

**WORKERS'
LIBERTY**

Double issue nos 12 and 13 £1.80

Stalin's heirs face the workers



In this issue:

- The nature of the Eastern Bloc: a symposium with Robert Brenner, Martin Thomas, an Iranian socialist, Oliver Macdonald, and Frank Furedi • **Art and the Russian Revolution**
- New Times and class struggle: a debate with Marxism Today • **Clare Short on Ireland**
- The road to Tiananmen Square • **Wang Fan-hsi: Trotskyism versus Stalinism in the Chinese Revolution** • Social Democracy goes Thatcherite



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ВСПОМИНИ ТЕХ КТО ДЕРЖАЛ
ЕГО ПЕРЕД НАМИ

Letter to readers

Our last issue contained much discussion material on the Eastern Bloc, arguing against the idea that socialist transformation there can be expected from reforming bureaucrats like Gorbachev.

Since then the idea that the *working class* is the agency for socialist change has been dramatically confirmed by the near-revolutionary upheaval in China and the strike wave in the USSR. This issue covers those two developments, and also looks in detail at the lessons to be learned from the last time the working class shook China, in the 1920s.

The theoretical debate is continued with a symposium on the nature of the Eastern Bloc: workers' states, new exploiting systems, or aberrant societies with no definite ruling class at all? It is probably the most sustained attempt to confront a range of different ideas on this question since the 1940s.

Many people still identify

Marxism with Stalinism, and conclude that the left today must replace Marxist ideas, or at least heavily dilute them, with some sort of market-oriented welfare economics. We debated with *Marxism Today* and investigate why Social Democracy in many countries has turned to free-market policies.

The horrors of Stalinism have also been used to discredit revolution in general. On the 200th anniversary of the great French Revolution, conservatives have been arguing that the Jacobin Terror was the first link in a chain leading to the Gulag and Pol Pot's massacres in Cambodia. We examine the arguments.

The clearest *good* result of Gorbachev's reforms in the USSR has been a great expansion of artistic freedom there. How stable this freedom will be remains to be seen. Our article on class, culture and Stalinism is illustrated by an eight-page picture feature.

We have had to hold over two scheduled items: the second part of our interview with Eric Heffer MP, and the rest of 'The Essential Shachtman'. They will appear in the next *Workers' Liberty* (November-December).

This is a double issue because it is double-size but also because it is late. We have plenty of material and ideas for this magazine, but not much cash, and few material resources. We appeal to readers to become *supporting subscribers* (see ad below) and help us make sure *Workers' Liberty* appears on schedule in future.

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The heirs of Stalin face the workers

In China, in Yugoslavia, in Poland, in the USSR, the working class is becoming an independent force for the first time in many decades.

The strike wave that swept the USSR in July 1989, from Siberia to the Ukraine, is one of the most important events in recent history. To understand its significance we have to look at the origins and nature of the Eastern Bloc systems.

Central to the rise of Stalinism, everywhere it has taken power, was the absence of a strong, militant, organised workers' movement. In the USSR, the working class exploded with tremendous revolutionary energy in 1917 and, led by the Bolshevik party, took power. But in the subsequent civil war and the war to beat the foreign interventionist armies — no fewer than 14 of them! — the Soviet Union's economy was wrecked.

The most class-conscious and self-sacrificing workers were killed in the fighting or absorbed into the new state machine. Vast numbers of workers went back to the villages from the starving towns, where industry had ground to a halt except to service the war effort.

The Russian working class was driven off the stage of history in the course of its own immense and heroic struggle to defend its revolution. The section of the state bureaucracy led by Stalin gained power and privilege; defeated the genuine Bolsheviks, the Trotskyists and Zinovievites; balanced between the working class and the new bourgeoisie that had been allowed to grow up after 1921; and then in 1928 and after destroyed that bourgeoisie, destroyed all remnants of working-class rule, and (in Trotsky's words) made itself sole master of the surplus product.

In Yugoslavia, where local Stalinists won state power without the aid of the Russian army, the working class was tiny. Its own communist organisation had, under Josip Tito's leadership, transformed itself into a military force based mainly in the peasantry. That army/party took power in a war against the German and Italian invaders and, simultaneously, in a civil war with the Yugoslav monarchists.

They confronted the working class as a conquering — though popular — force; and they imposed on the working class, and on all Yugoslav society, a rigid Stalinist police state. The regime was modified in the years after Stalin's 1948 break with Tito, but the police-state framework remained intact.

In China events were similar to Yugoslavia. The tremendous energy displayed by the Chinese working class in the '20s, and especially in 1925-7, proves that the Chinese working class, at the head of the hundreds of millions of peasants, could have led a great revolution, the true continuator of the Russian Revolution. But the Chinese working class was grotesquely misled by the Chinese Communist Party, acting under Stalin's direct orders, into a terrible catastrophe. Then a section of the Communist Party deserted the towns, organised a peasant army, won



Soviet miner on strike

control of parts of China, gained power and authority fighting the Japanese invaders, and then conquered all mainland China. Even more than the Yugoslavs, the Chinese Stalinists confronted the workers in the towns as conquerors, though most of the workers probably welcomed the Stalinist armies.

In the areas of Eastern Europe occupied by the Stalinist Russian army at the end of World War 2, the working class was often tiny and in any case overwhelmed by the conquering force. The main partial exception was Czechoslovakia, where a mass Communist Party retained some vitality from before the war.

The Stalinist party in Czechoslovakia mobilised the working class to help it into full power, and then, after 1948, imprisoned the workers in an iron grip that was not loosened until 1968, when it took a Warsaw Pact invasion to force the Czechoslovakian workers back into the iron cage of Stalinism.

In East Germany (a relatively backward part of Germany, but very advanced compared to most of Eastern Europe), the working class had been pulverised by the Nazis since 1933, and then suffered conquest by the plundering, rampaging armies of Stalin, which treated the Germans as an enemy nation.

Men and women of the Stalinist party came out of Hitler's camps — Erich Honecker, for example, had spent 12 years in the Hitlerite camps — and formed an apparatus for Stalinist rule. Their ideas and conceptions were entirely derived from the USSR model. The working class went from one totalitarian state system to another: it is a sobering thought that the East German working class has now lived under totalitarian regimes for 56 years!

Everywhere the Stalinists took power independently, without USSR military help, they did so at the head of broad national movements for liberation and reconstruction, with a mass peasant, and at best a peripheral working-class, base. The result was a degree of nationalist legitimacy which has lasted in some cases (like China), backed up by police states, for decades.

The Stalinist organisations carried through revolutions against the old ruling classes, wiping them out as classes and sometimes wiping them out physically too. Usually, the bourgeois segment of the old order — in China, for example — was feeble and incapable of establishing its own full rule. The Stalinists replaced it, assuming the historic responsibility for developing the economy. The goal of socialism, which the Stalinist parties still emptily proclaimed, was displaced in practice by the goal and the ideology of 'developmentalism'.

The working class was also usually weak numerically, repressed by the old order, and betrayed by the Stalinists who claimed to be its class party. Instead of the feebleness of the bourgeoisie leading to working-class power through permanent revolution, with the working class at the head of the oppressed rural petty bourgeoisie, the weakness of both bourgeoisie and proletariat opened the way for a new ruling elite to emerge from the old middle classes, to take power, and to stamp its own pattern on the whole of society.

At the same time as they made their revolutions against the old ruling classes, the Stalinists carried through counter-revolutions against the working class. They denied that class even whatever residual openings for independent development there were under the old order. They deprived the working class of everything in the way of civil rights it needed to become a class for itself.

Individual workers were clawed into the bureaucracy in about the same way at the Turkish state of old recruited its janissaries from young slaves.

Everywhere the Stalinist regimes have been even more savage and implacable in their repression of any stirrings of working-class activity than they have been against other sections of society. In many countries of Eastern Europe, intellectuals have long had some degree of freedom — but not the working class.

The record shows that working-class mass strike action is the most potent weapon of struggle against the state-monopoly systems. Given an opening, it can spread like a great fire, without prior organisation. Thus it was in Germany in 1953, in Poland and Hungary in 1956, and in Poland in 1980.

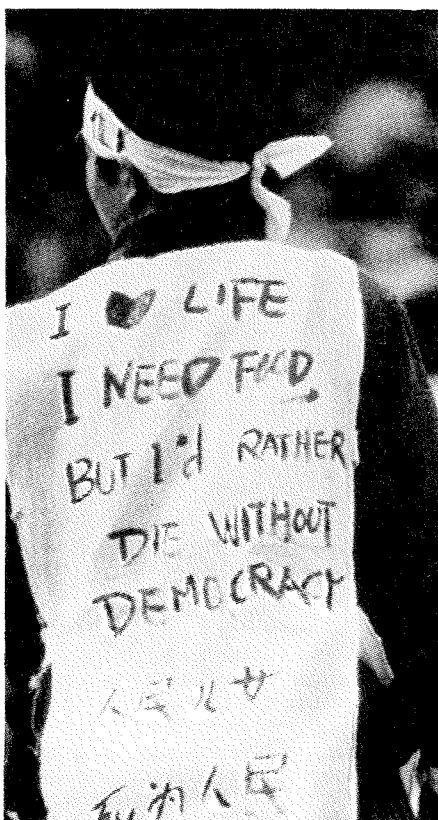
Poland and, marginally, Hungary,

remain the only Eastern Bloc countries in which trade unions independent of the state are allowed. But we can see, even in the USSR itself, the stirrings that will certainly produce a mass Solidarnosc there too.

In China, workers have organised independent trade unions. According to the accounts published by surviving participants in the student occupation of Tienanmen Square, the workers there were the most resolute in facing the army and its tanks when the slaughter began on 4 June. The free trade union activists have been jailed; the nascent free trade union organisations have been smashed, for now.

Why have the workers begun to move after so long, and why now?

Lenin argued that three conditions were needed for a revolution: that the old ruling class could not go on ruling in the old way; that the subordinate classes refused to go on being ruled in the old



Student in Beijing

way; and that the subordinate classes were organised and ready to make a revolution.

Plainly the immediate impulse to act has come to the working class from the crisis, indeed panic, of the Stalinist rulers. The same people who for decades proclaimed the omnipotence and omniscience of the ruling Stalinist supermen are now loudly condemning the system. They have stopped lying about their achievements, and admit that under state-monopoly rule their societies have rotted and stagnated.

Has there ever before been such a collapse of the morale, confidence, and coherence of a ruling class? Has any other ruling class, prepared as these state-monopoly ruling classes have been for so long to wade through rivers of blood to

stay in power, ever been so candid in admitting that it does not deserve power even according to the standards it sets for itself?

Of course they will still fight to hang on to power — as the butchers of Beijing did in June, as Gorbachev will do if he 'has' to. But their political panic, and the shake-ups produced by their economic resort to market measures to try to revive their systems, have stirred up the working class as never before.

In Poland the labour movement is in a position to demand that it should form the government, though it has left state power for now to the Stalinists. Indeed, Poland shows us the strange spectacle of a mass labour movement whose leaders hob-nob with the US President, the elected king of the foul gang of US plutocrats, and propose to replace the state-monopoly system with a full-scale restoration of capitalism!

Yet it should be only momentarily surprising. Just as we had labour movements in the West enthusiastic for what they thought existed in the state-monopoly systems, because they identified them as the negation of the horrors that they knew in the private-profit systems, so too in Poland, a labour movement pitted in bitter struggle against the particular horrors of the state-monopoly system idealises the West — not only the limited political democracy we have won here, but the whole filthy exploitative capitalist system.

In fact the big majority of Polish workers do not know what would flow from their market-oriented economic programme — the basic direction of which they share with both Jaruzelski and the powerful Polish Catholic Church.

Other workers in the state-monopoly societies will oppose the consequences of perestroika — and of Solidarnosc's programme in Poland, if it goes through — by harking back to the 'good old days' of security under the centralised state system, as marchers in China harked back to Mao.

In the USSR, the striking miners had confidence in Gorbachev; they said they wanted him to succeed with his 'restructuring' and 'openness'.

Everywhere the workers, though beginning to stir, are politically subordinate to sections of the bureaucracy or the middle class. But workers learn in struggle.

In 1970, after hundreds of strikers were shot down at the Gdansk shipyard, the Polish workers had confidence in the new party leader, Gierek, who went to the shipyards and talked to them 'as a worker, as an ex-miner'. They believed Gierek. How did Gierek's rule end? When Solidarnosc erupted in 1980.

In Poland, the working class is *politically* in thrall to the petty bourgeois intellectuals who take West European democracy and capitalism as their model and goal. Public ownership of the means of production seems to be the programme of the discredited bureaucrats; market economics is the alternative.

The workers have, as yet, no political independence. Politically and ideologically, they are (though *negatively*) still under the heel of the bureaucracy.

They are shepherded along by the Catholic Church and the liberal intelligentsia. It is as if, in Tsarist Russia, the working class had followed the programme of the liberal-capitalist intelligentsia against the autocracy, and failed to generate an independent policy of its own.

What made the difference in Russia was the struggle of the Marxists to organise a force to lead the working class for its own goals — even within what was considered by Lenin until 1917 to be a *bourgeois-democratic* revolution. That is what stopped the Russian labour movement becoming an appendage of the bourgeoisie.

That is what is lacking now in the Eastern Bloc — a revolutionary socialist movement able to compete with bureaucratic demagogues and capitalist-oriented intellectuals for the leadership of the working class. That is what is lacking for the fulfilment of Lenin's third condition for revolution — that the subordinate classes are ready and able to assume power.

In the Eastern Bloc, Stalinism has massively discredited Marxism and socialism; and so we have Solidarnosc in tow to the liberals, and Walesa, like a mirror image of the pro-Stalinist Arthur Scargill, adopting policies that go flatly against the interests of his members.

In the unfolding crisis of the Stalinist systems, the outcome will be determined by whether or not Marxist organisations can be built to help the rising working class shape its future as an independent force.

Workers learn from experience. In the West, liberal or Catholic unions have become socialist (the once-Catholic union federation in France, the CFDT, became the left of the mass labour movement in 1968 and after, and linked up with the Socialist Party). So also the members of Solidarnosc can learn from the socialist minority in that organisation.

It would be foolish to try to predict in any detail the future course of the revival of the working class in the Stalinist third of the globe; foolish too to be disconcerted by strange events like the political evolution of Solidarnosc. When tens of millions of people awaken to political and trade union life for the first time all sorts of unexpected things will happen.

Whoever benefits now, or seems to benefit, from the eruption into politics of the working class, the ultimate beneficiary will be the working class itself. The working class will learn from its own experience. That is why we can dare to predict that the ultimate beneficiary will be neither the pro-capitalist liberal intelligentsia of Eastern Europe and China, nor any section of the bureaucracy, but unfalsified working-class socialism.

Our cover illustration

Our cover illustration is an adaptation by Fleet Graphics of a painting by the

Soviet artist Pyotr Aleksandrovich. Aleksandrovich's painting 'Hour Glass' (1987) shows Stalin in place of Deng.



Salman Rushdie

Rushdie and the labour movement

In London, National Front skinheads, the sort of thugs who terrorise Asians, demonstrate ostensibly in defence of free speech against Muslims trying to root a little bit of Islamic intolerance in Britain.

Muslims must be defended from racists, the thuggish and the more subtle alike. But there is no way that the left can side with or endorse the current demands of the Muslim zealots without betraying itself completely.

Muslims are offended by Salman Rushdie's 'blasphemous' book. But the right of free speech and writing has to be the right of *offensive* speech and writing, for if no-one were offended or outraged by the speech or writing no-one would want to challenge it.

It is not so long ago that the Christian equivalents of the Muslim zealots did to their critics what some Muslims want to do to Rushdie. The Christian zealots' legal power to repress has fallen into disuse, but the blasphemy laws which the Muslims want extended to their own faith still exist and could be used again.

If there are to be blasphemy laws, then logic is on the side of the Muslims. And likewise with their demand for state subsidies for Muslim schools: why should Anglicans, Catholics, and Jews have their schools subsidised and not Muslims?

The Tories want to refuse the Muslim demands and be blatantly discriminatory. Some Labour MPs want to bow to the Muslim demands. Labour should stand against the demands of the Muslim zealots — but on a consistent and honest basis.

That can only be a vigorous Labour opposition to all blasphemy laws, a commitment to disestablish the Church of England, and a commitment to end all subsidies to religious schools.

For a democratic united Europe!

It is unlikely that Mrs Thatcher's differences with the other states in the European Community (EC) will lead to any fundamental rupturing of Britain's links with the EC, despite Mitterrand's half-threats that the EC may proceed to full monetary union without Britain.

The integration of the EC — or at least of its core nations — is such that more and more moves towards the creation of a European federal state are a certainty in the years ahead. It is inconceivable that, after 17 years in the EC, the British ruling class will exclude itself, or let itself be excluded, from these moves.

But the left is put in a dilemma by Mrs Thatcher's strident anti-Europeanism. Hostility to the EC has been a mainly left-wing cause for over twenty years now. Mrs Thatcher is stealing some of the left's clothes. Thatcher, not Kinnock, has picked up the left's long-championed cause of British sovereignty. It is Thatcher who denounces the left's traditional bogeys, the 'faceless bureaucrats' of Brussels.

True, what Mrs Thatcher objects to is the 'socialism' she sees in the EC and in such EC documents as the Social Charter, whereas the left has long campaigned against the EC on the grounds that it copper-fastens capitalism. True, Thatcher fears (relatively) pro-working-class interference by the EC, whereas leftists like Tony Benn have denounced the EC as a force that would thwart and hinder a genuinely socialist government at Westminster.

The list of neat inversions could be extended; nevertheless, Thatcher has stolen the left's anti-EC flag.

The flag which Thatcher has 'stolen' always belonged to Tories more than the left. There could never be socialism in Britain without the European working class (at least) also making a socialist society. All the smug and complacent assumptions embedded in the idea that a capitalist EC would stop social change in progressive Britain have been shown up for what they are by Thatcher's discovery that 'sovereign' Britain is so far to the right that the EC's social legislation is 'socialist' by comparison.

There never was any other sensible policy for the left and the working class than a drive to get the maximum Europe-

wide unity of the working class against the Europe-wide coordination of the capitalist classes. The idea of breaking up the limited and piecemeal economic unity the bourgeoisie has created in Western Europe, and retreating to nationalist protectionism as before World War 2, was always both reactionary and utopian.

The socialist criticism of the EC as 'a bosses' club' is valid, but British withdrawal was always a wrong and nonsensical answer. It is nonsense, however, that has lasted on the left for nearly 30 years. For nearly 30 years, sections of the left, and sometimes nearly all the left, have stood for little Britain against internationalism, for the implicit idea of socialism in one small island, for the breaking-up of the limited economic unification of Europe achieved by the bourgeoisie since World War 2.

How could such a thing happen? When the EC was formed in the '50s, the British ruling class chose to stay out. They had the Commonwealth (ex-Empire) as their international association.

But the Commonwealth rapidly faded away as an economic force, as the EC burgeoned. By 1961 the Tory government decided to seek admission. They failed. Big sections of the ruling class continued to look to the Commonwealth. The Labour Party (including many of its right wing) supported them.

But the Commonwealth orientation was hopelessly outdated, and gave way, in 1967, to a feeble Labour government attempt to get into the EC.

The CP and the reformist left opposed the attempt to put Britain into the EC from the beginning. The CP simply played its usual British nationalist card, and followed through Stalin's late-'40s decision to exploit divisions in the ranks of Western capitalism. The reformist left looked to the Commonwealth, and were also romantic British nationalists. Some, Michael Foot for example, had links with the anti-EC bourgeoisie, like the press baron Beaverbrook.

At first the revolutionary left was unanimous in denouncing the CP and the reformist left as chauvinist and retrogressive, and in calling for European workers' unity.

But then the CP and the reformist left generated a broad hostility to the EC in the labour movement. They were aided by trade union leaders who prized the cosy relationship they had with Downing Street — the seats on quangos, nationalised industry boards, and Economic Development Councils — and feared it might be disrupted by the EC.

So most of the would-be Trotskyist groups, one after the other, changed their position in the late '60s! The reasons given varied, but the result was always the same: to get in line with the dominant opinion on the broad left.

The definitive changeover of the British SWP (then IS) to being a tightly-controlled and bureaucratic sect occurred as a result of the ructions generated within the organisation in 1971 when it belatedly followed the other far-left groups. It is a sad story. Our tendency has been almost alone in sticking to the Marxist line of the early '60s.

The sight of Mrs Thatcher as the

champion of 'British sovereignty' and the scourge of the EC for its allegedly 'socialist' legislation is already hastening a shift of opinion on the left away from anti-EC nationalism. The TGWU conference this year dropped the union's anti-EC policy with scarcely a murmur.

But it is not enough to drop the old policy in embarrassment. The left should boldly slough off nationalist prejudice, learn the lessons of the last 30 years, and start fighting for a positive working-class response to the growing West European integration of capitalism.

We should fight for cross-Europe workers' unity on all levels, and for fully accountable democracy in the EC — that is, for a sovereign European parliament. That is the way towards a socialist United States of Europe.

Industrial gangsters

The docks dispute of summer 1989 encapsulates the whole history of worker-capitalist relations in Thatcher's Britain.

First the boss-controlled Tory politicians decide to do what the employers want, and scrap the Dock Labour Scheme. The protective structures the workers have won are brutally ripped down by people who behave as a conquering class pushing those they have beaten into 'their place'.

The union tries to keep within the law so that its assets will not be seized. The law forbids the workers to strike in defence of the Dock Labour Scheme, for that would be a political strike. So the union goes through the motions of trying to negotiate conditions to replace the Dock Labour Scheme with the employers — those same employers who have just lobbied the Government into abolishing the scheme.

Meanwhile militancy is being banked down and bled off. Redundancy payments are made attractive. It's a small price for the employers to pay for the profits they expect after they have smashed trade unionism in the ports.

The bosses refuse even to consider a national agreement to replace the Dock Labour Scheme. So the union ballots its docker members.

A big majority vote to strike. The bosses go to court. Their lawyers argue that the Dock Labour Scheme includes a ban on strikes which nobody has noticed in 40 years! The judge says that there may be something to the argument, and since the damage to 'the nation' of a docks strike must outweigh the damage to the dockers of postponing their strike, he grants an injunction. The union is held down for weeks, while the strike mandate expires.

There is unofficial strike action, called by the Port Shop Stewards' Committee, but it peters out. The dockers eventually accept union leader Ron Todd's decision to try to protect the union from Mrs Thatcher's skinhead judges itching to tear it apart. Rumours begin to circulate of dockers' shop stewards and other union activists meeting secretly — as in other industries — to discuss what can be done to get round the law. *They are the underground activists of a partly illegal labour movement.*

The appeal to a higher court goes in favour of the dockers' right to strike; and a new ballot establishes that the big majority of dockers want to strike for a liveable nationally negotiated agreement with the employers. They strike.

By now, quite a number of dockers, older men, those who despair of winning any concessions, have taken the money offered and left the industry. Still, outside of Wales, the strike is fairly solid.

But it is hamstrung too. 'Secondary' picketing is outlawed, and so is everything that would have helped the dockers, even at this late stage, to mount a challenging, militant confrontation. Thatcher's Britain has the most restrictive, illiberal, and employer-helping labour laws this side of the line dividing neo-Stalinist from bourgeois-democratic Europe.

The legal obstacles depress and isolate the striking dockers. The Tory propaganda mills denounce dockers who are defending their jobs, their conditions, and their trade union organisation as the 'jobs for life' boys.

As if the exploiters and parasites don't have their robbed or inherited wealth 'for life'!

By this stage, in late July, the politicians, the judges, and the media have been kicking the dockers around for months on the bosses' behalf. Now the brave port employers move in, brandishing the big stick.

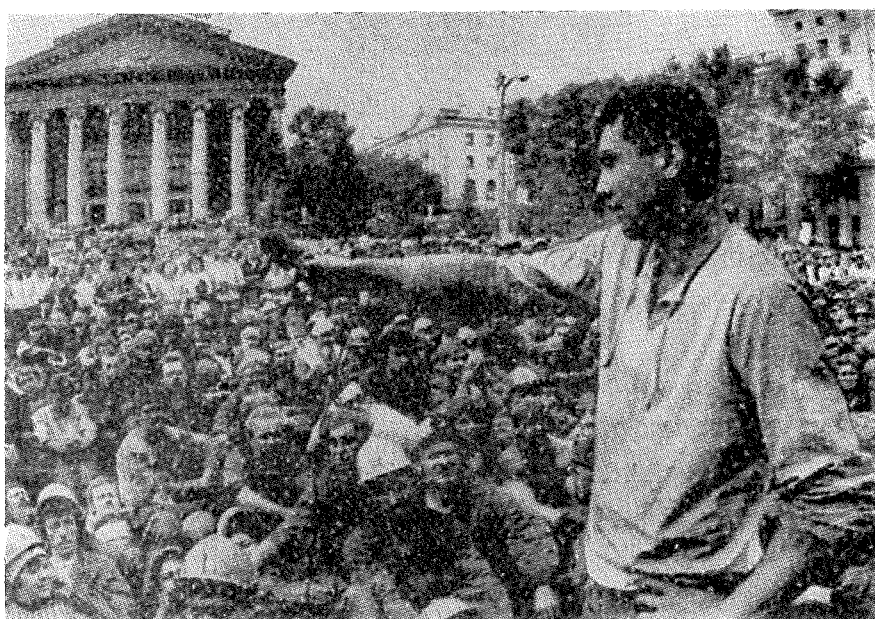
After much to-ing and fro-ing, the courts have conceded, grudgingly, that the dockers have a right to strike. 'Not so', say the employers, taking the Thatcherite anti-union legislation to its ultimate conclusion. 'You don't have the right to strike. We'll sack you if you do'.

They send out threatening letters. They sack 16 shop stewards at Tilbury. Some hundreds of Tilbury dockers are then black-jacked into reporting for work, with dock trade unionism in tatters. The majority fight on. The national docks delegate conference on 28 July decides to fight on.

More threats of sackings follow. More dockers go back to work. On Tuesday 1 August the TGWU calls off the strike.

Ron Todd put it well when he said that the behaviour of the Tory government and the employers was the behaviour of gangsters. That's what the Tories and the class they serve are — pin-striped thugs and gangsters who happen to have the law courts and the state in their hands, and the right to make up the law and decide what is legal and illegal according to what they need to beat down the workers.

The limited upsurge of wages militancy shows that the British working class is reviving. But the gangsters have won this round.



A Siberian miner addresses his comrades on strike

Towards a Soviet Solidarnosc

Out of the bowels of the earth came the worst nightmare of Mikhail Gorbachev: a strike by Soviet miners. Beginning in the Kuznetsk basin of Western Siberia just in time to commemorate the 200th anniversary of the French revolution, the strikes quickly spread 2,000 miles to the Donbass coalfield in Ukraine.

The miners were joined by others — transport workers, air traffic controllers, and even some police — in the largest workers' struggle the USSR has known since the 1920s, creating the greatest crisis since Gorbachev embarked upon 'perestroika'.

Previously, strikes had been easily repressed in the Soviet Union: kept isolated by total lack of news coverage, their leaders dumped in lunatic asylums and, if necessary, physically repressed. Within 'glasnost', superficial as it may be, none of that is possible. The strikers can be seen on Soviet TV, other workers can hear their demands. And so, as the bureaucracy has stumbled along trying to regain the initiative, the political scope of the strikes has increased.

In the new Assembly (a sort of parliamentary forum, still rather toothless), both the leadership in the Kremlin and the official state unions have come in for sharp criticism. The muttered comparison being made, by government and strikers alike, is Poland in 1980, the birth of Solidarnosc.

One of the demands in Ukraine is, indeed, for the establishment of an independent trade union — under the

name of 'Solidarity'.

There can be no doubt that these events are of immense importance.

The original focus of the miners' demands in Siberia — the strike wave began in the town of Mezhdurechensk — were on pay and conditions. Although miners earn on average twice the national wage, conditions are incredibly bad. Pit villages are beset by dreadful levels of pollution, and there is an appalling lack of basic necessities, such as soap.

An additional demand was for an end to central government control over the mines.

Very quickly, new political demands were being advanced. By Saturday 15 July the big demands coming from the Kuzbass was for a new constitution, to enshrine the various glasnost promises Gorbachev has made over the last few years — and for an end to the elite's privileges.

The strikes in Siberia were brought to an end on Tuesday, 19th, by a deal that promised better wages, more meat, sugar and soap, and improved housing: many miners live in squalid South African-style barrack huts.

There is some indication that many miners felt more could have been won.

The Ukrainian strikes, however, have proved much harder to end. By Friday 21 July, over 100 pits were idle in the Donbass. Strike committees issued a list of demands that ran to 37 points.

These include: wage increases of up to 40% for night shifts; travel time to work to be paid; more holidays; special provision for underground workers who use unhealthy machinery; recognition of various diseases as work-

related; retirement after 20 years; all miners to be provided with their own flat within 10 years (a demand that those who say everybody has somewhere to live in the USSR should take note of); soap; a reduction of the official union staff by 50%; maternity leave of three years; holiday pay; a wage increase of 60% for women working in dangerous conditions; no reprisals; no work on Sundays; a ban on punitive transfers.

This list of demands give some indication of how bad conditions are for miners.

Strikers at Chervonohrad added these demands: pre-term elections to the city council; the dismissal of the city party secretary, the chief of police, the head of the KGB, three judges and the editor of Chervonohrad Miner; the establishment of an independent union to be called 'Solidarity'; the removal of the First Secretary of the 'Communist Party' in Ukraine. Other reports have mentioned demands against environmental destruction. At the time of writing, the Ukrainian miners are returning to work, their demands met, but industrial unrest is still spreading.

Central to the strikes has been the formation of strike committees which aim to continue after their demands have been won. In Siberia, it has changed its name to the Workers' Committee and has demanded that the government recognise it as the representative of the workers.

These committees, which do indeed represent tens of thousands of workers (180,000 in Kuznetsk) pose a fundamental challenge to the system of power in the USSR. They are embryonic 'soviets'. The question arises, can the system allow them to survive for very long? Gorbachev has been quick, while saying that the strikes are in support of 'perestroika' to say that they also endanger it. And he means it.

Even if Gorbachev were to balk at repressive moves, and he goes for consensus instead, there are others in the hierarchy who talk about a 'Deng option' — meaning an imitation of the Chinese leadership's butchery in Tiananmen Square. The similarity with recent events in China is all too obvious to the Kremlin, and seems to be obvious to the miners, who gather in meetings in town squares, like little Tiananmens. That Gorbachev now makes promises does not mean he won't use the 'Deng option' if the promises don't satisfy the workers.

The quick political focus of the strike wave is a necessary result of the state-monopoly system: any 'unofficial' industrial or political activity immediately becomes a challenge to the government and the bureaucratic order.

Official statistics put the number of strikes over the last year at 100; they don't say how long they were or how many workers were involved. But the openness the bureaucracy needs to restructure its rule together with the shake up which that involves for the working class, is also the signal to the working class to act and organise in self-defence to push its demands. The

bureaucracy knows that by its concessions to the miners, in full public view, it guarantees the inevitable consequence which will be that other workers will realise they too can follow the miners' example.

Clive Bradley

Industry

Almost like Old Times

This time it's for real: after several false dawns over the last few years, industrial militancy is now back with a vengeance.

As we go to press the Port Shop Stewards' Committee has decided to battle on against a government and employers intent on nothing less than the destruction of trade unionism in the ports. The dockers have been bound hand and foot by the Tory anti-union laws; so the fight to defend the conditions of the Dock Labour Scheme was slow to start, and the odds are now weighted heavily in favour of the port bosses.

But other battles are going better.

The Tories' 'de facto' seven per cent pay ceiling has been decisively smashed by a whole series of workers, some of whom did not even have to take strike action, but merely threaten it (like the power workers who settled for 9.2% in May, after balloting in favour of industrial action). Indeed, two watershed pay deals earlier this year were reached without even the threat of industrial action: at Ford, the second stage of a two-year pay deal triggered a 8.9% increase, while at Nissan a spectacular 15% was achieved in January as the first part of a two-year deal.

Settlements like these, combined with the steady rise to 8% and beyond of the price index, the increase in mortgage payments of up to £200 per month for many workers, and the well-publicised six figure salary increases of bosses like Lord King of British Aerospace and Jeffrey Sterling of P&O, have fuelled the present upsurge of wages militancy.

Meanwhile, workers' self-confidence has been boosted by the continuing decline in unemployment and the advent of a 'skills shortage' in engineering and manufacturing.

This explosive cocktail has been completed by a drive by several key employers for the restructuring of established bargaining machinery. In local government and on the railways, moves towards localised bargaining coincided with the upsurge in wages militancy to produce remarkably solid rank and file support for official disputes.

500,000 local government workers began a programme of 'rolling' strikes in early July demanding a 12% pay rise

with no strings. This resulted from a 60% ballot vote in favour of action — the first time their union NALGO, had ever called national strike action.

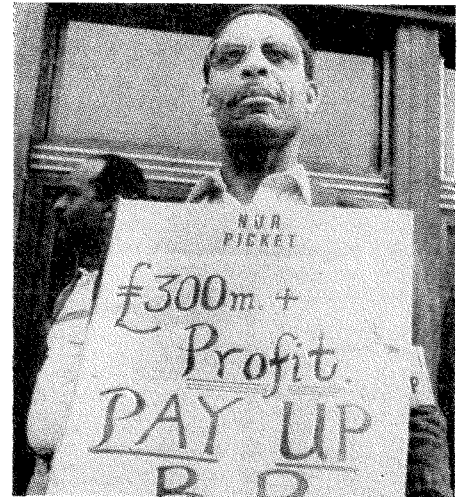
At the same time, railworkers embarked upon a series of highly effective one-day strikes in protest at an imposed 7% pay increase and the break up of their national negotiating machinery. The BR Board's 'tough guy' tactics soon collapsed in the face of railworkers' solidarity and the Board was forced to up their pay offer to 8.8% and withdraw at least some of the strings, in a humiliating climbdown. ASLEF and the staff union TSSA have now accepted this deal, and as we go to press it looks like NUR will also accept.

Socialists are rightly enthusiastic about the present upsurge in militancy and serious revolutionary organisations are, of course, making a priority of relating to it. Workplace and picket line bulletins arguing the case for the basics of industrial militancy (eg the need to build on limited weekly action, all-out strikes) are now essential. But we need to go further and give a political lead.

It is ironic that the new militancy coincides with Neil Kinnock's drive to make Labour a 'safe' alternative government for the British ruling class and to distance the party from extra-parliamentary struggle. After weeks of equivocation on the rail strike, Kinnock publicly called upon the NUR to accept the 8.8% offer. And the fact is that many strikers probably approve of Kinnock's leadership, seeing it as the best hope of ousting the Tories at the next general election and establishing a government that will not be so 'ideological' in its hostility to the working class. But what is required is a positive, working-class alternative, to both Kinnock's class collaborationist leadership in the Labour Party and the 'new realism' of trade union leaders of both left and right.

Within the unions this means laying the foundations of a rank and file movement capable of linking up struggles, placing demands upon the existing leaders and — where necessary — organising independently of them. It must be a rank and file movement that avoids the twin dangers of becoming simply an electoral machine and stage army for 'left bureaucrats' (like the CP dominated Broad Lefts of the 70s) and the syndicalist error of attempting simply to bypass the existing leaderships without placing demands upon them or challenging them politically.

The latter danger is probably the more immediate one at the moment. Given the employers' increasing readiness to use the courts and the Tories' anti-union legislation to outlaw official action and threaten union funds, many militants are looking towards 'pure' rank and file unofficial action as a way of circumventing the law and the timidity of official leaderships. The effectiveness of the unofficial London Underground strikes (especially when compared with the sorry spectacle of Ron Todd's capitulation to the courts during the dock dispute) has added to the attraction of 'pure' rank and file amongst many militants. But it is an approach that will lead to a dead end for all but the most tightly knit and well-organised groups of



Railworkers forced BR to break the Tories' unofficial 7% limit

workers. Paradoxically, the approach of totally by-passing official union structures can quite often suit the bureaucrats, allowing them to stand back from the action and evade their responsibility to provide leadership and support to the strikers.

Two demands are increasingly relevant in the present situation: the sliding scale of wages (the demand that wage agreements contain a clause guaranteeing automatic rises in line with inflation) and a charter of positive rights for workers. Both must be campaigned for within the unions and the Labour Party.

The workers' charter would include legally enforceable rights to strike and picket effectively; for unions to gain access to workplaces in order to organise; the right to stop the job whenever health and safety are in doubt; the right of unions to determine their own internal democracy free from control by the courts; and the right to employment free from racial or sexual discrimination.

Such a positive approach would directly challenge Kinnock's strategy of distancing a future Labour government from the unions and from militant union action. And it is an approach that has an obvious and immediate relevance to sections of workers aroused by the present wave of industrial struggle. Cheering from the sidelines is not enough. Socialists need to present a positive, political way forward.

Jim Denham

Abortion rights

Setback in the USA

A demonstration in Washington on 9 April this year attracted over 300,000 people from right across the USA. They were demonstrating about one of the most divisive political issues in the US, an issue likely to stay divisive in the years

ahead — the right to legal abortion.

The April demonstration was held on the eve of a Supreme Court ruling — 'Webster v Reproductive Health Services' — which undermines and threatens American women's rights to freedom of abortion.

Abortion is a constitutional right for women in the USA. It was guaranteed in a 1973 Supreme Court ruling on the case 'Roe v Wade'. An average of 1.5 million American women use their right to abortion every year, a high proportion of them young women getting early terminations (under 12 weeks). The average cost of such an abortion is \$213 (about £133), and most operations are performed in private clinics rather than big, multi-purpose hospitals.

Since the 1973 ruling the number of women dying from illegal abortions has dropped dramatically. According to a recent *Newsweek* survey, 58% of Americans would like the 1973 ruling to remain in force.

The Supreme Court ruled on 'Webster v Reproductive Health Services', a case which originated in the state of Missouri. Missouri is one of several American states which have attempted to legislate to either ban or restrict access to abortion. Of the nine Supreme Court judges (including the first ever woman Supreme Court judge, Sandra Day O'Connor), five agreed with the Missouri state's attempt to restrict access to abortion; but 'Roe v Wade' still stands, so that abortion is still a woman's constitutional right.

The new judgement means that the state of Missouri is acting within the constitution when it restricts publicly funded abortion services, and requires doctors to test for foetal viability at 20 weeks and over.

Other states have similar legislation 'on the books' and there will probably be moves soon to use them. The Supreme Court has also agreed to consider three other abortion cases over the next 12 months, and anti-abortion activists are hoping that judgements on these cases will further erode the 1973 decision. At the same time, they will be running state-by-state campaigns to take advantage of the current changes and any new ones. They are hoping that 'Roe v Wade' will be overturned altogether, and that abortion will be made totally illegal.

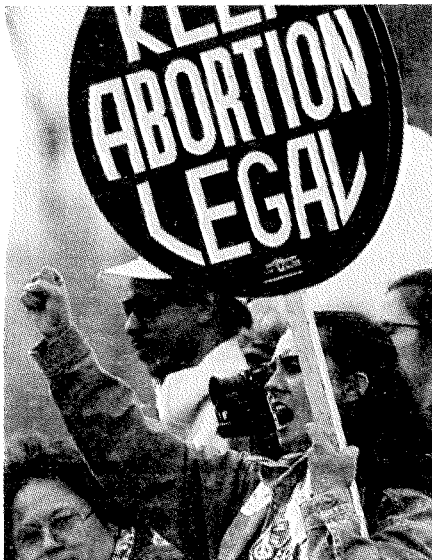
The anti-abortion movement in the US is very strong. Its supporters include ex-president Ronald Reagan and current president George Bush. Reagan replaced liberal Supreme Court judges appointed in the 1960s and '70s with right-wingers, and this encouraged the anti-abortionists as well as groups wanting to overturn 'affirmative action' and other civil rights legislation. It is likely that as other liberal judges retire (two are in their eighties), President Bush will replace them by 'pro-life' right-wingers. The probability is that attacks on women's right to choose will continue, and that those attacks will be successful.

The first people to be hit by restrictive new legislation will be poor and young women. The anti-abortionists appear to think that an all-out attack on the right

to abortion would fail right now. So they wage a war of attrition aimed at making abortion more difficult and the choice for individual women harder to make.

Anti-abortionists regularly picket abortion clinics. Women seeking abortion, or even just information, have had to fight their way through crowds of shouting and sometimes violent pickets. Some abortion clinics have even been bombed. This violent campaign has naturally made it harder for individual women to use the clinics. Some doctors have stopped performing abortions because of the constant abuse. Some clinics have closed, which means that some women have to travel further, at greater cost, to get the service they need.

If clinics and hospitals are prevented from using public money for any part of abortion services the cost will again rise. Only a few states provide public funds for abortion. Missouri and other states have recently passed laws which mean public funds can only be used when the life of the mother is in danger. Out of



300,000 marched for a woman's right to choose

17,382 abortions carried out in Missouri last year, only 90 were carried out by doctors in public facilities — and more than 1,000 women from Missouri went out of state for abortions. Missouri has also banned the use of public funds to 'encourage or counsel' a woman to have an abortion. Other states may well follow Missouri's example.

The women who rely on public hospitals are, of course, the young and the poor. They will find it hardest to raise the necessary cash to go out of the state for abortions. With no public funds, many clinics will have to raise prices, thus making abortion harder still for poor women. The restriction of access to information is even more worrying. Doctors not wishing to run foul of the law will simply have to refuse information to women who can't afford to pay for it! Now the Supreme Court's decision makes Missouri's actions legal, and there is every likelihood that other states with a strong anti-abortion movement will follow suit.

The Supreme Court has also made

mandatory viability testing (as in Missouri) legal. While it is accepted by most doctors that a foetus is only 'viable' (ie. capable of sustaining life outside the womb) at 24 weeks and above, the pro-lifers want testing to begin at 20 weeks. Ostensibly this is to allow for any mistakes in detecting the beginning of a pregnancy, but at the same time it is one more attempt to push down the age of viability as close as possible to the date of conception.

This has the effect of giving the state an alarming new role in the doctor/patient relationship, and again placing doctors at the mercy of legislation dealing with absolutes in an uncertain situation. Many may simply choose to opt out.

Viability testing too will put up the cost of abortion — for no real purpose. The main tests which a doctor can use — ultrasound and amniocentesis — are both expensive (from \$125-\$450) and extremely unreliable at 20 weeks. So the requirement to test for viability may have the effect of delaying the abortion for up to four weeks and tripling the cost. *Newsweek* estimates the cost of a 24-week abortion at \$1,200.

In fact, in 1983, only 0.8% of all abortions occurred after 21 weeks, the vast majority for therapeutic reasons. Anti-abortionists however have convinced enough people that America is full of women having late abortions for frivolous reasons, and that the age of foetal viability is dropping all the time. Both these assertions are myths, but it is the myths rather than the facts which are currently influencing legislation. The result will be more suffering for women in an already difficult position.

The anti-abortion movement is pressing for three other main changes: that all young women must have the consent of both their parents before abortion; that private abortion clinics should be as fully equipped as a general hospital operating theatre; and that women must give 'informed consent' to abortion.

All these changes are unnecessary and intrusive. 'Informed consent' basically means that women should be shown pictures of the foetus in the womb, and aborted foetuses, possibly with a mandatory waiting period as well. Women would also be told of the supposed 'risks' of abortion. Essentially, the screaming 'pro-life' pickets would move from the gates of the abortion clinic to the doctor's surgery — with the doctor forcing medically suspect information on a patient to guilt-trip her. It is an attempt to make the decision more painful for women, and to drive doctors away from abortion.

Parental consent may seem more reasonable, especially if you believe young women should have no rights over their own bodies. But in many cases it is simply impossible — if parents are separated, living away from the young woman, and so on. Girls between 15 and 17 account for 11% of all US abortions. At the moment girls must have parental consent, but they

may see a judge to 'by-pass' this law. It is this judicial by-pass which is under threat. A young woman who does not want to tell her parents that she is seeking abortion is unlikely to get much support from those parents if she has an unwanted child — but it is precisely those young women who will be denied abortion.

Finally, the anti-abortionists are pushing for new standards in abortion clinics. This will mean clinics will have to buy entirely unnecessary medical technology and pass the costs on to their patients. Up to 12 or 14 weeks, abortions are extremely safe and easy to perform. They often take place under local anaesthetic. There is simply no general need for upgraded facilities. Their goal is to ensure that at the same time as abortions are being banned from public hospitals, abortion clinics which now offer cheap facilities will be forced to raise prices beyond the capacity of many women to pay. Average abortion costs could rise from \$213 to \$750 — for no medical reason at all.

All the legislation, current or impending, is designed to reduce women's access to choices in reproduction. While the constitutional right to abortion may well remain, the price in both financial and emotional terms is being made impossibly high for many poor and young women. And thus, in practice, the poor and the young will no longer have an effective right to abortion.

Elizabeth Millward

World economy

Is it really slump-proof?

World capitalism has shrugged off the October 1987 stock market crash.

Private capitalist investment in the advanced (OECD) economies rose 11% between 1987 and 1988, after a much smaller rise in 1986-7 and virtual stagnation in 1985-6. The trend is still broadly upwards, though the US economy has dipped a little in recent months. Profit rates in the US were higher in 1988 than in 1987. Unemployment has fallen slightly in most major capitalist countries.

It's all the more remarkable since the current upswing, an upswing with continuing mass unemployment and bleak depression in many areas but an upswing nonetheless, has now continued for six years, since 1983. Four or five years has been the typical length of an upswing in recent years.

Capitalism owes its easy passage through the stock market crash to the

fraudulence of the Tories' programme of a "share-owning democracy". In the US in 1929 a lot of company shares were owned by middle-class individuals. The crash wiped out their wealth. They stopped spending, defaulted on debts, made panic sales of property, and thus cut demand for industry.

Today most shares in most countries, including Thatcherite Britain, are owned by pension funds, insurance companies and the like, not by individuals. These huge financial enterprises don't like losing millions on the stock market, but they aren't going to go bust, and their losses have no effect on industrial demand.

Another classic mechanism for a stock market crash to work through into an industrial slump is by cutting industrial investment. If the price of a company's shares falls, that doesn't hurt the company *directly* at all. But it does reduce its ability to raise money for expansion by issuing new shares. Also, stock market crashes generally go with high interest rates, which make it more expensive for companies to borrow money from banks for expansion.

The bulk of capitalist investment in today's economies seems to suffer these effects very little. The investment is mostly done by huge corporations which plan their outlays for years ahead and have a dozen and one ways of raising money. *Long-term* interest rates have risen much less than *short-term* rates over the last year and a half.

A stock market crash can produce a slump more directly by a domino effect. The crash brings down dodgy enterprises which have over-extended their credit, and the collapse of those dodgy enterprises, in turn, ruins sounder enterprises. This sort of effect is always unpredictable. It's a bit surprising that it has not developed this time — plenty of shady quick-buck men were chancing their arms in the stock market boom before October 1987 — but, anyway, it hasn't.

One conclusion from all this is that the whole stock market business is utterly parasitic. If the production of goods and services can advance undisturbed when the stock market collapses, then what purpose can the stock market serve except to give a few thousand rip-off merchants a chance to enrich themselves?

The system that serves those rip-off merchants has shown new flexibility and resilience. But what did we say at the time of the stock market crash? "Behind the Great Crash of 1987 lies the fact that in the 1980s the world capitalist system has moved into uncharted waters. Various forms of international credit, only minimally controllable by national governments, have expanded hugely. As with credit generally, this expansion has given capitalism **more flexibility — and a greater risk of sudden slumps.**" (*Workers' Liberty* No.9, emphasis added).

That problem remains. And the imbalance in the world money-moving system which caused the stock market crash remains. It could cause other crashes.

The stock market crash was triggered by fear of the dollar's value slumping in relation to other currencies, and by

perception of high interest rates remaining high (hence more gains to be made from bonds than from shares). Those developments, in turn, were generated by the US's huge trade deficit.

The capitalist upswing since 1983 has been powered by an expansion of demand in the US. The US government, US companies, and US consumers have been straining their credit to the limit to buy things, many of them imported from other countries. Now the US has lost its lead in productivity in many sectors, an increase in demand there pulls in a lot of imports.

Since 1983 the US has run huge current-account deficits — \$139 billion in 1986, \$154 billion in 1987, \$135 billion in 1988. The deficit is now decreasing slightly, but very slightly. The latest OECD estimate is that the deficit will be \$123 billion in 1989 and \$116 billion in 1990.

How can the US spend so much more than it earns? Either capitalists from other countries *lend* it the money (ie. invest in the US), or it prints more dollars — and the dollar correspondingly loses value.

Capitalists from other countries *have* invested a lot in the US. But from 1985 the dollar's value slid against the yen and the deutschmark. In October 1987 capitalists panicked from fear that the slide would turn into a collapse.

The dollar did indeed lose value in the last two months of 1987. But since then it has been remarkably stable.

No-one knows how long the US can continue to live on credit without the bailiffs knocking at the door. We do know that there are three major factors for instability in the world system today. World trade is still based on dollars — IOUs repayable in US-produced goods — at a time when the US's advantage in productivity is disappearing.

International credit has expanded hugely and in an uncontrolled way, and credit systems can collapse. And there are major imbalances — the US trade deficit and the Third World debt crisis — with no prospect of being cured.

