared in *Vorwärts* today, reprinted without my knowledge and laid out in such a manner that I appear as nothing more than a peaceable lover of legality at all costs. I therefore desire all the more that an uncut version of the "Introduction" be published in the *Neue Zeit* so that this shameful impression is wiped out.'

Using the pretext of threats of legal sanctions, Bebel and Kautsky refused to comply. Engels let himself be coaxed and did not insist on a complete reproduction of the 'Introduction'. This only happened after 1918 through the good offices of another international — the Comintern.

* Translators' note — The so-called 'Hottentot elections' of 1907 resulted in an unexpected setback for the SPD. As the election followed several years of unprecedented rise in the living standards of the masses and the institution of social legislation it was generally expected that the SPD would increase its vote. However, when Imperial Chancellor Bülow dissolved the Reichstag he did so as a manoeuvre to discipline the Catholic 'Centre Party' and create a parliamentary bloc which could govern without reliance on the 'Centre'. The chosen battleground proved to be the question of guerrilla activity in South West Africa ~~and~~, although the ostensible

target of Bülow's campaign was the 'Centre Party', his violently xenophobic campaign was in reality launched against the SPD.

As so often in European history the socialist movement crashed on the rocks of the chauvinism and patriotism inspired in the working class by the bourgeois demagogues and the SPD suffered a major reverse, declining from 81 to 43 seats. However, although this was seen as a clear defeat for the SPD, the underlying strength of German Social Democracy was clearly revealed by the fact that it actually increased its vote by 240,000 — that it lost seats was more a result of the anti-socialist coalition and the vagaries of the German electoral process than any real decline in mass support. This is an important point to remember, as the sacred question of the 'balance of forces' was to be one of the major reasons given by the union bureaucracy for refusing to organise a thoroughgoing resistance to the government in the following years.

4. Trotsky had almost echoed Rosa's opinion in *Results and Prospects* (1906), emphasising the increasingly conservative character of social democracy. However, because of the conciliatory position he adopted on the faction fight in the RSDLP, he came closer to Kautsky in 1908 and supported him against Rosa in the debate on the 'mass political strike'. Lenin took a very cautious attitude on the conflict between Rosa and Kautsky in 1910, attempting to stop a bloc developing between Kautsky and the Mensheviks. In his article 'Two Worlds' he asserted that the differences between the Marxists (amongst whom he numbered not only Rosa and Kautsky, but also Bebel) were only of a tactical nature and, moreover, in the final analysis were minor disagreements. He praised the 'caution' of Bebel and justified his thesis according to which it was preferable to leave the enemy the initiative in starting the war. (*Werke*, Vol. XVI, pp 311-16, Berlin, Dietz-Verlag)

The roots of Rosa's fight against the 'tried and tested tactic'

Of course, the new objective situation had been partially grasped by the most far-sighted Marxists at the end of the 19th century. The phenomenon of the extension of colonial empires and the beginnings of imperialism, insofar as it was the expression of the political expansion of big capital, had been analysed. Hilferding had erected that remarkable monument *Finance Capital*. He recorded the appearance of cartels, trusts and monopolies (used by the revisionists to claim that capitalism would become more and more organised and thus its contradictions less acute; there really is nothing new under the sun). After the International's Stuttgart Conference the suspicions of Lenin, the Polish, Dutch, Belgian and Italian left regarding Kautsky's concessions to the revisionists increased, especially on the question of the fight against imperialist war. Electoral opportunism and 'tactical' blocs with the liberal bourgeoisie of this or that region or national group (such as the Baden group in Germany*, the majority of the Belgian Workers Party, the followers of Jaurès in France, etc.) came under heavy fire. However, all this criticism remained partial and fragmented and, above all, 'the tried and tested tactic' was not scrapped in favour of a new system of strategy and tactics. On the contrary, it was treated with more reverence than ever before.

From 1900 to 1914 Rosa was the only socialist west of Russia to strike out in a new direction. This exceptional achievement was not just the result of her undeniable genius, her clarity of thought, and her unflinching devotion to the cause of socialism and the international working class. It can be explained above all by the historical and geographical, that is to say social, conditions in which her theory and practice were nurtured and developed.

Her unique position as a leader of two social democratic parties (the German and Polish parties) placed her at a vantage point for understanding the two contradictory tendencies in international social democracy. On the one hand there was the dangerous slide into bureaucratic routinism which was becoming ever more pronounced in Germany, and on the other hand there was the rise of new forms and methods of struggle in the Tsarist Empire. She was therefore able to perform for the tactics of the workers movement the same audacious operation that Trotsky had performed for revolutionary perspectives. No longer did the most 'advanced' countries necessarily show the 'backward' ones the image of their own future. On the contrary, the workers of the 'backward' countries (Russia and Poland) were showing the Western countries the urgent tactical modifications that had to be adopted.

Naturally, this too had been foreseen by certain Marxists. As early as 1896, Parvus had published a long study in the *Neue Zeit* in which he envisaged the use of 'a mass political strike' as a weapon against the threat of a coup to suppress universal suffrage. 'This study was itself inspired by a

resolution Kautsky had submitted to the 10th Session of the Socialist Congress in Zurich (1893) on the appropriate response to threats to universal suffrage. Engels had broached the same question in the past, but all these had been isolated forays which led to no strategic or tactical changes.

Rosa was also helped by an in-depth study of the two political crises which had shaken Western Europe towards the end of the century: the Dreyfus affair in France, and the General Strike for universal suffrage in Belgium (1902). From this twofold experience she developed a deep hatred of parliamentary cretinism. Furthermore, she developed a growing conviction that 'the tried and tested tactic' would fail at 'the decisive hour' if the masses were not trained well in advance in the politics of extra-parliamentary action as well as routine electoralism and purely economic strikes. However, it was above all the experience of the Russian revolution of 1905 that enabled Rosa to integrate her scattered criticisms into a systematic critique of 'the tried and tested tactic'. With hindsight we can say that it was undoubtedly 1905 which marked the end of the essentially progressive role of international social democracy and ushered in the prolonged phase of vacillation in which formerly progressive traits were increasingly combined with reactionary influences which steadily grew in strength until they brought the party to the disaster of August 1914.

To grasp the importance of the Russian revolution of 1905 we must bear in mind that it was the first mass revolutionary upheaval which Europe had witnessed since the days of the Paris Commune: that is, for 34 years! It was therefore perfectly natural that such a passionate revolutionary as Rosa should carefully study every detail of the explosion and all its particular characteristics in order to draw out the central lessons of 1905 for the coming upheavals in Europe. In this she merely followed in the footsteps of Marx and Engels, who performed exactly the same examination for the upheavals of 1848 and the Paris Commune.

One aspect of the 1905 revolution in particular was decisive in precipitating the development of a new strategy and new tactics for international social democracy, counterposed to the 'tried and tested tactic' of the SPD. For decades the debate between the anarchists and syndicalists on the one hand and the social democrats on the other had been caught in a false polarisation which counterposed the supporters of *minority direct action* to those who supported *mass, organised action*, which meant in practice 'peaceful', 'legalistic' work (in the electoral arena or the trade unions). However, the revolution of 1905 produced a combination of events which neither side had foreseen. For 1905 saw *direct action by the masses*, yet these masses, far from wallowing happily in a pristine state of spontaneous and unorganised innocence, organised themselves precisely through their experience of mass action in order to prepare themselves for even more audacious actions in the future.

Thus, even though revolutionary syndicalism had for many years counterposed the 'myth' of the general strike* to social democratic electoralism, and although it was at that

* Translators' note — In understanding the degeneration of German Social Democracy it is necessary to grasp the differential conditions which operated throughout 19th and early 20th century Germany. The situation in South Germany was very different from that in Prussia, and power was based on an alliance of conservative landowners and liberal professional classes who presented a very different image from the Junker-dominated and militaristic Prussian state. Hence from the beginning of the 20th century the Baden Social Democratic group used Parliament not merely as a propaganda tribune, but also blocked with the liberals against the Catholic 'Centre Party' to promote certain social reforms. From that moment on reformist degeneration spread rapidly; the deputies soon renounced even the traditional social democratic gesture of defiance and ceased to vote against the budget!

5. The article was entitled 'Staatsstreich und politischer Massenstreik', and was first published in *Neue Zeit*. It has been reproduced in the anthology *Die Massenstreikdebatte*, published by the Europäische Verlagsanstalt (Frankfurt, 1970, pp. 46-95).

* Translators' note — The concept of the general strike as a 'myth' was mainly the work of Georges Sorel, the major theorist of revolutionary syndicalism. In his book *Reflections on Violence* (1906) Sorel defined the mythical quality of the general strike, 'the myth in which Socialism is wholly comprised, i.e., a body of images capable of invoking instinctively all the sentiments which correspond to the different manifestations of the war undertaken by Socialism against modern society'. Thus the strength of the general strike lies in the fact that it does not divert the working class into the avenues of social reform but symbolises and actualises the 'cleavage' between the fundamental classes of bourgeois society, transforming individual conflicts into the pure class war. The general strike becomes the moment of proletarian transformation into the class-for-itself and consequently has this central mythical quality which encloses 'all the strongest inclinations of a people, of a party, or of a class'. Consequently, a clear counterposition was made by Sorel between the revolutionary act and the 'middle class' reformism of social democracy. Cf. *Reflections on Violence*, Collier Books, 1950, pp.124-6 and 133-5.

very moment that a general strike was victorious in Europe for the first time, both Lenin and Rosa grasped the fact that had not been understood in the West: that 1905 sounded the death-knell of revolutionary syndicalism in Russia! They should have added, of course — and Lenin understood this only after 1914 — that the eclipse of revolutionary syndicalism in Russia could only be explained by the fact that, far from opposing the mass strike or trying to curb it in any way, the Russian and Polish Social Democrats (or at least their most radical wings) had become enthusiastic organisers and propagandists for the mass strike and had thus definitively overcome the old dichotomy: 'gradual action — revolutionary action'.

Rosa was dazzled by the experience of the 1905 revolution, an experience which had struck a chord in the hearts of workers in several countries to the west of the Tsarist Empire — beginning with Austria, where it provoked a general strike that won universal suffrage. The last 14 years of Rosa's life thus became a sustained effort to teach this one fundamental lesson to the German proletariat: it is necessary to abandon gradualism, it is necessary to prepare for mass revolutionary struggles which are once again on the agenda. The outbreak of the First World War, of the Russian Revolution of 1917, and of the German Revolution of 1918 all confirmed the accuracy of the estimation she had made in 1905.

On the first of February 1905 she wrote:

'But for international social democracy, too, the uprising of the Russian proletariat constitutes something profoundly new which we must feel with every fibre of our being. All of us, whatever pretensions we have to a mastery of dialectics, remain incorrigible metaphysicians, obsessed by the immanence of everything within our everyday experience... It is only in the volcanic explosion of the revolution that we perceive what swift and earth-shattering results the young mole has achieved and just how happily it is undermining the very ground under the feet of European bourgeois society. Gauging the political maturity and revolutionary energy of the working class through electoral statistics and the membership of local branches is like trying to measure Mont Blanc with a ruler!'

She continued on the first of May:

'This is the main point to grasp: we must understand and assimilate the fact that the actuality of a revolution in the Tsarist Empire will provoke a colossal acceleration in the tempo of the international class struggle so that even in the heartlands of "old Europe" we will face in the not too distant future revolutionary situations and entirely new tactical problems.'

Finally, in a confrontation with reformist syndicalists like Robert Schmidt at the Jena Congress on 22 September 1905, she cried out indignantly:

'So far you have sat here and heard many speeches delivered on the political mass strike. Doesn't it make you feel like putting your head in your hands and asking yourself: are we really living in the year of the glorious Russian revolution or is it still decades away? Every day you can read the accounts of the revolution in the papers, every day you can read the dispatches, and yet you obviously have neither eyes to see nor ears to hear... Doesn't Robert Schmidt see that the moment predicted by our great teachers Marx and Engels has actually arrived? The moment when evolution becomes revolution! We have the Russian revolution right in front of our eyes. We would be fools if we didn't learn anything from it.'

Looking back we know that she was right. Just as the victory of the Russian revolution in 1917 would have been infinitely more difficult without the experience of 1905 and the tremendous revolutionary apprenticeship that it represented for tens of thousands of Russian worker cadres, so the victory of the German Revolution of 1918-9 would have been far easier had the German workers experienced pre-revolutionary or revolutionary mass political struggles before 1914. You can't learn to swim without getting your feet wet, and the masses cannot attain revolutionary consciousness without the experience of revolutionary actions. Even if it was impossible to imitate the 1905 revolution in Germany between 1905 and 1914, it was at least perfectly possible to transform completely the daily routine of social democracy, to reorientate it towards an ever more revolutionary mode of intervention and cadre formation, and thus to prepare the masses for the inevitable confrontation with the bourgeoisie and its state apparatus. By refusing to strike out on a new course and by clinging to increasingly unreal formulæ about the 'inevitable' victory of socialism, the 'inevitable' retreat of the bourgeoisie and its state in the face of 'the calm and tranquil strength' of the workers, the leaders of the SPD during these decisive years sowed the dragons' teeth which sprang up as armed warriors in 1914, 1919, and 1933 as the German workers reaped the bitter harvests of defeat.

The debate on the mass strike

It is in this context that we must examine the debate on the mass strike which unfolded in the SPD after 1905. The main stages of the debate were marked by: the Jena Conference of 1905 (in a certain sense the most 'gauchiste' conference before 1914, obviously due to the pressure of the Russian revolution); the Mannheim Conference of 1906; the publication in that same year of two pamphlets, one by Kautsky and one by Rosa, both addressed to the problem of the 'mass strike'; the 1910 debate between Rosa and Kautsky; and finally the debate between Kautsky and Pannekoek.⁶

We can rehearse the essential points of the debate, even if rather schematically, as follows. Having fought the idea of a general strike as a 'general stupidity' ('Generalstreik ist Generalunsinn') for decades under the pretext that one must first organise the vast majority of workers before such a strike could be successful, the SPD leaders were shaken by the Belgian General Strike of 1902-3, but approached any revision of their 'quietist' conceptions only in a very hesitant way.⁷ In 1905, at the Jena Conference, a clash broke out between the union leaders and the leaders of the SPD during which the union leaders went so far as to suggest that the supporters of the general strike should depart for Russia or Poland post haste to put their ideas into practice.⁸ With reluctance, but not without vigour, Bebel entered the arena and attacked the union leaders, admitting the possibility of a mass political strike 'in principle'. However, a compromise was hammered out between the conferences of Jena and Mannheim. At Mannheim (1906) peace was restored in the central apparatus. Thereafter only the union chiefs were to

6. As early as *Reform or Revolution*, Rosa had written: 'It fell to Bernstein to consider it possible that the farmyard of the bourgeois parliament would be called upon to bring about the most incredible social transformation in history — the passage from capitalist to socialist society.'

Rosa's critique of parliamentarianism and her analysis of the decline of the bourgeois parliament written in 1900 retains a freshness and a relevance which no other Marxist writing in Western Europe before 1914 possesses. In the same vein Rosa explained the increasing strength of revolutionary syndicalism in France as a result of the illusions of the French working class in 'Jauresist' parliamentarianism. (Cf. her article published in the *Sächsische Arbeiterzeitung* of 5/8 December 1905 — Rosa Luxemburg, *Ausgewählte Reden und Schriften*, Vol. 1, p.196.)

7. These quotations are from an article published in the *Neue Zeit* ('Nach dem ersten Akt'), in the *Sächsische Arbeiterzeitung* ('Im Feuerchaine der Revolution') and from her speech at the Jena Congress (see Rosa Luxemburg, *Ausgewählte Reden und Schriften*, Vol. II, Dietz Verlag, Berlin, 1955, pp. 220/1, 234/5, and 244).

8. A good summary of this debate is given by Antonia Grunenberg in her introduction to *Die Massenstreikdebatte* (pp.5-44).

9. For example, in the article 'The Lessons of the Miners' Strike' ('Die Lehren des Bergarbeiterstreik') which appeared in the *Neue Zeit* in 1903.

10. Rosa Luxemburg, Speech at the Jena Congress, 21 September 1905 (*Ausgewählte Reden und Schriften*, Vol. II, pp. 240-1).

be considered 'competent' to 'proclaim' strike action, including a mass political strike, after they had weighed up all the problems of 'organisation', the funds available, the 'balance of forces', etc. After the untoward intervention of an actual revolution in Russia, the SPD leaders heaved a sigh of relief and returned to the familiar and well-trodden paths of 'the tried and tested tactic'.

Throughout all this Rosa was, of course, furiously champing at the bit. She was just waiting for the most propitious moment to strike a decisive blow for her new strategy and tactics. The moment dawned with the elections to the Prussian Diet in 1910, when agitation for universal suffrage was launched. The masses were demanding action and Rosa organised a dozen mass meetings aided by thousands of workers and militants. A police ban on the meetings led to skirmishes and finally a central demonstration of 200,000 was organised in Traptow Park, Berlin. But the SPD leadership hated these 'disturbances' like the plague, and concentrated on preparing the best possible electoral intervention in the 1912 elections. Consequently the agitation was stifled at birth and this time it was Kautsky himself, the 'guardian of orthodoxy', who took up the cudgels and led the theoretical and political struggle of the apparatus against the left. He produced countless pedantic articles and pamphlets which reveal, above all else, a complete failure to grasp the dynamic of the mass movement. ^{11*}

At first sight a reversal of alliances had occurred. At the turn of the century, Rosa and Kautsky (the left and the centre) had blocked with the apparatus of the party around Bebel and Singer against the revisionist minority around Bernstein. In 1906, at the Mannheim Conference, the trade union apparatus went over to the revisionist camp and the Bebel-Kautsky-Rosa alliance seemed stronger than ever. So how then should we account for the sudden reversal in this system of alliances, which took place within the space of four years (1906-10)? In fact, the social and political realities of the problem differed decisively from the appearances. Bebel and the party apparatus were just as much enamoured of 'the tried and tested tactic' in 1906 as in 1910. They were fundamentally conservative, that is to say supporters of the status quo in the heart of the workers movement itself (without having lost for all that their socialist convictions and even passions, but having relegated these to the province of a distant future). Bernstein and the revisionists threatened to upset the delicate equilibrium between 'the tried and tested tactic' (that is, the daily reformist practice), socialist propaganda, the hopes and faith of the masses in socialism, the unity of the party, and the unity between the masses and the party. For that reason Bebel and the apparatus opposed him; for essentially conservative ends so as not to upset the apple-cart.

However, the revolution of 1905 and the impact of imperialism on the relations between the classes in Germany itself aggravated the tensions in the heart of the workers movement. When the possibility of a split emerged after the Jena Conference, Bebel, Ebert and Scheidemann showed that they preferred the unity of the apparatus to unity with radicalising workers — that is how they interpreted 'the primacy of organisation'. From that moment on, the whole of the party apparatus broke with the left, because it was now the left who was demanding that 'the tried and tested tactic' be jettisoned, not only in theory but also — horror of horrors — in practice. The die was cast.

The only question which remained open for a time was Kautsky's position. Would he side with the party apparatus against the left, or with the left against the apparatus? After the 1905 revolution he momentarily leaned to the left, yet a significant incident decided his fate. In 1908 Kautsky wrote his pamphlet *The Road to Power*. In it he examined precisely the question that had been left unanswered since Engels' famous preface of 1895. How does one pass from winning the majority of the working masses to socialism (by means of

the 'tried and tested tactic') to the conquest of political power itself? His formulæ were moderate and did not imply any systematic revolutionary agitation. The question of the abolition of the monarchy was not posed (instead he modestly referred to 'the democratisation of the Empire and its component states'). But even so there were too many 'dangerous phrases' in this pamphlet for the small-minded, conservative and bureaucratised 'Parteivorstand'. The possibility of 'revolution' was mentioned, it was even mooted that, 'Nobody should be so naive as to imagine that we will pass imperceptibly and peacefully from a militarist state... to democracy'. This was 'dangerous phrasemongering'. It might even 'provoke a law-suit'. And so the Parteivorstand decided to turn the pamphlet back into pulp. ¹²

A tragi-comedy ensued which decided the fate of Kautsky as a revolutionary and a theoretician. He appealed to the Control Commission of the party, which found in his favour. But Bebel remained unmoved. Kautsky then agreed to submit to party censorship and to *emasculate the text himself*. He censored anything that might prove controversial and thus rendered the text completely anodyne, emerging from the whole affair as a completely spineless individual with no strength of character. Even in this episode one can see the seeds of his future break with Rosa, his centrism, his role as an apparatchik in the 1910-12 debate, his base capitulation in 1914, etc.

It is no accident that the acid test for Kautsky, as for all centrists, was the question of the struggle for power and the reintegration of revolution into a strategy entirely founded upon a daily reformist routine. Effectively, this had been the decisive question for international social democracy since 1905.

An analysis of the first draft of *The Road to Power* reveals that elements of centrism were present even before the bureaucratic axe fell. For although Kautsky perceptively analysed those factors leading to increasing class contradictions (imperialism, militarism, reduced economic expansion, etc), his fundamental philosophy was still that of 'the tried and tested tactic': industrialisation and the concentration of capital are working for us, our rise is irresistible unless something unforeseen occurs... Such was Kautsky's reasoning, and the idea of abandoning passive fatalism was only entertained for those instances when 'our enemies commit a foolish mistake' — a coup d'état or a world war. After all, matters had not progressed one inch since 1896, when Parvus first formulated the problem.

Revolutionary strikes and mass explosions were of no importance in Kautsky's *Road to Power*. Even the Russian revolution was only invoked to show that it opened an era of revolutions in the East (which was correct), and that because of inter-imperialist conflicts the revolutionary period in the East would have profound effects on conditions in the West (which was also correct) and would undoubtedly exacerbate the tensions and increase the instability of bourgeois society. But no connections were made between the objective effects of the Russian upheaval in creating instability and the effects of the revolution on the activity of the proletarian masses of Western Europe. Political initiative, the subjective factor, the active element — these go completely by the board. 'Await your enemy's mistake, prepare for zero hour by

11. See in particular his article 'What Next' (*Neue Zeit*, 1910) with its distinctions between 'pre-emptive defensive strikes' and 'strikes of aggression' (a distinction which originates from the book by Henriette Roland-Horst on the mass strike), 'economic' and 'political' strikes, 'strategy of attrition' versus 'strategy of overthrow', etc. (*Die Massenstreikdebatte*, pp. 96-121).

* Translators' note — For the most recent resumé of this whole debate in English, see Perry Anderson, 'The Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci', in *New Left Review* 100, pp. 61-88.

12. See the edition of *The Road to Power* published by Editions Anthropos (Paris, 1969), with an introduction and an appendix of correspondence which throw some light on this sad affair.

purely organisational means, *be careful to leave the initiative to the enemy* — that is the sum total of the centrist wisdom of Kautsky in a nutshell! Later this was to be rendered still more profound by the Austro-Marxists — whose catastrophic failure did not burst upon the world until 1934!

Rosa's superiority is clearly revealed in every aspect of this crucial debate. To the dull rote of statistics with which Kautsky justified his thesis that 'the revolution can never break out prematurely', Rosa counterposed a profound understanding of the immaturity of conditions which *each and every* proletarian revolution will know in its birth-pangs:

'...these "premature" advances of the proletariat constitute in themselves a very important factor, which will create the political conditions for the final victory, because the proletariat cannot attain the degree of political maturity necessary to accomplish the final overthrow unless it is tempered in the flames of long and stubborn struggles.'¹³

Rosa had written this as early as 1900, and it was here that she began to formulate the first elements of a theory of the *subjective conditions* necessary for a revolutionary victory, while Kautsky was still obsessed by an examination of purely *objective conditions*, to the extent of denying the very existence of the problems raised by Rosa! With her deep sympathy for the life and aspirations of the masses, her sensitivity to the moods of the masses and the dynamics of mass action, Rosa was able to raise, as early as the debate of 1910, the crucial problem of proletarian strategy in the 20th century: the futility of expecting an uninterrupted rise in the combativity of the masses and the fact that if they were frustrated by a lack of results and a lack of leadership they would relapse into passivity.¹⁴

When Kautsky asserted that the success of a general strike 'capable of stopping all the factories' depended on the preliminary organisation of *all* the workers, he pushed the 'primacy of organisation' to an absurd point. History has shown that in this debate he was wrong and Rosa was right. We have known numerous general strikes that have succeeded in paralysing the entire economic and social fabric of a modern nation, despite the fact that only a minority of workers were organised. May '68 is only the latest confirmation of an old experience.

If Rosa is guilty of a 'theory of spontaneity' (something far from proven) it certainly cannot be gauged from her judgements on the inevitability of mass, spontaneous initiatives during revolutionary upheavals (she was 100 per cent right on this point), neither in some illusion that these spontaneous initiatives would be sufficient for revolutionary victory, nor even that such initiatives in and of themselves would produce the organisation which would lead the revolution to victory. She was never guilty of the infantile misconceptions so dear to today's spontaneists.

What gave the 'mass political strike' such an exceptional place in Rosa's schema was that she saw in it *the essential means to educate and prepare the masses for the coming revolutionary conflicts* (better still: to educate them and create the conditions which would enable them to *perfect their education through self-activity*). Although she had not elaborated a strategy of transitional demands, she had drawn from the sum of past experiences the following conclusions: that it was necessary to break with the daily practice of electoral struggles, economic strikes and abstract propaganda 'for socialism'. For her the mass political strike was the essential means to break out of that very ghetto.

Confrontation with the state apparatus, raising the political consciousness of the masses, revolutionary apprenticeship... all this was seen from a clearly revolutionary perspective which foresaw revolutionary crises in a relatively short period of time. If it was Lenin who founded Bolshevism on the conviction of the actuality of the Russian revolution, if it was he who extended this notion to the rest of Europe only after 4 August 1914, then it was Rosa who merits the distinction of first conceiving a socialist strategy

based on the same imminence of revolution in the West itself, directly after the first Russian revolution of 1905.

When Kautsky argued against Rosa that 'spontaneous movements of the organised masses are always unpredictable' and for this reason dangerous for a 'revolutionary party', he revealed the mentality of a petty jack-in-office who imagines that a 'revolution' will run according to a carefully worked-out schedule. Rosa was a thousand times right to stress in opposition to this view that a revolutionary party, like Russian and Polish Social Democracy in 1905, distinguished itself precisely by its ability to understand and grasp what was progressive in this unavoidable and healthy mass spontaneity in order to harness its energy on the revolutionary goals that it had formulated and embodied in its organisation.¹⁵ It took all the dogged conservatism of the Stalinist bureaucracy to dredge up again against Rosa the unfounded accusation that her analysis of the revolutionary processes in 1905 placed 'too much emphasis' on the spontaneity of the masses and 'not enough on the role of the party'¹⁶.

The fact that she had a realistic — and unfortunately prophetic — vision of the role that the bureaucracy in the workers movement could play in such a revolutionary crisis comes out in her speech to the Jena Conference in September 1905:

'Previous revolutions, and especially those of 1848, have shown that in the course of revolutionary situations it is not the masses who must be curbed, but the parliamentary tribunes, to stop them betraying the masses.'¹⁷

After the bitter experiences of 1906-10 she was even more precise when she returned to the same subject in 1910:

'If the revolutionary situation comes to full bloom, if the waves of struggles are very advanced, then the leaders of the party will find no effective brake and the masses will simply push aside those leaders who stand in the path of the storm. This could happen one day in Germany. But I do not believe that in the interests of social democracy it is necessary or desirable to move in this direction.'¹⁸

The unity of the work of Rosa Luxemburg

In the context of Rosa's 'grand design' — to lead Social Democracy to abandon 'the tried and tested tactic' and to prepare for the revolutionary struggles which she judged imminent — the totality of her activity acquires an undeniable unity.

Her analysis of imperialism does not only correspond to autonomous theoretical preoccupations, although these preoccupations were real¹⁹. She was aiming to uncover, in

13. Rosa Luxemburg, *Ausgewählte Reden und Schriften*, Vol. II, page 136.

14. *Ibid.*, pp. 325/6, 330. These are extracts from an article published in *Dortmunder Arbeiterzeitung* entitled 'Was Weiter?'.

15. It is simply a slander, spread by the Stalinists and 'innocently' repeated by today's spontaneists, that Rosa attributed 'all the merits' of the 1905 revolution to the 'unorganised masses' without mentioning the role of the RSDLP. Here, from a wealth of others, is just one quotation which proves quite the opposite: 'And even if, in the first moments, the leadership of the uprising fell into the hands of chance leaders, even if the uprising was apparently bedevilled by all sorts of illusions and traditions, the uprising is nothing but the result of the enormous amount of political education spread deep inside the Russian working class by the underground agitation of the men and women of Russian Social Democracy... In Russia, as in the rest of the world, the cause of liberty and social progress is in the hands of the conscious proletariat.' (8 February 1905 in *Die Gleichheit - Ausgewählte Reden und Schriften*, Vol. 1, page 216).

16. Cf. the biography of Rosa by Fred Oelssner, Dietz Verlag, Berlin, 1951 — especially pp. 50-53.

17. *Ausgewählte Reden und Schriften*, Vol. 1, page 245.

18. 'Theorie und Praxis' (*Neue Zeit* 1910) reproduced in *Die Massenstreikdebatte*, page 231.

19. Rosa herself remarked that while writing her 'Introduction to Political Economy' she stumbled on a theoretical difficulty when she wanted to demonstrate the impediments to the realisation of surplus-value. Hence her project to write 'The Accumulation of Capital'.

all its aspects, one of the main causes of the worsening contradictions in the capitalist world and in German society in particular. Similarly, internationalism was not simply thought of as a more or less platonic theme for propaganda, but as a function of two requirements: the increasing internationalisation of strikes, and the preparation of the working class for the struggle against the coming imperialist war. The internationalist campaign which Rosa waged for twenty years in international social democracy was guided by a revolutionary perspective and a strategic alternative, like her campaign for the 'mass political strike' and her profound analysis of imperialism.

The same is true for her anti-militarist and anti-monarchist campaigns. Contrary to a widely-held belief, sometimes even repeated by sympathetic commentators²⁰, Rosa's anti-militarist campaign was not only a function of her 'hatred' (or her 'fear' of the war) but was the result of a precise understanding that the bourgeois state had to be smashed for a socialist revolution to be victorious. As early as 1899 she wrote in the *Leipziger Volkszeitung*:

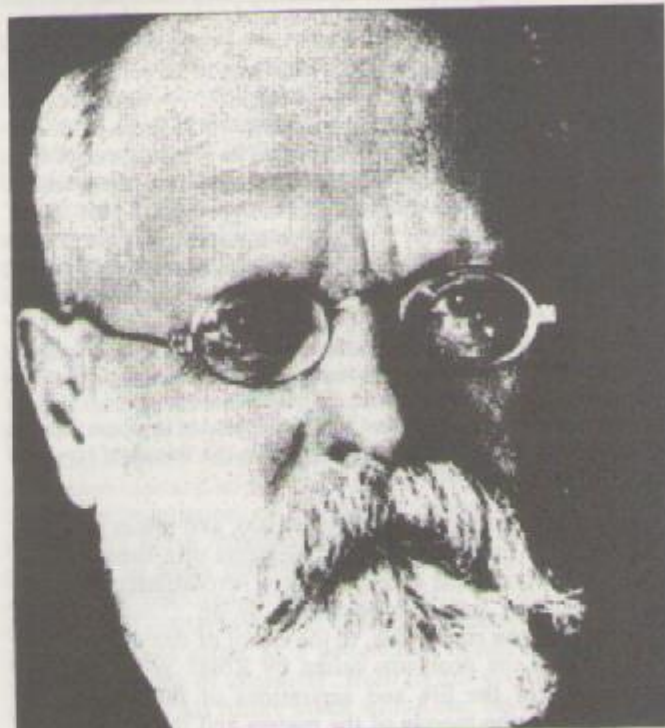
'The power and domination of the bourgeois State as well as the bourgeois class is concentrated in militarism. Likewise social democracy is the only political party which fights militarism for principled reasons. So this principled struggle against militarism belongs to the very nature of social democracy. To abandon the fight against the militarist system would simply lead in practice to the abandonment of the struggle against the existing social order.'²¹

In *Reform or Revolution* one year later, in her comments on compulsory military service, she succinctly repeats that, if this prepares the material basis for the arming of the people, it does it 'under the guise of modern militarism, which expresses in a most striking manner the domination of the people by the militarist State, the class nature of the State'. These crystal clear formulæ demonstrate the immense gulf that separated her, not only from the rambling of Bernstein, but also from the lawyer's phrases of Kautsky on the 'democratisation [sic!] of the Empire'.

We can therefore immediately understand the terrible anger that must have gripped Rosa when she saw those very reformists who had blamed her for 'risking the workers' blood' with her 'adventurist tactics'²² themselves spill the blood of the workers after August 1914 on a scale a thousand times greater, not for their own cause but for that of their exploiters. This indignation was what inspired her bitter verdicts on the SPD: 'social democracy is nothing but a stinking corpse'; 'the German Social Democrats are the greatest and most infamous criminals that have ever lived on earth'.²³

So what, then, is the verdict of history on Rosa Luxemburg? She was to all intents and purposes wrong in her mutual appreciation of the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks in Russia. She had simultaneously fought against Lenin's 'ultra-centralism' whilst tolerating Leo Jogisches' iron regime in her own underground Polish Workers Party²⁴. She was inclined to set too much store by the vanguard's assimilation of socialist doctrine and thus underestimated the need to forge working class cadres really capable of guiding those broad masses who would politicise and enter the historic stage only on the day of the revolution. For the same reason she devoted no resources to building a tendency or an organised left fraction within the SPD after 1907 (the formation of a new party was of course impossible until the treachery of the SPD leadership had been irremediably demonstrated to the masses by manifest betrayals of an historic scope). The young Spartakusbund and later the KPD were to pay a terrible price for this failure to use the intervening decade to build a real leadership team; they were forced to undertake this task in the midst of the revolution.

Yet all these areas were in function of the great struggle which had dominated her life. Rosa was actually in Germany, and as such she developed an increasing scorn and suspicion for the social democratic apparatus of time



Karl Kautsky

servers and functionaries whose crimes she perceived far earlier and far more clearly than did Lenin. Not until 1914 did Lenin adopt Rosa's conclusions on German Social Democracy. Only then did he deduce the fundamental historic lesson of the tragedy — that it was completely insufficient for victory merely to have built a 'powerful organisation'. What was needed was an organisation whose programme and whose daily use of it to intervene in the class struggle would ensure that on the day of the revolution the party would be the driving force of the proletariat and not its bureaucratic hangman. And not until 1918 did Rosa in turn reach Lenin's conclusions. It was then that she grasped the need to build an organisation of the revolutionary vanguard and firmly understood that it was not sufficient to have unbounded confidence in the creativity of the masses, or in their spontaneous ability to jettison social democratic bureaucrats who had finally nailed their counter-revolutionary colours to the mast.

All in all, contemporary revolutionary Marxism owes a tremendous debt to Rosa Luxemburg. She was the first Marxist to have defined and begun to resolve the central problems of revolutionary Marxist strategy and tactics which alone can ensure the victory of the proletarian revolution in the imperialist heartlands.

(Translated from the French by Val Graham and Frederick Leplat)

20. Notably Antonia Grunenberg in her introduction to *Die Massenstreikdebatte* (page 43), where she maintains that Pannekoek was diametrically opposed to both Rosa and Kautsky in formulating strategic conceptions on the conquest of power, posing the question of the struggle against bourgeois state power.

21. *Ausgewählte Reden und Schriften*, Vol. 1, page 47.

22. *Ibid.*, page 245.

23. Speech on the programme delivered by Rosa to the founding conference of the KPD (*Der Gründungsparteitag der KPD*, Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1969, page 194.). In particular her hackles were raised when, after the 1918 Armistice, the SPD leaders tried to use German soldiers against the Russian revolution in the Baltic countries.

24. Very recently Edda Werfel published in Poland the Rosa Luxemburg-Leo Jogisches correspondence, which will undoubtedly furnish important supplementary material for a study of the practical and theoretical attitude of Rosa to the 'question of organisation' inside her own Polish party. A partial translation of this correspondence into French and German (by Editions Anthropos and Europäische Verlagsanstalt) is in the pipeline.

TROTSKYISM AND REVOLUTION

Geoff Roberts

[Restrictions of space have prevented me from taking up all the points raised by Tariq Ali and Robin Blackburn in their *Red Weekly* article. I have concentrated, therefore, on what appear to me to be the broad, fundamental issues at stake in this debate. Even so it has been necessary to limit both the scope of my arguments and their documentation. I am grateful to the IMG for giving me this opportunity to reply and look forward to continuing the debate in the future. — G.R.]

Introduction

In December 1976 *Red Weekly* devoted its monthly 'Battle of Ideas' supplement to a reply by Tariq Ali and Robin Blackburn to an article of mine — 'The Politics of the IMG — Aspects of a Critique' — which had been published by *Marxism Today* in February 1976. The opening of a serious discussion on the vital and complex issue of revolutionary strategy between Communists, Trotskyists, and others on the left is long overdue.¹ Such a discussion will be of enormous value so long as it avoids the caricature, slander and cheap demagoguery which has for so long bedevilled debates on the left.² The critical nature of the national and international conjuncture in which the left finds itself at present underlines the urgency of an honest and open discussion through which clarity on the question of strategy can be achieved. The publication recently of a new draft of the Communist Party's programme, *The British Road to Socialism*, makes this and other such discussions particularly opportune. For all the abuse that has been heaped upon it, *The British Road to Socialism* remains the only truly strategic document available to the left as a whole for public comment and discussion, and as such it will no doubt continue to be the axis around which left discussion on the problems of strategy revolves.

Theory and Politics in Trotskyism

In their reply Ali and Blackburn correctly assert that my

critique of Trotskyist politics is, above all, rooted in a criticism of the *theoretical* tradition of Trotskyism. Such recognition, however, is not matched by any sustained attempt to confront that criticism or to develop an alternative account of that tradition. Blackburn and Ali leap over the question of theory and for it substitute what, in their view, are the key elements of the Trotskyist *political* tradition. The result is that neither is adequately dealt with, for any attempt to analyse and assess the political tradition of Trotskyism outside its theoretical context is, inevitably, forlorn. To say this is not to fall into the reductionist trap of a form of theoreticism, that is, viewing political practices as expressions of theoretical concepts, but is to affirm the necessity of mapping out the interconnections between the two spheres. Ali and Blackburn's failure in this respect

1. Ali and Blackburn suggested that my article was the first serious critique of Trotskyist politics from a Communist position to avoid what they call 'traditional Stalinist slanders'. This is incorrect. I draw the reader's attention to Monty Johnstone's article 'Trotsky and the Popular Front' published in *Marxism Today* October/November 1975; to the same author's 'Trotsky — His Ideas' published in *Cogito* 1969 — a work which the IMG described at the time as a 'thorough and vigorous critique of Trotsky's ideas, based on a political analysis of their content and application', which 'meticulously refuted the slanders against Trotsky' current to the Stalin period; and to Betty Reid's pamphlet *Ultra-Leftism in Britain*, published in 1969.

2. Apart from odd polemical excesses I was impressed by the seriousness of tone and approach throughout the Ali and Blackburn article. The same cannot be said, however, of Patrick Camiller's article in the latest issue of *International*, replying to Monty Johnstone. The dogmatic and blinkered method of the author does the IMG a great disservice and in no way provides a basis for a continuing and fruitful debate. As to the Healyite method employed in the conclusion, it should receive the contempt and condemnation it deserves. I am glad to hear that these remarks are to be withdrawn and a public apology made. One can only wonder, however, why it was that they were published at all in a journal in whose editorial the banner 'Against Monolithism' is raised.

pervades the whole of their enterprise. This point made I would, however, admit that my original article does not provide an ideal point of departure for such an undertaking on their part, being wanting in some respects in clarity and rigour both in structure and content. A recapitulation and development of my original arguments is therefore necessary.

Marxism is nothing if it is not a creative science constantly developing, renewing, and transforming itself. In this respect the last decade or so has formed a particularly intense period for Marxists with the proliferation of new and diverse theories, approaches, and ideas that has occurred. Running through this novelty and diversity, encompassing all but the most neanderthal elements within Marxism, there has been a thread of unity: the project of ridding Marxism of *economic determinism* — the form that has predominated throughout most of its history.³ Such a project has been crucial both in relation to its liberating effect on Marxist theory and in its implications for revolutionary political practice.⁴

What has all this got to do with Trotskyism? Everything, for the Trotskyist theoretical tradition constitutes a *species* of economic determinism. Indeed, to give credit where credit is due, within the broader tradition (more precisely sub-tradition) of which Trotskyism forms a part, Trotsky himself was the representative *par excellence* of that species. Chris Arthur, reviewing Geoff Hodgson's book *Trotsky and Fatalistic Marxism in International* (Vol.3, No.3), finds it hard to credit Trotskyism with 'fatalism' given its political characteristic of excessive voluntarism. A most telling point, it would seem, until we consider that determinism within Marxism has always been of the *conditional* variety. As, for example, even in the case of Plekhanov, who wrote: 'Social Democracy considers historical development from the standpoint of necessity, and its own activity as a *necessary link* in the chain of those *necessary conditions* which, combined, make the triumph of socialism inevitable. A *necessary link* cannot be *superfluous*. If it were suppressed, it would shatter the whole chain of events.'⁵

Plekhanov here expresses a view common to all the main theorists of Second International Marxism. Whereas for them the 'necessary conditions' came eventually to be constituted by political practices of the passivist type, in Trotskyism voluntarism forms the link in the deterministic causal chain and, concomitantly, the consequences of a 'break' in the chain are seen as catastrophic in content ('Socialism or Barbarism'). In the one case a 'passive fatalism' predominates; in the other what Hodgson calls an 'active fatalism'. Hence also Gramsci's comment on Trotsky's position that it was a 'modern form of the old mechanism masked by the general theory of permanent revolution' The economic determinist co-ordinates of Trotsky's thought find full expression in his concept of the epoch, which he defines in the following passage: 'The revolutionary character of the epoch does not lie in that it permits of the accomplishment of the revolution at every given moment. Its revolutionary character consists in profound and sharp fluctuations and abrupt and frequent transitions from an immediately revolutionary situation; in other words such as enable the CP to strive for power.'⁶

What are we to make of such a statement? To argue that it is an empirical generalisation derived from 'observation', or that it constitutes a subjectivist excess, is to denigrate Trotsky's thought. In fact it arises out of a particular conception of the relation between economics and politics (more precisely, the moment of class consciousness within politics) in the 'epoch of capitalist decline'. That relation is conceived in terms of simple causality or, as Denise Avenas puts it in her recent reconstruction of Trotsky's Marxism: 'In the imperialist stage the dialectics of economics were expressed directly in politics.' Or again: 'Politics is the direct expression of international economic and social contradictions.'⁷ Derivative of this in turn is the couplet *economic crises-revolutionary upsurges*. And since the imperialist epoch is characterised by the exhaustion of capitalism's

capacity to expand the productive forces, the system is periodically beset by intense economic crises⁸ which, in the words of Mandel, 'must periodically lead to revolutionary situations' (original emphasis!).⁹

Here also is a vision of the movement of the masses mirroring the explosion of contradictions at the economic level: 'In all countries the proletariat is racked by deep disquiet. The multi-millioned masses again and again enter the road of revolution.' Why? Because 'The orientation of the masses is determined first by the objective conditions of decaying capitalism'¹⁰

It is within this schema that we can locate one of the two characteristic expressions of Trotskyist voluntarism — *vanguardism*, that is, an overestimation of the state of class consciousness and the stage reached in the struggle and underestimation of the terrain that has yet to be conquered by the working class and its allies.¹¹ The other component of Trotskyist voluntarism is, of course, *leadership reductionism* ('The historical crisis of mankind is reduced to the crisis of revolutionary leadership'). It is this component which constitutes the necessary condition of Trotsky's determinism, for the causal chain of economics and politics is discontinuous by way of time ('Politics considered as a mass historical force always lags behind economics'¹²) and blockages ('The chief obstacle in the path of transforming the pre-revolutionary into a revolutionary stage is the opportunist character of the proletarian leadership'¹³). The role of leadership (the 'Revolutionary Party') is thus to make good the lags and clear away the obstacles. Let us take the question of political consciousness and view, by analogy, its stages of development in terms of progress up the rungs of a ladder.

In the Trotskyist schema the masses are periodically driven by economic circumstances to climb up the ladder to the very top rung (a 'revolutionary situation'). In a similar vein,

3. At least one of our authors — Robin Blackburn — may be identified with this project. See, for example, his (with Gareth Stedman Jones) 'Louis Althusser and the Struggle for Marxism' in D. Howard and K.E. Klare (eds), *The Unknown Dimension: European Marxism since Lenin*.

4. An interesting phenomenon is the process by which politico-political concepts become detached from the theoretical source of their meaning and coherence, and are transmuted into 'revolutionary principles'. At least two results of this are worth noting: firstly, it enables Marxists who have made a genuine break with economic determinism at the level of theory to adhere simultaneously to a contradictory political position; secondly, it causes considerable confusion amongst those who seek to apply such concepts whilst not understanding their genesis. A reading of the IMG internal debates will confirm this last point.

5. It seems to me that 'determinism' is a more appropriate term to use in relation to Trotsky's Marxism.

6. Quoted in L. Colletti, *From Rousseau to Lenin*, p.70.

7. Quoted in A. Davidson, *Antonio Gramsci: Towards an Intellectual Biography*, p.252.

8. *The Third International After Lenin*, pp.81-2, Pathfinder Press, 1970.

9. In any case the statement was made before the majority of the so-called 'revolutionary situations' occurred.

10. *International*, Vol. 3, No. 3, p.47.

11. I cannot deal here with the strictly economic analysis involved in Trotsky's concept of the epoch. For a good critique see the Hodgson book.

12. *The Leninist Theory of Organisation*, p.10, IMG 1971. I must thank Ali and Blackburn for directing my attention to this text. A re-reading of it considerably clarified my criticisms of Trotskyism.

13. *Transitional Programme*, pp.13,14, SLL 1970.

14. Ali and Blackburn admit, without specifying, that 'Trotskyists, and even Trotsky himself (sic), have been responsible on occasion for vanguardist errors which mis-estimated the readiness of the masses to undertake a struggle against the bourgeois order.' Two points are in order here: firstly, no explanation, apart from an implied subjectivism, is advanced for those errors; and secondly, far from such errors being occasional, they are the rule rather than the exception in the history of Trotskyism. On this latter point see M. Johnstone, *Trotsky and World Revolution*. Perhaps Ali and Blackburn would like to comment on the analyses contained in this work.

15. Quoted in Avenas, *op. cit.*, p.44.

16. *Transitional Programme*, p.13.

Mandel recalls Trotsky's metaphor of steam (the masses in revolutionary movement) and a piston (the party). The piston compresses the steam at the decisive moment.¹⁷ Little wonder that for Trotsky the question of the party was the 'question of questions'.¹⁸ Thus it is apparent that Trotsky's economic determinism leads to a political problematic defined by the notion of preparing for the revolution of which the most important aspect is the forging of the instrument of the revolution, the party.

Clearly this schema contains elements of truth, for capitalism is periodically rent by economic, social and political crises, reformist leaders do obstruct the revolutionary process, and revolutionary leadership is crucial. However, the reductionist content of the framework within which problems such as these are posed impedes rather than facilitates analysis, distorts rather than clarifies. Within this model, for example, the concept of ideology as a mediating level (to take one instance) between the economic and political finds no place. This is no academic question, for its absence distorts analysis of crises in capitalist societies and disarms revolutionaries faced with the task of developing appropriate modes of political intervention. The notion of revolutionary situations arising automatically out of objective conditions prohibits consideration of how to make a revolutionary situation, in other words, the question of a strategy for the preparation of revolution rather than one of preparing for the revolution. The political consequence of the latter is the condemnation of revolutionaries to the role of perpetual opposition within capitalism.

Gramsci and Trotsky

Armed with this preliminary consideration of the theoretical backdrop to the Trotskyist political tradition, we can now get down to cases. Ali and Blackburn object to my counterposing Gramsci against Trotsky, and after stressing the difficulties involved in assessing either they go on to suggest a major point of convergence in their political thought which I am accused of ignoring. Clearly there are problems in assessing Gramsci and Trotsky, more so in the case of the former than the latter. But however 'dense and cryptic' Gramsci's writings may be, there is one point on which they are crystal clear and on which all commentators agree: Gramsci made a decisive break with the deterministic Marxism of the Second and Third Internationals. Trotsky, as we noted above, made no such break; he merely shifted the deterministic co-ordinates of the passivist Second International tradition to his own brand of catastrophism within the tradition of the Third International. It is this gulf which separates Gramsci from Trotsky. We can illustrate this by reference to the role of economic crises in the strategic thought of each. For Gramsci, economic crises created 'more favourable ground' for revolutionary intervention. For Trotsky, as we have seen, they play the role of providing the decisive ground for revolutionary intervention, indeed Trotsky's strategic thought holds out no effective solutions without the ground they provide. The difference is not accidental but arises from the circumstance of Gramsci's break with economic determinism, which opened the way for him to investigate those structures in capitalist society which buffer the effects of economic incursions in the form of crises and the like.¹⁹

What of this convergence in the political thought of Gramsci and Trotsky? According to Ali and Blackburn, 'for both, a crucial defining feature of governments in the bourgeois democratic states is that they rest on the consent of the masses'²⁰ Agreed. But to say this is not to say very much, for it would be difficult to find any major figure in the history of the international revolutionary movement who did not accept this truism. The crucial task is the identification of the mechanisms of production of this consent and thereby enable a strategy to be devised by which this consent to the capitalist order can be broken, a consent for a new social order be established, and on this basis a working class power strong enough to carry through the

revolutionary process created. In relation to this problem Ali and Blackburn go on to suggest a complementarity between Gramsci and Trotsky, the one concentrating on the ideological and cultural reproduction of consent, the other on the political forms that the expression of this consent assumes in bourgeois democratic states. For Trotsky the primary 'political form' involved is the role of the reformist workers parties in holding the working class in check. In truth the complementarity is more apparent than real, for Trotsky's concern with the role of social democracy appertains to an object wholly different from that of Gramsci — that is, not as a mechanism of consent but as an obstacle in the path of the revolution. Hence, though Trotsky may furnish us with 'essential insights' into the operation of the bourgeois democratic system, there is a notable absence in his thought of any real attempt to constitute it as a determinate object of analysis. Any search for such in his collected writings on the major bourgeois democracies²¹ will be in vain.

A careful reading of those works reveals why this is so. Trotsky's analytical object throughout these writings is with the conjuncture, whether it be France 1936, Britain of the General Strike, or Germany in the prelude to fascism. In all of these cases the conjuncture is characterised as revolutionary or pre-revolutionary. What happens is that the bourgeois democratic system as an object of analysis is dissolved into an analysis of the conjuncture until all that remains is an aspect of that system, namely, the role of the social democratic leaders. Which leads me to the general point that the Trotskyist political tradition is prefigured by the couplet epoch-conjuncture; in other words, the epoch is viewed as a series of revolutionary conjunctures and the object of political analysis is these conjunctures and the modes of political intervention within them. Omitted here is any concept of the strategic — the link between epoch and conjuncture and between conjunctures themselves. What do we mean by this? Precisely, the delineation of the strategic problems of taking power and making a transition to socialism in, for example, advanced capitalist societies of the bourgeois democratic type. Such a delineation demands appropriate analysis, different from that involved in analysing the conjuncture, asking, for example, different questions such as what is the nature of ruling class power, etc. Without it you not only end up with no strategy but with no real knowledge of how to intervene in particular conjunctures and how to link those interventions with a precise strategic line of advance. You end up, as in the case of the IMG, moving from conjunctural posture to conjunctural

17. *Op. cit.*, p.9. One may inquire, however, how the 'water' is to be boiled?

18. Leon Trotsky on Britain, p.162, Pathfinder Press, 1973.

19. A major weakness in Perry Anderson's essay on Gramsci in *NLR* 100 is a failure to note the significance of the theoretical distance between Gramsci and the tradition represented by the Comintern. This leads him to the curious conclusion that Gramsci's development of a much wider theory of hegemony was a function of 'the "desituated" mode of discourse peculiar to many of the texts of Gramsci's imprisonment' (p.20), whereas in fact the ground of Gramsci's advance and of the Comintern's limitations was theoretical. Another consequence of this omission in the Anderson text is a confusion between terms and concepts, for example, in relation to the 'United Front', a term common to both Gramsci and Trotsky, but whose theoretical constitution makes apparent the difference in concept — at least if we are talking about the Gramsci of the Prison Notebooks.

20. There is a slight inaccuracy here because for Gramsci the 'rule' of the dominant class rested on consent — a much wider notion than that of government.

21. See Leon Trotsky on Britain; The Struggle Against Fascism in Germany; and Whither France. Also The First Five Years of the Communist International and The Third International After Lenin. Significantly, none of the exponents of this view of Trotsky as the theorist of bourgeois democracy — Blackburn and Ali, Anderson, and Geras — provide substantive textual support for their argument. The quotations mustered consist in the main of fragments lifted from a context in which Trotsky is concerned with a different object altogether.

posture, now student vanguardism, now the 'new' thinking, now the general strike, and, finally, the present position, a class struggle tendency in the labour movement. Whither the IMG? Whatever criticism one might make of the Communist Party line over the past period, it at least has had the merit of consistency — a consistency based on the fact that it has got a strategy.

These last considerations on Trotskyist politics do not apply to Gramsci. Gramsci, unlike Trotsky, was a genuine strategic thinker, and in his work we can discern elements of a strategic line appropriate to the conditions of advanced capitalist societies. In my original article I sought not to appropriate Gramsci's political legacy — how could I, for it has yet to be constituted — but to contrast certain of his strategic ideas (war of position, counter-hegemony, national road) and contrast these to Trotskyist conceptions and to demonstrate the superiority of the former over the latter. However, as Perry Anderson has recently pointed out, Gramsci shares with Trotsky the absence of any consideration of the *system of bourgeois democracy* as an 'ideological linchpin of Western capitalism'.²² Ali and Blackburn also raise this problem and note its omission from my article, and argue that the approach taken in the article 'denies the real problems of Marxist strategy in a bourgeois democracy'. The omission was in part a consequence of the fact that my critique was never intended to be more than a partial one²³, and in part a consequence of what I was dealing with, that is, Trotskyism, which as we have seen is also guilty of such an omission. The clue to my approach on this question is contained in Ali and Blackburn's own designation of me as 'fundamentally orthodox'. For what is the *British Road to Socialism* if not an attempt to grapple with the problem of revolutionary strategy in an advanced bourgeois democracy? Far from representing a 'cultural reformism' (in my opinion it's not cultural enough), the sights of the *British Road* are firmly on state power and on the problems of taking a state power located in a bourgeois democratic framework. In this respect the unifying concept of the *British Road* of a 'democratic road to socialism' is highly significant. It will prove instructive to compare and contrast the approach taken by the Communist Party with that of Blackburn and Ali.

Bourgeois Democracy and Proletarian Revolution

In essence, the strategy outlined in the *British Road* is one of conquering the bourgeois democratic terrain, of the working class and its allies appropriating the system of bourgeois democracy for itself. The instrument of this strategy is the system's own petard — democracy. Hence the notion, for example, of the democratic transformation of Parliament into an institution of working class power. Contained within this strategy is also a strategy of dealing with the State²⁴, for the concept of democratic transformation extends to many of its key sectors — the civil service, for example. *In a sense* what is proposed here is the incorporation of those sections of the State amenable to it²⁵ into the system of bourgeois democracy, which is itself the site of *mass struggles* for democratisation by the working class. Furthermore, such a strategy creates the conditions for a successful hegemonic struggle — the importance of which Blackburn and Ali recognise — on the terrain of civil society, for, as Anderson argues, bourgeois democracy 'constitutes the formal framework of all other ideological mechanisms of the ruling class. It provides the general code in which every specific message elsewhere is transmitted'.²⁶ Far from advocating, as Blackburn and Ali suggest I do, a self-sufficient hegemonic project which renders 'revolutionary politics' redundant, I am arguing for a strategy which can *unify* political and ideological struggle.

As I understand it, Ali and Blackburn's alternative to the above approach is as follows. Bourgeois democracy contains within it elements of proletarian democracy. The task of

revolutionaries is to avert the incorporation of those elements into the system and to build upon them to create a counter-democratic pole of attraction from which an assault on State power can be launched. The instrumentalities of this policy are those developed by the first four Congresses of the Comintern, Trotsky, and the Fourth International, namely, transitional demands, the united front, the transitional programme, workers governments, etc. Tactical excursions onto the terrain of bourgeois democracy (for example, electoral intervention by revolutionaries) form part of this approach.

This argument, repeated by Perry Anderson in *New Left Review*, contains a number of misconceptions. Firstly, there is a misunderstanding of the nature of bourgeois democracy as evidenced by the notion of belts of proletarian democracy suspended within the bourgeois democratic system. Bourgeois democracy seeks not to incorporate the working class's democratic institutions because those institutions are integral to it anyway. Indeed, bourgeois democracy was itself born of the struggle of the working class for political liberty; it is democratic precisely because those struggles made a reality, at least in part, of the ideals of the great bourgeois revolutions. The democratic in the bourgeois system (elections, free speech, etc.) is not in contrast to proletarian democracy but is (in part) it, limited and subject to perversion though it may be. Furthermore, bourgeois democracy is not just a screen behind which lurks the real power of the ruling class but, within its own terms, a reality through which the working class has been able to exert its influence and extract significant concessions. Also, the working class has been able to legitimise itself as a political actor in the eyes of the population as a whole. The real threat to the working class comes not from a ruling class strategy of incorporation but from a strategy of the erosion of the democratic liberties it fought for decades to attain. The strategic indicative of the foregoing is not the overturning of bourgeois democracy and its replacement by 'proletarian democracy' but its capture by the working class and the remaking of it in the working class's own image — a transformation of bourgeois democracy into socialist democracy.

Secondly, the project of a self-sufficient proletarian democracy fails to come to terms with the immense strength of the bourgeois democratic system, particularly in relation to its legitimating functions vis-à-vis the middle strata — a section of the population the working class must win to its side if it is to accumulate enough power to deal with the last line of resistance of the ruling class, the coercive state

22. *Op. cit.*, p.28. Ali and Blackburn question my attribution of primacy to ideological/cultural structures in the maintenance of ruling class power. So long as we include bourgeois democracy as one of these structures, albeit of a special variety, then the designation seems perfectly justified. Further, ideology and culture is not as they state an 'unanchored realm', but rooted in the materiality of real practices and institutions.

23. In fact the first draft of the article, twice the length of what was published, contained a substantial section on the question of the State.

24. The State is defined here as consisting of the armed forces, the police services, the judiciary, and the permanent civil service. It makes no sense to dissolve, as Perry Anderson does, the system of bourgeois democracy (elected government, political parties, the system of bourgeois institutions, electoral systems) into a concept of the State. To do so is to make a mistake of the same order as those Anderson criticises, for abolishing the distinction between State and civil society by defining the former as consisting of all those institutions functional to the maintenance of ruling class power.

25. Those sections not amenable (for example, the secret police) will have, in a very literal sense, to be 'smashed'.

26. *Op. cit.*, p.28.

apparatus²⁷. To abjure a real contest with the ruling class on the terrain of bourgeois democracy is to abandon into the hands of the ruling class a potent instrument indeed.

Thirdly, there is an implicit assumption that to take up the mantle of bourgeois democracy is to become its prisoner. The example of Chile is often cited in support of this argument. This misses the point that the working class is already a prisoner of bourgeois democracy; the need is for a strategy that will enable the working class to snap its chains. The advantage of the strategy of inner democratic transformation is that it tests out bourgeois democracy and reveals its limitations and in the process creates the conditions in which those very limitations can be transcended. The problem with posing proletarian democracy against bourgeois democracy is that it provides no solution to the problem of moving beyond the propagandist level except to say that the masses will learn by experience the superiority of one over the other. But what *kind* of experience is necessary for that to take place? Given the extent of integration of the working class into the system, the only possible experience is precisely that of waging a battle for democracy on the bourgeois democratic terrain itself.²⁸

Unless, of course, you believe that circumstances will wrench the masses out of the bourgeois democratic system and thereby lay the basis for a real experience of proletarian democracy. Which brings me to my fourth point, concerning the suggested instrumentalities of this project of proletarian democracy. On this I can only repeat that Trotsky's tactical prescriptions, such as the united front and transitional demands, arise out of an economic determinist and catastrophic model of the structure and dynamics of the capitalist social order, and it is from that which they derive their meaning and coherence. Let us take the example of transitional demands. A reading of Mandel's *Leninist Theory of Organisation* makes it clear that the function of transitional demands is firstly to connect the revolutionary party with the advanced workers in the stage preparatory to the revolutionary conjuncture and, secondly, to connect the party/advanced workers with the working class in the revolutionary conjuncture. All very coherent so long as you accept the dual notion of building the party/preparing for the revolution and its attendant catastrophic vision.²⁹

Conclusion

I want to end on a positive note. My assessment of the Trotskyist theoretical and political tradition is a negative one, though this is in no way to belittle the historic service rendered by Trotsky in organising the October insurrection and in founding the Red Army, nor is it to belittle the very positive contributions to the struggle for socialism made by Trotskyist militants past and present. It is clear to me also, however, that there is a forward looking trend within the Trotskyist movement that is seeking to come to terms in a real way with the historic problem of socialist revolution in

Western Europe, and on the evidence of their reply Ali and Blackburn are part of this trend. We can point to their recognition of the importance of Gramsci and of the importance of ideological and cultural interventions by revolutionaries within civil society, and, further, to the expressions of this in IMG practice in the women's movement and in the recent *Red Weekly* forums on the mass media. The problem is that analytical and practical advantages such as these are marred by an attempt to combine them with an incompatible theoretical and political tradition. As a result such advances take on a fragmented character, unintegrated into the main political line, external to it and, as a further consequence, ineffective. Sooner or later the critical trends within Trotskyism are going to have to come to terms with their movement's legacy.

27. Of course, coercion forms an operational element of the armoury of ruling class power at all times. However, under conditions of capitalist democracy it becomes the dominant element only at particular moments; and, moreover, it is not inevitable that it should become so though it is likely to do so. The Communist Party's conception of a transition to Socialism without civil war does not repudiate the notion of coercion attaining dominance in the last stages of the revolutionary process, but it does posit the idea that the popular forces can contain ruling class endeavours to deploy its coercive apparatuses.

28. Although the notion here is primarily one of working class power expressing itself through existing institutions (e.g. Parliament) the development of new forms of working class power, even of the Soviet type, is not precluded. Indeed, it would seem to me that this should form an integral part of the strategy as a whole. Utilisation of existing institutions and the development of new, autonomous (from the bourgeois democratic system) working class institutions should be seen as complementary rather than contradictory. A problem in the *British Road to Socialism* is that whilst a mechanical application of the forms of the Russian revolutionary process is correctly rejected, some of its content, valid in the British situation, tends to get thrown out as well.

29. No doubt on this point the authority of the 'First Four Congresses of the Comintern' will be invoked. Authority, however, is no proof and the criticism remains valid, until shown to be otherwise, whether it is Trotsky, the Comintern, or anyone else who argued this position. Within its own terms, though, the invocation is legitimate. For the Comintern shared with Trotsky an explicit economic determinism and catastrophism. This is true even for a period after Trotsky's exit from the ranks of the Comintern. An interesting example of this concerns the so-called 'Third Period'. It is normally assumed that at no time was the Trotsky/Comintern divergence greater than in the Third Period. In many ways this was the case, but in one major respect their positions converged, that is, in Trotsky's acceptance of the notion of a third period, a period of intense capitalist economic crisis which would be accompanied by major revolutionary upsurges on a par with those that had followed the First World War. Trotsky's disagreement with the Comintern was over the *tactics* to be employed during this period — as it turned out, a difference of historic proportions, at least in the case of Germany. With the Seventh Congress of the Comintern we do see, however, the *beginning* of a break with economic determinism and catastrophism. (This point is developed in an essay of mine, *The Communist Movement: Past and Present*, to be published by the Communist Party's History Group.) Trotsky never made such a break and neither, hitherto, have his followers.

2. What is the 'Democratic Road' to Socialism?

Robin Blackburn

In his rejoinder, Geoff Roberts has adopted an old procedure. His original critique of the IMG sought to establish a link between the tactics of the IMG over the past few years, the general orientation of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International in the Seventies, and the theoretical tradition of Trotskyism. In our reply we defended the general underlying political analysis and strategic orientation of the USFI and its British section over the past period. We also sought to refute the facile counterposition of Gramsci and Trotsky, and to draw attention to the major contribution which Trotsky made to the elaboration of revolutionary strategy in the advanced bourgeois democracies.

Roberts has now chosen to concentrate almost entirely on a general critique of the 'economic determinism' which is held to vitiate Trotsky's thought; to which is appended some hasty reflections on the previously neglected topic of bourgeois democracy. We are not at all reluctant to join issue with Roberts on these latter questions, but we do object to Roberts' method of posing them — a method which involves conducting a debate on revolutionary strategy in some abstracted realm above and beyond history and politics. Naturally we are glad that Roberts has not indulged in petty point-scoring, or the inflation of every small incident or accident to historic significance which is sometimes passed off as polemic on the left. But to refuse to engage at all with the political conjuncture in Europe in this decade — the ostensible starting point of this exchange — is simply an *evasion*. Roberts has chosen not to respond to our defence of the general orientation of the Fourth International in capitalist Europe in this decade, nor to reply to our specific criticisms of the CPGB, nor to comment on our argument concerning the vital significance of proletarian democracy.

The strategic accommodation to bourgeois democracy which is now explicit in European Communism evidently requires a refusal to investigate the explosive dynamic of the crisis of the bourgeois order — a crisis which will be exacerbated by the assumption of governmental power by Communist Parties. Instead of firmly situating his analysis on the terrain of class struggle and capitalist crisis, Roberts constructs a supra-historical model of bourgeois democracy peacefully growing over into socialism. The pious 'democratic' incantations of the *British Road to Socialism* will, it seems, suffice to destroy the power of a ruling class which has accumulated a long experience of repression and sabotage of popular movements, with the appropriate accompaniment of provocation and demagogy.

The Question of Economic Determinism

The first part of Roberts' rejoinder is concerned to establish that Trotskyism is a species of economic determinism; that for Trotskyists pre-revolutionary and revolutionary situations are engendered by the economic contradictions of capitalism; and that they conceive the task of the revolutionary vanguard as being to remove the obstacles to socialist revolution and to make up for 'lags' in class consciousness. Roberts outlines all this in fairly simplified terms, but at least the caricature has some resemblance to its object. In fact we are happy, as Marxists, to plead guilty to many of the charges laid against us by Roberts in this section.

Let us take first the question of 'economic determinism'. According to Roberts, one of the main problems with the Fourth International is that it shares the economic determinism to be found in the Third International; and the economic determinism of the Third International was in its turn little but an echo of the economic determinism of the Second International. Roberts does not say so, but we can, I think, plausibly suggest that the root of this 'economic determinist' heresy is to be found in some of those involved in the *First International* — in fact in the work of Marx and Engels, much of which was devoted to examining the operation of economic determination in human societies. All scientific activity must have as its aim the establishment of determinant links between different kinds of phenomena. Marx and Engels were concerned to map out the dynamic of the successive modes of production and above all of the capitalist mode of production. They were concerned to establish the different ways in which the contradictions of a mode of production and social formation can unfold — and this included the role of *ideology* and *politics* in deciding which of several rival outcomes would triumph and why. We do not propose to enter into an exposition of the Marxist conception of the ways in which economic determination works itself out, since this is a vast subject. We do, however, strongly contest the implied assumption made by Roberts that all analysis of the forms of economic determination is necessarily reductionist, or that it involves diminishing the relative autonomy of ideology or politics.

In justifying his rejection of 'economic determinism', Roberts refers to a 'proliferation of new and diverse theories' in the last decade and the unifying thread within it: 'the project of ridding Marxism of *economic determinism* — the form that has predominated throughout most of its history'. This way of putting his argument at least makes it clear what he is *against*, namely most of the history of

Marxism. But what are we to put in its place? Apparently, the 'novelty and diversity' of the last decade; some quotations from Gramsci's Prison Notebooks; and the perspective offered by Stalin and Dimitrov at the Seventh Congress of the Comintern, which (so we are assured in footnote 29) marked the *beginning* of a break with this otherwise pervasive 'economic determinism'.

We will not undertake here any detailed examination of the new and diverse theories that have erupted within Marxism in the last decade. We certainly would not deny that some valuable advances have been made, but what *has* been valuable certainly cannot be assembled under the rubric 'against economic determinism'. There have for example been some notable advances in Marxist historiography — including from the pen of those who are members of the CPGB. But part of what has been valuable in them has been an uncovering of economic determination in the age of capital with its unfolding class struggles. As for the trends in Marxist philosophy that have acquired a new currency over the past decade, what has been of most value here has been the beginnings of an emancipation from *Stalinism*. Unfortunately this has been incomplete. As Sebastiano Timpanaro has argued in *On Materialism*, it has been accompanied by not a few concessions to fashionable varieties of bourgeois idealism (phenomenology, structuralism, etc.). And as Perry Anderson has argued in *Considerations on Western Marxism*, the 'Western Marxists' systematically neglected history, politics and economics, which is no way to establish a valid critique of 'economic determinism'.

It seems likely that Roberts is primarily thinking of the work of Louis Althusser and his followers when he refers to the advances of the last decade in Marxist thought. In some of Althusser's work there is a materialist concern to establish the hierarchy of determination and 'over-determination' in history. But Althusser's work has been utterly disoriented by an unhistorical critique of Stalinism in the light of the Chinese Cultural Revolution. The latter event was supposed to make possible an emancipation from the economic determinism of the Second and Third Internationals. It led directly to a species of cultural determinism in which ideological apparatuses decide the character of a society, 'political revolutions' can be made within the education system, the family is a crucial component of the state apparatus, and the Soviet Union is a capitalist country because intellectual labour supposedly dominates manual labour. This dangerous series of theoretical and political errors was attractive to some simply because it enabled them to equate Stalin and Trotsky, and to evade the devastating critique of the Stalinist system to be found in *The Revolution Betrayed*. Having briefly indicated how dubious and factitious we believe Roberts' alternative theoretical standpoint to be, we will now turn to his political critique of Trotsky's 'catastrophism'.

Trotsky and the Nature of the Epoch

Revolutionary Marxists maintain that August 1914 inaugurated an epoch of wars and revolutions. In the mid-Twenties Trotsky insisted that the stabilisation of capitalism would not last for ever, and that a new and deeper capitalist crisis would bring in its train a crisis of the bourgeois order throughout Europe. He predicted 'profound and sharp fluctuations and abrupt and frequent transitions from an immediately pre-revolutionary situation'. In different ways the events in Austria, Germany, France and Spain were to bear out this perspective. So long as bourgeois democratic regimes survived, the workers parties were able to make striking advances; the widespread social misery caused by the depression was certainly a historical condition of this radicalisation. In three of these states the growing strength of the workers movement produced a counter-revolutionary bourgeois mobilisation which eventually smashed the workers parties; in France the Popular Front

disoriented and demoralised the workers movement and helped pave the way for Petain.* We would accept that Trotsky advanced a 'catastrophist' view in the sense that he predicted that catastrophes would ensue if the Communist Parties did not fundamentally revise their strategy and tactics. He was right.

Since, as Roberts concedes, Trotsky was an economic determinist, we may be sure that he would not have projected the possibility of imminent pre-revolutionary situations into the Europe of the post-war boom. For more than two decades after 1948 the locus of wars and revolutions was the 'Third World'. As we pointed out in our original critique, Trotskyists have sought to analyse this post-war capitalist boom, its consequences for the working class and the new contradictions which it has generated, at the ideological and political as well as the economic level. If capitalism in Western Europe had not achieved renewed economic dynamism but had plunged back into depression, there would certainly have been stormy class struggles. But acknowledging the post-war stabilisation of capitalism does not mean any neglect of the decisive events which made it possible: the victories of fascism, the frustration of the anti-capitalist dynamic within the European resistance movements, the Cold War. Until the post-war stabilisation was achieved, the course of events corresponded to a view of the epoch involving 'profound and sharp fluctuations and abrupt and frequent transitions from an immediately pre-revolutionary situation' in many parts of continental Europe. The exhaustion of the post-war boom has again begun to thrust the bourgeois order in Europe into a prolonged period of danger and uncertainty. Very often it is precisely those questions which were evaded or suppressed in the period 1945-8 that are now resurfacing: the fate of Spain, Greece and Portugal, the possibility of Communist-led governments in Italy and France, the alternatives to British Labourism, the ravages of Stalinism in the European workers movement, the corruption of social democracy.

Political Conjunctions and the Neglect of Ideology

A refrain of the Roberts article in *Marxism Today* was that Trotsky substituted a catastrophist concept of the epoch for a *concrete analysis of the 'current moment'*. This line of criticism seems to have been abandoned. We now learn that Trotsky *did* analyse many political conjunctions, and that this was his error, since he did so without paying due attention to the crucial structural role of ideology. Roberts apparently denies that the study of particular conjunctions will often have to *precede* a full or adequate structural analysis. This is not simply because the class struggle is pressing and cannot wait for all the ideal conditions of analysis to be assembled. It is also because a 'conjunctural' analysis or intervention like Marx's *Eighteenth Brumaire*, Lenin's *Left Wing Communism* or Trotsky's writings on Germany often proves to be a *necessary preparation* for a more systematic theory (of the capitalist state, parliamentarism, fascism, etc.). The historical and practical *test* to which such concrete analysis is necessarily subject is a condition of theoretical advance which cannot be matched by even the best generalised statements of a theoretical and political position.

In his fascination with 'cultural' determination, Roberts has again managed to avoid the awkward question of *history*. Yet anyone who reads *Results and Prospects* or *Where is Britain Going?* can see how important historical development was for Trotsky in deciding the 'specific

* Clearly we cannot do justice to this historical record here, but see Fernando Claudin, *The Communist Movement*, London 1976, and Ernest Mandel, *Peaceful Coexistence and World Revolution*, New York 1972.

gravity' of a given social formation within world economy and world politics, and for shaping the predominant forms of national culture. It is, of course, a pure myth that Trotsky failed to address himself to the relative autonomy of the domain of ideology and culture. In Russian conditions he was often concerned to vindicate the positive contribution which bourgeois cultural traditions could make to the proletarian revolution (for example, in *Problems of Everyday Life and Literature and Revolution*). But this certainly did not make him insensitive to the oppressive and limited character of bourgeois cultural forms. These aspects of bourgeois ideology and culture are, of course, invariably rooted in social and economic structures of inequality and domination. Combating bourgeois ideology is thus inseparable from a struggle against the source and roots of that ideology.

Thus in the *Transitional Programme* an important place was given to the struggle against the oppression of women and blacks, and in *The Revolution Betrayed* there was a whole chapter on the re-emergence of bourgeois family norms in the Soviet Union under Stalin. Trotsky had this to say about the struggle for women's rights in the Soviet Union: 'To establish the political equality of men and women in the Soviet State was one problem and the simplest. A much more difficult problem was the next — that of establishing the industrial equality of men and women workers in the factories, the mills and trade unions, and to do it in such a way that the men should not put women at a disadvantage. But to achieve the actual equality of men and women in the home is an infinitely more arduous problem. All our domestic habits must be revolutionised before that can happen. And yet it is quite obvious that unless there is an actual equality of men and women within the home, in a normal sense as well as in conditions of life, we cannot speak seriously of their equality at work or even in politics. As long as woman is chained to her house work, the care of the family, the cooking and sewing, all her chances of participating in social and cultural life are cut down to the extreme' (*Problems of Everyday Life*, London 1953, p.21).

The recent emergence of an independent women's liberation movement has evidently transformed the possibilities and conditions of the struggle against women's oppression, and has produced a valuable debate on its forms and underlying mechanisms. But it would be absurd to claim that Trotsky's conception of politics was deeply incompatible with such a development. In fact, every section of the Fourth International has had a far-reaching internal discussion on the questions raised by the women's movement, with the formation of women's caucuses and the involvement of the whole membership. Likewise every section has incorporated the fundamental demands of the women's movement into its programme — the comrades in Iran, Mexico and Portugal as well as those in the United States, Britain and France, where a stronger women's movement has made this easier.

While Roberts had much to say about the Trotskyist neglect of the role of ideology and culture in bourgeois society in his original article, he said nothing about the specific political mechanisms of bourgeois democracy. In his rejoinder he seeks unsuccessfully to remedy this deficiency.

'Consent' and the Origins of Bourgeois Democracy

Geoff Roberts claims that there is nothing very novel in Trotsky's observations concerning the role of popular consent within bourgeois democratic regimes. In that case we must ask why there has been no theoretical or historical study of this question for decades within the orthodox Communist movement? Roberts seems to have forgotten the dark shadow thrown on Marxist political theory by Stalinism and the reluctance of orthodox Communist theoreticians to face up to the reality of bourgeois

democracy in the West and the denial of proletarian democracy in the East. Thus the source of the 'new thinking' to be found in the *British Road to Socialism* was not an analysis of the workings of capitalist democracy but a dubious analogy from the 'People's Democracies' of Eastern Europe (as James Klugmann points out in his article on the origins of the *British Road in Comment*, 5 February 1977).

Roberts suggests that in a bourgeois democratic regime not only does the governmental system rest on popular consent, as Trotsky maintained, but that the whole social order rests on popular consent. We think this is a confused and misleading formation, since bourgeois democracy is a much more limited affair than this would imply. As Norman Geras has observed: 'Bourgeois democracy obtains the consent of the masses not by revealing their subordination to them, but by concealing it from them, much as the wage form conceals their exploitation. It throws up a screen (which is not just a fiction, however, but a real structure with real effects) of elections, parliamentary legislation and debate, equal democratic rights, etc. behind which the central executive apparatuses of the State and their points of contact/access to the capitalist class are obscured' (Norman Geras, *The Legacy of Rosa Luxemburg*, p.59). While Trotsky insisted that the governmental system rested for support on the masses, he could emphatically declare: 'Anyone who would say that in England, France, the United States, and other democratic countries, private property is supported by the will of the people would be a liar. No one ever asked the consent of the people' (*Leon Trotsky on Britain*, p.72).

To argue that the governmental system — a real structure with real effects — rests on popular consent is not to minimise its significance. In order to claim this popular support the bourgeois regime must permit important democratic rights of expression and association in addition to a universal suffrage. Roberts is right in asserting that the workers movement historically fought for these democratic rights and for universal suffrage — and that it did so in large measure *against* the bourgeoisie. But he is wrong to argue that the installation of bourgeois democracy was purely or predominantly the work of the working class. There were, in fact, very few successful proletarian campaigns for universal suffrage. In the United States the introduction of manhood suffrage in the North pre-dates the emergence of an industrial working class in the modern sense. As George Novack has argued in a valuable historical study, *Democracy and Revolution*, the petty bourgeoisie and urban artisans played an important part in democratic agitation — and in some instances slave-owners like Jefferson and Jackson played a crucial role. In Britain the great popular movement for universal suffrage — Chartism — was *defeated*, and a decisive enlargement of the franchise was made by a Tory leader, Disraeli. In France the first stable bourgeois democratic regime was established after defeat in the Franco-Prussian War and the crushing of the Paris Commune. A not dissimilar pattern ensued in many other European states in the twentieth century following the two world wars. The initial conditions for this spread of bourgeois democratic regimes were certainly established during the great bourgeois revolutions. But it would be thoroughly anachronistic to ascribe these first shoots of bourgeois democracy to the working class in any modern sense. Subsequently, *war* and *frustrated revolution* have made a decisive contribution.

Roberts' conception of the scope and origins of bourgeois democracy clearly impels him to view it as being essentially a product of the working class and in principle amenable to its wishes. Yet if bourgeois democratic institutions were installed usually without the direct intervention of the working class, and if their operation normally excludes an effective command of the state apparatus, then the formation of a workers government upon the terrain of bourgeois democracy is a much more perilous and explosive

undertaking than Roberts is prepared to admit.

The Workers Government and Revolutionary Leadership

The strategy of the *British Road* envisages the establishment of a government composed of workers parties and with a programme of transition to socialism within the parliamentary regime. Such a conception is essentially similar to that of the Union of the Left in France or the Popular Unity in Chile; it is different from the 'historic compromise' proposed by the Italian Communist Party, which calls for coalition with a major bourgeois party. While the historic compromise — if it can be pursued — implicates the Communists in the decay and repressive involution of Italian bourgeois society, the formation of a workers government in the 'weak' sense provokes an extra-parliamentary mobilisation of all layers of society.

In normal times governments formed on the terrain of bourgeois democracy have considerable powers in the sphere of economic and social policy so long as they observe two crucial taboos: that they do not encourage or permit any fundamental challenge to private property (expropriations, workers control); and that they do not encourage or permit any undermining of the effective monopoly of organised violence claimed by the bourgeois state (i.e. workers militias, soldiers councils, etc.). A workers government in the *weak* sense attempts a partial and piecemeal dismantling of bourgeois power, with the decisive acts coming from above with all the 'force' of governmental authority. This invariably provokes an extra-parliamentary mobilisation of the bourgeoisie (economic sabotage, police provocations, military conspiracies, media demagoguery, manipulation of the petty bourgeoisie, etc.). Every historical experience bears out the revolutionary Marxist contention that only a superior extra-parliamentary mobilisation of the working class and its allies can meet such a challenge and destroy the counter-revolution before the counter-revolution smashes the organised workers movement along with the workers government. A workers government in the 'strong' sense would anticipate and exploit the bourgeois mobilisation, using it to impose more comprehensive measures of expropriation and democratisation, guaranteed and implemented from below through the formation of revolutionary committees and militias.