I do not know how long these three factors for instability can be kept quiet. But if I were a capitalist I wouldn't be complacent.

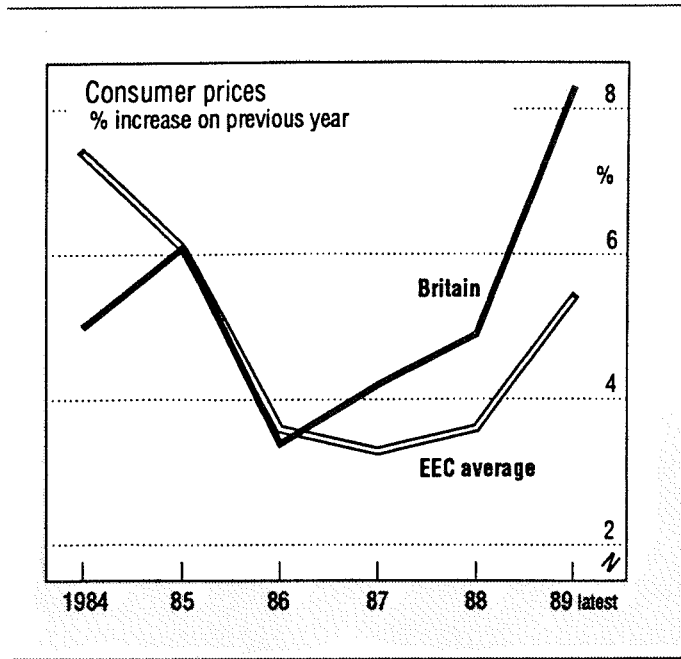
Chris Reynolds

Britain

More a mess than a miracle

Prices in Britain are rising at an average of about eight per cent a year. This new surge of inflation has embarrassed the Tory government and helped to generate a wave of industrial militancy.

Increased costs for housing make up a big part of this inflation. Mortgage



payments rose by about 50 per cent in 1988, and rents rose over 8 per cent, thanks to central government pressure on local authorities, while food prices, for example, rose only 4 per cent.

The hardest-hit, therefore, have been people who are paying off mortgages and for whom those mortgage payments are a big part of their expenditure — in other words, better-off workers rather than the rich or the very poorest. A household in the middle 60 per cent of the income range, with a mortgage, suffered an effective inflation rate of 13 per cent in 1988.

The mortgage payment increases are caused by higher rates of interest, which in turn are caused by the Tory government trying to handle Britain's trade deficit.

In 1986 Britain's trade was in balance. By 1988 its exports covered only 70 per cent of its imports. The reason is the long-term decline of British manufacturing.

Ever since the Industrial Revolution, Britain has exported more manufactured goods than it imported, while importing more raw materials and farm produce. Over the 1980s Britain has lurched into importing more manufactured goods than it exports. For a while, oil exports from the North Sea covered over the problem and kept trade in balance overall; but now those oil exports are dwindling.

The Tory government says that high interest rates will induce capitalists to place money in Britain — i.e. lend money to cover the trade deficit — in the short term; meanwhile, many of the goods being imported are machines which will set British manufacturing up for a comeback.

It is true that Britain's capitalists have been investing more in machinery and buildings. Private fixed capital formation increased 14 per cent between 1986 and 1987, and 17 per cent between 1987 and 1988. But British investment still remains low compared to investment in other advanced capitalist countries; as both effect and cause of that fact, the rate of return on capital in Britain,

though much increased in recent years, is still substantially lower than in the US, Japan, West Germany, France or Italy.

In the slump of the early 1980s, some sectors of industry *disappeared* from Britain, and they are not being rebuilt. The chances of British manufacturing making a comeback in world competition seem poor.

So the future spells slump. Interest rates cannot be pushed up much higher for much longer; and the only other way of handling the trade deficit is for the economy to slump sufficiently so that people cannot afford to buy so many imports any longer.

Colin Foster

Scotland

Stalemate on the left

The achievement of an Assembly remains top of the political agenda for most left-wing activists in Scotland, and political currents continue to eddy and flow around that issue.

Discussion now is focused on the question of whether a future Assembly should be elected by means of proportional representation (PR). The recent meeting of the 'constitutional convention' in Inverness indicated that this will be another sticking point in terms of a unified approach to the Assembly campaign.

PR is an elementary demand which socialists should have no difficulty in supporting. Yet, although it enjoys the backing of Liberals, Democrats and Greens, the Labour Party remains doubtful on the issue and has promised

to initiate an internal discussion on it.

Sceptical observers, however, may be of the opinion that this is only a delaying tactic to put off further a vigorous campaign for an Assembly.

Meanwhile, the Scottish Nationalists continue their boycott of the convention, convinced that the adamant refusal of Thatcher to tamper with the Union will rebound in their faces, leading to maximum popular support for their campaign of parliamentary disruption and civil disobedience to gain independence.

The recent victory of Labour in the Glasgow Central by-election has, however, been a blow to the Nationalists, registering a failure to repeat their Govan success.

The Labour win can give little succour to socialists, strengthening as it does the further swing of the party to the right. The virtual imposition of the Labour candidate, Mike Watson, by the NEC symbolised the problems facing socialists in the Labour Party.

Watson, a leading figure in the LCC, swung from unilateralism to multilateralism, and from a non-payer to a 'reluctant payer' of the Poll Tax to gain Kinnock's blessing. Campaigning for a Labour victory may have kept the Nationalists out, but it also reinforces the creation of a Kinnock-Gould type Labour Party in Scotland. That presents a dilemma which the left remains too weak and divided to address effectively.

Of the forces on the left, the Militant presents the most contradictory image. Jubilant at the recent success of its anti-Poll Tax Federation in terms of large rallies and demonstrations, Militant appears to be almost oblivious to the expulsion/proposed expulsion from the Labour Party of about 30 members accused of being supporters of the tendency. Whether this suggests a new trajectory for Militant remains to be seen.

Support for a vigorous campaign for an Assembly and for non-payment and non-collection of the Poll Tax remain vital ingredients of the Scottish political scene. Yet the Labour leadership, well ahead of the other parties in the opinion polls, remains complacent and somnolent. In that context, socialists are stymied and frustrated. Creating an organisational framework which gives political expression to their demands remains the major task.

As yet, both Scottish Labour Action and the Socialist Conference/Movement lack a sufficient degree of credibility, the former being regarded as potentially an LCC Mark II and the latter as a London-oriented talking shop. Clearly, both of these descriptions are so schematic as to be bordering on caricature. Both bodies are hopefully capable of further political evolution. By responding more politically to the initiatives of both organisations, Socialist Organiser may be enabled both to make a contribution to Scottish socialist politics and, by the same token, enrich its own development.

Ian McCalman

Documents

How Beijing workers organised their own union

The Workers' Autonomous Federation emerged in May 1989 as a prototype for a future independent trade union movement in China.

It arose alongside the student demonstrations which began in April 1989 calling for greater democracy, an end to corruption, a more open and accountable government and autonomous student unions.

Under the red banner of the Workers' Autonomous Federation and fluttering slogans calling for democracy and freedom of association, between fifty and one hundred workers erected a tented headquarters on the outskirts of the students' tents at the Tiananmen Square in Beijing in mid-May.

Members of the union were mostly production workers, service sector workers and worker intellectuals. Among the core members, there were steel-workers, railway workers, aviation workers, restaurant cooks, students and lawyers. Apart from Beijing, workers at the camp also came from other areas such as Tianjin, Shanxi, the north-eastern cities, Jiangsu, and they ranged in age from early 20s to late 40s. Their action was the first open attempt by workers to set up an autonomous organisation outside the official-run All China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU).

The organisers launched their action by issuing pamphlets and leaflets to publicise criticisms of the present labour policies and union structure and to spread their call for a genuine and democratic workers' movement. They set up a public address system in Tiananmen Square to explain their demands.

The organisers worked in harsh conditions, staging round-the-clock pickets in the Square under flimsy tent roofs, in the blazing heat, rain and cold, lacking sufficient food and sleep. They were bombarded from two directions by the competing loudspeakers. On the one side, their own broadcasts continued to repeat their calls, punctuated by the Internationale and other songs. On the other side, the central government public

address system blared official propaganda, repeating martial law regulations and issuing warnings to the demonstrators.

At any time during the day, hundreds and sometimes thousands of workers and residents crowded around the Federation's loudspeakers, listening to the speeches. Whenever the union managed to print some handouts (which was sporadically, due to a lack of printing facilities), the crowds rushed up to grab a copy. The demand always outstripped the supply many-fold.

Amidst the students' campaign for democracy and liberty, workers set up the union in mid-May. The founders reckoned that the fight for democracy and liberty bore relevance to their immediate interests, allowing the workers to aspire to have independent and genuine representation in policy making as well as improving their own economic position.

Members and correspondents were recruited at the campsite; several hundred workers had already signed up and received membership cards.

Before the massacre, the situation in Tiananmen Square was already growing tense. Three of the Federation's leaders had been detained by the Public Security Bureau earlier in the week. Although they were later released they knew they were under close surveillance and so remained in hiding. The other leaders were also pursued by the security agents and therefore could only appear at odd times.

During our meetings we discussed the issues and problems the union founders were addressing, their needs, and their future plans. They said they felt that their priorities were to build up their network among the grassroots workers, to consolidate the organisation internally, to propagate their ideas further, to recruit members and to develop the resources, leadership, skills and infrastructure needed for the new federation.

They saw their main obstacle as the clearly expressed antagonism coming from the government, and the government-run union movement, the All-China Federation of Trade Unions. The authorities were labelling them an unlawful body comprised of unruly elements. They were concerned that there was resistance from some demonstrating students towards workers' involvement in the democracy campaign. Some students apparently felt a need to restrict their campaign purely to students and intellectuals.

The Federation was addressing the problem of the corrupt bureaucracy and the existence of a privileged elite in China. The wide wage discrepancy between the workers and plant managers, the lack of workplace democracy, the lack of genuine workers' representation in the policy-making process, poor labour protection and working conditions and the deterioration of workers' living standards in recent years — these were among their main grievances.

On 3 June, the Federation's leaders were still talking of finding ways to legalise their organisation, by liaising with some of the relatively sympathetic

sections within the official ACFTU, and by gathering support from the democratic political parties. They insisted that they wanted to organise their Autonomous Federation through constitutional and legal means and stated that they did not oppose the rule of the Chinese Communist Party.

The Autonomous Federation camp was sited towards the north-east of the Square. On the evening before the massacre, troops were massing at that end of the Square, and it was clear that a confrontation of some sort was about to occur. The members of the union were among the most courageous of the demonstrators. Holding their union banner high, they marched to the front of the crowds facing the waiting troops. It was from this corner of Tiananmen Square that the massacre began.

Students who survived the massacre told us in the following hours that most of the representatives of the Autonomous Workers' Federation were killed as the troops attacked.

On the 8th of June, three days after the massacre, the regime announced that the Workers' Autonomous Federation, as well as the Student Autonomous Federation, were counter-revolutionary organisations. Organisers and activists in these groups would be rounded up and arrested. The government set up a special telephone hotline for informers to assist with the process of hunting down the members of these groups.

On Friday 9 June, demonstrators numbering more than 100,000 rallied in Shanghai. Among the protestors' banners were those from the Shanghai Workers' Autonomous Federation. It was reported that there were at least one thousand workers rallying behind this particular banner.

There were also reports that similar independent trade union banners were raised in Guangzhou following the Beijing massacre.

After the massacre by tanks and machine guns of the peaceful pro-democracy demonstrations held by students and workers in Beijing on the morning of 4 June, the next ten days saw a reign of terror in the Chinese capital as well as in many other Chinese cities.

On 12 June the Chinese Central Television (CCTV) showed a badly beaten leader of the Shanghai Autonomous Workers' Federation. On the same day, through the official media, the Chinese government called on official unions to mobilise workers to demolish independent workers' federations all over the country. It was reported that 80 people had already been rounded up in Beijing over the previous few days for their involvement in the independent students' and workers' federations. The military and police forces were also given orders to shoot and kill in their arrests of the so-called 'counter-revolutionary activists'.

Initially the ACFTU showed support for the students' pro-democracy movement in the capital city but, shortly before the violent crackdown, they backtracked on their position. On 2 June, the ACFTU issued a statement in the Beijing

Daily, denouncing the Beijing Workers' Autonomous Federation as unlawful, and calling on the government to crush the pickets and other activities organised by the Federation. In the statement, the ACFTU also called on workers to rally behind the government's efforts to attack and eliminate the Autonomous Federation.

At this moment, the Chinese authorities are waging a massive and brutal witch-hunt of the pro-democracy student and labour leaders. From our discussions with the organisers and workers, it is clear they were simply organising for a democratic and autonomous workers' body.

Before the massacre, one of their main objectives was to seek ways to legalise their organisation through peaceful means. They were also planning for grassroots mobilising throughout the country. When asked if they wanted to push for the right to strike (which was taken away from the Chinese people in the constitutional amendments in 1982), their reply was no, for the reason that they really just wanted to organise within the laws and constitution of China.

These workers made a historic and heroic move by raising the banner of the autonomous workers' federations in Beijing, Shanghai, Xian, Hangzhou, Guangzhou and other cities of China. Their actions marked the first open attempt by Chinese workers to fight for their right to organise independently since 1949. Their goals were radical, their will was genuine, their act courageous and their means peaceful. They certainly did not deserve to be brutally murdered, beaten and detained by the Chinese authorities.

From a report by Trini Leung (Hong Kong Trade Union Education Centre), 15 June 1989.

'Workers' inspectors must run the city'

The Permanent Secretariat of the Beijing Independent Workers' Association is calling an urgent meeting for this afternoon. In the present situation, the mission that we are going to carry out demands an especially urgent meeting. In the present situation, the members of the secretariat have perfected the leadership of the teams. They have created cells, a General Secretariat, a Propaganda Committee, a Supply Committee and a Contact Committee.

In the first place, the Association is a spontaneous organisation of workers in the capital, responding to the present situation. Its aim, along the lines of democracy and legality, is to correctly lead this patriotic and democratic movement. It welcomes every worker in the capital and each union in the *danwei* [production units] of the factories and mines into active membership in our union organisation.

Secondly, as a result of what has happened, the general assembly has decided specifically that:

1. The task of the moment is for the teams of workers' inspectors to act in coordination with the autonomous associations of the students' union in order to protect and defend the lives of the student comrades, and the stability of the social order in Beijing city.

2. While maintaining political and social peace, they will guarantee the despatch and transport of necessary products for the civil life of Beijing city, including vegetables and grain as well as everyday manufactured goods.

Special statement published by the Plenary Assembly of the Standing Committee of the Beijing Independent Workers' Association, May 21, 1989

'The working class must be the shock troops of the democratic movement'

The working class is the most advanced class; we must be the shock troops of the democratic movement.

The People's Republic of China is under the leadership of the working class, and we have the right to drive out every tyrant.

The workers have understood perfectly the need for knowledge and technology in production. This is why we absolutely reject the outrages suffered by the students and educated people.

We must not flinch from our duty to destroy tyranny and dictatorship and promote the democratisation of the state.

Unity is our strength; our unshakable conviction is the guarantee of our success.

In the democratic movement "We have nothing to lose but our chains, and a world to win."

Provisional Committee of the Beijing Independent Workers' Union, May 21, 1989

'Ensure that the workers are really the masters of the firms'

Since the middle of April, in the democratic movement of all the nationalities led by the students, many Chinese workers have shown their desire to participate in political life, while recognising that, until now, they have lacked a truly representative workers' organisation to express their opinions. For this reason we believe it necessary to set up an independent organisation to speak in the name of the workers and take up the issues that concern them. To this end, we are preparing to organise an Independent Workers' Union in Beijing and are putting forward the following proposals for a programme.

1. This organisation must be totally independent and it must be set up as the result of a democratic process in which workers take part of their own free will. It must not be under the control of other organisations and must have equal status

with other mass organisations.

2. The basic aim of this organisation must be to put forward the views of the greatest number of workers on political and economic questions, and not to be merely a welfare organisation.

3. This organisation must have a monitoring role over the Communist Party.

4. In firms and businesses which are the property of the whole people or under collective ownership, this organisation must have the right to use all the appropriate and legal means to monitor the legal representatives and to ensure that the workers are really the masters of the firms. In other firms and businesses, it must uphold the workers' interests through negotiation with the enterprise directors or through other legal means.

5. This organisation must guarantee all the legal rights of its members in the constitutional and legal spheres.

Provisional Committee of the Beijing Independent Workers' Union, May 21, 1989

Preamble to the union rules

Provisional Memorandum

Based on the initial guiding principles, prepared by the preparatory committee of the Beijing Workers' Autonomous Federation, issued on 25 May 1989

Preamble

In the entire people's patriotic democracy movement, led by the students since mid-April, the majority of the Chinese workers have demonstrated a strong wish to take part in politics. At the same time, they also realise that there is not yet an organisation which can truly represent the wishes expressed by the working masses. Therefore, we recognise that there is a need to set up an autonomous organisation which will speak for the workers and which will organise the realisation of workers' participation and consultation in political affairs. For this purpose, we put forward the following preparatory guiding principles.

1. The organisation should be an entirely independent, autonomous organisation, built up by the workers on a voluntary basis, through democratic processes and should not be controlled by other organisations.

2. The fundamental principle of the organisation should be to address political and economic demands, based on the wishes of the majority of the workers, and should not remain just a welfare organisation.

3. The organisation should possess the function of monitoring the party of the proletariat — the Chinese Communist Party.

4. The organisation should have the power, through every legal and effective means, to monitor the legal representatives of all state and collective enterprises, guaranteeing that the workers become the real masters of the enterprise. In other enterprises, through negotiation with the owners and other legal means, the organisation should be able to safeguard the rights of the workers.

5. Within the bounds of the constitution and the law, the organisation should be able to safeguard all legal rights of its members.

6. Membership of the organisation should come from individuals on a voluntary basis, and also group or collective membership in branches of various enterprises.

The road to Tienanmen Square

Jack Cleary explains why the workers and students are in bloody conflict with China's 'socialist' rulers



One of the Chinese army's victims in Tienanmen Square

For three weeks in May and June, the Chinese government lost control of a large part of Beijing. It lost control of its capital city to the people who live there, spearheaded by the students and workers demanding radical democratic reform.

They paraded with a home-made replica of the Statue of Liberty, but their anthem was the Internationale, the song of revolutionary socialism all over the world ever since the French workers took another capital city, Paris, out of the hands of the French bourgeoisie.

Like the French workers in 1871, the students and workers in Beijing were massacred by the soldiers of the threatened regime. Unlike the French workers who were armed and fought back, the masses of young people, students and workers, in Tienanmen Square were completely unarmed. They pitted the moral force of their own idealism and self-sacrifice against the regime, as if daring it to strike them down or trying to shame the murderous old men into acting differently from the way they had acted most of their political lives. Many of the students and workers took an oath that they would die there if necessary. And die they did.

When China's rulers launched their — reportedly drugged — soldiers against the people, it was as a conquering army which went through the streets shooting anything that moved, driving tanks over the young bodies, reportedly even killing unarmed soldiers who were in the square.

For the first 30 of its 40 years in power, this regime, whose victims understandably (though not quite accurately) call it 'fascist', has been a beacon for socialists throughout the world! For a dozen years, up to the mid-'70s, many tens of thousands of revolutionary youth became Maoists. And even many of those socialists who criticised China's regime admitted that it was 'progressive' and that, despite everything, the workers ruled there.

Forty years ago the Stalinist-led Peasant armies of Mao Zedong conquered the whole of China. Over the following years they created an economic and political system modelled on that of Stalin's Soviet Union.

The top layers of the so-called Communist Party owned the state, which soon owned everything; so the top bureaucrats, collectively, owned everything. They became a privileged elite. Their political system was a rigid totalitarianism. From the beginning the Chinese state displayed the features that it had taken the Russian Stalinists over a decade to develop and perfect.

All the freedoms won over centuries by the working people in countries like Britain, some of which had begun to have a flickering existence in China too, were obliterated.

There was no freedom of speech, press, self-organisation, assembly, sexuality or intellect. The working class was

regimented, controlled, forbidden to form trade unions, forbidden to organise politically, repressed when it tried to.

Over three decades the ruling Maoist elite tried to develop China's economy, which was very backward and poor in resources. They did develop the economy, mobilising and driving the working class and the farmers with a combination of physical police-state pressure and intensive propaganda. They said that they were building socialism, though in fact the ruling bureaucracy had most of the features of traditional exploiting classes.

They developed the economy; but they bungled it. The combination of bounding population growth and great shortage of natural resources created tremendous difficulties anyway. The attempt to plan and control that development from above, by an elite giving orders, with no democratic control over economic goals or economic measures, with very scanty information — this made the difficulties vastly greater.

The group around Mao went in for irrational economic experiments aimed at achieving miracles of economic development. They drove the people, who had no say in the matter, into economic adventures like the 'Great Leap Forward' in 1958. It led not forward but to widespread destruction and waste in the economy. As a result over 20 million people starved to death in the late '50s and early '60s.

The failure of that adventure led to serious faction-fighting inside the ruling party. At first Mao was forced to take a back seat. But in 1966 and after Mao, backed by the army, came back and organised the so-called 'Cultural Revolution'.

Students and others made a god of Mao, around whom there had always been a Stalin-like cult. They went on a rampage through China, destroying the culture of the past and of the world outside China, denouncing intellectuals, and preaching the miraculous power of 'Mao Zedong thought'. Though sometimes the youth got out of hand, ultimately they were controlled by the army.

To this day the Chinese higher education system is warped and stunted because it came close to being destroyed in that 'Cultural Revolution'. In 1970 there were more teachers than students in China's institutions of higher education.

When Mao Zedong died, those who eventually succeeded him decided on a radical change of course. Breaking with much of Maoism, abjuring the long Maoist search for economic miracles, they went to the other extreme: 'market socialism'.

The central controls and commands over the economy were lessened and weakened. Managers were allowed great leeway in deciding production targets and selling what they produced. Better-endowed areas were encouraged to thrive and differentiate from the rest of the economy.

The peasants were given back the land and allowed to grow things for their own profit, reaped by selling their produce at market. Foreign investment was eagerly sought, both joint state-foreign ventures and straightforward Chinese subsidiaries of international companies.

It worked for a while. Industrial pro-

duction advanced, so did food production.

The lessening of economic controls led to a lessening of other controls. The decades of intense Chinese isolationism and chauvinism came to an end. Students were allowed to study in countries like the USA. This international contact would be a factor in inspiring the revolt of 1989.

For over 10 years China has been introducing the sort of 'market socialism' that Gorbachev is aiming for. Like the Russian bureaucrats, China's rulers had no time and no thought for the best alternative to rigid state control: conscious democratic planning of the economy by the proletarians and working farmers.

Such democratic planning is the programme of working-class power in China. It would mean the expropriation of the existing bureaucratic ruling class, and the



The Statue of Liberty in Beijing

rule of another class.

Compared to the old command economy, the 'market socialist' system at least allowed the people to have some choice and gave them some method of expressing preferences, but it was both wasteful and brutal.

It led to chaos: bounding inflation; an unevenness which means, for example, that many factories are idle because of a chronic shortage of energy; massive unemployment, as workers are shaken out of industries where before they had some sort of security, in deference to the new god of profitability.

It has led to tensions between regions, some of which are comparatively thriving while others lag behind.

In short, the changes unleashed the 'war of all against all' characteristic of capitalism — but within, and as part of, a system still heavily weighed down and shaped by the gigantically inflated bureaucratic state, run by the state-party.

The state retains final control, and has power to snuff out the capitalist growths springing up in the areas it controls. The all-powerful Chinese state licensed

capitalists in the '50s and then snuffed them out, though it is unlikely to find it as easy now to stamp out the elements of capitalism that have come into existence in the last decade.

Two parallel but interconnected crises came together to give China's political and social life its peculiarly explosive character: the economic crisis and the crisis of political leadership.

After ten years of reform the Chinese economy is wracked by inflation. It has a bad and worsening balance of payments problem, which means it can't pay for essential imports. The unplanned changes in the economy have created crippling dislocations — dislocations such as the disruption of production by shortages of materials and energy, at least as bad as the dislocations produced by undemocratic and bureaucratic planning.

There is widespread and growing unemployment. In Beijing there are as many homeless people sleeping out as there are in London.

Inequality has grown. So has crime and corruption. China has a peculiarly savage way with robbers and other law-breakers: the state kills upwards of 30,000 such 'criminals' each year, sometimes after parading them around the streets as a warning to onlookers. Even South Africa is moderate by comparison, with a couple of hundred legal killings a year.

Corruption has eaten away at the bureaucracy like a virus. Many officials have become rich through participation in 'market-socialist' enterprises, others through straightforward corruption. For example, the son of Deng Xiaoping, the present leader of the Chinese Stalinists, is widely believed to have sent large sums of money to a foreign bank account out of funds collected to help disabled people. (He himself is in a wheelchair, having been thrown out of a window by 'Red Guards' during the Cultural Revolution).

The issue of corruption links the economic and political crises in China. Corruption and nepotism in China take their present form because of the monopoly of power and patronage held by the ruling party. That monopoly used to be linked to the organising function of the party in the economy and life of the country. Now it begins to seem more and more arbitrary and restrictive, both to the organisers of 'market socialism' and to the students and others who see that access to jobs is linked to patronage and family position in the top bureaucracy. They are against hereditary privileges for the bureaucracy.

The student movement began in April, using as cover the funeral of a reputedly liberal party leader sacked two years ago after the student demonstrations of December 1986 and January 1987. The students raised seven demands. The key ones were for free speech, a free press, and an end to corruption.

Students are more apt to rebel than others because they have a chance to rise out of the normal milieu and to begin to gain some overall picture of the world around them. What have the present Chinese student generation seen around them?

Maoist official ideology was egalitarian; and although the top leaders

enjoyed huge privileges behind the scenes, the ideology had some real grip. That egalitarianism has been replaced by the doctrine of dog eat dog.

But the party elite retains a monopoly of power and control over the allocation of jobs; and that elite is increasingly corrupt, self-serving, and nepotistic.

Some of the students have been overseas to study in bourgeois democracies. They see and hear of change in the Soviet Union. Naturally they want the same in China, where a decade of economic reform has gone without parallel political change and has generated economic chaos and corruption as well as growth.

The Maoist regime began not in 1949, with the declaration of the People's Republic of China, but twenty years earlier, with the defeat of the Chinese working-class movement at the hands of Chiang Kai Shek.

Masses of communist workers were slaughtered by the White Terror. After the Canton uprising of December 1927, the Chinese working class remained prostrate under the heel of Chiang. But it was still alive and capable of reviving — at least until the full-scale Japanese invasion of 1937 crushed political life in the cities.

What happened to the Chinese working class was partly determined by the actions of its political vanguard, the Chinese Communist Party. In 1927 and after that party suffered, so to speak, a three-way split.

There was the 'faction' of the massacred; the faction which eventually became Trotskyist through studying the catastrophe; and the Stalinist faction which eventually came under the sole leadership of Mao.

The Trotskyist faction remained in the cities, took as its historical precedent the policy of the Russian revolutionaries after the defeat of the 1905-7 revolution, and continued to try to organise in the proletariat. In the aftermath of the defeat, it was inevitably slow work, conducted under continuing White Terror.

The Maoist faction took another road. They went into the countryside and organised their own armies. There was little effective central state power in China; in some areas there was not even any effective local state power. The Maoists conquered a succession of territories, forming a sort of itinerant state until the mid-'30s, after which they held territory continuously.

After the breakdown of the moribund empire in 1911, China had been plagued for over a decade by the rule of the so-called 'warlords' — militarists who were local kings in their areas. Chiang Kai Shek overcame the warlords, doing deals with some of them, and forcibly united China in 1928 — just at the point where the Stalinists effectively created the most powerful of the warlord forces, a force that would eventually destroy Chiang Kai Shek.

That is the essence of it — Stalinist warlordism. For in 1927, when Chiang Kai Shek turned on the communist

workers, there was more to it than the state's butchers being turned on the people. There was a split in Chiang's own apparatus.

Many of the communists, and future Stalinists, had positions in Chiang's army. General Chu Teh created the first communist army by leading a revolt of one of Chiang's units in August 1927.

The Whampoa Military Academy, where after 1922 Chiang's Guomindang officers were trained, had been run by instructors from the USSR, and communist officers had also been trained there.

The Mao/Chu Teh group was not short of trained military personnel. They based themselves on the peasantry in some of the most backward areas of China, organised and fomented rebellion, recruited many tens of thousands of peasants into their 'Communist Party', and built up their own military apparatus, creating a local state power counterposed to Chiang's state.

The party gradually ceased to be a political selection, and became more or less identical with the cadres of the Maoist army. The Chinese Communist Party did not cease to have some presence in the towns; nor did it abjure organising the



Sun Yat-sen, founder of the Guomindang. Under Chiang Kai Shek the GMD was transformed into a military/police machine.

working class. But more and more it withdrew from the towns, until by the mid-'30s it had no influence or implantation in the towns worth speaking of.

Because of the weakness of the central state, the poor communications and transport, and the vast distances, the Maoist 'warlords' could resist the central state's drives against them. Chiang, who saw the Maoists for the threat they proved to be, hammered away at them for years without success until, in 1934, they were driven to make the year-long Long March from their base in Kiangsi north-west to Yenan.

The Stalinists suffered tremendous casualties, but they survived and, in 1935, the itinerant Maoist state established itself in Yenan, close to the USSR border. Soon Chinese Stalinism took the essential shape it would have in 1949.

The party/army ruled over perhaps 80 million people, in backward conditions. They mobilised and organised the peasants. Until 1937 they organised peasant class struggle against the landlords; but the Maoist military machine retained the power to do what Mao would describe

as manipulating the 'contradictions among the people'.

The Maoist crypto-state was organised on the model of Stalin's USSR. They replicated Stalin's purges of 'Trotskyists', and proudly called their own political police the 'GPU', after Stalin's.

But so far, this was no more than an enlarged piece of warlordism, with a durability given to it by the revolutionary aspirations of its core and the important distinction of treating the peasants as human beings, albeit human beings subordinated to the Maoist apparatus.

The Maoists were walled off in a very backward part of China, which had no cities and was poor in resources. Their prospects of conquering all China were not very good. The political situation had to change fundamentally before their prospects would change.

Chiang Kai Shek's Guomindang regime nominally controlled all of China except the 'Red' areas by 1928. The GMD had begun as an ineffective and loose bourgeois-liberal electoral alliance. In 1922 it was reorganised on 'Bolshevik' party lines with the help of Communist International (CI) experts. It became a centralised, hierarchical party — and one with its own army and its own officers' training academy, initially staffed by experts from the USSR.

The GMD was associated with the Communist International, and Chiang Kai Shek was elected an honorary member of the presidium of Stalin's CI! It was a bourgeois party, but a party of a backward and very weak bourgeoisie — moreover, a bourgeoisie tied to the landlords even more closely than the Russian bourgeoisie had been by 1917 — and a bourgeois party organised as a militarised 'combat organisation'.

It was a bourgeois political movement capable of a high degree of independence from the bourgeoisie. This was very important for what happened to the GMD and to the Chinese bourgeoisie.

The bourgeoisie did not like the GMD, and nor did the imperialist powers which had control of large parts of cities like Shanghai and Beijing. Chiang's treacherous massacre of his communist allies in 1927 changed all that. He made his peace with the imperialists and with the remaining unconquered warlords, and the GMD settled down to rule China.

What might at the beginning have been a movement whose core members were motivated by ideals higher than getting rich, degenerated rapidly into a corrupt bureaucratic apparatus for plundering China. Chiang Kai Shek himself was reputed to be comparatively honest, but his wife was a member of the rich, plundering, capitalist Soong family.

Despite the corruption, the GMD police state — as it soon became — was a formidable power. Then the Japanese intervened.

They invaded Manchuria in 1931, and set up a puppet kingdom there called Manchukuo. In 1937 they invaded the rest of China, and quickly controlled over half the country, including the cities. This was the test for Chiang.

He failed it spectacularly. A national war of defence and liberation, to prevent the enslavement of China, was the burn-

ing necessity. It was endorsed and advocated by everyone from the Chinese bourgeoisie to the Stalinists and Trotskyists. Though the GMD regime was still a formidable force against the Chinese opposition, it was almost helpless before the Japanese onslaught, unable to mobilise and organise the people. Chiang seemed more concerned to prosecute his ten-year-old war against the Chinese Stalinists than to defend China. Chiang was increasingly discredited.

In 1935 the Stalinists had made the turn towards Popular Front politics made by the Communist Parties everywhere. Now they called for a national front against the Japanese. This became an increasingly popular demand as the Japanese cut through China. It found echoes within Chiang's own army and party.

On the border with the Stalinist-held territories, the GMD officers made a private truce with the Stalinists. Chiang came to put a stop to it and was made prisoner by his own officers, who were now working closely with the Stalinists. After consulting Stalin in Moscow, the Maoists decided to release Chiang on condition that he agreed to an anti-Japanese alliance with the CP's 'state'. He agreed, and the second 'United Front' period, 1937-46, began.

The Stalinists made huge concessions — on paper. They would accept Chiang as head of state, subordinate their army to his high command, dissolve the rural 'soviets', and cease being hostile to the landlords. But in fact they made few concessions in substance. They retained their own armies and their own control of those armies, whatever was said. In effect it was an alliance of states, with the Stalinist state keeping its de facto sovereignty.

The initial result was to stiffen the resistance to the Japanese. But the corrupt GMD increasingly tried to get out of the firing line by way of local accommodations with the Japanese. The CP increased in power, strength, and credibility with layers of the people of China, and the GMD was weakened, discredited, and rendered more decrepit as a ruling force.

Even the bourgeoisie was alienated. The GMD now used the state, which it 'owned', to pillage and expropriate sections of the bourgeoisie, going far beyond the previous corruption.

Backed by the USA, which had advisers in China, and indeed had soldiers there during World War 2 and until 1946, the bourgeoisie organised the 'Democratic League' in an attempt to regain direct power. But the Democratic League was smashed up by the GMD police state, and its leaders driven into exile in Hong Kong. Most of the bourgeoisie had been eliminated as a political force.

The decrepit GMD 'party-state', hated by intellectuals, bourgeois, peasants and workers alike, faced the vigorous Maoist 'party-state', whose standing was high with large sections of all those classes and which organised the peasants as its base everywhere it went. The Maoists took much of the credit for the Chinese resistance to Japan, and they said (sincerely or otherwise) that they wanted to continue the alliance with Chiang after Japan surrendered to the US and Britain in 1945.



Chiang Kai Shek (front left) with his generals, American and Chinese

Chiang launched a new civil war in 1946, throwing million-strong well-armed armies against the numerically inferior forces of the Stalinists. But his regime was even more rotten now than it had been before 1937, when it had failed to destroy a much weaker Stalinist movement.

Whole armies went over to the Stalinists, taking their equipment with them. In 1948 the Stalinists occupied major cities, returning there in force for the first time in 20 years. In 1949 the GMD regime, led by Chiang, fled to Taiwan, where it rules to this day. In October Mao declared the People's Republic of China.

Symbolically, Mao's armies surrounded the cities and conquered them. Even Chiang Kai Shek had used working-class risings to capture cities like Shanghai in the '20s. Not Mao. The workers were strictly told to stay at work and not to strike or take any action against the employers.

Symbolic too was what the Maoists did to the grave of the first secretary of the Chinese Communist Party, Chen Duxiu. Chen had carried out Stalin's disastrous policy in 1925-7 against his own judgment, observing CI discipline, and then had been scapegoated for the catastrophe. He became a Trotskyist, was jailed by the GMD, and died in 1942. The triumphant Stalinists overturned and destroyed his gravestone.

Chinese Stalinism came, so to speak, out of the mountains and the wildernesses fully formed and able to take control of society. It had its model of society — Stalin's USSR. It camouflaged its rule by including remnants of the bourgeoisie in its governments. For seven or eight years it allowed the bourgeoisie to flourish as they had long ceased to flourish under Chiang, and then bought the capitalists out, giving them managerial jobs and 7% p.a. on their capital. The Chinese state was still paying this 7% until 1969, and resumed paying in the 1980s.

For 20 years, through many tortuous manoeuvres and zig-zags, the Maoist leaders had been fighting tenaciously to overthrow the old order. (The pseudo-Trotskyist argument that the Maoists were forced to take power by 'the pressure of the masses' is utterly baseless). The Maoists had also, in that time, been shaping, augmenting, steeling and perfecting

the instrument of rule of a new class of state bureaucrats.

The resulting socio-economic formation was characterised — in many ways like the ancient Chinese empire — by the preponderance of the gigantic state machine and its political control over the economy. Through that military-political control over the economy, it was able over decades to engage in wild experiments in 'social engineering', completely outside the control of the masses who bore the cost of it in their lives and, for millions of them, in the loss of their lives.

But, though the elite could crudely control the people and the economy, they could not at will escape China's backwardness and paucity of natural resources. Their attempts to do so by seeking economic miracles only added to the difficulties. The latest zig-zag, towards market economics, has provoked new convulsions, which are far from over.

On 6 July 1989 there was a general strike in Beijing. There have been strikes in other cities. Workers have organised independent trade unions — and suffered terrible repression.

The Stalinist troops surrounded Beijing, as in 1949. Then the cities were passive or welcoming. Now the cities were vibrant and alive, rejecting the Stalinist state power. As if by a miracle, the Chinese nation has come back to autonomous life. The iron tombstone of the Stalinist regime has lost its power to hold it in stillness.

The regime had no authority in Beijing, nor in many other cities. Probably the regime still retains support in the countryside. The farmers have had a serious degree of self-determination restored to them in the last ten years. They have had the benefits of a radical land reform carried out by the Deng regime, and many of them have known far greater prosperity than in a generation.

Even so, the legitimacy of the regime has been seriously shaken with large sections of the Chinese people. They will not believe the regime's lies about what happened. A whole generation of students have been made into bitter critics and enemies of the regime. They will be a revolutionary leaven throughout Chinese society, despite the Stalinist reign of terror.

The students have organised independent student unions. Some workers organised independent trade unions; the leaders of that movement were among the first to be arrested, even before the massacre in Tienanmen Square. Almost certainly some underground organisation will survive.

Whereas Russian Stalinism rose on the grave of the October 1917 workers' revolution, the Chinese Stalinists led a revolution. As a result of that the Maoist regime had great credit with the people, despite its bungling and its repression. It was a powerful nationalist force which had restored self-determination to the Chinese people and unified China. It was a regime whose members were not individually corrupt, though the ruling elite

was a privileged class.

All that credit has been exhausted over the last decade. Individual corruption has eaten into the party and the state machine. A process comparable to the degeneration and corruption which rotted the GMD has progressed very far in the Chinese Stalinist polity over the last decade. The old Jacobin egalitarian ethos which Maoism provided for the masses (though the elite did very well for themselves behind closed doors) has given way to a new ethos of self-enrichment.

Only a few have got rich. The resulting damage to the standing of the ruling party has been massive. Now its open resort to mass terror must surely destroy what remains of its legitimacy.

The long historical episode of Chinese Stalinism in power as the leader of a great nation-reshaping revolution is over. The drive of the people to act for themselves and to slough off the carapace of the all-powerful state has been demonstrated mightily.

The Chinese workers have come from being a crushed and atomised mass, ground under the state, to be a mighty force. The natural weapon of the workers in the Stalinist states is the mass strike. It was the weapon in East Germany in 1953, in Poland and Hungary in 1956, and Poland in 1980. It made its appearance in China in May and June 1989. Nothing will ever be the same again — however long the reign of terror lasts at its present intensity.

Their experience of struggle will give great encouragement to the Chinese masses in the battles they face against the effects of the economic chaos created by the combination of bureaucratic tyranny and market economics. Whatever the bureaucracy does, whichever way it turns, the economic chaos will be immense. If the free market is allowed to go as it is going, many tens of millions of workers will become unemployed. But to restore centralisation will be difficult. All the conditions exist in China for a series of major working-class struggles.

In Poland a mass independent trade union, Solidarnosc, emerged in 1980 in a mass strike movement; it was the result not alone of the immediate conflict between workers and rulers in the strikes of summer 1980, but also of a long experience — the semi-revolution of 1956, the strike movements of 1970 and 1976. In those struggles the women and men who built Solidarnosc in 1980 and after gained experience and clarity.

We cannot know how long such a process will take in China, but we can be certain that it is already underway.

The reappearance on the political stage of the Chinese proletariat is also the right time to draw a balance sheet on those socialists who, for many years, accepted the present butchers of the Chinese workers as the protagonists in the Chinese workers' revolution.

In the 1940s, the survival of Stalin's

system in the USSR and the expansion of Stalin's empire into central Europe, together with the creation of autonomous state-monopoly systems by revolutionary Stalinists in Yugoslavia and China, threw the Trotskyist movement into an immense and prolonged crisis. Incoherently still hanging on to the working-class socialist programme of Trotsky, the Trotskyists responded to the survival and expansion of Stalinism by saying that it was the spread of world revolution across the globe in a 'deformed' way.

The argument had echoes from a century earlier. In 1850-1 the Communist League, for which Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels had written the *Communist Manifesto* in 1847, was convulsed by a division which led finally to a bitter split.

The division was about the European revolutionary movements of 1848-9 and the conclusions to be drawn from their defeat.

Marx declared: *"We tell the workers: If you want to change conditions and make yourselves capable of government, you will have to undergo fifteen, twenty or fifty years of civil war. Now they are told [by the opposing faction in the Communist League]: We must come to power immediately or we might as well go to sleep."*

The word 'proletariat' has been reduced to a mere phrase, like the word 'people' was by the democrats. To make this phrase a reality one would have to declare the entire petty bourgeoisie to be proletarians, i.e. de facto represent the petty bourgeoisie and not the proletariat. In place of actual revolutionary development one would have to adopt the revolutionary phrase."

Willich and Schapper, Marx's opponents in the Communist League, insisted that immediate revolution was still on the agenda. In somewhat the same way, the Trotskyists of the late '40s responded to the defeats of the working class East and West by asserting that it was still the epoch of revolution. Anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist revolutions were being made; so they had to be working-class revolutions, even though they had not been made by the working class and they 'seemed' very far from any of the old ideas of socialist revolution.

For China, the Trotskyists were led by this sort of reasoning to identify the Stalinist 'Communist' Party as the agency (for now, and in a deformed way) of the working-class socialist revolution. The Maoists had made a revolution; it must be the socialist revolution they had made, albeit in a deformed way.

If Stalin had dug the grave of the Russian Revolution, Mao had led the Chinese Revolution to victory, though unfortunately he had bureaucratic tendencies. All that Marxists could do if they were not going to be 'normative sectarians' was face the facts and offer advice and friendly criticism to those who were actually leading the revolution. They wrote letters to the Central Committee of Mao's party which, as late as 1960, began 'Dear Comrades...'

Working-class democracy would of course have been better than Mao's bureaucratism, it was said, but that was for the future. Indeed, the cunning of the World Revolution would ensure its

development in the future. Trotskyists could and should help along the work of World Revolution; but they could not counterpose themselves to the real revolutionary process by calling on the Chinese workers to fight to overthrow Mao, or advocating a new workers' revolution. Even a call for the sort of supplementary ('political') revolution which Trotsky had called for in the USSR after 1935 (and which the post-Trotsky Trotskyists continued to advocate for the USSR) would be sectarian for China.

For nearly 20 years after Mao conquered all of mainland China in 1949, the mainstream Trotskyists, led by Ernest Mandel and Michel Pablo (Raptis), refused to accept that the Chinese working class would have to act independently to overthrow the oppressive Stalinist state. The Maoists were — for now — the agency of the real revolutionary process. Mandel and Pablo gave immense political and moral credit to them. When the Maoists organised the 'Great Leap Forward' in 1958-60 — and tens of millions starved to death in the consequent economic chaos — the Pablo-Mandel press published self-evidently impossible statistics and balance sheets from the Chinese government as proof of the wonders such a progressive regime could do.

In 1959 the Chinese government brutally took full control of Tibet, which had been brought back under loose Chinese jurisdiction in 1950 after half a century of de facto independence. The Trotskyists backed the invasion as a progressive extension of the Chinese revolution.

Now the Chinese working class has reappeared on the political scene, to confront the Stalinist butchers who rule China. It marks the end of an epoch. It sheds a cold light on the would-be socialist politics that, for a prolonged period, accepted those Stalinists as the agency of socialist revolution in place of the proletariat.

Like a grotesque parody of the Willich-Schapper faction, the mainstream Trotskyists in the late '40s and early '50s refused to recognise the scale of the defeats suffered by the working class at the hands of both the capitalists and the Stalinists. They maintained their belief in the proletarian revolution by accepting *something completely different* as representing that revolution — in a deformed way, and for the time being.

Willich ended up as an officer in Abraham Lincoln's Union army during the US Civil War (Marx also supported Lincoln, of course); but it is not recorded that Willich or Schapper or their friends justified their 'perspectives' by gross and quixotic delusions about the world around them as the Mandel-Pablo current did and do.

There were deep reasons, of course, for the confusion which led so far astray people who were sincerely devoted to the international proletariat and who did their best to uphold some of the ideas of revolutionary socialism. Those are outside the scope of this editorial. But the reappearance of the Chinese proletariat is the right time to draw a balance on the nonsense which has passed for Trotskyism for so many years.

Social democracy goes Thatcherite

Neil Kinnock's applause for the capitalist market is part of an international trend. In many countries, social democracy has gone 'Thatcherite'. Ruth Cockcroft explains why

Much post-war economic growth has been through protectionism and nationalisation. Limited state control and planning has been on the agenda not only for Labour governments since 1945, but also for such right-wing governments as De Gaulle's in France.

The clearest model of state economic planning is the USSR, which was able to carry through a massive programme of heavy industrialisation; but more limited versions of such state planning have been very common.

In many countries, most notably in the 'Third World', but also in Europe, economies have been developed by state capitalism and intervention. Franco developed Spain by incorporating almost the whole of industry into the state and a policy of extreme isolation and autarky. In return for virtually guaranteeing their jobs, workers were denied trade union and political rights. So both left and right governments have adopted interventionist strategies.

However, with the growing crisis of capitalism, such economies have become unproductive, inert, bureaucratised and inflexible. They have been unable to adapt to the modern demands of the capitalist world economy, based as it increasingly is on new technology and communications, rather than the traditional heavy industries developed under nationalised economies. A new response, therefore, has become necessary.

For decades Stalinism and the Keynesian economics of bourgeois economic management have been the major influences on the politics and ideology of social democratic labour movements: now this ideology is beginning to be rejected and Labour parties like Britain's are attempting to create a new strategy and approach to politics.

There is a fundamental crisis of ideology and direction in the labour movement. Rather than adopting a rational plan for genuine socialisation of the nationalised industries, social democratic parties throughout the world have turned back to free-market economies.

The Lange Labour government in New Zealand, for example, has dismantled tariffs, imposed regressive taxation policies and engineered a major redeployment of the workforce through redundancies, privatisations and



General strike in Spain against 'socialist' government

unemployment. There have been massive attacks on public services, and nine major nationalised enterprises have been floated on the stock market.

The Lange government has consciously adopted and spoken of a Thatcherite project, and has openly taken on board the Thatcherite notion of "rolling back the frontiers of the state". The Communist Party-led New Zealand Federation of Labour (TUC) has agreed to go along with this economic restructuring.

The basic principle underlying these tendencies is austerity, a Thatcherite zeal for "penny pinching", and the notion that labour costs have to be driven down in order to free the "entrepreneurial spirit" and offer incentives to the rich to invest.

Lange's Labour Party is one of four ruling social-democratic parties that have lurched drastically towards free-market economics. The others are in Australia, France and Spain.

The make-up and history of these parties is not uniform. The French Socialist Party has the support of the CFDT trade union federation, which is the second largest federation after the CP-controlled CGT. From 1972 onwards, the SP's membership grew rapidly as left-wingers joined who had been radicalised in 1968. In the '70s it adopted a radical programme under pressure from the left. The programme included

a commitment to workers' control, and declared that "to control the government is not to take power, we must avoid bureaucratic and technocratic deviations and mobilise the popular masses through workers' control and councils."

Since 1981, however, under the pressure of a steadily right-moving Mitterrand presidency, the French left has collapsed; as a result the sociological make-up of both the left and the party has changed.

In none of the four parties is there a coherent left grouping.

The Australian Labour Party has a history and structure similar to the British Labour Party. It is based on the trade unions. As the Hawke government has pursued its right-wing policy, the party has been rejected in droves by the left. The left has dispersed into green, anti-nuclear and single-issue campaigns.

All four countries show a pattern of decline of the left, decline in working class membership of the social-democratic parties and the building of a new middle-class and white-collar base for the parties. Indeed, former Gaullist ministers like Jacques Delors have joined the Socialist Party and have moved rightwards towards monetarism and consensus. The working class has become increasingly demoralised and the bourgeoisie has been bolstered up.

The French CP is in decline, losing

both members and its base in the CGT. And this cannot be taken as the working class rejecting Stalinist 'socialism' in favour of more radical answers, for the Trotskyist movement has not experienced a corresponding growth. There is little evidence of a major shift in the working class from Stalinism, Eurocommunism and social-democratic reformism to Trotskyism, though in Spain the Trotskyists made some gains from the school students strike.

The fundamental problem for all these governments has been incomes policy. All have exploited their special relations with the working class to squeeze concessions, and have been able to do that without the strife generated by Thatcherism.