Whatever the type of workers government, there can be no socialist revolution without that qualitative break in which the bourgeois repressive apparatus is dispersed and full sovereignty assumed by organs of workers power. In relatively backward conditions the socialist transition can be effected by a workers and peasants government that is not squarely based on political organs of the soviet type (e.g. Cuba, Vietnam). But in the conditions of an advanced bourgeois democracy only a full development of *proletarian democracy* can release all the energies that are required to destroy the social power of a more developed antagonist. The 'democratic road' to socialism is not, in Roberts' curious and revealing phrase, 'the working class and its allies appropriating for itself the system of bourgeois democracy', but the *suppression* of all the limitations and restraints imposed on the masses by the bourgeois regime in an act of proletarian insurrection.

At one point in his rejoinder (footnote 28), Roberts himself makes a critical comment on the *British Road to Socialism* which, if taken seriously, could only lead to the rejection of its fundamental 'strategic' conception. Roberts writes: 'Although the notion here is primarily one of working class power expressing itself through existing institutions (e.g. Parliament) the development of new forms of working class power, even of the soviet type, is not precluded. Indeed, it would seem to me that this should form an integral part of the strategy as a whole. Utilisation of existing institutions and the development of new, autonomous (from the bourgeois democratic system) working class institutions should be seen as complementary rather than contradictory.

A problem in the *British Road to Socialism* is that whilst a mechanical application of the forms of the Russian revolutionary process is correctly rejected, some of its content, valid in the British situation, tends to get thrown out as well.' It is odd, to say the least, that Roberts, who embarked on his critique of Trotskyism declaring his faith in the *British Road*, should now choose to make such a comment as an aside, literally in a *footnote*. And it is no doubt significant that the hesitant, typically centrist phrasing of this remark fails to make clear whether 'new, autonomous... working class institutions' will be permitted to assert their *sovereignty* against the bourgeois regime in any version of the *British Road* re-written to suit Roberts' prescription. A strategy oriented to the victory of organs of workers power — whether in the context of a 'strong' or 'weak' workers government — will certainly require a revolutionary leadership.

Contrary to Roberts' apparent belief, Gramsci always insisted on the role of revolutionary leadership in the struggle for workers power. Gramsci's central strategic conception in 'The Modern Prince' is that workers councils must be forged from the spontaneous reaction of the exploited and oppressed to capitalist crisis. The spontaneous mass response must be 'educated, directed, purged of extraneous contaminations'. He recalled that the Turin workers council movement 'gave the masses a "theoretical consciousness" of being creators of *historical* and institutional values, of being founders of a State. This unity between "spontaneity" and "conscious leadership" or "discipline" is precisely the real political action of the subaltern classes and not merely an adventure by groups claiming to represent the masses.' In this same passage Gramsci issues a warning to all those who, like the latter-day

socialist revolution

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Communist leaders in Chile, Italy or France, simultaneously reject mass spontaneity and the need for organs of workers power:

'Neglecting, or worse still despising, so-called spontaneous movements, i.e. failing to give them a conscious leadership or to raise them to a higher plane by inserting them into politics, may often have extremely serious consequences. It is almost always the case that a spontaneous movement of the subaltern classes is accompanied by a reactionary movement of the right wing of the dominant class, for concomitant reasons. An economic crisis, for instance, engenders on the one hand discontent among the subaltern classes and spontaneous mass movements, and on the other conspiracies among the reactionary groups who take advantage of the objective weakening of the government in order to attempt *coups d'état*. Among the effective causes of the *coups* must be included the failure of the responsible groups to give any conscious leadership to the spontaneous revolts or to make them into a positive factor' (*Prison Notebooks*, pp.198-9).

Roberts will no doubt find distressing symptoms of economic determinism, catastrophism and vanguardism in this text of Gramsci. He will also note that Gramsci did *not* espouse the apparently super-revolutionary view that the task of the hegemonic party was, as Roberts puts it, 'the preparation of revolution rather than one of preparing for the revolution'. Gramsci well understood that this spuriously radical notion involves neglecting or despising the *spontaneous creativity of the masses*, and imagining that the entire historical process can be brought under the supervision and control of an omniscient Party centre.

Social Democracy and the United Front

In his discussion of Trotskyism and bourgeois democracy, Roberts simply fails to grasp some of the most basic points. While Trotsky himself did not elaborate a systematic account of the workings of bourgeois democracy, his work does offer a number of crucial insights and watchwords. Thus it is quite wrong to say that he regarded the elements of 'proletarian democracy' in bourgeois society as being entirely *outside* the political system. Likewise it is false to maintain that Trotsky considered social democracy to be purely and simply an *obstacle* to proletarian revolution. Having failed to understand these questions, Roberts is naturally incapable of comprehending the revolutionary Marxist conception of the united front, transitional demands, or workers government, arriving finally at the absurd conclusion that Trotsky and the Fourth International lack a *strategic* concept of socialist revolution.

Let us invite Roberts to consider again what Trotsky had to say about social democracy and the 'elements of proletarian democracy' in bourgeois society:

'In a developed capitalist society, during a "democratic" regime, the bourgeoisie leans for support primarily upon the working classes, which are held in check by the reformists. In its most finished form, this system finds its highest expression in Britain during the administration of the Labour Government as well as during that of the Conservatives... In the course of many decades, the workers have built up within the bourgeois democracy, by utilising it, by fighting against it, their own strongholds and bases of *proletarian democracy*: the trade unions, the political parties, the educational and sports clubs, the co-operatives, etc. The proletariat cannot attain power within the formal limits of bourgeois democracy, but can do so only by taking the road of revolution: this has been proved by theory and experience. And these bulwarks of workers democracy within the bourgeois state are absolutely essential for taking the revolutionary road.' (Trotsky, *The Struggle Against Fascism in Germany*, New York 1971, pp.158-9).

As we have earlier shown, Trotsky certainly did not regard reformism as the *only* ideological weapon of the ruling class within a bourgeois democracy — nationalism, racism, male

chauvinism and many other ideologies spawned by bourgeois society are extremely important ideological expressions/supports of capitalist social relations. But at the political level, reformism and economism within the workers movement play a decisive role in preventing the working class from struggling for the leadership of society. And reformism is invariably more or less collusive with these ideological poisons and the repressive structures which generate them. In Europe today the traditional workers parties are playing, or are about to play, an absolutely central role within the politics of every single state in capitalist Europe. That is to say, social democratic or Communist parties are in the government or are the most significant opposition grouping in every European state except Switzerland. Evidently Trotsky was quite right to stress that bourgeois democratic regimes rest on the working classes, and that the function of reformism is to hold the latter in check. Until now social democracy has carried out this function well enough, with only minor splits and strains; it remains to be seen whether the militants of the European Communist Parties will prove more recalcitrant. At all events, it should be clear from the passage from Trotsky quoted above that he saw social democracy not *only* as an obstacle but also as the residue of a historical conquest by the working class, and furthermore that the bulwarks of proletarian democracy within bourgeois society were *inside* as well as *outside* the political institutions of a bourgeois democracy.

Because social democratic parties represented in part an historical gain of the workers movement the goal of communists, according to Trotsky, must be to engage in united action with social democrats, wherever this was possible. The programmatic basis of such united action could be either immediate demands (for example, a wage rise), democratic demands (such as trade union rights) or transitional demands. United action with social democracy was not only permissible, it was mandatory. Trotsky formulated this question in 1933 in the following limpid formulas:

'Let us for a moment transfer the problem to Great Britain, where the Communist Party (as a consequence of the ruinous mistakes of Stalinist bureaucracy) still comprises an insignificant portion of the proletariat. If one accepts the theory that every type of the united front, except the Communist, is "counter-revolutionary", then obviously the British proletariat must put off its revolutionary struggle until that time when the Communist Party is able to come to the fore. But the Communist Party cannot come to the front of the class except on the basis of its own revolutionary experience. However, its experience cannot take on a revolutionary character in any other way than by drawing mass millions into the struggle. Yet non-Communist masses, the more so if organised, cannot be drawn into the struggle except through the policy of the united front. We fall into a vicious circle, from which there is no way out by means of bureaucratic ultimatum. But the revolutionary dialectic has long since pointed the way out and has demonstrated it by countless examples in the most diverse spheres: by correlating the struggle for power with the struggle for reforms; by maintaining complete independence of the party while preserving the unity of the trade unions; by fighting against the bourgeois regime and at the same time utilising its institutions; by relentlessly criticising parliamentarism — from the parliamentary tribunal; by waging war mercilessly against reformism, and at the same time making practical agreements with the reformists in partial struggles.' (Trotsky, *The Struggle Against Fascism in Germany*, New York 1971, pp.169-70)

United action to defend the interests of the working class is not only valuable in itself, it also lays the basis for autonomous working class organisation and a pole of anti-capitalist politics — as Trotsky put it, organisations of the soviet type are the highest form of the united front. For Trotskyists the united front with social democrats is thus a

tactic *within* an overall strategic orientation towards workers power; it is not in itself this strategy. We certainly reject any concept of *strategic unity* with social democracy. Where social democracy is actively promoting class collaboration and pro-imperialist politics, as it is prone to do, and as the Labour Government is doing in Britain today, then there is no basis for united action with the whole of social democracy. Indeed in these circumstances the task of developing an independent pole of proletarian, anti-capitalist politics requires a struggle *against* social democracy. It becomes a priority to develop a *socialist alternative*, based on class struggle and prepared to contest social democracy on its home ground — *the electoral arena*.

In Britain today this is the burning task presented to us by the 'current moment' — Phase Three of the Social Contract, the Lib-Lab pact, the hopelessness of the Labour left, cuts in social expenditure, falling living standards, massive unemployment, the electoral advance of fascism, the repressive involution and decay of bourgeois civilisation in Britain and of its traditional state forms. In such a situation all those within the labour movement who are committed to anti-capitalist class struggle should unite to present the socialist alternative in the electoral arena. Bourgeois democracy claims to embody popular sovereignty and normally it does wield certain real powers and rest on mass consent. That is why the national and local apparatus of elections and assemblies are a crucial arena for presenting a socialist alternative to the crisis and decay of capitalism. Because bourgeois democratic institutions focus the political attention and aspirations of the masses, an intervention at this level is essential to any strategy which aims to release their independent political initiative and capacity.

Workers Power and Workers Government

The underlying *strategic goal* informing the tactics of the Fourth International in capitalist Europe is that of working for the emergence and victory of institutions of dual power. This entails striving to develop a revolutionary alternative to reformism in the working class movement and thus educating and preparing the working class for the creation of their own instruments of power. There is, of course, little that is specific to Trotsky in these conceptions. Lenin, or for that matter Gramsci, were equally concerned to find the road to workers power. To seek to counterpose Gramsci to Trotsky (and also presumably to Lenin) on this question is a very misconceived exercise. Gramsci's writings on the Turin workers councils furnish, in fact, a more detailed and vivid portrait of the emergence of a workers power than anything to be found in either Lenin or Trotsky (see the recently published volume of Gramsci's *Political Writings*). However the defeats of 1919-20 impressed on all three Marxist leaders that the victory of workers power in the bourgeois democracies would require a strategy that took into account the strength of bourgeois power in these states. Hence *Left Wing Communism*, hence the *Prison Notebooks*, and hence Trotsky's writings on the united front and the transitional programme, on Germany and France, on Britain and Spain. But as Lenin made perfectly clear the theses of *Left Wing Communism* did not cancel out the imperatives indicated in *State and Revolution* and, as we have argued above, workers councils remained at the core of Gramsci's strategic thinking in the *Prison Notebooks*. It is no disrespect to Lenin or Gramsci to point out that Trotsky's writings on Western Europe have greater scope and concreteness. Because Trotsky wrote much, much more about the actual course of class struggle in the advanced countries than either Lenin or Gramsci, his writings contain many more precise concepts and formulas for understanding and intervening in that struggle than are to be found in their writings. For that same reason there were also more errors of interpretation and mistakes of prescription in Trotsky's work, but these are errors and mistakes from which much can be learnt.

As we have seen, Trotsky declared that parliamentarism

should be denounced *from the parliamentary tribunal*. In *Left Wing Communism* Lenin also urged the British Communists to address themselves to the task 'of getting pro-Soviet politicians *into* parliament.' The early Comintern conducted a very important debate on the immense *opportunities* and the mortal *danger* that would face any workers movement that was in a position to form a government on the terrain of bourgeois democracy. But at this time there were very few concrete reference points. At that time, social democratic parties had formed governments either as a consequence of revolution (in Central Europe) or on a minority, coalition basis. In the Thirties there was a prospect of workers parties dominating the government in a series of European states. Trotsky's writings on Belgium, France and Spain for this reason furnish a more concrete indication and elaboration of the meaning of transitional demands, an Action Programme, the perspectives of a workers government, than is to be found in the earlier discussions. Thus Trotsky's analysis of the French conjuncture may have contained peremptory or false estimates of the tempo of events, or of the precise character of some of the French political parties (important questions which we cannot go into here). But they certainly contain some novel developments in proposed revolutionary tactics.

Thus Trotsky, in the Action Programme which he proposed to the French Trotskyists, suggested that they agitate for 'a more generous democracy' (abolition of the Senate and Presidency, etc.) since this would facilitate the struggle for workers power. This programme declared that if the social democratic SFIO 'were to gain the confidence of the majority, we are and always will be prepared to defend the SFIO government against the bourgeoisie. We want to attain our objectives not by armed conflict between the various groups of toilers but by real workers democracy, by propaganda and loyal criticism, by the voluntary regrouping of the great majority of the proletariat under the flag of true communism. Workers adhering to democratic socialism must further understand that it is not enough to defend democracy; democracy must be regained... We can defend the sorry remains of democracy, and especially we can enlarge the democratic arena for the activity of the masses, only by annihilating the armed fascist forces that, on 6 February 1934, started moving the axis of the state and are still doing so.' (*A Programme of Action*, June 1934).

As is well known, Trotsky opposed the political formula of the Popular Front that was subsequently formed in France. But this did not stop him from calling for its transformation into a force that could achieve a durable victory over the fascists and their collaborators: 'Is the Popular Front intended for the defence of "democracy"? Then let it begin by applying it to its own ranks. This means: the leadership of the People's Front must be the direct and immediate reflection of the will of the struggling masses. How? Very simply: through elections. The proletariat does not deny any one the right to struggle side by side with it against fascism, the Bonapartist regime of Laval, the war plot of the imperialists, and other forms of oppression and violence... The last Congress of the Communist International in its resolution on the Dimitrov report expressed itself in favour of elected Committees of Action as the mass support for the People's Front. This is perhaps the only progressive idea in the entire resolution. But precisely for this reason the Stalinists do nothing to realise it. They dare not do so for fear of breaking off collaboration with the bourgeoisie. To be sure, in the election of Committees not only workers will be able to participate but also civil service employees, functionaries, war veterans, artisans, small merchants and small peasants. Thus the Committees of Action are in closest harmony with the tasks of the struggle of the proletariat for influence over the petty bourgeoisie. But they complicate to the extreme the collaboration between the workers bureaucracy and the bourgeoisie.' (Trotsky, *Whither France?*, London 1974, pp.100-1).

The course of the class struggle was to show that the

possibility of such Committees of Action was no figment of Trotsky's imagination; but in France, as later in Spain, the momentum of workers committees was broken when the large workers parties denied them a democratic character. The strategy and tactics which Trotsky and the Fourth International elaborated in the Thirties have been further developed in debates and practical experiences (most recently concerning Chile and Portugal). However we believe that the class struggle in prospect in Europe today differs in one decisive respect from that which prevailed in most European states in the Thirties and Forties. During that epoch social democracy and Stalinism exercised an almost complete hegemony over the workers movement. Political developments in Europe since 1968 have shown that social democracy and Stalinism are in crisis and decay, and that there exists a newly radicalised layer of workers who are drawn to revolutionary socialism. In the recent French municipal elections the united far left slate obtained an average of more than 5 per cent of the vote and in some areas (for example, Orleans) they obtained over 10 per cent of the votes. In Britain over the last decade the far left has grown into a stronger force within the working class than at any time since the early days of the CPGB: the latest evidence for this is the votes gained by the far left in a number of union elections.

The fact that there is now the beginnings of an open debate between members of the CPGB and the organisations of the far left is in itself a welcome sign of the new climate within the workers movement. Roberts in his conclusion declares that 'the critical trends within Trotskyism are going to have to come to terms with their movement's legacy'. We would point out that Trotskyists have every reason to be proud of their legacy, since it is the legacy of a movement which held fast to the best traditions of revolutionary Marxism in appallingly difficult circumstances and confronted, in all their enormity, the dire consequences of the ascendancy of Stalin. There are certainly 'critical trends' within Trotskyism. Indeed there is a continual debate within the Fourth

International on many important questions, since this is integral to the democracy that characterises a healthy revolutionary movement. Until members of the CPGB like comrade Roberts undertake a thorough settling of accounts with the legacy they inherit, especially its rejection of proletarian democracy, their politics will lack the essential foundation for a victorious assault on capitalism, and will be smothered by the superior strength of bourgeois political forms and forces.

MARXISM AND BOURGEOIS DEMOCRACY: A NOTE ON THE LITERATURE

Since this exchange has largely centred on the Marxist analysis of bourgeois democracy, the recent literature on this topic should be briefly summarised.

Two recent major studies of the capitalist state — Nicos Poulantzas, *Political Power and Social Class*; and Ralph Miliband, *The State in Capitalist Society* — contain much valuable material on the modalities of capitalist power but are not focused on the contradictions of class struggle in the framework of bourgeois democracy. The classical Marxist debates on these questions are re-considered in Lucio Colletti, *From Rousseau to Lenin*; Norman Geras, *The Legacy of Rosa Luxemburg*; and Perry Anderson, 'The Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci', *New Left Review* 100. The historical antecedents and developments of political democracy are traced in George Novack's pioneering work, *Democracy and Revolution*, New York 1971.

For the discussion within the Fourth International on the workers government see Michel Pablo and others, *The Workers and Farmers Government*, SWP 'Education for Socialists' series, New York 1974. For the experience of the Allende government in Chile see Regis Debray, *Conversations with Allende*, London 1971; Tariq Ali, *The Only Road to Socialism and Workers Power*, London 1973; Ralph Miliband, 'The Coup in Chile' in *The Socialist Register*, 1973. For the experience in Portugal see Robin Blackburn, 'The Test in Portugal', in *New Left Review* 87-88, and the exchanges between Joseph Hansen, Ernest Mandel and others in *Intercontinental Press* (New York) between August 1975 and January 1976. For the current strategic orientation of the Fourth International in Europe see Ernest Mandel, 'Revolutionary Strategy in Europe', in *New Left Review* 100; and the important statement of the Fourth International, 'On Socialist Democracy and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat' to be published in *Inprecar* in June-July 1977.

The Comintern and Indian Nationalism

Jairus Banaji

'When the objective conditions for a deep political crisis have developed, the smallest conflicts, which, seemingly, are the least related to the actual seat of revolution, may have the most serious significance as a starting point The Proletarian Party is, before all, unconditionally bound to utilise all and every conflict, to unfold these conflicts, to widen their significance, to connect with them the agitation for the revolutionary slogans, to carry the knowledge of these conflicts to the wide masses, to rally them to an independent open action with their own demands ...'

LENIN

'The first quality of a truly revolutionary party is the ability to face realities.'

TROTSKY

'In the event that the Indian bourgeoisie finds itself compelled to take even the tiniest step on the road of struggle against the arbitrary rule of Great Britain, the proletariat will naturally support such a step. But they will support it with their own methods: mass meetings, bold slogans, strikes, demonstrations and more decisive combat actions, depending on the relationship of forces and the circumstances. Precisely to do this must the proletariat have its hands free. Complete independence from the bourgeoisie is indispensable to the proletariat, above all in order to exert influence on the peasantry, the predominant mass of India's population.'

TROTSKY

Lenin once remarked shortly before his death that the outbreak of socialist revolutions in Russia, China and India would settle the balance of class forces on a world scale. In the early decades of this century these nations comprised the bulk of humanity. In each of them there existed an enormous

mass of impoverished peasants, of which only a minor, if unequal, proportion found employment as a factory proletariat. In sharp contrast to the expansion of capitalism in Europe and the white colonies, in Asia, including 'semi-Asiatic' barbarous Russia, capitalism, when it did develop, merely superimposed itself on a primitive agrarian base.

But the three nations experienced this combined development through the refraction of quite different modes of imperialist domination. Whereas French and Belgian capital rapidly industrialised Russia, without, however, reconstituting the peasantry of the Black Earth region as a proletariat, China's semi-colonial domination left more room for the emergence of a national industrial bourgeoisie. In India capital exports were of no great significance in the industrial sector, which remained confined, before 1914, to cotton textiles in Bombay and jute textiles in Calcutta. Foreign capital flowed mostly into productive sectors with a low organic composition of capital, into non-productive sectors like trade, banking and insurance, and finally into the construction of infrastructure based on the export requirements of imperialism. On the other hand, in contrast to China, India was directly dominated by a colonial state. Any revolution which might develop thus had to face a more imposing, a better organised machinery of repression than anything the Chinese landowners and capitalists had established.

It was in fact India's national peculiarity that of the three nations her nascent working class faced the least favourable internal balance of forces. The rapid growth of this working class during the First World War and its aftermath was coterminous with an expansion of national capital; the complementary pole of its existence was a national bourgeoisie without any umbilical ties to foreign capital. Unlike the liberalism of the Russian bourgeoisie which, in Trotsky's description [1], was stillborn, that of the Indian bourgeoisie was strong enough to impose its hegemony over the whole nation. Whereas the Russian bourgeoisie had singularly failed to establish a stable coalition after

1. L. Trotsky, *Results and Prospects*, cf. 1905 (translated A. Bostock, Allen Lane, 1972).

February, and the Chinese bourgeoisie could only establish its rule for some two decades and chiefly in the cities, the bourgeoisie of India not only won political independence but successfully prevented a proletarian or agrarian revolution in the process.

The dilemmas of the Comintern vis-à-vis the revolution in India sprang essentially from this difference, though at no stage in the 1920s did any of its rapporteurs or representatives concerned with India — M.N. Roy, G.K. Lubani, O. Kuusinen, R.P. Dutt, V. Chattopadhyaya — show the slightest awareness of this fact. Even before the rapid internal degeneration of the Comintern under the pressure of bureaucratic distortions within the Soviet Union, there was no attempt to grasp the essential national peculiarities of the Indian Revolution, to establish, for example, the decisive differences between China's semi-colonial domination and India's domination, for a longer historical period, by a colonial state. There was even less incentive for this sort of analysis once the Comintern began, with the Third Period, to impose a more or less uniform strategy on the countries of Europe, Asia and Latin America, regardless of their internal variations, the particular balance of forces prevailing within them, and so on.

But strategy, as Trotsky maintained, both in this period and subsequently, springs from national peculiarities. No historical sequence is ever an exact replica of the next.

In this article we shall attempt first to delineate the main features of the national conjuncture, shifting the focus progressively from this plane to that of the Comintern's understanding of the conjuncture and reactions to it. We are concerned mainly with the Twenties.

The Growth of National Capitalism in India

Before 1914 the cotton and jute industries dominated the industrial sector. During the war both industries experienced substantial expansion due to abnormally high rates of profit reflecting disruptions in the international economy — a sharp fall in the volume of raw jute exports and shifting terms of trade between raw jute and jute manufactures — and, secondly, a fall in the imports of cotton piecegoods. The expansion in textiles reached a peak in 1919-22, when the volume of investment rose from an annual Rs 395 crores* to Rs 726 crores. It is significant, however, that in this period the level of investment in cotton textiles, produced mainly by national capitalists, grew in relation to the level of investment in jute textiles, where there was a greater involvement of British capital. As against a pre-war figure of 356, the total number of newly registered companies was 948 in 1919-20 and 1,039 in 1920-21. It is true that the boom coincided with, in fact attracted, sharp increases in the volume of capital imports, which reached Rs 55 crores in 1922, but there was simultaneously a shift in the relative proportions of national and British capital. 'The grip of European businessmen on the economy of India was loosened by the impact of the First World War', writes Bagchi. 'Many Indian concerns sprang up in engineering and other trades supplying the army and the navy... In other fields also, such as iron and steel, paper and cement, India began to supply more and more of her own requirements.' [2] By the Twenties new Indian industrial groups had begun to emerge.

The basic determinants of this early post-war expansion were not primarily the shifts in policy on the part of British imperialism, signified in the setting up of the Industrial Commission in 1916, or in the policy of differential protection advocated by the Fiscal Commission in 1922 (for instance, the raising of the import duty on cotton piecegoods). In fact, as Britain re-established her commercial grip during the boom and a new phase of 'relative stagnation' emerged [3], lasting from 1922 to the

Depression, the policy of imperialism again hardened. Protection was offered only piecemeal, and 'no general policy of industrialisation was ever adopted by the Government at this time' [4]. In short, while a shift in policy did play a certain role in encouraging industrial expansion, it was a secondary factor based on short term conjunctural requirements due to the war. The basic factors in the expansion of industry related to the growth of demand for certain products and the shift in India's commercial relations with the external world, in particular the phase of import-substitution which this permitted. It was a temporary modification in India's structural role in the world market which provided the real stimulant behind the first spurt of expansion. Already in 1921, in presenting his 'Theses to the Third World Congress of the Comintern', Trotsky had grasped this phenomenon: 'The transoceanic countries which export raw materials, including the purely colonial countries, have in their turn utilised the rupture of international ties for the development of their native industries.' [5]

After 1922 cotton, iron and steel entered a period of stagnation. 'Production continued to creep upward, though registering considerable excess capacity. Moreover, there was a severe fall in profits... The reinforcement of integration with world capitalism not only led to the loss of the momentum gained during the war but threatened to wipe out the wartime gains.' [6] During this period of 'waiting for the growth of Indian industrial capitalism' [7], imperialism reduced the export duty on leather and skins, defeated the proposal to reserve the coastal traffic of India for Indian shipping, fixed the exchange rate at 1s 6d as against the desired 1s 4d, and, between 1930-32, proceeded to adopt wholesale the policy of Imperial Preference. British capital imports shrank to an annual average of around £2 million in the middle Twenties. 1927 saw one of the lowest levels of new investment since the war. While the policy of differential protection did not affect the volume of investment substantially till the 1930s [8], the major consumer goods industries only came to enjoy tariff protection after 1929-30. It was not till the relative stability of the international economy was again jolted, this time more sharply, by the Depression that national capitalism entered a new period of expansion. The level of aggregate industrial investment in real terms showed a 'surprising' stability during these years. The advance made in this period was 'decisive' and 'irreversible', according to one writer. [9] 'The sugar, cement, matches and even steel industries were firmly established only during the 1930s.... These are the years when several major groups of modern Indian capitalists — the Birlas, Dalmia-Jains, Singhanias, Thapars — ventured into the industrial field.' [10] By the beginning of the 1940s the Indian industrial bourgeoisie had strengthened its economic base enormously — due to the protracted nature of the world crisis and the intervention of the Second World War.

The particular rhythm of expansion which Indian capitalism experienced was decisive in at least one respect: the reinforcement of Britain's stranglehold on the economy following the post-war boom, and the significant slowing

2. A.K. Bagchi, *Private Investment in India 1900-39* (Cambridge University Press, 1972).

3. Cf. Bipan Chandra, 'Colonialism and Modernisation', *Indian History Congress*, 28-30 December 1970, where the rhythm of industrialisation is linked to shifts in the international economy.

4. Bagchi, *op. cit.*, p.45.

5. L. Trotsky, 'Theses of the Third World Congress on the International Situation and the Tasks of the Comintern', adopted at the 16th session, July 1921, reprinted in *The First Five Years of the Communist International* (Pioneer Publishers, 1945).

6. Bipan Chandra, *op. cit.*

7. Bagchi, *op. cit.*, p.438.

8. Bagchi, *op. cit.*, p.69.

9. Bagchi, *op. cit.*, pp.438-9.

10. Chandra, *op. cit.*

*A crore = 10 million

down in the pace of industrialisation which this induced, gave the struggle for independence an unduly protracted character. Had the Indian capitalist class entered the Depression with the strength with which it left it, it could conceivably have achieved independence several years earlier.

The Rhythm of Working Class Consciousness

The early phase of industrial expansion unleashed by the First World War was accompanied, inevitably, by a growth in the size and organisation of the working class. The second factor was as important as the first, for no sooner was the Indian proletariat born than it had to struggle for survival. In 1919 the level of foodgrain prices was 93 per cent higher than its pre-war level, and that of home-made textiles 60 per cent higher. An official report [11] admitted that since the war the general level of real wages had fallen considerably. The movement of strikes closely mirrored the rhythm of inflation.

The strike wave reached its climax during the boom and thereafter declined continuously in the period of stagnation. When prices rose towards the end of 1921, there was a fresh outbreak of strikes after the previous climax of 1919/20. In the whole of that year over 6 lakhs* of workers were involved in strikes, and some 6.9 million working days were lost. In early 1922, when prices fell, the proportion of unsuccessful strikes rose, and throughout that year the number of strikes and proportion of working days lost declined in relation to the previous year. Thereafter the decline was sharp and continuous, reaching a low ebb in 1926-27. In this period there was little increase in employment, and both the main sectors of textiles production experienced stagnation. In the coal mines employment shrank from 184,355 to 165,213. The struggles of this period were of a defensive character [12], launched to ward off wage cuts and fight retrenchment. Around 70 per cent of the strikes in this period were unsuccessful, this proportion reaching 82 per cent in 1926. The retreat reflected itself in the composition of the sessions of the All-India Trades Union Congress. The first session in Bombay in 1920, and especially the second at Jharia in 1922, had been marked by the presence of a large working class element. At the Lahore session in 1923 the middle class element was more prominent. 'This was more or less the case also at the next congress, Calcutta 1924, and at the next three congresses...' [13]

Official reports attempting to explain the sudden explosion of class conflicts in the factory focussed on the seminal role of the war. 'The war had done much to educate the Indian peasantry regarding conditions and methods in other countries', wrote one report. [14] 'Conditions particularly as regards working hours, which had formerly been accepted as inevitable, were no longer regarded as tolerable... The value of concerted action was rapidly realised.' A Memorandum of the Royal Commission on Labour similarly noted: 'The industrial worker has become more class conscious as a result of the economic and political influences which have come into play since the war...' [15] One index of this nascent class consciousness was the distinct tendency for localised disputes to spread rapidly to other sections of the industry, hence the large size of most of the important strikes, as shown in Table I:

Year	Strike	Numbers involved
1918	Bombay cotton textile workers	125,000
1919	Cawnpore woollen mills	17,000
1919/20	Jamalpur railway workers	16,000
1920	Calcutta jute workers	35,000
1920	Jamshedpur steel workers	32,000
1920	Sholapur textile workers	16,000
1920	Bombay textile workers	60,000
1920	Madras textile workers	17,000
1920	Ahmedabad textile workers	25,000

1923	Ahmedabad textile workers	46,000
1925	Bombay textile workers	145,000
1925	Northwestern Railway workers	22,000
1927	Kharagpur railway workers	15,000

The bitterness of some of these strikes is sufficiently indicated by the example of the strike of workers on the Northwestern Railways, which lasted three months and ended with the victimisation of several thousand workers; or of the Bombay mill strike of 1925, launched against a wage cut of 11½ per cent and lasting 2½ months; or of the strike of Ahmedabad textile workers, due to a 20 per cent wage cut and lasting 3 months.

The growth of the more elementary forms of proletarian class consciousness was thus simultaneous with, and in many instances even preceded, the birth of organised trade unionism, which from its modest beginnings in Madras in 1918 spread rapidly to embrace the Bombay and Calcutta proletariat by 1922, when there were some 113 unions. [16] In the period 1921-27 the Bombay cotton mills experienced a higher intensity of strikes than the jute mills of Bengal — both in terms of the number of disputes and the workers involved. While the latter were badly hit in 1922, when there were some 40 strikes involving a loss of over 1 million working days, the Bombay textile factories were badly hit in 1921, and again in 1923, 1924 and 1925. The following year the intensity of the strike wave fell sharply, coinciding with the low point of the recession. [17]

Shifts in the Political Conjunctionure

The years following the First World War were crucial on another level too. It was in this period that the political character of Congress shifted from that of a small liberal-constitutional body to that of a movement with a 'mass' character rooted more firmly now in an active petty bourgeois cadre and capable of a sporadic mobilisation of sections of the peasantry. This shift was accompanied by another one, which would prove equally decisive in subsequent conjunctures — as Nehru wrote later in *Toward Freedom*: 'The Amritsar Congress 1919 was the first Gandhi Congress. The slogan *Mahatma Gandhi ki jai* began to dominate the Indian political horizon.' In another work he returned to this theme, dating the birth of the 'Gandhi era in Congress politics' to the special session of Congress at Calcutta in the autumn of 1920. 'A new class of delegate, chiefly drawn from the lower middle classes, became the type of Congressman... Now the peasants rolled in, and in its new garb Congress began to assume the look of a vast agrarian organisation.' [18] Thus the middle classes and peasantry made a more decisive entry into the political arena precisely as the leadership of Congress passed to Gandhi. To some extent the connection was a direct one. 'He (Gandhi) sent us to the villages...', wrote Nehru.

It was at the Calcutta Special Congress in 1920, that which inaugurated the 'Gandhi era in politics', that the organisation adopted the form of struggle characteristic of it in subsequent periods. 'Non-violent non-cooperation' for the first time provided a framework in terms of which the Congress leadership could mobilise its political base and simultaneously keep it firmly within its control. As such, it

11. *The Bulletin of Indian Industries and Labour*, quoted in V.B. Karnik, *Strikes in India* (Bombay, 1967), p.62

12. Karnik, *op. cit.*, pp.128-32.

13. *Communists Challenge Imperialism from the Dock. Meerut Conspiracy Case 1929-33* (Calcutta, 1967), p.257.

14. Cf. Karnik, *op. cit.*, p.62.

15. *Ibid.*, p.74.

16. Cf. S.C. Jha, *The Indian Trade Union Movement* (Calcutta, 1970), pp.104-7.

17. Cf. Bagchi, *op. cit.*, pp.142-3.

18. D. Norman (editor), *Nehru: The First Sixty Years*, volume one (London, 1965), pp.59,62,64.

* A lakh = 100,000

was the form which best corresponded to the strategy of Congress [19], which Subhas Bose later described as the 'method of periodical compromise' [20]. The essence of this strategy consisted in the attempt to consolidate the political and economic position of the Indian bourgeoisie by forcing a series of concessions from the colonial state through the periodic mobilisation of mass pressure. These purely short-term concessions were not, however, the final object either of the Indian capitalist class or of the Congress leadership. Their final objective was a smashing of the entire framework of direct colonial domination which, in the consciousness of the rising bourgeoisie, specifically its older established professional strata from which the class derived both its organic as well as its traditional intelligentsia, acted as the chief constraint on the rapid capitalist development of the nation.

The left-democratic leaders of Congress, particularly Bose and Nehru, who combined in their persons the roles of organic and traditional intellectual, were quite conscious of this long-term contradiction between the interests of national-capitalist development and British imperialism. In a letter to *The Tribune* written in 1928, Nehru wrote of Britain and India, 'our economic interests conflict all along the line'. Bose was even more explicit: 'From the economic standpoint, India is to Britain a supplier of raw materials and a consumer of British manufactures. On the other hand, India aspires to be a manufacturing nation... The industrial progress of India is against Britain's economic interests.' [21] Thus the frequent short-term compromises effected between imperialism and sections of the Indian bourgeoisie were in no sense an 'abandonment' of the goal of 'independence'. They were in no sense a 'betrayal'. Rather, they were the means by which the Indian bourgeoisie gained in strength and confidence before reformulating its demands vis-à-vis imperialism. This, however, was a point which practically none of the major Comintern figures directly understood. It was precisely the point that to the bourgeoisie's relative economic autonomy there was no corresponding political autonomy that was missing in the debate at the Sixth Congress, as we shall see.

Of 1921 Nehru wrote: 'There was a strange mixture of nationalism and politics, and religion and mysticism and fanaticism. Behind all this was agrarian trouble and, in the big cities, a rising working class movement.' [22] These evolutions were largely separate, though they coincided in the empty space of time. There is little doubt that the most decisive intervention in this period was not that of the peasantry — the Moplah rebellion in Malabar, the Midnapore No-Tax campaign, or the experiment in Bardoli — but the massive wave of strikes in which some 600,000 workers were involved. It was this massive upsurge in working class militancy barely two years after the birth of trade unionism in India which had the greatest potential significance in terms of the anti-imperialist struggle. But Congress remained aloof, on the whole. To Bose and Nehru, despite the bourgeois radicalism of the first or the bourgeois republicanism of the second, the working class remained an external object, a sombre mass on their horizon, acting at a distance. Thus the social connections which were made in the first great upsurge of the post-war aftermath were not between 'the rising working class movement' and Congress, but between Congress and the peasantry. 'Our thinking became more and more conditioned to the peasantry', Nehru told a foreign observer, 'not so much to the industrial workers'. [23] Again, 'the advanced sections of labour fought shy of the National Congress. They misunderstood its leaders, and considered its ideology bourgeois-reactionary...' [24] Thus the strange atmosphere of 1921 which Nehru describes merely reflected the ideological amorphousness of the mass base which Congress acquired in that year. 'About our goal there was an entire absence of clear thinking.' [25]

For lack of the only social force capable of counterposing

to it its own scientific rationalism, the conservative semi-obscurantist, ethico-political pacifism which Gandhi so dramatically imposed on the mass movement with the Bardoli retreat of early 1922 was never seriously challenged as the dominant mass ideology of the national movement. The weak intellectual Fabianism of Nehru was never in any position to constitute the chief ideological link between the Congress leadership and its mass base. At best it provided the framework in terms of which the Indian bourgeoisie would attempt to work out its early Plans after the seizure of power. Gandhi was the linchpin of the national movement. Without Gandhi there was no ideological basis on which the Congress leadership, from Motilal Nehru to Subhas Bose, could appeal to and attract the vast backward peasant masses and the volatile urban middle class.

The Role of Gandhi

The strategy of Congress was a dual one. It had not only to mobilise its mass base to win concessions from imperialism. It had also to ensure that no 'transformation' occurred in this process, that the internal tendency of all national-revolutionary struggles to acquire a certain 'permanence', to rapidly outstrip the framework of bourgeois democracy, to shift the terrain radically from a purely national struggle to a social one — that this tendency, this inner logic would have no room to come into play. Thus the second limb of the Congress strategy was the blocking of the permanence of the national-revolutionary process, the task of ensuring that the movement was constantly deflected from its 'natural' elementary directions. Faced with the inner working out of this logic, the Chinese bourgeoisie in the same decade delegated to Chiang Kai-shek the task of brutally suppressing the Chinese working class. As the strike wave of 1925 began to affect not only the foreign-owned factories but the 'national' ones as well, a rapid shift occurred within the Kuomintang towards the right, leading in that year to the assassination of a prominent left-Kuomintang leader, and in the following year to Chiang's first coup. The Comintern, without in the least understanding this logic, of which Trotsky continually warned, continued to subordinate the Chinese Communists to Chiang. In India such a situation was never reached, except much later and in different circumstances. Here Gandhism provided the strategic and ideological framework in terms of which the various sections of the bourgeoisie could control the mass movement. The fact that this was possible for so long reflected not merely the greater internal cohesion of the Indian bourgeoisie, and not only the relative backwardness of the Indian Communists, but also the fact that the working class was never drawn directly into the political vortex. Its political strikes tended to be symbolic actions, *hartals** of short duration. The working class thus played a peripheral role in the national struggle, and its fierce combativity in the Twenties was a reflex of the economic recession rather than a symptom of growing politicisation.

Gandhism was in fact of decisive importance in this period, for in India ideology displaced force as the dominant

* Walking off the job

19. On this question our ideas are taken from Bipan Chandra, 'The Indian capitalist class and imperialism before 1947', paper presented to the International Seminar on Imperialism, Independence and Social Transformation in the Contemporary World 24-29 March 1972, Delhi, and 'Elements of continuity and change in early nationalist activity', paper presented to the Indian History Congress, 27-29 December 1972.

20. S. C. Bose, *The Indian Struggle 1920-42* (Bombay, 1964), p. 366.

21. Cf. *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, volume three (Orient Longman, 1972), p. 22. The letter is dated 27/1/28. Bose, *op. cit.*, p. 365.