The Accord (social contract) in Australia was heralded by big business as a major success. In all these countries there has been a decline in real wages. The Accord is now blamed, however, by, amongst others, the *Financial Times* and the *Economist*, for low foreign investment and for the intractable relationships between the governments and the unions, and for maintaining a rigid labour market.

There are contradictions in what Hawke has had to do in order to keep the unions under control. Electricians struck in Queensland and the right-wing state government attempted to seize the union's funds. The Hawke government blocked Queensland's actions and strengthened arbitration and conciliation procedures to counter this open union-bashing. This is the contradiction in this sort of policy.

In Spain, the UGT, the union federation linked with the Socialist Party, was for a long time complicit with the cuts. Since then there has been an upsurge in class activity. Since the re-election of the Socialist prime minister Felipe Gonzalez in 1986 there has been an increase in demonstrations. Madrid has been brought to a standstill on several occasions, with working farmers joining industrial workers and students on the streets. On 14 December 1988 there was an eight million-strong general strike.

Although Gonzalez has attempted to tie the UGT to his administration, his policies have led to unrest. Indeed, the general strike was prompted by one of his youth labour schemes (similar to YTS). Redondo, a union leader, told Gonzalez on television that his problem was the workers, whom he would be unable to control. Gonzalez was unable to reply.

The UGT's demands were for "socially responsible policies" — raising of pension levels, unemployment benefit, a minimum wage and abolition of the scheme. Gonzalez was able to postpone the strike by offering to negotiate with the unions, but then put the scheme in the budget. The UGT then was torn between its leaders' desires to maintain good relations with the state, and the growing radicalisation of its rank and file, coupled with the fear of workers moving to the CP.

In New Zealand, Roger Douglas, the Treasurer, was sacked by Lange for forcing the pace of change too quickly. He was scapegoated in the face of growing

labour unrest and recession.

So free-market social-democratic governments are well placed to exploit their relations with the working class and introduce monetarist policies, but they are unable to prevent major build-ups of unrest and 'Winter of Discontent' scenarios after the numerous disappointments. Hawke is said to be haunted by memories of what happened to the last British Labour government.

All of these governments have also been able to create vast pools of 'flexible' labour, poverty-stricken and available for the most menial jobs. However, there exist no mass movements of the unemployed and no riots on the same scale as Brixton or Toxteth. Unlike in the '30s, where unemployment grew steadily, under this restructuring unemployment seems to be long-term and relatively level.

In addition to this 'underclass', the middle classes seem to be in disarray. Australians have held militant rallies against the Accord, but traditional right-wing parties have faced decline and disorientation, where 'Labour' parties have come to power with their policies. In France this has allowed the growth of a fascist party. Le Pen now controls a minimum of 10% of the French vote.

Have the social-democratic centre left and the traditional right crossed paths and exchanged traditional roles? No. The right-wing in Spain makes a lot of propaganda about how it can understand the working class being on the streets and the general strike, and the need for socially aware policies. The restructuring, however, is the result of an organic need of capitalism, and ultimately whichever bourgeois party is in power, it will be forced to carry out similar tasks. In Britain, the Tories are in power, whilst the Labour Party looks inept. Such is the case in other countries, but in reverse.

In addition, some radical policies have been introduced. New Zealand, for example, has withdrawn from the ANZUS military alliance and become a nuclear free zone, much to the annoyance of the USA. France has abolished the death penalty. However, the real progressive content of these governments has been nil. There has been little investment in the economic infrastructure which would allow for real growth in the future, even within capitalism. Much of the strife in these countries has been around the education system — where they are also cutting back. In France, Chirac was forced to back down by massive student demonstrations. Similarly, there is little investment in road building, or transport.

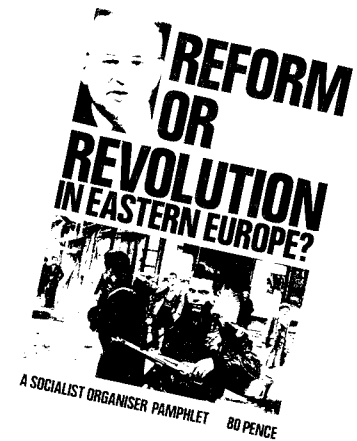
These social-democratic governments have big problems. Gonzalez is at loggerheads with the unions still. In Australia, the government has found itself limited by the Accord. In France, some of Mitterrand's ministers have been exposed for insider dealings.

The extent to which the revolutionary left can grow out of these contradictions is hard to assess. Certainly the CPs have declined, and this should leave space for Trotskyists.

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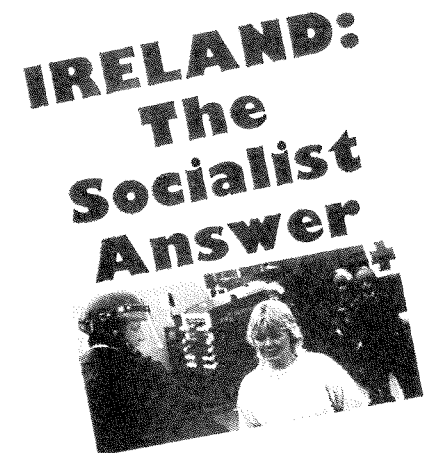
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New Times or class struggle?

Mark Perryman, from the editorial board of the Communist Party magazine *Marxism Today*, and Alan Johnson from *Socialist Organiser* debated at the Workers' Liberty summer school in July 1989

Mark Perryman

If I was a 'conspiracy theorist', which you'll soon discover I'm not, I could think that I was being set up — I'm sure that's not the case — because in the Chair's introduction to the session there are a number of phrases used: "In place of the old class struggle, diverse alliances; dispel class struggle; working class

fading away".

I want to say quite clearly, right now, that I'm not going to debate the preposterous proposition which says 'farewell' to the working class, because it is a proposition that has never, and will never, be put forward in *Marxism Today*. So, let's get that one out of the way.

What we are saying on class is that class is the starting point of our politics, not the end point, and that class, like socialism, is itself problematic. It's not

the beginning, middle and end of the argument. Unless one accepts that class is itself problematic, we're not talking about politics, we're talking about trench warfare. It's like trying to fight the Second World War as if you're doing the war games of Napoleon of the 19th century.

I find it very interesting that virtually the whole of the far left, be it Socialist Organiser, Socialist Worker, or Living Marxism, have chosen 'post-Fordism' as the way into discussing 'New Times'. They've chosen the economic way into that group of ideas, and one could choose a whole different range of ways; we could be debating post-Modernism, what we term 'the politics of identity', or 'the politics of choice' — a whole range of different ways in — yet you, like so many others on the far left, have chosen the economic way and that says something about your politics.

I want to deal with post-Fordism as a way into discussing the crisis of political parties. So I'm going to deal with post-Fordism relatively briefly and schematically. I'm going to concentrate more on post-Fordist *consequences* for the political and, more specifically, for the revolutionary party.

Just to start off with some of the statistics: a third of our present workforce are now working in offices; a third of the Gross National Product comes from the distribution sector; and, since 1960, 2.5 million jobs have been lost in manufacturing. So, there's clearly a shift going on.

Fordism, the precursor to post-Fordism, can be typified by four characteristics: standardised production; mass production; scientific management; and assembly line production, the flow-line. Those four characteristics have four consequences: mass consumption; protected national markets; vulnerability to falls in demand; the mass worker.

Post-Fordism, on the other hand, is first of all an economic system which has been revolutionised by information technology to conquer the problem of supply and demand.

I'm sure some of you shop at

Sainsbury's, so you may be interested to know how this has had an impact on Sainsbury's. Every evening at Sainsbury's they receive details of the sales, all 12,000 of its lines, from the check-outs at each of its shops. These are turned into orders for warehouse deliveries for the coming night and replacement production for the following day. With computerised control of the stock for the shops, transport networks, automatic loading and unloading, Sainsbury's flow-line, make-to-order system has conquered the Fordist problem of stocks.

Secondly, there's been a fragmentation of the mass product. Sainsbury's in Islington gives you an absolutely brilliant example of this. If you go to the Sainsbury's in Liverpool Road, by the Angel, you'll find there pitta bread, the widest range of mineral water you can imagine in your life, a whole range of Greek food, taramasalata, hummus, and so on. If you go to the Sainsbury's down on Holloway Road you won't find any of those exotic products. Class is alive and kicking among Sainsbury's customers.

Thirdly, you have the move from economy of scale to the economy of scope. I'm sure you've all heard about what they used to say about Model T Fords — "You can have any Model T you like, as long as it's black." Well, now just remember the Paula Yates ad (I can't remember which car it's for). She goes through all the different colours — orchid, rose, yellow, purple, anything you like, not only the body, the dashboard could be a different colour to the bonnet, the bonnet a different colour to the doors, the doors a different colour to the roof, and so on; you can have anything you like. So it's a movement from economy of scale to the economy of scope.

Linked in to that we have the role of innovation within this economic system, with design being a key area of employment. If you like, it's shifting from the era of keeping up with the Joneses to being different from the Joneses.

Now that all can sound quite exciting. It can sound like the era of innovation, creativity and variety. And it certainly jars with the puritanical and moralist tradition which is as endemic in the far left as in the Labour right and, I suppose, the Communist Party in between. But I want to make it quite clear that we're not celebrating post-Fordism, we're engaging with it.

Robin Murray, in his article on post-Fordism in *Marxism Today*, quotes a British worker working in a Japanese, very post-Fordist factory in the North East: "They want us to live for work; we want to work to live." So, they're creating 'quality circles', whole new ways of working within a factory, but it's still based on an extremely oppressive system.

Another aspect of post-Fordism is the new relationship between core workers and part-time workers.

But within post-Fordism there's a constant resistance as well as acceptance of that system. You have, particularly since 1968 — '68 being a key point in this — development of craft movements, alternative plans, workers' co-ops, workers' plans, and so on. There's a plurality of contestations of post-Fordism.

Because Fordism was the era of mass production, it was at the same time the era of the mass party, of mass politics. Post-Fordism changes that. Before I say something about the broad consequences of this for revolutionary organisations, I want to make a point about Trotskyist organisations in Britain.

To me there are two crucial dates in the development of the post-war Trotskyist movement in Britain. First, 1956, when there was the most serious split ever in the Communist Party. 10,000 left the CP virtually overnight, over the question of the invasion of Hungary. The CP at that time agreed with that invasion. Then in 1968, you saw tens or hundreds of thousands involved in revolutionary politics, but not involved in revolutionary organisations.

Between those times — '56, '68 and '89 — the total numbers actually involved in those organisations which could be termed Trotskyist has never exceeded 8,000. Now there's clear evidence of the stagnation, if not decline, of the SWP, the eclipsing of Militant as a significant force on the far left of the Labour Party, the RCP suffering yet another split over Ireland, and stagnating around about 500, and your own tendency — well, we won't go into your problems, I'm sure you can talk about that yourselves.

I don't make those points in idle gloating. I think there's a bad tradition on the left of never being honest about your own organisation, never having any humility. When I joined the CP ten years ago, it had something like 25,000 members; we've now got in the region of 8,500 members — I won't give you the precise figure! We had a significant split in 1987 with the Stalinists on the *Morning Star* and we had a real problem reforging and renewing our organisation. The traditional strength of the CP in the trade union left has suffered. The real growth point for the CP is the influence of Marxism Today — I think you recognise that, otherwise presumably you wouldn't be having this debate.

There is a real crisis of the political party. This is also true of the right and centre. Even the Greens will find this. It is a crisis of the party form itself.

What is needed is a new conversation between the left and society. It's like conceiving of society as a party — I don't mean political party, I mean parties that one enjoys in the evenings — no-one really wants to talk to us, and very often, because of our culture, we find it very difficult to talk to them. And that conversation is central to revolutionary politics because, I would say, the defining characteristic of revolutionary politics is mass politics. Unless you are about mass politics you are about the politics of sectarianism and the ghetto.

There are six reasons why the party is in crisis and all of those reasons are drawn from the fact that we are living in the beginnings of a post-Fordist era, which our politics — I include my own — are only beginning to come to terms with.

Firstly, we have seen over the last 20 years, the vast expansion of what we mean by politics. This is most crucially explained by the women's movement slogan, which should become much more than a slogan, "The personal is political". The realm of

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politics has moved far beyond what boys, men, used to traditionally define as the political.

Secondly, there is a recognition across the left that there is a changed role for the state and the problem is that we are dragged down by the baggage of Labourism which continues to uphold the Keynesian, 1945 Beveridge consensus that the welfare state is A-OK and there's nothing really to worry about; you can just go back to defending the health service, having comprehensive education as it's always been and so on, everything will be all right.

Thirdly, we see the increasing internationalisation of politics. It isn't just about 1992 and EMS, it's also about forging a new relationship between the north and the south in the world.

Fourthly, there is a need to create a culture where new thinking is welcomed within the left. I've always found it absolutely ironic, but if you come up with new ideas you're accused of being a revisionist on the Marxist left.

I would have thought if you could engage with Marx, Lenin, Engels, Trotsky, Gramsci, Luxemburg, and bring their ideas up to date, that should be welcomed. Instead, revisionism is seen as the bees knees — as far low as you can get.

The right has occupied the intellectual high ground for the last 20 years. That's undeniable. It's not because of Rupert Murdoch, or whoever owns the *Daily Mail*, it's because they've been able to set the *intellectual* agenda and take us to the cleaners.

Fifthly, we've seen the fragmentation of constituencies. As I was saying at the beginning, class is the starting point, not the end point of politics, and class is itself problematic in exactly the same way as gender is, as race is, as sexuality. It's a myth that there are homogenous blocs in society which are not given with fragmentation. That fragmentation is being accelerated under the impact of post-Fordism and post-Modernism and a number of other pressures.

And, sixthly, there are changing polarities in politics. Exactly where does one place the Greens on the political line, left or right? Certainly sections of them, represented by Sarah Parkin, you would clearly put on the right. There are other sections — the Association of Socialist Greens, and those associated with the Socialist Conference — you'd easily pigeonhole on the left. But the vast majority do not occupy a clear position on that line.

Similarly, within the Labour Party the key division now is between the modernisers and the traditionalists. And the modernisers are not always from the left or right. It's very difficult to place them into those pigeonholes. Some people find it easy, but that isn't the way we're going to move forward.

And so, in the face of that crisis in the political party as an organisational form, we need a new political language which is very foreign to our traditional political culture. It is a language which takes risks, which is about uncertainty, which is about doubt and which is about the one thing the left is most scared about — compromise.

Labourism is failing because of its wholesale failure to modernise. It is trapped in the quagmires of the past. On the other hand we have the traditional Leninism of the far left which is exemplified in one staple form in the regimes of Eastern Europe — inefficiency, corruption, inequality, centralisation, environmental despoilation. The tragic massacre of the last month in Beijing, as your organisation should know above all others, was not an isolated example of Stalinist repression. It was just one more, wasn't it, in a litany.

Trotskyism has traditionally been a dynamic force. That's where its rationale has come from. I wonder if it's going to be able to, in the new times which we are beginning to enter, to remove itself from the mindset of certainty and actually have the guts to take risks with its politics. I hope it will, I believe that it will, but that's open to question.

Alan Johnson

I entirely agree that there's a desperate need on the left for a political culture in which ideas can be debated seriously in a democratic form.

Socialist Organiser has had its own experience over the last five or so years of trying to raise Marxism up to the level of the new problems posed by the latter half of the 20th century: such issues as the development of modern imperialism, and how precisely we approach the national question at this time. We have been meeting indifference and hostility and demagoguery right across the left. So we agree on the need for a political culture which allows for real debate.

But part of that political culture has to be the old saying that who says A has to say B, and I won't agree with your view that the Communist Party still holds to class as being central. As somebody said, the politics of Marxism Today is the "politics that dare not speak its name".

It is often left to writers in the bourgeois press to say things clearly about the left. I have an article written by Edward Pearce, writing in the *Sunday Times* — or 'Ed' Pearce when he writes in *Marxism Today*! — and he says: "What a pleasure it is these days to converse with the Communist Party of Great Britain, who are becoming full members of the democratic mainstream. But if the party is to be candid with itself, it will have to honour Eduard Bernstein, the first revisionist, who prophesied the 20th century in the 1890s." I think that is a substantially more honest and accurate assessment of the trajectory of Marxism Today than Mark Perryman's. I'll try to prove that, not just assert it.

The idea is that 'New Times' and 'post-Fordism' mean such profound economic, social, cultural and political changes that almost everything we once held to be true is no longer true. Central to that idea is the notion that 'New Times' decouples and pulls apart the working class from the project of

socialism. That's the core of 'New Times' politics.

Martin Jacques said it 12 months ago: "To have any chance of success the movement of opposition must seek to embrace not only the centre, but also the wets and, for want of a better expression, the post-Thatcherite wets like Michael Heseltine in the Tory Party."

That is the political context, the framework, in which Mark and people like Mark are urging us to respond to 'New Times'.

There is an immediate contradiction: you say to us that you're engaged in the only real genuine dialogue with the 'new social movements' — of feminism, the peace movement, etc — and yet you propose an alliance with Heseltine, the man who sent the troops in to smash up the Molesworth peace camp! Now that is a circle that can't be squared, and I think it is representative of a whole number of circles that can't be squared in the Marxism Today package.

What they offer is a particular interpretation of the changes that are happening in capitalism at the present time, and their implications, used as a means to justify and 'explain' the need to abandon class politics. It is an attempt once more to lead the labour movement into the old class collaborationist 'Popular Front' politics which the CPs have had, with few interruptions, since 1935.

What I'm trying to do here in the debate is three things: **one**, to talk about some of those changes in capitalism and dispute the idea which, I think, is at the core of what you're saying, that socialism has been de-coupled from the working class as a project for the liberation of humanity.

Secondly, I want to talk about the political project of the CP today, which I think is basically this:

- to demoralise, defeat and isolate the socialist left, what you call the 'fundamentalists'.

- to help recreate the Labour Party as a safe, stable pro-capitalist party, that is, a Labour Party which is capable of going to the third stage, which is forming a broad alliance with the Democrats, the Greens, Michael Heseltine and, of course, the CP itself.

Thirdly, I want to say a few words about the 'solution' they propose at the end, about which I think there is a thorough-going utopianism.

Mark makes a massive oversimplification of the old world he describes as 'Fordism' and of the new world he describes as 'post-Fordism'.

For instance, take the notion that branches of production are becoming smaller in scale, that workplace size is declining, etc., that mass production is now at an end, and that we are now moving to a new kind of production based on the small scale. Most of the German chemical industry is concentrated in three massive plants which employ 50,000 workers each. Vehicles, electronics, arms and food — the key, core sectors of capitalist production — are still concentrated in big factories.

Another fact: Fordist production was

never the norm in Britain. Take the car industry in Britain: less than one third of British manufacturing used assembly lines, and only half of them were ever mechanically paced. It's an enormously more complicated picture.

You talked about diversity and, citing Sainsbury's, philosophised upon the greatly increased choice of pitta bread and Greek food. I'll quote what somebody else said about it: "It's true that Islington consumers can get their hands on Greek yoghurt more easily these days, but only because it's no longer manufactured in Cretan villages, but in a giant factory in Athens."

Yet Marxism Today's Stuart Hall tells us how he walks around a supermarket and realises that there's a Thatcherite subject in all of us when he looks along the shelves and sees the enormous array and choice of goods. He becomes hypnotised by all that. But he's seeing everything from the *consumption* end of capitalism. That is to ignore fundamental developments that are taking place in production. There it is still true that the kind of flexible specialisation and diversity that you talk about is dependent upon — still — mass consumption inside the working class, and mass production methods.

The restructuring of capitalism is a fact, but it is enormously more complicated than it's talked about by those like Marxism Today, who want to use the changes taking place in capitalism now to argue for their old 'Popular Front', anti-working class politics. Politically, they saw the working class off long ago; 50 years later they fondly imagine capitalism is seeing it off sociologically for them!

New technology has had an impact. But in 1980, there were still more people keeping books by hand in America than there were workers in every single computer industry there.

That is not to deny the fact of development and change; it is to say that the simple notion that we had 'Fordism' in the past, and now we have something else, 'post-Fordism', completely crudifies, distorts and misrepresents the developments that have taken place in the working class.

You imply that 'Fordism' was a form of production in which trade unions developed easily, that working class organisation and power grew out of Fordism mechanically, almost as a matter of course. Take a British factory like Ford of Dagenham, for instance. You know how Dagenham was organised? The Communist Party tried to organise Dagenham and got beaten back. The Trotskyists tried to organise Dagenham and got beaten back. It was an enormous, protracted struggle to organise the trade unions inside Ford Dagenham, and at the end of the day it was the Ministry of Labour in the Second World War which imposed trade unionism there! That's how they got organisation at Ford.

So it's not true that once upon a time we had workplaces that were easy to organise for workers, and today everything is so difficult and incredibly different, and the working class can no longer organise itself to be a collective

aspiring to change the world.

The notion of core and periphery workers is also a very problematic one, because the assumption is, again, that there was once an enormous homogeneity in the Fordist industries; that there was a roughly similar range of skill levels, and thus it was easier to develop trade unions and the spirit of collectivity: and now everything is changed or changing, there is a fracturing, a breaking-up of the working class into 'core' and 'periphery'.

There is some truth about these ideas, but we have to separate the sense from the nonsense. For instance, Henry Ford's own policy — the policy of classic 'Fordism' — was to create precisely a flexible workforce based upon a core of workers and a manipulable, unorganised, part-time, contracted-out periphery. This was a problem for those who organised Ford workers then. It's a problem now, but it is no new problem. At Ford Halewood, for instance, there has been a restructuring battle over the last three or four years on the shopfloor — an enormously protracted fight.

The kinds of workplace organisation that are emerging out of it are to do with more flexibility; workers can no longer stay on the trim line, they've got to go to the press shop if they're told to; there's much more flexibility across the plant. Small autonomous work groups are being put together there, that's true, but most people who look at it see that the potential working class collectivity at work is *bigger* out of those kinds of production.

In fact the capitalists are very worried that, suddenly, they can't split the workforce, section by section. They've got to move them around the plant. The old kinds of demarcation based on job control were never simply an unambiguously good thing for workers. They also split them up into sections, and sectionalism to a degree came out of it.

So there are a whole series of changes and they are far more complex, I think, than Mark's picture of them. We can't glibly conclude that Fordism leads somehow to working class unity, and post-Fordism not only to working class disunity, but to the destruction of the very possibility of the working class organising itself into a force that can change society.

That the manufacturing workforce has declined is undoubtedly true. But the capacity of the working class to organise and fight is not confined to manufacturing workers alone. Even if it were, in Britain today, about one quarter to one third of the workforce is still manufacturing workers. You know something? In the years 1968 to 1974, when a strike-wave of enormous proportions flared right across Europe, the proportion of manufacturing workers in the workforce of Italy, France, Germany and the rest was the same as it is now in Britain. The structure of the class we've got now is very similar to the structure of the class in the '60s and '70s when there was this enormous strike-wave. Think about that!

A lot of the ideas coming from Marxism Today are very Anglo-centric, or Euro-centric. In the world as a whole there are more industrial proletarians of the classic kind now than at any time in human history. There are millions and millions of us all over the world; we are growing in support — that's the actual development looked at on a world scale.

You put it to us now as if it's an original idea, that capitalism has spread its wings and operates on a world scale. But it's 60 years since Trotsky managed to smuggle 'The Third International after Lenin' into the Comintern discussions, insisting on precisely this idea as the cornerstone of revolutionary politics, that you must start from the world economy in working out your political outlook and programme!

Capitalism always restructures because it is a dynamic system based upon competition. The competitors have to improve their production, so they invest in new technology, they develop new ways of doing things. Every time they do that, in Marx's words, everything that is solid melts into air. So old regions that were the heart of the working class decline, new regions arise, greenfield sites don't remain greenfield sites for ever. Milton Keynes may be a safe haven for capitalists for now, but as more workers go there and industry becomes concentrated there, it will become no longer a haven for capitalism.

The real heart of the working class is its social relationship to capital. The essential thing is not a particular trade, or a particular cultural attribute, but a social relation between capitalists who own and control the means of production and workers who have to sell their labour power to those capitalists if they are to live in this system, and whose exploitation is thus the source of the profit and upon which the entire system depends. Now it's either/or. Either that is still the fundamental relationship in our society, and within that system of labour-capital relations we have got a process of restructuring, which, of course we need to analyse and understand; or something fundamentally new is happening and the working class, because it has lost or is losing its central place inside capitalist society, is no longer able to act as a class to create a new society. Either/or!

I want now to come back to Martin Jacques and Michael Heseltine. Jacques' basic argument is that the crisis of the labour movement is so deep and the ruling class offensive so bad that we must forget about socialism — for the foreseeable future anyway — and settle for a 'popular front'.

The effect that that's had on the left has unfolded in two stages. First of all we had the stage where they talked about the 'third road' — that is still what is being said now whenever it is a left-wing audience: 'between Labourism and Leninism we have the third road: detach Kinnock from the right. Don't press Kinnock, give him some breathing space on the left so he can move into it. Let's have a participatory left, the modernising left that he talked about'.

But in fact the right detached Kinnock

from the soft left, then Kinnock dragged most of the soft left in his slipstream. Solidarity, the right-wing organisation of the Labour Party, has announced its own disbandment because it says, and with good reason, its job has been done and, by and large, it now sits on the front bench. What is the CP's verdict on that New Model Labour Party? The verdict in the new CP manifesto is this: "The first signs of modernisation are appearing with the Labour Party Policy Reviews, moves to extend inner-party democracy and the Social and Liberal Democrat document..."

I am astounded! Where is this extension of inner-party democracy? There must be many people here who want to ask you where it is, because they'll want to go and claim some of it! Right now most of them are fighting battles to preserve what little democracy remains in the Labour Party. So that passage in the manifesto I can see as nothing else than an attempt to crawl to Bryan Gould and ignore every objective development concerning inner-party democracy in the Labour Party.

You want to have an alliance with the likes of the Democrats to move away from the old bureaucratic Labourism. But that's another circle that can't be squared.

David Marquand often writes in *Marxism Today*. He's one of the theoretical leaders of the Democrats. What is his verdict on what has happened to the Labour Party?

"There can be no doubt that Labour has broken with the insular fundamentalism of the late '70s and early '80s. It has become another European social-democratic party, committed to the EC and a mixed economy. Give or take the odd detail here and there, Labour has now embraced the revisionist social democracy of the '60s and '70s, the social democracy for which Gaitskell fought, Crossman campaigned and the Gang of Four left the Labour Party."

The Labour Party has returned to Harold Wilson's bankrupt politics of 1964. The Democrats — apart from what they themselves stand for — laud that development and say it's a wonderful thing that Labour has moved rightwards. You've got a big problem telling us that that's a genuine modernising development! What's actually happened is that the Labour Party leaders have resurrected the old Labourism of the '60s and '70s. It couldn't answer the problems that capitalism posed then, and it can't answer the questions capitalism poses now.

So what you get when you read through the 'New Times' manifesto, and listen to Mark speak is, I think, a series of very strange pictures; it's like when you enter a hall lined with mirrors which distort everything. It is almost as if you can see them talking out of two sides of their mouths at once.

For instance, by your role inside the labour movement you bolster the right-wing of the Labour Party. Yet you tell us that it was bureaucratic Labourism that led to the labour movement's crisis

in the first place. You praise the new Labour Party internal democracy and then you tell us that you're for the Labour Party ending its old culture of refusing to have a dialogue with the 'social movements'. Well, argue that with Black Sections, argue that with women's sections, argue that with the people in Vauxhall who've just had a candidate imposed on them because the Labour Party wanted a safe white candidate.

The actual role you play in the movement is in flat contradiction with the good left phrases you offer us here, and which we can all agree with. You talk of a Labour Party that needs to mobilise, campaign, participate — yet you back up the leadership which sets its face like flint against any such mobilisations and campaigns — think, for example, of the role Neil Kinnock played in the miners' strike. There's a whole set of contradictions there.

Two brief points. One is on the trade unions: the idea that the trade union development of the '60s and '70s was just sectionalist, greedy militancy — which is what Eric Hobsbawm says — simply misses the whole point about how socialism is achieved.

In the '60s and '70s you had workers who were fighting, struggling against the restructuring of capital you were talking about. By and large they were defensive struggles; workers wanted to say no to the developments that took place. The question for socialists is: what particular development could have related to that, hooked into it, generalised it, politicised it?

The Labour government of the time despised that militancy, attacked the stewards' movement, did their best to beat that working class creativity down. You play the left face of that broad current which dismisses working class militancy as a squalid nuisance when you support politicians like John Smith, Bryan Gould and the rest of them. Like you, they dismiss it as sectionalist and greedy. In your attempt to theorise your attitude here in terms of Leninism, you falsify and distort the whole Marxist notion of economism: nothing in Lenin — or Marx — condemns workers because naturally they defend their material interests. Nothing in Marx or Lenin dismisses the economic class struggle as irrelevant to socialism — quite the opposite. The question is, can Marxists key into that struggle and raise it to the level of adequate working class politics? But you take economism to mean that those defensive struggles are in themselves wrong and greedy and all the rest of it: you simply miss out on the whole dynamic of the elemental class struggle!

The last point is this: the deep, deep utopianism of the strategy outlined by the CP. The document says: "It is vital that opposition parties meet their responsibility to society by settling differences and agreeing priorities." That means that Michael Heseltine, the Greens, the Democrats and the Labour Party have got to get together and settle their differences for the sake of the *nation*. The word 'society' is actually a figleaf for the real word, 'nation'.

That is, at best, Jo Grimond Liberalism: the notion that class conflict can be ended by political parties! It's the bureaucratic notion that the classes have been replaced by parties and they can somehow get together and settle differences from 'on top'.

A whole series of problems are, in the CPGB document, 'solved' in this way by the imaginary future 'progressive alliance': "These issues can be resolved in a progressive way. They will not usher in socialism but would mean that society would move onto a more sustainable pattern of development" — this is under a coalition government, remember, of the parties that we have talked about. "The global and national ecological crisis could be solved" — remember all this is under capitalism. "The internationalisation of production, power and politics, the crisis of social cohesion, care and compassion, the crisis of male society, the future of work, the modernisation of the economy..." — it doesn't specify whether it's capitalist or whatever, but capitalist it is — "the future of British democracy, the future of the British nation," etc. can be dealt with.

There is a deep-going utopianism about the idea that a coalition government could solve the problems. It is a return to the idea — and this is where I think you are precisely post-Marxist! — that capitalism is a system which can be made to work for the workers. The whole debate comes down to something as simple as that.

There's a section in the manifesto where it says, let's get away from this old notion that the market and the plan are somehow counterposed to each other: comrades, they are just two technical ways of doing things. Now you cannot get any more post-Marxist than the notion that the market economy doesn't structure into it and carry with it specific social relations which carry with them exploitation, inequality, lack of democracy, poverty — but that's how far the 'Communist Party' has gone.

To sum up, I think you have moved — whether you want to say it or not — decisively away from the notion that the working class can change the world. You now believe that the changes in capitalism have taken away the proletariat's capacity to do so. For the prosecution of the class struggle you want to substitute a deeply utopian and reactionary political project to tie the working class and the Labour Party into a new Popular Front broad class alliance. 'Post-Marxist' indeed!

Mark Perryman's reply to discussion

The first thing that Alan did which is quite traditional in debates on *Marxism Today* was to use a quote from, as he put it, the bourgeois press. So he chose Ed Pearce from the *Sunday Times*.

If somebody in the *Sunday Times* says something nice about *Marxism Today* and the Communist Party, it doesn't worry me an inch. If they say something nasty about us, it

doesn't worry me an inch. If they say something good, I use it; if they say something bad, I won't use it. But don't try to portray my politics by what someone else says about me. Similarly, I wouldn't go to the SWP to find out what Socialist Organiser says, I'd go to Socialist Organiser. I think we should be fair on one another.

The point that it's not a simple change from a Fordist world to a post-Fordist world — I completely agree. Let's use another trend, Modernism and post-Modernism. You could drive around London and you could see a very new building which is post-Modern, Camden Sainsbury's. Drive a bit further, you see the Lloyds building in the City of London. You couldn't get more Modern than that, but they were both built around the same time. So it's not a simple shift from one era to another era, so there's no disagreement on that.

The point that post-Fordism will create good times for the left: yes, that is a possibility, it's also a possibility that it will create even more desperate times than we've faced for the last ten years. It's for us to grasp the opportunity.

Alan was doubtful about changes in the workforce, and he talked about international developments. But *Marxism Today's* main, almost exclusive, area of coverage is domestic British politics, so where we talk about changes in class, we're actually talking about changes in the domestic British working class.

Alan made use of the quote "All things solid melt into air", which recognises that capitalism is a dynamic force. Another favourite quote which is, if you like, a watchword for Marx was, "Nothing is constant but change", which points to the need to rethink and review politics constantly.

Alan seemed to think that we were very soft and pro-Kinnockite on the Labour Party. Well, just a couple of quotes on the Labour Party from the 'Manifesto for New Times': "Despite repeated attempts at renewal, Labour as yet appears incapable of illuminating a vision of social progress which matches the needs and aspirations of the New Times." Again: "Labour's crisis is not a set of election defeats, its crisis is its failure to modernise alongside the social and economic forces which are creating the society of the 1990s. Most of the Labour Party seem stuck in the quagmire of the past." They may be different criticisms than you want to make of the Labour leadership, but they are as critical.

The point about sectionalism, that we're too critical of sectionalism and portray wage militancy as greed: we're simply putting forward that wage militancy is not enough, which I think is a revolutionary Marxist position.

You say that we support Gould, John Smith, etc. Just because we have them in our magazine doesn't mean that we necessarily support them. We want to engage with them, we want to be in the mainstream. I would have thought a successful Workers' Liberty is where you're not debating with Mark Perryman but where you're debating with Bryan Gould, or Sean Matgamna against Neil Kinnock. That's the sort of world you want to be in, but you're not going to agree with the person whom you're debating.

We've never been criticised for being 'utopian'. This is obviously a new criticism; we're usually criticised for being pessimistic, so it's been a complete about-face on our part, not on your part because you remain critical whatever we say. But it is good to know we've turned from being the downhill pessimists to the gung-ho utopians.

Going on and on about long words rather flies in the face of the points Alan was making in his introduction and veers towards anti-intellectualism. I would warn you to be careful about that.

Our political proposals aren't new: I agree. Frankly we use the word 'new' as a bit of advertising. When we put 'New Times' on the cover of *Marxism Today* its sales went right up.

I'm not saying that flexibility or diversity will help the working class, it won't. Like post-Fordism generally, it can create a good situation for the working class movement, or it can create a bad situation: it's our task to address those changes and create the best possible situation out of it. But you are putting forward an either/or position: you're either with us, or you're against us, which puts the possibility of real dialogue absolutely out of the window.

Finally, Alan's last criticism was, that if I was honest, I would be a post-Marxist. Well, we haven't reached that stage yet, but we might one day.

Alan Johnson's reply

First, the *Labour Party*. Mark argues that he is not, effectively, supporting Kinnockism by quoting something from 'New Times' which says that the Labour Party hasn't modernised enough yet. Yes, 'New Times' says that. But 'New Times' also says: "The first signs of modernisation are appearing with the Labour Party's Policy Reviews."

If you support the "modernisation" of the Policy Reviews, which are an unmistakable throwback to the managerial capitalism of Harold Wilson, then I can't see how you can honestly deny supporting the right wing inside the Labour Party.

The discussion about language from the floor here today: I agree, to some extent, that there was a danger of anti-intellectualism. *Marxism Today* deals with complex ideas which require long words and you can't explain every idea in the language of the *Daily Mirror*. The problem lies somewhere else. A lot of the theories we have heard are based on a notion that language, words, are completely malleable, that words do not mean anything in and of themselves, that you can do anything with words if you just interpret them and relate them to other words in a particular way.

For instance, in the 'New Times' manifesto you get notions like "We must modernise the British economy"; "The market can provide incentives and discipline". Now, if these words are broken down, we find concrete meanings. You imply that "markets exercise discipline in a certain way, but it's a discipline we can manipulate if we take it in a certain way, in our direction, in the direction of socialism"; but the discipline the market imposes is not something to do with ideas or language, it is an actual material reality. It coerces the worker within the capital-labour relationship, and that relationship contains the conflict between classes, and working class exploitation by capital.

The working class and the social movements: it is not true that you say, like us, militancy is not enough. You say much more than that. Bea Campbell says: 'militancy is male, it is bad. We must reapportion the national cake and give more to lower paid workers, and that can be done by way of the well organised workers abandoning strikes and taking lower wages'. That pernicious nonsense is clearly argued by Beatrix Campbell and by a whole number of other people inside the Communist Party who say that militancy is greedy and bad.

Obviously the working class is fragmented and divided. There is a bad political culture inside the movement on oppressions around gender and race. The solution which comes out from *Militant*, for example, which is

basically to ignore those issues and talk about bread-and-butter issues, is grossly inadequate.

But the Beatrix Campbell approach is also inadequate — the approach based on identity politics. We look to events such as the miners' strike and the heat produced by class struggle, combined with autonomous organisation such as Women Against Pit Closures. During the miners' strike bedrock class struggle and autonomous organisation forged together in a very particular way, and the whole was more than the sum of the parts, which, by themselves, would not have carried the force they had in living, creative combination.

Abstracted from class struggle, from active class battle, those autonomous organisations do not themselves possess the strength or the capacity to increase the overall strength of the working class, that they have when they fuse together inside the class struggle itself.

I don't think the problem lies in the idea of "the plurality of contestations" Mark talked about. That is just a fairly unclear way of repeating something Lenin said long ago: that to expect that the working class will line up in massed ranks over here, and the bosses line up over there, and then they'll set to and engage each other on an open battlefield — that is just ludicrous. Capitalist society is far more complex than that. There are, obviously, many, many conflicts and contradictions within it, as well as the basic worker-capitalist conflict.

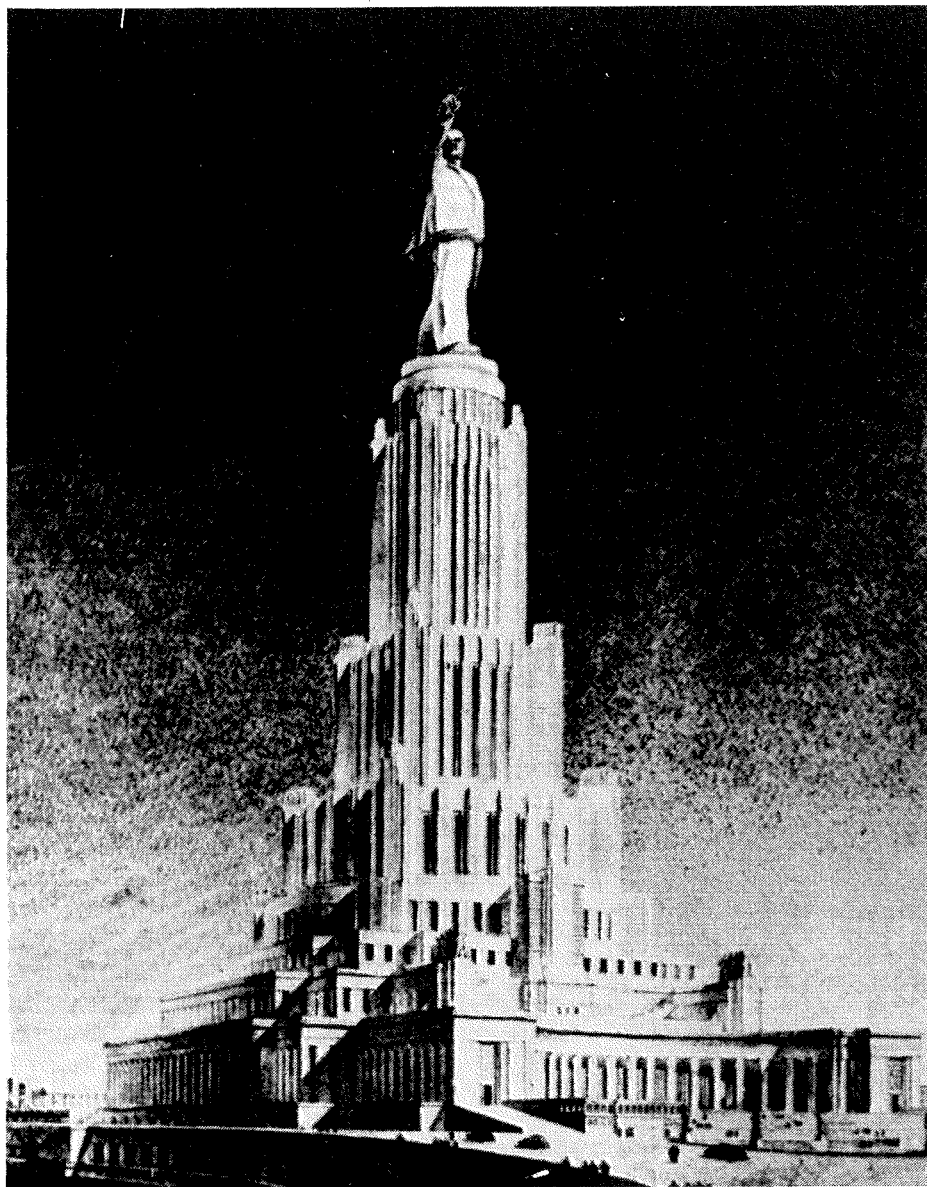
I don't think that classical Marxism had a problem with that, but it did rightly assert the centrality of the main contradiction, that between labour and capital. It sought to explain and progress some of the other conflicts via and through the conflict between labour and capital.

An example: take Solidarnosc in Poland. I think that the Polish working class has been the biggest and best example in recent times of Marx's notion of the working class as the universal class, a class which can liberate itself and draw in its train, by its struggles, the rest of society. Solidarnosc was able, by its very struggle, to draw in behind it the kinds of conflicts that are not reducible to class that Mark talked about. The other way to handle this "plurality of contestations" is the way that you have allowed writers in *Marxism Today* to handle it, talking about the working class no longer being a revolutionary class, that the whole working class socialist project is a matter of history, that what we are now talking about is radical individualism and popular democracy.

One last point: "In society the labour movement now is like the man at the party nobody will talk to" — as Mark put it. But why will nobody talk to us at the party? Just carry the analogy on. Why would no-one want to talk to the labour movement at this imaginary party? You'd get to the party and people would say, "Oh my god, they're here again, do you remember in 1929 when they came in, they didn't bring anything to drink and pinched all ours! Then in 1979 they smashed the bottle over our heads and told us it was in our interests."

That is what's missing entirely from your picture — the role that Labour governments have played so far. One after another Labour governments have played an awful role, given socialism a bad name, acted against workers' interests, etc. But why do you remain silent on that? For one clear reason — you have to, for how could you possibly criticise past Labour governments from the left, when you are trying to recruit allies to the right of the Labour establishment?

In a nutshell, this is why you can't develop a strategy for the working class. If you are hooked up with the construction of a Popular Front alliance of people well to the right of the Labour Party, how can you come to terms with the legacy of reformism?



Stalin planned to build a 'Palace of the Soviets' to be crowned by a 150 foot tall statue of Lenin. Thankfully, it was never built.

Which class rules in the USSR?

Workers' states, systems where new ruling classes exploit the workers, or societies with no ruling class at all? At Workers' Liberty 89, Martin Thomas (Socialist

Organiser), Robert Brenner (Against the Current), Oliver Macdonald (Labour Focus on Eastern Europe and Socialist Outlook), Frank Furedi (author of 'The Soviet Union Demystified'), and a comrade from the Iranian Marxist group 'Socialism and Revolution' debated the nature of the Eastern Bloc

"Trotsky thought the bureaucracy...couldn't be defined as a class...on the evidence of the last 50 years that argument obviously does not hold"

Martin Thomas

Marxists have been arguing about the nature of the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc for a very long time.

A lot of this discussion has been conducted around which label we should apply to these states. Are they socialist? Are they workers' states which are not socialist but nevertheless workers' states of some sort? Are they state capitalist, or bureaucratic collectivist?

The argument that goes on under those labels is important. It's also important to recognise that very often the label doesn't tell you what the substantive theory is. For example, there are groupings who say these states are degenerated and deformed workers' states, but the actual substance of their theory is that these are some new form of bureaucratic society, not really anything to do with the working class but in some way progressive compared to capitalism.

And likewise under the labels bureaucratic collectivism and state capitalism there are quite a variety of different perspectives.

So it is important to look at what the underlying issues are, the substantive issues that we've got to resolve.

The first one is, are these states indeed socialist? If not, are they maybe, however, the next stage that follows capitalism? Is the Marxist notion that capitalism through its contradictions generates the basis for socialism wrong? Is it not the fact that capitalism, through its contradictions, generates the basis for this sort of society, a bureaucratic sort of society?

What sort of forces create these states? And what should be our attitude to those sort of forces? Do we ally with them, and if so, when and under what circumstances?

Those are the underlying issues. What place do these systems have in history? How do they relate to the historical perspective we have as Marxists?

I want to make one note before starting on the substantive questions. Socialist Organiser as a tendency doesn't have a formal position on what label we should apply to the Eastern Bloc states. My personal view is that these societies are a form of state capitalism. Probably a majority of comrades in Socialist Organiser have a different view, and would be closer to the view which Robert Brenner will be arguing.

We think the important thing is to gain agreement on the perspectives and the programme, and that's what we're based on as an organisation. The rest of it we are debating openly.

What is the evidence from the last 40, 50 or 60 years of the operation of these systems?

Although the title of this debate is focused on the Soviet Union, the evidence is not just from the Soviet

Union or even mainly from the Soviet Union.

Firstly, what do these systems do in terms of developing the productive forces? It used to be conventional wisdom on the left that whatever else about the Stalinist states, however bad their political regime, they were much better at economic development than market capitalism. There is a bit of a consensus developing now to exactly the opposite effect — namely that they are generally much worse.

Both are oversimplifications. What we can certainly say is the Eastern Bloc systems are within the same general historical period, the same epoch. They are roughly speaking **parallel** to the societies we recognise as capitalist in the development of the productive forces.

They build up industry, they develop working classes. China, for example, now has a working class of maybe 100 million workers developed over the last 40 years.

The Eastern Bloc systems develop the productive forces but they do not develop the productive forces in a way that is qualitatively superior to capitalism.

Within that framework, within a given level of development of productive forces, on the whole these systems are **worse** for the working class than market capitalism. If you compare the conditions of the working class in North Korea and South Korea, or East Germany and West Germany, there are some respects in which the working class is better off in the Eastern Bloc states, the Stalinist states. There are some; but the overwhelming balance is that the working class is **worse off** and worse off particularly in that it is denied the possibility of organising independently — of organising its own trade unions.

Of course there are market capitalist states in which workers are also banned from organising. But not all of them, and not even all of the worst despotisms. Even in South Korea there are some small cracks and openings which don't exist in North Korea.

The third thing we notice from the evidence of the last 50 or 60 years is that these societies do not emerge from highly developed capitalism. They are not systems which arise when capitalism has developed to an extremely high degree and its internal contradictions have matured. They have generally arisen in countries of under-developed capitalism, in countries where capitalism is combined with all sorts of archaic structures.

And you can't say they arose there because it was impossible for these countries to develop on a capitalist basis. A lot of Trotskyists used to say that, but I think if you look back at the experience of capitalist development in Asia over the last 40 years, it's not tenable to say that if the Maoists hadn't won, China could not have developed industrially on a capitalist basis. Eventually, and at whatever cost, it could have developed.

So the Eastern Bloc systems don't emerge, as some comrades within our movement have argued, from some absolute necessity of the development of the productive forces. They are created

consciously, created sometimes through quite bitter and heroic struggles by particular social groups.

The Maoists weren't just a reflection of the abstract needs of history. They fought a long and bitter struggle. The Vietnamese Stalinists fought a tremendous war to create their system. It didn't just emerge spontaneously.

The groups which create these systems generally came out of the middle class and the petty bourgeoisie, which is an extremely large class in many countries of underdeveloped capitalism. They are groups from the middle class welded together in militarised formations. They conduct wars, build up a military bureaucratic apparatus in the course of the struggle, and then that military bureaucratic apparatus becomes the core of the new ruling group once they've won victory.

As for that new ruling group — Trotsky thought that the **bureaucracy** in the Soviet Union couldn't be defined as a class. He thought that it was too unstable, its perspectives were unclear, it didn't have any clear role in history.

If you look at the ruling groups in the Stalinist states, on the evidence of the last 50 years that argument obviously does not hold. In China, for example, the ruling group, the Stalinist bureaucracy, is in no sense a usurper of an economic structure that somebody else created. They created that economic structure, they moulded that society, **they nationalised industry, they drafted** the economic plans, they organised agriculture, they created that system.

And moreover, as ruling groups they reproduce themselves in a more or less **stable fashion**. Obviously they have crises like all ruling classes do, they have divisions like all ruling classes do, but on the whole there is a tremendous degree of continuity in that bureaucracy. It has even been able to carry out very sharp, radical changes in policy, in China and in other countries, without civil war and sometimes without even a change in personnel at the top.

The evidence is also that these systems, if they develop in powerful large states, are imperialist. There is a great deal of pettyfogging about this on the left. People say they don't correspond to what Lenin defined as imperialism in 1916.

They don't exactly. But neither does anything else today. Neither does the US, Britain...they're not exactly the form of imperialism that Lenin analysed in 1916.

So either we throw out the word imperialism altogether, or we look at the various different forms of imperialism that have existed in history, and say this is certainly a form of imperialism and one that is in no way more progressive than the imperialism of the United States or Britain or countries like that.

Those six points I have made are some of the basic facts that we can derive from the history of the last 40 or 50 years. There is then a debate about what label you apply to that system, but facts are clear.

These are societies that bitterly repress workers. They are nevertheless also societies that develop working classes — develop working classes that struggle

and behave and develop programmes and ideas as we would expect, on the basis of Marxist theory, a working class to behave, working classes that are capable of making socialist revolutions. If you look at the experience of Hungary, Poland and China there is no doubt about that.

What political conclusions does this lead to? Firstly, these are not societies in any way transitional from capitalism to socialism. They are not a step forward or progressive compared to capitalism.

The fact they have nationalised property does not make them progressive compared to capitalism. Indeed, if you look closely at the writings, classical Marxism never thought that nationalised property in and of itself was necessarily working class or socialist.

Secondly, they don't represent a wiping away of the possibilities for socialist revolution and the replacement of the working class by a class which has no socialist possibilities. At the same time they create the most terrible suffering they also create their own gravediggers — the working class.

From that general perspective, it follows that in some circumstances and in some issues we do ally with the groups that **make these revolutions**. For example, we ally with the Sandinistas in Nicaragua against US imperialism and the Contras on the issue of national self-determination.

We do not think that a stabilised Sandinista regime would represent socialism, or even a new society qualitatively superior to capitalism, but on the issue of national self-determination we side with them.

We side with the Vietnamese Stalinists against the United States.

But there is no general rule that says we have to side with Stalinists, and if comrades have theories which say that we should have that general rule they should just think about Cambodia and think where that rule would lead them in Cambodia.

These are systems which are going to be overthrown and replaced by something better through working class struggle. Our basic task is to support that working-class struggle without any hesitations based on illusions that maybe those societies are a bit progressive.

The key test on this has been the struggle of Solidarnosc. The key issue has been whether we support the Polish workers against their state. We don't say we can't support a boycott of Polish goods because after all Poland is different from a capitalist state. We don't refuse to support the breaking of links with the state unions in the Eastern Bloc because after all they're something to do with the working class.

No! We should have supported Solidarnosc's call for a boycott of Polish goods at the time of the military coup. We should support Solidarnosc as a workers' movement unconditionally, irrespective of what political ideas it comes forward with at any particular time. We should also support unconditionally the breaking of links with state trade unions in these countries, and the creation of links with the genuine movement.

"There was a workers' state. This workers' state degenerated. Now this degeneration has gone so far that we can no longer call it a workers' state"

T, a comrade from 'Socialism and Revolution'

You cannot overemphasise the **political** importance of this debate.

The Soviet Union, being such a major social and economic power in the world, overshadows class struggle everywhere. The way we orient towards that class struggle depends on our analysis of the character of the Soviet Union.

It is a question which has baffled Trotskyism ever since its foundation. Major crises of Trotskyism have been due to their different approaches to this question. Major splits inside Trotskyism have been due to different approaches to this question. So we cannot overemphasise the importance of this question for the major divisions today within Trotskyism, which in practical revolutionary terms would sometimes put us on different sides of the barricades.

When someone calling himself Trotskyist says I welcome the Soviet army invading West Berlin or expects the Soviet army to bring socialism to Afghanistan; that should indicate the importance of this question.

We ourselves believe that one of the major deficiencies of Trotskyism is on this question.

I do not claim, and we do not claim as a group, that we have all the answers. I am thinking aloud. Our group has been **thinking aloud about the question for 4 or 5 years**. We want to share some of our ideas with you and debate them. I don't think it is wise to jump to hasty conclusions.

Our approach, as far as we can see it, is still within the tradition of Trotskyism, despite the fact that it has found problems with that tradition.

What was Trotsky's position? There are two problems with Trotsky's position. First of all, it was an algebraic formula, related to ongoing events taking place in the Soviet Union. The workers' state was established, the workers' state degenerated, a caste inside the state seized political power from the working class, and Trotsky called it a degenerated workers' state.

He said that the counter-revolution which was behind that degeneration was incomplete. There was no total return to capitalism, therefore it was incomplete. It was a Thermidor, not a proper, total thorough counter-revolution. There were gains of October which we should still defend.

That was an algebraic formula. Since Trotsky formulated that theory many decades have passed. How much has the USSR degenerated now?

Degeneration is not a fixed quantity, it is an algebraic term which takes different arithmetic quantities. How much

can the USSR degenerate before we can no longer call it a workers' state?

Those comrades who still defend that formula (with whatever content behind it) should now be able to offer a more precise description.

Yet they simply repeat the algebraic formula.

You could argue that 'degenerated workers' state' means it was a workers' state which degenerated and is no longer a workers' state. That could be the meaning of that terminology. Or is it still a workers' state? Two entirely different approaches and both approaches have in fact co-existed inside Trotskyism.

We ourselves are more of the view that there was a workers' state but it has degenerated so it is no longer a workers' state. Fully fledged capitalism has not returned. But simply because capitalism has not returned we cannot call it a workers' state.

We do not only have black and white in the world. You can have exceptional transitional formations which, given a certain balance of forces can last 40 years, 50 years, or 60 years, although they are unbalanced, transitional, unstable forms.

What has remained of those gains of October that we talked about? What do we mean by those gains? Who is to say that simply nationalised property is a major gain we should defend? If there is nothing else remaining, everything else has degenerated, who can argue that simply the question of nationalised property is enough for us to call the USSR a workers' state?

These are the points that have to be tackled. There has not been enough concrete studies of these questions — the degree of degeneration, the degree of success of the counter-revolution, the historical success of counter-revolution in the Soviet Union, and the nature of these so-called gains of October.

And that is not the only problem Trotsky's position has. Another major problem is that if you want to talk about the class character of the Soviet Union you must have a theory of transition from capitalism to socialism.

And Marxism was not all that well armed before the October revolution with a theory of transition from capitalism to socialism.

A strong tradition inside Trotskyism has been to call these societies not only degenerated workers' states but also transitional societies — societies that are in between capitalism and socialism. But the concept of transition cannot be separated from political rule of the working class.

You cannot say a society is in transition between capitalism and socialism unless the working class has actual political power, not just some mysterious social power.

Trotskyism seems to have fudged that question or abandoned that approach.

If you do not have political power by the working class, who decides on the so-called plan? Who actually runs the plan? If you cannot organise the plan on the basis of political power of the working class who decides how to exchange

various products in that society?

Unless those things are decided according to human needs, and that can only be guaranteed by the political power of the working class, how can nationalisation lead to socialisation? Nationalised property can remain nationalised property but it will never be transformed into socialised property unless the forces of production are planned and organised on the basis of need not on the basis of spontaneous economic forces as they exist in capitalist societies. If they are not organised on the basis of need, there is absolutely no reason why these societies should be in transition towards socialism.

As Trotsky himself formulated it, either there is a revolution and the working class takes political power and leads these societies towards socialism — or there is a bureaucratic spiral back to capitalism. That is the true historical perspective for the Soviet Union and Eastern bloc.

We have seen this spiral of bureaucratic degeneration which has created further and further conditions for the return of capitalism.

We cannot call societies in which the working class does not have political power workers' states, or we would end up also having the formula of deformed workers' states, workers' states created without the working class actually doing anything. We would have some form of mysterious social power of the working class that reflects itself simply through nationalised property.

The political dangers in such a position we have seen for the last 50 or 60 years in the adaptations of Trotskyism towards Stalinist forces and petty bourgeois forces.

We don't have the resources or capabilities in our own small group to arrive at finished conclusions. It obviously needs international debate and the contributions of many other comrades and many other experiences.

But I think the basic approach of Trotsky was correct. There was a workers' state. This workers' state degenerated. Now this degeneration has gone so far that we can no longer call it a workers' state.

Soviet society is not a society in transition. Just because something is in between capitalism and socialism or is neither capitalism nor socialism does not mean we call it a transitional society. A transitional society is only a society in which there is direct political rule by the working class so that the economic planning is based on needs and not on spontaneous economic forces, or the interests of various groups inside the bureaucracy.

Has the bureaucracy become a ruling class? I don't think so.

There is not yet a ruling class in the Soviet Union. We cannot yet, I think call it capitalism.

Martin refers to China or Vietnam, but I think that's the wrong approach. Unless we had the Soviet Union we would not have had China or Vietnam. You cannot explain Vietnam without first understanding the Soviet Union. A certain balance of forces was created in-

ternationally which led to many peculiar formations; we must first understand what is behind that balance of forces and the nature of the Soviet Union itself. It is best to limit the discussion to the nature of the Soviet Union rather than expand it to all these areas.

"...we have a bureaucratic ruling class collectively organised in a state, politically excluding the workers in order to take a surplus"

Robert Brenner

Class structure is the key to society's economic dynamic, its laws of motion and forms of crisis.

It is also key to the forms of political struggle. It gives some idea of the political limits of reform in different societies. All told, class analysis is all about the potential for change or transformation of different sorts of society.

In all societies there are property relations that define how various people — the rulers and the exploited — have access to the means of production and to the social product. These social relations will be reproduced regularly and they are crucial because they define what is necessary for the individuals in the society to maintain themselves and improve their condition.

They define economic rationality, the rules of maintenance of the individuals in the society. Every class structure has a different form of rationality and therefore a different form of development.

We live in a capitalist society and we tend to take capitalism as our starting point for analysing class societies. This can be dangerous because in historical terms capitalist societies are an extremely peculiar species. What's peculiar is that in this society both the members of the exploiting class and the exploited working class are separated from their means of production.

They don't have the means to maintain themselves directly available. They have to buy them on the market — capitalists do and workers do.

Historically that is unique and has unique results. Capitalists since they have to buy in the market, have no choice but to sell something in order to survive. They have to sell competitively. They have to maximise the relationship between the cost of the things they buy and the price that they sell for or rate of profit. They have to cut costs, they have to specialise, they have to accumulate, they have to innovate.

And to survive, they have to produce a product that is socially necessary, that is, to meet demand.

This involves peculiar, unprecedented and unparalleled, convergence between what is in the interests of the individual rulers and what is in the interest of the development of the productive forces. The convergence operates only up to a point, because the system also generates disastrous crises, but up to a point, there is a tremendous

convergence between what the rulers as individuals find it in their interest to do and what is needed for the development of the productive forces.

Workers also have to sell a commodity to survive. They have to sell their labour power as a commodity.

This form of exploitation gives the capitalists as a ruling class an unprecedented control over the labour process. The workers can be fired — and this is the most efficient means ever for disciplining a labour force. The capitalists can discipline labour without having to spend a lot of money on coercion and control.

The bureaucratic collectivist societies are more like pre-capitalist societies in many ways, than capitalist societies. In two fundamental respects bureaucratic collectivist societies are parallel to pre-capitalist societies.

First there is the merger of the direct producers with the means of production, the means of subsistence.

Secondly in these societies, precisely because of this merger of the direct producers with the means of subsistence, it requires a political extra-economic process to get the surplus. The rulers have to organise themselves politically to get the surplus.

It is necessary to organise politically to maintain oneself as the dominant class. There is no real separation between the state and the ruling class, and the key function of political organisation is exploitation.

To be a member of the ruling class you have to be a member of the state and if you are a direct producer you are politically excluded from the state.

I see bureaucratic collectivism as based on surplus extraction by extra-economic coercion. It may seem as if the state takes a surplus by virtue of ownership as if it's some kind of big capitalist, as in a society with wage labour and labour power as a commodity, but in fact that is only the way it appears. In fact workers are merged with the means of subsistence because they can't be fired.

Why can't they be fired? Not because of any gains of the workers in the so-called workers' states, but because it's not in the interest of the ruling class either as a class or individually to fire them. So long as they produce a surplus they should be hired. There is no interest in a surplus army of unemployed if you own the means of production and you are trying to maximise output.

The same is not true under capitalism. Capitalists don't give a damn about total output. All they care about is the rate of profit and the size of the profit of their individual firms. A surplus army of unemployed is rational because it involves their ability to maintain and reproduce their exploitation.

Under bureaucratic collectivism this kind of surplus army can't be rationally created and isn't created.

So we have a bureaucratic ruling class collectively organised in a state, politically excluding the workers in order to take a surplus.

What's the dynamic of this society? In the first place, this particular ruling class

exists in a capitalist environment. So there is a tremendous pressure on the bureaucratic ruling class to accumulate. To compete politically it has to invest its surplus and try to develop the productive forces through a command economy, through what they'd call a plan. However, they can't actually accomplish this very well.

The social relations of reproduction and the property relations of the system make it exceedingly difficult for the ruling class to organise the development of the productive forces. Unlike with capitalism, there is a sharp disjuncture between the requirements of the individuals in the system and the needs of development.

There is no pressure on them to compete to stay alive. None of the units have to innovate, or to produce in response to demand. On the part of the units and the managers in the units, who have to meet the political requirements of the plan there is a tremendous interest in preventing the planners from getting any information about what's going on in the particular units. There is a tremendous need to get as much material and hoard as much labour as possible. Their concern is unbridled growth of their own unit, to maintain their position in the management hierarchy and the state/party hierarchy.

On the other hand the workers have no control over the surplus, so they have no incentive to work. But they can't be fired.

So in a sense bureaucratic collectivism has the worst of both worlds. It has an alienated labour force just like capitalism; but it has none of capitalism's competitive pressure on the individual units to transform production.

The historical result of this is that bureaucratic societies can accomplish and have accomplished a significant development of the productive forces. But the way they do this is by a political process of combining the machinery at hand with a growing labour force.

They can do this up to a point and produce a relatively small number of goods, but to be able to produce many goods requires being able to respond to a diversified demand — not just consumer demand but the demand for millions of tiny products that go into production of goods.

These societies also have a tremendous difficulty transforming the means of production.

So the Soviet Union can achieve quite a degree of growth through the extension of the labour force bringing people in from the countryside. And they can begin to re-equip them.

But in terms of development of productive forces the USSR has a completely inferior capacity, because each unit, unlike under capitalism, has none of the drive that capitalist units have to transform the means of production, transform technology and so on in order to respond to demand.

That problem produces the pressure for reform. It's an attempt to get the advantages of a market society within that set of non-capitalist property relations.

The contradictions of reform are built into that.

"As far as we can tell, the bureaucracy is ideologically committed to introducing capitalism in some modified form".

Frank Furedi

I do not believe it is possible to discuss what people have alluded to as theories or as definitions, primarily because from a Marxist point of view they are more pure labelling than anything else.

There is a real danger that we will get into a discussion of definitions and concepts which encompass a whole range from Nicaragua to China to the Soviet Union, all more or less seen as pretty much the same thing. By being robustly resistant to facts you can talk about the Soviet Union model as being 60 years old and ignore that within the Soviet Union there are very important breaks and developments. Today's Soviet society is not at all comparable to the '20s.

We must have some notion of specificity, rather than to dissolve everything and assume that we know everything. There is a lot of laziness going around, a desire to go for a label rather than to look at the facts and talk about what is going on in the Soviet Union not by talking about China and Nicaragua but by talking about the Soviet Union itself.

I want to look at the main trends of development.

At the moment all that you can do is point to certain obvious areas of development without coming to any hard and fast conclusions.

Looking at the Soviet Union today, in such flux and such tremendous change, it seems clear that the Soviet Union cannot be understood in terms of any imminent inherent trends of development contained within it. It is very much the result of a series of historical accidents. Its durability and the fact that it has lasted so long, albeit with tremendous changes, is very much the consequence of the weakness of capitalism and the problems that capitalism has had over the last 100 years and particularly the last 50 or 60 years. Its survival is in many respects due more to the international context than to anything internal.

If you look at the discussions that are going on in the Soviet Union today, it is very evident that individual Soviet bureaucrats would like to become a class. They talk very favourably about Swedish social democracy.

If you talk to them one to one, they say they would like to be capitalists.

At the recent conference in Oxford where everybody was talking about workers' states and state capitalism, there were these East Europeans and Soviet bureaucrats in the lounge looking at the price of cars and different consumer goods. That's what they are in-

terested in, rather than discussing state capitalism or workers' states.

They would very much like to be a class. However, this individual psychological aspiration to be part of a class is not really founded on anything objective or material within Soviet society.

The reason for that is to do with the nature of the system as it's evolving at the present moment and as it has evolved. At present over the last 4 years it's not possible to point towards any internal dynamic towards raising the productive forces. There is no developmental tendencies within Soviet society that you can point to. There is no automatic reproductive mechanism within society.

Those comrades who have got all these fancy theories should go to the Soviet Union and you will see for yourself that even within the Soviet Union social relations in Tashkent or in Georgia or in Armenia are very very different than they are in the Ukraine or in Byelorussia.

You will see for yourself that the inability of Soviet society to reproduce itself in a serious sense is very very important.

And because there is no dynamic towards development of the productive forces, there is insufficient surplus for the creation of a class. Plenty of goods are produced in Soviet society, but that still begs the question of how you transform those goods into a tangible surplus which the bureaucracy can use.

That key problem — the inability to sustain and reproduce surpluses on a sufficient basis, creates tremendous difficulties for them and ultimately calls in to question their coherence. That's why they can only survive through artificial political means. There is nothing within society itself, except their hatred for the working class, that endows them with any degree of coherence.

So there is an absence of an economic regulator — there is no equivalent to the law of value for example in capitalism — there is no mechanism for the distribution of resources. The spontaneous forces within society and the tendencies towards chaos are very strong, and can only be curbed through political means.

The dominant expression of this is the tendency towards fragmentation, both on a regional and geographical level but also with industry. The bureaucrats are not even able to establish a social division of labour except in certain industries through very artificial means, through what they call priority allocation.

To look at the present situation is 100 times more interesting than talking about definitions. For more than a decade the Soviet leadership has been pretty much aware that they have reached an impasse. They are fairly clear that the tinkering, economic reforms and perestroika, simply do not work.

They are concerned that there is no generalising tendency within the Soviet Union. There is no way in which you can generalise any reform. There is no way in which you can reproduce any policy that may work in a particular area.

As a result of that the Soviet Union is

becoming more and more a number of different social economies.

The bureaucrats have begun to rethink their general strategy, both in terms of the Soviet situation and more widely internationally. Now, in 1989, only those who are absolutely fiercely against looking at the information could argue that there is anything in common between the Soviet Union and Vietnam or Nicaragua. You really have to be the most vehement dogmatist to suggest that Vietnam — which is basically still capitalist because they explicitly refuse to transform capitalism — or Nicaragua, where they've installed a mixed economy, have got anything in common with the Soviet Union.

For that matter there is plenty of information about the nature of Soviet Asia. There is plenty of information for example about the Baltic states where collectivisation was never anywhere near as extensive as in the Soviet Union. Very different social relations are obvious there.

In China, you have an expatriate Chinese capitalist class directly intervening within China itself, and the law of value in fact exists in a more direct and immediate way than it does in Eastern Europe.

But in the USSR we have to be very clear about the lack of generating capacity or reproductive capacity of Soviet society. And so the bureaucrats are increasingly at least at the ideological level prepared to return to the market. The most far-reaching development, the newest development, whose implications we still don't understand, is that sometime in the late '70s or early '80s a growing section of the Soviet bureaucracy consciously began to explore the possibility of how they can introduce not just piecemeal reform but the market mechanism in a broader sense — at the ideological level, not the practical level.

A corollary of that is that whereas in the past political power and political means were sufficient to give the bureaucracy coherence, that is now no longer in operation. Local bosses, local mafias, and local communist parties are fragmenting on regional and industrial lines.

It is very difficult to implement policy, not just economic policy but even political policy, in many parts of the Soviet Union. It is simply no longer possible for the Kremlin and the Central Committee to cohere society together and endow the bureaucracy with some kind of coherence as it was possible in the past.

This loss of identity, this inability to speak with one voice, is becoming the most fascinating and interesting element within Soviet society.

As far as we can tell the bureaucracy is ideologically committed to introducing capitalism in some modified form. They don't call it capitalism, they call it the mixed economy or a market without capitalism but what they really have in mind is Sweden and Scandinavia. Now there's no danger of Sweden extending into the Soviet Union at this particular stage in time, but that's what they want

to do intellectually.

Practically they realise that this is a very difficult operation. You have to remember that the reason why you are a bureaucrat in the Soviet Union isn't because you are an entrepreneur or particularly creative but because you can say 'yes' and you can crawl and you are able to act as a bureaucrat. It is very difficult for them to transform themselves though in places like Poland and Hungary they are now doing that.

In Poland you have a Minister of Finance who is a millionaire and who has bought his factory. There are now something like 400 or 500 communist party bureaucrats that are privatising their own factories, buying them themselves so that they can emerge as the future capitalist class. Obviously it's much easier in Eastern Europe than in the Soviet Union.

The only section of Soviet society which is 100% committed to capitalism is the intelligentsia. They are anti-working class, anti-proletarian, they love the market, they love Thatcher and they would like to see the introduction of capitalism into the Soviet Union.

Fortunately, or unfortunately, depending on your point of view they are not a particularly strong section of society. They don't carry much social weight within the Soviet Union. They do influence the media and culture, but that is about all.

The working class response is very interesting. In the working class you have a sort of intellectual abstentionism. Working class people do not say yes or nay to capitalism in any kind of rhetorical intellectual sense. What they are indicating is that they are absolutely fervently against perestroika; and you have to remember that perestroika, if it were implemented, would represent that first step to capitalism.

At the moment all that perestroika means is labour discipline and a higher and more intensive level of exploitation. Workers are reacting against it. As a result the bureaucrats can't introduce price rises within the Soviet Union because of working class opposition.

We are living in a state of flux. We are now confronted with a new problem. The debates about workers' states versus state capitalism and everything else were pretty sad in the 1960s. Today they are a real crime. Today we are confronted with a question that we have never been confronted with before, which is the possibility of a transition from a post-capitalist society back to capitalism. That was something that revolutionaries have never had to confront — now it is a practical possibility.

Whatever will come out of it, whichever possibility is eventually realised, obviously does not depend only on the internal developments in the Soviet Union itself. There is the international dimension.

To our surprise, those of us that are Trotskyists or Leninists or Marxists, world capitalism is not particularly keen on returning the Soviet Union to capitalism.

They are so scared about upsetting the

world equilibrium which has served them so well they are very very careful.

And if capitalism were restored in the Soviet Union not every capitalist country would benefit equally. America certainly wouldn't benefit, the most dominant country, because they would not be the most efficient imperialist state. Germany would, Japan would, France and Italy would.

So you are getting a very differential response, and you can see this differential response to Polish events, Hungarian events, Chinese and Soviet events.

In response to the Chinese events, the whole of the imperialist world is very careful. We don't get the anti-Communist hysteria as over Hungary in '56 or Czechoslovakia in '68.

What's really taking place now is a very interesting convergence on the political level between imperialism and the status quo leaderships in the Soviet Union and other places. There are major upheavals taking place in the east, the corrosion and erosion of these societies and at the same time both the Soviet bureaucracy and the imperialist world order are actively mobilising against that erosion.

That is a new problem for us which we must investigate and try to work out before its consequences become all too evident.

"If we use a conception of power based on social relations of production in the Soviet Union, we find that the working class has immense social power"

Oliver Macdonald

I very much agree with what Frank Furedi said about labels or purely formal discussions ripped out of historical context.

To illustrate my point — this discussion about bureaucratic collectivism first came up in the '40s. At that time the real substance of this discussion was whether or not there was a new mode of production emerging in the East which socialists had not foreseen, potentially a new, very dynamic mode of production that was of an appalling character because it was exploiting and oppressing the working class, but had been created by the most dedicated socialists and Marxists. There was the possibility that this new monster was going to come and sweep us all away.

Today that sort of view is not around, for the simple reason that the states of the East have been losing the struggle between the social systems over the post-war period. There's no point in beating around the bush on that. These states — not simply the regimes or political leaderships of these states — have their backs to the wall in the great social struggle that has been going on between the two social systems.

Therefore, we get a quite different substance of the theory of bureaucratic collectivism, much more the sort of thing that Bob has been talking about, namely that bureaucratic collectivism is really a sort of pre-capitalist way towards capitalism.

That was more or less what Bob was saying — that it's a useful sort of mechanism for industrialisation, but once you reach the threshold of capitalism these formations disappear and we have capitalism. So these societies aren't some new historical phase.

Frank posed a very important question — do we think as socialists that there is anything worth preserving in the East against the onslaught of capitalism? Yes or no? This is not an academic question, it's an important issue that confronts us. Is there anything that socialists should be concerned about as to whether they restore capitalism or not in the East? Yes or no? It's a fundamental world historical issue for us.

One of the things I like about Frank's book, and also his speech, is that I get a sneaking feeling that Frank thinks there is perhaps something worth preserving against capitalist onslaught in the East. The only thing I would say is, come out and say it loud and clear, Frank, because that's also my position.

I don't want to see these states being overthrown and returned to capitalism, though I do want to see the political regimes in these states being overthrown by the working class, in political revolution.

Mine is a position which is not very often argued on the left. I think these states are workers' states.

Why is it that the case for these states being workers' states has not really been adequately defended? In all my time on the left I have very rarely heard people getting up and self-confidently defending the theory of degenerated workers' states. Nobody wants to do it. Why?

Of course one argument may be that it's because there is no argument there, but I think that there are other reasons for this.

Let me just refer back to that debate in the '40s. In that debate the bureaucratic collectivists did give us a couple of very concrete scientific tests that should be applied to the future evolution of the Soviet Union. The Shachtmanites said in the 1940s debate that there would be two key tests.

One test was whether or not in the Soviet Union there was going to be a continued trend towards huge social inequalities between different social groups. The second test was whether or not there was going to be the continuation of terror. If these two things go on, they said, there will be in effect a bureaucratic collectivist sort of slave society.

In fact, in the Soviet Union there has been a reversal of the trend towards personal inequalities. The Soviet Union under Brezhnev was massively more egalitarian — with all the poverty and all the extreme wealth of the top bureaucrats — than societies in the

West. And as for terror, the story speaks for itself.

But bureaucratic collectivist theory has been immensely popular. Why? My argument is this: the left in the West is completely awash with one particular form of bourgeois social theory, namely Weberianism. Weberianism is what explains the tremendous fashion for bureaucratic collectivist theories and the utter rejection of workers' state theories.

Why people reject workers' state theories is because they cannot answer one question. The question is: how can you argue that ordinary working people in the Soviet Union have any power at all? Their answer is we can't argue that they've got any power at all. Power is entirely in the hands of the bureaucracy. Therefore we can't argue that the Soviet Union is in any sense a workers' state.

If you adopt a Weberian theory of power and how it operates, this is absolutely consistent and obvious. If on the other hand you adopt what I take to be a Marxist conception of power, then things are not nearly so obvious.

Let me give you some examples from what Bob was saying. Bob, of course, presupposed what he had to demonstrate. He presupposed that there was a ruling class in the Soviet Union. He never explained why he thought there was a ruling class. In other words, he presupposed that **decisive power, social power, is in the hands of some narrow group.**

He got into a little bit of difficulty trying to explain why they don't have unemployment in the Soviet Union. In Bob's view this is nothing to do with the working class having any power in the Soviet Union. Therefore it must be to do with the inclinations of the bureaucrats. They don't want unemployment.

Why don't they want unemployment? Don't they want to get richer? Surely it would be a good idea to sack a few workers. He says something about the workers being tied to the means of production. Why are they tied? Why not sack them? They would certainly, by all accounts, love to sack them at the moment. Is there not a problem of power here?

Now let me just indicate what I mean very simply. Power is not simply the government's formal right to lock you up in jail, but the agenda which any government has given to it — the limits of its agenda given to it by the social relations of production.

If we use a conception of power based on social relations of production in the Soviet Union, we find that the working class has immense social power.

Its social power does not mean that it has any formal political rights, but it has immense social power, for example the power to prevent unemployment, the power to generate tremendous pressures towards egalitarian social policy, the power to demand and to assert things like, for example, the freezing of prices, and so on.

Frank says that we're headed towards capitalism in the Soviet Union, and this is Gorbachev's policy. Why is it that Gorbachev has completely stopped in his

tracks over freezing prices in the Soviet Union? Why, when the working class has allegedly got no power?

Unfortunately, everybody thinks in terms of these Weberian bureaucrats. Who are these Weberian bureaucrats? The poor devil who was at the conference in Oxford, looking at ads for consumer goods, has been slaving away in some administrative job. If he is such a great member of the ruling class, why is he so eager to get his hands on all these little gadgets?

There are a large number of bureaucrats in the Soviet Union, Weberian bureaucrats, desk workers. They are not any more oppressive than the bureaucrats running the National Health Service or the Social Service departments locally — who, we are told, using the same Weberian conceptions, are viciously oppressing us.

What a pile of nonsense! The people who rule the Soviet Union are not Weberian bureaucrats at all. They are not desk workers. They are highly

political officials, state officials. They are very energetic people, by and large, who are not concerned with consumer goods a great deal. Some of them are corrupt, but you've also got the Ligachev types, the ascetic types.

These people are **political leaders**. They are bureaucrats in Trotsky's sense. There is bureaucratic rule in Trotsky's sense, not because they are desk workers but because they politically exclude the working class completely from political power.

It's in that sense and not in a sense of Weberian bureaucratic structures that we can talk about bureaucratic rule.

And I'll just make this point. Ask yourself this question. Do you think that because there are no political rights for workers in these states that means workers have no power as a collective force? If you say yes, I say that is a capitulation to the overwhelmingly dominant ideology in Anglo-American academic and intellectual circles, namely the ideology of Weberianism.

Responses to the discussion

"You have to appreciate that Stalinism is something within the workers' movement in order to understand these societies"

Oliver Macdonald

Stalinism has been a tremendous millstone around the neck of the left. But we've got to face the brutal reality of what we're talking about here. The bitter reality is that Stalinism is a phenomenon of the working class movement.

We may wish it out of the working class movement, that it was never a part of that movement, but it is within the working class movement.

I became more deeply convinced of the degenerated workers' state theory — the workers' state theory — in the early '80s.

Let me give you some examples. In 1970 the regime drew a dividing line down the strike committee in Szczecin. One leading figure on that strike committee had the political police stuff his head in a gas oven. Another leader of that strike committee became by 1980 the party secretary for the Szczecin region — one of the top bureaucrats.

Another person involved in the 1970 events was the party secretary in a shipyard and in 1980 he brought the workers out on strike.

Who went on strike in August 1980? Who led the strikes in 1980? Overwhelmingly it was people in the Communist Party. The decisive move in those strikes in 1980 was in the mines. One in three of the workers in the crucial mines was in the Communist Party.

It was a gigantic crisis within Stalinism, within the Communist Party, which is also within the working class

movement in Poland. And ever since 1980 the working class movement has been in a gigantic crisis.

Don't think it's just a crisis of Stalinism. It is a tremendous crisis of working class socialism in Poland.

Take the Klebanov affair: you see the same phenomenon. Klebanov was hounded and witchhunted and destroyed. Why, **politically** why? Because in the Donbas mines something like one third of the miners were completely won over to the bureaucratic apparatus in the mines. They got benefits out of it.

I had a lot of dealings with the KOR people in Poland. I spoke to the main people, people like Litinski, who were involved with Robotnik and so on. And they convinced me that the workers who were on the party committees in the big factories in Poland on the one hand considered that the working class was the ruling class in Poland, and on the other hand were bitterly opposed to Gierek's policies and were prepared to go along with the movement from below.

You have to appreciate that Stalinism is something within the workers' movement in order to understand these societies.

Some people think that these states work with terror and coercion. This is just nonsense. It's absolute nonsense. Of course they use coercion, of course they stuff people's heads into gas ovens and so on. Certainly they do that. But the idea that that is why they have continued in power is just nonsense.

They have continued in power because they have had the capacity to reproduce themselves in the working class.

Political power is not a precondition for bourgeois rule, why should it be a precondition for working class rule? The question is whether the bourgeoisie can

veto moves to transform the social relations of production and whether the working class can veto moves. In Eastern Europe the working class has been able to veto moves up till now. Whether they'll be able to do that right the way through I don't know.

Let's not forget, comrades, that when we talk about unemployment we're not talking about some particular little right, we're talking about whether you have the gigantic coercive class power of the capitalist market. And if you don't have that capacity to say 'you dock workers, to hell with you! Out you go! Get out!' and ruin their lives, if you don't have that power, as you don't in Eastern Europe, then you are in a very weak position.

It's all very well to say there are no democratic rights in the Eastern Bloc. Quite right, there are no democratic political rights for the working class of the Soviet Union.

But in Britain in the early 1980s public opinion was overwhelmingly in favour of full employment. No political party in this country was in favour of full employment. In Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union there are no open political parties, and yet these regimes lack the political power to introduce unemployment. Why? Why is this?

These communist states in the East are weak states. Think about it, they are weak states.

The Stalinist project is an absurd project. What are they saying? They are saying to everyone in society, 'comrades, leave it all to us. We take full responsibility for everything and you shut up.' And of course they can't manage everything. So they piss people off right across the board.

They are tremendously over-committed. They have committed themselves right across the board to do everything. That makes them very weak.

A strong state is a state freed from all social commitments — the Thatcherite state, for example, the Nazi state, for example. They made no commitments to guarantee anything to anybody. They said to you 'look after yourselves'.

Gorbachev is trying to make the Soviet state a strong state. He's trying to say 'we're going to get rid of all these commitments'.

If you want to understand these societies, in my opinion, you've got to start thinking of Stalinism not as this great monster state which is terrorising everybody, but as a weak state, weaker and weaker as time has gone on, which has been doing ethically disgusting things but has been increasingly shown to be absolutely bankrupt and weak.

And in becoming weak it has weakened the workers' state as a whole vis a vis imperialism.

"...the longer Stalinism lasts, the more difficult it is for the bureaucrats to assimilate new societies into their own social pattern"

Frank Furedi

Engels and Marx insisted time and time

again that there are many many states without classes. In fact what they said is that the closer history moves towards capitalism, the more the divergence between social groups and states begins to converge. It's only under capitalism that the state and the class are fully convergent.

In fact the question what is the class basis of a state is a question you can only ask under capitalism. It's a non-question under any other society.

The reason why you ask that question only under capitalism is because only under capitalism does the neutral appearance of the state confuse the real class character of it. For the first time in history the class nature of a state is confused and mystified by its neutral appearances, and therefore becomes a theoretical problem.

In feudal Britain no-one was going to say it was a neutral state. Everyone



knew it was the king's state.

We see that Kampuchea is fighting Vietnam, Vietnam is fighting China, China is against the Soviet Union, China has a strategic alliance with American imperialism. So I find it very difficult to define a general something common to all these states.

I know Vietnam decided not to imitate what happened in the Soviet Union. In Nicaragua the same thing.

The point is that, the longer Stalinism lasts, the more difficult it is for the bureaucrats to assimilate new societies into their own social pattern. The Baltic states have very very different social relations than you will find in the Russian or Ukrainian parts of the USSR. If you go to the Asian part, it is very very different again. To imagine there is a common 'something' is in fact Weberian sociology, because the logic of what you are saying is that it's repressive so that defines it. Well so is Chile, so is South Africa. Where do you stop? Which repressive states are Stalinist and which repressive states are capitalist?

I could say that everytime I meet somebody from Socialist Organiser they've got brown eyes. I meet six people in Socialist Organiser with brown eyes and therefore I declare that if a comrade has blue eyes they can't be from Socialist Organiser.

That is a false construction but that is the logic that you are using. You never spell out what is that general

'something' that is being generalised and reproduced over there. It is **assumed**. You all assume that there is something there that is being reproduced time and time again.

I want to come to the question of tactics and strategy. A Marxist never confuses theoretical questions with tactical questions. If I am in a meeting like this I will argue bitterly against the communist or so-called communist system in the East because I am among left wing people.

If, on the other hand I am on the street and somebody says 'go back to Russia' I'm not going to say 'I'm not like that, I'm really democratic'. Often I hear new comrades say 'We're not like these Chinese bureaucrats' and I say: 'you are wrong, you are giving into the anti-communist prejudice.'

When I go back home to Hungary and talk to people, I talk to a lot of anti-working class reactionaries. I must almost sound like a Stalinist because in those circumstances your job is not to criticise Stalinism — nobody likes Stalinism in Hungary or Poland — your job is to criticise the illusions that people have in the market economy and in capitalism.

Tactics are important. The way you raise issues is always in relation to consciousness. The consciousness of a bourgeois, a left wing activist, and a Hungarian Stalinist or anti-Stalinist are very very different and the way you approach it politically has got to be in relation to that. It isn't just one big consciousness. It's very very important for us to bear that in mind.

Afghanistan is a practical expression of whether you understand Marxism or not. It's fairly straightforward. You're against the invasion of Afghanistan by the Soviet Union because you recognise it denies the right to self-determination and can only discredit the forces of communism. On the other hand, when the Russian side pulls out and imperialism is moving in on Afghanistan and trying to impose an imperialist solution, we are against that. We want the imperialists and the Mohajedin to be defeated because now the balance has changed.

It has got to be an open-ended, flexible approach, addressing the problems as they arise. If you haven't got that, then you've got a problem.

"...it is clearly the bureaucrats' state and the bureaucrats' class rule"

Robert Brenner

I think Frank gave the lie to himself in a moment of naivete when he said you don't have to ask in a feudal society what's the class nature of the state. It's obviously the feudal lords' state.

You barely have to ask it about the Soviet Union because it is clearly the bureaucrats' state and the bureaucrats' class rule, exactly in line with the analogy that you made.

There is a more serious objection. Do they actually extract a surplus? Is there a definable group that extracts a surplus?

But to me it couldn't be more obvious that there's a definable group that extracts a surplus. You have to be crazy to think there is no growth in the Soviet Union or that none of the surplus has gone back into the means of production. I would want to see this system overthrown yesterday, but you'd have to be crazy to deny that even the working class has enjoyed some increase in consumption and there has been reinvestment.

I can't believe Oliver MacDonald! Yes, there were some increases in the standard of living under Brezhnev. Those are the statistics he knows about. But can you deny that the definite group that runs the state and controls the surplus is massively differentiated in terms of consumption — even though it is a paltry level of consumption compared to the United States.

You can define the bureaucracy as the leading elements within the state or in the party — it's more or less the same. There are massive differences in education, massive differences in day to day consumption.

What it comes down to is saying that these are not capitalist states because the surplus is not extracted through the exchange of labour power and there is no law of value. As Frank rightly says, there are all kinds of differences, there are no tendencies towards homogenisation because there's no tendency towards an average rate of profit.

There wasn't under feudalism, there wasn't under Roman society, so there's no homogenisation going on, but that doesn't say there's no system that is reproduced.

To deny that the system reproduces itself you would have to say that somehow the system can't get commodities to the workers, to get dressed or to get food the next day. That is the degree to which you are taking a point that has some sense, which is the USSR's inability to develop the productive forces the way capitalism does. You take it into some kind of idea that this is a society in which a ruling class does not reproduce itself and take responsibility for the reproduction of the society as a whole.

Why does all this really matter? It matters in two fundamental respects.

It has to do with assessing the potential for reform in this society. Precisely because there is a ruling class, precisely because the dominant class takes its surplus and reproduces itself on the basis of its monopoly control of the state, you can't get any degree of democratisation.

You cannot even expect as much democratisation as under capitalism where there is a separation between the taking of a surplus and the state. You can't expect that in these countries where the taking of the surplus is equal to the reproduction of the ruling class.

If there is anything which the experience of Solidarity shows in 1980/81 it is that there was no element within the state that was willing to respond to the workers' demands in the smallest degree. I remember Oliver told us at the time that we should look to a section of the Communist Party, but what happen-

ed was that no section of the Communist Party split (although many communists split, which is a completely different question). The state did not crack, the state repressed the workers' movement entirely, without leaving a smidgeon of democracy.

On the question of the reforms Frank is right to say that they can't develop the productive forces the way they would do under capitalism. Therefore they want to decentralise. They want to bring in the mechanisms of capitalism within a bureaucratic system of property.

So they decentralise. They give the firms their own controls over investment over loans and everything else. But what do these firms do? Do these firms unemploy the workers, do the firms slim down production?

Absolutely not, because these firms are tied to the state and state property. There's no pressure to maximise the rate of profit or optimise the rate of profit. All they do is accumulate workers. They don't unemploy them, they accumulate them. They accumulate means of production, and the crisis of the system is only exacerbated.

The answer for the bureaucracy would presumably be capitalism, because then you would have private property, development of productive forces etc.

Why don't they go that way? Because they are not a capitalist class. They are a ruling class based on the state, and there is no way in which those who are in the ruling class can simply tinker with the social system and turn themselves into capitalist private owners. If they could possibly do that they would, but that they draw back everytime is a sign that they are a ruling class that cannot take the necessary step to develop the productive forces.

They want to be capitalist but they can't maintain that themselves by taking that step.

"You can have transitional unstable formations"

T, 'Socialism and Revolution'

We can't always say we must either have a workers state or a bourgeois state. That is the fallacy that we have kept on sticking to for the last 50 or 60 years.

It is not theoretically justified. You can have transitional unstable formations. The Soviet Union is one such state. It is important if we want to explain Eastern Europe, China, Yugoslavia to first understand the Soviet Union.

For example in the North of Iran we have a province called Gilan. There was a Soviet republic in Gilan. The reason that Soviet republic came into existence was because we had the Russian revolution. If the Russian revolution had not happened, that republic would not have lasted 2 days, never mind 8 months. It was crushed after 7-8 months, but nevertheless the balance of force brought this peculiar so-called soviet republic of Gilan into existence. It was not a soviet republic, but a coalition of the Com-

munist Party and a bourgeois nationalist guerilla army under the leadership of a character that could be called the Khomeini of that time.

If that sort of state had lasted for 4-5 years, we couldn't have just referred to the class formation in Gilan and tried to analyse that state. That would be absolutely impossible. The only way one could have explained it was from the balance of forces that created this peculiar and unstable formation.

Because of the Russian revolution a certain balance of forces was created internationally which has influenced many events.

Even laying aside the balance of forces in the question of developing productive forces by some petty bourgeois or bourgeois nationalist forces, the Soviet Motherland is indispensable. Look at Khomeini. We have cars which are translations of Polish and Russian cars. The mullahs who consider that anybody who is an atheist must be shot and killed have copied many things from the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe in so far as they see them as a very nice instrument for keeping the workers suppressed and providing the means of sustenance for reactionary groups. Even out of emulation you can have an extension of the Soviet system.

Unless we understand the Soviet Union we cannot explain the Soviet Union, then we can try to reunderstand and re-examine all the other questions. And we should not be too hasty to abandon Trotsky's framework, because one fundamental question in that approach was that capitalism has not yet returned. That idea I think has proved its importance.

Some comrades say the bureaucrats would like to be capitalists but are not capable of becoming good capitalists. If mullahs in Tehran can become capitalists I don't see why technocrats in Moscow cannot become capitalists. Wanting to become capitalists depends on certain material requirements, not just the capabilities of individuals.

Historically we have reached a stage in which those material conditions have been better and better prepared for capitalism, but we have not as yet gone all the way.

That does not mean we should call it a workers' state.

That basic Trotskyist approach with these modifications is still more in tune with what is happening internationally than some of the new formulations.

"Our choice is neither the market nor Stalinism. What we fight for is workers' control, workers' liberty and socialism"

Martin Thomas

If you are faced with a choice between capitalism and Stalinism, do you say Stalinism is better and worth defending? I would argue no.

In some of the Stalinist states, not all of them but some of them, there is more

job security than there is in Britain, for example. In Franco's Spain there was more job security than there is in bourgeois democratic Spain now. So should we have been on the streets demanding the maintenance of Franco, no to any bourgeois democracy in Spain? No, obviously not. You can't take one feature of a system, a feature which is obviously a method of control, as decisive.

The bureaucrats do have to control the working class. They can't just do anything they want. Obviously the working class in the Soviet Union does have a certain power to resist. The working class has a power to resist in Britain, too. But if the railworkers win their strike will we say that the workers must be the ruling class in Britain?

You can't use partial features to say that the Stalinist system is generally better.

I'm a bit puzzled by Frank's position on this, because his conclusions seem to be tending towards the idea that the Stalinist states are in some ways a bit better. For example, he says they are 'post-capitalist', i.e. they're something after capitalism, something further on in historical progress.

But the way he actually describes the system, the logic of his theory, is that the system in the Soviet Union is a massive regression on capitalism. In fact it's a massive regression on feudalism, or even slavery, because he says it has no dynamic for the development of the productive forces.

Slavery in the Roman Empire did develop the productive forces. Feudalism developed the productive forces. If the system really has no dynamic of development of the productive forces, no dynamic of the extraction of a surplus, we should think it a very good thing if slavery is reintroduced in the Soviet Union. We are not moralists. Socialism depends on the development of the productive forces. If the system can't do it and slavery can, then slavery will be progress.

The comrade's conclusions are completely at odds with his theory. It's completely incoherent.

Our choice is neither the market nor Stalinism. What we fight for is workers' control, workers' liberty and socialism. That's our alternative both to the market and to Stalinism.

And so far as we are not able to realise that objective, we don't take sides between them. We defend particular things in the Soviet Union. We would fight to defend the job security. At the same time, however, in Nicaragua we would fight to defend the limited liberties that workers there have against the imposition of a fully fledged Stalinist state, and in Cambodia we would have fought against the military victory of the Stalinists there.

We take sides on the concrete issues. We defend even limited liberties. We defend trade union rights. We are in favour of greater availability of consumer goods and so on, but we also defend job security.

These systems are not better than capitalism.

C L R James

C L R James died on 31 May, at the age of 88.

Born in Trinidad in 1901, he was an agitator for West Indian and African independence, and an associate of the pioneering West Indian and African nationalists; organiser of black sharecroppers in the racist Deep South of the US; a militant in the US and British Trotskyist movement; a prominent mainstream Trinidadian politician in the late '50s and early '60s; a lone aged prophet for the generation of black militants who became active in the '60s and '70s; and author of many books and articles on a wide range of subjects.

James wrote one very important book, *The Black Jacobins*, about the rising of the blacks of Santo Domingo under the leadership of Toussaint Louverture, and at least one very useful book, *World Revolution*, a history of the Communist International to 1936.

James grew up in a world awash with national chauvinism and then with hysterical pseudo-scientific zoological racism, all of it superimposed on the staple centuries-old anti-black racism which had been woven from the slave trade into the fabric of post-Renaissance European and American society.

No wonder James was an outsider. That much came to him with his community, its geography, and the colour of his skin. The rest, a life-long commitment to the struggle of the oppressed, and all he did with voice, pen and organisational work in that cause, he generated in himself.

By the time he died James enjoyed considerable fame. It was commonplace in the last decade and a half to find breathlessly lauding articles about James in the bourgeois press. It was natural and easy enough — especially, perhaps, for journalists with a narrow modern mainstream education and a narrow experience of life — to weave the facts of James's broad life and broader achievements into heroic myth and story.

The classless universality of the world-wide black cause overshadowed the 'narrowness' of the revolutionary working-class commitment of James's middle years, and anyway James himself had shed that 'narrowness', though he remained a socialist and called himself a Marxist still.

In exchange for what had James shed that 'narrowness'? He broke with the Trotskyist movement in 1951, when he left the Socialist Workers' Party of the USA. Together with others, he had made many just criticisms of that movement and the direction it had taken.

Post-war Trotskyism was being given shape in its attempt to analyse Stalinism, which was now plainly no longer what it had seemed to Trotsky — a transitory regime, which could not be designated a new exploiting society only because it was transitory, with its dominant bureaucracy a malignant social growth rather than an organically functioning ruling class. James advocated his own 'state capitalist' analysis, and talked of the danger of what he called 'Pabloism' replacing Trotskyism.

The problem was that 'Trotskyism' no longer existed as a ready-made complete doctrine. It had to be recreated and recast. But when James left the Trotskyist movement in 1951, he moved not towards a recreated, recast, renovated Trotskyism, but radically away from Leninism altogether.

He resorted to cloudy and sometimes almost mystical generalities about the spontaneous generation of socialism by way of the everyday activities of the existing labour movement. It was no longer necessary to

build a Leninist party. History had superseded Lenin.

Thus James paralleled the 'orthodox' Trotskyist movement, which responded to defeat by looking to other forces, even other classes than the working class, to carry out the 'world revolution'. They too broke with Leninism, though without acknowledging it. Both James and the 'orthodox' Trotskyists said: we are defeated, but nevertheless we are winning. Both moved from a rational conception of a movement to be built which would lead the working class to achieve socialism, to a 'millennarian' concept of Revolution which had no clear notion of ends and means, of the who and what of it.

Today, the reappearance of the Chinese working class shows how monstrous was the acceptance by some would-be Trotskyists of the Chinese Stalinist party as the force to lead the socialist revolution.

The defeats suffered by the British working class show how senseless was the regression of James (and others, among them until 1968 Tony Cliff of the British SWP, though he did not go as far as James) to a belief in the self-sufficiency of working-class spontaneity. For few post-war working classes were more creatively militant and innovative as to means of struggle than the British working class was in the '60s and early '70s. Militancy alone was not enough.

Modern history has not rendered the ideas associated with Lenin and Trotsky out of date; on the contrary, it is one long series of negative vindications of the idea that the working class, even when militant and creative, cannot win unless its vanguard militants have succeeded in building a Marxist cadre organisation within the broad workers' movement.