22. *From Toward Freedom*, cf. Norman, *op. cit.*, p. 75.

23. Norman, *op. cit.*, p. 79, from an interview with Tibor Mende.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 176, from *Toward Freedom*.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 75. Cf. M. N. Roy, *Memoirs* (Allied Publishers, 1964), p. 542.

instance. In Nehru's words, 'non-violence was the moral equivalent of war and all violent struggle'. [26] Only non-violence could ensure that in a given conjuncture the mass movement, even if confined to symbolic actions of the peasantry and working class, would not surpass the limits of a bourgeois democratic struggle. Though there are many statements by Gandhi to show that this was how he understood the question, his obscurantist idealism obscured the fact. It was Nehru's self-conscious pragmatism which brought it out more clearly. Thus at the Lahore Congress in 1929 he would say, 'Violence too often brings reaction and demoralisation in its train, and in our country especially it may lead to disruption... The great majority of us, I take it, judge the issue not on moral but on practical grounds and if we reject the way of violence it is because it promises no substantial results.' [27] There were occasions when Gandhi was more explicit. Thus in 1922, in justifying the Bardoli retreat before Nehru, he wrote, 'I assure you that if the civil resistance movement had not been suspended we would have been leading not a non-violent struggle but essentially a violent struggle... the foetid smell of violence is still powerful, and it would be unwise to ignore or underrate it.' [28] It is well known that the retreat was triggered off by the fact that at Chauri Chaura peasants had stormed and burned the local police station. Two years earlier he had referred, in similar circumstances, after the calling off of the *satyagraha**, to 'the recrudescence of violence on the part of those who might not have understood the doctrine of civil resistance' [29]

At the Amritsar Congress, 'his' Congress, in Nehru's words, Gandhi was adamant that 'mob violence' in the Punjab and Gujarat should be formally condemned. The Subjects Committee had thrown out the resolution. Gandhi responded with a characteristic piece of blackmail. 'He firmly but politely and respectfully expressed his inability to attend the Congress, if the Congress could not see its way to accepting his viewpoint.' [30] When the resolution was successfully moved the next day, Gandhi remarked, 'There is no greater resolution before this Congress than this one ...' Two years later at the Ahmedabad Congress the ideology of Gandhism was stripped of its outer layers of mysticism: 'This Congress is further of the opinion that Civil Disobedience is the only civilised and effective substitute for an armed rebellion...' [31] It is in this light that Gandhi's apparently trivial interventions at subsequent Congresses on the question of violence assume a certain 'pragmatic' significance. Thus in 1929 the Congress passed a resolution condemning the bomb 'outrage' on the Viceroy's train, 'reiterating its conviction that such action... results in harm being done to the National Cause'. [32] Again, at the Karachi Congress in 1931, Gandhi's amendment dissociating Congress from Bhagat Singh's 'political violence' performed the same role of ideological reinforcement, though on this occasion the fight was a more difficult one. To large sections of the Indian masses Bhagat Singh had momentarily become more of a 'national hero' than Gandhi.

It would be wrong to underrate the effects of what Roy, writing in *Inprecor* in 1923, called the 'deadening inactivity imposed by the authority of ethical dogmas' [33]. Nehru would describe these effects with a certain 'inside knowledge': 'fifteen years' stress on non-violence has changed the whole background in India', he wrote, 'and made the masses much more indifferent to, and even hostile to, the idea of terrorism as a method of political action. Even the classes from which the terrorists are usually drawn, the lower middle classes and intelligentsia, have been powerfully affected by the Congress propaganda against methods of violence.' [34] In the decade preceding its transformation into a 'mass' party, the decade in which Gandhi had returned to India, Congress had lived in the shadow of revolutionary violence. In the war years

dacoities* and assassinations had increased sharply; dozens of terrorists had been sentenced to long terms of imprisonment or hanged. There had been the Nasik Conspiracy Case, the Gwalior Conspiracy Case, Howrah Conspiracy Case, Dacca Conspiracy Case, Barisal Conspiracy Case, Lahore Conspiracy Case. Copies of *Jahan-i-Islam* which advocated the extermination of Englishmen were freely circulated in Lahore and Calcutta [35]. In this situation an early independent development of the working class movement on a political basis would undoubtedly have drawn such currents into itself. As it was, there was no working class party till the middle Thirties, and by that stage Gandhi had effectively neutralised some of these currents. Bose wrote later that there had been a possibility in the early stages, at the time of the first Civil Disobedience campaign, that the ex-revolutionaries 'as a class would go against the Congress owing to ideological differences', but that in 1921 they had been won over by Gandhi [36] under the illusion that 'swaraj'* would come within a year.

The disintegration of the petty bourgeois terrorist current was, however, only one of Gandhi's early tactical victories. The other was the neutralisation of the 'left' current within Congress, specifically Nehru, which, after the death of Tilak and later Das, remained the only potential source of opposition to his leadership. Nehru's deliberate promotion by Gandhi to the presidency of the Lahore Congress in 1929 had the function of reinforcing an already strong emotional bond between the two men. 'No-one has moved me and inspired me more than you', Nehru had written to Gandhi the previous year. [37] 'Am I not your child in politics?' Gandhi saw the manoeuvre in more rational terms: 'He is undoubtedly an extremist, but he is humble enough and practical enough not to force the pace to the breaking point' [38]. To those who disputed the choice of Nehru, Gandhi gave the assurance that it would be like having himself in the chair. [39] 'The Lahore Congress was a great victory for the Mahatma', Bose wrote some years later, not without some bitterness. [40] The Working Committee elected in January 1930, with Nehru's assistance, was dominated by a solid pro-Gandhi bloc. 'With a subservient cabinet, it was possible for him to conclude the pact with Irwin in March 1931, to have himself appointed as the sole representative to the Round Table Conference, to conclude the Poona Agreement in September 1932...' [41] Nehru's neutralisation had a certain relative effectivity. Though his initial reaction to the Gandhi-Irwin Pact had been one of dismay, he finally came round to accepting it. Helplessly he wrote in *Toward Freedom*, 'even if we disagreed with him, what could we do? Throw him over? Break from him? Announce our disagreement?' [42]

But Gandhi's role was not confined to paralysing the energies of the masses with an ideology of pacifism or to

* Robberies motivated socially and/or politically

* Freedom

26. Norman, *op. cit.*, p.76.

27. Reported in B. Pattabhi Sitaramayya, *History of the Indian National Congress*, volume one, 1885-1935 (New Delhi, 1969) p.355.

28. Norman, *op. cit.*, p.85, letter dated 19/2/22.

29. Reported Sitaramayya, *op. cit.*, p.173.

30. *Ibid.*, p.180.

31. *Ibid.*, p.226.

32. *Ibid.*, p.356.

33. *International Press Correspondence* (hereafter *Inprecor*), 26/4/23.

34. Norman, *op. cit.*, pp.148-9, from *Toward Freedom*.

35. Cf. R. Gopal, *How India Struggled for Freedom* (Bombay, 1967), pp.219ff.

36. Bose, *op. cit.*, pp.60,69.

37. *Selected Works*, p.19, letter dated 23/1/28.

38. Norman, *op. cit.*, p.191.

39. Cf. Edwardes, *Nehru* (Allen Lane, 1971), p.76.

40. Bose, *op. cit.*, p.174.

41. *Ibid.*, p.175.

42. Norman, *op. cit.*, p.241.

* Passive resistance

disintegrating the two 'left' currents within the nationalist struggle. His sudden and apparent shifts to the left, such as the resumption of Civil Disobedience at the Lahore Congress, signified an attempt to **move with** the broader shifts in the mass movement, to co-opt and radically **block** the logic of a permanent transition from the terrain of bourgeois democracy and anti-imperialism to social revolution. In defending the resumption of Civil Disobedience he stated, 'Civil Disobedience alone can save the country from impending lawlessness and secret crime, since there is a party of violence in the country which will not listen to speeches and resolutions... but believes only in direct action'. [43] Just as Stalin did more to disintegrate the morale of the Left Opposition by his manoeuvre of an apparent wholesale adoption of their policies than by outright coercion, Gandhi in 1929, in that same decisive year, 'took the wind out of the sails of the Extremists by himself advocating independence at the (Lahore) Congress and divided the ranks of the opposition by winning over some of the left wing leaders' (Bose). [44] In a penetrating analysis Bose refers to Gandhi's 'capacity to assimilate other ideas and policies. But for the latter factor, Gandhism would have ceased to dominate the Congress long ago' [45].

Gandhi, then, was the guiding personality in the national movement in these years. Without an analysis of his role, it is impossible to grasp concretely how it was possible for the Congress leadership not only to bring pressure to bear on the colonial state through sporadic mass mobilisations, but also to thwart the independent development of a mass peasant struggle or workers' revolt within the framework of these mobilisations.

Symptoms of Renewed Radicalisation 1928-30

This role of unleashing a mass movement and simultaneously restraining it assumed the greatest importance towards the close of the decade, with a renewed upsurge in mass consciousness. The five years from 1922 to 1927 saw a retreat on almost all fronts. Industry entered a period of stagnation and even crisis, strikes became purely defensive, the proportion of unsuccessful strikes increased sharply, the level of unemployment rose, while politically the national movement fell to a low ebb. Gandhi retired from politics, and the leadership of Congress passed to the Swarajists under Das. The tactic of mass mobilisation was replaced by the tactic of contesting elections and fighting from within the legislatures. The arena and character of the struggle shifted to a more constitutional plane. Simultaneously, and starting as early as 1923, there was a progressive deterioration in Hindu-Muslim relations, and in 1924 Allahabad saw serious communal rioting.

The first signs of a renewal of radicalisation after this slump came with the sharp upswing in the curve of industrial strikes beginning in 1928 or late 1927. In the course of that year the strike wave reached a new intensity, with more workers involved in strikes than at any time since 1921, and with a total loss of working days far exceeding anything previously witnessed — 31 million as against an earlier peak, in 1925, of 13 million. An official report stated of the strikes in 1928, 'a significant feature of the disputes during that year was the growth of picketing and intimidation which in some cases resulted in violence and bloodshed. In the general strikes in the Bombay textile mills and also in the strike on the East India Railways, the South Indian Railway and in the Fort Gloster jute mills, Bengal, the police were compelled to resort to firing.' [46] Again the size of many of the strikes was significant, as is shown in Table II.

Year	Strike	Numbers involved
1928	East India Railways	16,315
1929	Calcutta jute mills	200,000
1929	Bombay textile mills	140,000
1930	GIP Railway strike	22,608

The East India Railway strike was triggered off by dismissals and retrenchment, the Calcutta jute strike by the employers' attempt to increase the working week and introduce a single shift system, the Bombay textile strike by victimisations in the Wadia group of mills. One writer says of the strikes in this period that 'they were more bitter (than earlier ones) and fought with a determination and vigour which were not so much in evidence during the earlier periods' [47].

But the process was not merely one of radicalisation. It is true that the circulation of political ideas was much wider in this period than in the earlier one, that many workers were becoming acquainted with the ideas of class struggle, that the split in the trade union movement between a reformist and revolutionary wing was bound to affect the consciousness of the more advanced layers. But this was also a period of a loss of bargaining power on the part of the working class, with wage cuts being enforced in practically all the major centres. 'Given the excess supply of labour, concerted action by trade unions was very difficult. Further, the Trades Dispute Act of 1929 made it a punishable offence to strike without sufficient reason.' [48] Already by October 1928, in a letter to Chattopadhyaya in Berlin, Nehru was writing, 'labour after a succession of struggles is exhausted' [49] 'In Bombay the strike of 1928 was followed by a long period of **dwindling trade union membership and generally ineffective union resistance** to wage cuts in the face of a dwindling volume of employment...' [50] The following year in Bengal some 130,000 jute workers were thrown out of work. It is interesting that the Communists on trial in the Meerut Conspiracy Case themselves pointed out that 'at the end of 1929 a certain exhaustion became apparent' [51].

A second early symptom of radicalisation was the victory of the 'left' current at the national Congress held in Madras in late 1927, where the independence resolution was put and carried under Nehru's influence. Bose saw this victory as 'standing for a definite orientation towards the left', though that was not the analysis given in the pages of the Comintern weekly, as we shall see. [52] When, in May 1928, Bose went to preside over the Maharashtra Provincial Conference at Poona, the 'enthusiasm' he met there was 'striking'. 'I urged that the Congress should directly take up the task of organising labour...' [53] That a new mood of militancy pervaded sections of the Congress rank and file even before the year had begun is brought out by Luhani's report in an issue of *Inpreoor* in July 1927, in which it was stated, 'since the beginning of this year the Nagpur Committee of the Indian National Congress has been showing great disaffection with the official leadership. On 25 April this year this Committee adopted a resolution censuring the Congress leaders for their recent policy of co-operation with the British Government in the legislative assembly...' The president of the Committee is reported to have started a small movement called the Nagpur Republicans, which began to develop 'as a rallying point for all the left elements within and without Congress'. [54] Finally, towards the end of 1928, at the national Congress, 'though the left wing leaders were inclined to avoid an open split, the rank and file

43. R.C. Majumdar and A.K. Majumdar, *Struggle for Freedom* (Bombay, 1969) p.465.

44. Bose, *op. cit.*, p.159.

45. *Ibid.*, p.398.

46. *Bulletin of Indian Industries and Labour*, cited in Karnik, *op. cit.*, p.170.

47. Karnik, *op. cit.*, p.164. He attributes this to 'the entry of the Communists', but this is doubtful.

48. Bagchi, *op. cit.*, p.142.

49. *Selected Works*, p.297, letter dated 23/1/29.

50. Bagchi, *op. cit.*, p.144.

51. *Meerut Conspiracy Case*, p.258.

52. Bose, *op. cit.*, pp.145-6.

53. *Ibid.*, p.152. Bose repeated this sentiment at the Lahore Congress the next year.

54. G.K. Luhani, *Inpreoor*, 14/7/27.

of the left wing would not think of a compromise' [55]. Gandhi's attempt to defeat the independence resolution at this Congress was only narrowly successful, with some 973 delegates voting against. 'The voting showed that the left wing was strong and influential', writes Bose. [56]

Bose, however, notes that the Congress leadership made no efforts to intervene in the working class struggles which erupted in 1928, and that by 1930, when the Civil Disobedience movement was launched, this current of struggle had subsided. [57] Outside Congress there were other more distant signs of a shift to the left. Thus in January 1929 the Workers' and Peasants' Party (WPP) contested the municipal elections in Bombay, winning some 12,453 votes. Roy wrote in *Inprecor*, 'the election result indicates the general radicalisation of the entire political situation' [58]. The following year saw the resurgence in Bengal of the sporadic individual terrorism of the petty bourgeoisie, signified most conspicuously by the Chittagong Armoury Raid. But at that stage the Civil Disobedience movement was in full swing. Corresponding to the shift to the left in the entire political situation of the country, imperialism intensified its repression. By June the Congress had been declared illegal, and some 50,000 men, women and children jailed. Towards the close of the year the United Provinces were on the brink of agrarian revolution, though it was only several years later that the peasant movement acquired any organisational shape.

The impression conveyed by these years is of a series of disconnected upheavals, of a massive current of radicalisation, but without any internal order or coherence; of an upsurge in mass consciousness fragmented by its own uneven rhythm and dispersed by the discontinuities of space. Congress was in no position, in fact, to lead this struggle forward along revolutionary lines, to utilise and develop its inherent potential, for its own framework of thought did not include the organisation of either the peasantry or the working class on an **independent class** basis. But witnessing this upheaval from afar, a series of Comintern writers vigorously denounced Congress for failing precisely to carry the struggle forward in a revolutionary direction, as if its leadership had ever proclaimed this as one of its objectives. But the illusion was not entirely without some basis in reality, for Congress was a series of paradoxes, a fusion of apparently contradictory elements. In its leadership it included such conspicuously left elements as Nehru and Bose, both of whom understood that even within the womb of colonised India a society had grown up divided into classes; that in India, as in advanced Europe, there were capitalists and workers. Yet these petty bourgeois radicals led an organisation which articulated the class interests of the Indian bourgeoisie, even when their sympathies lay with the working class. The leadership of Congress, a party of bourgeois democracy, lay with elements drawn from a social stratum with no immediate connections with business or the ownership of the land, and even critical of capitalists and landowners. Congress more than any other organisation in that period symbolised the 'organic' function which Gramsci attributed to intellectuals in the subordinate tasks of 'social hegemony and political government'.

But a second peculiarity sprang from the fact that Congress combined the characteristics of a class-party with those of a mass movement. In its periods of intensified activity, as in 1921 or 1930, it gave the appearance of an unorganised spontaneous force, the mere skeletal framework of the most disparate currents of opposition to British rule. One Comintern writer remarked, with obvious despair, 'the masses do not yet believe in the treachery of the Congress because they think that they are the Congress...' [59] In 1920 Gandhi had referred to Congress as a 'national organisation providing a platform for all parties to appeal to the Nation' [60], and later Nehru would reiterate a similar conception when he wrote: 'The Congress was a party in some ways; it

has also been a joint platform for several parties.' [61] This complex ambiguous character, directly reflecting the fact that in India alone of the major colonial countries an indigenous bourgeoisie was successful in leading a mass movement against imperialism, was a source of considerable intellectual confusion in the Comintern, in which two contradictory conceptions of Congress co-existed: on the one hand, of Congress as a narrow class party of Indian capitalism and semi-feudal interests, analogous to the Kuomintang in China or the Tory Party in Britain; and on the other, of Congress as an implicitly or potentially revolutionary movement restrained from developing according to its internal logic by an accidental play of forces — for example, the illusions of the petty bourgeois elements in its leadership, or the charismatic fascination of Gandhi. The Comintern's failure to understand that the peculiarity of Congress was precisely that it combined both these moments was, however, only complementary to its failure to grasp the strategy of bourgeois nationalism in India.

Slow Formation of the CPI

Crucial to the ability of the bourgeoisie, including its professional-intellectual strata, to impose its hegemony on the national movement, and guide it according to its own strategy of periodic compromise, was the exceptional backwardness of the Indian Communist Party in its early phases of attempted formation. Due to this backward development the working class was left politically leaderless in a period (1919-30) when it was time and again forced into the sharpest conflicts with British and Indian capitalists and when it demonstrated its own capacity for political interventions, as when it demonstrated against the Simon Commission, or when it interrupted the Calcutta Congress late in 1928 with a symbolic occupation of the platform for some two hours [62]. For while it lacked the leadership of a firm Communist Party, the working class had not been integrated, either ideologically or organisationally, into the framework of Congress.

The CPI in fact did not begin to grow till 1934, by which stage a shift to the Popular Front was already visible. In that year the size of the party increased from 20 members to 150. [63] In the previous six years the Comintern had voiced frequent complaints about the practical insignificance of a Communist Party in India. Most of these complaints began to be made in 1928, when the phase of political recession abruptly ended with the announcement of the Simon Commission. At the Sixth Comintern Congress in the middle of 1928, one of the delegates stated that no definite steps had been taken 'during the last nine years to bring about the formation of a CP in India.' [64] At the same Congress, in presenting his 'Theses on the Revolutionary Movement...', Kuusinen had described the 'union of all Communist groups and individual Communists scattered throughout the country into a single, illegal, independent and centralised party' as the 'first task of Indian

55. Bose, *op. cit.*, p.157.

56. *Ibid.*

57. *Ibid.*, p.148.

58. Roy, *Inprecor*, 1/3/29.

59. G.S., *Inprecor*, 26/2/31. This writer goes on to say: 'In reality the Congress is a collection of rich lawyers, patriotic usurers, merchants selling goods to English firms, manufacturers and their underlings, who hide behind "revolutionary" phrases to deceive the masses...'

60. Sitaramayya, *op. cit.*, p.193.

61. Norman, *op. cit.*, p.67.

62. Reported in Sitaramayya, *op. cit.*, p.332, where the number of these workers is given as 50,000. Other estimates are: 10,000 (Bose, *op. cit.*, p.158); 20,000 (B. Chandra Pal, cited Roy, *Inprecor*, 22/2/29); 25,000 (Roy, *Inprecor*, 15/2/29).

63. G.D. Overstreet and M. Windmiller, *Communism in India* (Bombay, 1960), p. 155.

64. S. Sur, reported *Inprecor*, 3/8/28.

Communists'. [65] Later in 1928 an ECCI document stated that as the existing Communist Party of India showed no signs of revolutionary life, it had 'no grounds to consider and even call itself Communist'. [66]

It is true that at this time, December 1928, after the conference of the Workers' and Peasants' Party held in Calcutta, the WPP leadership constituted itself as the CPI, elected a Central Committee and applied for admission to the Comintern. But this attempt proved as futile apparently as the others had been, for shortly before the July Plenum of the ECCI the following year Manuilsky wrote that there was still no independent Communist Party in India.[67] The same was said by R.P. Dutt as late as the end of the next year, 1930. [68] The situation within the CP in that year is revealed by the following interesting comment of one of its early members, 'chaos and disorganisation in the Party all over the country appeared in an acute form. Comrades in Calcutta had been carrying on the work of the Party under the name "The Calcutta Committee of the CPI". In spite of repeated requests from the Calcutta Committee to give an all-India shape to the CP, there was no response from the Party leaders in Bombay.' [69] In fact, in an article which appeared in a German magazine in February 1931, Roy dismissed the CPI 'as of little consequence and hardly existing outside of Bombay and Calcutta. He reported that the Party consisted largely of students and functioned more as a student group than anything else.' [70] It is perhaps not surprising then that in the same month *Inprecor* carried an article by the All-India Anti-Imperialist League which called for the establishment of this body in India on the grounds that 'it is only through this organ... that the tasks of the national revolution can be carried through'. The programme it advocated included the establishment of a Workers' and Peasants' Republic. [71] In June 1932 *Inprecor* published an 'Open Letter' from the Communist Parties of China, Britain and Germany appealing to the Indian Communists to 'undertake the formation of the Communist Party'. [72] The CPC reiterated this appeal the following year in July. [73] After this, and following the release of some of the Meerut prisoners, a secret conference of the Party was held in Calcutta in December 1933 at which a new political resolution and party constitution were adopted. [74]

There is ample evidence, then, for the fact that in this crucial period of mass struggles from 1928 to 1932 there was no centralised, effective, functioning Communist Party in India. Trotsky had described similar situations in Europe as 'a crisis of leadership'. In India, however, this 'crisis' did not assume the same staggering proportions as for example it had in Italy in 1920, or would do in France during the Popular Front. It was nevertheless a real, if invisible, factor in the situation of that period, and one which contrasted sharply with the development of the Chinese Communist Party, which already by July 1926 had a membership of 30,000 and by the spring of 1927 a membership of 58,000; or with that of the Indonesian Communist Party, which in 1926 claimed 3,000 members, controlled several trade unions, and had successfully infiltrated leadership positions in Sarekat Islam. In fact, as early as 1923 one estimate put the membership of the Perserikat Kommunist di Indonesia at 13,000.[75] In that year in India there were probably not more than 50 Communists, let alone an organised Communist Party.

An official Government circular from Whitehall provides some information on the strength of the Indian Communists in 1922 [76]. According to its report there were small communist and semi-communist groups in Bombay, Madras, Lahore, Bengal and the United Provinces. Late in 1922 Roy had instructed the Bombay, Madras and Lahore groups to contact each other, which indicates that they were working in isolation. The organisation of the Bengal group was described as 'rudimentary', although they were said to produce a considerable amount of propaganda. Finally, it is

clear from the circular that all these groups, with the possible exception of the Madras one under S. Chettiar, were mainly propagandist. That is, they had not made the transition to agitation.

A few years later, in December 1925, Muzaffar Ahmad and some others had formally constituted an all-India Communist Party, but this attempt proved abortive, for when in March 1927 the EC of the CPI met to discuss Roy's request that the party be disbanded and replaced by an All-India Workers' and Peasants' Party, the committee members decided that in view of the party's inactivity no formal dissolution was required. [77] Nevertheless, some sort of Central Committee apparently continued to meet, 'in some years.... even four times' [78].

The Workers' and Peasants' Party

The reason for this apparently odd state of affairs was that although no centralised Communist Party was founded in this period, by the end of 1928 an All-India Workers' and Peasants' Party had successfully been established. The first provincial WPP was established in Bengal early in 1926, following a peasant conference at Krishnanagar in Nadia. A year later a WPP was established in Bombay and another one in Punjab. Finally in 1928 a fourth one was founded in the United Provinces. It is clear that the intervention which the Communists made in some of the strikes of 1928 was through the medium of these organisations, and not formally as members of a Communist Party. Ahmad states, 'although the CPI was not illegal, it was difficult to work under its name openly. What we used to decide in the CP was actually put into practice from the platform of the WPP. The manifestos of this party were all drafted by the CC of the CP.' [79] Hence, presumably, the need to maintain a Communist Central Committee even when there was no Communist Party as such.

There is sufficient evidence to indicate that the various Workers' and Peasants' Parties were in fact quite active in the massive upheaval of 1928. In May that year Luhani wrote in *Inprecor* that the WPP had taken a 'prominent part' in organising strike action, in forming strike committees and carrying on 'incessant propaganda by daily strike meetings' [80]. Ahmad states that members of the WPP 'wholeheartedly participated' in the struggles of 1928. It is equally clear, however, that the social composition of the various provincial organisations differed quite significantly, particularly as between the Bombay and Bengal sections. Thus, while in the course of 1928 the Bombay WPP was said to dominate the 'Congress organisation in Bombay', to have organised the demonstrations of workers

65. Reported in J. Degras, *The Communist International 1919-43: Documents, Volume Two, 1923-28* (Oxford University Press, 1960) p.544.

66. *Ibid.*, pp.558-9. Dated December 1928.

67. Degras, *The CI 1919-43: Documents, Volume Three, 1929-43* (OUP, 1965), p.22.

68. Degras, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, pp.558-9.

69. M. Ahmad, *The Communist Party of India. Years of Formation 1921-33* (Calcutta, 1959), p.37.

70. Cited by J.P. Halthcox, *Communism and Nationalism in India. M.N. Roy and Comintern Policy 1920-39* (Princeton University Press, 1971), p.179.

71. *Inprecor*, 5/2/31.

72. Degras, *op. cit.*, vol. 3, p.220.

73. Mentioned by Ahmad, *op. cit.*

74. *Ibid.*

75. For the PKI, cf. Degras, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p.311; *Inprecor*, 16/8/23, reports by Bergama and Tan Malaka; *Inprecor*, 27/9/23, further report by Bergama.

76. Home Political Files, 103/IV/1923, 'Summary of information regarding Indian Communists' (Indian National Archives, N. Delhi).

77. Halthcox, *op. cit.*, p.56.

78. Ahmad, *op. cit.*, p.21

79. *Ibid.*, pp.23-4.

80. Luhani, *Inprecor*, 31/5/28.

against the Simon Commission [81] and to have been involved in several strikes, in Bengal, according to one report at the Sixth Comintern Congress, the WPP was said to be 'falling into the hands of philanthropic petty bourgeoisie' [82]. Ahmad also implies this with his remark that 'in Bengal, non-Communists were more numerous in the WPP' [83]. Finally, Bose noted and tried to explain the difference with the theory that 'class differentiation' was more 'acute' in Bombay than in Bengal, and that consequently the petty bourgeois element was not so strong or influential there as in Bengal. [84]

At any rate, it is clear that insofar as Communists were engaged in mass struggle in this period this was primarily through the Workers' and Peasants' Party, which, if we accept the reliability of one Comintern reporter [85], could even attract 'thousands of poor peasants' to its provincial conferences in early 1929. As we shall see, this greater 'mass' character of the WPP was an important factor to Communists working in India, although the Comintern, from a distance, had informally abolished it in the middle of 1928.

The Decolonisation Debate 1928

At no time did the Comintern discuss the question of India in greater detail than at the Sixth Comintern Congress from July to September 1928. By that stage Chiang's two coups and the disastrous adventure of the Canton Commune had left the Stalin-Bukharin line advocating alliance with the Kuomintang in shambles. But even six months after Stalin had shed the precious blood of the Canton workers with the putsch he organised to coincide with the RCP Congress in December 1927, there was a profound silence on the subject. The episode was referred to as a 'rearguard action' which had nevertheless been 'correct'. The question of China, though of prime importance after the defeats of 1927, was nonetheless conveniently pushed into the background at the Sixth Congress by an apparently (and in many ways in fact) quite academic question, the 'decolonisation debate'. According to Roy, it was S. Tagore who, in the course of 1927, first emphasised the rapid development of industry in India and triggered off the discussion. To most of the participants, however, the word 'decolonisation' was associated with Roy himself, and it is true that as early as 1921 Roy was promulgating the theory that with the First World War the policy of imperialism had changed radically on the question of India's industrialisation. At this time Roy argued, curiously, that if after the war the Government had resumed its old policy of checking the country's development, this would have compelled the bourgeoisie to take its stand at the head of the national movement. To Roy the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms had forestalled this possibility. Of course, in the seven or eight years following the appearance of Roy's article and book *India in Transition*, imperialism hardened its policy considerably despite the partial concessions it made on the tariff question, thus precisely forcing the bourgeoisie to renew the struggle for further concessions and more concrete prospects of accommodation.

At the Congress it was Kuusinen who proposed the 'traditional' view. The early concessions granted by imperialism had been due to 'fear of the revolutionary movement during the war'. Once this movement was 'betrayed' by the Indian bourgeoisie in 1922, imperialism 'once more reverted to its policy of hindering India's industrial development'. Kuusinen argued, correctly, that 'the specific colonial forms of capitalist exploitation in the final analysis hinder the development of the productive forces of the colonies Since, however, colonial exploitation presupposes some encouragement of colonial production, this is directed on such lines and promoted only in such a degree as correspond to the interests of the metropolis Part of the peasantry, for example, may be encouraged to turn from grain cultivation to the production of cotton,

sugar or rubber (Sudan, Cuba, Java, Egypt) Real industrialisation of the colonial country, in particular the building up of a flourishing engineering industry which would promote the independent development of its productive forces, is not encouraged but, on the contrary, is hindered by the metropolis.' [86] At an early session of the Congress, Bukharin had endorsed this view. Kuusinen came back to the question much later, at the Twenty-Ninth Session: 'Industrialisation means the transformation of an agrarian into an industrial country, it means a general thorough industrial development, above all development of the production of the means of production This is not a question of whether any industrial development has taken place in India — this has certainly been the case — it is rather a question of whether it is the policy of British imperialism to industrialise India.' [87] According to Kuusinen, at most 10 per cent of British capital exports to India at the height of the boom went into manufacturing; most of the investment in that period was non-productive. Some sessions later the counter-attack began, based sometimes on quite astonishingly abstract arguments. Thus Cox, who described the 'transformation of the colonies into spheres for industrialisation on the part of the imperialist bourgeoisie' as a 'fundamental law of imperialism' [88]. At the next session S. Tagore took the Industrial Commission of 1916 as signalling a 'turn in the policy of British imperialism in India'. The framework of the argument was provided by the model of a **fully developed neo-colonial relationship**: 'The sole purpose of the Taxation Commission was to adjust the burden of taxation in order to expand the internal market. The scheme for modernisation of agriculture was formulated for the purpose of raising the purchasing power of the peasantry.' [89] Arnot thought it was sufficient to refer to Lenin on the export of capital to make the point that Britain was now industrialising India. [90] Bennett went even further in a mechanical understanding of the question: he referred to the 'law' which Marx had postulated according to which railways in India would usher in an epoch of rapid industrialisation. [91] Rothstein, another member of the same delegation, had apparently gone to the extent of saying that due to imperialism the colonies would be transformed into 'serious competitors' of the metropolis. Replying to these interventions, Kuusinen made the obvious point that it was too simple to identify capital exports with industrialisation: 'Loan capital is being exported by England to Australia or Canada, or by America to Germany. This can promote industrialisation and in fact does (In India) as is clearly to be seen from the statistical material, British export capital serves for the greater part unproductive purposes ...' [92].

Underlying this apparently academic problem was a political one, the problem of the alignment of social forces in terms of which the national movement would develop. But the politics deduced from the orthodox position in Kuusinen's 'Theses' were not those which corresponded to it logically. No sharp political differentiation divided the delegates who argued for and against the notion of a British NEP. For while the British delegation and Tagore argued, quite logically, that the Indian bourgeoisie had now to be regarded as a counter-revolutionary force, 'in the same camp' as imperialism politically because their short and perhaps even long term economic interests converged around the goal of industrialising India, neither Kuusinen nor any of

81. Cf. C. Dutt, *Labour Monthly*, March 1928.

82. S. Sur, *Inprecor*, 8/10/28.

83. Ahmad, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

84. Bose, *op. cit.*, p. 89.

85. P. Sch, *Inprecor*, 29/3/29.

86. Kuusinen, cited Degras, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, pp. 534ff.

87. Kuusinen, *Inprecor*, 4/10/28.

88. Cox, *Inprecor*, 25/10/28.

89. Tagore, *Inprecor*, 30/10/28.

90. Arnot, *Inprecor*, 30/10/28.

91. Bennett, *Inprecor*, 30/10/28.

92. Kuusinen, *Inprecor*, 21/11/28.

his supporters in the debate ever argued that the sharpening of the contradiction between imperialism and the Indian bourgeoisie implied in imperialism's reversion to the old anti-industrial policy would produce necessary political effects in driving the bourgeoisie to the left, even if periodically and with vacillations. The furthest they went was to argue, as Kuusinen did, that the bourgeoisie was a national-reformist force, in other words 'vacillating and inclined to compromise' [93].

But even this position was not argued in terms of a characterisation of the strategy of bourgeois nationalism. The apparently 'ambiguous' role of the colonial bourgeoisie in the national movement was not explained from the standpoint of the specific forms of struggle corresponding to the interests of that bourgeoisie as an independent class, but in terms of economic divisions within the bourgeoisie. 'The national bourgeoisie in these colonial countries do not adopt a uniform attitude to imperialism', Kuusinen argued. 'One part, more especially the commercial bourgeoisie, directly serves the interests of imperialist capital The other part especially those representing the interests of native industry, support the national movement; this tendency, vacillating and inclined to compromise, may be called national-reformism.' [94] 'National-reformism' was thus the political reflection of an economic incoherence within the bourgeoisie. The 'vacillations' of the colonial bourgeoisie sprang not from the immanent logic of its strategy but from internal contradictions due to relatively distinct economic interests. But if this had in fact been the case in India, a quite different process would have occurred. The bourgeoisie would have split organisationally into its comprador and national sections.

The position was a confused one, to say the least. Murphy, the only British delegate to support Kuusinen, argued correctly against a crude lumping together of imperialism and the national bourgeoisie, but argued simultaneously that there was no hope of the latter carrying through a policy of industrialisation in the colony. [95] Kuusinen was more hopelessly confused on the important political questions: 'The national bourgeoisie are not significant as a force in the struggle against imperialism. Nevertheless this bourgeois-reformist opposition has a real and specific significance for the development of the revolutionary movement insofar as it has any mass influence at all.' [96] The same inconsistencies were apparent in the statements of the Indian Communists on trial in the Meerut Case: 'The conclusion which follows from these facts is that British imperialist policy is generally directed towards the restriction of Indian industrial development The reactionary policy of imperialism in relation to industry all go to determine that the policy of the bourgeois class must be one of hostility to imperialism Nevertheless, we consider that the Indian bourgeoisie is not objectively capable of pursuing a revolutionary policy It is too weak and its interests are bound up too closely with both British imperialism [emphasis mine — JB] and Indian feudalism.' [97] They went on to argue that the Indian bourgeoisie was not 'serious' about independence, and cited as evidence the fact that neither the Non-Cooperation Movement (1919-22) nor the Civil Disobedience Movement (1930-1) had demanded complete independence. As for Nehru's Independence for India League, 'the formation of this organisation was simply a demagogic device, having no serious purpose to secure Independence behind it'. [98] 'Independence for the Congress leaders is a "phrase".'

The position of Tagore and the British delegates was internally consistent, though wrong. The logic of decolonisation was expressed in the sharpest terms by Tagore when he said at the Congress, 'to the same degree as the hindrance in the way of the capitalist development of India has been removed by British imperialism, the bourgeoisie is sliding more and more towards cooperation and one group after the other is capitulating to imperialism' [99]. This one-sided understanding of the dialectics of the national movement

was nonetheless consistent with the assumption that in its new policy British imperialism sought only to further the capitalist development of India. Kuusinen, on the other hand, while maintaining a formally correct position on the character of imperialist policy, was driven to uphold an absurd position on the role of the bourgeoisie in the national movement. His confusion was brought out in his concluding remarks: 'The fact that there exists an objective and even profound contradiction between the class interests of the national bourgeoisie and imperialism, and that this bourgeoisie has its own political main line which is not without significance, does not at all mean that it is capable of representing its objective class interest in a more consistent, more independent manner. The national bourgeoisie of the colonies is not able to do this ...' [100]

These confusions were symptomatic. They offer a first insight into the 'theoretical' mistake of the Sixth Congress on the question of the political character of the Indian bourgeoisie. Without exception all the delegates and speakers, from those with the sophistication (in such matters) of Bukharin to others with the mechanical dullness of Arnot, sought to deny either the economic or the political autonomy of the Indian bourgeoisie. Of course this autonomy was only a relative one, but it was real nonetheless. It was the one underlying factor which not only made it possible for the Indian bourgeoisie to impose its hegemony on the national movement but even compelled it to do so. As long as the national capitalists retained and even expanded their own autonomous base within the economy — and during the Depression and Second World War there was considerable expansion in this direction — there could be no question of the bourgeoisie finally compromising with imperialism, betraying the national movement, giving up the goal of independence. For the independence at stake was precisely the future of the Indian bourgeoisie as an independent ruling class with the political means to determine its economic destiny. Independence, in the consciousness of this class, signified a radical shift in its class position, from dependence on a state apparatus reflecting metropolitan interests and political subordination to this apparatus, to control of its own state apparatus.

The Question of the National Bourgeoisie

In fact there were several factors which precluded this almost obvious vision of the Indian bourgeoisie. For one thing, the main phase in the consolidation of its economic power was still to come. However, the initial determining circumstance was the fact that the criminal ineptitude of the Stalin line of alliance with the Kuomintang was dramatically exposed by the course of the class struggle in China itself. When first published, Palme Dutt's *Modern India* had advocated a regroupment of the left-nationalist elements within Congress and the Swaraj Party around a 'popular-national programme'. In the English edition issued late in 1926, after the official policy imposed on the CCP had begun to disintegrate, partly under the strain of Trotsky's attacks, Dutt declared, 'the Indian bourgeoisie is today a counter-revolutionary force; they fear the social revolution that would follow on national independence more than they desire independence' [101]. This kind of totally pragmatic volte face would of course become quite characteristic of Dutt and his sort in later years. Here was an early example of it, caused not by any sharp turn of events within India during 1926, but by the shifts and vacillations of Comintern policy

93. Kuusinen, *Degras*, op. cit., vol. 2, p.538.

94. *Ibid.*

95. Murphy, *Inprecor*, 30/10/28.

96. *Degras*, op. cit., vol 2, p.540.

97. *Meerut Conspiracy Case*, pp.81-82-3.

98. *Ibid.*, pp.84-5.

99. S. Tagore, *Inprecor*, 30/10/28.

100. Kuusinen, *Inprecor*, 21/11/28.

101. Overstreet and Windmiller, op. cit., p.84.

under the pressure of events in China. Nonetheless, it was still possible as late as December 1927 for Luhani to predict a **sharpening** of the contradiction between imperialism and the bourgeoisie: 'The political concessions which British imperialism is in a position to make are not of a nature to satisfy the Indian bourgeoisie' [102].