At least James looked to the workers and oppressed groups. How he went from those ideas to become the secretary of Dr Eric Williams's ruling party in Trinidad is something of a mystery to me. He fell out with Eric Williams and was put under arrest and deported.

James P Cannon, who had persuaded C L R James to go to the United States and help the Trotskyist movement in the vital work of organising black workers there, said of James after his departure from the ranks of the Socialist Workers' Party USA: "*The Johnsonites were personal cultist followers of Johnson as a Messiah... [Johnson] was the name James used inside the SWP]. A cult requires unthinking fools for the rank and file. But that is not all. In order for a cult to exist, it is not enough for a leader to have personal followers — every leader has personal influence more or less — but a cult leader has to be a cultist himself*".

These are harsh words, but they are probably fair, and better than the prevalent uncritical sentimentalising of James. James broke with Trotskyism not for something better but to pursue an erratic, meandering course which, taken all in all, was worse than the post-Trotsky Trotskyism he criticised before his departure in 1951. He remained broadly in our camp, but he leaves us little to build on for the future.

The latter-day public cult of James in Britain was a strange thing. Amidst all the lavish journalistic praise, James must sometimes have taken offence, or at least paused to consider if some of it was concerned less with his undeniable status as a very capable human being with important achievements to his credit, than with a cult of him as a token black revolutionary.

Jack Cleary

The other Israeli

Clive Bradley and John O'Mahony spoke to Adam Keller during his recent lecture tour of Britain

The Palestinian *intifada*, the uprising that began in December 1987 and shows no sign of abating, has left deep marks on Israeli society. Commentators often dwell on the growth of the far right and Jewish fundamentalism. But there has been a parallel development on the left, as Adam Keller, an Israeli socialist who visited Britain earlier this year, was keen to point out.

Even five years ago, the 'two states' option to solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was supported only on the margins of Israeli politics. Now, more and more, even prominent sections of the Israeli Labour Party are looking to a 'two states' solution, even including negotiations with the PLO.

For Keller this gives grounds for immense optimism. A solution to the conflict could be in sight, he thinks — in the next two or three years.

Keller represents a particular strand in Israeli left opinion. Traditional left voices range from the Zionist left, including the old Mapam kibbutz-based party, now in opposition, to various anti-Zionist groups. The strongest anti-Zionist party has always been the pro-Moscow Communist Party and its coalition group (or front) Haddesh.

Keller is a member of the Progressive List for Peace, formed for the 1984 elections, which brings together Arabs disillusioned with the CP (which, in an Arab town like Nazareth, is the Establishment), and Jews from left-Zionist or, like Keller, ex-Zionist backgrounds.

The Other Israel, which Keller edits, is produced by the extra-parliamentary Israeli Council for Israeli-Palestinian Peace, a group that has long advocated dialogue with the PLO, although it has been closely associated with the somewhat maverick figure of Uri Avnery. Avnery is a former



Knesset member, and editor of a popular muck-raking journal.

So the political groups Keller works in are broad, and in the PLP, an attempt to hold together Jewish and Arab activists. "There are problems," Keller admits. But he sees the PLP as a brave venture.

Keller and the PLP are typical of the activism of the Israeli minority that openly campaigns for talks with the PLO. Since the *intifada*, there has been a proliferation of peace groups, often finding ways to have joint action with Arabs on both sides of the 1967 'Green Line'.

In a society where everyone has to do military service, and men have to do up to 60 days every year, peace movement activity can lead to personal risks. Adam Keller has been imprisoned several times for his actions against the occupation.

Last year, he was imprisoned for three months for spraying tanks with anti-occupation slogans.

Keller, like many on the Israeli left, is a member of Yesh Gvul, 'There is a Limit', originally formed during the 1982 Lebanon invasion, a group of those who refuse to do their military service in the occupied territories.

"There are others less radical," Keller notes. "Some people think it's important to serve in the territories, so that they can intervene against acts of repression." But Yesh Gvul believes that firmer action against the occupation is necessary to end it.

Much of Keller's time is devoted to *The Other Israel*, a digest of news and information about the current situation, peace activities in Israel and events in the occupied territories. He believes that the *intifada* has forced big changes on Israel.

"There are many forms of resistance to the occupation, including among Israeli Arabs. For example, Arab fruit pickers sabotage Israeli production of oranges. They swap the worst oranges, meant to be thrown away, with the oranges intended to be exported." This is just one example of the many small methods, as well as dramatic ones, that are being used to undermine Israeli occupation. He believes the occupation's days are

numbered. But he admits that the left has problems dealing with the right's general domination of poorer, working class Jews. Israeli society, says Keller, is warped by the national question, full of what his book, 'Terrible Days', describes as "political paradoxes". People on the 'left' in social or economic policy can be on the right on the Palestinian question, and vice versa. Class-conscious struggle — certainly joint struggle by Arabs and Jews — is very difficult to achieve.

There have been attempts, and the left Zionist party to which Keller used to belong, Shelli, saw its role as to try to bring about such unity. More recently, he feels that work in the army can be useful. In prison, he met many working class Jews, mainly defectors, who began to listen to his ideas on the Palestinian question.

Socialism, he feels, is not on the agenda, and the priority is to achieve peace. But issues do not stop there. "Israelis need to see that their country is a colony of the USA, and we need to end that relationship if we are to achieve freedom ourselves."

Although the signs are good, the obstacles to peace are formidable, in particular the growth of the Right. Keller sees Israel as heading down the road of South Africa.

But is it already an apartheid state? Keller thinks not. "If there was a direct parallel, if you could swap Jew for white, and Arab for black, surely it would be the Israeli government that wanted two states, and the PLO that was firmly against it. In fact, the PLO wants two states and the Israeli government rejects it. So either both the PLO and the Israeli government are out of their minds, or it is a different situation from South Africa."

The tour of Britain in February was a success, Keller thinks. He was able to speak in many colleges, to share platforms with PLO representatives, and to appear on radio phone-in programmes. Among Jewish students, especially, he detected a growing eagerness to know about the 'peace camp' — and an openness to be convinced.

Whether Keller's optimism proves well-founded or not, the current on the Israeli left that he represents is clearly a growing, and vocal, force.



Adam Keller

Class, culture and Stalinism

Most interested Westerners hold dear the idea that art is 'free', a matter for the artist expressing him or her self without restrictions. The notion that art should be 'used' for ideological purposes is presented in the media as a perversion practised mainly by Stalinists.

But the fact is that all ruling classes control artistic production. They hold the purse strings, have access to the publicity machine, and from their ranks come the critics who make and break reputations.

Of course the ruling class in capitalist countries does not lay down rules for art, demanding this or that style on pain of death or prison, but they don't have to buy what they don't like; and it is money which buys access to books, materials and education. If individual artists can support themselves, then technically they are free to produce what they like. But whether any of it is seen by the public or recorded in the history books is a matter for the ruling class. The history of art itself is a bastion of ruling class ideology.

The ruling class also benefits from the trade in art. Artefacts and artists are bought and sold like any other commodity. First make someone's reputation, then watch the prices rise. Good and bad art doesn't come into it, the criteria are saleability, ideological utility, reputability; investment security, likely value enhancement over time... Today single works of art may sell for a great deal more than the artist earned over an entire lifetime.

Everyone knows, of course, that many great artists have starved in the face of a hostile public. That many of the great leaps 'forward' in art were met with unbelief and ridicule. Self-proclaimed revolutionary artists — the Dadaists or the Surrealists, for instance — did not achieve instant popularity. Still, their works now fetch millions. Their ideas were quickly accommodated to by a ruling class, eager, amongst other things, to prove its open mindedness. The bourgeoisie pats itself on the back for having recognised 'good' art, and sneers at mere propaganda, while it organises the very lucrative business which could be called: 'art as an investment for rich philistines'.

Nevertheless, compared with the horrors of the totalitarian ice age in which art and literature have for many decades been gripped in the Stalinist states, bourgeois society has been by comparison a haven of artistic and literary freedom. And Stalinist

attitudes on questions of art and literature, justifying and glorifying the artistic policies of ruling Stalinist parties, have unfortunately not been confined to fully-fledged Stalinists. The true teaching of Marxism on these questions is the very opposite of Stalinist practices; and not less so than is the true programme of working class socialism the literal opposite of what exists in the Stalinist states under the stolen name of socialism.

Part I: The impact of 1917

Awakening in the 1860s from the coma of the Tsarist Academy's unchallenged rule, Russian painters spent the next few decades alternately lapping up what their contemporaries in Europe were pioneering; and discovering that there had been active Russian art before the Academy had made 18th century French court art (at second-hand) the only style which could earn a painter a living. Earnest safaris up-country yielded evidence of rough decorative peasant woodcuts and embroidery; ancient icons were cleaned up and exhibited for the first time. Meanwhile, the Academy continued to patronise portrait painting in the manner of 18th century France; and the new movements found favour with the liberal bourgeoisie.

Like Russian industry and the Russian labour movement, Russian painting found its whole development telescoped. Learning quickly from French Impressionism and its multifarious preceeding and succeeding movements, but keeping their own identity by virtue of their passionate involvement with the national tradition, the most swiftly advancing groups and individuals soon found that they were ready for a revolutionary breakthrough, that they were no longer following their comrades in the west, but leading them. Now their patrons were not so keen; it was all very well while the avant garde was progressive only in relation to feudalism. But certainly not when the First World War came, and a definite rebelliousness, suspiciously resembling the rebellious Dada movement founded in Zurich, was seen in many avant garde activities. Now they found themselves out in the cold, their audience shrunk to a few intellectuals and unable — as yet — to turn to another class for support.

Two main movements emerged in 1915, called Suprematism and Constructivism. The first of these flourished mainly before the revolution; it was a form of completely abstract art, relying chiefly on geometric shapes and the confused and somewhat mystical 'philosophy' of its leader Malevich. Some of his ideas resemble those of Kandinsky (his compatriot and sometime colleague, and one of the greatest founders of 20th century art). But he'd

In the following article — written some time ago — Rachel Lever presents a comprehensive survey of the impact on art of the 1917 workers' revolution in the Tsarist empire; chronicles the advent of the Stalinist ice age which blighted art and literature for over half a century; and, finally, presents a brief examination of the theoretical framework within which Marxist socialists examine questions of art and literature.

lacked the latter's intellectual clarity and never achieved the same stature; nor was he able to develop his simple forms to any extent, and in the hands of less talented followers Suprematism became an easy and fashionable formula.

Constructivism was by nature far more extrovert and active; its vigour enabled it to seize the opportunities of revolution, and in fact it was only after 1917 that it came to life as a movement. Basically it grew out of Vladimir Tatlin's attempts to break down the barriers between art and life, and before the revolution these attempts were necessarily modest. They took the form of 'constructions' which shed the safe harbour of frame and wall, and came out into space. They couldn't be called sculpture, because that is basically solid. Now space itself became an element at the very heart and centre of the design. The constructions were made from wood, glass, wire and plaster — all potential builders' materials. The old duality of form and content was resolved in a synthesis where the actual materials, their texture, the juxtaposition of the planes and rhythms they formed, their shape and structure — became the main subject matter. Perhaps most important was the possibility it afforded of incorporating real movement: a very novel idea in 1915, though now it is an accepted element in both painting and construction.

These experiments, which Tatlin regarded in a somewhat scientific light, were bound to suggest more ambitious projects than his Corner Reliefs. Moreover, there was a marked streak of functionalism in its make-up, and in Tatlin's outlook (during the Civil War he was to design a stove to burn the minimum quantity of fuel while giving the maximum heat). This, before October, was bound to come up against numerous barriers and frustrations; later, having elaborated his theories of the Culture of materials and the Artist Engineer, Tatlin was to look back on this period as a time of back-room research, of thinking isolated from action.

Art comes out of its corner

Most important of all, the revolution

Art and the Russian revolution

A special
eight-page
photo
feature

(1) Postcard of Lenin, B. Yemirov, 1918. (2) 'Lenin on the Tribune', 1930, A. Gernsimov. The difference between these images of Lenin is striking. In 1918 Lenin was portrayed as a thoughtful human figure. By 1930 he has become heroic — the leader rather than one of the masses.

(3) 'The Attempt on the Life of Lenin', PP Baloynssov.



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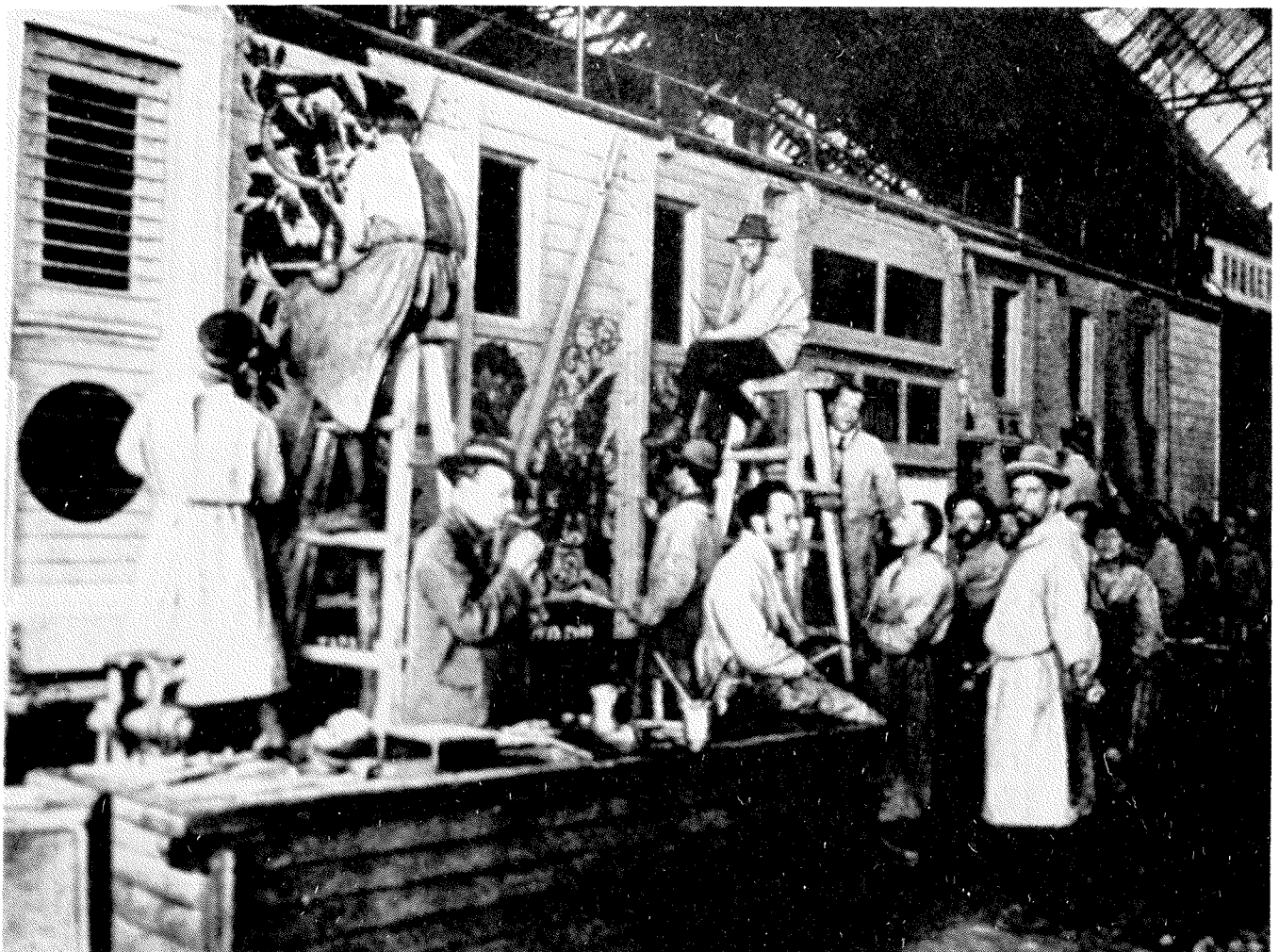
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(4) Malevich with students departing for Moscow, 1920. (5) El Lissitzky in his studio, 1919

(6) A large part of the propaganda work for the new revolution was undertaken by artists who decorated trains, trucks, buildings, china, and produced posters using images of the revolution and a mixture of styles, including the style of icons familiar to the illiterate Russian peasants.

(7) 'Books are nothing but men talking to everyone', S. Ivanov poster, 1920. Posters like these, with a simple, bold message, were produced in vast quantities. They were both good communications and exciting images for everyone.

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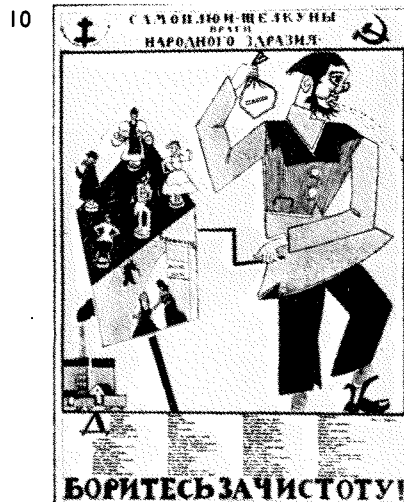


(8) 'Either we destroy capitalism or it walks all over us', Victor Deni poster, 1917

(9), (10), (11), (12) As well as using traditional designs and styles based on woodcuts and peasant icons, the artists used styles and typefaces which were a development of suprematism and constructivism.

- (9) Design for a stamp, N. Altman, 1922
 (10) Poster against spitting, Pashkov, mid-'20s
 (11) Poster advertising 'Blue Blouse' — groups of young actors producing agitprop plays, mid-'20s
 (12) Poster advertising the free health service, Mayakovsky, mid-'20s
 All this diversity was to disappear in favour of Socialist Realist blandness.

(13), (14) White on White, Malevich, 1917-8; Black on Black, Rodchenko, 1918
 These images are the logical conclusion of the suprematism developed by Malevich. Earlier works are more interesting and it is easier to see their supposed spiritual significance. Even so, suprematism marked a decisive break with the past and a step into the new ground of abstract art. Russian artists were extremely innovative during this period until Stalin demanded a return to the past with Socialist Realism.



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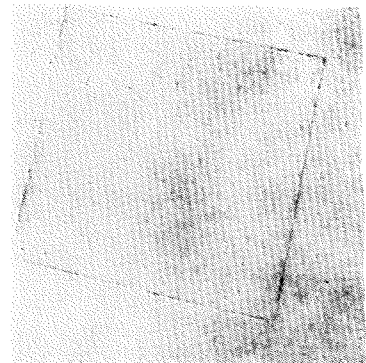


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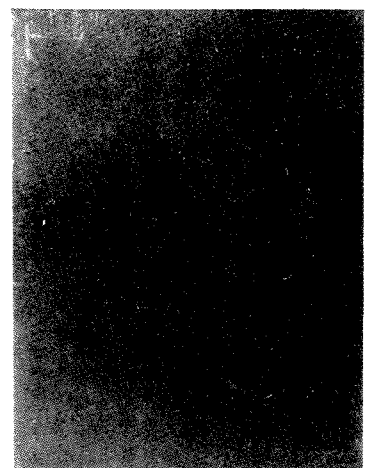
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1 2 МАЯКОВСКИЙ
ВЛАДИМИР МАЯКОВСКИЙ
13 ЛЕТ РАБОТЫ
ТОМ 2



16



17

(16) 'The Tired Soldier', anti-war poster for Petrograd Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, L. Pasternak, 1917

(17) Political meeting of factory workers in Briansk, October 1905

(19) Cover design of Red Laughter, short-lived satirical magazine, B. Kustodiev, 1906. Cover is to commemorate Bloody Sunday when troops opened fire on a peaceful demonstration to the Tsar, killing over 200, in January 1905

(18) Desecrated Torah Scrolls in the synagogue at Kishinev after the Pogrom of 1903. Inspired by the idea of a mystical Orthodox crusade, the Tsarist-backed Union of Russian People sponsored the Black Hundreds in their provocation of 'enemies of autocracy' and their inhuman pogroms against the Jews



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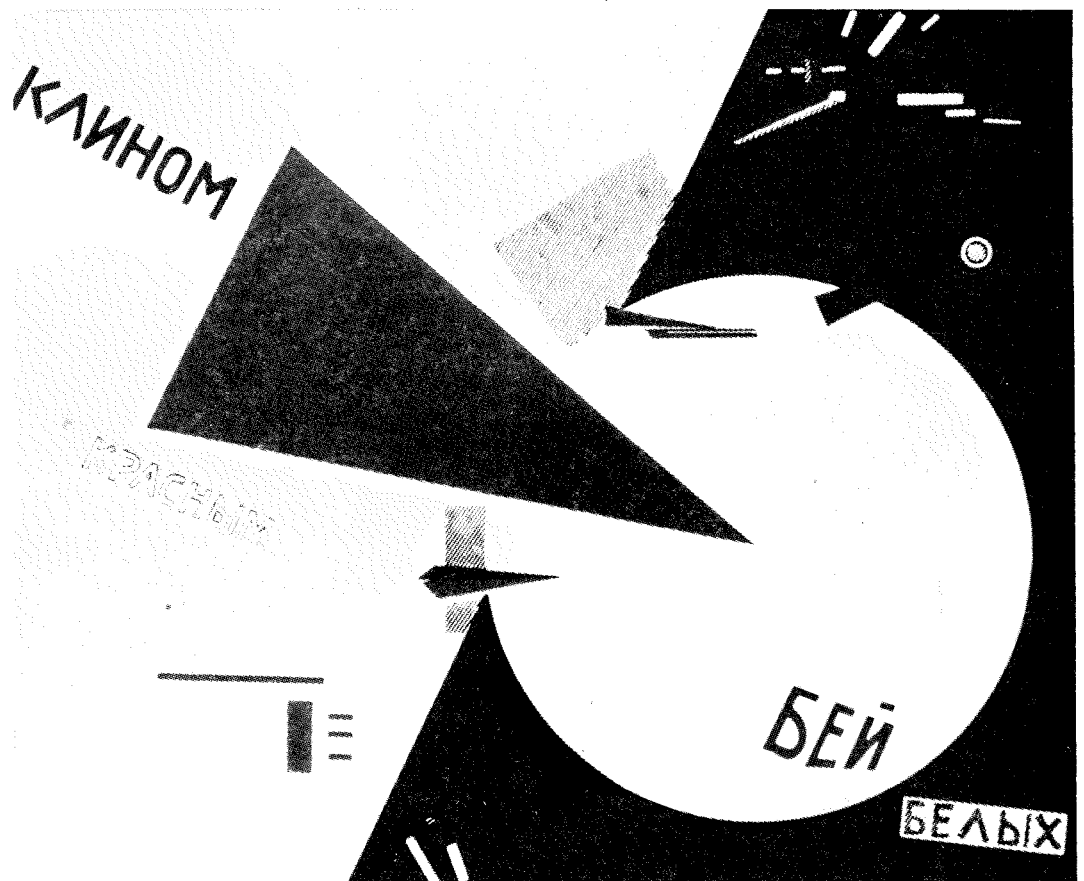




(20) Socialist Realist image of Stalin receiving acclaim from the wives of technologists and engineers, Moscow 1936. Tableaux like this and (21) of Stalin at the 1938 party conference characterise Socialist Realism. Heroic figures of party leaders and idealised workers are frozen into statuesque poses. 'Bureaucratic Blandness' would be a better title for the style.



Above: Defend Petrograd
with all your strength!
Alexander Apsit (Petrov),
1919



Right: Beat the Whites
with the Red Wedge
Lazar (El) Lissitzky, 1920

offered the possibility of integrating art with society and bringing an end to its use as a mere market commodity which was enjoyed by at most a small elite. The results appeared almost overnight; from being hungry experimenters, artists of the avant garde suddenly found themselves in positions of power and influence — as heads of art colleges, leading members of the Commissariat for People's Education (NARKOMPROS), the Institute of Artistic Culture (INKHUK) and IZO, which had the task of reorganising the country's museums.

This favourable situation came about mainly because of these artists' attitude to the Revolution. While their reactionary critics and all the old Academicians immediately left the country (several returned, however... with the White Armies) the avant garde — now known as Leftists — leapt to action and gave all their energies to helping the spread of communist ideas throughout Russia, in Agitprop, the theatre, posters and many other spheres of activity. Unlike the present cultural hacks with their Black Sea villas, their only privilege in the first years was to be hardworking and self-sacrificing, to suffer the same cold, hunger and hardship as the working class and be as obdurate as the Bolsheviks; later, they continued to share in the fate of the Bolsheviks — in suicide, prison and Siberian cold.

Propaganda was put up everywhere; it was sometimes gigantic and hideous, often inventive and witty, with the emphasis on caricature. Walls of buildings were painted and covered with slogans, quotations from leading Bolsheviks and the 'Old masters', and even the latest news. All means of transportation, wagons, ships and trains were covered with brightly painted revolutionary pictures, so that the message might reach the most remote outposts. Even everyday objects like plates, cups and matchboxes carried pictures and slogans. Most of this work was based on the prevailing styles of the avant garde — at first Suprematism. Like the poster on the previous page (the lettering says: 'Beat the Whites with the Red Wedge') and later Constructivism. It was naturally very rough and ready (these examples, particularly the poster by El Lissitzky, are probably exceptional) but nevertheless the sudden proliferation of painted images and vigorous, strong typography must have been very exciting — not to say effective — while the lack of refinement was often compensated for by freshness and spontaneity. Its effectiveness, in this period when propaganda played a leading role in the defense of the workers' state, gives the lie to the Stalinist bogey about the remoteness and incomprehensibility of abstract art; at such a time of civil war and desperate self-defense by the regime it is unlikely that any medium of propaganda which failed to appeal to the widest masses would have been so encouraged.

Art to reach everyone

The first response to the revolution was seen in the abandonment of easel

painting and all small scale work. For a time the 'Bolshevik monumental style' prevailed, with huge portraits set up of world heroes of revolution. Art had to be big and imposing enough to reach everyone. The failure of this 'style' depending as it did solely on size, was as rapid as it was inevitable. The most serious and lasting attempts were made in music.

After many discussions between Gastev and Mayakovsky, and trial performances at Leningrad and Nizhni-Novgorod, the first real performance took place in Baku, on November 7th 1922, to mark the fifth anniversary of the Revolution. Foghorns of the whole Caspian Fleet, all factory sirens, two batteries of artillery, several infantry regiments, a machine gun section and real hydroplanes took part — as well as massive choirs in which all the spectators joined. The Festival was described as very impressive, but later attempts at such things as factory whistle symphonies encountered unsurmountable problems, failing to achieve even a recognisable Internationale.

But the desire that art should reach out into the streets and factories was still foremost in the ambitions of most artists — expressed in Mayakovsky's aim to 'make the streets his brushes and the squares his palette.' The Constructivists' solution to this now brought them forward as the most important movement of the day. 'The Art of the proletariat', they said, 'is not a holy shrine where things are lazily regarded, but work, a factory which produces new artists' things.'

From this grew the desire to be active builders, not just back room designers. Tatlin saw his previous achievements as mere experiments to occupy his time until he could emerge as the artist-engineer of the new society. Indeed, he is generally best remembered now for the projected Monument to the Third International, rather than for his Corner Reliefs and had the monument been realised in its final form it would in fact have been his greatest achievement:

"The monument was to be twice the height of the Empire State building. It was to be executed in glass and iron. An iron spiral framework was to support a body consisting of a glass cylinder, a glass cone and glass cube. This body was to be suspended on a dynamic asymmetrical axis, like a leaning Eiffel Tower, which would thus continue its spiral rhythm into space beyond. Such 'movement' was not to be confined to the static design. The body of the monument itself was literally going to move. The cylinder was to revolve on its axis once a year: the activities allocated to this position of the building were lectures, conferences and Congress meetings. The cone was to complete a revolution once a month and to house executive activities. The topmost cube was to complete a full turn on its axis once a day and to be an information centre. It was constantly to issue news bulletins, proclamations and manifestos — by means of telegraph, radio telephone and loudspeaker". (Camilla Gray — the Great Experiment; Russian Art 1863-1922. Thames and Hudson,

1962).

This was an ambitious project for 1919 under any circumstances and considering Russia then as a country emerging from feudalism and fighting a civil war it is hardly surprising that the plans were never realised beyond a small wooden model. Other plans, for a huge Labour Palace in Moscow, for new workers' dwellings and the rational rebuilding of whole towns, never went beyond paper.

The Constructivists found themselves in the same predicament as that of the Bolsheviks. They were far ahead of the technical resources and know-how of a country with 150 million illiterate peasants. If the social aims of Lenin were in excess of the possibilities afforded by the objective situation, then all the more so were the aims of Tatlin, which far exceeded Lenin's hopes for the immediate future in the field of art and culture. Lenin believed that the masses deserved something better than pageants and circuses. "They have acquired the right to a genuinely great art". But since art should be understood by the masses without being lowered, there must first be the "The broadest possible enlightenment and education. That will lay the foundation for a culture — on condition, of course, that the question of bread is solved. On that foundation there ought to grow up a genuinely great new communist art, which will create a form corresponding to its content". A concept which Stalin later saw fit to reverse, deliberately bringing art down to the lowest possible level in his use of it as bureaucratic propaganda.

Tatlin and his fellow artists saw the revolution as one event which would overnight bring them within reach of their highest ambitions, rather than as the first stage of a society in transition, a society which was even vulnerable to degeneration if faced with adverse conditions and isolation within national boundaries. His plans could never be executed, and he resorted eventually to industrial design — which later offered a fairly sheltered harbour from bureaucratic conformity. Many others, including Gabo and Pevsner, left the country to continue their work wherever they could find the technical resources. Most members of the Constructivist Group, however, stayed on and tried to find other outlets. This they did quite successfully for about ten years after the revolution, mostly in the Theatre, and with typography, poster design, photomontage (which greatly influenced Eisenstein's film-making technique) and various projects which can be called 'mass theatre' — pageants, mass poetry readings, and the re-enactments of October which were organised by Nathan Altman, Ivan Puni, and his wife Bogoslavskaya: in 1918 to mark the occasion they covered the square in front of the Winter Palace in Petrograd with huge posters.

In the theatre

In reaction against the static bourgeois realism of Stanislavsky, the 'synthetic theatre' had been pioneered by constructivists at the Moscow Kamerny

Theatre. Their first attempts, before 1917, involved integrating the sets, costumes, actors and their gestures into a dynamic system; but the productions then were all put on for small circles of the intellectual avant garde and suffered from this unreal seclusion. The possibility of extending the scope of these productions, after 1917, led to a real flowering of the constructivist theatre and its many variants. Its exponents included men like Tairov and Meyerhold, who between them, using declamation, involving the audience and destroying the 'illusory' aspect of theatre, were the forerunners of Brecht's 'Theatre of Alienation'.

Vsevolod Meyerhold developed what he called the bio-mechanical technique, whose physical expressiveness and dynamic momentum became suitable for an extravert social experience. He replaced decorative scenery with constructions expressing 'action and technology', declaring:

"The new theatre denies and repudiates everything which is merely ornamental and not directly practical... therefore its framework must include the technical creations of the present, machines of all kinds, motors and cannons, all the more because these objects also strengthen the dynamics of the production". (R. Fulop-Miller: *The Mind and Face of Bolshevism* p.122).

These productions were often 'animated' by searchlights, steam sirens, peals of bells and air acrobats.

Meyerhold's Constructive theatre soon became the idiom for plays put on in factories and workers' clubs. It became so popular that soon even the classical theatre companies were using his methods, and the State Opera House 'revolutionised' *Carmen* and Wagner's *Lohengrin* with dynamic light effects and geometric props. Meyerhold was given much encouragement from the Party and honoured as People's Artist — but his mass popularity notwithstanding he was denounced as a formalist by those who were sending the Red Bolsheviks to their graves and arrested in 1939.

Experiments were also made with hanging planes and moving stairways, where the actors were to move vertically as well as horizontally. Eisenstein, working then for Forregger's Prolecut Company, moved the actors around on ropes, and would on occasion suddenly darken the stage, lower a screen and show a film. This company exaggerated the athletical aspect of Meyerhold's bio-mechanics into a predominating clowning and acrobatics. A similar emphasis emerged in another company, the 'Projection Theatre' which had no stage at all. The performances took place in the middle of the hall, and consisted entirely of silent action, using geometric constructions and appliances.

It was not only the use of actual 'constructions' in the production which was derived from the ideas of Tatlin and the constructivists; the exploration of space and materials, the dynamics of movement and the actual physical properties of the body were as integral to the theatre of Meyerhold and Forregger as they were to the art of Tatlin. Where Tatlin abandoned the background to his

reliefs and integrated them into the surrounding life and space, Forregger similarly staged his productions 'in the round' and shed the constricting effects of stage and backcloth.

On the stage, Meyerhold often integrated the movement of great cylinders or wheels with the physical actions or emotional climaxes of the characters, thereby heightening the drama. Though Tatlin was technically unable to proceed at that period towards kinetic art, his plans for the Third International Monument reveal an increasing interest in movement. The experimental theatre was able to develop these ideas at a time when the artists outside the theatre were limited to plans on paper, and so became the only medium through which constructivism was actively realised in its full sense, in all its dimensions.

Museums for the present

Though the Constructivists had neither



the knowledge nor the material basis to be real artist-engineers, they did have an excellent opportunity in the field of education. This was time of discussion, experimentation and decision on the future organisation of art education and the institutions set up to direct the programme were either dominated or entirely staffed by 'leftist' artists.

Under Narkompros, IZO was set up in 1918, with David Sternberg as director, Alexander Rodchenko (a leading Constructivist) as head of its Museum Bureau, and Altman, Tatlin, Kandinsky, Olga Rosanova and the critics Osip Brik and Punin on its staff. In the 36 museums they launched in the next three years, 'leftist' art was predominant, though they usually included also an 'historical museum' section containing 'art of the past' for 'scientific study', the more than doubtful assumption being that it had no aesthetic contribution to make either to life in general or to the development of a new form of art. This rather dangerous view was not held by all the artists concerned; many felt that art of the past must be seen as part of a process, an element in the creation of a new art to be used and understood

without having to be copied or repeated. As Lenin had said "you must take the whole culture which capitalism left and create socialism out of it". Later, he elaborated this view:

"Without a clear understanding that only with an accurate knowledge of the culture created by the whole development of mankind, only by working it over, can we create a proletarian culture — without this understanding we will never fulfill this task".

But while Lenin saw the past as the doorway to the future, Stalin was to use it as a straitjacket, resurrecting it to stifle any future art.

Schools for the future

It is most likely that the basic motive in the rejection of past and academic art was the desire to rectify the pre-revolutionary situation, where artists of the avant garde were expelled from the academies and schools, removed from their posts (if they had them), derided, mocked and persecuted and prevented from exhibiting, by members of the Academy — which often made it impossible for them to earn a living. It must also be said that, other than icons, there was only a negligible quantity of paintings from Russia's past that were even worth keeping. Before the 1860s Russia's cultural tradition was almost entirely literary. This desire to redress the balance was soon active in the schools themselves — hitherto a bastion of reaction — but now under IZO's directorship. In 1918 the Petrograd Academy of Art was re-opened as Svomas (Free Studios) whose programme allowed the entrance of anyone over the age of 16 at any time of the year, with the right to elect professors of their choice. This soon led to chaos, and the Svomas were abolished in 1921, to be re-established a year later on a programme worked out by Kandinsky.

In Moscow, the College of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture was closed and reformed, together with the Stroganov School of Applied Art, as Vkhutemas or Higher Technical-Artistic Studios, aiming to bring about a synthesis of art, crafts and industry as another part of the general campaign to bring the artist into closer contact with the people and vice versa. It was also very liberal in its organisation and practically autonomous. Apart from the actual teaching much of the time was given up to discussion and seminars which were open to the public and to visiting artists.

This is by no means the whole picture, but a general survey of some of the major trends of the years (roughly) 1917-24. Beneath the surface were a number of issues and forces — political, personal and social which ultimately disrupted and changed it. Among the questions debated at length which ultimately was to become all-important was 'proletarian art' and the relationship of the artist to the workers' state. The rise of Stalinism with its artistic doctrine of 'socialist realism' buried all the experiments and ideas of the first years in its mud of compulsory mediocrity.

The Russian Revolution ignited the explosion of artistic creation we have surveyed. It was not planned, it happened; an epiphenomenon of the working class seizure of power and the savage class struggles that followed. But the proletariat in power needed theories of art, and so did the revolutionary artists and writers, to explain what was hap-

pening and why, to know what should be made to happen, and perhaps stopped from happening in the future.

Side by side with the explosion of cultural practice, there occurred an explosion of theorising about culture and the proletarian revolution. And then, almost as soon as the civil war and the

wars of foreign intervention against the workers' revolution were over, the new bureaucracy began increasingly to make itself felt, in this field as in all others, until, ultimately, it had clamped its stultifying iron hoops around art and literature as on everything else in the new Soviet society.

Part 2: The transition

The statements and discussions of the CPSU in the early twenties left no doubt that artists must be left free to work, develop and experiment both in the matter of form, and regarding their relationship with propaganda or direct political commitment (I will discuss this in more detail below). Before the Stalinist bureaucracy could lay it down in 1932 that both the style and content of a work of art in any medium must follow certain rules, a period of time had to elapse, in which the transition could be made from Bolshevism to Stalinism.

It was during this period that RAPP (Association of Proletarian Artists and Writers) came into its own. It was supposedly independent and unofficial, but in effect functioned under the guardianship of the Stalin faction, and through economic boycott and strangulation, systematic political and social ostracism, it wielded enough power to bludgeon and bully and suffocate most artistic endeavour in the late 1920s.

Its main task was not to lay down formal rules for literature and art — the writers were not yet compliant enough for that. What it did insist on was the principle that art must serve propaganda, and this reached a climax in 1930 at an international Congress it sponsored at Karkov, with delegates from 22 countries.

RAPP owed its success to the fact that it managed to take into itself many genuine, if mistaken, communists who wanted to show their devotion to the Revolution as actively in the arts as in other spheres of life. Many of the campaigns were directed at writers outside the Party, and RAPP's early slogans, like 'The Living Man' and 'Tearing down the Masks' appeared harmless enough. They still insisted on the artist's right to tell the whole truth in objective and human characteristics, they had respect for psychological truth, and never advocated over-simplification.

Literary ability, however, was way down its table of virtues. Membership depended on ability to "organise the psyche of the toiling masses in the direction of the ultimate tasks of the proletariat" — which meant organising the writers in the direction of the tasks set by the Russian bureaucracy. Presiding over this process was Leopold Averbach, whose own style was once likened to that of "a business-college sophomore studying to be a publicity writer for a scenic railroad". Victor Serge described him around 1930: "He

was a young Soviet careerist possessed of an extraordinary talent for the bureaucratic calling. Less than thirty, he had the hairless head of the young senior official, the verbal fluency of a congress demagogue, and the dominating false-sincere eyes of the manipulator of meetings."

The seizure of power in literature

A good deal had been accomplished by 1930, when such slogans as "The Five-Year Plan in Poetry" and "Creative Duty to the Socialist Fatherland" found mute acceptance at the Kharkov Congress. There, RAPP members spoke of 'the art job', 'poetic shock troops', 'turning out literary commodities' and 'the seizure of power in literature'. Heedless of Marx's opposition to that division of labour in the arts which reduced an artist to being solely a painter, writer, sculptor, etc., Tretyakov blithely outlined his plan — and was applauded!

"We foresee the operation of literary workshops where the functions are divided... That is, the workshops will contain specialists of an extra-literary order, having valuable material at their disposal (voyages, investigations, biographies, adventures etc); alongside them fixators will be at work gathering necessary material, happenings, notes, documents. The mounting of the received materials in this or that sequence, the working up of the language in dependence upon the public for which the book is being written — this is the job of the literary formulators... We can't wait forever while the professional writer tosses in his bed and gives birth to something known and useful to him alone. We assume that book production can be planned in advance like the production of textiles and steel."

Victor Serge remembered a similar RAPP meeting "...we heard a report from Averbach on the spirit of the proletariat, the collective farm and bolshevism in literature. Lunacharsky, frozen in a stance of weary boredom, kept passing me ironical little notes."

The purpose of these activities was to bring to heel the many bourgeois and fellow-travelling writers who had remained in Russia, and those writers and artists who had returned to seek private patronage after the NEP. They were destined to be the mainstay of the future regime in the arts, being far easier to control than those who had joined the

Party and had worked with the Bolsheviks to make and hold the revolution. Among them were some fine and independent writers, like Boris Pilniak, who had to be picked out and humiliated before he could be useful to the bureaucracy. Others had been bourgeois hacks and, having learned the lesson from the example of Pilniak, were just as willing to be Stalinist hacks. When they were thoroughly broken in, they could be brought in to replace the Marxists — literary scabs. The Bolshevik historian Pokrovsky for example, was denounced, and in his place two bourgeois historians, Tarle and Vipper, were rehabilitated and recalled to carry out the important Stalinist tasks of glorifying Russian despots of the past.

Despite all the bullying by RAPP, and the increasingly oppressive atmosphere, there was still a certain amount of latitude for intellectuals and, considering the coming ice-age, comparative freedom. Other small societies existed which could shelter the individual artist from the fury of RAPP; many managed to avoid RAPP by reason of their reputation — Mayakovsky stayed away from it until shortly before his suicide; and despite a spate of 'Five Year Plan' novels and plays, there was no Absolute Decree on style.

By 1932 it was judged that RAPP had completed its useful work, and as a reward it was summarily dismissed. All other writers' organisations were abolished, and the Central Committee assumed direct control through the single Union of Soviet Writers. At the same time 'Socialist Realism' was declared to be the official style of all Soviet writers, painters, film-makers, musicians etc.

RAPP had done its job and could not be trusted any longer — it contained too many people who were genuinely striving for 'proletarian' art, and a number of these were later denounced as 'Trotskyists'. As for Averbach — "He was still the nephew of Yagoda, the head of Security, and a good bureaucrat to boot. He delivered a number of speeches condemning his own 'cultural politics' of yesterday... And the CC gave him the task of managing a Communist organisation in Magnitogorsk. There Leopold Averbach initiated a sabotage-trial, acted himself as prosecutor against the technicians concerned, (and) had them condemned to death according to the rite".

Part 3: The Stalinist ice age

Socialist Realism

Everybody praises a work of art which is true to life; conversely, art which is false and artificial is generally regarded as signalling decadence, though it can still give pleasure and entertainment. As such, however, it is usually ranked second, as art, to the work of truth and sincerity..

But 'true to life' is a very general phrase and likewise the word 'realism' needs to be defined before it can be useful. Sometimes it rests on polar opposites: Classicism contains the essence of the real, a 'universal' reality derived from a constant study of nature; 'romantic' realism generally concentrates on the particular. It either depicts this particular with exact and photographically representational likeness, or caricatures, distorts and exaggerates it, ignoring the niceties of correct detail, in order to draw attention to it. Also, a work can be termed realistic simply because of its **choice** of subject matter, regardless of the **form** it takes — this usage in particular became popular in the last century to cover subjects which had hitherto not been considered worthy of art — ie ordinary everyday objects and the 'unheroic' lives of the exploited classes.

To merit praise as 'true to life' or sincere, a work of art may be realistic in any one of these ways, or in a suitable combination of them — or in none of them. But a bad combination of the contradictory elements in form or subject can lead to disaster, ie something just as false and meaningless as a piece of purely decorative art — except that the latter has no pretensions, and at least brightens up the view.

If one took the Stalinist bureaucrats at their face value, the only possible conclusion would be that they made every mistake in the book when they formulated their art of the Socialist Fatherland. Less charitable people will probably say that the bureaucracy didn't care a damn about the rules of art.

They started out from the 'social realism' of the 19th century — Balzac, Tolstoy, Zola. At the time, Marx had taken realism as the main criterion of a work of literature. Not only was it, in artistic terms, the avant garde at that time, but socially it could not be other than revolutionary. Both Marx and Engels thought that no matter where the writer stood politically, if he only faithfully portrayed the society he lived in and its relationships, his work would be revolutionary. This view was also held by the ruling class, which was horrified by the realists. The 'Social Realist' method of minute physical and psychological investigation, the documentary approach they often adopted, led to the shedding of much of the moralising sentimentality which had hitherto coated all depictions of the 'lower' classes.



Was this what Stalin's cultural commissar Zhdanov wanted? No, not quite. It was explained that these classics had used realism to negate their society. Socialist Realists must use realism to affirm theirs. In practice, in order to do this, genuine realism (loosely defined as 'true to life') had to be suppressed completely, and the **forms** of it harnessed to a fantasy-propaganda world; or, as another variant, a loose approximation to reality could be shown, but so generalised and so glossed up that it had nothing to do with realism either. The penetrating eye and unflinching pen of a genuine realist would surely have shown us something of the suffocating political atmosphere; it might have given a glimpse of old men rummaging through dustbins at the back of GPU men's homes, hoping to find some potato peelings; we may have been shown the wives and daughters of workers supplement their wages by selling themselves to those same GPU men, or the wife of a bureaucrat emerging from one of the special 'Luxe' shops laden with fine clothes, delicacies and perfumes, while homeless children are rounded up from the streets and treated like criminals. But Socialist (!) Realism (!) could show none of these — for its brief was, without looking or thinking, to be positive and affirmative about the Stalinist society around it. But not only did the truth have to be suppressed. It had to be suppressed while appearing to be shown.

So, when dealing with reality, the Socialist Realist writer or artist couldn't be too careful. Leonov's novel *Road to the Ocean* tells the story of a Bolshevik hero — but the presidium of the Union of Soviet Writers decided it was too individualised. History must never be just crudely reflected — but subtly fitted in with the demands of propaganda, spruced up to fit the image. Alexei Tolstoy's Civil War novel — *Bread* (1937) — had to alter countless historical facts so as to make Stalin the hero of the defence of Tsaritsyn. (Not that Alexei Tolstoy minded!) One had to be careful

about ancient history too: Demyan Bedny's 'Epic Heroes' was denounced for treating satirically the 10th century conversion of Russia to Christianity.

What was wanted was not reality at all, but an idealised, generalised, 'typical' Soviet hero, the larger-than-life collective farm worker that-should-have-been; the Leader, recognisable only by moustache and pipe, inflated monstrously and surrounded by all the evidence of an apotheosis. The observer's impartiality of many of the 19th century realists had been wiped out without a trace: RAPP had seen to that. The formula laid down "the ideological remoulding and education of the toiling people in the spirit of socialism". For 'Spirit of Socialism' read a strong tinge of Romanticism — "a supreme spirit of heroic deeds and magnificent future prospects".

What then was left of the classic realism which had once been so revolutionary and which, in Soviet conditions, would have been equally revolutionary? All that remained was the name, which was a very good — if ill-fitting — cover for the figments of a hack imagination. Who, after all, could object to the idea of an art which is true and sincere, or call into question such an eminent ancestry? Also, Marx and Engels could always be dragged in by the hair and made to testify that Realism is a desirable quality — forgetting the fact that 'Socialist Realism' had absolutely no connection with Realism. Their statements on commitment (the following two samples are Engels') could be quietly forgotten:

"The more the author's views are concealed the better for the work of art. The realism...may creep out even in spite of the author's views." (Letter to Margaret Harkness).

"...I think the bias should flow by itself from the situation and action, without particular indications, and that the writer is not obliged to obtrude on the reader the future historical solutions of the social conflicts pictured." (Letter to the novelist Minna Kautsky).

There remained also, as a hollow shell, the **forms** of the 19th century realism, the surface style. This, devoid of its content, was quite irrelevant to the whole question of realism. But it was a useful way to suppress experimentation, and by keeping to the conventions which the censors could understand, kept the artists safe from any deviations into genuine realism which might be cunningly disguised within some new found form.

Evidently taking it all at face value, Brecht summed up the whole question in a July 1938 article intended for *Das Wort*, a German literary review produced in Moscow, of which he was co-editor at the time, but which was not published until 1954:

"As a result no doubt of essays concentrating on a particular way of realist writing — that of the bourgeois novel — readers of *Das Wort* have recently expressed their concern that this review may be restricting realism in

literature within too narrow boundaries. One or two articles may have laid down unduly formal criteria for realist writing, and as a result several readers came to interpret this as meaning that a book is written realistically when it is 'written in the same way as the bourgeois novels of the last century'."

After quoting Shelley, Cervantes, Swift, Grimmelhausen, Dickens, Voltaire and Hasek as realists using different forms from those of Tolstoy and Balzac, he concluded that 'realism is not a matter of form' —

"Tying together a great conception like Realism to a few names is dangerous however famous they may be, and so is the bundling together of a few forms to make a universally-applicable creative method, even if those forms are useful in themselves. Literary forms have to be checked against reality, not against aesthetics — even realist aesthetics. **There are many ways of suppressing the truth, and many ways of stating it.**" (Emphasis RL).

Some years later, he summed up in retrospect the effect of this reduction of the notion of realism to one style. It is worth quoting at length again — Brecht was one of the few genuinely creative artists whose friendship Stalinism could boast. Although sufficiently disillusioned to write in the same notebook the cryptic question "Accessible to the people or accessible to the official?" he still writes with the sympathy of one who believes it was all just a matter of well-intentioned mistakes:

"The principles of a realistic and socialist art were not examined but simply treated as a style to be imposed on artists of very different sorts, some of them of world-wide reputation. This led to a pernicious levelling and to the discouragement of that individual and independent sense of form without which no art is possible. The campaign against the formalism of decaying bourgeois art was turned into a campaign against the sense of form... Without Marxist knowledge and a socialist outlook it is impossible today to understand reality or to use one's understanding to change it. For art, however, this is not a question of style, least of all today. Style only comes into the matter in so far as the style needs to be as simple as possible, as intelligible as possible; the battle for socialism cannot be won by a handful of highly educated connoisseurs, a few people who know how to understand complicated charades. But I said as simple as possible. Certain complex processes which we need to understand cannot be quite simply portrayed." (From Brecht on Theatre, trans. John Willet. Methuen.)

Another writer with no political fish to fry was the great Irish Stalinist playwright Sean O'Casey, who expressed himself rather more directly in a private letter (to Ken Coates in 1955):

Life, he said, was complex, "...bewildering, lively, dull, selfish, generous and so on. And what a complex thing is one human life alone! All it has to deal with, within himself, without from the life of others. Zhdanov — of whom you have heard, I daresay — didn't know what he was talking about;

and all who echoed him in the Daily Worker and elsewhere, knew a damned sight less". (Published in The Socialist Register, 1964).

How was the 'most advanced literature in the world' brought into being? How could a writer or a painter abandon his life's course and "with hands that tremble for fear of the verdict of some official", as Brecht wrote, set about the precarious task of deriving "the material for his works of art, his subject matter, images, artistic language and speech, from the life and experience of the men and women of Dnieprostroy, or Magnistostroy...from the heroic epic of the Chelyuskin expedition, from the experience of our collective farms"; at the same time steering between the "seamy side of Soviet life" (a subject strictly forbidden) which stared him daily in the face, and the mythical master-race of the bureaucratic propagandists?

The answer is that, unless he wanted to emigrate, he had no choice. The Central Committee had the monopoly of publishing, printing, distribution, criticism: "Success was manufactured wholly by the Party offices. The chosen book, recommended to all the libraries in the land, was printed in tens of thousands of copies; the Foreign Languages Publishing House translated it into several languages, and the author, loaded with money and praise, became a 'great writer' in the space of a season, which of course deceived nobody" (Serge). Conversely, those books which accidentally got printed and were not favoured by the Writers' Union, were not even permitted a small circulation — they were sent immediately to be pulped.

Close supervision reigned long before the printing stage: "I was checked, line by line, by experts charged with the task of uncovering possible sabotage in the disposition of semicolons. I knew Nadezhda Constantinova Krupskaya was working in similar conditions on her memoirs of Lenin; a committee was reviewing her every line. Gorky was altering his own memoirs on the demand of the Central Committee..." To Boris Pilniak "it had been suggested...that to avoid banishment from Soviet literature, he should remodel 'Forest of the Isles', that 'counter-revolutionary' tale of his, into a novel agreeable to the CC. This body's Cultural Section had assigned him a co-author who, page by page, would ask him to suppress this and add that. The helpmate's name was Yezhov..." (Serge).

There were inducements of a different kind. Serge continues: "Then came the years of rationing, famine and black-marketeering. Authors with the right ideas received fantastic secret rations from the GPU co-operatives, including even butter, cheese and chocolate! 'Do have a little taste' a friend asked me, 'of this highly confidential Gruyere...' Doubtful writers, that is any who were lyrical, mystical or unpolitical, got mediocre official rations." This was increasingly supplemented by imprisonment, deportation and killings.

The 1934 Writers' Congress

After several years of such conditioning,

and two years after the announcement of 'Socialist' 'Realism', the intellectuals were brought out and put on show in a great circus called the first Writers' Congress. During 25 sessions over two weeks 200 speeches and reports were delivered to the 590 Russian delegates and 40 distinguished foreign guests. The main purpose of the exercise was to acclaim the 'most advanced literature in the world', and to attack and denigrate anything which looked like contending for the title.

The flavour of the affair — the awful combination of ignorance with Pope-like laying down of the law — is best savoured from the speech of Karl Radek, a renegade Trotskyist soon to be sent by Stalin to Siberia, where he perished. Radek laid about him condemning the 'decadence' of modern 'bourgeois' art. As his prime example he chose James Joyce's great novel 'Ulysses' which had been banned everywhere when Joyce published it in the early '20s. As everyone remotely interested in such things knows Ulysses follows the movements and encounters of a number of characters around Dublin during a single day in June 1904. Radek denounces Joyce for petit-bourgeois small-mindedness and indifference to great events for having set this highly personal chronicle against the background which Joyce allegedly ignored of the 1916 rising in Dublin! Plainly Stalin's cultural commissar, Radek, had never read the book he was condemning!

A few voices spoke in different tones — and within three years they were silenced. The short story writer Isaac Babel, author of the famous collection of civil war stories, 'Red Cavalry', spoke for the 'right to surprise', to experiment. Jean Richard Bloch advocated different levels for literature — that some could be written for a very small audience, but serve society generally by being "test pilots of literature, seekers after new forms."

The bureaucracy, however, was far from wanting new forms. After all, what was good enough for their great-grandfathers was good enough for the workers, though it was to be described by Che Guevara as "nothing more than the corpse of the bourgeois art of the nineteenth century". But anyone who harboured such thoughts could be silent and starve or be silent and make some kind of living working on translation of the bourgeois classics or converting folk songs into popular poems and songs, so long as the themes were general enough. For the hacks, those Guevara called the "docile servants of official thought", it wasn't a bad life.

These were by no means all revolutionaries. Ilya Ehrenberg had written in 1919 a long poem, "Prayer for Russia", an attack on Bolshevik rule and lament for Russia's fate. But probably the foremost of the hacks was Alexei Tolstoy, who hadn't even stayed behind: "I had met him in Berlin in 1922, an authentic counter-revolutionary emigre, negotiating his return to Russia and his future royalties. Highly esteemed by the educated classes under Tsarism, a discreet liberal and honest patriot, he

had fled with the White forces from the Revolution... In character, manner, morals he was really a high Russian lord of the olden days, loving beautiful things, good living, polite literature, cautiously liberal opinion, the odour of power..." (Serge). Tolstoy began to write historical works on Peter the Great, and with unerring instinct, or perhaps an eye on the main chance, managed to bring out certain comparisons with his own newly embraced Great Leader. Stalin was well flattered, and later Tolstoy wrote two plays glorifying Ivan the Terrible in the same way. This was also in accordance with the build up of nationalistic propaganda. Little wonder that Tolstoy was soon acclaimed as the official Great Writer.

On this note the Thirties drew to a close. Most of the really talented writers were no longer to be seen — they had either been purged, or taken their own lives, or just quietly given up the ghost and stopped writing, lapsing into what Babel had called the 'Genre of Silence'. The tight control over literature continued, on the pretext that there was a constant danger from counter-revolutionary Trotskyists and saboteurs, until the German attack in 1941. When the real danger came the controls were relaxed, within the specified formal limits. A writer could find satisfaction in



Isaac Babel

writing genuine documentary reports and stories from the Front. Thus true realism was only permitted when it did not indict the regime.

Zhdanovism

To counter the effects of war-time looseness and re-establish the Party's role and its 'ideological orthodoxy', Andrei Zhdanov dropped back into the scene like a ton of bricks, and initiated a period of such tight control that the 'Party line' was carried out to the letter — with catastrophic consequences.

He started out in August 1946 with a denunciation or two. This was how it was reflected in the British Stalinist press: "Zoshchenko was condemned for 'scratching about amidst the lowest and pettiest sides of life' and not being at all concerned with the efforts and heroism of the Soviet people. Akhmatova's poems, 'mainly emphasising erotic love themes, interwoven with notes of sadness, yearning, death, mysticism and

fatality', — Jack Beeching's description, in 1957, was of "an elderly lady writing, apparently, mainly on the themes of pussy cats and unrequited love...[which] could do young people nothing but harm — 'they can only sow gloom, low spirits, pessimism, the desire to escape from the vital problems of social life'." (Emile Burns, 'The Soviet Discussions', in *The Modern Quarterly*, Autumn 1948).

Zoshchenko and Anna Akhmatova were among the few to have survived the Thirties without becoming hacks, and during the war had formed a rallying point for younger writers of the new generation. They had been attacked in a half-hearted way as far back as 1943, and now that absolute obedience was once again required, their influence had to be removed. They were also to serve as an example and a warning to others.

The initial keynote, then, was optimism. Whereas before the stress had been on the socialist struggle, conflict was now reduced to a minimum. Lest Akhmatova's fate befall them, the well-trained pen-pushers responded with bright saccharine smiles. They succeeded so well that all the theatres remained half-empty, and there was no sale for their books.

To neutralise this, the critics were brought in to complain. Safronov, writing in the magazine *October*, in 1948, condemned plays with "neither conflict nor character; they have only comedy-type situations." In the same journal, I. Altman said that "the main defect of our drama is the quite unjustified attempt on the part of our writers to smooth out the conflicts which manifest themselves in life, to make a play less sharp-edged, and to make the hero into a 'mouthpiece for ideas' who loses the traits of a living character."

Now it seems that the critics did their job a little too zealously, and had themselves to be reined in. An editorial article on 28 January 1949 in *Pravda* initiated the new campaign, against "an anti-patriotic group of theatre critics" which embraced "nests of bourgeois aestheticism, camouflaging an anti-patriotic, cosmopolitan corrupt attitude towards Soviet art". They had indulged in the vile crime of raising the question of an opposition "between literature's educational role and its artistic standards." The article defined the task of Soviet literature as the glorification of the regime's achievements and successes, and went on to list the most suitable 'sources of inspiration'.

The chief emphasis now was on patriotism, though this was hardly new. This twist in the campaign had been heralded as early as 1947 when Nusinov was attacked for having given too much credit to Western influences in the development of...Pushkin! Now any critic who had objected (or even mentioned) that characters pronounced didactic high-flown speeches about the Motherland, was accused of lack of patriotism. However, the new patriotism demanded a specific condemnation of the old and praise for the new in each and every work. To make their point, the Union of Writers picked out V.

Sosyura's poem, 'Love the Ukraine', as a dismal failure, for it had concentrated on the 'eternal Ukraine of field and sky and nature' without mentioning the power plants or telegraph poles that were a new feature of these fields. Though it had been written in 1942, long before the current campaign, it was singled out in 1951 and attacked as 'bourgeois nationalist', and both Sosyura and the translator Prokofiev had to admit their error.

As a result of the campaign against the iniquitous cosmopolitan critics (many of them Jews; and this was a time of a wholesale anti-semitic campaign, thinly disguised as a campaign against 'rootless cosmopolitans' and 'Zionists') a whole series of new rationalisations had to be constructed. What now was the function of the critic? What authority had he? The answer was that he must 'hold dear the fate of Soviet literature' and not be 'alien and hostile'. And presumably the converse applied — the right line of criticism was right because it 'held dear the fate of Soviet literature' and wrong line because it was 'hostile and alien'!

The 'Optimism Campaign' of 1946 had led to synthetic smiles all round, and the critics' remedy had been too strong. To try and find a happy medium, a new law of 'dialectics' was concocted, whereby there was not exactly conflict, but something faintly resembling it...**misunderstanding!** Henceforth, all 'conflict' within Soviet society was not between Good and Bad, or Black and White, as it had been previously, but between the Good and the Better, or the Good and the Excellent. Principally, it must be between old and new production techniques.

The next period saw a crop of plays about workbench lovers falling out over safety regulations, the wife who leaves her husband because he favours sowing a 'backward' crop, the collective farm hero who works himself to death during harvest time, disregarding the doctor's advice, and the girl who, waiting for her boyfriend in the woods, thinks he must have made the date to discuss production problems. To the extent that these worthy artistic entertainments gained an audience at all, it was from dearth of choice offered to the newly literate masses avid for culture. But on the whole they showed their discrimination by ignoring the 'most advanced literature in the world', and turning to the classics. Theatres showing 'Soviet' plays stayed half-empty, and 'Soviet' novels and poetry remained unopened in shops and libraries.

In yet another bid to win an audience, the bureaucracy now turned to ridiculing the products of its last campaign, pointing out the rather obvious fact that this was really not quite how everyone lived their lives. Moreover, they complained, the story of the wife leaving her husband belittled Soviet marriage, while the one about the hero of the harvest belittled Soviet medicine! In the same breath they called for a little satire and fun, but nobody by then felt in the mood — who knew what he might unwittingly be in danger of belittling?

All the zig-zags and exaggerations of the period known as Zhdanovism were a logical culmination of the attempt to dictate the content and style of a work of art. The better trained were the hacks, the more they carried out to the letter the latest instruction; until, finally, every iota of individual creative interest had

been drained out. It was exactly as Brecht once warned: "It's not the job of the Marxist-Leninist party to organise production of poems as on a poultry farm. If it did, the poems would resemble one another, like so many eggs." Soviet arts had come to a complete full stop. The masses,

increasingly discriminating and having a little leisure in which to think, were every day voting no confidence in the 'works of genius' offered to them from on high. The situation was changing, and the policy had to be modified accordingly.

Part 4: The post-Stalinist 'thaw'

Stalin died in March 1953. After a prolonged struggle at the top of the bureaucracy, he was succeeded by the first reforming Stalinist Tsar, Nikita Krushchev, who stopped the permanent terror, opened the labour camps and allowed some critical voices to be heard, the first such voice for a quarter of a century. Intellectuals were permitted a slightly longer rein. A few critical voices were heard, but only when their criticism was 'safe'. Writers and artists were no longer shot, but hundreds of them — at least — were kept hidden away in asylums, together with people such as the organisers of an underground free trade union. It was demanded of the poet Brodsky when he was tried as a malingerer that he **prove the usefulness** of his poetry! When the anti-Stalin upheavals of 1956 were found to have unleashed a flood of experimentation, the bureaucracy had to stem the tide: at a gathering of writers in 1957, Khrushchev declared that "his hand would not tremble" if it came to shooting a few who had strayed too far. Art exhibitions could now include, occasionally, a work which attempts to break out of the bounds of the 19th century academicism; but not too far — several exhibitions that got as far as opening their doors had them closed within the hour on a flimsy pretext.

Under Brezhnev, who ousted Krushchev in October 1964, there was a partial re-Stalinisation, though it was more a matter of the icing over of the sludge of Krushchev's partial 'thaw' than a return to the deep ice age. Even so, this period saw a savage and prolonged persecution of the Ukrainian identity by way of assaults on its language and culture. It is too early to assess what the reign of Gorbachev, the second reforming Stalinist Tsar, will bring in this field.

Soviet arts have reflected and paralleled at every turn the economic and political basis of Russia. In every sphere of life the slight lessening of the official grip has led to a situation where the genie (of the free activity of both workers and intellectuals) has oozed out of the bottle and been pushed back, with the bureaucracy wrestling to replace the cork. But the battle to free the arts will not be won until the workers have retaken power, and re-established the principles of the Bolsheviks in the early 1920s. In 1956 some intellectuals may have imagined that the ice was about to melt; they learned that only the top layer had thawed a little, that Stalinism is not 'the reign of Stalin' but the rule of bureaucracy, and that the ice must be broken by the proletarian

sledgehammer, not merely modified by a controlled change in official temperature. The bureaucracy even today under Gorbachev has just as much monopoly control over what is published and exhibited as it ever had in the days of Zhdanov and Stalin. The fact that it may choose to exercise its power more liberally should not blind anyone to the fact that it does so only in order to secure that power.

It is ironic that, in the sphere of culture — and this is particularly strange, considering that **creatively** the past 60 or so years in Russia has been 'an epoch of mediocrities, laureates and toadies', as Trotsky wrote in 1936, when only half the damage had been done — the Russian masses are probably the most literate and most receptive in the world to the best of bourgeois culture.

Part 5: Can there be a proletarian culture?

The horrors in art and literature of the Stalinist ice-age were an aspect of the untrammelled rule of the bureaucracy. It was not proletarian rule but bureaucratic rule over the proletariat in society which generated that system of regimentation of art, life and thought.

Nevertheless, the Stalinists claimed to rule for the working class, and claimed that they were applying the ideas of Marxism to the work of creating a proletarian culture. The great and obvious lie at the heart of such a claim does not automatically dispose of the issues thus posed on the level of ideas. And though the relationship of the Stalinist cultural commissars with even the most confused of the earlier genuine enthusiasts for 'proletarian culture' and 'art' was that of a direct negation, nevertheless, the forms of the ideological rationalisations employed by the Stalinist dictators did bear some relationship to the ideas of Proletcult and RAPP.

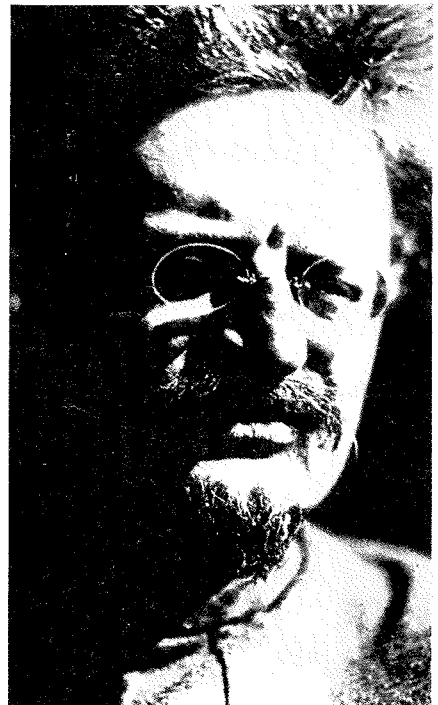
We must, therefore, finally, consider the question as posed by both the earlier honest enthusiasts and later, hypocritically, by Stalin's cultural policemen: can there be a proletarian culture? Could there have been a genuine proletarian culture had the Stalinist bureaucracy not taken power and stamped their own image on this as on all other aspects of Soviet society?

A workers' art for a workers' state

In his preface to the first Italian edition

The general education of the proletariat, which Lenin specified as an essential prerequisite for a workers' culture, is now a reality in the USSR. It has come about precisely because these workers were offered only two choices — either to read the bourgeois classics, or to plough through the fifth-rate Stalinist imitations of them.

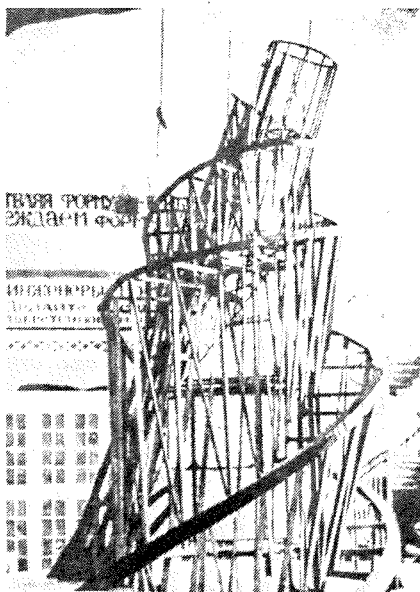
At the present time, by comparison with the total censorship enforced by Stalinism, bourgeois culture manages to appear completely free. When the time comes, as it must come soon, that the Russian workers establish the genuine freedom of a proletarian democracy, it will be obvious at first glance that bourgeois art has been and is weighed down by the money-bags-society only a little less than Russian art has been by the censor.



Trotsky at the time of writing 'Literature and Revolution'

of the Communist Manifesto in 1893, Engels had asked: "Will Italy give us the new Dante, who will mark the hour of birth of this new proletarian era?"

Ten years later his question was answered for him by Rosa Luxemburg:



Tatlin's monument to the Comintern

"the working class cannot create its own art and science until after it is completely emancipated from its position as an actual class". (Vorwaerts, March 1903). In 1925, Leon Trotsky elaborated on this. The bourgeoisie, even though they came to political power after a long period of gradual accumulation of independent wealth and culture, took several centuries to develop their own art. How can the proletariat which comes straight to power from a state of wage slavery, be expected to produce from its sleeve a fully grown culture. But will it ever develop its own culture? Trotsky argued that since nobody envisaged the Dictatorship of the Proletariat as lasting long enough to do this before altogether abolishing classes in society, including itself as a class, the proletariat would never find the time, historically, to create its own independent art: "The proletariat acquires power for the purpose of doing away forever with class culture, and to make way for human culture..."

By then, proletarian culture had become quite an issue. Within the Party, there were very few who felt like being dogmatic about it, and I know of no official statement on the matter being made until 1924; then a special Party conference on art declared that the hegemony of the proletariat must be won in the field of art by superior productions that there must be free competition among all groups, and that the main task in any case was to raise the cultural level of the masses. Its conclusions were published by Krassnaia Nov as a pamphlet entitled "On the question of the Policy of the Russian CP in Artistic Literature". At the same time, it sharply denounced all forms of "pretentious, semi-literate and self-satisfied combigoty" (a term to describe bureaucratic, pompous self-importance).

This was particularly aimed against Proletcult (Organisation for Proletarian Culture) which was a seedbed for the assumptions which were to prevail in the coming Stalinist era in the arts. Its

ideology was a convenient one for use later by the bureaucracy, so that all the issues which arose in the discussions around this (in itself sincere and fairly harmless) organisation were perfectly relevant to the period of Stalinism. In effect, the last free discussion about the '30s and '40s took place in the early and mid-1920s.

There were two mainstays to its credo: that the arts must be strictly organised and regimented to act as a weapon of the proletariat; and that to this end a new mass culture must be created, which would be proletarian not because it came from the workers, but by virtue of having been cultivated in the hothouses of Proletcult itself. The founding president, Bogdanov, actually declared that proletarian poetry was neither proletarian nor poetry — which gives the measure of his patronising attitude.

'What a mess!'

Bogdanov's successor Pletnev wrote an article for Pravda (September 27, 1922), on which Lenin made his view clear by writing in the margin of his copy such telling comments as "Ha, ha!", "What a mess!", "arch-fiction" and "...bunk". In October 1920 he had made his views known more publicly. At the 3rd All Russian Congress of Communist Youth he had said: "The proletarian culture is not something that jumps up from nobody knows where. It is not a thought-up scheme of some people who call themselves specialists in proletarian culture. That is all pure nonsense. The proletarian culture must appear as a natural development of those stores of knowledge which man has worked out under the yoke of the capitalist society, the landlord society, the bureaucratic society."

For Lenin, there were certain pre-conditions for any art of the whole people. Whether or not the proletariat would still exist as a class, these pre-conditions were the same as those for socialism: "In order to have a culture a certain development of the material forces of production, a certain material basis, is necessary." (On Cooperation). In this sense, the mass culture would develop organically, together with socialism: neither can be instituted by decree. It was, above all, a question of broad general education. Vyacheslav Polonsky, in 'Lenin's views on Art and Culture', quotes him as saying: "In order that art may draw near to the people and the people to art, we must in the first place raise the existing level of culture and education". And again, 'Page from a diary', Jan 1923: "While we were jabbering about proletarian culture and about its relation with bourgeois culture, facts have been presented to us and figures demonstrating that even in the matter of bourgeois culture things with us are weak indeed. It became known that...we are still far behind the goal of universal literacy... This will serve as a warning and a threat and rebuke to those who have been soaring and are soaring in the empyrean of 'proletarian culture'. That shows how much real dirty work remains for us to do in order to attain the level of an ordinary civilised state of western

Europe. It shows, moreover, what a mountain of work stands before us now before we can attain, on the basis of our proletarian acquisitions, any kind of real cultural level at all."

But what about the question of the use of art as a class weapon? Here again I feel one could do worse than turn to Lenin, the greatest of socialist revolutionaries, whose views most likely sum up the outlook consistent with the healthy workers' state. Lenin neglected nothing he considered vital for the proletariat's fight for power, using to the full every possible weapon and front of the class struggle, and in particular waging a constant struggle on the front of ideology. Yet far from wishing to organise and use the fine arts, he always aligned them with the goal, rather than the instrument of the revolution; the theatre, he said (and art) is the only single thing that can replace religion in the consciousness of the masses. It must be for enjoyment and relaxation — "A theatre is necessary" he had said in 1919 during a debate on whether to close the Bolshoi Theatre "not so much for propaganda, as to rest hard workers after their daily work. And it is still early to file away in the archives our heritage from bourgeois art." But perhaps more eloquent than anything he did write on this subject, is what he didn't write. Not a word could the Stalinists later find to suggest that Lenin would have approved of "socialist realism", of the 1934 Writers' Congress, or of Zhdanov's regimentation.

New Narodniks

Unwittingly, the Proletcult organisation was instrumental in reviving many of the old Narodnik approaches, of worshipping the masses at their existing level and thus standing in the way of the future. Trotsky in Literature and Revolution described the attitudes which led from the genuine wish for an art of the proletariat, back in the opposite direction:

"It would be monstrous to conclude...that the technique of bourgeois art is not necessary to the workers. Yet there are many who fall into this error. 'Give us', they say, 'something even pock-marked, but our own'. This is false and untrue. A pock-marked art is no art and is therefore not necessary to the working masses. Those who believe in a 'pock-marked' art are imbued to a considerable extent with contempt for the masses and are like the breed of politicians who have no faith in class power but who flatter and praise the class when 'all is well'. On the heels of the demagogues come the sincere fools who have taken up this simple formula of a pseudo-proletarian art. This is not Marxism, but reactionary populism, falsified a little to suit a 'proletarian' ideology. Proletarian art should not be second-rate art. One has to learn regardless of the fact that learning carries within itself certain dangers because out of necessity one has to learn from one's enemies. One has to learn and the importance of such organisations as the Proletcult cannot be measured by the rapidity with which they create a new literature, but by the

extent to which they help to elevate the literary level of the working class, beginning with its upper strata."

The ideas and attitudes which Proletcult fostered were later caricatured by Stalinism, which had arrived at the end of the trail towards populism when Trotsky wrote, in 1936 — "What is not wanted by the people", Pravda dictates to the artists, 'cannot have aesthetic significance'. That old Narodnik formula, rejecting the task of artistically educating the masses, takes on a still more reactionary character when the right to decide what art the people want and what they don't want remains in the hands of the bureaucracy." (Revolution Betrayed, p.185)

It need hardly be said that the alternative to Proletcult was not a passive acquiescence in the continued separation of the artist from the masses. The evidence of the early period of the revolution clearly shows a constant striving by the avant garde artists and poets to find new forms which would bring them closer to the workers. To a large extent they met with success. But this success in reaching the workers, in their case, meant looking to the future, and not, as in the case of the hacks of the thirties, bringing out of the past all the stale, ready-made bourgeois entertainment-'art' forms. They were constantly seeking new forms, not for the sake of novelty, but with the consciousness that art could make a big break through the walls and barriers which stood between it and the life of the workers.

In 1937 the Soviet Bureaucracy invented 'formalism' to silence Lissitsky, Tairon, Meyerhold and others seeking new forms through which to liberate art. It even brought in 'dialectics' to claim that such over-insistence on forms at the expense of content was 'anti-socialist'. Of course it never occurred to these gentlemen, who

didn't know Matisse from Michelangelo, that perhaps the real content of these 'empty forms' was the laying of roads to the future.

The limits of revolutionary censorship

Proletcult implied, and Stalinism of course instituted, censorship over artistic productions. The CP had clearly gone on record in 1924 in favour of a variety of groups and styles. Did this include openly counter-revolutionary propaganda? Where was the line to be drawn?

Trotsky had then defined the question thus: "while holding over them all the categorical criterion, FOR the revolution or AGAINST the revolution, to give them complete freedom in the sphere of artistic self-determination." At the Special Conference on Art in 1924 he had spoken of dangers of revolutionary censorship, which was of course essential within strict bounds, spreading uncontrollably: "Our standard is clearly political, imperative and intolerant. But for this very reason, it must define the limits of its activity clearly."

His view was that: "A work of art should be judged by its own law...The Marxist methods are not the same as the artistic. A philosophy which 'conceives' reality in the form of a practical procedure towards a goal cannot give directives to creative art which *perceives* reality and carries a goal within itself." This view was not limited to the Left at this Conference. Even Bukharin declared for a separation of creative endeavour from the Workers' State machine: "It seems to me that the best means of ruining proletarian literature...is to reject the principle of free anarchist competition. If we take our stand for a literature which is to be regulated by the State power and enjoy

all kinds of privileges, then there is no doubt that we will put an end to proletarian literature." Prophetic words indeed!

The heyday of Stalinism saw a censorship which broke all bounds. Perhaps its most repugnant aspect was the tight grip of the state in every sphere of the arts on form and style — in the name of 'Marxism'. In this connection I shall say no more, and let Marx himself speak:

"My property is **form**, it is my spiritual individuality. **The style is the man**. And how! The law allows me to write, but on condition that I write in a style other than my own, I have the right to show the face of my spirit, but must first set it in the **prescribed expression!** What man of honour would not blush at such presumption and prefer to hide his head under his toga? At least the toga suggests the head of Jupiter. The prescribed expression only means putting a good face on a bad situation.

You admire the delightful variety, the inexhaustible wealth of nature. You do not demand that a rose should have the same scent as a violet, but the richest of all, the spirit, is to be allowed to exist in **only one form?** I am a humorist, but the law orders me to write seriously. I am bold, but the law orders me to be modest. Grey and more grey, that is the only authorised colour of freedom. Every dewdrop in which the sun is reflected, glitters with an inexhaustible display of colours, but the sun of the spirit may break into ever so many different individuals and objects, yet it is permitted to produce only one colour, the **official colour**. The essential form of the spirit is **gaiety, light**, and you make **shadows** its only proper manifestation; it must be dressed only in black, and yet there are no black flowers. The essence of the spirit is always **truth itself**, and what do you make its essence? **Modesty**. Only the knave is modest, says Goethe; and you want to make a knave out of the spirit? Or should the modesty be that modesty of genius of which Schiller speaks, then first transform all your citizens and above all your censors into geniuses."

(Ueber die Neueste Preussische Zensurinstruktion ['A new Prussian censorship law']. MEGA, Part 1, Vol.1, p.154)

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Is Scotland a colony?

Doctor James D Young is the nearest thing to a theoretician possessed by the 'Movement for a Socialist Scotland', the breakaway from the Labour Party in Scotland which, on February 25th, proclaimed itself the 'Scottish Socialist Party'.

An assessment of his pamphlet, 'The Scottish National Question and Labour History', penned by this master of the non sequitur in 1982 would, therefore, cast some light on the muddled thinking behind the emergence of this new party, especially given the misplaced reverence with which the Doctor is regarded by some of the members of the fledgling party.

"There has been an almost unbroken continuity of pent-up anger and resentment against British imperialism within Scotland since the late eighteenth century," asserts the pamphlet.

This assertion dovetails with the argument put forward by Young in his book 'The Rousing of the Scottish Working Class': "The colonial relationship between England and Scotland defined the context in which industrialisation and the making of the Scottish working class occurred...At every critical point in the relationship between England and Scotland, the authorities in London made it crystal clear that Scotland was an internal colony."

The alleged status of Scotland as an "internal colony" of England explains, or so the Doctor would have us believe, why the 'Scottish identity' is "at once a national and a class one", and why the Scots have traditionally been "much more anti-imperialist and outward-looking than the English."

The notion of Scotland as an "internal colony" does not stand up to a moment's examination. Even Tom Nairn (author of 'The Break Up of Britain', and every bit as much a nationalist as Doctor James D Young, albeit one with a greater concern for historical facts) recognises that by the nineteenth century "Scotland had left the category of 'subject nations' for good and joined the ranks of the 'imperialists'."

Scotland's development since 1707 has not been a colonial one, but one of integration into an all-British national economy. As Nairn again points out, it has participated in "two centuries of Great British exploits, in the subjugation of many genuine 'subject nations'."

Hardly surprisingly, therefore, Doctor James D Young is not on any firmer ground in asserting a continuity of struggle against the supposedly internal-colonial status of Scotland. One can point to a history of 'struggle' for some

Stan Crooke looks at the theories of the Scottish Socialist Party

form of Scottish self-government. But that history is far from being "almost unbroken".

Early Scottish radicalism had little connection with an aspiring Scottish nationalism. Radicals active in the aftermath of the French Revolution, at the time of the 'Radical Rising' of 1820, or during the campaign for Parliamentary reform in the early 1830s, looked to allies in the South to help achieve their goals, not towards Scottish separatism.

Only the revival of radical liberalism in the latter part of the nineteenth century saw the development of links between Scottish nationalism and radicalism. When a rather motley array of disaffected Liberals launched the Scottish Labour Party in 1888, they took with them, as a piece of political baggage from their Liberal past, the call for Scottish Home Rule and passed it on to the emerging labour movement.

After a flurry of interest in the issue in the period 1914-1923, any campaigning for some form of Scottish self-government again dropped off the political agenda of the labour movement in Scotland.

Between 1924 and 1931 the Scottish TUC did not discuss the question at all, and then voted down a pro-Home Rule resolution at the 1931 congress. Although there was an occasional flickering of interest in Scottish self-government in subsequent decades, it effectively remained a dead letter until the growth of the Scottish National Party in the late 1960s.

According to Young, "in the 1880s and 1890s, the indigenous trade unions and the Independent Labour Party were passionate advocates of Scottish self-government". Apart from overstating the case (the programme of the Scottish United Trades Council Labour Party, for example, a Trades Council-based Labour Party set up in 1892, did not take up the issue of Home Rule), this assertion begs the question of why the early labour movement in Scotland supported, passionately or otherwise, Scottish self-government.

Certainly not because its members were so confused as to consider Scotland an "internal colony" of England. As already pointed out, the early labour movement in Scotland inherited support for Scottish Home Rule from the Liberals. As John Mac-

Cormick, eventual founder of the Scottish National Party, wrote of the Independent Labour Party in the 1920s: "Many of them had begun their political life as Liberals in the Gladstonian tradition, and Home Rule was inherited along with other items of the Radical faith."

For the Liberals of the late nineteenth century, Scottish Home Rule was a means to three specific ends: abolition of the liquor trade; disestablishment of the Church; and resolving the land question. The pioneers of the labour movement — abstemious God-fearing folk, for whom unearned income from land was a sin against the Protestant work ethic — shared the ends and, with them, the means.

There was certainly nothing 'anti-imperialist' about the Liberal or Labour support for Scottish self-government. Like the Liberals, the Scottish Labour Party envisaged separate parliaments for England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales — plus the maintenance of an 'Imperial Parliament' to govern the British Empire.

Doctor James D Young is even less successful and even more inaccurate in dealing with the attitude towards Scottish separatism and nationalism held by individuals and organisations to the left of the mainstream labour traditions in Scotland in the early twentieth century.

He claims that John Maclean "supported the agitation for Scottish self-government long before the First World War, though he did not regard it as the most central issue facing the left in Scotland." This is a rather generous interpretation of, for example, Maclean's writings of 1912 in which he described a possible Scottish Parliament as "a Scottish Babel" and "a buffer betwixt us and our goal, or a brake to curb our revolutionary fervour." Its creation would be "a retrograde step and should meet with our opposition and ridicule. What is good or bad for England is good or bad for Scotland."

Young's attempts to portray Trotsky as an ideological precursor of his exotic arguments (which become increasingly exotic in the course of his pamphlet) are positively bizarre. Attributing to Trotsky views which were entirely alien to him, the Doctor writes:

"Aware of the insurgent proletarian radicalism of the years of the Red Clyde, Trotsky did not ignore the importance of racial factors in the Scots' contribution to the socialist struggle...Trotsky attributed the greater militancy of the Scots than the English workers to 'racial' characteristics and the lateness of capitalist

development in Scotland." (Trotsky explicitly opposed the creation of a Scottish Parliament, but Doctor James D Young skips over this fact. In passing, it is worthy of note that this self-styled political iconoclast endorses the hoary mythology about 'Red Clydeside'. But how could he do otherwise, given his assertion that "(by) 1919 it was crystal clear that the Scots were to the left of the English"?)

There is also something odd about the Doctor's references to the Communist Party and the national question in Scotland. "The British CP was opposed to the struggle for Scottish self-government at its very inception," he writes, because "it was opposed to the break-up of the Empire and full freedom for the colonial peoples."

Ten pages on we learn that "the Party changed line in 1940. The communists in Scotland were now agitating for a Scottish Parliament and identifying with Scotland's cultural heritage...The Party not only supported the Scottish agitation; it also asserted that the Scots had 'a common language and common economic life'."

But was the pre-Stalinist Communist Party really opposed to the break-up of the Empire? And why should this affect its attitude towards Scottish self-government? The Liberals and the Scottish Labour Party had been *both* pro-Empire and pro-Scottish self-government. And the Communist Party of the 1940s which backed Scottish self-government was more definitely a toady of British imperialism.

In any case, the Communist Party 'changed line' arguably well before 1940. In 1936 the Party had put out a statement in support of a Scottish Parliament. By 1938 its members turned up for May Day demonstrations clad in tartan, carrying pictures of Bruce, Wallace, Burns and R.L. Stevenson!

Young asserts that the early Trotskyist movement displayed "a certain ambiguity towards the distinctive national traditions and cultures of the Africans, the American negroes and the Scots" — surely an amazing amalgam by anyone's standards.

But it is no accidental amalgam. Doctor James D Young really does equate Blacks in America with Scots in Britain. Referring to the bitterness of Blacks in the Southern states of the USA, the Doctor declares that "the same sort of resentments were elicited on Red Clyde when Scottish socialist speakers such as Bob Smillie asserted that the Scots were just as entitled to decent housing as the English workers."

Escaping an historical trap

The problem is wrongly stated, in my view, when the call is for the removal of British troops. British troops are in Northern Ireland because there we have a malfunctioning political unit.

It was relatively peaceful from Partition to the time of the Civil Rights Movement, but incredibly unjust and unequal. Then there was a peaceful protest asking for one person, one vote, equality in housing, and equality in access to jobs, and people were attacked and burned out of their houses because they joined that peaceful democratic protest. The Northern Ireland state looked on or joined in.

It's because of that that British troops were sent in, and because of that that the IRA were reborn. The IRA had practically gone out of existence after its Border Campaign in the '50s, but the violent response to the civil rights movement led to the re-establishment of the IRA by public demand.

Soon we got internment, and the troops moved against the nationalist community.

The call for the withdrawal of British troops is an inadequate and muddled demand. What we have to have is a new political settlement in Ireland including the removal of British troops, and that has to be done in a responsible way that minimises disruption and the risk of violence.

The first stage is the maturing of the political debate in Britain beyond the sort of instinctive aspiration to withdrawal that is reflected in the opinion polls.

Then, I think, you give a commitment to British disengagement — without a time limit, that's my own view. The way I see it is that you might win it on the left, then in the labour movement, and get into a position where the British Labour Party would fight a general election on a commitment to organise a disengagement from Ireland.

The Partition of Ireland has made the situation very complicated. You can't pretend that it's a straight decolonisation. It's more complex.

You have to look at Britain's most irresponsible decolonisation, and that's Palestine. Look at all the suffering and mayhem there's been because of Britain's irresponsibility. If anyone says it's all imperialist to talk about the detail of how you go, I'd just ask them to look seriously at Palestine, and see how much better Britain could have done by all the people who live there.

But you turn a historical corner when you get that far, that you've got a British Labour government elected on a commitment to disengage itself from Ireland. The Protestant Irish will know that that is what the British people say.

They know it anyway. They discuss



Clare Short MP talked to Workers' Liberty about Ireland. She has been the central figure in the new 'Time To Go' campaign

the idea that one day there'll be a united Ireland — they just argue to defer it, "not in my lifetime."

You would begin the process of constitutional talks, with the British government, the Irish government, and all the parties in Northern Ireland, talking about the civil and religious liberties that would have to be secured. I think the ideal is a new constitution for the whole island of Ireland, though I know that Haughey has proposed what he calls a Scottish solution. Scotland has a different legal system and a different education system as one part of a united country, and that's an option for Northern Ireland to be negotiated over.

You begin the process, at the same time as those constitutional talks are going on, of uniting the transport system, agriculture, energy and other infrastructure. And you'd get into a "virtuous circle". Nationalist paramilitary activity would cease. The IRA would stop their campaign. So you could get rid of all the repressive legislation and the Diplock courts, and start releasing some of the prisoners from both communities. You could create a momentum of positive hopefulness.

Then you move as quickly as you can. I don't think you can put a deadline on it. You have to disengage responsibly, in a process of cooperation, consultation and new constitution-building.

But it isn't necessarily the only option. And if you did go for it — would the region be the Six Counties? Would it be the old Ulster? How much would there be decentralisation of power and a risk of continuing discrimination?

Federalism is a good option to be considered. But there are lots and lots of different forms of federation.

Part of the fear of the Protestant Irish — and they are Irish — is that the new Ireland will keep them down as they know they treated the nationalist people of the North.

But there's a lot of evidence against that if you look at how the Protestants of the 26 Counties have got on. I think the record of the 26 Counties is a good record.

The Protestant Irish are in a terrible historical trap which it is wrong to blame them for. Of course, they were part of the violence that led to the Partition of Ireland, but an enormous part was played by people in the British Establishment in achieving that.

They have been put into a situation where they have a statelet based on a sectarian headcount which gives them privileges but with the constant fear that they'll lose those privileges. All the discrimination flows from that. And in the best scenario of a new constitution, they'll be released from that and rediscover proudly the fine heritage they have in the United Irishmen and so on. They'd also get the end of violence. Britain has successfully "Ulsterised" the conflict, and the British state is represented by people recruited in Northern Ireland. They are the ones who are dying, which I think the IRA are failing to understand. They are in error to continue to attack people from the Protestant community as representing the British state. Their tactics are in error to achieve their object of a united Ireland.

But that violence would end. The Protestants would be released from a sense of international isolation. And I believe that the role they would have in building a new Ireland, a more pluralistic democracy, would be very significant.

Within the context of withdrawal it is extremely likely that there would be a growth in Loyalist paramilitary activity. There's already been some growth of it since the Anglo-Irish Agreement. You would expect more. You would need the forces of the British state to contain that.

There's an enormous number of legally held guns in the hands of the Protestant community, and there's the UDR, a big regiment of part-timers, all with their weapons at home. All of those weapons would have to be called in and those forces stood down. And there would have to be very serious job creation measures for people who would lose jobs with the security forces.

You would have to try to contain and minimise the risk of violence. The chances of doing so would be immeasurably greater because it would be understood that the British people have voted and no-one can ignore historical reality.

There is a worse case scenario of civil war and repartition. I admit that. But there are major differences between disarming the Protestants and disarming the Catholics.

Most of the arms in the hands of the Protestants have been given to them or licensed to them by the British state. That's never been the case with the Catholics. So the cases are different — unless you're going to suggest that the whole of the UDR would join in some

sort of armed uprising, which I think on the scenario of pull out instantly and leave nothing behind is a real risk, but not if it's managed properly.

When a historical corner has been turned, people know it has been turned, and they don't go on fighting forever.

And the Protestant Irish, because a lot of them do have privileged positions, have a lot to lose if there is mayhem. A vast proportion of the community would have a much higher interest in negotiating their place in the new Ireland which they know is coming than in mayhem.

The possibilities of a dissident minority engaging in paramilitary activity are very high. There's a possibility you'd get general strikes. But I think the failure of the Labour Government to stand up to the 1974 general strike was a historical disaster that could have been avoided.

No-one can guarantee that there won't be a horrible upsurge in violence. But no-one can guarantee that there won't be a horrible upsurge in violence under the present settlement. With the economy of Northern Ireland as bad as it is and getting worse, it's a mistake to assume that the present settlement couldn't lead to an escalation of violence.

In the Protestant community there has been a lot of discussion and examination of the possibility of an independent Northern Ireland. But the economics don't add up, and they know it.

Say you did get a lot of conflict and violence and movement of people and further burnings-out. There is still the question of how Britain is going to behave. Is Britain going to recognise a de facto repartition and agree to continue the present subsidy to Northern Ireland? Or is it going to use its economic power to prevent it?

And it's very unusual for people to fight for a backward step. The whites in Zimbabwe said they would fight to the last drop of their blood, but once they knew they had lost they cooperated in the constitutional talks. So I think an independent Northern Ireland is enormously unlikely, and that if Britain makes it clear that there will be no recognition of that state and all subsidies will end, it wouldn't happen.

Look at the reaction to the Anglo-Irish Agreement. I couldn't support the Anglo-Irish Agreement because it entrenched the undemocratic nature of Northern Ireland, but it is the first time since Partition that the British Establishment has not kow-towed to Unionist protest on any proposed constitutional change.

The Unionists organised all the resources of their community in absolute unanimity against the Agreement, and there were threats of bloodshed. The British state stood firm and didn't give in, and here we are!

So I think the argument that you have to keep the present constitutional settlement going because of the Protestants' threat to create a bloodbath falls down. Their bluff has never been called.

The bluff was thoroughly called in the case of the Anglo-Irish Agreement, and we might not like it, but it has settled down.

Desmond Greaves

Desmond Greaves, who died last year, was for half a century a very important figure in Irish left wing politics.

He ran the Communist Party's Irish organisation in Britain, the Connolly Association, and edited its monthly paper, *The Irish Democrat*. For decades that paper was sold on Saturday nights and Sunday mornings in cities like Manchester, Liverpool and London in the many Irish pubs where the uprooted Irish gathered to meet their own kind and drown their sorrows.

It is still sold, much diminished in confidence and influence, and probably in sales.

In Manchester, around 1960, we'd think badly of ourselves if half a dozen of us sold fewer than a thousand *Democrats* on a Saturday night tour with a new issue through the teeming pubs of Rusholme and Moss Side.

Young Irish people coming to England were warned in Catholic Truth Society pamphlets and in speeches from Irish pulpits to beware the lure of 'the Connolly clubs' whose zealots would meet them off the boats and seek to ensnare them in the politics of 'godless Communism'.

Meeting them off the boats was a myth, but for sure we met them in the pubs. Unfortunately the idea that we were preaching communism to them was a myth, too.

If you hadn't been told otherwise, you would have mistaken the *Irish Democrat* for a mainstream Irish nationalist paper, a *Fian-na Fail* paper maybe, complete with one of its 12 pages given over entirely to nationalist songs. If you knew your way around politics, you'd be tipped off that it was some sort of Stalinist paper by words like 'progressive', and by such foreign policy angles as praise for the 26 Counties' refusal to join NATO.

People did find their way to the Communist Party by way of the Connolly Association, though the traffic often went the other way too (me, for instance). One of our perpetual complaints was that we couldn't mobilise the CP's Irish members, except for occasional resolution-mongering at trade union branches. They integrated too easily into the labour movement, and were lost to Irish concerns through absorption and assimilation.

Great chances were thrown away to create an Irish communist cadre out of malleable people caught up in the flux of forced emigration from an underdeveloped to an industrialised society which confronted them freshly and starkly with the realities of class slavery. Instead of educating them, the CP and the Connolly Association were merely parasitic on the existing nationalist sentiments of those Irish they reached — rather like the far-left groups today, though with rather more excuse.

Yet Greaves did influence Irish politics, and help shape what has happened in the last 20 years. In his books and pamphlets he preached a sort of left-slanted populist Republicanism, stiffened with Stalinist dogma about a two-stage Irish revolution — first the 'completion of the bourgeois revolution' through unification, then a struggle for socialism. The message was that only the working class and small farmers could be consistent Irish nationalists, and therefore Republicans had to turn to 'the men and women of no property'.

This fusion of Stalinist dogma and Catholic-Irish radical nationalism was first made in the 1930s, when the Irish CP counted for something, and the Republican

movement too. It was championed by a Stalinist-influenced segment of the Republican movement, the 1934 'Republican Congress', which soon declined.

The Stalinist-led London branch of the Republican Congress started Greaves's paper, first called *Irish Freedom*, in the late '30s.

Such politics all but disappeared in the '40s and '50s, when Republicanism was smashed in the South, and what hadn't been smashed was very right-wing. You would find it only in odd memoirs and pamphlets by Paedár O'Donnell and George Gilmore, and, much diluted, in Greaves's publications.

But in the 1960s Greaves's work played a big role in convincing the then Republican movement to try to repair its fortunes by making a fresh populist appeal to the 'people of no property'. That turn helped generate the Provo split in 1969-70; today, twenty years later, the Provo leaders have come round full circle to similar ideas.

And not just the Provo leaders — the idea of populist nationalism as authentic Irish working-class revolutionary politics is dominant also in the far left groups, who thus owe a debt to Greaves, the Buonarrotti, the link man between them and the '30s.

For the Stalinist-populist '30s is, though they don't know it, where much of the politics of the would-be Trotskyist groups on Ireland originates. All they add is a bit of incoherent verbiage about 'permanent revolution' and the assertion (for which no evidence is or can be cited) that it will all lead to socialism, somehow.

Greaves's books testify that he was a man of immense learning in things Irish. He was the author of the first full-scale biography of James Connolly (1961), and of books and pamphlets on Liam Mellows, Wolfe Tone, Sean O'Casey and others. They stand out in a field of left-wing literature characterised above all by the crassest ignorance. Contrast them, for example, with Paul Foot's recent pamphlet, whose author doesn't know that there was a second Home Rule Bill in 1893 and indeed, crams his text with so many errors that you can't be sure that it is a typesetting mistake when he writes of Ireland's 36 counties.

But Greaves's career proved that, necessary though it is, knowledge is not enough.

He remained all his life within the framework of ideas he picked up in the Stalinist movement of the '30s. He never advanced, despite his learning. That was Greaves's tragedy. Insofar as he helped shape radical Republican politics, Greaves's political tragedy is also a part of Ireland's unfolding tragedy.

Sean Matgamna

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Murdered Communists 1927

The working class in the second Chinese revolution

Elizabeth Millward tells the story of the last time the working class took the lead

Before 1989 the Chinese workers' movement had been crushed for 60 years. But in the 1920s it fought heroic battles, rich in lessons for today.