It is clear that the hardening of attitudes which could be witnessed through 1928 was determined primarily by the fact that in China a 'national' bourgeoisie, which at one stage had even received the support of the Comintern, had by that stage 'deserted' the revolution and left Stalin's policy in ridiculous shambles, at the cost of the liquidation of the proletarian vanguard in Shanghai and Canton. In India no decisive swing to the right on the part of the bourgeoisie could be deciphered either in 1926 or in 1927 to justify Dutt's new characterisation. Nor were the events of 1922 of any determining significance, for even after the retreat there had been no question of denouncing the bourgeoisie or Congress as 'counter-revolutionary'. Thus in 1922 Roy had written to Indian Communists advocating penetration of Congress on an **entrist** basis; they were told not to 'part company with the National Congress but bid for its leadership' [103]. In June 1923 Roy wrote to C.R. Das calling on him to 'rally all the available revolutionary elements within and without Congress' [104]. In the same month, more significantly, the ECCI sent a message to the projected WPP which stated, 'the political party of the workers and peasants must act in cooperation with, and **give fullest support to, the bourgeois parties** insofar as they struggle against imperialism in some way or other' [105]. Again in March 1925, in its report to the Fifth Plenum of the ECCI, the Colonial Commission argued that it was 'necessary for the Communists to continue working in the National Congress and in the left wing of the Swaraj Party ...' [106]. Finally, late in 1926, a 'Manifesto to the All-India National Congress' published on behalf of the CPI appealed to Congress to adopt a radical programme. Also late in 1926, Petrovsky, the Comintern representative in London, had apparently told Spratt to write a pamphlet on China urging India to follow the example of the **Kuomintang**. [107]

This kind of statement was of course no longer possible after July 1927. That was the month in which the ECCI decided finally that the 'revolutionary role' of the (left-KMT) Wuhan Government had been 'played out'; 'it is becoming a counter-revolutionary force'. 'In Canton, Shanghai, Chansha, and now in Wuhan, the standard bearers of the "revolutionary Kuomintang" had changed from sterling allies of the revolution into cruel butchers of the revolution.' [108] The transposition of this shift to a **quite different** conjuncture in India — where all the signs were that the bourgeoisie would move the other way — took time to unfold. In January 1928, some six months after the 'desertion' of the left Kuomintang, Roy, whose own role in China was of no small significance, wrote in *Inprecor* that the bourgeois nationalist parties in India were not only 'politically bankrupt' but 'counter-revolutionary' as well. [109] In June the same year, now almost a year after the decisive turn in China, Palme Dutt wrote: 'In general, and on all fundamental questions, the role of the Indian bourgeoisie since the collapse of the Non-Cooperation Movement has evolved in the direction of becoming more and more clearly counter-revolutionary'. [110] Why, in that case, had the ECCI advocated the 'fullest support' to 'bourgeois parties' in 1923? Why, even three years later, had it bothered to appeal to Congress to adopt a radical programme?

At the Sixth Congress the following month, Dutt's transposed ultra-leftism was encountered quite frequently. At the Twenty-Fifth Session one of the delegates described Gandhi as an 'agent of British imperialism' [111]. Arnot at a later session concluded his speech with the view that the Indian bourgeoisie must now 'be regarded as a camp of counter-revolution' [112], and Dutt in his intervention referred to the 'present bourgeois counter-revolutionary

revolution (!) in India'. As no recent events were at hand to substantiate this strange view, he went back in time to the bourgeoisie's 'historic betrayal at Bardoli in 1922' [113]. 'It is our primary task to expose and explain the counter-revolutionary character of the nationalist reformist Indian bourgeoisie.' This description now acquired the character of a ritual incantation. Bennett followed Dutt, also referring to the 'counter-revolutionary role of the Indian bourgeoisie' [114]. An Indian delegate at the next session excelled even these pathetic interventions: 'We must not attach any considerable importance to the so-called nationalist movements in the colonies, as the history of this movement is the history of servile capitulation before the imperialist forces'. This delegate saw no inconsistency in going on to state a few lines later that as long as India was ruled by Britain there could be 'no free development of the natural resources of India, much less of industry' [115]. Two sessions later, another member of the same delegation argued, 'the bourgeoisie are not revolutionaries (!) but decidedly counter-revolutionary because they betray even the political independence movement'. Gandhi was again described as 'an agent of imperialism' [116]. Finally, Luhani asserted, with an admirable grasp of 'dialectics', that the Indian bourgeoisie was 'a potential if not already an actual counter-revolutionary force...' [117].

But if this shift had been determined in its initial stages by the events in China and the revised conception of the Kuomintang, in its later stages it gained a certain 'credibility' from events in India itself. For it was at the Calcutta Congress in 1928 that the demand for 'complete independence' of the previous year was temporarily displaced by talk of 'Dominion Status'. The ECCI described this in July 1929 as 'an undisguised betrayal of the cause of national independence by the Indian bourgeoisie' [118]. Towards the end of the same year the League Against Imperialism wrote in the Comintern press that 'British agents still dominate the Congress'. The following month a letter was published addressed to the youth, workers and peasants of India: 'Sever your contact with the National Congress and the League for Independence... Disclose their falseness and treachery... Show them up for what they are as assistants of British imperialism in India.' [119] Around the same time Dutt denounced Gandhi as 'a police agent of British imperialism in India' [120], and towards the end of the year the 'Draft Platform of Action of the CPI' characterised Congress as 'a class organisation of the capitalists' and called for 'ruthless war on the left-nationalist reformists' [121]. Early the following year this line was developed even further. An article in the Comintern's theoretical journal wrote that even Communists were confused about the Congress, whose programme, however, 'completely corresponds to the interests of British imperialism' [122]. Only two months before, however, *Inprecor* had

102. *Inprecor*, 27/12/27.

103. *Overstreet and Windmiller, op. cit.*, p.46.

104. *Ibid.*, p.52.

105. Cited in *Ibid.*, p.52.

106. *Ibid.*, p.73.

107. Mentioned in *Ibid.*, p.85.

108. Cf. H. Isaacs, *The Tragedy of the Chinese Revolution* (Stanford University Press, 1961), p.266.

109. Roy, *Inprecor*, 5/1/28.

110. *Overstreet and Windmiller, op. cit.*, pp.108-9.

111. Sur, *Inprecor*, 25/9/28.

112. Arnot, *Inprecor*, 30/10/28.

113. Dutt, *Inprecor*, 30/10/28.

114. Bennett, *Inprecor*, 30/10/28.

115. Raza, *Inprecor*, 8/11/28.

116. Sur, *Inprecor*, 8/11/28.

117. Luhani, *Inprecor*, 21/11/28.

118. Degras, *op. cit.*, vol. 3, p.45.

119. *Inprecor*, 27/12/29; *Overstreet and Windmiller, op. cit.*, p.140.

120. Degras, *op. cit.*, vol 3, p.99.

121. *Overstreet and Windmiller, op. cit.*, pp. 145f.

122. Degras, *op. cit.*, vol 3, p.156.

carried an article in which it had been stated, for information, that some 40,000 Congressmen were at that time languishing in overcrowded jails. And, of course, from the middle of 1930 imperialism had brutally intensified its physical assaults on the followers of this party, whose programme was supposed to correspond only to its own interests! Again, in February 1931, before the Gandhi-Irwin pact, *Inprecor* described Congress as 'developing in the direction of passing over to the side of imperialism and counter-revolution' [123]. After the pact with Irwin and the Second Round Table Conference, it seemed almost 'obvious' that the directing committee of the Congress had become 'an open agent of British imperialism', as the League Against Imperialism announced [124].

But neither the events in China nor the vacillations of the Congress leadership before imperialism by themselves explain the pronounced, almost exaggerated character of the ultra-leftism of this period (1929-31), for the new policy of regarding Congress as 'in the camp of the counter-revolution' was part of the general shift in policy to the line of the Third Period inaugurated by the ECCI's Tenth Plenum in the middle of 1929. On the analogy of denouncing European social democracy as the 'left' face of fascism, the theory of 'social fascism', the nationalist parties in the colonial world were transformed into the 'left' face of imperialism. This elimination of political frontiers would have especially tragic consequences in Germany, where it precluded the only basis on which the working class could have fought and defeated fascism in the early 1930s — through the policy of a united front between the Communist and Social Democratic workers which Trotsky tirelessly advocated. In the ossified brains of the Comintern's propagandists (Molotov, Manuilsky, Pyatnitsky, Togliatti, Thorez, Cachin, Kuusinen) Germany, in 1931, was 'already living under fascist rule'; 'Hitler could not make matters worse than they were under Brüning...' Trotsky wrote: 'Beneath this pseudo-radical verbiage hides the most sordid passivity... You are blundering disgracefully because you are afraid of the difficulties that lie ahead.' [125]

The distinguishing feature of 'Third Periodism' in India, however, was that in a sense it had started already almost two years before the Tenth Plenum. Already late in 1927 Roy was writing that, at the next National Session, Congress was going 'to declare peace with British imperialism. The bourgeoisie is not only withdrawing themselves from the national revolution; the withdrawal is but a prelude to a definite stand against the national revolution..' [126] In April 1928 Roy repeated, 'the bourgeoisie with all its elements from right to left are drifting away from the main current of the national-revolutionary struggle' [127]. As we have seen, by the middle of 1928 this position was a consolidated one: speaker after speaker denounced Congress as an agent of imperialism and the bourgeoisie as counter-revolutionary. Thus the formal announcement of the Third Period with the policy of imminent collapse of capitalism and the theory of social fascism merely prolonged the turn to ultra-leftism in India. Nor were its practical effects as openly disastrous as in Germany or in China, where the policy inaugurated a period of putschism under Li Li-sun's leadership. For one thing, the Indian Communists were not anywhere as well organised or as strong as the KPD and CCP. As a centralised organisation they were non-existent, and even their 'indirect' hold on sections of the working class through the medium of the WPP was not of very great significance. It became of even less significance once the latter organisation, already denounced at the Sixth Congress by Kuusinen and others, was formally abolished at the Tenth Plenum and effectively ceased to exist once its leadership was interned by the Meerut District Magistrate. Nevertheless, the Third Period policy merely accentuated the already backward development of Indian Communism, and thus helped to postpone its expansion for about seven years, till 1935.

The Comintern and Bourgeois Nationalism

Corresponding to the Comintern's failure to grasp the relative but real economic and political autonomy of the Indian bourgeoisie was its radically mistaken understanding of the strategy of bourgeois nationalism in India. These errors were strictly complementary, for a correct understanding of the latter presupposed some understanding of the former. An early example of this incomprehension was an article by E. Roy in *Inprecor* in 1925, where she wrote: 'So strong is the spirit of class interest and so selfish the leadership of the movement [emphasis mine — JB] that the prospects of freedom are deliberately jeopardised by a policy of compromise and concession. The Indian bourgeoisie is selling the birthright of the Indian people for a mess of pottage secured to themselves by bargaining with the Imperial overlord' [128] Almost with despair several years later, when on trial, the Indian Communist leadership would assert, with reference to Congress, 'the real situation is that they do not want that which could be obtained by violence, namely, the overthrow of British rule' [129]. In keeping with this notion it was sometimes argued, whenever there was a shift in the balance of forces within the Congress leadership to the left, or a resumption of the mass movement, that these were empty gestures, manoeuvres of hypocrisy. Thus, early in 1928, Roy wrote of the 'independence resolution' passed at the previous Congress that it had 'no practical value' [130]. Coming back to the subject in August, he said, with reference to the same resolution, 'those with a better understanding of the situation and of the class composition of the Congress leadership were sceptical. In this resolution they saw only a manoeuvre of the bourgeois leaders to retain their control over the radical petty bourgeoisie.' [131] With reference to the same subject, Kuusinen declared at the Sixth Congress, 'pressure from below makes the bourgeoisie indulge in oppositional gestures' [132]. Likewise the Meerut prisoners with reference to another Congress two years later: 'At the Karachi Congress the Independence Resolution was again passed. But the line taken by the Congress leaders since then, and especially their attendance at the Round Table Conference, has shown again that it was not seriously meant [emphasis mine — JB]... It is obvious [emphasis mine — JB] that people who can vote for Complete Independence one year and Dominion Status the next year do not attach any serious meaning at all to "Independence"... Independence to the ordinary Congress leader is a "phrase" with which to keep the rank and file contented, and perhaps to threaten the Government...' [133] Finally, there was the notion that even if the bourgeoisie was 'serious' about independence, it could never win independence. Again Roy and the Meerut Communists exemplified this view. Roy argued, 'the policy of imperialism is economic concessions but political suppression. Imperialism can afford to make some concessions... only in case it maintains the monopoly of political power... it has become brutally clear that the reformist programme of bourgeois nationalism is not realisable. The petty bourgeois Congress Party... stands exposed in its naive impotence. The resolution of the Madras Congress is only a stratagem to hide this total political bankruptcy.' [134] During the Meerut trial the leadership argued similarly that, 'the general line of

123. G. S., *Inprecor*, 26/2/31.

124. League Against Imperialism, *Inprecor*, 24/9/31.

125. Cited in I. Deutscher, *The Prophet Outcast—Trotsky 1929-40* (OUP, 1970), p.137.

126. Roy, cited in Overstreet and Windmiller, *op. cit.*, p.102.

127. *Ibid.*, p.107.

128. E. Roy, *Inprecor*, 7/5/25.

129. Meerut Conspiracy, p.86. They go on to say, 'but for whatever reason, they have incessantly preached non violence' (emphasis mine — JB).

130. Roy, *Inprecor*, 5/1/28.

131. Roy, *Inprecor*, 24/8/28.

132. Kuusinen, *Inprecor*, 4/10/28.

133. Meerut Conspiracy, p.85.

134. Roy, *Inprecor*, 5/1/28.

policy of imperialism is such as to give no basis for a compromise at all satisfactory to the desires of advancement of the Indian bourgeoisie... We conclude that there is **no objective basis for a lasting compromise** really satisfactory to the aspirations of the Indian bourgeoisie... There is no objective basis for a final compromise.' [135] In short, in addition to all their other mistakes, they also thought that bourgeois independence was impossible.

In none of the analyses we have cited was there the slightest trace of a Marxist analysis. The determining 'theoretical' concepts sprang from a problematic of **psychological subjects** — the Indian bourgeoisie was 'selfish', it allowed the 'spirit' of class interest to interfere with its leadership of the national movement, it was not really 'serious' about the goal of independence, its shifts to the left were 'sham' gestures, 'hypocritical' stratagems, and finally it was a 'naive', even 'stupid' bourgeoisie. Thus Freier discussing Kuusinen's report: 'In India the industrial development of the country has reached a point when further progress is possible only by destroying the imperialist-feudal fetters which shackle the productive forces of the country. **Even the native bourgeoisie is beginning to understand this**, at least to a certain extent.' [136] Here, then, was a bourgeoisie which according to Kuusinen was incapable of representing its own objective class interests; according to Freier, in the first stages of realising that India's economic development presupposed the expulsion of imperialism; according to Roy, naive enough to imagine that bourgeois independence was possible; and according to Roy's wife, selfish enough to make it impossible!

The dominant model which provided the framework for the Comintern's analyses of the Indian bourgeoisie was, however, a Chinese one. It was the experience of the national movement in China which guided Roy and others when they sought to understand the significance of shifts in the Indian conjuncture. It was the 'treachery' of the Indian bourgeoisie which impressed them most. The archetype of this bourgeoisie was Chiang Kai-shek the 'traitor'. The motif is easily traceable. In July 1930 *Inprecor* claimed that the Congress under the direction of Gandhi was 'just like the Kuomintang of China. Both are the tools of imperialism.' [137] The CP leadership in the same period argued in court: 'Our estimate of the position of the Indian national bourgeoisie is confirmed also by the events of the Chinese Revolution, which affords in some ways a **fairly close parallel to Indian history** [emphasis mine — JB]'. [138] In November of that year (1930), V. Chattopadhyaya, displacing Roy in the pages of *Inprecor*, said, 'the present policy of the Congress is to become a Kuomintang with the object of establishing an Indian Nanking with the blood of the workers and peasants'. [139] The following year an appeal from the organisation Chattopadhyaya ran in Berlin, the League Against Imperialism, repeated, 'the Congress has now abandoned the fight against the foreign imperialists, just as Chiang Kai-shek had done in China...'. [140] Some months later, Smeral referred to 'the complete going over of the Indian bourgeoisie to the path of Chiang Kai-shek', referring to the Karachi Congress. [141] The same writer a few months later again made the analogy: 'There is no going back for the Gandhists after the agreements which Gandhi concluded with the Viceroy... They must follow the path of betrayal up to the end, just as the Kuomintang and Chiang Kai-shek have done in China.' This, according to Smeral, was a 'historical law'. [142]

Failing to grasp the **strategy** of bourgeois nationalism, the Comintern took every short-term compromise as a 'final' abandonment of the national struggle, every temporary shift to the right as the last act of treachery against national independence. Conversely, a shift to the left no longer had any credibility. This could only be the reflex of 'pressure from below' or a 'strategem', a 'manoeuvre' of its 'false', 'insincere' leaders (all these phrases were used). There was, then, a radical misunderstanding of the **depth** of the contradiction which had developed between imperialism and the Indian bourgeoisie after the First World War, and a failure to keep the **long-term**

character of this contradiction in mind when attempting to interpret the vacillatory movement of the national struggle. The methodology of the Third Period was profoundly **empiricist**, and supported now by a psychological problematic, now by a mechanical analogy. The abandonment of Marxist method was integral to the political **retreat** signified by the Third Period.

The Comintern and the Solidity of Indian Nationalism

Confronted by the tragic spectacle of this retreat before the jackboots of Nazism, Trotsky had written: 'The first quality of a truly revolutionary party is the ability to face realities.' At no stage did the Comintern pose the question of the specific **strength** of bourgeois nationalism in India. This would have required an analysis of 'national peculiarities' for which, however, there was no room in a methodology of pragmatic reactions and transposed solutions.

It is true that Trotsky himself, for example in 1924, had been prone to a similar impressionism. At the Fifth Comintern Congress he had said of the situation in India, 'the parties of national liberalism and petty bourgeois utopias are melting into the void...' But in 1924 such an illusion was excusable. This, after all, was the low point of the recession, the period of transition from mass struggle to constitutional entry, the period of Gandhi's retirement from politics. At this stage the backward development of the Communist Party might have been excused, it might have been taken as a birthpang. On the assumption that such a party would grow rapidly in the next three years, as indeed it did in China, the situation was promising. In *Inprecor*, E. Roy referred to the 'complete and final defeat of orthodox Gandhism' [143], and there was indeed no means of telling at that stage that this was not so. The question of who would lead the working class and peasantry in the next stage of struggle still hung in the balance.

One or two years later the Comintern theoretical journal contained an article which made reference to 'the continuous process of the political decomposition of bourgeois nationalist organisations', referring specifically to India [144]. In 1928, however, this type of analysis was no longer feasible. Nevertheless, M.N. Roy stated that 'the outstanding feature of the nationalist movement during this year has been the process of class differentiation' and, developing this line of thought, wrote early in 1929 that, despite the defeat at the 1928 Congress, this process was bound to result in a struggle for leadership of the nationalist movement and that the rank and file were 'bound to move still further to the left — towards the formation of a revolutionary democratic anti-imperialist united front'. [145] But 1929 was precisely the year when Gandhi blocked such a process with an easy display of tactical skill — winning Nehru over and simultaneously coming forward as the champion of 'independence'. Bose wrote that 'by this process of assimilation the Gandhi movement was able to maintain its progressive character and prevent the emergence of any big left-wing development'. [146] Again, if we revert to 1928, in the middle of that year an ECCI report had said, in the section on India, '**it is no longer possible** for the bourgeois parties to force themselves on the masses as the leaders of the national-revolutionary struggle'. But it was, as Congress proved several times in the following years. [147]

135. Meerut Conspiracy, p.88.

136. Freier, *Inprecor*, 11/9/29.

137. Overstreet and Windmiller, *op. cit.*, p.145.

138. Meerut Conspiracy, p.87.

139. *Inprecor*, 8/11/30.

140. League Against Imperialism, *Inprecor*, 19/3/31.

141. Smeral, *Inprecor*, 2/4/31.

142. Smeral, *Inprecor*, 27/8/31.

143. E. Roy, *Inprecor*, 19/7/24. Trotsky's remark in Degras, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p.110.

144. Communist International, 1926?

145. Roy, *Inprecor*, 27/12/28, 18/1/29.

146. Bose, *op. cit.*, p.396.

147. Overstreet and Windmiller, *op. cit.*, p.109.

The tendency to underestimate the strength of Congress, the solidity of its relationship to the masses — particularly the urban petty bourgeoisie and peasantry — was distinctly visible in the 'Thesis' of the WPP issued at its national conference late in 1928. This document saw the Nehru Report as a 'retreat' before imperialism, and took it to signify 'a consolidation of the whole bourgeois class... into a single reactionary bloc, completely divorced from the masses' [148]. It is paradoxical that this document was published in an issue of *Labour Monthly* which reprinted one of Roy's articles in which Bipan Chandra Pal was quoted as saying, 'it is no longer possible to describe the Congress as a demonstration of mere middle class discontent... It can no longer be said that the educated classes in India have no backing in their political struggle from the masses of the people'. Perhaps because by this stage he had been discredited, Roy's articles were not read very carefully. The conclusion seems inevitable, for barely four months later in the same journal Clemens Dutt was writing, 'taken as a whole the bourgeois nationalist movement is on the decline, because it can no longer lead the struggle of the whole nation' [149]. Dutt too had in mind the Nehru Report, which he described as a 'reversion to liberalism'. As Roy had done in 1928, Dutt in 1929 emphasised the growing 'cleavage' within the ranks of Congress between its 'pro-bourgeois' and 'pro-working class' wings. This theory of 'differentiation' was repeated yet again the following year, this time by Chattopadhyaya, who wrote with remarkable optimism, 'there is no doubt that the official leaders will soon find themselves isolated' [150]. More significant, however, was a contribution to *Inprecor* which appeared nine months later, signed G.S.: 'Some comrades think that the overwhelming preponderance of the Congress is a wall which cannot be broken down...' [151]. This parenthesis reflected a truer grasp of the situation than the detailed analyses of Roy and Chattopadhyaya.

Parallel to this, but less importantly, there was a tendency to underestimate the economic strength of the Indian bourgeoisie, its relative autonomy in the sphere of investment. Thus as early as 1921, in his report to the Third Congress, Trotsky argued that the native bourgeoisie's struggle against imperialism could not be 'either consistent or energetic inasmuch as the native bourgeoisie itself is intimately bound up with foreign capital and represents to a large measure an agency of foreign capital' [152]. This may have been true of some of the nascent bourgeoisies of the colonial world, and was partially true of the Chinese bourgeoisie, but its application to the Indian bourgeoisie was more remote. Trotsky never lost this illusion, for as late as 1939 in his letter to the workers of India he explained the 'compromising' character of the Indian bourgeoisie in terms of the fact that they were 'closely bound up with British capitalism' [153]. The CP leaders stated in their trial that the Indian bourgeoisie was too weak to lead the struggle against imperialism because their interests were 'bound up too closely with British imperialism' [154]. A curious final example is Nehru himself, who in his speech at Calcutt in May 1928 made a similar assertion: 'The Indian capitalists are bound hand and foot with British capitalists and Indian industries are undoubtedly run with 90 per cent of British capital and 10 per cent of Indian capital. Protection of Indian industry means protection of British capital.' [155] This statement in itself says more about the strength of the national movement in India than any argument one could propose. It demonstrates the margin of autonomy which bourgeois democracy possessed vis-à-vis the 'narrow' interests of the capitalist class.

The pages of *Inprecor* are littered with another illusion, the reverse of the first one — the illusion that the fierce combativity of the Indian working class in 1928 was the prelude to its rapid politicisation and assumption of a hegemonic role. This illusion was especially harmful as it failed to focus on the special characteristics of the position of the working class in that period — its economic weakness in the face of retrenchment and the fact that there was no centralised



M.N. ROY

functioning CP to which it could turn. Ironically the first of these facts was brought out by Luhani in an article on the strike situation in India in 1928: 'By coming out on strike, workers face instantaneous death from bullets or slow death from starvation in the distant villages to which they must return in default of work.' [156]. The following year Clemens Dutt was writing in *Labour Monthly* in the following terms: 'The trial of the 31 Indian working class leaders at Meerut remains the most important event of the period in India, giving the truest indication of what is happening there The Meerut trial reveals and expresses the new stage of acuter class antagonisms The big strike movement in India during the last 18 months has been only one sign of the new period characterised by the emergence of the proletariat as an independent political force In spite of the hammer blow directed against it, the Indian proletariat is not only unsubdued but is still advancing.' [157] Two months earlier Spratt had written that the Indian proletariat were 'in the front rank', but did not specify of what exactly [158].

148. The document is reproduced in *Labour Monthly*, March 1929.
 149. Clemens Dutt, *Labour Monthly*, July 1929.
 150. *Inprecor*, 28/6/30.
 151. G.S., *Inprecor*, 26/2/31.
 152. *First Five Years of the Comintern*, p.223.
 153. 'An Open Letter to the Workers of India', *Writings of Leon Trotsky 1935-39* (Merit Publishers, 1969), p.37.
 154. *Meerut Conspiracy*, p.83, cf. p.69.
 155. *Selected Works*, p.243.
 156. Luhani, *Inprecor*, 31/5/28.
 157. C. Dutt, *Labour Monthly*, July 1929.
 158. Spratt, *Labour Monthly*, May 1929.

Such ultra-optimistic reports recurred time and again in 1929-31. P. Sch writing in March 1929: 'The Indian working class has reached such a level of maturity that the White Terror will not be able to get the better of it The revolution in India is developing quite in accordance with "prescribed rules"'. [159] Arnot in April 1929: 'The heroic five-month textile strike ended in October with the workers **undefeated in spirit** and ready to resist any attack of the employers.' [160] Kuusinen in July: 'There are unmistakable signs of the maturing of a **revolutionary situation**' (let us recall Lenin's definition of such a situation) [161]. Lozovsky at the same Plenum: 'We can see the **approach of revolution there**', referring to India [162]. Chabr in April 1930: 'The futility of Gandhi's tactics of non-violence becomes **obvious** to the masses.' [163] The All-India Anti-Imperialist League in February 1931: 'The disillusionment of the masses is progressing rapidly. They are rapidly realising that whatever sham fight the Congress is putting up is only to serve the class interests of the capitalists and the landlords They now understand that they cannot overthrow the system of British imperialism with the weapons of Gandhism' [164] Smeral in April 1931: 'As a result of the executions in Lahore [of Bhagat Singh and his comrades — JB] large and important sections of the population are being freed from Gandhism and brought to **revolutionary consciousness** Everybody in India can now see that everything that Gandhi and Nehru have done in the past year was nothing else but a preparation for the deliberate betrayal of the Indian national revolution.' [165] Clemens Dutt in September 1931: 'There are clear signs that the masses are already in increasing measure escaping from the ideological ascendancy of the Congress leadership.' [166] Clemens Dutt in October: 'In spite of Gandhi, in spite of the National Congress, the mass struggle in India cannot be subdued.' [167] This strange mentality persisted vigorously from 1928 to the end of 1931. Not only was it not based on any concrete understanding of the balance of forces in India or of the strategy of bourgeois nationalism, but it reflected the crudest impressionism and bad faith. It is perhaps not accidental that none of these writers had ever had any direct experience of a strike struggle in the factories of Bombay or Calcutta during the trade depression when, as Luhani had said, the alternatives were starvation or the firing squad, when resistance to wage cuts was generally ineffective and redundancies on the increase.

The Degeneration of the Comintern

'For them the Congress leaders really do not want the British to go away', wrote Nehru of the Communists in India. 'It is surprising that able Communists should believe this fantastic analysis, but believing this as they apparently do, it is not surprising that they should fail so remarkably in India. Their basic error seems to be that they judge the Indian national movement from European labour standards; and, used as they are to the repeated betrayals of the labour movement by the labour leaders, they apply the analogy to India.' [168] The framework in terms of which the nascent Communist Party in India approached and understood the national movement during the renewed radicalisation of 1928-32 was a transformation of the theory of 'social-fascism'. Both in Germany and in India in this period, despite their radically different conjunctures, the absence of any significant political intervention by the proletariat resulted from an **identical omission**: in both instances what was missing was any Leninist concept of the **united front**. At the Third Congress of the International in 1921, Lenin and Trotsky had had to defend the concept vigorously against the ultra-radicalism of the German, Italian and Dutch parties. For the European parties in that period of temporary stabilisation of capitalism the concept implied that 'marching separately Communists and reformists should strike jointly at the bourgeoisie whenever they were threatened by it or could wrest concessions from it the

main arena of the united front lay outside parliament the Communists had to pursue a double objective: they should seek to secure the immediate success of the united front, and at the same time assert their own viewpoint within the united front' [169] In the Third Period Trotsky alone defended the application of this strategy to the situation in Germany — against the pseudo-radicalism of the Stalinists. But the 'fighting unity' which he advocated through the temporary alliance of Communist and Social Democratic workers did not materialise. 'One of the decisive moments in history is approaching', Trotsky said, 'when the Comintern as a revolutionary factor may be wiped off the political map for an entire historic epoch.' Such an epoch was in the process of dawning.

The concept underlying Lenin's theses on the bourgeois democratic movement in backward countries was in all essentials the united front concept. 'Patiently Lenin replied to Roy, explaining that for a longer or shorter period of time the Indian Communist Party would be a small party with but few members, having only weak resources, incapable of reaching, on the basis of its programme and by means of its own activity, a substantial number of peasants and workers. On the other hand, on the basis of demands for national independence it would become possible to mobilise large masses and it was **only in the course of this struggle** that the Indian Communist Party would forge and develop its organisation to the point where it would be in a position to attack the Indian bourgeoisie.' [170] To Lenin it was inconceivable that the tiny Communist Parties of the colonial countries could find any circuit of expansion outside the struggle for independence, outside the sphere, in other words, of the bourgeois liberation movements in the colonies — as long as such an opening existed and the exponents of those movements (for example, Congress in India) did not 'hinder our work of educating and organising the peasantry and the broad mass of the exploited in a revolutionary spirit' [171]. There is no doubt that in the late Twenties, as subsequently, such an opening existed in India. In January 1929, a month after the WPP conference, Nehru had written to Chattopadhyaya complaining that 'the WPP at their meeting in Calcutta decided not to permit their members to join the Independence for India League. This was not a very wise decision, I think. Various other factors too have gone to weaken the League.' [172] Bose registered a similar complaint. [173] Of course, neither Bose nor Nehru were revolutionary Marxists, nor was Congress an organisation capable of carrying through a revolutionary fight against imperialism. But this had never been the basis on which a front with the various currents of reformism, in their imperialist or colonial refractions, had been justified. The sole justification was that only through such an alliance could the party of the proletariat expand its own resources, establish a wide platform for its views, and make significant interventions in mass struggles. The function of the united front had never been the strengthening of (imperialist or colonial) social democracy, but the utilisation of the possibilities it offered in a given conjuncture to further the independent class standpoint of the proletariat.

159. Sch, *Inprecor*, 29/3/19.

160. Arnot, *Inprecor*, 5/4/29.

161. Kuusinen, *Inprecor*, 20/8/29.

162. Lozovsky, *Inprecor*, 11/9/29.

163. Chabr, *Inprecor*, 17/4/30.

164. AIAL, *Inprecor*, 5/2/31.

165. Smeral, *Inprecor*, 2/4/31.

166. Dutt, *Inprecor*, 17/9/31.

167. Dutt, *Inprecor*, 1/10/31.

168. Norman, *op. cit.*, pp.281-2.

169. Deutscher, *The Prophet Unarmed — Trotsky 1921-29*, pp.62f.

170. Alfred Rosmer, cited Overstreet and Windmiller, *op. cit.*, p.32.

Rosmer was in Moscow quite frequently in this period.

171. V.I. Lenin, 'The Report of the Commission on the National and Colonial Questions', in *Lenin on the National and Colonial Question* (Peking, 1967).

172. *Selected Works*, p.297, letter dated 23/1/29.

173. Bose, *op. cit.*, p.393.

But in India there were other weaknesses, not the least important being the absence of any implantation in the countryside. Again Lenin had insisted in the amended version of his theses that 'it would be utopian to believe that proletarian parties, if indeed they can emerge in these backward countries, could pursue communist tactics and a communist policy without establishing definite relations with the peasant movement and without giving it effective support'. But if the Indian Communists were weak in the cities, they were even weaker in the countryside. Their links with the peasantry were non-existent. It was left to Nehru to point this out: 'Communists in India have little knowledge of, or contact with, the rural areas Congress workers, on the other hand, have spread all over the rural areas.' [174]

Confronting an already strong bourgeoisie and a colonial state apparatus, misguided by Comintern policies whose shifts they barely understood, and isolated from the peasantry, the Communists in India were doomed to remain a **backward insignificant** force throughout the main course of the national movement. When their forces did begin a slow expansion in the middle Thirties, this was no longer on the basis of any **independent** class policy. For the strategy of the Popular Front, officially adopted at the Seventh Comintern Congress in 1935, was in no sense an application of the united front concept. The latter had presupposed that within the alliance with reformism the proletariat would maintain its class independence; the essence of the Popular Front line was the **subordination** of the class interests of the proletariat to bourgeois democracy, the threatened bourgeois democracy of France and England and the nascent bourgeois democracy of the colonies. In India the shift was visible quite early. Thus in June 1932 *Inprecor* had referred to the 'turning point' in the national movement, admitting that 'the bourgeois National Congress has so far succeeded in maintaining influence over considerably wide masses of the workers'. The CP's biggest mistake was that it 'stood aside from the mass movement of the people against British imperialism' [175]. In February the following year the same point was repeated. By 1935 the reversal was open. At the Seventh Congress it was the hardline Stalinist, Wang Ming (alias Chen Shao-yu), who emerged as the chief spokesman on colonial questions. Recommending to the CPI the example of the Brazilian and British CPs, he added: 'Our comrades in India have suffered for a long time from left-sectarian errors; they did not participate in all the mass demonstrations organised by the National Congress and affiliated organisations.' [176] The following year *Inprecor* published an article written jointly by Palme Dutt and Bradley which saw in Congress 'the united front of the Indian people in the national struggle It is even possible that the National Congress, by the further transformation of its organisation and programme, may become the form of realisation of the Anti-Imperialist People's Front' [177]. Needless to say, there was no attempt to explain how the character of this organisation had undergone such a radical change since 1928 or 1931, when the leadership of Congress were called 'agents of imperialism' and 'counter-revolutionary'.

But by this stage in the history of the Comintern such reversals were a common occurrence — they required no justification. Stalinists like Dutt could always refer to shifts in the objective situation to justify any and every grotesque turn dictated by the Kremlin bureaucracy. There were few parties in the world which went in for such turns with a more nauseating display of blindness and loyalty to Stalin than the British and Indian Communist Parties. The entrenched character of Stalinism in the politics and thinking of the latter party were due, in fact, to its **late formation**. By the time the various Communists in India had finally established a centralised functioning party in 1934-35, the assault against the Left Opposition was already an historic fact. It had occurred between 1925 and 1928. Those events — Trotsky's opposition to Stalin over China, the Left Opposition's

promulgation of an economic programme which the right-centre bloc successfully resisted, the formation of the United Opposition, the heroic demonstration on the Revolution's Tenth Anniversary, attacked by the police, the expulsion of Trotsky and Zinoviev from the party in late 1927, Trotsky's exile in January 1928 — **had not the least repercussions on Indian Communism**. When the latter constituted itself as a centralised party, it was comparatively homogeneous in its political affiliations. There was no struggle against Trotskyism within the party, as there was in China as late as 1930 and even later during the front with the Kuomintang. Outside the party Trotskyism was an insignificant force. Thus the chief source of challenge to the shifts and turns of the CP leaderships in the 1930s and 1940s was absent in India.

By 1939 the party had come around to attributing a 'progressive role' to Gandhi. The party's labour policy was made to conform to the policy of cooperating with and supporting the Congress Committees. Any attempt to force a militant stand on non-Communist trade union leaderships was described as 'nothing short of disruption' [178]. When the war first broke, the stand was against it as an imperialist war. Three years later, the CC of the CPI would issue a manifesto titled 'India for the Allied Cause', canvassing support for the democratic imperialism of the allies against the fascist imperialism of Germany, while most of the Congress leaders were in jail for their opposition to Indian involvement.

Already in the late 1920s the degeneration of the Comintern was an open fact. By that stage all blunders and mistakes resulting in a defeat of proletarian forces were automatically blamed on the various national leaderships. An early example of this sickening dishonesty relates to Indonesia. When in the spring of 1925 strikes and disturbances erupted in that country, the ECCI drew up a detailed programme for the PKI urging it to advance nationalist rather than proletarian slogans. In November 1927, after the defeat of these upheavals, a further statement was issued by the ECCI condemning the PKI on the following grounds: 'The entire course [of the revolt of 1926-7] showed the lack of serious political and organisational preparation of the movement as a whole. It is highly characteristic that the revolt was conducted under the general slogan of fighting Dutch imperialism, without concrete political and economic slogans' [179] It is well known that in the history of the CCP this kind of inverted substitutionism became a common occurrence — with the dismissals of Chen Tu-hsiu, Chu Ch'iu-pai and Li Li-san for 'errors' which resulted from a loyal application of the Comintern line. India too offers an example. The Fifth Plenum of the ECCI in 1925 had advised Indian Communists to work inside the National Congress. Later, however, when this organisation had become 'counter-revolutionary', *Inprecor* published the following attack on Roy: 'From 1919 till 1928 Mr Roy was in charge of the communist movement in India Mr Roy, instead of giving proper advice and instructions, misled the workers' representatives by wrong instructions, such as **working within the Congress** His policy of the Communists working within the Congress was calculated to make them a tool in the hands of the compromising and betraying bourgeoisie.' [180]

The degeneration of the Comintern was, however, only a reflection of the **collapse of soviet power within Russia itself**, of the defeat of those political forces which represented the true interests of the Russian working class — above all, the Left Opposition. After 1925 practically no

174. Norman, *op. cit.*, p.263.

175. Overstreet and Windmiller, *op. cit.*, p.151.

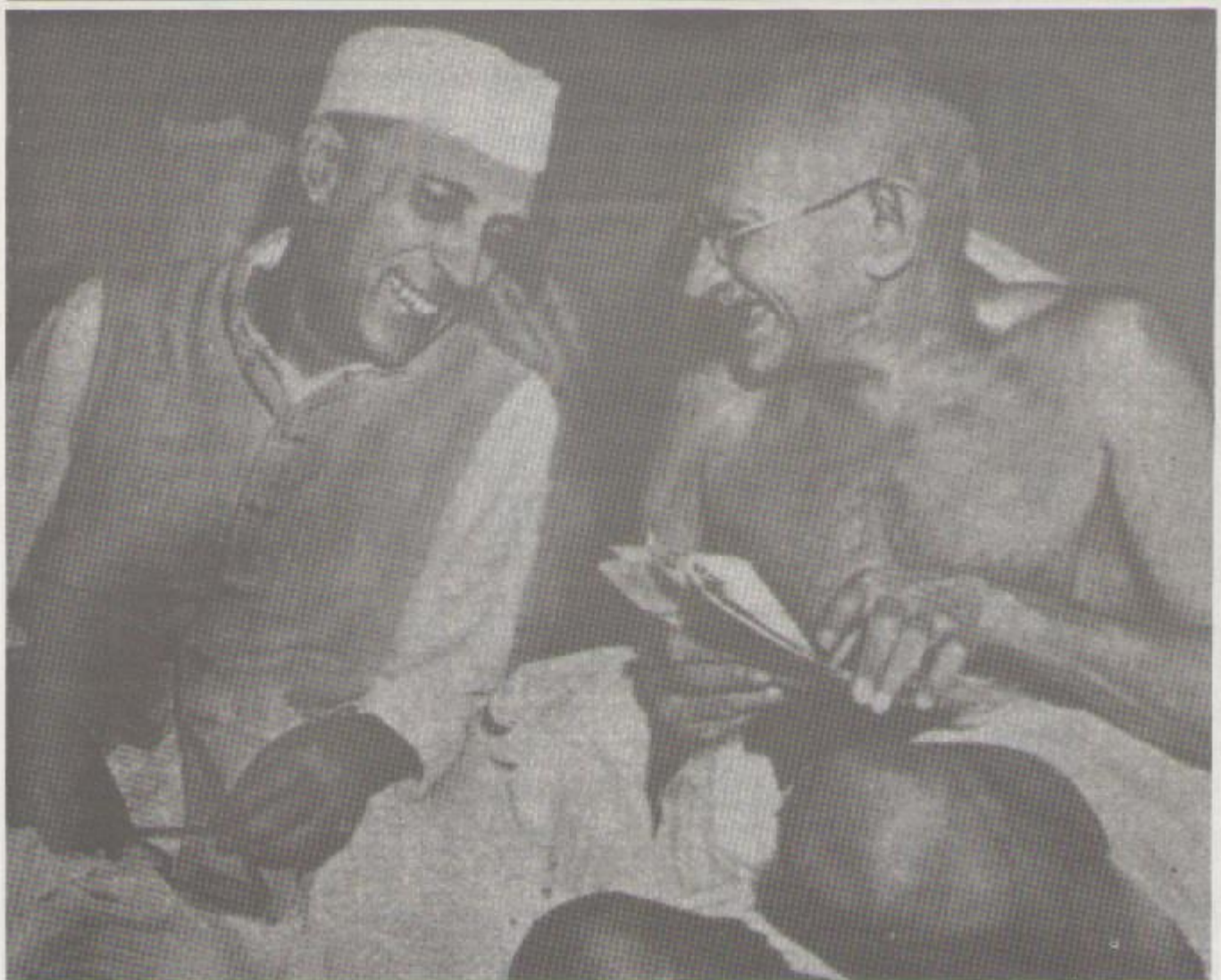
176. *Ibid.*, p.158.