Our feature on those class battles opens with Elizabeth Millward's account of how a working class developed in China, how its struggles interlaced with those of the nationalist bourgeoisie, and why it was defeated.

The article that follows, from Wang Fan-hsi, a veteran of Chinese communism and Trotskyism, reviews the debate in the communist movement on strategy and tactics in that period. As a short preface to Wang's survey, we also publish a brief account by Wang himself of his life and political activity in the 1920s.

The names Chen Tu-hsiu and Kuomintang are spelled in the

modern manner, Chen Duxiu and Guomindang, in Wang's article.

The history of the second Chinese revolution must begin with an account of what China was like at the turn of the 20th century, after 2000 years as an almost closed empire.

At the beginning of the 20th century, China bore little relationship economically or politically to the countries of the West. The vast majority of the population were peasants — by the 1920s over 90% of the population still lived outside towns and only 6% lived in cities of over 50,000. The urban proletariat was tiny, largely concentrated in Shanghai, where 300,000 workers made up perhaps 20% of the workforce, although the proletariat in all of China formed only 0.5% of the population. Other concentrations of workers included 200,000 in Canton and Hong Kong, and 100,000 in and around Wuhan. About half the proletariat (44%) worked for foreign-controlled enterprises.

Until 1912 the country was governed by an Emperor, and a network of civil servants. In addition, with the exception of the new foreign industries, produc-

tion and distribution was highly centralised, with vast public works (notably irrigation for agriculture) and food distribution in times of shortage. Peasants produced handicrafts with few industrially manufactured goods. Foreign intervention disrupted the balance of this economy by introducing cheap manufactured goods and upsetting central organisation.

Industry was largely foreign-owned and run from 'concessions' policed by foreign powers in the big cities and seaports. China was being forced to trade at the point of a gun. Foreign-imposed tariff laws did not permit China to build its own industrial base.

China became chaotic and divided, the vital public works fell into further disrepair, and local warlords ruthlessly exploited the peasantry who had now no form of redress. Sun Yat-sen ruled in South China, and various warlords (Tchuns) in the north, with key cities (like Shanghai) under almost total foreign control.

China's enforced entry into World War I was on the orders of the allies, who wanted an excuse to seize German concessions and shipping in China. The attempt by the allies to hand these concessions over to Japan at the end of

the war — to whom they were 'given' by the great powers who signed the Versailles Treaty — sparked huge protests in 1919 — the so-called May 4th movement. Chen Tu-hsiu, a professor at Peking university, initiated a demonstration in Peking of 5,000 students. This spread to include over 100,000 people in 16 provinces. As a result, the Chinese government refused to sign the Versailles Treaty. The May 4th movement showed that nationalism was not just the prerogative of foreign-educated intellectuals like Chen and Sun, but had a real grip on the minds of ordinary people.

In addition to anti-imperialism, the intellectuals hated the warlords' militarism. The warlords were financially tied to foreign powers and also used the foreign-policed concessions as a place of retreat from the fighting on their home ground.

The imperialist powers had created a chaotic and divided China, and wanted to retain it in that condition. Different imperialists supported different warlords, using them to attack Sun Yat-sen. Sun appealed to America for help with his programme of democratic construction, but America, like the other powers, was interested in China mainly as a market. A united China, especially one united under Sun's anti-imperialist, anti-militarist programme would lead to the expulsion of the foreign powers, and maybe the reclaiming of the territories seized by those powers (eg. Hong Kong).

Western-style democracy under Sun Yat-sen failed under these conditions and he abandoned it even as an idea, re-organising his nationalist forces for a period of 'tutelage' (in reality dictatorship) with the help of the only country who would answer his appeal — Russia. Far from wanting to extend Russia's exploitation of China, Lenin's government had pledged to return the territories occupied by the Tsars. Even though Sun Yat-sen did not favour communism for China, he agreed to negotiations with the Soviets.

The bourgeois nationalists

Out of the chaos of China's economic, political and social situation flowed a desire for change. The opposition movements were to divide into two main currents, both developed with the help of Russia and the Communist International. These currents were nationalism and communism. The nationalists, initially led by Sun Yat-sen and later Chiang Kai Shek, wanted to re-unify the country, to end the domination of the imperialist powers and to bring Western political structures to China.

By the late 1920s these ideas had simply deteriorated into the desire to unify China militarily, and democracy which had been tried very briefly had fallen victim to corruption and been abandoned.

The opium trade (forced on China by Britain in the 19th century), had drained the country of its wealth (silver), and China was forced to borrow heavily from the west to finance further trade it

did not want.

The lives of the peasant majority were not easy; a 1927 survey showing that more than half of all Chinese peasants were either partial or full tenants paying up to half or more of their produce as rent, or were agricultural labourers receiving irregular or minimal pay. Despite this, the landlords were subject to governmental control. Periodic peasant uprisings, which led to government investigations, prevented the worst excesses of the landlords, and centralised food distribution prevented the worst of the periodic famines.

No-one was allowed to prevent the exploitation and degradation of Chinese labour in the foreign-owned factories, and the profits from those industries went out of China, bringing no benefits to the Chinese. Between 1851 and 1855, the excess of imports over exports from China was over £175 million, and China was forced to borrow money to buy European iron and steel. In 1894 Japan tried to annex part of China but was stopped by Russia, France and Britain. Yet Japan was 'given' a treaty port and 'indemnities' of £34.5 million — China was then lent £48 million by British and European banks to pay this! The money had to be paid back out of taxes generated by the peasants, putting them under a huge burden.

For the Western ports, China was a market, its Manchu Emperors to be propped up or not, depending on the benefits to Western capitalism. Its economy (oriental despotism), previously balanced, if primitive, was in tatters, and its people exploited as cheap labour and taxpayers for European loans. Yet it was this exploitation, and the concentration of the workers in industry which was to sow the seeds of the coming revolution.

The first revolution

The Manchu dynasty collapsed in the late 19th century, to be replaced in 1912 by a republic under the (initial) leadership of Sun Yat-sen. Sun, like many of China's intellectuals, had been educated abroad. He wanted to bring China into the 20th century by adopting Western ideas and political structures. He was primarily a liberal, a democrat and a nationalist, seeing the foreign domination of China as the greatest evil. Sun was aided by Yuan Shih-K'ai, the former imperial commander-in-chief, who bargained with the republicans for the title of First President of the Republic. Since he was the real power, he got the title.

The parliament created by the republic was deeply corrupt, its members intent, above all else, on feathering their own nests. It did not take long for Yuan to show his true intentions — the attempt to found a new imperial dynasty with himself as Emperor. But Yuan, having broken with the republican constitution, could not maintain an empire. Other military men seized the chance to set themselves up in opposition, in different parts of China,

supported by the various foreign powers under the principle of divide and rule.

In these conditions, a communist party was founded in 1921 by a small group of intellectuals led by Chen Tu-hsiu, the founder of the May 4th movement.

The original group of intellectuals expanded into a powerful workers' movement in a few short years. Its aims were to lead the national democratic revolution and to 'organise the proletariat and to struggle for the establishment of the dictatorship of the workers and peasants, the abolition of private property, and the gradual attainment of a communist society'. In addition, the CCP had a number of 'objectives', including 'the overthrow of military cliques, and the establishment of internal peace...the removal of oppression by international imperialism and the complete independence of the Chinese nation [including self-determination of national minorities like Tibet]...legislation for workers, peasants and women...' (from *Manifesto of Second National Congress*, July 1922).

So some of the aims of both groups were common to both nationalists and communists. Under the influence of the CI, common ground led to common work.

The future of post-revolutionary workers' Russia was inexorably tied to the overthrow of capitalism in Europe and America. Lenin and Trotsky insisted that to survive, the new Soviet Union needed revolution in the more advanced capitalist countries, and that such revolutions must be made by the workers of those countries. The Third International (Comintern) existed to help the revolutionary parties of those countries, and equally to guide the policies of the new workers' state.

The second congress of the International, held in Petrograd in 1920, turned to the colonial and semi-colonial countries primarily to further the spread of revolution in the West. Lenin said that countries like Britain would collapse if they were deprived of their markets in China, Africa and India, and that as long as capitalism could turn a super-profit in the colonies and semi-colonies abroad, it could afford to buy off the workers at home. Deprived of these markets, capitalism would inevitably turn on its native industries and, in fact, upon itself.

The first task of the proletarian parties in colonial and semi-colonial countries was therefore to drive out the imperialists, and the Theses of the Second Congress on 'The Colonial and National Question' deal with this issue. But the theses go further, looking at the prospects for socialist revolution in colonial countries, and the relationship between the proletariat, its parties, and the peasantry. The nationalist, anti-imperialist revolution is seen as broadly analogous to the bourgeois revolutions in Western democracies, and the role of the proletarian party is therefore similar — to work with the revolutionary nationalist forces, but to maintain class independence. Although the nationalists are revolutionary against imperialism,

they will be counter-revolutionary against the workers, so the task of communists is to foster no illusions about the nationalists or the nationalist revolution, and not to subsume the communist parties in the nationalist struggle. **Therefore, "the Communist International may enter into a temporary union with the bourgeois-democracy of colonies and backward countries, but not intermingle with it, and invariably preserve the independence of the proletarian movement even in its most primitive form."**

The theses identified two main revolutionary groups — **one, the peasantry and proletariat, who form the mass of the population but who have been suppressed — and, two, the educated middle class who express the latent "spirit of revolt."** "Foreign domination has obstructed the free development of the social forces; therefore its overthrow is the first step towards a revolution in the colonies. So to help overthrow foreign rule in the colonies is not to endorse the nationalist aspirations of the native bourgeoisie, but to open the way to the smothered proletariat there."

So, "the foremost and necessary task is the formation of communist parties which will organise the peasants and workers and lead them to revolution... Such parties should co-operate with the bourgeois nationalist parties but always struggle against... control and help to develop class consciousness amongst the working masses of the colonies."

Finally, the theses deal with the ideas of permanent revolution. This is the question not just of whether the revolution must pass through a stable capitalist 'stage', but of the leadership of the revolutionary movements. "The real strength of the liberation movement in the colonies is no longer confined to the narrow circle of the bourgeois democratic nationalists. In most of the colonies there already exist organised revolutionary parties which strive to be in close relation with the working masses. The relation of the CI with the revolutionary movement in the colonies should be realised through the medium of these parties or groups, because they are the vanguard of the working class in their respective countries. They are not very large today, but they reflect the aspirations of the masses and the latter will follow them to the revolution. The Communist Parties of the different imperialist countries must work in conjunction with these proletarian parties of the colonies and give moral and material support to the revolutionary movements in general.

"The revolution in the colonies is not going to be a communist revolution in its first stages. But if, from the outset, the leadership is in the hands of a communist vanguard, the revolutionary masses will not be led astray, but go ahead through the successive periods of development of revolutionary experience. Indeed, it will be extremely erroneous in many oriental countries to try to solve the agrarian problem according to pure communist principles. In its first stages, the revolution in the colonies must be carried on with a programme which will include many petty-bourgeoisie

reform clauses, such as division of land, etc. But from this it does not follow that the leadership of the revolution will have to be surrendered to the bourgeois democrats. On the contrary, the proletarian parties must carry on vigorous and systematic propaganda of the soviet idea, and organise peasants' and workers' soviets as soon as possible. These soviets will work in co-operation with the soviet republics in the ultimate overthrow of the capitalist order throughout the world."

In fact the leadership of the revolution was surrendered to the bourgeois democrats. When Stalin came to power, the policy of co-operation and united front with 'independence' for the CP became an article of faith to be adhered to even though the objective conditions in China had changed. When the united front was negotiated with Sun Yat-sen, on Sun's terms, it made sense. The CCP was a tiny force. But things changed, and changed quickly.

The founding of the CCP

The CCP was founded officially in 1921 with the help and support of the Comintern. Discussions between CI representative Voitinsky and leading left activists and intellectuals began in 1920 in **Peking when they met Chen Tu-hsiu**, then producing *New Youth*, a Marxist journal. The political situation was in a state of flux, with anarchists and nationalists far more numerous than **Marxists**. **Voitinsky proposed the formation of a communist party to organise the Marxists and increase Marxist propaganda and spread information about the Soviet revolution.**

In May 1920, a provisional central committee was established, and in August of that year it was agreed to proceed to the formal organisation of a party, it was hoped within 12 months. The first tasks of the group were to build up organisation, and to make propaganda. A new journal, *The Communist*, was started, alongside journals for the labour, youth and women's movements. In addition, a Socialist Youth League was established **by Chen Tu-hsiu and Chan T'ai-lei**. Activity spread to the other major cities, with small groups being formed in Peking, Shanghai, Wuhan, Changsha, Canton and Tsinan, with a further group established in Paris in February 1921.

From the first, the communists oriented towards the working class (although Chen did have links with progressive Shanghai industrialists). In **October 1920, the CCP organised its first industrial union, the Shanghai Mechanical Workers Union**. In January 1921, the communists established a committee of the workers' movements in **Shanghai, and began a workers' school**. Similar initiatives were pursued everywhere the communists were organised, including the founding of the Hong Kong Chinese Seamen's Union, which was to launch the first really militant national strike 12 months later.

In all of this work the communists co-operated with other radicals and

anarchists where their aims coincided, but already communist influence was far greater than their numbers indicated.

In 1921 the Communist Party was officially founded, organised as a Leninist party, having approximately 50 members — plus several hundred youth activists. It had a central committee of **three, with Chen Tu-hsiu as general secretary**. The first programme of the party called for the overthrow of capitalism and its replacement with the dictatorship of the proletariat and pledged the party to devote itself to labour organisation, propaganda and recruitment. This programme was to be filled out during the following year, and a more comprehensive, detailed strategy was adopted at the 1922 Congress. But the 1921 Congress did take a firm line on co-operation with Sun Yat-sen's nationalist party. In contrast to the policy of the united front which was to follow, the First Congress decided to criticise Sun, and remain independent of the nationalists.

Initial labour movement

In mid-1921 the party established a Labour Secretariat in Shanghai, with branches in Wuhan, Tsinan, Peking, Canton and Changsha. The Secretariat was influential in a number of strikes for better conditions, the first being the October 1921 strike against the British-American Tobacco Company in Shanghai. In January 1922, the Chinese Seamen's Union struck in Hong Kong. The union involved 10,000 workers. Other workers in Hong Kong and Canton supported the strike (as did Sun Yat-sen), as well as labour in Shanghai and elsewhere. By February some 100,000 workers were involved, virtually paralysing Hong Kong and forcing the British to concede the right of the union to continue, and substantial wage increases.

The communists then initiated a national General Labour Union which held its first congress in Canton in May 1922. The congress claimed to represent about a fifth of China's workers, and advanced communist-inspired slogans for an 8-hour day, mutual aid and the overthrow of the imperialists and warlords. In the year following the Hong Kong-Canton Strike of 1922 the communists reportedly led 150,000 workers in more than 100 strikes.

The first wave of strikes climaxed in February 1923 with the crushing of the Peking Hanchow Railroad strike where the communists, attempting to deal with the warlord Wu P'ei-fu against another Chang Tso-lin, organised railway workers into a national union, calling a conference in Chengchow on 1 February 1923. Wu felt the communists had outlived their usefulness and banned the meeting, causing a 10,000-strong protest strike. On 7 February, Wu's men fired on strikers up and down the railroad, killing at least 40, injuring more than 300 and then dismissed thousands from their jobs. It is likely that Wu was supported by the British in smashing the strike and the union, providing an object lesson for the young labour movement on the subject of alliances, and

temporarily halting its development.

The communists were far more influential than their numbers would suggest. By mid-1922 only about 120 communists were in touch with the national organisation, although these were found in 16 provinces. Official party structures existed in at least 10 regions, and apart from work in the labour movement, these party organisations organised workers schools, produced journals and attempted to organise young people, students and women. There were also attempts to organise amongst the peasantry. The party was organised along Leninist lines, being democratic centralist, and at the 1922 Congress adopted an organisational framework modelled on that of the Russian CP of 1919.

The 1922 Congress also advanced for the first time the idea of an alliance with the Kuomintang (KMT; also spelled Guomindang — Sun Yat-sen's party). This united front, in line with the CI theses, was to be around the common aims of struggling against militarism and imperialism. But the CCP was determined to be an equal partner with the KMT, to retain its independence, and continue its work with the labour movement, with the overthrow of capitalism as its ultimate goal. In fact, the united front was realised in a very different form, and against the spirit of the Second Congress, and against the views of leading communists like Chen.

At the time that the CCP was building itself into the sort of party which could lead important political and labour movements it was receiving financial support from Russia and the Comintern. The CI had an active role in the development of the new party, through representatives like Voitinsky, and later Maring and Joffe, who spent time in China. In addition, Chinese communists visited Russia. The Russians who had made the October Revolution were committed internationalists, who submitted their decisions to the CI, and politically believed that the revolution in Russia could only be safeguarded and lead to socialism if it was spread to the West — and to countries like China.

But they could not afford to stake the short-term security of the new workers' state on immediate revolution in other countries. They knew that capitalism did not want to see the workers' state succeed, and consequently isolated Russia as much as possible. The imperialist wrangling over China could mean nothing good for Russian security. If China was to be subjugated completely by the imperialist powers forming a bloc and further dividing the country amongst themselves, then Russia would be completely surrounded by hostile forces. So Russia had an interest in a stable China, which had driven out imperialism, both from the point of view of allowing the class struggle to develop, and in securing a friendly neighbour for itself.

Sadly, neither the Russians nor the CI realised how successful the CCP was to become, and in how short a time — in the early '20s it looked as if Sun Yat-sen

had more chance of ridding China of foreign powers than the communists did. So the Russians negotiated with Sun directly, offering him much-needed help. By the time it was to become clear how much the Chinese workers were capable of, Stalin was in control of the CI and was concerned only with defending 'socialism in one country' — Russia.

The CI therefore approached Sun Yat-sen for a united front between the CCP and the KMT in mid-1922. Sun refused, but, not wishing to lose the Russians' aid or his one potential ally in a hostile world, offered to let the communists join the KMT on an individual basis, submitting to his discipline. He also said that he saw no role for communism in China, and Maring, accepting all his terms on behalf of the CI, agreed with him. When Maring reported the negotiations to the Chinese communists, they were not so keen, and at a meeting of Chen and other leading communists in August 1922, the terms of the united front 'from within' were rejected.

Eventually, the communists agreed to join the nationalists, watering down Sun's harshest conditions, and retaining the right to membership of their own party. But Maring had to threaten CI discipline before the decision to join the nationalists was agreed. The united front 'from within' was thus a compromise — with the CCP able to maintain itself, and a limited amount of independence, but with the real power in Sun Yat-sen's Kuomintang, to which the communists had now agreed to submit.

In fact, as time showed, the compromise was not really acceptable to either party, and it was to lead to political catastrophe when exposed to Stalin's insistence on 'two stage' revolution, and his characterisation of the KMT as a 'bloc of four classes', which would unite the people in the fight against imperialism. This characterisation, arrived at to justify the continuation of the united front on the KMT's terms, was rejected by the Chinese communists who saw clearly what the KMT was, and were afraid of losing both their independence and their ability to operate.

Trotsky opposed the united front from the beginning, although his opposition was not made public until much later. In 1927 he rubbished the idea of a 'bloc of four classes'. "...This by no means signifies that the imperialist yoke is a mechanical one, subjugating 'all' the classes of China in the 'same' way. The very powerful role of foreign capital in the life of China has caused very strong sections of the Chinese bourgeoisie, the bureaucracy and the military to join their destiny with that of imperialism..."

"It would further be profounder naivete to believe that an abyss lies between the so-called comprador bourgeoisie, that is, the economic and political agency of foreign capital in China, and the so-called national bourgeoisie. No, these two sections stand incomparably closer to each other than the bourgeoisie and the masses of workers and peasants.

"Installed within the Kuomintang

and its leadership, the national bourgeoisie has been essentially an instrument of the compradors and imperialism..."

"It is a gross mistake to think that imperialism mechanically welds together all the classes of China from without...The revolutionary struggle against imperialism does not weaken, but rather strengthens the political differentiation of the classes." (*The Chinese Revolution and the Theses of Comrade Stalin*).

For Trotsky, the revolutionary forces would divide along class rather than national lines. With that division established, everything else followed — the proletarian party should not subordinate itself to the bourgeois nationalists, and should struggle against them. Stalin insisted that the new communist forces engage first and foremost in the struggle against imperialism. This was the policy which led to such disaster.

Reorganisation of the Kuomintang

On 4 September 1922, Sun Yat-sen announced his intention to reorganise the KMT. The plans were agreed by January of the following year, drawn up with the help of Chen Tu-hsiu, and with input from the CI and Russia. The negotiations included Yoffe, Lenin's ambassador to China. In 1923 Sun began to build an independent nationalist army, sending Chiang Kai Shek to Russia to collect arms and study military organisation.

At the 3rd Congress of the CCP, held in June 1923, the party again debated its relationship with the KMT. Once more, Maring bore instructions from the CI to maintain the 'bloc within', saying that the KMT should take the lead in the national revolution. There was considerable opposition from Chen and others to the bloc, but the CI's position was agreed, and included a statement that the CCP was to maintain its independence within the bloc. In fact, as the communists were soon to learn to their cost, this 'independence' was an illusion. Even though it was CP members who did lead the most radical workers' struggles, this was from within the KMT. The idea of CP independence 'within' the KMT was used by conservative nationalists against the communists, and to agitate against the two parties having such a close alliance.

Despite misgivings (and open antagonism) from both sides, the KMT's first national congress in January 1924 included the communists. It reorganised the party along hierarchical 'soviet' lines, with the communists well represented at every level, particularly in the organisational and labour bureaux. The only place the communists were not able to penetrate was the KMT military council, or to obtain the senior roles in the military fields that they enjoyed in the political work of the KMT. At the Military Academy at Whampoa (established in 1924), communists and Young Socialists made up a large minority of recruits and graduates, but CCP leadership was on the political, rather than the military, side of the

academy's work.

Within the KMT, the CCP organised itself into fractions, and were acknowledged to be the most energetic party workers and organisers. The CP attempted to manipulate the left of the KMT against the right, and so gain the leadership of key areas of party life. In this they were largely successful, but they did arouse opposition from KMT conservatives.

After Sun's death in 1925, the conservatives gradually increased their power behind the scenes, with disastrous consequences for the CCP. The CCP had difficulty retaining an independent class profile in, for example, labour work. The KMT wanted this directed primarily towards nationalist goals, the CCP were not prepared to mislead the working class into thinking that a united China would significantly improve their lot. Some KMT conservatives were landlords and factory owners — the communists' urge was to cut against these people.

Such contradictions abounded and fuelled antagonism between communists and conservatives. It was the class nature of the KMT which caused the contradictions. By 1924 the CCP was again ready to leave. Once again, pressure from the CI, and changes in the political situation kept the front alive. The working class began to recover from the May 7th massacre of railway workers, and to take strike action in Canton and Shanghai, and to build new unions. Cooperation in these activities between CCP and KMT buried their differences amongst the activists. The 4th CCP Congress (25 January) maintained the united front, but Chen criticised those communists who were too subservient to the KMT within it. At the same Congress, the CP (then numbering just under 1,000) decided to relax its membership conditions and attempt to turn itself into a mass proletarian party rather than a mainly intellectual group.

The events of 1925

By the end of 1925 there were over 10,000 members of the CCP — a wave of powerful strikes swept through China, influenced by communists, new unions were set up and the brutal insensitivity of the imperialists won thousands of recruits to the nationalist and communist causes.

As the CCP relaxed its membership rules, the newly radicalised workers could, and did, join in large numbers. The contradictions between communism and bourgeois nationalism were felt even more strongly, but Stalin's policy remained the same.

The return of workers' confidence was felt in Shanghai where strikes were held against the Japanese owners of the textile mills, and on the railways the National Railroad Union held its second congress in February 1925. The leaders of the powerful Chinese Seamen's Union joined the CCP. The National General Labour Union was formed by 166 unions in 1925, and held a congress in 1925 representing over half a million workers. The union was led by communists, who could now claim to

influence a significant proportion of China's workers. By 1927 the CCP claimed to represent three million organised workers — the unions and other workers' organisations were growing, and as they grew they moved leftwards.

On 15 May 1925 a factory guard killed a striker in the Shanghai cotton mills (which had been on strike since February). This was not the first such incident, and on May 28th the CCP central committee called for co-ordinated protest demonstrations on 30th May. As thousands of demonstrators met on **Nanking Road, International Settlement** Police, under a British officer, opened fire, killing 10 and wounding and arresting scores of others. The response was bigger demonstrations, culminating in a general strike on 1st June. A Shanghai General Labour Union was set up, under communist leadership.

The strikes and protests spread to other Chinese cities, climaxing in the Hong Kong-Canton strike and blockade. The strike was called by the NGLU, and a large supporting demonstration was fired on by British and French troops on 23rd June in Canton. Over 50 people were killed. This intensified the strike, involving those previously moderate and resulted in a boycott of Hong Kong which paralysed its trade. So as not to be forced to work, strikers left Hong Kong for Canton, effectively bringing it to a halt. The strike, supported by the sailors, lasted 16 months, the longest in China's history. Hardly a ship moved in or out of Hong Kong for over a year.

Again, the leaders of this tremendous revolutionary movement were communists. From being a small party composed largely of intellectuals, the CCP had increased its membership tenfold, of which between half and two-thirds were workers.

Obviously, the May 30th movement did not just swell the ranks of the CCP, the nationalist movement benefited as well; merchants and businessmen joined the protests. The CCP worked with these elements inside and outside the united front, but also used the time to tighten up and increase their own propaganda and educational work in the cities.

The communists targetted specific groups like women and youth, and began agitation amongst the peasants, forming peasant associations in several provinces. By 1927 the peasant associations claimed more than 9 million members in 16 provinces. Although much of the basic organisational work was done by communists in the early 1920s, the peasants were more than ready to take their place in the revolutionary struggle. Yet the pressure of the united front with the KMT was to cause the CCP to hold the peasants back from taking land, as it was to cause the communists to hold back strikes.

The situation in China had **changed**. The workers' movement was strong, militant and led by communists. Inevitably it would be held back if the alliance with the KMT was maintained. The workers' struggles had the power to pull sections of the bourgeoisie towards

the left, and also to effectively close down imperialist enterprises in the big cities and ports. The CCP was no longer a couple of intellectuals, but a party rooted in the working class, with mass support. Even the peasants were starting to move, and move with, rather than against, the urban workers. The time had come for the communists to call for the oppressed masses to throw off all their oppressors — Chinese as well as foreign.

In other words, the time had come for the CCP to leave the united front and lead a revolution. As Trotsky put it, in **September 1926: "The revolutionary struggle in China since 1925 has entered a new phase, which is characterised above all by the active intervention of broad layers of the proletariat, by strikes and the formation of trade unions. The peasants are unquestionably being drawn into motion to an increasing degree. At the same time, the commercial bourgeoisie, and the elements of the intelligentsia linked with it, are breaking off to the right, assuming a hostile attitude towards strikes, communists and the USSR."**

"It is quite clear that in the light of these fundamental facts the question of revising relations between the CP and the KMT must necessarily be raised. The attempt to avoid such a revision by claiming that national-colonial oppression in China requires the permanent entry of the CP in the KMT cannot stand up under criticism.

"The leftward movement of the masses of Chinese workers is as certain a fact as the rightward movement of the Chinese bourgeoisie. [The] KMT...must now be torn apart by the centrifugal tendencies of the class struggle. There are no magic political formulas or clever tactical devices to counter those trends, nor can there be...

"...The CCP must now...fight for direct independent leadership of the awakened working class."

Trotsky goes on to point out that it is the organised strength of the working class which will influence the petty-bourgeoisie, not manoeuvres within the KMT. The Stalinists, by contrast, felt that the time was not right for communism or soviets to be raised in China. They said that the CCP was not ready, and that the KMT must lead the nationalist revolution. In order to remain within the united front the CCP was to moderate its demands and its militancy. As Trotsky put it, "the desire...[is] to convince the bourgeoisie and not to win the proletariat. This kind of position establishes the premises for inevitable retreats before the right, centre and pseudo-left leaders of the KMT." Events were to prove Trotsky right.

At the second congress of the KMT, the question of continuing the united front was again raised by the conservatives. But the left, headed by Wang Ching-wei and including (it seemed) Chiang Kai Shek, held the day.

Within the CP, many, including Chen, thought the time had come to leave the KMT, but Stalin's CI again prevailed. The CCP agreed to maintain the united front, working with the left and opposing the right, but to build their own organisation first in areas where the

KMT was weak.

Chiang had other ideas. He began to talk of 'deceit' from the communists, and on 20 March 1926 declared martial law. He used martial law to move against some Soviet advisers, placing them under house arrest, as well as 50 communists, alleging that they were involved in a plot against the KMT. Chiang said that he did not want to disturb the alliance with Russia, merely take action against plotters, but he laid down limitations on the CP's further involvement in the KMT. These included limits on the number of communists on the KMT executive, a CCP membership list to be supplied to Chiang, no communist to have a leading KMT or government post, and no nationalist to join the CCP without permission. In addition, the ability of the CCP to act separately from the KMT was curtailed.

The coup against the CCP helped consolidate Chiang's own power and influence within the KMT. The only leader who might have stood against him, the 'left' Wang Ching-wei, was having a 'rest cure' in Europe. For the time being at least, Chiang was in control.

Chiang had, in fact, shown his colours, despite his later declaration that he was still friendly to the CI and the USSR. He maintained that he had simply wanted to stop certain Russians and CCPers and promised to restrict the nationalist right-wing as a balance. But, once again, the CI representatives (eg. Borodin) chose to stay with Chiang, urging the communists to keep their heads down and follow the nationalist lead.

Stalin's line had not changed, even though circumstances clearly had. The CCP, led by Chen Tu-hsiu, wanted to move to a 'bloc without', but Stalin insisted on retaining the united front, while telling the CCP to bloc with the left and maintain their independence. Stalin blamed the CCP for failing to sufficiently build the KMT left, but forbade them to attempt to take over the party, urging instead that they build the left and attempt to turn the centre and right of the KMT against each other. At the same time, he warned them against alienating the bourgeoisie or petty-bourgeoisie as he said these elements could still be influenced by the left.

In fact, none of Stalin's instructions made any sense. There was no real left within the KMT, and the CCP were powerless to create one. The KMT was led by the armed right and centre, and the communists had been subordinated to it by Chiang's manoeuvrings and Stalin's treachery. Because of Moscow's insistence on the maintenance of the united front from within, and Chiang's terms for that, the CCP would do little to turn the mass movements of workers against Chiang — because that would mean turning them against the KMT. Stalin persisted in labelling Chiang a revolutionary and demanded that the CCP conciliate him.

It was obvious to most of the Chinese Communist Party leadership that Chiang's leftism was just a pose, but without breaking with Stalin, they could not fight Chiang, or fight for their own goals. Such 'left' as existed within the KMT was around Wang, who had

already shown his unwillingness to fight Chiang. When things got difficult he just left the political centres for Europe.

The Northern Expedition

These contradictions became even more obvious when the Northern Expedition (to unify China by armed force against the warlords) began in July 1926. To aid the expedition, the communists stepped up their agitation amongst the peasants along the army's route. The peasants were ready to seize the land, and to fight the landlords and the warlords who maintained them. But the policy of united front prevented the social revolution in the countryside. There were few demands about which the communists and nationalists could agree.

By 1927 the communists were forced to restrain the peasants, urging only seizure of lands from the biggest landlords; the small landlords and those landlords who were part of the KMT were left alone. By the end of 1926 the nationalists had only authorised the demand for a 25% cut in rents for the peasants, while Stalin was demanding that the communists should 'restrain' the peasants, to avoid antagonising the nationalist generals (who were also landlords).

The same was true in the cities, with the labour movement. Armed labour pickets and strikes destabilised the warlords' economy to help the nationalist troops. These activities were organised by unions led by the communists. But as soon as a city fell under nationalist control, the strikes were forbidden and the pickets disarmed. To maintain the united front, the CCP had to help end strikes (like the Hong Kong-Canton strike, called off in October 1926, without major gains).

Yet at the same time as the social revolution was being halted by Stalin's policy, Stalin himself was calling on the CCP to make use of the 'revolutionary potential' of the 'revolutionary nationalist' government. Stalin forbade the CCP to break the terms of the agreement with the KMT on land redistribution, while arguing that the KMT's policy of trying to buy off the urban petty-bourgeoisie by seizing the land of the big bourgeoisie and reducing rents would foster agrarian revolution.

The nationalists did not want social revolution, urban and rural, and the Chinese communists could see that perfectly well, but they were forced to maintain the united front, and at the same time try to stay true to the peasants and workers. It was an impossible situation. To maintain the united front the CP had only one course open to it — to restrain the revolution which they had helped create. Anything else risked a backlash from the KMT right, and the break-up of the united front.

Shanghai (1927)

As Chiang's armies approached Shanghai, the CCP-led Shanghai GLU began a series of strikes and protests against the warlords and imperialists

who ran the city. In line with Stalin's confused policy, the CCP decided to attempt to take control of the city and hand it over to Chiang's nationalist forces.

With Chiang's troops 25 miles from Shanghai, the SGLU called a general strike, which paralysed the city. There was street fighting, and a bloody repression. The communists called off the strike on 24 February, but prepared for further action. Chiang's forces, which had stopped during the fighting, moved again on 21 March, and a second general strike was called, this time backed up by an armed rebellion.

The workers established a workers' government, which was in effective control of the city, raising demands for improved working conditions. At the same time, with Chiang's troops just outside Shanghai, in other parts of China leftists and union leaders were being repressed by the nationalists. Anti-communist purges took place in various central Chinese cities, and 19 communists were to be executed in Peking less than a month later.

When Chiang arrived in Shanghai on 26 March, he immediately set about preparations for an anti-communist coup. He set up a rival government and negotiated with reactionary forces for an armed showdown. The CI insisted on maintaining the united front, even though it was obvious that Chiang meant to break it decisively.

The communists were instructed to prepare for a coup, but not to provoke it, if necessary hiding their weapons. There was to be no withdrawal from the KMT. At the same time as the CP paper was warning of the dangers of nationalist repression, the workers were still applauding and welcoming Chiang. A small force of pickets was armed and trained, but instructed not to act. The CCP, and thus the workers' organisations, were effectively paralysed.

On 12th April, Chiang's Shanghai massacre began. The CCP organisation and the labour unions were crushed at a stroke, and hundreds of leading communists rounded up. Protest demonstrations were fired upon, killing several hundreds, and in other Chinese cities communists were rounded up and hundreds killed. Unions and labour organisations were outlawed, and many communist leaders were forced to flee the cities or go into hiding. In the space of a few days, thousands of leftists were killed or arrested, and the labour movement brutally crushed. Chiang declared a new national government in Nanking, in opposition to the government in Wuhan — also called a national government.

Chiang's troops, and the reactionary forces he had bargained with (like secret societies) spent days roaming the streets of Shanghai executing workers at random as a 'warning' to others. Demonstrations were ineffective, labour was unarmed for the most part and had not been properly organised to fight back. Even though the communists had expected the massacre since Chiang's troops had refused to enter the city and join in the battle to take power, they were unprepared to lead the workers against

Chiang. The bloody repressions of communists and labour leaders just beginning in other parts of China had pointed to the same conclusion.

The Soviet and CI advisers agreed that Chiang would turn against organised labour in Shanghai. The only people surprised by the events in Shanghai were the workers who had, under communist leadership, welcomed Chiang to the city. Stalin, too, had the gall to evince surprise. A matter of days before the massacre began, the CI and Chiang had exchanged fraternal statements.

On 6th April (six days before the massacre began), Stalin said, of ending the united front: "Why drive away the right, when we have the majority and when the right listens to us?...Chiang Kai Shek has perhaps no sympathy for the revolution, but he is leading the army and cannot do otherwise but lead it against the imperialists." (My emphasis).

In fact Chiang kept his army away from the fight against the imperialists, hoping that the workers would be crushed. When the workers of Shanghai took power away from the imperialists, Chiang led his army against them. A month before, on 17th March, Chiang too went on record, saying: "I have never taken the view that I cannot co-operate with communists...I have also made it clear that while I was opposed to oppression of the communists, I would check their influence as soon as they grew too powerful." (My emphasis). While Chiang's reassurances are not worth the paper they are printed on, he does admit something Stalin would like to conceal, ie. which side of the class struggle he was on.

Trotsky's attitude to the Shanghai coup was one of scorn towards the Stalinists in the CI and China. He all but begged the CCP to reject Stalin's analysis of the disaster, and criticised their policy, as always from the perspective of the irreconcilable class forces in China. While *Pravda* 'regretted' Chiang's coup and the bloodbath of Shanghai, Trotsky writes: "Ever more frequently one hears accusations at our party meetings against the 'ultraleft' Shanghaiers and in general against the Chinese workers for having provoked Chiang Kai Shek by their 'excesses'."

Stalin's attitude to the coup was firstly to avoid all mention of it, and secondly to shift the blame to anywhere except where it belonged.

Two weeks after the massacre, the CI held a meeting of its executive committee (27 April 1927). NM Roy reported from China, without once referring directly to Chiang's coup. "If Roy's abstract terms were translated into concrete reality, we would end up with: Chiang Kai Shek's anti-communist coup 'has strengthened the bonds between the KMT's left wing and the CCP'. Thus the 'bloc of 4 classes' remained; it merely became necessary to get rid of that part of the big bourgeoisie represented by Chiang Kai Shek. The policy of 'KMT-CCP collaboration' remained; it was only necessary to get rid of the 'KMT right-wing' which Chiang represented, and replace it with the 'KMT left-wing' led by Wang Ching-wei. This, then was the

direction given to the 5th Congress of the CCP by the CP representative." (Peng Shu-tse introduction to *Trotsky on China*).

Put at its simplest, Stalin excommunicated Chiang from the KMT-CCP bloc and declared Wang and his Wuhan 'national government' the new revolutionary leaders. Thus the policy before and after Chiang's coup was identical — Chiang's connection with the KMT was ignored, and Wang became its leader. All of this, of course, took place completely outside reality. Chiang and Wang were in the same party, Wang consistently avoided showdowns with the KMT conservatives, even at the time of the coup, and there was no evidence at all that, as Stalin said, "the revolutionary KMT in Wuhan, by a determined fight against militarism and imperialism, will in fact be converted into an organ of the revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the peasantry."

These are precisely the things Stalin was saying about Chiang not two months before, when Chiang too was masquerading as a left-winger. In exactly the same way that Chiang had been declared leader of the revolution, Stalin now named Wang. In exactly the same way the CCP was to fall in behind the new, better, more left-wing KMT. The same rules applied: no agrarian revolution, no anti-KMT agitation, no 'excesses', no 'provocation'. Two CCP members joined the 'revolutionary government' in Wuhan as ministers of labour and agriculture. Far from pulling the government to the left, they were in fact used to hold back the revolution. Once again, the revolutionary movements were paralysed, once again the workers and peasants had no independent voice, no independent party fighting for their interests.

As Trotsky put it at the CI meeting: "...Stalin assumes, and wants the International to assume, the responsibility for the policy of the KMT and the Wuhan government, as he repeatedly assumed the responsibility for the policy of the former 'national government' of Chiang Kai Shek (particularly in his speech of April 5, the stenogram of which has, of course, been kept hidden from the International). We have nothing in common with this policy. We do not want to assume even a shadow of responsibility for the policy of the Wuhan government, and the leadership of the KMT, and we urgently advise the CI to reject this responsibility...Politicians of the Wang Ching-wei type, under difficult conditions will unite 10 times with Chiang Kai-Shek against the workers and peasants."

Which, of course, is exactly what happened less than two months later, with more slaughter of workers, peasants and communists. Trotsky's demand was for the CP to call for soviets to pull over KMT troops and unite against the reactionary generals, landlords and imperialists. Trotsky urged the revolutionary masses to leave the KMT and to have no confidence in it — but rather to fight in their own name, and to crush those compromisers who stood in their way. "The Chinese bourgeois-

democratic revolution will go forward and be victorious either in the soviet form or not at all." (Second speech on the Chinese Question, 24 May 1927, emphasis in original).

Tragically, far from being heeded, Trotsky was hounded and ridiculed by the Stalinist CI. When Wang crushed the labour movement and massacred a peasant army in and around Wuhan and expelled and arrested communists from the KMT (the 'July 15th expulsion') Stalin reacted predictably. He should have admitted that Trotsky had been right all along. Instead he moved further into the realms of fantasy and declared that, far from being defeated, the revolution had moved onto a 'higher plane'.

Trotsky stated that the revolution had been defeated, that the labour movement, the trade unions and the CCP had been smashed. In saying this he was stating bald facts — facts concealed as so many others had been by Stalin. Trotsky pointed out that China would now face a period of reaction and counter-revolution, but for Stalin the time had come for the CCP to declare itself, leave the KMT (they had been expelled anyway!) and organise armed uprisings.

These uprisings were no more than adventures to conceal Stalin's disastrous line. These uprisings were doomed to failure — and they failed. In Nanchang in August 1927 those armed revolutionaries still alive after the previous defeat were largely destroyed. The same happened in the 'Hunan-Hupeh Harvest uprisings', the Haifung soviet movement and finally in the Canton Insurrection of December. In Canton alone almost 6,000 people were killed.

If there had been any potential for the CCP to go underground, maintain contact with the workers and peasants and start to re-build, Stalin's uprisings had destroyed it. The revolution had been defeated in April, Stalin's adventurism finally killed it, ensuring that few communist cadres were left to fight again. The Chinese Communist Party, thanks to Stalin, had missed its opportunities, confused and misled the workers and peasants and finally destroyed itself.

"Bolshevik policy is characterised not only by its revolutionary scope, but also by its political realism...The greatest task is to know how to recognise in time a revolutionary situation and to exploit it to the end. But it is no less important to understand when this situation is exhausted and converted, from the political point of view, into its antithesis. Nothing is more fruitless and worthless than to show one's fist after the battle..." (Leon Trotsky, 'The Chinese Question after the 6th Congress', 4 October 1928).

Stalin fails on both counts. "Having subordinated the Chinese workers to the bourgeoisie, put the brakes on the agrarian movement, supported the reactionary generals, prevented the appearance of soviets and liquidated those that did appear..." Stalin then blamed the whole mess on Chen Tu-hsiu, and expelled him from the party he had founded. Stalin was truly "the gravedigger of the second Chinese revolution." (Trotsky, 'Stalin and the Chinese Revolution', 26 August 1930).

A Chinese Marxist in the '20s

By Wang Fan-hsi

I joined the Chinese Communist Party in 1925, at Hangchow in Chekiang province. Then I went to Peking and worked in that district. In 1926 I became a political commissar in the army.

At that time, the Communist military units were taking part in the Kuomintang's Northern Expedition against the war-lords. But I did not serve in the army long, because the Party wanted me to go back to Peking. At the time, Peking had not been 'liberated', but was under the rule of the Peiyong war-lord, Chang Tso-lin, and his 'white terror'. The Party considered it was more important to do revolutionary work in the reactionary area than in the Army. At that time I was a student of Peking University, so I returned to Peking where I became a leading member of the Party's university committee.

The objective situation and conditions were very favourable, and a growing number of students wanted to enter the Party. In a very short time, the university cell of the Party had a membership of more than two hundred. Then I left the university. After Li Ta-chao and other leaders of the Party were executed in the spring of 1927, I became a member of the Peking district committee of the Party.

Then I went to Wuhan, where I was assigned by the Party to work for the revolutionary newspaper *Mingkuo Yak-po*. Wuhan was the seat of the 'Left Kuomintang' government of Wang Ching-wei. But in the autumn, Wang betrayed the revolution and made a compromise with Chiang Kai Shek. So all the comrades were thrown into confusion. I was soon arrested; I was perhaps the first Communist to be arrested at the time by Wang Ching-wei. I was in prison for one month.

After I was released, the Party sent me to Moscow. I studied in the Eastern University (University for Toilers of the Orient) which contained students of more than seventeen nationalities. It was here that I accepted Trotskyism. This was still in 1927. At that time the struggle between Stalinism and Trotskyism was most severe and strenuous. When I had come to Moscow, of course, I had not known the difference between the two factions. But when I was at Eastern University, I studied the documents issued by the central committee of the CPSU. All these were cut and arranged to favour Stalinism, and yet we could read the difference. Basing our judgement on our experience in China, we concluded that the Trotskyists were right. But in the university there was no Trotskyist organisation.

Then, in the summer of 1928, I was

transferred to Sun Yat-sen University, where we began to organise a Trotskyist tendency. At that time, almost all the students of the Eastern University were won over to Trotskyism and in the Chinese university too Trotskyism was very influential. In the autumn of 1928 we organised a Trotskyist leading committee in the university. This had three members, of whom I was one. We began to organise clandestine work in the Soviet Union, in cooperation with some Russian comrades who were, of course, by then also organising underground. The situation was very difficult, more difficult than that which we found later in China, because of the GPU.

Our clandestine work continued for about one year, from the autumn of 1928 to the summer of 1929. During this period, I was one of the leading members of the Trotskyist tendency in the Soviet Union. I think that at that time there were more than four hundred Chinese Trotskyists, including the comrades in Sun Yat-sen University, those in military schools and some in the Lenin Institute.

In the summer of 1929 I applied to be sent back to China. My application was accepted and I arrived in Shanghai in September of that year. At that time, it was a secret that I was a Trotskyist, so I was able to work inside the Party.

Before we returned to China, we had a meeting in Moscow to discuss how we should work in China. We decided that we should work within the Party to be the best revolutionaries, so that people might know that we were not mere bourgeois intellectuals interested simply in new theories or other novelties, but genuine revolutionaries. We decided that we must prove ourselves to be real revolutionaries through our work for the Party; in that way we would win the confidence of the comrades and be listened to. We thought that we could convince them and win them to our side only in this way. A group of more than twenty Chinese Trotskyists went back to China with me, via Vladivostok, to Shanghai.

When I arrived in Shanghai in September 1929, I was received by Chou En-lai, who at that time was head of both the organisational bureau and the military council of the central committee. I was assigned to work under him, as his assistant in the organisational bureau. So I was put in charge of the Party's work in one of the five districts of Shanghai. Shanghai was the most industrialised city in China, and the work there was directly under the leadership of the central committee rather than under the Kiangsi provincial committee. The Party considered its work in Shanghai to be the most important of all. Under Chou En-lai there were five assistants,

each of whom was assigned to one district of Shanghai. I worked under Chou for about one year.

During this time I kept secret contact with those Trotskyists who had returned to China before me because they had been expelled from the Party in Moscow. They had been expelled from the Chinese Party at the same time as Trotsky was expelled from the Bolshevik Party, since they had been waging an open struggle against the Stalinists. We, on the other hand, had organised only clandestine activity in Moscow, and they did not discover us.

These comrades who had come home before me numbered between thirty and forty. One group of them had gone to Peking, another to Hong Kong, where they had become workers at the Tai-koo Dockyard. Only three of them had come to Shanghai, where they had established a bookshop called New World.

I kept secret contact with these three comrades from the bookshop. They organised the Chinese Trotskyists returning from Moscow, and started to publish an organ called *Our Voice* (*Wo-men-te-Hua*), the title of which was taken from Trotsky's pre-revolutionary Paris paper *Nashe Slovo*. *Our Voice* was the first Trotskyist publication in China. This was in 1929. At that time I was still working within the Party and devoting all my time to Party work. The situation was very difficult, indeed dangerous, and I was in fact once arrested during that time.

In the winter of 1929, the Moscow underground organisation was betrayed and all the Trotskyists were arrested. They were put in prison or sent to Siberia. Nobody was sent back to China. As a result, Sun Yat-sen University was closed down, because it was useless for the Stalinists to run the university only to educate Trotskyists.

An informer testified in court that all the students of the university were Trotskyists. In this way, I too was discovered to be a Trotskyist. When my secret was discovered, I was sick in hospital. Chou En-lai came to have a talk with me, and said: "Moscow says that you are a Trotskyist, but we have worked together for a year already and you have done your work very satisfactorily. So you had better make a declaration that you will give up your positions." I agreed to make a declaration and the next day a messenger came to take it.

In my statement I said that I was a Trotskyist and that the resolution passed at the Sixth (1928) Congress of the Chinese Communist Party was wrong. But I said that I would accept the decisions of the majority. I said that I wanted to work in the Party and reserved the right to speak at the next congress. The messenger took the statement back and immediately the official Party organ *Red Banner* announced that I had been expelled. This was how my connection with the Communist Party ended.

Thereafter, for the next 20 years, Wang was a leading Trotskyist militant in China. He was forced into exile after the Maoist victory.

Trotskyism versus Stalinism in the Chinese revolution

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was an offspring of the Russian October Revolution. Ideologically and materially, the CCP owed its birth and growth to the aid of the Russian communists who had already achieved victory in their own revolution.

Without this aid, a communist organisation might still have emerged in China in the early 1920s, but it is unlikely that it would have grown at the same speed; nor would it have been capable of playing as powerful a role in the revolution of 1925-27.

But this outside aid not only promoted the emergence and growth of the CCP and sped the development of the revolution; it also — irony of history — became one of the main causes of the tragic defeats suffered by the CCP and the Chinese revolution.

For an explanation of this paradox we must look into the nature of the aid, particularly the ideological aid, the directions from the Communist International.