177. *Ibid.*, pp.158-60.

178. *Ibid.*, pp.168-9.

179. Degras, *op. cit.*, vol 2, pp.311,413.

180. *Inprecor*, 29/10/31.



Congress leaders Nehru and Gandhi

Oppositionists were allowed to state their positions within the forum of the Comintern Congresses. Debates at these Congresses became increasingly stage-managed shows. They no longer reflected the sharp clash of ideas which proletarian democracy inevitably unleashes. It was at this stage in the history of the Comintern that most of the early CP leaders in India established any significant political contacts with it. Before that most of these had been mediated through Roy, who was himself a centrist, unable to break with a politically incorrect line except by relapsing into incorrect and even completely un-Marxist positions. Thus the leadership of Indian Communism had no conception of what the Comintern had been like in the days of Lenin, no conception of its glorious revolutionary past, of its heroic early years, when the whole political outlook and intellectual level of the organisation were radically different from 1928. They had not breathed the atmosphere of those early Congresses when internationalism had still to find its 'Socialist Fatherland'.

POSTSCRIPT

The article above was written in 1972-3. If I had to develop the theme today, the basic framework of the analysis would remain, that is, the critique of the Comintern and of its understanding of the logic of the national movement. However, a central thesis that underlies this critique, if only implicitly, namely, the notion that the Permanent Revolution formed a **historically viable** alternative programme in that period, would have to be drawn out and re-examined much more critically. This notion assumes that the Indian working class of the 1930s and '40s was sufficiently developed to form the social core and political leadership of a revolutionary movement. When we survey the history of

Indian capitalism in retrospect, taking in the years after Independence, this assumption becomes much more problematic. To start with, the history of the national movement in India provides not a single example of a generalised working class intervention on the model of Shanghai 1927 or even of Argentina 1945. Of course, working class struggles did erupt periodically, notably in the strikes of the Twenties, but they retained a predominantly economic and local character. In the second place, a substantial modern proletariat would emerge only after Independence, with the new period of capital expansion that started in the Fifties. Yet a notable characteristic even of this phase of its development remains its relative **political** passivity. I do not want to deny, and in fact it would be absurd to do so, that Indian Stalinism played a role, even a major one, in accounting for this prolonged quiescence. It remains true, nonetheless, that the struggles launched, for example, by the railway workers, both before and after Independence, constitute an exception confirming an otherwise bleak pattern, and that a properly historical Marxist analysis would have to probe much deeper to draw out phenomena not immediately evident in the straightforward 'politician' critiques of Stalinism — phenomena connected with the historical constitution of the class and with the specific features of this process that were determined by the general evolution of capitalism in India and by the nature of the sort of capitalist democracy (sic) that evolved post-1947. In this sense, the critique of Indian Stalinism proposed in the article remains, to some extent, 'subjectivist' and ahistorical. (Finally, I should like to acknowledge the fairly radical influence exerted on my conception of Indian nationalism by the more recent writings of Bipan Chandra, one example of which is his 'Jawaharlal Nehru and the Capitalist Class, 1936', **Economic and Political Weekly**, Special Number, August 1975.)

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movements who signal a socialist solution to the crisis.

Most of these workers will support anti-capitalist policies but they aren't prepared to join any of the existing far left organisations. So we have to build footpaths which will lead us to bridges linked to the main body of the working class.

Revolutionary socialists in Britain today face a double task. On the one hand they must build a mass movement which will be able to carry out the tasks of a socialist revolution. On the other hand they must build a mass movement which will be able to carry out the tasks of a socialist revolution.

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THEIR DEMOCRACY AND OURS



Socialist Challenge RALLY

Details of the rally are given in the article on page 10 of this issue.

Socialist Challenge will be out for the first time on 9 June 1977. It will be a committed paper, pledged to full support for the anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist struggle, and aiming to be a voice and an organiser for the socialist revolution.

Because it intends to play a decisive role in the fight for a new socialist society, it will also be a paper that encourages and stimulates free and open debates. It will make every effort to draw on the experiences and creative ideas of as many militants as possible.

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40 Theses on Imperialism and Permanent Revolution[★]

Jacques Valier

1. The theory of permanent revolution is the political expression of the analysis of capitalism as a world reality created by the law of uneven and combined development. The intensification of uneven and combined development during the imperialist stage of capitalism reinforces the objective premises of the strategy of permanent revolution.

1. THE CAPITALIST PRODUCTION PROCESS IS WORLDWIDE AND HIERARCHICALLY STRUCTURED

The productive process is worldwide

2. Under the capitalist mode of production the class struggle and inter-capitalist competition create a tendency to accumulation. The capitalists can survive only by accumulating and by constantly transforming their instruments of production. This transformation presupposes and at the same time brings about the development of the division of labour.

Forced ceaselessly to extend the base of their accumulation, the capitalists have internationalised their production, bringing every nation into the sphere of their activity: 'Capitalist development — not in the abstract formulas of the second volume of *Capital*, which retain all their significance as a *stage in analysis*, but in historical reality — took place and could only take place by a systematic extension of its base. In the process of its development, and consequently in the struggle with its internal contradictions, every national capitalism turns in an ever-increasing degree to the reserves of the "external market", that is, to the reserves of world economy.'

Capitalism has thus created a world productive system characterised by a definite internal division of labour.

3. Flowing from this international division of labour, the world economy cannot be conceived of as a simple addition of national economies but only as a reality which dominates the national markets. The specificities of national economy, important as they are, 'enter as component parts and in increasing measure into the higher reality which is called

world economy' ¹. These specificities are not 'merely supplementary to the general features', but 'the national peculiarities represent an original combination of the basic features of the world process.' ²

4. Proletarian internationalism is not based on the existence of 'general features', of the different national capitalisms. 'Its scientific basis is the interdependence of the national economies and the existence of a higher unity — the world economy. 'If we take Britain and India as polarised varieties of the capitalist type, then we are obliged to say that the internationalism of the British and Indian proletariats does not at all rest on an *identity* of conditions, tasks and methods, but on their indivisible *interdependence*'. ³ The interdependence of the national economies unites the interests of the bourgeoisie on an international scale to the degree that all class struggle in a particular part of the world necessarily affects all the capitalist countries. Thus the class struggles in the different countries, while each display their own specific characteristics, are closely interlinked.

The productive system is hierarchically structured

5. The world productive system is hierarchical: it is structured into dominant and dominated economies. This structure results from the historical conditions of the

* This article, as 'Imperialisme et revolution permanente', first appeared in *Critiques de L'Economie Politique* no. 4-5, 'Sur L'Imperialisme' (July-December 1971). A small number of alternative references have been substituted in the translation, to make them more readily available to readers with access only to English language editions. Insofar as is possible, quotations from Lenin and Trotsky are taken from the standard translations. However, it should be noted that the materials in the works of Trotsky in French do not exactly correspond to the English. In a few cases, therefore, references to the original French have been retained.

1. Trotsky: *Permanent Revolution* (New York), p.29.
2. *Ibid.*, p.24.
3. *Ibid.*, p.23.
4. *Ibid.*, p.23.
5. *Ibid.*, p.26.

development of the capitalist mode of production. These conditions depend on the operation of the dialectic of uneven development — more precisely, of *the law of uneven and combined development*.

6. Capitalism increasingly structures the whole world but it 'operates by methods of its own, that is to say, by anarchistic methods which constantly undermine its own work, set one country against another, and one branch of industry against another, developing some parts of world economy while hampering and throwing back the development of others'.⁶ The world development of capitalism is therefore an uneven development.

7. At the same time as it develops *unevenly*, capitalism also necessarily develops in a *combined* way. The constant economic and political pressure exerted by the advanced capitalist economies forces the backward countries, in order to avoid succumbing totally, to progress by leaps and to reach straight away the most advanced techniques: 'A backward country assimilates the material and intellectual conquests of the advanced countries. But this does not mean it follows them slavishly, reproduces all the cycles of their past... Although compelled to follow after the advanced countries, a backward country does not take things in the same order. The privilege of historical backwardness... permits, or rather compels, the adoption of whatever is ready in advance of any specified date, skipping a whole series of intermediate stages.'⁷

Historical backwardness is a relative idea: 'There are backward and advanced countries, but there is also a reciprocal action between them: the backward countries are forced to borrow the technique, the science, etc., of the advanced countries in the attempt to catch up with them. Thus a combined development occurs in which backward traits continue to exist alongside the last word in modern technology.' Thus, in the case of Russia before the revolution, for example, 'while the peasant economy frequently remained at the level of the seventeenth century, Russian industry, by its type if not by its capacity, was at the level of the advanced countries and surpassed them in certain respects... This fact is difficult to reconcile with the vulgar conception of Russian economic backwardness. However, it does not contradict that backwardness but dialectically complements it.'⁸

8. National peculiarities are thus nothing else but the most general product of the unevenness of historical development, its summary result, so to say. Thus the peculiarity of a national social type is precisely and only 'the crystallisation of the unevenness of its formation.'⁹

9. Uneven development takes place at different interlinked levels: between industry and agriculture, between branches of industry, between countries.

In relation to uneven development between countries, the most obvious inequality is that separating the industrialised capitalist countries from the 'underdeveloped' countries. However, even within the advanced economies uneven development, if in a less flagrant form, continues to exhibit itself — these economies do not develop in the same ways and at the same rates. In considering these two different expressions of uneven development, however, we must note that whereas in the advanced economies what is involved is development within a situation of the full establishment of capitalism, in the case of the dominated economies what is involved is the domination of the international capitalist system over countries in which real national capitalism does not exist.

10. By introducing itself into countries where a pre-capitalist system of production predominates, the capitalist system:

* First, progressively destroys the domestic economy. Such an economy is either incapable of withstanding competition or is constrained to adapt itself to the conditions of the dominant capitalist countries. The impact of commodities from developed countries brings about the dislocation of the organisation of local production.

* Secondly, develops an export-oriented sector which uses the most modern techniques of production.

The consequence of these processes is that in colonial and semi-colonial countries a complex structure of production results from this combined development — very developed sectors, oriented towards the outside world, coexist with backward sectors whose activity is focused on the internal market. This particular structure impedes industrialisation on a national capitalist base.

Uneven and combined development thus brings about a very special class structure in the colonial and semi-colonial countries. The national bourgeoisie is very weak and to all intents and purposes dependent on foreign imperialism. It is not capable of leading a bourgeois revolution and establishing the capitalist mode of production on a secure national base. Moreover, through the existence of very developed sectors of the economy, the industrial and agricultural proletariat is highly concentrated in the urban centres or big enterprises. As far as the peasantry is concerned, it possesses only very small plots of land which are barely profitable.

However, if the domination of the imperialist countries blocks the industrialisation of the colonial and semi-colonial countries, the industrial backwardness of these countries allows the countries of the dominant bloc to develop at an accelerated rate through unequal exchange, superprofits, etc.

11. It is not possible to explain the different rates of the development of the economies in the dominant bloc simply by making an analysis in terms of the clash with different modes of production. An analysis also has to be made of the particular conditions which have affected the development of each of the advanced capitalist economies. From this point of view three phases of uneven development can be distinguished.

The first period of this process of uneven development comprises the period of the rise of industrial capitalism in England and the decline of commercial capitalism in Holland and Italy. In this phase the very development of commercial and banking capital in Holland, Italy, Germany and to a lesser extent France blocked the development of industry in those countries. Instead of investing their resources in industrial production, the merchants of these countries attempted to develop themselves on the basis of their monopoly trading and commercial position. To the degree that their power was linked to petty-commodity production, the merchants did not desire a change from this predominant mode and instead preferred to concentrate on the defence of already existing trading advantages. These classes were therefore incapable of seriously modifying the techniques of production or of increasing the division of labour.

In England, however, at the time at which industrial production was appearing, the English merchants were faced with competition from Flemish and Italian merchants. To overcome this competition the English bourgeoisie turned its attention to industry — which they attempted to organise on the basis of the most modern methods available.

In this period of uneven development, therefore, a clear process may be seen in which the development of commercial capitalism can, after a certain point and in certain combinations, act as a brake on the development to a higher stage of capitalism, while simultaneously the same commercial capitalism, in different countries with a more favourable development of circumstances, can be a powerful benefit to the development of industrial capitalism. It was on the basis of this more favourable combination that English capitalism developed by leaps and bounds through the

6. Trotsky: *The Third International After Lenin* (New York), p. 19.

7. Trotsky: *History of the Russian Revolution* (London), p. 22.

8. Trotsky: 'La révolution russe' in *La Révolution Permanente en Russie*, *Classique Rouge* no. 1 (Paris), p. 42.

9. *Permanent Revolution*, p. 24.

introduction of new techniques of production — techniques which brought about a heightened division of labour and accelerated industrial development. Parallel with this process, and on the basis of its supremacy in industrial production, the English bourgeoisie turned its attention to the conquest of external markets.

The second phase of uneven development of the advanced capitalist countries, a phase beginning in the latter part of the nineteenth century, was one in which the English bourgeoisie was overtaken by the ruling classes of new dominant capitalist economies.

The basis of this new phase was the way in which England's advance had itself forced the merchant capitalists of other European countries to reorient themselves towards industrial production. This process must, however, be clearly distinguished from the process which occurs when capitalism confronts prior modes of production — as in colonial countries. What was involved was *the development of forces which had already acquired major resources through commerce and on the basis not of foreign assistance but of their own development*. The ruling classes of these countries were both determined to, and capable of, defending their own accumulated wealth. To achieve this goal, most of the European economies resorted to protectionism as a way of barring access to English goods. In this role the bourgeois State played an essential role.

This phase therefore sees a clear reciprocal and combined relation between England's progress and that of the other European countries. English capitalism, impeded by the customs barriers, needed the development of the other European economies — as only then would their frontiers be open to English goods. On the other hand, the other European economies benefited from England's industrial advance in that they profited from the technical discoveries brought about by this development.

After a certain stage had been reached, the adoption of the most up to date production techniques by the more backward capitalist countries gave them the opportunity to develop new branches of production which were characterised by a more highly developed division of labour and greater capital concentration. From this time on, a redistribution of labour took place on a world scale which favoured those countries with the best historical conditions for the development of new sectors of production. At the same time, the industrial structure of those countries which had previously been the most advanced became dated because of the difficulty of making the change to new industries.

It was this general trend which explained the tremendous development of the United States and Germany in the second half of the nineteenth century. It was in these countries that the most favourable conditions existed for the development of new sectors of industry such as petrol, electricity and chemicals.

These new sectors of production had their own effect in relation to the structure of the national economies. All these branches of industry required massive investment of the type which only the wealthiest companies could afford. Capital was concentrated and centralised at an accelerated rate which in its turn made possible a faster growth of industry — it is revealing in this context that the concentration of capital in Germany and the USA has been higher than in those countries, principally England, which held the lead in capitalist progress during the earlier part of the nineteenth century.

Within this phase of uneven development, also, a number of other countries joined the inter-capitalist competition — notably Japan, Russia, and Italy. These countries also benefited from the development of other economies in that they were able to assimilate these countries' modern techniques of production. As they did not pass through the stage of competitive capitalism, production and capital in

these countries was highly concentrated and centralised right from the beginning of their industrial development. The progress of these countries brought about a still more marked decline in the position of England as it suffered from sharper and sharper international competition.

Finally, even within this second phase of uneven development, we must note that the United States and Germany did not progress equally in deriving benefits from prior English technical and industrial progress. The American economy was helped by a number of historical factors which did not apply in Germany. These elements essentially resulted from the fact that in the United States capitalism had been imported into a country in which serious resistance from a pre-capitalist mode of production did not exist. The development of the US economy allowed the export of commodities and capital under exceptionally favourable conditions reflecting, and profiting from, the relative backwardness of other industrialised capitalist countries.

The American bourgeoisie's domination really began to emerge after the First World War, during which the European ruling classes had torn each other apart in their struggle to supplant each other in foreign markets. This US dominance was then consolidated in the inter-war period.

The third phase of uneven development, one which characterises the present situation, has seen the American bourgeoisie itself become the victim of uneven development — particularly to the benefit of the German and Japanese ruling classes. While maintaining its *absolute* domination, US imperialism has entered a *relative* decline. In the inter-imperialist struggle the German and Japanese capitalists are able to reap the benefit of the possibilities of increased exploitation of the working class brought about by the crushing of the labour movement under fascism, and to benefit from the aid which US imperialism gave their economies after World War Two. By giving them this aid the political aim of the US ruling class was of course to strengthen the national bourgeoisies vis-à-vis the working class, and to gain markets for American capitalism. However the US also gave the European and Japanese bourgeoisies the possibility of benefiting from American imperialism's own production techniques and its degree of division of labour. The US ruling class had become the victim of its own development to the degree that this allowed an important development of other imperialist economies — above all West Germany and Japan. The growth of these economies enters into contradiction with the power of US imperialism. The US bourgeoisie can only maintain its hegemony by creating sharper international competition.

II. UNEVEN AND COMBINED DEVELOPMENT IS INTENSIFIED DURING THE IMPERIALIST STAGE OF CAPITALISM

The imperialist stage

12. The imperialist stage of capitalism is the epoch of wars, crises and revolutions.¹⁰ As Trotsky noted, 'the European epoch which comprises the years 1871 to 1914, or at least 1905... was an epoch of the organic accumulation of contradictions which, so far as the internal class relations of Europe are concerned, almost never overstepped the bounds of legal struggle and, so far as international relations are concerned, adjusted themselves to the framework of an armed peace. This was the epoch of the origin, the development, and the ossification of the Second International, whose progressive historical role completely terminated with the outbreak of the imperialist war.

'Politics, considered as a mass historical force, always lags

10. For a fuller analysis of the chief theoretical positions on the theory of imperialism, see J. Vallier, 'Les théories de l'imperialisme de Lénine et Rosa Luxemburg' in *Critiques de L'Economie Politique*, July-December 1971.

behind economics. Thus, while the reign of finance capital and trust monopolies already began towards the end of the nineteenth century, the new epoch in international politics which reflects this fact first begins in world politics with the imperialist war, with the October Revolution, and the founding of the Third International.¹¹

The objective premise on which the Third International was founded was that, 'The present epoch is the epoch of the disintegration and collapse of the entire world capitalist system, which will drag the whole of European civilisation down with it if capitalism with its insoluble contradictions is not destroyed.'¹² This is exactly why 'the imperialist epoch... (is) an epoch of proletarian revolutions'.¹³

13. As Lenin has shown, the imperialist stage of capitalism is characterised by the domination of the monopolies, the fusion of industrial and banking capital into finance capital, the division of the world into groups of great powers, and the existence of a tendency to stagnation.

Imperialism has passed through several phases

14. The period between the two imperialist world wars was largely dominated by the tendency to stagnation. This tendency, asserting itself over accumulation, was historically materialised in the crisis of the 1930s and was reflected in the stagnation of production and the appearance of large scale unemployment in the imperialist economies themselves.

Capitalism even in this situation, however, as Trotsky had already outlined at the beginning of the 1920s, was not automatically doomed. 'If we grant — and let us grant it for the moment — that the working class fails to rise in revolutionary struggle, but allows the bourgeoisie the opportunity to rule the world's destiny for a long number of years, say two or three decades, then assuredly some new equilibrium will be established. Europe will be thrown violently into reverse gear. Millions of European workers will die from unemployment and malnutrition. The United States will be compelled to reorient itself on the world market, reconvert its industry, and suffer curtailment for a considerable period. Afterwards, after a new world division of labour is thus established in agony for perhaps 15 or 20 or 25 years, a new epoch of capitalist upswing might perhaps ensue.'¹⁴

The only solution to the very deep crisis of the 1930s was a political solution, which was concretised in the choice between socialism or barbarism. 'A situation so unstable that the proletariat cannot take power while the bourgeoisie does not feel firmly enough the master of its own home must sooner or later be abruptly resolved in one way or another, either in favour of the proletarian dictatorship or in favour of a serious and prolonged capitalist stabilisation on the backs of the popular masses.'¹⁵

In the actual development, the diversion of working class struggles into Popular Front type experiences allowed the bourgeoisie to find a temporary political solution to its economic contradictions in fascism. Fascism crushed the workers movement and allowed a new increase in the rate of exploitation of the workers — thus giving the bourgeoisie greater room to manoeuvre and allowing a new development of the accumulation of capital.

15. From the Second World War onwards the tendency to stagnation, while not disappearing, was counteracted by the tendency to accumulation, and the functioning of capitalism was again characterised by the development of the productive forces — at least in the advanced capitalist countries. This expansion of the imperialist economy was not an automatic product of spontaneous economic forces, but resulted from the crushing of the workers movement by fascism and the betrayal by the Stalinist and social democratic leaderships of the revolutionary possibilities open to the European proletariat at the end of World War Two.

As a result of this development, from 1945 to the 1960s some contradictions in the advanced capitalist countries

appeared with less strength than previously: less extreme fluctuations, crises that were not catastrophic, a smaller number of permanent unemployed than in the inter-war period. These phenomena had three chief causes:

(a) The economic interventions of the bourgeois State in an attempt to protect monopoly profits. In this context we should take note of the very important role played by military expenditure, which was permanently maintained at a high level, in a way without precedent in the history of capitalism. These expenditures were the source of sizable and very profitable orders for key sectors of industry.

(b) The necessity for big capital to maintain or increase profits by adopting the latest technological innovations led it to favour the liberalisation of trade. A sharpening of competition between the big trusts at a national and international level resulted. The big trusts therefore accumulated rapidly.

(c) The construction of a neo-colonial system of exploitation, which permitted the 'pillaging' of the 'underdeveloped' countries. Extremely high profits have been extracted from these countries by the imperialist economies.

But despite these changes in its mode of functioning, capitalism has changed neither in its nature (exploitation of labour power by capital, inter-capitalist competition), nor in its logic (contradictions which govern its functioning). Crises, concentration, unemployment, imperialism are still present, even if the specific weight of particular contradictions differs from previous periods.

This new phase in the history of capitalism has furthermore added other sources of crisis and exacerbated new contradictions. In the advanced capitalist countries one can see that two of the key aspects of the functioning of the system since 1945, the action of the monopolies attempting to increase their rates of profit, and the bourgeois State attempting to guarantee these increases, have been reflected in the monetary sphere by a continual development of inflation. By its permanent nature this has become a new phenomenon in the history of capitalism.¹⁶

In the colonial and semi-colonial countries the domination of imperialism has resulted in the stagnation of the economies of these states, growing concentration of incomes, and large scale unemployment. These developments have been the objective economic bases of the development of the colonial revolution since 1945.

From the beginning of the 1960s all these contradictions sharpened. It is now clearly possible to speak of the crisis and break-up of the new system of capitalism and imperialism established following the Second World War.

16. Since the beginning of the 1960s, after a period of about fifteen years during which revolutionary crises had in effect been restricted to the colonial and semi-colonial countries, a new period has opened up. It is symbolised by the general resurgence of workers' struggles in Western Europe. This resurgence, together with a severe crisis within the leadership of US imperialism following its defeats in Vietnam, has allowed the colonial revolution to push forward again. Such a powerful international upsurge of struggles has not been witnessed before in recent history (in that respect we should not exclude the development of powerful mass movements in the bureaucratically degenerated workers states).

This increase in struggles, this multiplication of revolutionary crises from the '60s onwards, is a demonstration of the worsening of the contradictions of imperialism on a

11. *The Third International After Lenin* (New York) p.79.

12. 'Invitation to the First Congress of the Communist International' in Degras (ed): *The Communist International 1919-43 Documents* (London), Vol.1, p.2.

13. *The Third International After Lenin*, p.79.

14. Trotsky: *The First Five Years of the Communist International*, Vol. 2, p211.

15. *The Third International After Lenin*, p.85

16. See Mandel, *Late Capitalism* (London 1975), pp.408-437, and *Critiques de L'Economie Politique* no. 1, 'L'inflation'.

global scale. In the advanced capitalist countries growing difficulties appeared from the beginning of the '60s, both in the creation of additional surplus value (a result of heightened working class combativity) and at the level of the realisation of surplus value. This framework has created a crisis of markets which is made worse by the fact that military production is growing at the same rate as previously and by a tendency towards insufficient private demand for consumer and capital goods. These growing problems of realisation have brought about a sharpening of inter-imperialist competition and a growing internationalisation of capital movements (for example, movement of capital to Western Europe).¹⁷

In a contradictory fashion this sharpening of competition forces the ruling class to struggle harder against inflation. To attempt this they have to adopt a dual policy of integration and repression towards the working class. This policy, whose success is a *sine qua non* for the organic development of capital, inevitably collides with the resistance of the working class (May '68 in France, the 'creeping May' of Italy, and strike movements in a whole series of countries where developments of this order are taking place for the first time since 1945). This working class resistance impedes the possibility of the organic development of capital and exacerbates imperialism's contradictions from two points of view:

* In the advanced capitalist economies unemployment has been increasing for some years.

* Competition between the various national bourgeoisies has sharpened.

This aggravation of competition has been reflected in a permanent crisis of the world monetary system from the 1960s onwards — a crisis which is just the expression of the contradictions which have developed inside the world productive process.¹⁸ More precisely, heightened inter-capitalist competition has called into question the existing hierarchy of world currencies and, therefore, brought on the monetary crisis.

In the colonial and semi-colonial countries we can see:

(a) The crisis of world imperialism in the 1930s allowed a number of underdeveloped countries to undergo a relative industrialisation (initially designed to provide import substitutes), and therefore favoured the growth of an embryo national bourgeoisie and the constitution of a young proletariat. This bourgeoisie, however, has faced growing difficulties in accumulating capital independently in the period since the war, and has found its base increasingly undermined. Such capitalist classes have become transformed into a bourgeoisie associated with foreign capital.¹⁹

(b) The stagnation of the economies of the colonial countries, and the revolutionary movements which develop in them, become all the more significant for the imperialist countries to the extent that the latter face a growing crisis of markets.

The worsening of all these contradictions demonstrates the weakness of the imperialist system and the actuality of the revolution. To cope with these growing economic difficulties, and confronted with a radicalised working class, the only solution open to the bourgeoisie will be to crush the workers movement. The choice between socialism and barbarism appears clearly again.

The intensification of uneven and combined development

17. The analysis presented above shows clearly the way in which uneven and combined development becomes exacerbated in the imperialist epoch of capitalism. 'Imperialism, thanks to the universality, penetrability, and mobility and the break-neck speed of the formation of finance capital as the driving force of imperialism, lends vigour to *both these tendencies* [the tendency to invade the whole world and the tendency to do it in an anarchic fashion which brings about uneven development — JV]. Imperialism links up incomparably more rapidly and more deeply the individual national

and continental units into a single entity, bringing them into the closest and most vital dependence upon each other and rendering their economic methods, social forms and levels of development more identical. At the same time it attains this "goal" by such antagonistic methods, such tiger-leaps and such raids upon backward countries and areas that the unification and levelling of the world economy which it has effected is upset even more violently and convulsively than in the preceding epochs.'²⁰

The lack of any organic development of capital on the international level has meant that capitalism in the present epoch could only develop at the cost of more acute competition between the imperialist countries. This competition was originally concerned with the conquest of colonial markets. Then it was carried back inside the imperialist countries themselves, where it brought about a growing interdependence of the advanced economies. Since the end of the Second World War, trade between the advanced capitalist countries has increased considerably. The same is true for capital movements. These countries have increasingly limited their exports to the colonial and semi-colonial countries, while at the same time multiplying trade between themselves. Simultaneously, a tendency towards the interpenetration of capital in the advanced countries has developed — this is particularly clear in Western Europe.²¹

These phenomena do not mean that the colonial and semi-colonial countries are no longer important for the imperialist countries. In fact, in the case of the American bourgeoisie it is clear that the very large profits that it gathers from the underdeveloped countries, particularly from Latin America — profits which are larger than the mass of capital that it has invested there — are a decisive source of capital to export to Western Europe.

18. Imperialism intensifies more and more the contradiction between the development of the productive forces and the barriers which separate the national states. The growth of inter-capitalist competition during the imperialist epoch comes into more and more direct contradiction with the outdated framework of the national state.

THE ACTUALITY OF THE PERMANENT REVOLUTION

19. The development of capitalism according to the law of uneven and combined development, intensified during the imperialist epoch, is the objective foundation of the strategy of permanent revolution.

20. It follows from this analysis that the strategy of permanent revolution has a double meaning.

(a) It implies the *actuality of the proletarian revolution*. It 'eliminates the question of countries that are "mature" or "immature" for socialism in the spirit of that pedantic, lifeless classification given by the present programme of the (Stalinist) Comintern. Insofar as capitalism has created a world market, a world division of labour and world productive forces, it has also prepared the world economy as a whole for socialist transformation. Different countries will go through this process at different tempos. Backward countries may, under certain conditions, arrive at the dictatorship of the proletariat sooner than advanced countries.'²²

17. See Mandel, *Decline of the Dollar* (New York).

18. See *ibid.*, and *Critiques de L'Economie Politique*, no. 2, 'La Crise du Systeme Monetaire International'.

19. See Mandel, *Late Capitalism*, pp310-376, and *Critiques de L'Economie Politique*, no. 3, 'La Formation du Sous-Développement'.

20. *The Third International After Lenin*, p.20.

21. For a fuller analysis, see P. Florian and J. Vallier, 'Essai d'explication de la crise du Systeme Monetaire International', in *Critiques de L'Economie Politique*, no. 2.

22. *Permanent Revolution*, p.156.

The law of combined and uneven development implies that there are no longer any insurmountable economic barriers to proletarian revolution in any country, 'backward' countries included. Only the dictatorship of the proletariat can bring about, in both the backward and advanced countries, a quantitatively and, above all, qualitatively superior growth of the productive forces. This is not to say that every country is equally ready to make that revolution, but simply that there are no historical conditions that must be awaited before setting about the task of preparing the proletariat for its historic tasks. This is one political implication of the law of combined development. The alternative of 'socialism' or 'barbarism' is not a catastrophic vision but the understanding of the fundamental tendency of the epoch. It means that the urgent task of the epoch is the preparation of the proletariat and its vanguard to resolve the contradictions of decaying capitalism, in advanced as well as backward countries.

(b) The theory of permanent revolution analyses *the impossibility of building socialism in a single country*. The law of combined and uneven development tells us that those same 'backward' countries which 'may... arrive at the dictatorship of the proletariat sooner than advanced countries' will 'come later than the latter to socialism.'²¹

21. The theory of permanent revolution thus states that the revolution which is on the order of the day in both imperialist and colonial countries is a *proletarian socialist revolution*. Internationalism is not just an abstract principle but the political expression of the law of uneven and combined development. 'The international character of the socialist revolution... flows from the present state of the 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.'²⁴

A. The advanced capitalist countries

The analysis of the development of capitalism since the First World War makes it clear that the objective conditions of sufficiently developed productive forces for proletarian revolution exist. As Trotsky put it in 1938: 'The objective prerequisites for the proletarian revolution have not only "ripened"; they have begun to get somewhat rotten.'²³ It has already been shown that imperialism is distinguished by putrefaction — that is, by the permanent presence of a tendency to stagnation; that this tendency materialised as an actuality in the 1930s; that the bourgeoisie through the diversion of workers' struggles imposed 'barbarism', i.e. fascism, as a temporary political solution to its worsening economic contradictions; that the development of the productive forces since the Second World War has not abolished the tendency to stagnation; that, finally, the growing acuteness of economic contradictions since the 1960s once again threatens to pose the crushing of the workers movement.

23. There remains the subjective factor. What Trotsky said on this question still applies today: 'The historical crisis of mankind is reduced to the crisis of the revolutionary leadership.'²⁴

Imperialism has only passed through periods of stabilisation because of the defeats of the working class. In these defeats the Stalinist leaderships bear a heavy responsibility. As Trotsky wrote, and it applies equally to the period after the Second World War: 'One must understand clearly that the initial and basic cause — the so-called "stabilisation" — lies in the contradiction between the general disorganisation

23. *Ibid.*, p.155.

24. *Ibid.*, p.9.

25. Trotsky: *The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International (Transitional Programme)*, p.2.

26. *Ibid.*

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of the economic and social position of capitalist Europe and the colonial East on the one hand, and the weaknesses, unpreparedness, irresolution of the Communist Parties and the vicious errors of their leadership on the other.' 27

The crisis of capitalism does not by itself mean the end of the bourgeoisie's domination — the subjective factor plays a determining role. The responsibility of the Stalinist leaderships in the abortion of numerous revolutionary crises (China 1925-27; May '68 in France; England 1926; Popular Front 1936; National Front in Italy and France in 1945) demonstrates this very clearly.

This conclusion is not to say, of course, that revolutionary situations exist at every moment: 'Official scholasticism is incapable of understanding that between mechanical determinism (fatalism) and subjective self-will there stands the materialist dialectic.' 28

It is simply affirmed that the general maturity (and even over-ripeness) of the objective situation (in spite of flux and reflux) makes the subjective factor determinant.

The role of a revolutionary leadership is the more important as imperialism is characterised by 'the extreme instability of the entire system, the foundation of which is corroded by irreconcilable contradictions'. 29 From this fact, 'The revolutionary character of the epoch does not lie in that it permits the accomplishment of the revolution, that is, the seizure of power at every given moment. Its revolutionary character consists in profound and sharp fluctuations and abrupt and frequent transitions... Under these circumstances the role of the party leadership acquires exceptional importance. The words of Lenin to the effect that two or three days can decide the fate of the international revolution would have been almost incomprehensible in the epoch of the Second International. In our epoch, on the contrary, these words have only too often been confirmed and, with the exception of October (1917), always from the negative side.' 30

In the imperialist stage, therefore, 'the key to the whole historical process passes into the hands of the subjective factor, that is, the party. Opportunism... always tends to underestimate the role of the subjective factor, that is, the importance of the party and of revolutionary leadership... Such an attitude, which is false in general, operates with positively fatal effect in the imperialist epoch.' 31

24. The intensification of the economic contradictions in the advanced capitalist countries since the 1960s can only open up the choice between socialism and barbarism. The objective crisis will never lead automatically to the collapse of capitalism. It only creates conditions which are much more favourable for the conscious intervention of the working class, led by its vanguard, to overthrow the bourgeoisie. The victory of the proletarian revolution depends, in the last analysis, on the existence of a mass revolutionary International capable of leading the working class to victory.

B. The colonial and semi-colonial countries

25. The law of combined and uneven development has five essential implications in the colonial and semi-colonial countries.

26. The bourgeoisie in colonial and semi-colonial countries is incapable of completing the tasks of bourgeois democracy and national liberation. Weak, linked to foreign imperialism and the landowners, and having to confront a young and highly concentrated proletariat created by combined development, the capitalist class of backward countries is incapable of completing the bourgeois revolution.

The first great historical example of this was given by Russia from February to October 1917; as Trotsky said: 'The February Revolution showed itself to be powerless to resolve both the agrarian and the national question. The peasantry and the oppressed nationalities of Russia endured, struggling for democratic goals, to support the October revolution.' 32

Since then numerous other historical examples have confirmed this thesis. They range from Nasser's Egypt to the countries of Latin America, not to mention India, Ceylon and the countries of Black Africa.

In Latin America, for example, 33 the reintegration of the underdeveloped economies into the world productive process, after the world crisis of capitalism in the 1930s, signified a re-subordination of the accumulation of capital there to the world laws of accumulation. The embryonic bourgeoisies were forced under pain of disappearance to invest according to the forms that the capitalists of the advanced countries imposed on them. Hence the existence of sizable production capacities. But, confronted by these capacities, the domestic market based on the highly concentrated nature of incomes and the weak expansion of productive employment is insufficient to absorb output. To compensate for this inadequacy the national capitalists producing capital goods raised their prices. But this only weakened them in relation to foreign firms. The stranglehold of foreign capital intensified. Any national bourgeoisie was transformed into a bourgeoisie associated with foreign capital.

27. For the colonial and semi-colonial countries, therefore, the theory of permanent revolution signifies 'that the complete and genuine solution of their tasks of achieving democracy and national emancipation is conceivable only through the dictatorship of the proletariat as the leader of the subjugated nation, above all of its peasant masses.' 34

As the bourgeois democratic tasks can only be accomplished by the dictatorship of the proletariat, it follows that the proletariat of the oppressed countries, if it carries behind it the peasant masses, can take power more rapidly than in the advanced capitalist countries. One of the key concepts of the theory of permanent revolution, as Trotsky applied it to Russia, was that uneven and combined development could force the proletariat in the backward capitalist countries to seize power first: 'We have in the final analysis explained the October revolution not at all through the backward state of Russia but through the law of combined development. The dialectic of history does not admit states that are purely and simply backward... Everything consists of concrete reciprocities... It was only because the democratic Russian petty bourgeoisie could not fulfil the historic tasks which had been carried out by their counterparts in the West that the Russian proletariat achieved power before the workers of the West.' 35 We know how Lenin supported the same theses in April 1917. 36

28. The importance of the agrarian and national questions gives the peasantry, which generally makes up a majority of the population of backward countries, an extremely important role: 'Without an alliance of the proletariat with the peasantry, the tasks of the democratic revolution cannot be solved, nor even seriously posed. But the alliance of these two classes can be realised in no other way than through an irreconcilable struggle against the influence of the national liberal bourgeoisie.' 37

This thesis was, moreover, the same as that outlined by the first congresses of the Third International. As Lenin stated

27. *The Third International After Lenin*, p.83.

28. Trotsky: *L'Internationale communiste après Lénine* (Paris), pp.70-71.

29. *The Third International After Lenin*, p.180.

30. *Ibid.*, pp.82-83.

31. *Ibid.*, p.84.

32. *L'Internationale communiste après Lénine*, p507.

33. See Salama, 'Brazil, Argentina, Mexico: Industrial Structure and Conjunctural Problems', in *Inprecor*, 16 January 1975, and J. Bailly, 'Vers une nouvelle stratégie de l'imperialisme', in *Critiques de L'Economie Politique*, no.3.

34. *Permanent Revolution*, p.152.

35. *L'Internationale communiste après Lénine*.

36. See Deutscher, *The Prophet Armed* (London), pp249-261

37. *Permanent Revolution*, p.152.

at the Second Congress, 'are we to consider as correct the assertion that the capitalist stage of economic development is inevitable for backward nations now on the road to emancipation and among whom a certain advance towards progress is to be seen since the war? We replied in the negative. If the victorious revolutionary proletariat conducts systematic propaganda among them, and the Soviet governments come to their aid with all the means at their disposal — in that event it will be mistaken to assume that the backward peoples must inevitably go through the capitalist stage of development. Not only should we create independent contingents of fighters and party organisations in the colonies and backward countries, not only at once launch propaganda for the organisation of peasants' soviets and strive to adapt them to the pre-capitalist conditions, but the Communist International should advance the proposition, with the appropriate theoretical grounding, that with the aid of the proletariat in the advanced countries, backward countries can go over to the Soviet system and, through certain stages of development, to communism, without having to pass through the capitalist stage.'³⁸

Contrary to this thesis, the Stalinist practices are as follows:

(a) First, those of the Communist International under Stalin's leadership: the most characteristic example is provided by the Chinese revolution, especially in 1925. In this epoch the leadership of the Communist International declared that in the colonial and semi-colonial countries the objective could not be the overthrow of capitalism and the setting-up of the dictatorship of the proletariat supported by the peasantry. The objective was 'the democratic dictatorship of workers and peasants'. This objective could be achieved by a coalition of classes including not only the working class and the peasantry but also the national bourgeoisie. Such a solution had nothing in common with that envisaged by Lenin for Russia in the course of previous discussions before the 1905 revolution, and which he had finally abandoned in April 1917, for Lenin never envisaged collaboration with a section of the bourgeoisie.

Further, during the Chinese revolution of 1925, the leadership of the Communist International presented the Kuomintang as a 'bloc of classes' inside which the members of the Chinese Communist Party must dissolve and integrate themselves without having the possibility of putting into practice an independent policy. The Stalinist leadership in fact adopted the Menshevik theory of revolution by stages.

(b) That of the Stalinist bureaucrats, the successors of Stalin: their practices have been the same as those put into operation under Stalin's leadership. Classic cases are the support given to Nasser's Egypt³⁹, to the Indian bourgeoisie, to the Peruvian government, the supply of arms (jointly with US imperialism) to the present Ceylonese government, or the support given to numerous African governments. (In this respect, the Soviet 'theoreticians' have put forward a new idea for the African states, 'national democracy', which allows these countries either to follow or to avoid the capitalist stage and pass directly to socialism, the choice being dependent on the wishes of the African leaders!)

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Behind all these examples there is fundamentally the Menshevik theory of revolution by stages. The proletariat must in the first stage support a 'national bourgeoisie' which is thought to be capable of accomplishing the tasks of democracy and national liberation.

(c) As for the Chinese bureaucracy, to put it mildly one can say that it bears the mark of Stalinism very heavily. In fact, even if in China itself the Maoist leadership, taken as a whole, had a strategy closer to the strategy of permanent revolution than the Stalinist strategy of revolution by stages, it is nonetheless the case that:

(i) At the level of theory, the theory of the 'bloc of classes' remains typically Stalinist. Of course, in 1959, 10 years after the victory of their revolution, the Chinese leaders came forward with a theory, which they called 'uninterrupted revolution by stages', attempting to theorise their practice and even coming nearer to the theory of permanent revolution through that. But they tried through this theory to justify their own political past by artifices which attempt to save the Stalinist theory of a 'bloc of classes'.

(ii) The attitude of the Maoist leadership towards the Sukarno government in Indonesia consisted in congratulating Aidit, leader of the Indonesian Communist Party, for his participation in the government of a state which the Maoists chose to call semi-bourgeois and semi-proletarian. A short time before the massacre of hundreds of thousands of workers and peasants by the bourgeoisie with which they were in alliance, Mao Tse-tung declared that, under the leadership of the Communist Party, the Indonesian people would go forward from victory to victory. In the case of the present Ceylonese government, China granted a loan to the Ceylonese government while the repression against the JVP was at its height and the Maoist Ceylonese Communist Party renounced all struggle against the repression and gave its support to the government.*

29. This alliance of the proletariat and the peasantry 'is conceivable only under the political leadership of the proletarian vanguard, organised in the Communist Party... no matter how great the revolutionary role of the peasantry may be, it nevertheless cannot be an independent role and even less a leading one. The peasant follows either the worker or the bourgeois.'⁴⁰ The history of the Russian, Chinese or Vietnamese revolutions shows that, however sizable the peasantry, it plays neither an independent nor a politically leading role.⁴¹ From the very inception, 'The dictatorship of the proletariat which has risen to power as the leader of the democratic revolution is inevitably and very quickly confronted with tasks, the fulfilment of which is bound up with deep inroads into the rights of bourgeois property. The democratic revolution grows over directly into the socialist revolution and thereby becomes a permanent revolution.'⁴² From the very fact that the proletariat is in power, the transformation of the democratic tasks into socialist tasks is inevitable.⁴³

This phenomenon of the growing over of the democratic revolution into a socialist revolution appeared for the first time in the USSR on the morrow of the October revolution. It appeared again in the Chinese revolution, the Cuban revolution, and the Vietnamese revolution — both in the Northern state and in the liberated zones of the South. In a

* This article was written before the post-Cultural Revolution turn of the Chinese leadership confirmed the above analysis in even more startling form — ED.

38. Lenin: *Collected Works*, Vol. 31, p244.

39. In the case of Egypt, Stalin's successors followed their master's example to its logical conclusion in dissolving the Egyptian Communist Party into the Nasserite formation in the same way as the Chinese Communist Party had been dissolved into the Kuomintang.

40. *Permanent Revolution*, p.153.

41. See Maitan, *Party, Army and Masses in China* (London, 1975), and Rousset, *Le Parti communiste vietnamien* (Paris, 1973).

42. *Permanent Revolution*, p.152.

43. Marx himself of course first advanced the concept of 'permanent revolution' — see for example his *Address to the Central Committee of the Communist League* (June 1850).

more general way the dynamic of colonial struggles, whether in Africa or Latin America, is one in which only class fronts of the proletariat and peasantry, under the leadership of the proletariat, are capable of achieving the tasks of democracy and national liberation. Simultaneously, however, the very fact of the leading role of the proletariat poses the growing over of the democratic revolution into a socialist revolution.

31. The process of the growing over of the bourgeois democratic revolution into a socialist revolution is, however, not sufficient in itself to define the process of permanent revolution. The process of permanent revolution is equally defined by the impossibility of limiting the development of the revolution within a national framework. 'All true revolution in a capitalist society... and especially now in the imperialist epoch, tends to be transformed into permanent revolution, that is not to stop at any particular stage reached, not to limit itself to national frameworks, but to extend itself and deepen until... the final abolition of class distinctions... This is what the Marxist conception of the socialist revolution consists of, which is distinguished from that of the bourgeois revolution, which is limited by its national framework and its particularist objectives.'⁴⁴

If the law of uneven and combined development defines the first aspect of the strategy of permanent revolution, it also equally determines the second conclusion — the impossibility of constructing socialism in a single country.

The impossibility of 'socialism in one country'

32. The problem of knowing if a particular country is ripe for the dictatorship of the proletariat is not at all the same as the question of knowing whether that country can achieve socialism.

As far as the latter question is concerned, 'The socialist revolution begins on the national arena, it unfolds in the international arena, and is completed in the world arena. Thus the socialist revolution becomes a permanent revolution in a new and broader sense of the term: it finally attains completion only in a final victory of the new society on our entire planet.'⁴⁵ Lenin considered exactly the same: 'We have always proclaimed and repeated this elementary truth of Marxism, that the victory of socialism requires the joint effort of workers in a number of advanced countries.'⁴⁶

The impossibility of building socialism in one country means:

(a) The impossibility of achieving socialism in the real sense of a 'superior stage' to that of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

(b) The existence of worsening contradictions in a transitional society between capitalism and socialism which is limited to a single country.

33. The realisation of socialism and the complete elimination of bourgeois norms of distribution implies an extremely important development of the productive forces beyond capitalism. Such a condition necessarily implies the victory of the revolution in at least the principal developed capitalist countries. It is quite impossible to achieve in a single economy. Bukharin and Stalin's conception, first defended at the 14th Congress of the RCP, that it was possible to construct socialism in one country, was aptly described by Trotsky: 'The fact that socialism can be based only on the highest productive forces — in a word, the Marxian dynamics of the displacement of one social form by another on the basis of the growing productive forces — has been completely blotted out. Revolutionary and historical dialectic has been displaced by a skinflint reactionary utopia of self-sufficient socialism built on a low technology, developing with the "speed of a tortoise" within national boundaries.'⁴⁷

34. A society in transition between capitalism and socialism which is limited to a single country is characterised by contradictions which grow ever more acute. As Trotsky said in 1934: 'The present growth of the Soviet economy remains

a contradictory process. While consolidating the workers state, economic successes do not at all lead automatically to the creation of a harmonious society. On the contrary, the contradictions revealed by the attempt to build socialism in isolation reappear at a higher level with redoubled strength.'⁴⁸

More precisely, the attempt to build socialism in one country has three catastrophic consequences. The first consequence, and without doubt the most important, is the transformation of the Communist Parties from an instrument of world revolution into the frontier guard of the country in which 'socialism is being built'.

Lenin's attitude, and that of the Communist International during its first four congresses, was twofold:

(a) It was affirmed that world revolution was a necessary condition for the victory of socialism in the USSR. Lenin stated the position clearly: 'The socialist revolution can triumph only on two conditions. First, if it is given timely support by a socialist revolution in one or several advanced countries.'⁴⁹

(b) The task therefore was not to 'build socialism' in the USSR alone but to reinforce the dictatorship of the proletariat in that country in order to use it as a base of support for the international revolution:

* To reinforce the dictatorship of the proletariat meant to consolidate and develop the alliance of workers and peasants while preparing for the next victories of the international revolution and, within this framework, to improve systematically the conditions of the proletariat.

* To use the revolution in Russia as the basis to push forward the international revolution. In Lenin's words: 'Single handed, the Russian proletariat cannot bring the socialist revolution to a *victorious conclusion*. But it can give the Russian revolution a mighty sweep that would create the most favourable conditions for socialist revolution, and would, in a sense, *start* it. It can facilitate the rise of a situation in which its *chief*, its most trustworthy and reliable collaborator, the European and American *socialist* proletariat, could join the decisive battles.'⁵⁰

Of these two 'levers' of world socialism, the reinforcing of the dictatorship of the proletariat and the world proletarian revolution, the second is the most important: 'Economic construction is of tremendous significance. Without a correct leadership, the dictatorship of the proletariat would be weakened; and its downfall would deal a great blow to the international revolution from which the latter would not recover for a good many years. But the conclusion of the main historical struggle between the socialist world and the world of capitalism depends on the second lever, that is, the world proletarian revolution. **The colossal importance of the Soviet Union lies in that it is the disputed base of the world revolution and not at all in the presumption that it is able to build socialism independently of the world revolution.**'⁵¹

The positions of Stalinism run directly counter to those of Lenin and the Communist International:

(a) In the period of Stalin's personal leadership of the Communist movement, attempts were sometimes made to justify the theory of socialism in one country by claiming that it offered a perspective to the Russian workers and because of that gave them courage. But as Trotsky correctly replied: 'The worker who understands that it is impossible to build a socialist paradise like an oasis in the hell of world capitalism, that the fate of the Soviet Republic and therefore his own fate depend entirely on the international revolution, will fulfil his duties towards the USSR much more energetically than the worker who is told that what we

44. *L'Internationale communiste après Lénine*, pp. 374-5.

45. *Permanent Revolution*, p. 155.

46. Lenin: *Sochineniya*, Vol. XLIV, p. 418, cited in Lewin: *Lenin's Last Struggle* (London), p. 4.

47. *The Third International After Lenin*, p. 45.

48. *L'Internationale communiste après Lénine*, p. 566.

49. Lenin: *Collected Works*, Vol. 32, p. 215.

50. Lenin: *Collected Works*, Vol. 23, p. 372.

51. *The Third International After Lenin*, p. 83 (our emphasis).

already possess is presumably 90 per cent socialism. If so, is it worth while to strive towards socialism? Here, too, the reformist orientation works as always not only against revolution but also against reform. 'Our party', Trotsky wrote, 'has passed through its heroic period with a programme which was entirely oriented on the international revolution and not on socialism in one country... the members of the party and the YCL fought at the front or lugged logs to the railway stations, not because they hoped to build national socialism out of these logs but because they served in the cause of international revolution which made it essential that the Soviet fortress hold out — and every additional log is important for the Soviet fortress.'⁵²

From the moment when the Stalinist leadership affirmed that socialism could be built on the basis of a national state, provided that military intervention was averted, then the task of the Communist Parties became not to struggle directly for power but to pressurise the world bourgeoisie against military intervention aimed at the USSR.

Such a transformation of the role of the Communist International in fact changed it from the instrument of struggle for the victory of world socialism into a tool of the Kremlin bureaucracy's diplomacy. When the Communist Parties were at the head of struggles they attempted to use this position not to struggle for power but to push the international policy of the bourgeoisie into directions favourable to Stalin's foreign policy. The Communist Parties' policies were always subordinated to this consideration. Thus, for example, Stalin was able to sign in 1935 a peace with Laval, President of the French Council of Ministers, in which the whole position of 'revolutionary defeatism' in relation to French imperialism was renounced. This was fully accepted by the French Communist Party. By such means the Communist International ceased to be a world revolutionary leadership and became simply a pressure group on the world bourgeoisie — a role culminating in its dissolution by Stalin during the Second World War.

Any objective study shows clearly that the sole constant factor in the politics of the Communist Parties in this period was the pursuit of the maintenance of the status quo between the USSR and the capitalist world.

(b) The practices of the bureaucrats who have succeeded Stalin have fully maintained the same direction. The policy of 'peaceful coexistence', whose counter-revolutionary effects are so obvious they hardly need demonstrating (the politics of treason and class collaboration of 'Communist' parties, support openly given by the Kremlin bureaucracy to various bourgeois governments, the scandalous inadequacy of the aid given to the Vietnamese fighters), takes up this same perpetual search after the status quo — an objective which is, moreover, absolutely chimerical.

(c) As for the Chinese bureaucracy, it has never had a revolutionary policy at the international level. It has verbally condemned the Kremlin's policy of peaceful coexistence — without, however, ever stating that it is simply Stalin's policy of the maintenance of the status quo. But at the same time it has never ceased following, in its own manner, a policy of 'socialism in one country' — a policy of 'power politics' in defence of its own 'national' interests. This has been fully carried on at the expense of revolutionary struggles in the world. The policy of the Chinese bureaucracy in Indonesia at the time of Sukarno was already clear. As far as Pakistan was concerned, the Chinese leadership supported the reactionary regime of Ayub Khan and Yahya Khan because it suited Mao that Pakistan should be a 'counterbalance' to India.

The treason that the Maoist bureaucracy committed over the question of Bangladesh⁵³ showed just how far it was ready to subordinate the interests of the international revolution to its own interests as a privileged layer — even though by these actions it harmed its own interests as the defender of the Chinese revolution. As Tariq Ali has written: 'In this way the Chinese bureaucracy shows its short-sightedness. It has not yet understood that a victorious

struggle in Bengal could modify the international relation of forces and would be an extension of the Chinese revolution. It closes its eyes to the obvious fact that Bengal, which historically has always been in the vanguard of the struggle in the Indian sub-continent, could become a base pushing forward the Indian revolution and completely destroying the US military strategy in the region. At the same time, it would aid the Indochinese revolution.'⁵⁴ Far from helping the militant Bengali communists, the Chinese position helped the leadership of the bourgeois Awami League to maintain its grip over the mass movement.

As for Ceylon, the Chinese government granted a loan to the Ceylonese government at the height of the repression of the JVP, while at the same time the local 'Maoist' party renounced all struggle. It is one thing to attempt to make relationships with other states, which China must do to break the imperialist encirclement, but it is quite another to give a loan to a government which is in the process of ferociously repressing the masses, and to subordinate the Communist Party and its militants to the supposed interests of the Chinese state and the bureaucracy which governs it.

The examples of Indonesia, East Bengal, and Ceylon demonstrate clearly the character of the foreign policy of the Chinese leadership. A bureaucracy which attaches itself to the petty bourgeois conceptions of the Bandung principles (mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual non-aggression, mutual non-interference in internal affairs, equality and reciprocal concessions, peaceful coexistence) and which congratulates a government carrying out a policy of national oppression and massacring thousands of workers and peasants has completely abandoned the positions of the Third International: 'Petty bourgeois nationalism restricts internationalism to the recognition of the principle of the equality of nations and... preserves intact national egoism, while proletarian internationalism demands: the subordination of the workers' struggle in one country to the interest of the worldwide struggle; the agreement of countries which have already overthrown the bourgeoisie to the greatest national sacrifice for the purpose of overthrowing capitalism on a world scale'; and 'the aid given to the destruction of the foreign domination in the colonies is not in reality aid given to the nationalist movement of the indigenous bourgeoisie, but the opening of the road to the oppressed proletariat itself.'⁵⁵

35. The policy of 'building socialism in one country' has a second consequence: it establishes a terrain much more favourable to the creation of a parasitic bureaucracy. From the moment when the line of 'socialism in one country' retards the world revolution, it follows that:

(a) The movement towards the disappearance of relative penury in the country is slowed down — which favours the development of the bureaucracy.

(b) The pressure of the world bourgeoisie on the party apparatus is maintained — which also favours the growth of the bureaucracy.

52. *The Third International After Lenin*, p.68 and p67.

53. We need only recall the notorious message sent to Yahya Khan by Chou En-lai. This assured the dictator that 'Your Excellency and leaders of various quarters in Pakistan have done a lot of useful work to uphold the unification of Pakistan and to prevent it from moving towards a split', and that 'the Chinese government and people will, as always, firmly support the Pakistan government and people in their just struggle to safeguard state sovereignty...' (*Pakistan Times*, 13 April 1971 — reproduced in *Explosion in a Subcontinent*, ed Blackburn [London 1975], pp.358-9).

To put this position in its true setting we need only note that (a) East Bengal was a nation oppressed and reduced to the state of a colony by Pakistan; (b) the 'unity' of the Pakistan of that time was a monstrosity created by British imperialism against the workers and peasants of the subcontinent; (c) the Pakistan army imposing this 'unity' was a reactionary bourgeois army, formed and trained by imperialism, which was ready to ally itself in the service of imperialism with Iran and Afghanistan, and which had massacred thousands of workers and peasants in East Bengal.

54. *Rouge*, 12 April 1971.

55. *Thèses et additions sur les questions nationales et coloniales*, (Paris), p.58 and p.60.



Chinese bureaucracy has followed Stalin in defending its own 'national' interests at expense of revolutionary struggles in the world

36. Finally the policy of 'building socialism in one country' has a third consequence: the laws of the world economy are ignored, it is forgotten that 'the passing of power from the hands of Tsarism and the bourgeoisie into the hands of the proletariat abolishes neither the processes nor the laws of world economy.'⁵⁶

The fundamental conclusion of the Marxist analysis of the construction of socialism, and therefore also of the theory of permanent revolution, is that 'the way out of those contradictions which befall the dictatorship of the proletariat in a backward country [and also in a developed country — JV] will be found in the arena of world revolution.'⁵⁷ In more precise terms the law of uneven and combined development, which dictates that the proletarian revolution cannot be a simultaneous act on the international scale, and that it can begin in a backward country, also explains the impossibility of building socialism in a single country. 'From the uneven sporadic development of capitalism flows the non-simultaneous, uneven, and sporadic character of the socialist revolution; from the extreme tensivity of the interdependence of the various countries upon each other flows not only the political but also the economic impossibility of socialism in a single country.'⁵⁸

Any attempt to justify the theory of the building of socialism in one country is in reality a utopian conception of ignoring the world division of labour and the contradiction created between the development of the productive forces and national frontiers in the imperialist epoch.

37. The attempt to ignore the world character of the productive process which is involved in the theory and practice of socialism in one country leads immediately to the abandoning of other fundamental positions:

(a) It attempts to by-pass the fact that the conquest of power by the Soviets did not at all isolate the Soviet Republic from the system of international division of labour created by capitalism.

(b) It attempts to ignore the fact that, precisely because of this international division of labour, the USSR, in Lenin's words, would be submitted to the test set by the 'international market to which we are subordinated, with which we are connected, and from which we cannot isolate ourselves.'⁵⁹

More precisely, as Trotsky put it, 'the capitalist world shows us... that it has other instruments of persuasion than those of military intervention. To the extent that productivity of labour and the productivity of a social system as a whole are measured on the market by the correlation of prices, it is not so much military intervention as the intervention of cheaper capitalist commodities that constitutes perhaps the greatest immediate menace to the Soviet economy... a Ford tractor is just as dangerous as a Creusot gun, with the sole difference that while the gun can function only from time to time, the tractor brings pressure to bear upon us constantly.'⁶⁰

Even if the USSR and the other bureaucratic workers states have achieved important economic successes, this does not allow them to escape the fact that economic construction in an isolated workers state can only remain limited and contradictory. The present economic difficulties of these states, and the growing links that they have woven with the world market, are clear evidence of the fact that it is impossible to escape the reality and consequences of the international division of labour and the world productive process.

38. The theory and practice of socialism in one country represents a reversion to utopian and pre-Marxist socialism in its attempt to deny that even the productive forces of capitalism are in contradiction with the confines of the national state. This development, shown in every aspect of capitalism from exports, through colonial and neo-colonial policy, to the two world wars, reveals how completely incapable is the national state of providing the framework for socialism. A socialist society requires a vast increase of the forces of production over capitalism — an achievement

necessitating a surpassing of the national state. 'To aim at building a *nationally isolated* socialist society means, in spite of all passing successes, to pull the productive forces backward even as compared with capitalism... The international division of labour and the supra-national character of modern productive forces not only retain but will increase twofold and tenfold their significance for the Soviet Union in proportion to the degree of Soviet economic ascent.'⁶¹

The Chinese bureaucracy merely peddles illusions of the same type through the use of ambiguous formulas such as 'relying on our own strength' or developing the economy in the framework of 'national independence'.

39. The impossibility of cutting off any economy from the world division of labour and the contradiction between the development of the productive forces and national boundaries would be still more important for a workers state established in an advanced capitalist country than it was and is for the USSR. These states are far more integrated into the world productive process and international division of labour than any backward country. 'Great Britain, being no doubt a highly developed capitalist country... has *precisely because of that* no chance for successful socialist construction within the limits of its own island... To be sure, all other conditions being equal, the more highly developed productive forces are of enormous advantage for the purposes of socialist construction. They endow economic life with an exceptional flexibility even when the latter is hemmed in by a blockading ring, as was evidenced by bourgeois Germany during the war. But the building of socialism on a national basis would imply for these advanced countries a general decline, a wholesale cutting down of productive forces, that is to say, something directly opposed to the tasks of socialism.'⁶² Such a situation clearly vindicates 'the Marxian doctrine, which posits that the socialist revolution can begin only on a national basis, while the building of socialism in one country is impossible.'⁶³

If one adds to this the growing difficulties and contradictions experienced by the bureaucratized workers states, the significance of such slogans as the United Socialist States of Europe is clear. It implies the perspective of social revolution in the European capitalist countries and political revolution in the bureaucratized workers states.

40. The basic conclusion of all these analyses is to reaffirm once again that internationalism is not an abstract principle but the political expression of the international development of the productive forces and the world scope of the class struggle.

But neither the bourgeoisie of the capitalist countries nor the governing bureaucracies in the workers states will fall by themselves as an automatic consequence of the worsening contradictions which beset them. Only the existence of a mass revolutionary International, something which can only be constructed on the basis of the theory of permanent revolution, can ensure the victorious outcome of the struggle. This is the significance of the construction of the Fourth International. Only such an International, developed into a mass force, can lead the world working class in the advanced capitalist countries, in the colonial world, and against the bureaucracies of the deformed and degenerated workers states.

56. *Permanent Revolution*, p.28.

57. *The Third International After Lenin*, p.40.

58. *Ibid.*, pp51-52.

59. Lenin: *Collected Works*, Vol. 33, p276.

60. *The Third International After Lenin*, pp.47-48.

61. *Permanent Revolution*, p22 and p28.

62. *The Third International After Lenin*, p58.

63. *Ibid.*, p22.

FROM THE ARCHIVES

LEON TROTSKY

The Nation and the Economy

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The recognition of the right of every nation to self-determination is part of the programme of Russian Social Democracy. This demand has its origins in the period of the revolutionary struggles of national bourgeois democracy. In the last analysis it means the recognition of the right of every nation to state independence. Following from this flows the duty of Social Democracy to oppose actively all regimes where the forceable cohabitation of nations and national fragments exists, and to support — depending on conditions of place and time — the struggles of nations and national fragments against an alien national yoke. But what is more: Social Democracy by no means casts aside the programme of national democracy as the unbridled social-imperialists would have us do. It cannot and will not be reconciled with forceable retention by a state of national groups within the large state body, ostensibly in the interests of an economic development which is being paralysed by divisions along national lines. But neither does it make its own aim a multiplication of these divisions, that is to say, it does not turn the national principle into some sort of historic absolute idea.

It is absolutely clear that Social Democracy stands always and everywhere for the interest of economic development and opposes all political measures capable of holding it back. However it understands economic development not as a self-sufficient, extra-social, productive-technical process, but as the basis of the development of human society into its class groupings, with its national-political superstructure, etc. This point of view was, in the last analysis, not to ensure for local or national capitalism success over the capitalism of other places and countries, but to ensure the systematic growth of man's power over nature. Accordingly the class struggle of the proletariat itself is the most important factor ensuring further development of the productive forces by leading them out of the imperialist blind alley onto the broad arena of socialism. A state of nationalities and national groups, which exists through force (Russia and Austria are examples), may without doubt for a certain time develop the productive forces, by creating for them a broader internal market. But by generating the bitter struggles of national groups for influence on the state power or by evoking 'separatist' tendencies — that is, the struggle for separation from that power — such a state paralyses the class struggle of the proletariat as the most important force of economic and historic progress in general. The proletariat is deeply interested in the elimination of all artificial frontiers and barriers, in the greatest possible extension of a free arena of economic development. But it cannot buy this aim for the kind of price which, above all, disorganises its own historic movement, and thus weakens and lays low the most important productive force in contemporary society. The present day social-imperialists, mainly of the German type,

reject the idea of self-determination as a 'sentimental' prejudice of the past, and recommend yielding to the iron necessity of economic development; so they propound as the supreme criterion, above the historically limited claims of nations, not some absolute need of economic progress but its specific historic form, which stands before us in the guise of imperialism. In the present war this is showing itself in contradiction not only with the needs of further economic progress but even with the most elementary conditions of human existence.

Democracy is and remains the condition for the development of the proletariat and the sole form in which it can wield state power. This latter demands first a growth in the political-cultural independence of the masses, their economic and political association on a broad field, their collective intervention in the fate of the country. Thus a national language, the tool of human intercourse, becomes at a certain stage of development the most important instrument of democracy. The desire for national unity has thus comprised an indefeasible aspect of the movement of the period of bourgeois revolution. We see before us in backward regions — not only of Asia and Africa, but of Europe too — the awakening of historically belated nationalities. And this is of necessity assuming the form of a struggle for national unity and national independence, and coming face to face with the imperialist desire to break through the nationally defined framework of capitalist economy and create by means of military violence a world empire.

In this process Social Democracy in no way identifies itself with the internally contradictory imperialist methods of solving its ripening historic tasks. But just as little if not less does it counterpose to imperialism, and more importantly, to the progressive historic needs it is pursuing, the bare national idea. That would be to think with a pitiful vulgar utopianism a *la Herve* that the fate of Europe will be decisively ensured if the state map of Europe is brought into conformity with its national map, if — ignoring geographic conditions and economic links — Europe is parcelled up into neat squares, each a nation state. France and Germany in the past period approached a type of nation state. This by no means prevented their policy of colonialism, nor their present plans to expand their frontiers — to the Rhine or the Somme. An independent Hungary, Bohemia or Poland will in exactly the same way seek an outlet to the sea by means of a violation of the rights of other nationalities, as Italy is seeking to do at the expense of the Serbs, or the Serbs themselves are at the expense of the Albanians. National democracy is awakened by capitalism, which strives to wield as many elements of nations as possible into one economic unit. But it is this very capitalism which strives everywhere it sets down roots to expand the limits of the internal market as widely as possible, to create as many favourable outlets as possible to the world market, to

impose its domination over regions with an agrarian type economy. The national principle is for national capitalism neither an absolute idea nor the final crowning of the edifice. It is only the springboard for a new leap in the direction of world domination. At the present stage of development, the national idea appears as a banner of struggle against feudal-particularist barbarism or foreign military aggression. In the long term, by creating a self-sufficient psychology of national egoism, it becomes itself a tool of imperialist barbarism.

The task consists in reconciling the claims of nations to autonomy with the centralised needs of economic development.

Social-nationalism amazed everyone, itself above all, by its strength. Almost without opposition, in the first period of the war, it took hold of the strongest parties and organisations of the proletariat. But together with this suddenly discovered power went an extraordinary, thoroughly disgraceful ideological bankruptcy. Not one serious attempt to think things through theoretically, from beginning to end! Decisions and actions, on which socialism depends for its life or death, are explained and justified with contradictory and haphazard reasoning, in which political intuition freed from any theory plays the most important role. The basic argument underpinning the social-nationalist policy of a workers party is the idea of 'defence of the fatherland'. But none of the social patriots has yet troubled himself with the sense to explain what actually in the fatherland is threatened by danger and what is subject to defence. The French socialist talks about the republic and revolutionary traditions — he is defending the past. The German patriot quotes his powerful national industry, as the basis of socialism — he is defending the present. Finally our home grown social-nationalist quotes the interest of future economic development of Russia, repeating all the old arguments and lying enough for two — he is defending the future. Each of them with more or less resolution is making the attempt to proclaim his own 'national' interest as the higher internationalist interest of mankind. But each such attempt only introduces into the affair a more hopeless confusion. It is one of two things: either the international interest demands the defeat of Germany (or Russia) — in which case it is pointless talking about defence of the fatherland, since after all there are people in the world for whom Germany or Russia is the fatherland. Or on the other hand defence of the fatherland is an independent principle of proletarian policy — and then it is useless to attempt to reconcile this aim with a generally obligatory line of conduct for the international proletariat. For the defence of one fatherland demands the utmost destruction of another fatherland.

At the beginning of the war, Kautsky tried to determine that basic good in the name of which the proletariat bears its class independence to the bloody altar of defence of the fatherland. This good is the nation state. In the first article we spoke of what a powerful factor of historical development national-cultural unity is. It would be necessary to add that a state (that is, the fatherland) is the more subject to defence, the more it approaches a type of nation state. It is exactly thus that Kautsky poses the question. But then the question arises as to what extent the proletariat of Austro-Hungary, and more importantly of Russia also, can and must defend its fatherland? From the point of view of Kautsky, the multinational proletariat of a monarchy near the Danube has obviously no obligations in relation to the state of the Hapsburgs. Kautsky himself arrived at this conclusion. But with the available international combinations the defence of Germany demands the defence of Austro-Hungary and Turkey, just as, on the other side, the struggle of France for national unity demands the perpetuation of a powerful block of nationalities called Russia, or of a world colonial power, Great Britain.

Together with the states of nationalities and national fragments stand the states where a far from complete national unity is fulfilled on one side by union with states of nationalities and on the other by violation of the national independence of colonies. The substitution of fatherland or state for the meaning of nation is the most widespread argument in favour of the social-patriotic policy of the proletarian party.

The present war, through the tendencies exposed by it, threatens not nations as such but that state which is the

historic home of the nation. Capitalism as little brings about national unity as it does democracy. It awakens the need for national unity but it also called to life tendencies which do not allow the fulfilment of this need. However the nation is a powerful and extremely stable factor in human culture. The nation will outlive not only the present war but capitalism itself. And in the social structure, free from the path of state-economic dependence, the nation will remain for a long time the most important seat of intellectual culture, for at the disposal of the nation is the most important organ of this culture — language. The state is another matter. It developed as a result of the intersection of dynastic, imperialist and nationalist interests and of a temporary correlation of material forces. The state is an incomparably less stable factor in historic development than the nation. For the past period economic development has found a home for itself in the capitalist state, which, with a great straining of interpretation, it has been accepted to call 'national'.

In this state-fatherland, cultural development found a home almost always as a divided nation exploiting or seeking to exploit other nations by means of the state apparatus. As capitalist development got bound up in the framework of the state, this was fulfilled by annexations and colonial conquests. The struggle for colonies — that is, the violation of the economic and national independence of backward countries — was the most important concern in the foreign policy of the so-called nation states. Competition for colonies led to the struggle of capitalist states amongst themselves. The productive forces became decisively bound up in the framework of the state. If the present day 'nation' state finds itself in danger, then this danger flows from inside, from the very economic development, which in the language of the world war is telling us that the 'nation' state has become a brake on development and that it is time to scrap it. In this sense the idea of the defence of the fatherland — that is, of the nation state which has outlived itself — is an extremely reactionary ideology. The more social patriots link the fate of the nation — which by itself in no sense paralyses economic development nor hampers it from taking an all European and world dimension — with the fates of restrictive state-military organisations, the more it is necessary for us internationalists to take upon ourselves the defence of the historic rights of nations to independence and development, against these reactionary 'patriot' defencists.

Capitalism strives to weld both the nation and the economy into the framework of the state. It created a powerful formation which for a whole period served as the arena of development for the nation just as for the economy. But both the nation and the economy came into contradiction — as with the state, so with each other. The state became too restrictive for the economy. By striving to broaden its base, it violates the nation. On the other side the economy refuses to subjugate the natural movement of its forces and means to division of ethnic groups on the earth's surface. The state is essentially an economic unit, it will be forced to adapt itself to the needs of economic development. The place of the closed in nation-state must inevitably be occupied by a broad, democratic federation of leading states on the basis of the removal of all customs barriers. National unity, flowing from the needs of cultural development, not only will not be destroyed by this but, on the contrary, only on the basis of a republican federation of leading countries will it be able to find its full consummation. An indispensable condition for this is the freeing of the framework of the nation from the framework of the economy and vice versa. The economy is organised on a broad arena of European united states, as the pivot of a world organisation. The political form can only be a republican federation in the flexible and elastic framework of which every nation will be able to develop its cultural forces with the greatest of freedom. Contrary to the German and other social-annexationists, we are not prepared to throw aside the recognition of the right to self-determination. Just the opposite — we think that the time is approaching when this right can finally be realised. On the other hand, we are very far from counterposing to the centralised needs of the economy 'the sovereign rights of every national group and grouplet.' For in the very process of historic development, we discover the dialectical reconciliation of both 'elements': the national and the economic. The recognition of the right of every nation to self-determination is for us of necessity fulfilled by the slogan of a democratic federation of all the leading nations, by the slogan of a United States of Europe.

French Trotskyists in Congress

Extracts from the Political Theses adopted in January 1977 by the 2nd Congress of the LCR, French section of the Fourth International

The political theses accepted by a majority of the second Congress of the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire comprise seven sections: The Regime; The Union of the Left; The Workers' Radicalisation; A Policy for the Unification of the Workers on a Class Basis; Our Policy for Unity; Our Tasks in the Face of the Crisis; The International Context. Extensive extracts from the first six sections follow:

I: THE REGIME:

Two years after his election Giscard has failed. His project was threefold: to enlarge the social and electoral basis of his majority; to solve the difficulties created by the illegitimate institution inherited from the era of De Gaulle, while moving towards a presidential regime supported by a large conservative party; widen the divisions within the Union of Left in preparation for its destruction. The predictable failure of his reformist demagoguery, of his economic policy and of his institutional projects are manifest.

Gaullism ensured the restabilisation of French capitalism by solving the colonial question and placing itself in the fore of imperialist developments, notably in Europe. It was able to carry out this transformation only by virtue of its Bonapartist character, the political defeat of the working class allowing it to find social support within the petty bourgeoisie and even a section of the working class.

The rapid accumulation of capital, following on a brutal increase in the productivity of labour and the devaluation of 1969, gave the regime a reprieve (the 'contracts for progress', 'the new society of Chaban'). The present crisis calls for a new transformation of the productive apparatus. It is no longer allowing capital to purchase social peace. On the contrary, it requires attacks against the very layers which used to support the regime. The divorce between the immediate interests of big capital and the petty bourgeoisie is deepening and the regime cannot enlarge its petty bourgeois social base without the prior defeat of the working class to permanently increase the rate of exploitation...

The failure of Giscard lays bare the deep crisis of the regime created by the coup of 1958. The establishment of the Bonapartist strong state moulded the political instruments which the bourgeoisie has at its disposal today. In contradistinction to traditional bourgeois parties which support themselves on local notables, elected in the different stages of parliamentary democracy, the UDR [1] has gathered, in the course of twenty years, a new political personnel directly implanted in the state apparatus. In the face of the rise of the workers movement and the possible victory of the left, the bourgeoisie can neither rely on a

parliamentary party nor a broad presidential party benefitting from a wide popular electorate (such as the Radical Party in the past or the large American parties). The new situation calls for a remodelling of the political system...

The disagreement between Giscard and the RPR [2] does not fundamentally express lines of divide between different fractions of the bourgeoisie. It is the historical product of the crisis of the political system set up under De Gaulle, a crisis which is becoming more and more acute, as the confrontations between the classes extend and amplify.

The debates and the political differentiations within the bourgeoisie more and more turn on the decisive question for them of the reversal of the relation of forces between the classes since the general strike of 1968. Both direct confrontation with the workers movement and recourse to the Union of the Left are dangerous solutions for the bourgeoisie, as both can lead to an explosion onto the scene of the mass movement itself, escaping the control of the bureaucratic apparatuses.

II. THE UNION OF THE LEFT [3]

Since their historical betrayal, the Communist Party and

1. UDR: Union of Democrats for the Republic, the ruling class party which supported De Gaulle and Pompidou. Following the death of Pompidou in 1974, the UDR presidential candidate, Chaban Delmas, lost in the first round to Giscard d'Estaing, the Independent Republican candidate. Chaban-Delmas had tried to hold the electoral base of De Gaulle together — but in a situation where the structural changes in French society, such as the move away from the land, made this project impossible. Jacques Chirac, the new Gaullist leader, took the post of Giscard's Prime Minister between 1974 and 1976, both to block the rise of the left and to influence the more 'liberal' aspects of Giscardian policies.

2. RPR: On December 1976, at a mass rally in Paris, the UDR became the 'Rally for the Republic' (RPR). This followed the resignation of Chirac from the Government on 25 August. The crisis in ruling class circles had been precipitated by the March district elections, in which the Socialist and Communist Parties increased their vote. Chirac came to the conclusion that a snap election was necessary, fought on the basis of the 'communist menace'. Giscard rejected this proposal in favour of pursuing his policy of mild reforms aimed at winning the middle ground from the SP.

3. Union of the Left: This alliance was formed in June 1972 by the SP and CP. A few months later the Left Radicals joined this class collaborationist bloc. The CP want to broaden the Union of the Left to a 'Union of the People of France' through the inclusion of left Gaullists and other 'anti-monopoly sectors'. In electoral terms, the Union of the Left has been making steady gains, from 40.45 per cent in the 1973 legislative elections to 51.5 per cent in the 1977 local elections.

Socialist Party have pursued an active policy of class collaboration. They have responded to the situation opened up by May 1968 by assembling a class collaboratorist coalition.

The policy of the CP and SP is a policy of class collaboration, the effects of which are evident as a result of their hegemony over the working class. The Union of the Left distorts the meaning of workers' unity; it blocks and breaks struggles and encourages passivity and disarray. It is this tendency which is largely dominant today. The CP and SP have the project of continually broadening their alliances towards new sections of the bourgeoisie (the policy of 'the union of the people of France', the willingness expressed to retain Giscard). They reinforce the illusions about the nature of the existing political institutions, promising to continue the 1958 Constitution and to democratise the state apparatus, thus reinforcing the workers' illusions in bourgeois democracy.

But the unity of the reformist parties, an accomplished fact, can under certain circumstances stimulate the self-confidence of the workers and strengthen the aspirations of the working class for its own unity, while nonetheless distorting these trends. This tendency is favourable to the reformist parties in a contradictory way. It explains the flow of new members into these parties, and consequently assists them, for an initial period, to proceed more effectively with their policy, even though it is a situation full of contradictions...

...While it is absolutely necessary to denounce the alliance of the CP and the SP with the Left Radicals, to characterise the Union of the Left as a Popular Front would imply giving a disproportionate weight in our propaganda and agitation to the necessity of breaking with this tiny bourgeois grouping. This would lead logically to abstention in the municipal elections in towns of over 30,000 inhabitants, in order to avoid voting for a Left Radical, and to prioritising interventions into the trade union congresses on the need of the CP and SP to break with the Left Radicals.

To consider such a struggle as primary leads to the underestimation of the critique of the Common Programme and various current aspects of the Union of the Left's policy of class collaboration, as well as underestimating the fact that today it is this programme which ties our hands in the struggle. But these aspects are essential. They make it possible to sow distrust in the minds of the workers influenced by the reformists. It is on them that we place the emphasis in our trade union intervention, for example by starting from established facts such as: 'The Common Programme doesn't meet our demands; it doesn't even grant us the 35 hour week; today we are told that the nationalisations will be voted by Parliament; it doesn't anticipate the abrogation of the 1958 Constitution or its institutions, and under the pretext of concluding new alliances our struggles are systematically broken, misled, etc....'

III: THE WORKERS' RADICALISATION

Since 1971 the annual figure of days lost in strikes has maintained itself at a rather exceptionally high level, which has no equivalent over such a period in 30 years: it was between 3.5 and 4 million days lost from 1971 to 1975, and the five million mark was topped in 1976; whereas, after the establishment of Gaullism in 1956, there was a maximum of 1 to 2 million days lost, except in 1963 (the miners' strike), 1967, and 1968.

If we take into account, moreover, the qualitative features which characterise these struggles, we can conclude that despite the effects of the economic crisis the intensity of struggles has been maintained at a very high level. Dozens of factories are permanently occupied, selling off stocks and resuming production for the benefit of the struggle; expropriation of the bosses is becoming a more and more common method of struggle, even in the bastions dominated by the CP. These struggles have been marked since 1968 by the progress of self-organisation, still embryonic, but all the more significant given that the accumulated experience of the French proletariat on this question was very rudimentary...

Class confrontations stimulate the entry into struggle of new sections of the proletariat (bank and insurance clerks, workers in small factories, women workers, immigrants)... Within the general radicalisation, the emergence of women's struggles is notable, as is the fact that consciousness of their oppression is no longer a marginal phenomenon among working class women. For several years, as a result on the one hand of the upturn in workers' struggles after 1968 and, on the other, of the economic crisis which hit sectors employing a large number of women (textiles, for example), we witnessed the massive entry into struggle of women workers. But this phenomenon of radicalisation is not a linear one.

Thus in 1971 the strikes in the large stores (such as Thionville), the struggles of the office workers (social security), expressed an outburst of anger by women suddenly becoming conscious of their super-exploited position: discrimination, salaries, working conditions...

In 1975-76 half the labour conflicts affected factories in which a majority of the workforce was female, many long conflicts with militant forms of action, such as Cerisay, CIP... In this context of an upturn in the struggle which permitted and encouraged the proliferation of debates on self-organisation and forms of action, it is clear that the entry into struggle of women, poorly unionised or with little history of activity, and until then playing little part in trade union activities, posed from the outset the problem of workers democracy...

The development of women's trade union commissions, as are foreseen by various projects, is an indication of the desire of the trade unions to intervene in this field.

The response which MLAC (Movement for Free Abortion and Contraception) has had in the factories, and the current emergence of family planning centres, confirm that today a certain number of matters once considered private can now be dealt with at the level of the factory.

The emergence of women's factory groups is a qualitatively different phenomenon: the success of their interventions, the response which their leaflets find, go well beyond their actual membership.

In this sense, it can be said that there exists today a real advance of consciousness on the part of working class women, including on the questions of their sexual oppression.

* * * * *

The existence of a broad vanguard, making it possible to bring to fruition united fronts with a revolutionary content, draws its roots from the social conditions (crisis of late capitalism) and historical conditions (crisis of Stalinism) which are producing a realignment of forces in the workers movement. The post-1968 situation is thus qualitatively distinct from the periods following 1936 or 1945

The broad vanguard is thus defined as a fixed feature of the period, which modifies the conditions for the construction of a revolutionary party and lays the basis for our break with entryism. In 1972 the revival of struggle inaugurated a new phase of working class radicalisation, as the deferred effects of May '68 unfolded more rapidly within the trade unions and mass reformist parties. At that time the theses [of the majority of the LCR — Ed.] performed a sociological dissection of the broad vanguard, which thus became merely a tactical concept rather than an historical one: alongside the broad workers vanguard, we had a broad student vanguard, a women's, teachers vanguard etc. This confusion did not have serious consequences in our working class interventions, which from the first were situated in a restraining united front framework (the unions); but it encouraged in other sectors the temptation to treat the broad vanguard as if it were made up of autonomous sectors, to the detriment of an overall united front tactic.

There exists within the working class a layer of advanced workers who acquire in the process of struggle a consciousness of the need to organise themselves in a collective and stable manner. It is this force which lies behind the responses to the employers' attacks. It is these workers who are capable of igniting, stimulating and orienting the struggles of the broad masses. It is therefore this layer of workers which revolutionary Marxists must win

over in the course of the revolutionary process.

Some can be led, generally from their own experiences as militants, to oppose one or several aspects of the reformists' policies, and from there to adopt an attitude of distrust towards the bureaucracies and their policies. It is this phenomenon of a clear break which defines the broad workers vanguard (the word 'broad' distinguishing it from the political vanguard of revolutionary Marxists). In the absence of any possibilities of going beyond this mistrust to a systematic challenge to the reformist policies, their rupture with the leadership of the workers movement remains partial, confused, subject to retreats, and often unstable. This vanguard is thus in constant motion, its features closely linked to the conjuncture as well as to the elements of the realignment of forces within the workers movement, of which the broad workers vanguard is a product. It is this phenomenon of the broad workers vanguard which will tomorrow create upheavals within the reformist parties and open the door to splits within their ranks...

IV. A POLICY OF UNITING THE WORKERS ON A CLASS BASIS

A. Our strategic aim is to win the working class to the fight for socialism, to become conscious of the revolutionary goal of its struggles, and therefore to throw off bourgeois democratic illusions and free itself from the reformists' hold. Our actions aim to seek every step forward in this direction, every advance in the mobilisations and consciousness of the masses.

B. The working class today identifies in its vast majority with the reformist parties. This confidence is deeply rooted in the normal level of consciousness of the workers, who believe that they are genuinely represented by these parties (even if they hold back, conceal, block, or 'lag behind' the objective movement of struggle). This confidence has been built up over a long period of time, it has a historic basis, and the working class won't free themselves of it without losing their illusions in the possibility of a peaceful and gradual road to socialism. We will therefore not convince them of the validity of our propositions solely by 'programmatic battles': they will have to experience in practice the ineffectiveness (the treason) of the reformist parties.

C. Through our propaganda themes and agitational slogans we seek to develop the actions of the workers and to achieve their unity in closing the gap between a situation where 'the problem of power is posed' (even in the consciousness of the masses) and the present level of consciousness of the masses, who do not 'know' how to resolve it. Despite the extreme weakness of our forces with regard to those of the reformists, it is incumbent on us to find means of influencing the course of the class struggle. To proceed in this direction a particular tactic is necessary.

D. Our approach is the following. We ask: (1) What is the current situation? What are the conditions of the class struggle? What responses are required? (2) What is the level of consciousness of the masses? What actions are immediately possible for a significant section of them?

Our propaganda begins with all the answers the situation demands, even if the mass of workers are not yet conscious of their necessity. On the other hand, our agitation establishes a 'bridge' between these demands and the concerns of the workers, what they feel to be 'urgent requirements'. It is not the language, the level, the time, nor the place where it is carried out that distinguishes propaganda from agitation: it is their relationship to the level of consciousness of the masses. Our aim is therefore to work out a class line, a mass line, capable of mobilising in a united way the workers and raising the consciousness of the workers.

The adoption of a united front policy is necessary in all circumstances, but its practical application depends directly upon the relationship of forces. It is necessary to avoid giving credibility to the idea that our own initiatives can at one blow achieve unity (or even that it is only correct to fight for it around such initiatives). But at the same time revolutionaries must, through basing themselves on all or part of the advanced workers, take initiatives (within the factories essentially through the trade unions) which make it possible,

no matter what obstacles the reformists put up, to launch action...

V. THE POLICY FOR UNITY

One of the characteristic products of the period of revolutionary upturn is the emergence and multiplicity of centrist organisations and currents which oscillate between reform and revolution. They express and take advantage of the radicalisation of a part of the broad workers vanguard, which has broken in an uneven and empirical way with reformism. They therefore constitute a component of the workers movement and will remain a substantial force so long as there has not been a qualitative modification in the relationship of forces between the main classes in at least one key country of the continent....

Our approach towards the groups of the far left must seek to:

* Systematise unity in action within the framework of a united front tactic, on the base of the central anti-capitalist tasks in the struggle for the destruction of the bourgeois state apparatus, the expropriation of capital and the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat: transitional demands, workers self-organisation and workers control, workers democracy, democracy in the trade unions, workers self-defence, anti-militarist work and the soldiers movement, the autonomous women's movement.

* Open up on this programmatic basis, which must include agreement on those strategic points and on the necessity of a democratic centralist party, a process leading to the possibilities of principled fusions.

On the basis of these criteria we formulate a common unitary policy towards the PSU [4], Lutte Ouvrière [5], and the OCT [6], which does not prevent us applying our approach in a different way to each of these groups. Thus the links which the PSU maintains with a periphery of leading trade union militants shows that it occupies a different role in the realignment of forces within the workers movement from that of Lutte Ouvrière....

That is why the Central Committee which will be elected by this congress is mandated:

* to pursue our unitary policy on the basis of the above criteria, and along the lines in which they have been

4. PSU: The Unified Socialist Party was formed in 1960 and by the early 1970s had 5,000 members. In January 1975 the left reformist current, led by Michel Rocard, joined the SP. The political project of the PSU is to build a 'movement for workers control and self management'. The role of the revolutionary party within that remains confused. The PSU has a federal structure and rejects democratic centralism. In the 1977 local elections they supported the Union of the Left slates and now have 940 local councillors. This decision provoked a sharp crisis within the PSU, leading to a split by former members of the Alliance Marxiste Révolutionnaire, the supporters of Michel Pablo who joined the PSU in 1975. The latter, who wished to support the revolutionary left candidates in the elections, established a new organisation called 'Communist Committees for Self-Management' at a national conference on 7-8 May.

5. Lutte Ouvrière: LO is the mainstay of a small international current comprising Spark in the USA, the African Union of Internationalist Workers, and Combat Ouvrière (Antilles). Their origins lie with a group which split from the Fourth International prior to the Second World War. They maintain their allegiance to Trotskyism, but argue that only the USSR can be considered a workers state, the rest being state capitalist. LO previously maintained fraternal relations with the British SWP, but these were broken at a conference in November 1975 on the Portuguese revolution. Since this time LO have been discussing with the Fourth International to clarify areas of political disagreement and possibilities for joint work.

6. OCT: Organisation Communiste des Travailleurs, emerged in December 1978 from the fusion of Révolution! and the Groupe Ouvrière et Populaire. At the time of the fusion, Révolution!, a split from the French section of the Fourth International, numbered 1,100; and GOP, whose origins lie with the PSU, 400. Both organisations agreed on the central political, and ultra-left, project of the construction of a 'workers and popular left'. This united front from below is put forward as a 'real and global alternative to reformism'.

concretised, notably by the moves and the agreement concluded with the OCT and LO for the municipal elections [7]:

- * to establish resolutely our paper **Rouge** as the forum of debate and confrontation between the publications of the far left;

- * to elaborate attentively the tactical and practical means of implementation of our unitary policy for each sector of mass work, along with the immediate axes and forms of discussion with LO, the PSU, and OCT.

VI. FACING UP TO THE CRISIS

Our response to austerity is to defend the workers' own demands while putting forward a unifying platform:

- * for the defence of living standards: a minimum wage of 2,300 francs a month (£60 a week); 300 franc (£8 a week) rise for all; a sliding scale of wages calculated on the basis of a common index of the trade unions;

- * for the defence of jobs: rejection of redundancies; reduction of the work-rate; the 35 hour week; opposition to short time working; exposure of the 'maternal wage' [allowance granted to a woman who leaves the workforce for an extended period to have children — Ed.] as a disguised form of female unemployment;

- * for the defence of social security: 100 per cent coverage of the costs of sickness and voluntary termination of pregnancy, which are not covered at the moment; repeal of the 1967 rules, for a single system of social security contributions borne by the employers.

But in the present situation we cannot be satisfied with an approach that starts from the elementary level of consciousness of the workers. Our approach, on the contrary, must have a two-fold starting point:

- * the fact that the Giscard Government is discredited, in a minority position in the face of the crushing majority of workers, and in constant retreat on the electoral terrain;

- * the perspective of a frontal attack on the living standards of the working class (the Barre plan).

This involves taking both facts into account while at the same time explaining: (a) that a counter-attack of the whole working class is necessary to get rid of the Barre plan and those who drew it up; (b) that the CP and SP, without waiting for the 1978 elections, must demand to form a government, not to manage the bourgeois state within the framework of the market economy as the Common Programme anticipates, but to drive Giscard out, meet the workers' demands, and take anti-capitalist measures which will open the way to workers power.

From now on it is necessary to launch the struggle without giving the bosses time to manoeuvre and reinforce their positions:

- * for nationalisation of the large firms without compensation;

- * abolition of VAT;

- * against price rises, for control by the workers and inhabitants organised in local committees;

- * expose the facts about wealth and profits, workers control of stocks, orders and accounts;

- * against the attacks on public and communal services, we must start fighting for:

- the development of free, 24-hour nurseries staffed by men and women and under the control of the staff and those who use them;

- the development of local abortion clinics in the neighbourhoods, hospitals and factories, controlled by the staff and women;

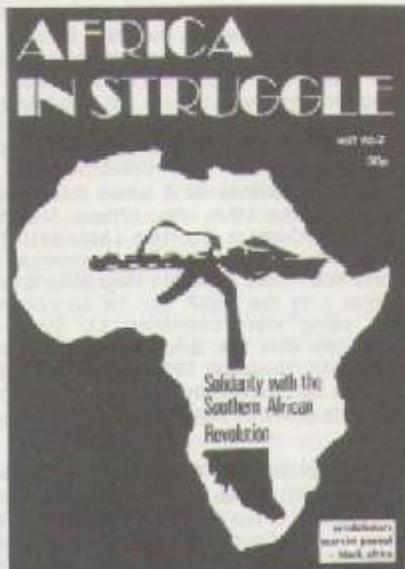
- repeal of the 25 per cent IVG limit in the hospital system, which means employing skilled staff and extending the intake capacity of the hospitals;

- free collective services (launderettes, restaurants, day nurseries, etc.) which will end the isolation and specialised roles of women;

- * against the outflow of capital and speculation, control by the bankworkers of all transactions, lifting of bank and business secrecy.

The attacks of the austerity plan and the bosses' manoeuvres in the face of the probability of a victory of the left lead us, then, to place the question of workers control once more to the fore. Henceforth concrete experiences can be translated into reality. Even if their practical effects remain limited, we can publicise them in order that lessons can be drawn from them on the national level. They can also assume an enormous educative value for a whole series of vanguard trade union militants and constitute an effective preparation for the strategic tasks which the working class will have to take up, and to the reformists' solutions.

7. In the March municipal elections the LCR, LO and OCT agreed a joint programme and slate of candidates in over 30 cities. In Paris the average vote was 3 per cent, in the provinces it averaged 6 per cent. High votes were obtained in important working class towns — Orleans 12 per cent, Nancy 8.3 per cent, Caen 8.3 per cent and Rouen 7.6 per cent. Following this success a further agreement was reached for a joint revolutionary contingent on the May Day demonstration in Paris. 15,000 people marched behind the revolutionary left's banners.



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review

Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution

Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution, A Political Biography 1888-1938, by Stephen S. Cohen (Wildwood House, £4.50)

Like most of the other leaders of the Bolshevik revolution, Bukharin has, for the last forty years, been in the shadows cast by Lenin, Trotsky and Stalin. It is only of recent date that Bukharin's ideas and legacy are being re-examined and with a little more objectivity. The biography of Bukharin by Stephen S. Cohen fills a gap and has been much needed; from this point of view the book is very welcome.

One of the problems facing any biographer of a Bolshevik leader is the inaccessibility of Soviet archives and of private papers located in the Soviet Union. As Cohen points out, only Trotsky's private archives are open to inspection (and until 1980 some of these will remain closed); the remainder of the Bolshevik leaders' private papers are still under lock and key in the Soviet Union. This problem has meant that anyone wishing to write such a book as Cohen's must, of necessity, largely rely on published records. Cohen recognises these limitations when he remarks: 'When Soviet scholars are eventually able to study and write freely about their revolutionary founders and their formative history, the account in this book will presumably be supplemented and some judgements revised.' Any such biography is even more of a work of detection than biographical researchers normally have to face. But I do not think we have to wait until the Soviet archives are opened before some of Cohen's judgements are revised, but more on that later.

Such a biography of Bukharin is long overdue, since it helps to restore a proper perspective to what for many is now rather a remote period. Moreover, a biography of Bukharin is doubly welcome, since it also serves as a signal reminder of the central place that he occupied in the development of Bolshevik theory and practice. The true stature of Bukharin has been overlaid and obscured by the attention focused upon the latter part of his life, ending in the obscene farce of the 1938 Moscow trial. Among revolutionary Marxists Bukharin has largely been ignored, partly because his name has tended to become synonymous with the appellation 'right-winger' that was justly bestowed on him in the last decade of his life. However, it might be pertinent to remind ourselves that, firstly, Bukharin did not

always carry such a label and, secondly, that even in his right-wing days he was the leader of Bolshevik-Communists, even if right-wing ones. Because of this neglect it has been left to liberal academics to rescue Bukharin from his undeserved obscurity.

Cohen documents much of Bukharin's pioneering work in the theoretical field on such questions as imperialism and the imperialist state, and how he related to both these phenomena developments in modern capitalism (circa 1916). Among the Bolsheviks and Russian socialists generally, Bukharin was among the first to develop ideas about the nature of imperialism and the consequences of monopolisation upon the State. Lenin drew heavily on Bukharin's work when he came to write his own much more widely known book *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism*, although it is wrong — as Cohen indicates — to suggest that there were no differences in the approach of the two. The differences substantially revolved around the question of the role and nature of the imperialist State, Lenin tending to think that Bukharin was showing semi-anarchist tendencies. The war and the collapse of the Second International, however, forced Lenin to reappraise a number of previous positions. In this sense Bukharin's writing on the imperialist State prefigures and points the direction for Lenin's *State and Revolution*. After a period of disagreement on the subject of the State, Lenin came to acknowledge the correctness of Bukharin's ideas, and embodied them in his own work of 1917.

Bukharin also pioneered study of the theoretical implications of the transition to socialism in his work *The Economics of the Transition Period*. Cohen has not given an adequate treatment of this book, which is a highly compressed text — Bukharin himself admitted that it was written 'in almost algebraic form'. A proper consideration of this text would have enabled Cohen to understand many of the constants in Bukharin's subsequent evolution during the 1920s.

However, Cohen gives an interesting description of Bukharin's independent cast of mind in his relations with Lenin. It shows a finely balanced relationship, being a mixture of affection and heated exchanges. Whatever Bukharin's faults, he was not a sycophant with Lenin, in fact of all Lenin's close collaborators Bukharin seems to have disagreed with him most often; and Lenin does

not always emerge with credit from Cohen's account.

Bukharin was the youngest of the top Bolshevik leaders in 1917, and this point needs to be weighed when assessing his subsequent evolution. The Bolshevik seizure of power in Petrograd has always claimed the overwhelming attention of those who study the revolution of October 1917. Cohen's account brings out two important points that have tended to be obscured in this respect. Firstly, in the period leading up to October, from April 1917, Lenin relied heavily upon the younger Bolsheviks in winning the party to his position, firstly in the struggle to get his April Theses adopted and then to take the decision to seize power. Bukharin played a key role in this process, since he was the leader of the younger generation in the Moscow organisation, and it was he and his peer group who overturned the older, established Bolsheviks in the Moscow region. In the discussions of the actual seizure of power it seemed likely that Moscow would be the first to take the uprising from the sphere of discussion to that of action. In the event it was Petrograd that led the way. However, it is worthwhile to note that Bukharin was only 29 years old when he led the uprising in Moscow. Unlike the Petrograd events, there was fairly heavy fighting in Moscow in which 500 party members lost their lives. Bukharin is usually portrayed as being wholly intellectual — not a 'practical' man — yet his role in Moscow in 1917 does not bear out this assessment. The second point that emerges from Cohen's account is that it was Trotsky and his group, who only joined the Bolsheviks in June 1917, who dominated events in Petrograd during the period of preparation and actual seizure of power. Almost without exception the old guard of Leninist Bolsheviks played subordinate roles or actually opposed the party in the October revolution. Cohen quite skilfully and concretely demonstrates the validity of these two propositions.

Insofar as Cohen has written only a one volume biography he has been forced to be selective. However, even allowing for the lack of Bukharin's private papers, I feel that there are certain important areas and points that are missing. The most notable absence is any real treatment of Bukharin's role in the Comintern. From its inception in 1919 Bukharin played a leading role in the functions of that body. It is true that, until his fall from power in 1925, Zinoviev played the central public role, and only after 1925 did Bukharin occupy the centre of the Comintern stage. But Bukharin's involvement was on a continuing basis for ten years. Cohen's failure to make more than a passing reference to these activities seems to me to flow from more than the need to compress.

From the year 1920 onwards Cohen has concentrated his attention on Bukharin's relationship to internal Soviet and party affairs, and in particular his role in the industrialisation debate. Coupled with this is an inadequate analysis of the social forces behind the debating positions.

This is where Cohen's treatment falls down: without an adequate analysis of international events, particularly the failure of the German revolution and the debacle of the Chinese Communist Party under the tutelage of Bukharin and Stalin, one cannot grapple with the rise of the Soviet bureaucracy and its subsequent victory. It is true that internal Soviet conditions were themselves alone sufficient for the rise of such a social formation, but there was no inevitability

about its victory and Cohen does not really try to explain the rise of this formation and its relationship to external factors. Nor can one divorce the triumph of the theory of 'socialism' in one country from the rise of the Soviet bureaucracy. Cohen makes no attempt at such an analysis and because of this muffs his discussion of the origins of the theory. It is true that some of the phrases and ideas that he pinpoints from Bukharin seem to be the first utterance of the theory, but one feels that had events taken another course one would not remark upon them now. Cohen does not ask why, despite what seem to be hints and allusions from Bukharin, it was Stalin who first articulated the theory of 'socialism' in one country in its most rounded manner. If Cohen had examined this point he might have been led on to the question of the bureaucracy. And if he had done so he would have been forced to look at Bukharin's relationship with that particular force. In this respect Cohen's treatment of Bukharin's fear of the 'new Leviathan' is devoid of class content and as such tends to downgrade Bukharin to a liberal-democrat.

Whilst there is, obviously, a fairly full treatment of Bukharin's economic ideas in the 1920s, Cohen does less than justice to Bukharin's opponents and this often tends to obscure the discussion. Every now and again Cohen admits that the ideas of the Left Opposition were distorted, but he makes no attempt to present a balanced picture. Nor is this accidental, as we shall see.

There is another aspect with which Cohen has failed to deal, namely Bukharin's role in the campaign against 'Trotskyism' in the mid-Twenties. Bukharin and his Red Professors unleashed a deluge of lies and distortions upon the left — and Trotsky in particular — which played no small part in rallying a large part of the new intake of raw party members (the Lenin levy) around the Central Committee majority. (I leave aside the particular 'skills' which Stalin used at the same time.) To write a biography of Bukharin with such omissions vitiates its overall usefulness. Bukharin helped to perfect the techniques which were later to lead to his own rout by Stalin in 1928-29, but Cohen passes this over. Was he perhaps afraid that it would detract from his hero? I say hero deliberately, for that is how Bukharin appears in Cohen's account. Perhaps all good biographers have this tendency, but Cohen seems to have allowed it to obscure his judgement.

Cohen started out to write this biography with a particular thesis which he wanted to prove. In the preface he writes: 'Much of what follows will suggest that by the mid-Twenties Bukharin... and his allies were more important in Bolshevik politics and thinking than Trotsky or Trotskyism. It will suggest, in short, that the view of Trotsky "as the representative figure of pre-Stalinist communism and the precursor of post-Stalinist communism" is a serious misconception' (p.xvi). This theme is linked, right at the end of the book, to the idea that Bukharinism is the underlying ideology of 'socialism with a human face' in Eastern Europe. In trying to prove his thesis, Cohen is trying to prove too much. If Trotsky was not the precursor of post-Stalinist communism, how does Cohen account for the enduring and increasing appeal of Trotsky's ideas to the youth of the world? Every time there has been a radical upsurge Trotsky's ideas have gained currency. One may not like some of the ways that Trotsky's ideas are presented, but I have not seen any Bukharinist organisation propagat-

ing its ideas recently. Any groups that owed allegiance to Bukharin faded away in the late 1930s. To say this does not in any way detract from Bukharin's merits, but it does mean that in the scales of history Trotsky weighs far more than Bukharin. For history is not made by Professors of History writing books, but by people — such as the 29-year-old Bukharin — acting it out in actual struggle. (Incidentally, I feel that only an academic could talk of Stalinist communism, there is no way these two terms can be coupled in



BUKHARIN

reality, since they stand in constant opposition to each other.)

But, it may be said, in Eastern Europe, in the 'socialist' countries, Bukharin and his ideas inspire the 'liberalisers'. Suffice it to say here that it is among the *bureaucrats* that a bowdlerised version of his ideas are popular. However, serious consideration must be given to the idea of the convergence of basic ideas between the Bukharinist opposition and the Trotskyist one, particularly in 1929-30. Moshe Lewin, in his *Political Undercurrents in the Soviet Economic Debate*, provides much evidence to support this thesis. Cohen, on the other hand, does not seriously consider this question, and this arises from his determination to 'prove' his thesis that Bukharin was more realistic than Trotsky. However, it must be admitted that any serious reading of the economic ideas advanced by both Trotsky and Bukharin in this period does show considerable agreement when faced with the excesses and irrationalities of Stalin's industrialisation and collectivisation drive.

The fact that many Left Oppositionists capitulated to Stalin at this period (1929-30) is usually taken as a sign that they thought that Stalin was adopting, albeit in a bureaucratic manner, the economic policies of the Left Opposition. After some momentary initial hesitation, Trotsky came to the conclusion that this was not the case, and remained firmly in opposition to the *whole* of Stalin's policies. And Trotsky, who for a number of years had appeared to be the radical on economic questions, was now forced into the role of moderate. It seems to me that Trotsky did this because he realised that without, as a first step, the restoration of inner-party democracy, the vastly increased tempo of industrialisation and wholesale unprepared collectivisation of agriculture presented as many dangers, if not more, than the previous snail's pace tempo. The fact that Trotsky was prepared to consider a bloc with Bukharin against Stalin, to fight for the

restoration of inner-party democracy, indicates Trotsky's appreciation of the seminal importance of an *overall*, and not one-sided, strategy of development for the Soviet Union.

In this respect it has to be considered whether Trotsky merely stood firm on his previous positions when faced with capitulations within his own ranks, or whether he came to realise that the Left Opposition had not been so homogeneous as had been (and still is) assumed? The fact that Preobrazhensky, the leading economist of the Left Opposition, capitulated to Stalin, while Trotsky remained firmly opposed, should provide some ground for re-consideration of the period and the evolution of Trotsky and Bukharin. 1929-30 presents a picture of two ships that pass in the night, both seeming to be on the same course, but this did not last.

Cohen consistently fails to come to grips with these problems, since it would tend to detract from the picture he wishes to present of Bukharin. There was a clear shift on the part of Bukharin in 1928-30, which brought the possibility of a bloc with the Left Opposition within sight. The fact that it did not take place is not only important in assessing the strengths and weaknesses of the Left Opposition, but even more so in examining the Right Opposition and Bukharin in particular. Cohen does not even attempt to deal with such problems, since for him Trotsky and the Left Opposition are merely a small band crying in the wilderness, whilst Bukharin apparently represented a broad, if diffused, opposition within all sections of Soviet society. What Cohen forgets is that the social base of the Left Opposition — the Soviet working class — has been enormously increased since 1930, whilst the social strata that the Right Opposition reflected — the small peasants — has all but disappeared from Soviet society. The Left Opposition may have been crying in the wilderness by 1930, but in the last analysis all that Bukharin could do was to cry in anguish at actions of the predatory monster he had helped to victory.

The historic merit of Trotsky lies precisely in the fact that he did not capitulate, that he was prepared to carry on a principled struggle against the Soviet bureaucracy against all odds. In the process he forged many of the intellectual weapons that are needed, first to understand this phenomenon and secondly to combat it. Bukharin's *consistent* refusal to take up the struggle against Stalin in public meant that he always had to compromise to Stalin's advantage. It was of little consequence after 1930 that Bukharin's *private* views sometimes coincided with Trotsky's *public* positions, because Bukharin never *did* anything about them, while Trotsky did.

If this review has seemed overly critical, it is because the matters dealt with are not merely ones of historical interpretation or judgement, they are central to politics here and now. And as such the omissions and failures cannot go unnoticed. This is not to say that those who are interested in uncovering the real heritage of revolutionary Marxism should not rescue Bukharin from his undeserved oblivion, but at the same time it may be necessary to rescue him from his more uncritical admirers. A study of Bukharin's writings is necessary for us to reappropriate our heritage, those that do so will be richly rewarded. But they have to study critically. Cohen's book needs to be used in the same way.

KEN TARBUCK

Some time last year the rock star David Bowie made some overtly right-wing statements in an interview. Since that time there has been a fairly uniform dismissal of his musical contribution on the left by the throwaway phrase 'oh, that fascist'.

Such a response is useless and inadequate. The relationship of politics to art — particularly in the case of one individual artist's politics — is a far more complex question than such an equation would recognise. I will show this in reference to Bowie's latest LP *Low* (RCA PL 12030 Stereo) — a record that what I shall characterise as a 'vulgar reductionist' position cannot possibly come to grips with.

Terry Eagleton has already set the tone for this discussion in his useful book *Marxism and Literary Criticism* when he said: 'What needs to be added is Marx and Engels' "principle of contradiction": that the political views of an author may run counter to what his work reveals.' He refers elsewhere in that book to the fact that Yeats, Pound, Eliot, Lawrence and Pirandello all flirted with fascism or became fascists and asks whether this means that their work should therefore be automatically dismissed.

So too with David Bowie in this day in the field of contemporary music, though of course there are no implications of comparative 'artistic worth' in the analogy. Bowie's persona and art is complex, and in particular I am not able to discuss in this article the important politico-sexual implications of some of his lyrics or his supposedly androgynous 'image'. However, it is undeniable that for a period he nurtured the ultimate in self-conscious, 'super-star' characteristics, which inevitably slipped over into a grossly self-indulgent and repulsive narcissism.

Certainly, too, his lyrics have often echoed strong overtones of a Nietzschean super-man/super-race philosophy, which was historically the intellectual precursor of fascist ideology. Nevertheless, much of his output was original and socially revealing, exposing dilemmas in gay/heterosexual relationships in an amusing and often original manner. Original too was his capacity to adopt and synthesise, sometimes in a chameleon-like manner, many of the musical strands in post-war popular culture.

The latest LP *Low*, on which he collaborates in part with ex-Roxy Music member Eno, is a whole new departure and cannot be understood by the application of political or sociological criteria alone. I would argue that in this work Bowie, despite his fairly recent overt political pronouncements (which we would condemn and attempt to discourage physically should they obtrude publicly in future) has produced something which one could justifiably categorise as 'progressive', abused as that term has been. It represents, in some ways, a significant break with the function, form and social content of most contemporary popular music and certainly Bowie's previous records.

If there were a genuine danger that popular music, as practised by Bowie and others, could be used by the forces of reaction in a direct and effective manner, then one would expect to see the increase of several features in that music. First, the use of overtly and clearly articulated vocal messages in the songs, conveying reactionary or racist themes. Second, the utilisation of simplistic compulsive rhythms to intensify the phenomenon of (passive) mass emotion, or what



Photo: MICHAEL PUTLAND (London Features International)

has been called 'mass hysteria'. Third, the build-up, through various audio-visual techniques, of the central, individual 'charismatic' super-star, divorced from any collective, collaborative musical context, to play the quasi-führer role.

What is amazing about the current LP *Low* is that almost all of these tendencies have been negated or reversed and steps even taken to challenge the whole conservative musical approach represented by the rock genre. Even the album-cover and the title express this changed stance — the *Low* of the title surely being an abbreviation of 'low-key'. Gone is the contrived and gaudy razamatuzz of many previous albums.

Furthermore, the record as a whole is obviously a collective and collaborative project with others, particularly Eno and Carlos Alomar, the guitarist. Gone is the up-front prominence of the Bowie persona, lyrics or voice — he is integrated into the production, not sitting on top of it. Compare *Low* with the schizoid, self-reverential preening of *Ziggy Stardust*, for example.

The first side of the album is composed of seven relatively orthodox-sounding rock numbers, in line of descent from his more recent, rather colourless albums.

Turn the record over and extraordinary things begin to happen. Here Bowie, in collaboration with Eno on two of the four

tracks, rides right over the conventions and form of mainstream pop into completely new fields. On the extended and most remarkable track 'Warszawa', they dispense with the orthodox driving rhythms of the other side and launch into a multi-layered electronic lament, reminiscent of (but far more textured than) Pink Floyd or Mike Oldfield. Particularly interesting is the way that Bowie's voice is used in relation to the instruments. Eno and Bowie totally reverse and re-work the relationship between the normally central, dominant vocal component and the other instruments — in a sense the music is 'decentred'. In addition, all cognitive content is taken out of the 'lyric', so that Bowie assumes an almost aboriginal tone, counterposed to the strictly twentieth-century 'backing' — which of course isn't 'backing' at all, in the conventional sense.

A central problem in rock is the imposition of a 'hierarchy' of importance between the instruments/voices, which comes down into the stage appearance itself. Eno himself has called the phenomenon 'ranking', whereby the patriarchal (sexist) form of contemporary capitalism has embedded itself into the conventions and relations between various instruments and musical components. In other words it is a culturally determined form which embodies ideology in contemporary music, not simply the lyrics — to put it even simpler, revolutionary music will have to change the dots as well as the words.

It seems to me that what Eno and Bowie have attempted on the second side of *Low* is firstly a progressive re-structuring of these central relations within music, displacing (yet still using) the human voice, and secondly a fracturing of the orthodox audio-hierarchy which maintains it. It is surely interesting (and needs to be explained) how two male bourgeois musicians (one even 'fascist') can be examining and helping to solve some of the problems that feminists and socialists must begin to tackle if a musical practice is to be forged which is in line with our social and political aspirations!

Of course, there are many other problems involved alongside these 'internal' ones, such as the complex relationships with the audience and the reduction of all such work to commodity status under capitalism. These are areas which Bowie has not shed any light on to date.

However, the turn which Bowie has taken here is completely out of tune (some would say in more ways than one!) with either his overt political utterances or the fears which the left has had about the increasingly reactionary social role he could play. There is no way that fascism could make use of such numbers as 'Warszawa', 'Weeping Wall', or 'Subterraneans'. This is cerebral music, challenging the audience into intellectual involvement and interaction with it, not passive, emotionally over-loaded acceptance.

Similarly, there is no way that such music could be used to magnify Bowie's previous, potentially demagogic, 'super-star' stage-persona — it is a clearly collective, non-individual product. This is a remarkable evolution which, although in no way self-consciously political, has very explicit 'progressive' implications, both musically and socially. It certainly validates the quotations from Eagleton mentioned earlier as applied to music, and equally certainly puts paid to the crass reduction of art to politics (which I too have been accused of) prevalent in large sections of the left.

CARL GARDNER

Correspondence

A letter from Monty Johnstone

Dear Comrade,

Your editorial remarks 'Against Monolithism' and your positive appreciation of the discussions in *Marxism Today* in your Spring 1977 issue are to be welcomed. In that spirit I was happy to see you publishing an article joining issue with my writings on Trotsky and the Popular Front.

Although of course I disagree with the arguments of the article by Patrick Camiller and will at a later stage reply to them, I consider that up to the beginning of the 'Conclusion' on page 30 it represents legitimate controversy. However I am appalled and disgusted at the so-called conclusion, which totally abandons the terrain of reasoned argument to engage in utterly unwarranted personal abuse and defamation, describing me as an 'amateur forger', a 'scurrilous intellectual swindler' engaged in 'intellectual prostitution' — and a 'shady character' (page 30). It is on a par with the worst kind of SLL/WRP character assassination and is in marked contrast to the Blackburn-Ali reply to Geoff Roberts in *Red Weekly*. It is clearly incompatible with reasoned and civilised discussion of the important points at issue.

I am not a little puzzled that you should think fit in your editorial to 'explain' such language of calumny — euphemistically described as a 'harsh tone' — 'by the provocative character of Monty Johnstone's anti-Trotskyism'. What the hell does that mean? Is 'provocation' deemed to be a generic attribute of any criticism of Trotsky in the same way as in the language of WRP paranoia any such criticism automatically constitutes a 'slander'? Or is it possible to make fundamental criticisms without being considered 'provocative'? If so, perhaps one could be told how? Actually, I am quite unable to fathom what it is that makes my latest *Cogito* article 'provocative' whereas *International* welcomed the tone and approach of its predecessor — *Trotsky — His Ideas* — and described it, much to the fury of *Workers Press*, as 'a thorough and vigorous criticism of Trotsky's ideas, based on an analysis of their content and application' which 'meticulously refuted the slanders against Trotsky's current in the Stalin period'.

Patrick Camiller's attack was apparently triggered off by a five-word quotation in a footnote at the end of my *Cogito* article referring not to the Popular Front at all but to the Second World War. Quoting Trotsky's statement that, if 'the present war' did not promote revolution in any of the advanced countries, 'nothing else would remain except only to recognise that the socialistic programme, based on the internal contradictions of capitalist society, ended as a Utopia', I argued that both this and his grossly over-optimistic predictions about the war's prospects for the Fourth International 'reflected his own impatience'. In a footnote to this I wrote that Ralph Fox, the British Communist writer killed early in the Spanish Civil War, 'aptly described this characteristic in Trotsky as the mark of "the petty bourgeois in a hurry"'. If I had appreciated

the emotional chords that this would apparently touch, I should have refrained from adding the Fox quotation, whilst maintaining my point about impatience, which I think is amply borne out by the quotations from Trotsky to which it refers.

However, a simple reading of the offending footnote quoted above shows that I did not say, as Patrick Camiller alleges, that 'Trotsky had all the features of what one "Ralph Fox aptly described...as "the petty bourgeois in a hurry"'. . .

There can be no justification at all for his statement that at this point I 'finally broke loose and felt free to heap on Trotsky one of those epithets coined in the high Stalin period', let alone for the wild and defamatory attacks on me that ensue, compared with which my use of the Fox quotation appears positively courteous.

So contrary is all this to your declared editorial intention 'to avoid vulgar polemics or slanders' and promote 'real debate' that I trust you will agree to publish a repudiation of the libellous remarks in the article's 'Conclusion', along with an apology, and an unconditional withdrawal by Patrick Camiller.

Yours fraternally,
MONTY JOHNSTONE

Patrick Camiller replies:

I am glad to take this opportunity to apologise for certain inflammatory remarks at the end of my article. It was clearly wrong to suggest that Monty Johnstone is in any literal sense a forger, intellectual prostitute or shady character. It is evidently not the case, and I never wished to imply that his method of analysis is the product of personal disreputability. The possibility that my remarks could be taken in that way was an unfortunate error on my part.

However, one term to which Monty Johnstone objects — 'scurrilous intellectual swindler' — raises a different problem. Perhaps the word scurrilous is too strong — in fact I think it is, and I will take it back. But in his letter, Johnstone repeats a striking example of his general method of distorting Trotsky's positions.

Johnstone claims to have found proof perfect of petty-bourgeois 'impatience' and 'revisionist forebodings' in Trotsky's last writings. But the context and actual thrust of the passage quoted by Johnstone are the exact opposite of what he would like us to believe. We have no space to document this fully here — readers should themselves refer to the article 'The USSR in War' contained in *In Defence of Marxism*. Let us simply note that from beginning to end it consists of a sustained attack on the then widespread idea that the proletariat is a spent historical force doomed to be submerged in an engulfing bureaucratic tide. It is thus astounding to hear Monty Johnstone using against the proletarian revolutionary Trotsky the very same term ('petty-bourgeois') which the Fourth International used as a scientific characterisation of these moods of desperation which it fought mercilessly at the time. Furthermore, the phrase 'if "the present war"...' which is 'quoted' by Johnstone is in fact separated from the bulk of the passage by a whole page!

This is Trotsky's real argument: 'If, however, it is conceded that the present war will provoke not revolution but a decline of the proletariat, then there remains another alternative...the replacement of democracy

wherever it still remained by a totalitarian regime... signalling the eclipse of civilisation.' What is this but a re-posing, in the concrete conditions of the rise of fascism and world war, of the classical alternative advanced by Marxists: socialism or barbarism? If, following the war, the organisations of the working class had been everywhere destroyed, then human civilisation would indeed have been threatened. Every child knows that that is not what happened. We know too that the colossal post-war rise of the proletariat was held back from revolutionary consummation by the cynical calculations of imperialist and Stalinist politicians at the tables of Yalta. But that is another story that Trotsky was prevented from seeing by the axe-blows of the GPU.

The main point here is that Johnstone's method consists not only of ripping quotes out of context but of distorting the sense of the quoted idea itself. Trotsky was simply spelling out the real historical basis on which revolutionary Marxists would have to abandon a socialist perspective. Is that a sign of petty-bourgeois impatience or despair? Under what conditions would Johnstone abandon a socialist perspective? Those mentioned by Trotsky, or some others?

My second general point is that Monty Johnstone's hue and cry about the WRP leaves a rather distasteful impression. For the undoubtedly slanderous attacks made by the WRP on its opponents pale into political insignificance beside the massive machinery of slander, violence and brutal torture directed by the international network of Stalinist bureaucracies in Eastern Europe and the USSR. Does Johnstone approve of its barbarities in the USSR, Poland or Czechoslovakia? I am sure he does not. Yet he backs its historical record as a tradition, and he is happy, indeed proud, to remain in the same world movement as the Stalinist oppressors of the working class. This is, of course, the result not of personal degeneracy on Johnstone's part, but of his continuing political attachment to an utterly degenerate and pernicious political tradition. And this is revealed with exceptional clarity in his whole approach to the 1930s.

It emerges too from that little 'five-word quotation' from Ralph Fox introduced at the end of his *Cogito* article. Since this appears in a general conclusion which ranges Trotsky and Trotskyism under the phenomenon of petty-bourgeois impatience, and since it refers to a book which consistently portrays Trotsky as an alien class intruder in the workers movement, the subtle distinction which Johnstone now tries to draw between having the characteristic impatience of a petty bourgeois and actually being one seems rather specious. After all, impatience is also a psychological asset in the revolutionary workers movement, and it becomes petty-bourgeois only when it engulfs its bearer in a frenzied divorce from the realities of the class struggle.

At any event, Johnstone genuinely believes that in 1977 in Britain it is possible to be taken seriously as a scholarly and sober writer on the history of the workers movement while quoting the standard opinions on Trotsky of Stalin's propaganda machine of 1933. In this, and in his distortions of Trotsky's positions, he betrays a lack of the most elementary standards of historical research — a lack which, while disturbing in any writer, becomes profoundly provocative in someone from the Stalinist tradition attempting to discuss Trotsky's struggle in the 1930s.

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