No strategy for the countries of the East was advanced by the Comintern until its second Congress. Then, in July-August 1920, the leaders of the world communist movement, through Lenin, worked out their theses on the national and colonial questions.

The policy recommended was "...support bourgeois-democratic national movements in the colonial and backward countries only on the condition that, in these countries, the elements of future proletarian parties, which will be communist not only in name, are brought together and trained to understand their special tasks, i.e. those of the struggle against the bourgeois-democratic movements within their own nations.

"The Communist International must establish temporary relations and even unions with the revolutionary movements in the colonies and backward countries without amalgamating with them, but preserving the independent character of the proletarian movement, even though it be still in its embryonic form."

These Leninist principles could not be carried out under Lenin's personal guidance because of his illness and subsequent death. When the revolution broke out in China in 1925 (and even earlier during its brewing), the leadership of the Comintern and the Communist Party of the Soviet Union had already fallen into other hands (first the Stalin-Zinoviev bloc, later the Stalin and Bukharin faction). And a new chapter had begun in the history of the Russian revolution, in which conservatism was replacing revolutionary enthusiasm, "socialism in one country" replacing "world revolution" and a narrow-minded arbitrary bureaucracy had emerged and consolidated itself. In these circumstances, the new leadership monopolised the direc-

Wang Fan-hsi, a veteran of Chinese communism and one of the founders of Chinese Trotskyism, surveys the debate in the communist movement on strategy and tactics in the 1920s. This is part I of an article written as an introduction to the German edition of 'Leon Trotsky on China'

tion of the Chinese revolution, adopting a line directly opposite to Lenin's. In defence of the October tradition in general, and Lenin's strategy in relation to China in particular, Trotsky and his co-thinkers rose to wage a struggle with the aim of securing a change of course, but ended in failure.

The defeat of the Russian opposition and the defeat of the Chinese revolution were closely and reciprocally related. The more evident the bankruptcy of Stalin's China policy became, the more violent suppression the opposition suffered. When the revolution was brought to a catastrophe in the fall of 1927, the Trotskyist oppositionists were annihilated — first politically and then physically. Their views — completely confirmed by events in China — were suppressed, distorted and then tabooed.

In spite of the omnipotent Stalinist censorship, the documents have survived and the truth of the ideological contest can easily be established.

The first controversial question that arose before the outbreak of the revolution and continued to be argued about until its defeat was: whether or not the CCP should retain its independence. It is interesting to note that this first, and perhaps most important, controversy on a fundamental question of the Chinese revolution initially broke out not among the Russian or Comintern leadership, but

between the leaders of the young CCP on the one hand and the Comintern leadership on the other. This took place immediately after the CCP's second Congress, in July 1922.

The Founding Congress of the CCP, early in July 1921, did no more than proclaim a series of principles. It declared that the Chinese communists had determined to follow the example of their Russian comrades, to struggle for the establishment of a proletarian dictatorship in order to realise communist aims in China, and had decided to set up a Communist Party based on the organisational principles of the Bolsheviks in order to achieve that aim. No attempt was made to link the ultimate goal of communism to the realities of contemporary China, except for a decision by the CCP to devote itself to educating and organising the working class.

After a year of practical work, the second Congress (July 1922) decided on an entirely different approach. For the first time, it was proposed that they should tackle the questions of anti-imperialism, anti-feudal and national-democratic revolution, and the relationship between the CCP and the Guomindang (GMD), Sun Yat-sen's bourgeois nationalist party (cf p.660 in *Leon Trotsky on China*).

On 10 June, a month before the Congress, the CCP issued its 'First Manifesto on the Current Situation', which declared "the urgent task of the proletariat is to act jointly with the democratic party to establish a united front of democratic revolution to struggle for the overthrow of the military and for the organisation of a real democratic government...Of all the political parties existing in China, only the GMD can be characterised as a revolutionary party." (Brandt et al, *A Documentary History*, pp.58 & 62).

Congress itself described the attitude of the CCP towards the "national revolution" in a special resolution as follows: "...we are of the opinion that the national revolution is advantageous not only to the bourgeoisie, but also to the proletariat. We should unite in fact with all revolutionary parties and form a united front with the GMD...At the same time we must tell them [the workers and peasants] that such a united front is not to make sacrifices for the sake of the GMD, but for the sake of securing a temporary freedom. Thus, the proletariat must not forget, in course of struggle, to maintain their own independent organisation." (Warren Kuo's *Chung-kun Shih-lun*, Vol.I, p.82)

That was clearly in line with Lenin's theses. But the Comintern leadership did not approve the line adopted by the second Congress of the CCP. By now the main concern of the Russian government and the Comintern was how to break the Soviet Union's diplomatic isolation in the Far East.



Chen Duxiu

From the time the Russians helped to establish a communist party, they had sent a series of representatives to Sun Yat-sen to sound out the possibility of friendly relations between China and Russia and of co-operation between the CCP and the GMD. First, G Voitinsky (autumn of 1920), then Maring (H Sneevliet) in the winter of 1921, and then S Dalin during the second Congress of the CCP went to see the GMD leaders with a proposal for a united front of revolutionary groups. Sun refused: instead he proposed that the members of the CCP and the Communist League of Youth join the GMD as individual members, and obey its programme and discipline.

Obviously under-estimating the potential strength of the newly-born CCP and over-estimating that of the GMD, Moscow showed its readiness to accept Sun Yat-sen's demands and decided to ask their Chinese comrades to do as Sun wished. Maring was then sent to China to push for such a decision. As we have seen, the CCP had already passed a resolution calling for a different form of co-operation with the GMD. Maring therefore demanded that the new CC of the CCP hold an emergency conference to discuss and accept the directive from the Comintern.

At the conference the five members of the CC unanimously refused to reconsider their decision. To join the GMD, argued Chen Duxiu, the general secretary of the CCP, was to confuse the class organisations and curb the Party's independent policy. As a result, the representative of the Comintern had to resort to international discipline and play on its tremendous prestige; and only then did the young Chinese communist leaders yield.

The question whether the CCP should have joined the GMD was among the first major causes of difference between Trotsky and Stalin. From 1923 Trotsky had opposed the CCP's entry into the GMD (see his letter to Shachtman, 1930). But he did not make his position public until 1926, because of the concessions — which he later admitted were a mistake — he made to the members of the Left Opposition (chiefly Radek) and to the Zinovievites in 1926 when the United Opposition was formed.

Only on 27 September 1926 did he openly reveal his opinion in his article 'The CCP and the GMD' (p.114). Even then his arguments were mild. He was still bound by the discipline of the United Opposition. On 7 May 1927, however, obviously under the impact of Chiang

Kai-Shek's April 12th coup in Shanghai, ignoring the constraints of that discipline, he launched his thunderous attack on the policy of abandoning the independent role of the CCP. (See *The Chinese Revolution and the Theses of Comrade Stalin*, p.170)

Zinoviev and his followers continued on this question until the eve of the "betrayal" of the "left" GMD in Wuhan, ie. until 2 July 1927, when they issued a common document with Trotsky ('The New Stage of the Chinese Revolution') in which they called for the withdrawal of the CCP from the GMD. It was too late. By then it was no longer a question of whether to stay in or withdraw from the GMD, but of how the Chinese communists could survive under the GMD terror, and organise the resistance to it.

But the position of the Stalin-Bukharin faction was much worse. Even after Wang Jing-wei, the so-called "left" GMD leader, assassinated communists on a mass scale, the Chinese communists were still not allowed to abandon the GMD banner and ordered to continue "co-operation" with the GMD, which as a whole had turned against the CCP and its followers with fire and sword. The most preposterous policy of "fighting against the GMD under the banner of the GMD" was abandoned only several months later, with the tragic defeat of the Canton insurrection of 11 December 1927.

The difference between Trotsky on the one hand and Stalin and Bukharin (and to some extent Zinoviev and Radek) on the other on the question of relations with the GMD was a logical extension of the different views on the character of the GMD as a party.

The majority saw the GMD as "a bloc of proletariat, peasantry, urban petty-bourgeoisie and the national bourgeoisie" (The resolution of the 7th Plenum of the ECCI). Stalin at first (1925) called the GMD "a workers' and peasants' party" (*Problems of Leninism*, p.264), then in May 1927 he called it a "party of a bloc of several oppressed classes" ('Talk with students of the Sun Yat-sen University'). If the GMD was a party or a bloc in which workers and peasants predominated, then the CCP's entry into the GMD (according to the Stalinists' thinking) would certainly not prevent it from maintaining its independence, but would enable it to win more allies.

Trotsky had pointed out as far back as 1924 that Sun Yat-sen's ideology was bourgeois (see 'Perspectives and Tasks in the East'). He believed that "the definition" of the GMD as a workers' and peasants' party "has nothing in common with Marxism" (*The Chinese Revolution and the Theses of Comrade Stalin*, p.178). He argued that "to depict the GMD as a formless organisation committed to no-one is to distort the very meaning of the question. No matter how formless the GMD is at its periphery, its central apparatus has the revolutionary dictatorship firmly in hand" (p.202). So Trotsky asserted: "The GMD is a Party, and in the time of revolution it can be understood as a party, in the past period this party has not embodied the 'bloc of four classes', but the leading role of the bourgeoisie over the masses of the people, the proletariat and the Communist Party included" (p.227, emphasis in original).

The leadership of the CCP knew little about this difference of opinion. Ever since they had been forced to abandon their independent position and to join the GMD, they had worked hard to carry out the policy of unity. But on several occasions they (or rather some of them) had proposed to the Comintern a change in policy as they found the official line increasingly difficult to follow.

First, after Chiang Kai-shek's preemptive strike against the communists on 20 March 1926, and the CCP's capitulation to Chiang under pressure from the Comintern, Chen Duxiu, general secretary of the CCP, who had opposed the entry policy at and after the party's second Congress, now raised his opposition again and in a report to the Comintern gave it as his personal opinion "that co-operation with the GMD by means of joint work within it should be changed to co-operation from outside the GMD." ('Appeal to all the comrades of the CCP'). Chen's proposal was bitterly attacked by Bukharin in an article in *Pravda*.

Nearly four months later¹, the fourth CC of the CCP passed a resolution at its second Plenum 'On the Relations between the CCP and the GMD'. While not demanding immediate withdrawal from the GMD, it proposed five concrete measures to guarantee the independent activity of the CCP. These measures were sharply criticised in an editorial of the Communist International, which called for a thorough reversal of these wrong decisions².

Thus the CCP had revolted for a second time against the Comintern on the question of the GMD. A third revolt occurred after the anti-communist coup in Changsha in 21 May, 1927. Twice Chen Duxiu proposed withdrawing from the GMD at a meeting of the Politburo of the CCP. His proposals were rejected by the majority and by the representatives in attendance.

Finally, on 15 July 1927, he tendered his resignation as general secretary of the party on the grounds that the "International wishes us to carry out our own policy on the one hand, and does not allow us to withdraw from the GMD on the other. There is really no way out and I cannot continue my work."

Unfamiliar with each other's stated opinions, the views of Chen Duxiu and Trotsky coincided in the matter of the relationship between the CCP and the GMD. This was one of the main reasons why Chen and his close friends became Trotskyists immediately when they got access to literature of the Left Opposition in the autumn of 1929.

Stalin's GMD policy was theoretically based on the idea of the "bloc of four classes" which, in turn, was supported by the fact of imperialist oppression in China; while this oppression had not eliminated class antagonisms, according to Stalin, it had greatly weakened and modified them; it made necessary and possible the formation of an "all-national united front" and the GMD served exactly as the political expression of that united front.

To support his assertion that the Chinese bourgeoisie could and should occupy an important position in the united front, Stalin stressed the division of the

Chinese big bourgeoisie into two unpromisingly opposite parts: national bourgeoisie and comprador bourgeoisie. "The former was anti-imperialist and the founder of the GMD, while the latter was pro-imperialist and it was and remains a sworn enemy of the GMD" (The third question in Stalin's Talk with Students of the Sun Yat-sen University).

As if anticipating such a conception of the national bourgeoisie, in July 1920, in his Report of the Commission on the National and Colonial Question at the second Congress of the Comintern, Lenin pointed out: "...A certain rapprochement has been brought about between the bourgeoisie of the exploiting countries and those of the colonial countries so that they very often even in the majority of cases, perhaps, where the bourgeoisie of the oppressed countries does support the national movement, it simultaneously works in harmony with the imperialist bourgeoisie, ie. it joins the latter in fighting against the revolutionary movements and revolutionary classes."

In conformity with Lenin's teaching,

"The bourgeoisie participated in the national war as an internal brake, looking upon the worker and peasant masses with growing hostility and becoming ever readier to conclude a compromise with imperialism"

Trotsky repeatedly expressed his own opinions on the same question since 1925 and most systematically elaborated in his criticisms of Stalin's *Theses on the Chinese Revolution*. "It would further be profound naivete to believe that an abyss lies between the so-called comprador bourgeoisie, that is, the economic and political agency of foreign capital in China, and the so-called national bourgeoisie," he wrote.

"No, these two sections stand incomparably closer to each other than the bourgeoisie and the masses of workers and peasants. The bourgeoisie participated in the national war as an internal brake, looking upon the worker and peasant masses with growing hostility and becoming ever readier to conclude a compromise with imperialism" (pp.160-1).

Events completely confirmed this. These lines were written on 7 May 1927, twenty five days after Chiang Kai-shek, leader of the "national bourgeoisie" had "capitulated to the comprador bourgeoisie" and massacred the workers of Shanghai. Now Stalin switched horses by offering the title of "national bourgeoisie" to another GMD leader, Wang Jung-wei (head of the Wuhan government) and declaring that he would

carry on the anti-comprador campaign. In only another two months, this new leader of the "national bourgeoisie" also capitulated to the "comprador bourgeoisie" and began to massacre workers and peasant masses in the Wuhan area (cf p.644, *Leon Trotsky on China*).

Closely linked with the above was the dispute around the question of soviets. If, judging from arguments alone, Stalin and his company too were of the opinion that the national bourgeoisie was weak-willed in its fight against imperialism, that it might come to compromise with imperialism, and that therefore the CCP should take measures to prevent the possible betrayal of the revolution by the bourgeoisie, so the vital difference between Trotsky and Stalin lay rather in the following question: with what measure could the CCP and the workers and peasants of China effectively prevent and counter-attack the possible betrayal of the national bourgeoisie?

According to Trotsky, the only reliable measure was to advance the slogan of soviets, to carry on propaganda for them and to organise them when millions of peasants and workers in Hunan and Hupeh provinces were aroused in response to the advance of the nationalist armies³.

Stalinists bitterly opposed this slogan throughout the revolution. The reasons they put forward for their opposition were as follows: first, to call for the formation of soviets would damage the united front with the bourgeoisie; second, it would give imperialists a new excuse to fight against the Chinese revolution by saying that the Chinese revolution was only an "artificially transplanted Moscow sovietisation"; third, soviets could only be organised as an organ for insurrection, and it could only be organised as an organ for the socialist proletarian revolution; and, four, in fact the Left GMD had already been a sort of soviet.

According to Trotsky, Stalin's "entire logic represents a flagrant distortion of the meaning of our entire revolutionary experience, illuminated theoretically by Lenin" (p.150). And the further development of the Chinese revolution mercilessly refuted these reasons and proved the correctness of Trotsky's proposals. Without soviets, the Chinese workers and peasant masses found themselves completely impotent and at the mercy of the butchers in the face of the repeated betrayals of the bourgeoisie.

The CCP leadership in no way participated in the discussion. In spite of the fact that the Hong Kong-Canton Strike Committee (1925-6) was the "Chinese version of the workers' deputies"; that the peasant associations organised in Hunan province during the period of the Northern Expedition played to some extent the part of peasant soviets (cf Harold Isaacs, *Tragedy of the Chinese Revolution*, Ch 7, pp.112-3, 2nd revised edition), and that the Shanghai workers after their armed insurrection of 22 February 1927 organised their own "soviets" (such as the "District Soviet of Yang-shu-pu", see Appendix 1 to *Controversial Problems of the Chinese Revolution*, by Qu Qiu Bai, p.196), the leadership of the CCP did not pay any attention specifically to this question.

However, Qu Qiu Bai, a so-called left-wing leader of the CCP at the time, wrote in the pamphlet cited that he "proposed to call on workers of different factories and trade unions to elect representatives and to agitate among the small merchants to do the same so that 'a provincial soviet of deputies of the townspeople' could be created" (ibid p.191). But it was a passing thought; he did not raise the suggestion again, probably because he had been told of the position adopted by the dominant faction of the CPSU on this question and submitted to it.

Further charges against Trotsky launched by the Stalinists were that he overlooked the great role the petty bourgeoisie and the peasantry in particular could play in the revolution. As a matter of fact, Trotsky was more discriminating than the charges alleged. For him the questions were: first, what section of the petty bourgeoisie should the proletariat ally with, and, second, how could they unite with these allies? To the first question Trotsky replied as follows:

"...When we, the Opposition, spoke of the necessity for the revolutionary alliance of the proletariat and the petty bourgeoisie we had in mind the oppressed masses, the tens and hundreds of millions of poor of town and countryside. The Comintern leadership understood and understands the petty bourgeoisie, those petty bourgeois summits, overwhelmingly intellectuals, who, under the form of democratic parties and organisations, exploit the rural and urban poor, selling them out at the decisive moment to the big bourgeoisie." (See *The Political Situation in China and the Tasks of the Bolshevik-Leninists Opposition*, p.404).

To the second question, Trotsky's answer was: the petty bourgeoisie must be won over to the alliance through the struggle of the proletariat.

According to Stalin, and part of the left oppositionists represented by M Alsky, China at the time was divided into two camps: in one were the imperialists and militarists and certain layers of the Chinese bourgeoisie, and on the other were the workers, artisans, petty bourgeoisie, students, intelligentsia and certain groups from the middle bourgeoisie with a nationalist orientation. They represented a reactionary alliance on the one hand, and a revolutionary front on the other. This division was definite and clear-cut. The former was manipulated by the imperialists, while the latter was "by right" under the hegemony of the proletariat. Most policies adopted by the Stalinists at that period were based on this theory of two camps.

Trotsky considered such a view not only mechanistic, but false and dangerous. "In fact," said Trotsky, "there are three camps in China — the reactionary, the liberal bourgeoisie and the proletariat — fighting for hegemony over the lower strata of the petty bourgeoisie and the peasantry." (See 'Letter to Alsky', p.128, *Leon Trotsky on China*).

Both the historical experiences and socio-economic analysis teach that neither the urban petty bourgeoisie nor the peasantry will participate in the revolutionary camp and follow the leadership of the working class "by nature", ie. simply

because of their class position. Just the opposite has been proved true: the petty bourgeoisie, and the upper layers of them in particular, were apt to be deceived and dominated by the national bourgeoisie, even by the reactionaries as well, and to be directed to fight against the working class.

To prevent this, therefore, Trotsky based almost all his policies in the Chinese revolution on the theory of three camps. The question which concerns him above all was: how could the party of the working class win the tens and hundreds of millions of poor in the town and countryside to the camp of the proletariat in order to fight against the two other camps: that of the reactionaries and of the liberal bourgeoisie.

On the question of the character of the Chinese society and the character of the Chinese revolution, Stalin levelled two charges against his opponent: one, failure to understand that "survivals of feudalism are the predominating factor in the oppression in China at the moment" ('The Revolution in China and the Tasks of the Comintern') and, two, "attempts

"There is no doubt that if the Guomindang manages to unify China then the capitalist development of China will go ahead with seven-mile strides. And yet all this will prepare the mobilisation of the proletarian masses"

mechanically to implant certain general formulas, regardless of the concrete conditions of the movement in different countries" ('Notes on Contemporary Themes').

Examination of what Trotsky had written over the period, from April 1924 till March-April 1927, however, shows that both charges are unfounded.

Unlike Radek, who contended that in China the strength of the survivals of feudalism were quite insignificant (he put forward his opinion in his book on the Chinese revolution, which was originally his lectures given in the Sun Yat-sen University, Moscow, when he was its rector), Trotsky recognised not only the existence of the "survivals of feudalism" in China, but also their "undeniable strength". But he strongly opposed Stalin-Bukharin's argument that the "survivals of feudalism dominated in Chinese economic life", and he opposed more strongly the idea that this dominance not only determined the bourgeois character of the revolution, but also determined the revolutionary character of the bourgeoisie.

Because, he thought, the feudal and capitalist relations in China were interlac-

ed in a complex and tortuous way, "There is no caste of feudal landlords in China in opposition to the bourgeoisie... the agrarian revolution is therefore just as much anti-bourgeois as it is anti-feudal in character." (*Summary and Perspectives of the Chinese Revolution*).

As for the allegation of mechanical implantation of certain formulas in China, the whole course of Trotsky's thinking on the character of the Chinese Revolution supplies a most convincing refutation. He did not deduce his views from a priori definition nor from historical analogies, but from the living structure of Chinese society and from the dynamics of its inner forces. Only by closely following the developments of the revolution, and through a series of successive approximations, did Trotsky reach his final "formula" about the character of the Chinese revolution and its revolutionary power.

It is both historically and theoretically interesting to trace, even briefly, the evolution of Trotsky's thinking on the question.

On April 21 1924, he spoke for the first time about the character and the perspectives of the Chinese revolution in a speech he delivered at the Communist University for Toilers of the East in Moscow. In it he said: "There is no doubt that if the Chinese Guomindang party manages to unify China under a national-democratic regime then the capitalist development of China will go ahead with seven-mile strides. And yet all this will prepare the mobilisation of the countless proletarian masses who will at once burst out of prehistoric, semi-barbaric state and cast themselves into industry's melting pot, the factory."

In 1925 and 1926 Trotsky did not, so far as we can see from the materials available, discuss the question of the character of the Chinese revolution in particular. He concentrated his proposals and criticisms on the question of the independence of the CCP. He was especially angered by the fact that while forbidding the CCP to withdraw from the GMD, which he considered a fundamental condition for the victory of the revolution, the Comintern comforted itself as well as the Chinese working masses, with a promise of "non-capitalist perspective of China". This perspective, he thought, could only be decided by a number of international factors.

In March 1927, we see once again Trotsky dealing with the question in his letter to Alsky (29 March): "Only an ignoramus of the socialist-reactionary variety could think that **present day** China, with its **current** technological and economic foundations, can through its **own** efforts jump over the capitalist phase" (emphases original).

Two days later, ie. on 31 March 1927, in a letter to the Politbureau of the CPSU Central Committee, he again raised this question in connection with the slogan of soviets: "A system of soviets in China would not be, at least not in the coming period, an instrument of proletarian dictatorship, but one of revolutionary national liberation and democratic unification of the country...In China, what is occurring is a national-democratic revolution, not a socialist revolution" (p.135).

Then, on 3 April 1927, eight days

before Chiang Kai-shek's coup in Shanghai, in his article 'Class Relations in the Chinese Revolution', he further elaborated his ideas on the question concerned:

"Above all it must be made clear to the vanguard of the Chinese proletariat that China has no prerequisites whatsoever economically for an **independent** transition to socialism; that the revolution now unfolding under the leadership of the GMD is a bourgeois-national revolution, that it can have as its consequence, even in the event of complete victory, only the further development of productive forces on the basis of capitalism.

"But it is necessary to develop no less forcefully before the Chinese proletariat the converse side of the question as well: the belated bourgeois-national revolution is unfolding in China in conditions of the imperialist decay of capitalism. As the Russian experience has already shown — in contrast, say, to the English — politics does not at all develop in parity with economics. China's further development must be taken in an international perspective. Despite the backwardness of the Chinese economy, and in part precisely because of this backwardness, the Chinese revolution is wholly capable of bringing to political power an alliance of workers and peasants, under the leadership of the proletariat. This regime will be China's political link with the world revolution" (p.142).

After the defeat of the revolution in China, in 1927, disagreements between Trotskyists and Stalinists revolved around three problems: one, what assessment to make of the new situation and what slogan to adopt for it; two, what would be the relationship between the peasant war and the next upsurge of revolution; three, what attitude to take towards China's war of resistance against Japanese imperialist invasion.

When did the second Chinese revolution end? In retrospect, it seems to be very easy to answer: it ended in July 1927, when the Wuhan government openly turned against the Communists and the workers' organisations throughout the country were smashed.

At that time, however, especially to those who were directly involved, it was rather a complicated and difficult question. Even Trotsky did not reach this decision immediately⁵. In 'New Opportunities for the Chinese Revolution, New Tasks and New Mistakes' which he wrote in September 1927, in connection with Ho Lung and Yeh Ting's "Southern Expedition" and the peasants' uprisings in Hunan province, Trotsky posed the question as follows: "Is it the epilogue common enough after great historic defeats ... or is it the spontaneous beginning of a great new chapter in the Chinese revolution?" (p.258). To this he answered: "Neither of these possibilities is excluded" (p.259).

As a revolutionary, Trotsky at first took a cautious and hopeful view of the new situation created after the debacle of Wuhan. But soon after, the defeat of the "Southern Expedition" and the tragedy of the Canton insurrection (cf p.634 in *Leon Trotsky on China*) showed that profound changes had occurred in the class

relationships of China, and he declared in June 1928 that the Chinese revolution had been definitely defeated and "we are entering in China into a period of reflux" (p.313).

Four months later, in October 1928, he expressed himself in still more definite language: "It must be distinctly understood there is not, at the present time, a revolutionary situation in China. It is rather a counter-revolutionary situation that has been substituted there, transforming itself into an inter-revolutionary period of indefinite duration. Turn with contempt from those who would tell you that this is pessimism and lack of faith. To shut one's eyes to facts is the most infamous form of lack of faith" (p.357).

It was exactly this most infamous attitude that Stalin and Bukharin struck towards this question. It was neither cautious, nor responsible. What concerned them first of all was to conceal the disasters caused by their treacherous policies. For that purpose, they not only refused to admit the defeat of the revolution, but declared that it had "entered into a higher phase". And in order to "confirm" their declaration, they ordered the CCP, which had already been brought to the brink of complete disintegration, to launch armed struggle throughout the country.

As a result, one defeat followed another, each time more serious, culminating in the Canton insurrection which was crushed in bloodshed. Stalin now was compelled to call the Canton insurrection as a "rearguard battle" yet at the same time, he and Bukharin declared it to be the "standard of the new soviet phase of the revolution" (p.351).

To the question whether the revolution had been defeated or not, no clear-cut answer was ever given. As late as the summer of 1928, at the Sixth Congress of the CCP, the assessment of the situation of China made by Stalin and Bukharin was still extremely ambiguous and treacherous. While declaring the "passing of the revolutionary rising tide", they promised that "a new, extensive revolutionary tide is inevitable" (Section 11, Politburo Resolution of the 6th National Congress of the CCP).

Different assessments of the situation

"China has no prerequisites whatsoever economically for an independent transition to socialism. But politics does not at all develop in parity with economics. Despite the backwardness, the Chinese revolution is wholly capable of bringing to political power an alliance of workers and peasants"

were followed by different slogans and policies.

Having realised that the revolutionary situation had been substituted by a counter-revolutionary one, Trotsky made a timely estimate of the possible developments in China's politics and economy: "There are sufficient grounds for assuming that the smashing of the Chinese revolution, directly due to the false leadership, will permit the Chinese and foreign bourgeoisie to overcome to a lesser or greater degree the frightful economic crisis now raging in the country" ('Summary and Perspectives').

Later on, in 'The Chinese Question after the Sixth Congress' (4 October 1928), he elaborated his thoughts in the period of "very lame stabilisation", with the reawakening of its class consciousness, the Chinese bourgeoisie would try to reap the fruits of its triumph more fully by "compelling the military cliques of the GMD to submit to the centralised apparatus of the bourgeois state" in order to "obtain an all the more favourable compromise" with the imperialists; "the aspiration of the most 'progressive' elements of the bourgeoisie and of the democratic petty bourgeoisie are now being directed" to a constitutional development, and finally even the agrarian problem will once more shift to the foreground and be posed on the parliamentary field.

For such a perspective, Trotsky formulated the central slogan of Constituent Assembly with full powers, elected by universal, equal, direct and secret suffrage. And he insisted only through an all-out struggle for the realisation of the constituent assembly and its programme (eight-hour day, confiscation of the land and the complete independence of China), could the CCP re-assemble and strengthen its own forces, re-emerge from underground, make a bloc with the masses, win their confidence, and thus prepare for the coming of the period of the creation of soviets and of direct struggle for power. To put forward the slogan of soviets in such a situation and to embark on armed struggle under that slogan, in Trotsky's opinion, was "doctrinaire, lifeless, or what is just as bad, it will be the slogan of adventurists" (p.379).

Precisely such an adventurist course did Stalin and co. take. Basing themselves on the estimate of "higher phase" and a "trough between two waves" of revolution, they bitterly opposed the slogan of a national assembly and ordered the CCP to carry out armed struggle under the slogan of soviets — which they had been condemning during the previous two years, a time when the revolution was rising. They accused Trotsky of "liquidationism" because of his sober estimate of the situation and the democratic slogan he raised. The results of Stalin's policy are well-known: the remaining organisation and influence of the CCP in the cities were finally eradicated by the year 1934⁶. A counter-revolutionary situation was thus greatly strengthened.

When, in its turn, the left-wing GMD (said by Stalin to be the petty-bourgeoisie) betrayed the revolution in the wake of the right-wing GMD (national bourgeoisie), and when the urban working class suf-

ferred crushing defeats during these betrayals, the Stalinists, true to their theory of the "bloc of four revolutionary classes", claimed that all this simply meant the withdrawal of three classes from the bloc of four, there remained one class — the peasantry; since from then on the peasants did not have to worry about a "united front" and got a free hand to carry on the agrarian revolution, so the revolution not only had entered a higher phase, but it also became more profound.

Substituting Marxist analysis of class relations with an exercise in elementary arithmetic, incredible as it may seem, was precisely the "theoretical" basis of the policy pursued by the leaders of the Comintern and the CCP of that time. They called for armed struggle throughout the country, by relying entirely on the forces of the peasantry. Although they never put this theory into any official resolution, they, especially the CCP leaders, repeatedly called the tune as follows: "We lost tens of thousands of workers, never mind, as a compensation we got millions, even tens of millions, of peasants." (This was the favourite saying of Xiang Chung-fa, general secretary of the CCP, elected at the 6th Party Congress, 18 June-11 July 1928, held in Moscow.)

When he read that one of the Chinese delegates declared triumphantly at the Sixth Congress of the Comintern that after the defeat of the Canton insurrection, "the membership of the party did not decrease but grow" as the CCP gained tens of thousands of new members among the peasants, Trotsky wrote: "It seems incredible that such monstrous information could have been presented to a world congress without immediately encountering an indignant refutation."

Then he made the following comments: "...After the decisive defeats suffered by the revolution in the cities, the party, for a certain time, can still draw tens of thousands of new members from the awakening peasantry. This fact is important as a precursory sign of the great possibility in the future. But in the period under consideration it is only one form of the dissolution and the liquidation of the CCP for, by losing its proletarian nucleus, it ceases to be in conformity with its historical destination" (p.347).

Who, Stalin or Trotsky, read the situation better and correctly, time had already shown.

One of the immediate results of the defeat of the Chinese revolution was to heighten Japanese ambition in relation to China. With the aim of reducing China into the status of a colony, Japan had since 1930 brought increasing pressure, diplomatic and military, to bear on the GMD government. Japan invaded Manchuria on 18 September 1931, securing its conquests almost immediately. In February 1932 Tokyo established the puppet state of Manchukuo in the occupied territory and launched a brief punitive expedition against Shanghai. The occupation of Manchuria was followed by six years of uneasy truce, until the Japanese invasion of Central China in the summer of 1937, which opened the Sino-Japanese war.

The GMD, because of its uncompromising hostility towards Chinese workers and peasants, stuck to its non-

"After the defeats in the cities, the party can still draw tens of thousands of members from the peasantry. But it is only one form of liquidation of the CP for, by losing its proletarian nucleus, it ceases to be in conformity with its historical destination"

resistance policy and kept making one concession after another, which angered the broadest masses of China. Unleashed as usual by students, a series of demonstrations and actions of protest (such as the former North-Eastern Army capture of Chiang Kai-shek in Xian in December 1936) had taken place both against the Japanese invaders and the GMD government.

They were supported by workers, urban petty-bourgeois masses, and even by those army groups not directly connected with Chiang Kai-shek. Under this popular pressure, and with the support of the US, Britain and the USSR, the Chiang Kai-shek regime finally began a war of resistance against the Japanese invasion in July 1937. The attitude the Chinese communists should take towards the war became a fresh matter of dispute between Stalin and the exiled Trotsky, and their followers in China and throughout the world.

In line with the switch of international Stalinism from the policy of ultra-left "third period" to an ultra-right "popular front policy", the CCP had, as early as August 1935, appealed to the GMD government for a cessation of the civil war and the formation of a united anti-Japanese front. This finally materialised in the autumn of 1937 after a series of negotiations, in exchange for which the CCP accepted the following terms imposed by the GMD: one, to strive for the realisation of Sun Yat-senism; two, to abandon its policy of overthrowing the GMD and its policy of confiscation of land from landlords; three, to abolish the existing soviet government in the areas under its control; and four, to integrate the Red Army into the GMD under the command of the GMD government.

This Trotsky denounced as "a crime all the more horrible because it is being committed for the second time" (p.573), the first capitulation having taken place in the 1925-7 revolution. He, of course, wholeheartedly supported China's struggle against Japan: it was a semi-colonial country fighting for its independence against imperialist invasion.

"The duty of all the workers' organisations of China," he declared, "was to participate actively in the front line of the

present war against Japan." While in so doing, they should not "abandon for a single moment their own programme and independent activity" (p.567).

Because the war was directed by the arch-reactionary Chiang Kai-shek, there was no assurance of victory and there was always the possibility of a rotten compromise with the invaders. So both in the interest of the war and of the revolution, Trotsky believed, "the vanguard of the proletariat remains during the time of war in irreconcilable opposition to the bourgeoisie. The task of the vanguard consists in that, basing itself on the experience of the war, it is to weld the workers around the revolutionary vanguard, to rally the peasants around the workers and by that to prepare for the genuine worker-peasant government, i.e. the dictatorship of the proletariat, leading behind it millions of peasants" (p.565).

The strategic course he proposed toward the Sino-Japanese war was the same as he advanced during the Chinese revolution of 1925-7. Trotsky himself makes this clear in the following words: "during the civil war against the internal agents of imperialism, as in the national war against the foreign imperialism, the working class, while remaining in the front line of military struggle, prepare the political overthrow of the bourgeoisie" (p.570, emphasis in original).

Here a question arises: if the "second GMD-CCP alliance" was a criminal repetition of the "first alliance" of 1925-7, how do we explain that it did not bring disasters to the CCP for the second time, but on the contrary, it seemed to have helped China win the war, and then helped the CCP win the revolution?

We shall discuss this in detail later. First, let us look at the differences between Stalin and Trotsky on the peasant war in China.

The exodus of tens of thousands of revolutionaries from the major cities and the industrial areas to the countryside after the defeat of the revolution was by no means an implementation of a new strategy adopted by the Comintern or the CCP. It was simply a result of the objective circumstances: either to seek security or to continue their revolutionary activities, they had to move out of the metropolises where the repression was unbearable.

Nobody at that time advocated a new line replacing the working class of the cities by the peasantry in the countryside as the main forces of revolution. On the contrary, such a tendency was firmly opposed. For example, Bukharin, in his report to the 6th National Congress of the CCP (July 1928) condemned "another proposal intending to seek another special kind of revolutionary class as the basis of the party, viz, to leave the proletariat and go to the peasantry" (Section 6, 'The Chinese Revolution and the Tasks of the Chinese Communists'). In the same report, Bukharin even devoted a special section to "emphasise work in major cities". In it he said: "The entire peasant uprising without the aid of the cities, or, more accurately, without urban leadership, inevitably will result in defeat. Uprisings involving no cities cannot achieve victory..." (Section 9).

The 6th Congress of the CCP accepted Bukharin's line. In the Political Resolution, the Congress on the one hand declared: "the bases in the Soviet regime preserved until the present time (in the southern provinces) and their few revolutionary armies of workers and peasants will become an ever more important element in the new rising tide." On the other hand, it immediately warned "The Sixth Congress holds that the signs mentioned above **should not be** overestimated, because...at present the urban working class has not yet overcome its setbacks." (Political Resolution, Section II, point 3, emphasis added).

In his famous article 'A Single Spark Can Start a Prairie Fire' (January 1928), Mao Tse-tung vigorously advocated a peasant guerilla war. At the same time he conceded that "Proletarian leadership is the key to victory in the revolution. Building a proletarian foundation for the Party and setting up Party branches in industrial enterprises in key districts are important organisational tasks for the Party...Therefore it would be wrong to abandon the struggle in the cities..." (*Selected Works of Mao*, Vol I, pp.122-3).

Thus we see that during the period from 1928 to 1930, on the fundamental question of which class should be the leading force of the coming Chinese revolution, neither Stalin-Bukharin nor Mao Tse-tung had any difference with the traditional Marxist position. Therefore there was no difference (at least on the surface) between Stalinists and Trotskyists. The real difference between them was about tactics: how and under what slogan should the CCP direct the peasant struggle which was developing in Southern China?

Proceeding from his assessment of the situation of China as "inter-revolutionary and counter-revolutionary", Trotsky put forward the slogan for the convocation of a national assembly in order to unify politically the scattered peasant uprisings, to co-ordinate the armed struggle of the peasants with that of the working class and to link these outbursts of agrarian revolution to the possible revival in the struggle of the urban population for democracy and national independence. Only in this way, Trotsky thought, could the peasant uprisings become an important factor in precipitating the new revolution and bringing it to victory.

Since Stalin and co., as we saw above, had no consistent assessment of the situation in China for a long period after the defeat of the revolution, their tactical line for the peasant struggles was also inconsistent and ambivalent.

They solemnly kept declaring up till 1934 that the priority of the party work was among the industrial working class. Yet at the same time, the CCP members were being dragged into the peasant armed struggles. Like gamblers, they put their stakes on the armed struggle of the peasants, in which they had no great confidence, hoping that good luck might bring about a "revolutionary tide", even lead on to victory of the revolution. Therefore they opposed participating, let alone starting any democratic campaign, and desperately opposed and condemned the slogan of a national assembly as "opportunism".

Which of the two tactical lines concerning the peasant struggle of that period had been proved correct at all by the history? Let us listen to the testimony of Mao Tse-tung. In his report to the CC of the CCP, 'The Struggle in the Chingang Mountains', (November 1928) Mao wrote:

"In the past year we have fought in many places and are keenly aware that the revolutionary tide is on the ebb in the country as a whole. While Red political power has been established in a few small areas, in the country as a whole the people lack the ordinary democratic rights, the workers, the peasants, and even the bourgeois democrats do not have freedom of speech or assembly, and the worst crime is to join the Communist Party.

"Wherever the Red Army goes, the masses are cold and aloof, and only after our propaganda do they slowly move to action...We have an acute sense of isolation which we keep hoping will end. Only by launching a political and economic struggle for democracy, which will also involve the urban petty bourgeoisie, can we

"The disagreements between the Stalinists and Trotskyists soon moved to more fundamental questions. Could the peasantry replace the working class to become the main force of the revolution? Was the leadership of the communists, separated from the urban working class, equal to the leadership of the working class?"

turn the revolution into a seething tide that will surge through the country" (*Selected Works*, Vol III, pp.97-8).

There could not be a better testimony than this!

From the initial difference on tactics, the disagreements between the Stalinists and Trotskyists on the peasant war, along with its further development, soon moved off to more fundamental questions. Could the peasantry replace the working class to become the main force of the revolution? Was the leadership which the communists, separated from the urban working class, gave the peasant war equal to the leadership of the working class? What were the perspectives for these armed peasant forces led by those communists? What attitude should the Chinese revolutionaries take towards the peasant "Red Army" and countryside "Soviets"? And so forth. Trotsky was the first to raise these questions and he gave unequivocal answers to them.

Unfortunately, his opponents never openly and honestly entered the discussion. Stalin and his followers never made any serious attempts to give a theoretical analysis of the problems or give formal directives on the CCP-led peasant struggles in China. In fact, since 1930, the CCP had been to some extent left to its own fate and it groped for a way to survive.

All that Stalin had to say on the Chinese

Red Army and the Soviet movement, as far as we know, were five sentences in a speech he delivered at the 16th Congress of the CPSU in June 1930:

"It would be ridiculous to think this misconduct of imperialists will pass for them unpunished. The Chinese workers and peasants have already replied to this by the creation of soviets and a Red Army. It is said that a soviet government has already been created there. I think if it is true then there is nothing surprising in it. There is no doubt that only soviets can save China from complete dismemberment and impoverishment." (*Pravda*, 29 June 1930).

This was, as Trotsky said, simply "administrative argumentation in all its power and splendour!" It had nothing to do with either theory or responsibility, but was equivocal, ambiguous and treacherous, with the sole aim of blaming the Chinese communists in case of failure and winning for Stalin a reputation of wisdom in the event of success.

D.Manuilsky, Stalin's spokesman at the Comintern at the time, fared no better in his attempt to justify theoretically the peasant armed struggle in China. He wrote in *Pravda* of 7 November 1930: "The Chinese revolution has at its disposal a Red Army, is in possession of a considerable territory, at this very moment it is creating on this territory a soviet system of workers' and peasants' power in whose government the communists are in majority. And this condition permits the proletariat to realise not only an ideological but also state hegemony over the peasantry."

Instead of supplying any theoretical basis for Stalin's five sentences, here Manuilsky only revealed the ideological background of Stalin's "administrative argumentation", i.e. the bureaucratic ideology which had already formed in the CPSU: "cadres decide everything". For them, "the communists are in majority" was a self-sufficient guarantee for the realisation of "not only an ideological but also state hegemony over the peasantry".

Having discovered that guarantee, Stalin and Manuilsky rested from further thinking. They abstained from pondering over those questions, which any serious Marxist would have to answer in such a situation: How could the Chinese revolution have at its disposal a Red Army not long after suffering a series of crushing defeats? In what kind of areas and in what manner was the soviet system created? What was the relation between the communists at the head of the government and the proletariat? If the communists were separated from the urban proletariat, how could they realise the working class hegemony over the peasantry?

Without considering and resolving these questions, one can never formulate a political line on the Red Army and soviet movement in China, and that was the case with Stalin and Manuilsky. One cannot, therefore, say whether or not the further developments of the Chinese Red Army and soviet movement had confirmed the Stalinist line, since there was never such a line.

Things were entirely different with Trotsky. When the Red Army and soviet movement in China began to attract world

attention, he formulated a clear-cut strategical line and proposed tactical measures. In the 'Manifesto on China of the International Left Opposition' (September 1930), he declared: "The peasantry, even the most revolutionary, cannot create an independent government." **"Only the predominance of the proletariat in the decisive industrial and political centre of the country creates the necessary basis for the organisation of a Red Army and for the extension of a soviet system into the countryside."**

He further stressed that "the heart of the Chinese revolution consists in political co-ordination and the organisational combination of the proletarian and peasant uprisings. Those who talk about the victory of the soviet revolution in China, although confined to separate provinces in the South, and confronted with passivity in the industrial North, ignore the dual problems of the Chinese revolution: the problem of an alliance between the workers and the peasants and the problem of the leading role of the workers in this alliance" (p.480, emphasis in the original).

Proceeding from principles to practical measures, Trotsky advised the Chinese communists not "to scatter their forces among the isolated flames of the peasant revolt..." but to "concentrate their forces in the factories and the shops and in the workers' districts in order to explain to the workers the meaning of what is happening in the provinces, to lift the spirits of the tired and discouraged, to organise groups of workers for a struggle to defend their economic interests, and to raise the slogan of the democratic-agrarian revolution" (p.481).

In reply to Stalin-Manuilsky's "administrative argumentation", Trotsky wrote: "In what way can the proletariat realise 'state hegemony' over the peasantry, when the state power is not in its hands? It is absolutely impossible to understand this. The leading role of the isolated communists and the isolated communist groups in the peasant war does not decide the question of power. Classes decide and not parties" (p.486).

The same line of arguments were repeated and elaborated two years later (September 1932) in a letter to his Chinese comrades: 'Peasant War in China and the Proletariat'.

Trotsky's position was fully in line with the teachings of revolutionary Marxism on the question of peasant war. And it was formulated on the basis of the fresh experiences of the Russian revolution and profited from the lesson drawn from the long history of peasant rebellions in China.

However, future developments showed that the road through which the third Chinese revolution achieved its victory was not in conformity but at variance with that outlined by Trotsky. Here events "revised" and supplemented prognoses.

Being assassinated by Stalin's agent in 1940, Trotsky did not live to see the outcome of developments in China. He did not draw some new conclusions from the discrepancy between the Marxist analysis of the peasant war and the actual development of events. So it is up to a new generation of Trotskyists to resolve the

problems arising from the CCP's victory.

This article was originally written as the introduction to the German edition of 'Leon Trotsky on China'.

Footnotes

1. The resolution was sent to Moscow but
2. there was no reaction to it from the Comintern until the following year when an editorial in the Communist International (no.11, 16 March 1927) entitled 'The 5th Congress of the CCP and the Goumindang' criticised it severely. The editorial writer demanded the forthcoming Congress of the CCP revise all the decisions taken at the July (1926) Plenum, but he mistakenly called it June Plenum (in fact there was no plenum in June 1926, and the previous plenum, ie. the first Plenum of the Fourth CC, had taken place in October 1925) and distorted the contents of the resolution. According to the resolution, "it is entirely wrong to advocate as some comrades so, that the CCP should sever all organisational relations with the GMD, to liquidate right now this party of the bloc of all classes..." (Reprinted in Warren Kuo's *Chung-kung Shih-jun*, Vol I, p.190). This position was presented in the editorial as "substitute an alliance as separate bodies for the policy of alliance by affiliation...which logically presupposes the exit of the CP from the GMD."
3. Trotsky's article 'Class Relations in the Chinese Revolution' was a direct criticism of the editorial. So he too spoke of it as the June Plenum and basing himself on the false report of the editorial he said: "It is necessary to approve as unconditionally correct the resolution of the
- June Plenum of the CC of the CCP, which demands that the party should withdraw from the GMD." As a matter of fact, Trotsky had already seen the resolution of the July Plenum six months earlier and had criticised it in his article 'The CCP and the GMD', saying: "We have taken the above-mentioned arguments from the 14 July 1926 resolution of the CCP Central Committee Plenum. This resolution, along with other documents of the Plenum, testifies to the extremely contradictory policies of the CCP and to the dangers flowing from that" (p.115).
3. The earliest published call for soviets that has been traced is his letter to Alsky, 29 March 1927. But in 'Summary and Perspectives of the Chinese Revolution' Trotsky writes: "...from 1926 on the Opposition advanced the slogan of soviets in China" (p.321).
4. Marxist historians in China as well as in the Soviet Union usually called the revolution in 1911 the First Revolution, the 1925-27 revolution the Second, and the 1949 revolution (which brought the CCP to power) the Third Revolution.
5. Until we read 'New Opportunities for the Chinese Revolution, New Tasks, and New Mistakes', which was published in English for the first time in 1976, we had believed that Trotsky declared the Chinese revolution had been definitely defeated immediately after the betrayal of the Wang Lingwei government in July 1927.
6. According to Liu Shaoqi's report to the 8th Congress of the CCP (September 1956). Since 1933, the underground organisations in the cities had been 100% eradicated.



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In defence of the French revolution

Continued from back cover

1. The case against the Revolution

In Simon Schama's book, all the violence done by the revolutionaries is described in horrified and colourful detail; the violence of the counter-revolutionaries in the Vendee in 1793 or in the White Terror of 1794-5 is noted briefly and dispassionately. The king, the queen and the other leaders of the old order are described with great sympathy, the revolutionaries with loathing.

But there are more serious conservative arguments — as follows.⁴

The old regime was hierarchical and riddled with privilege, but fluid. It did not exclude or repress those whose wealth came from trade and industry; on the contrary. Since the 16th century, the king had raised money by selling official state positions to the highest bidder. This practice enabled successful **bourgeois** to enter the nobility by buying an official position that brought nobility with it, and many did so. Many nobles were active in trade and industry; many bourgeois bought land or bought the right to receive the feudal dues from land. The bourgeoisie and the nobility were not two hostile classes, but two parts of a single ruling class. Historians used to say that there was an "aristocratic reaction" in the 18th century in which the nobility made its control of power and wealth more exclusive; but many now deny this.⁵

Liberal, modernising, free-trade ideas were widespread in this class, in the nobility as much as in the bourgeoisie. That is why the nobility put up so little resistance to the reforms of the National Assembly in 1789; indeed, many of the initiators of the reforms were nobles.

What was significant about the revolution, then, was not so much the reforms it legislated as the dangerous principle it established of change through violence.⁶ That principle then took its toll, with the even greater slaughter of the Terror.

That masses of the poor people of the cities came to play a central role in the Revolution was a **setback** to progress rather than an advance. For those masses were hostile to the new liberal, modernising, free-trade ideas, and preferred a traditional, regulated economy. "The Revolution drew much of its power from the (ultimately hopeless) attempt to **arrest**, rather than hasten, the process of modernisation".⁷

After all the destruction, what was there to show? The new ruling class, under Napoleon, was very similar to the old one: landowners and state officials. French trade and industry suffered during the Revolution and grew very slowly after it. "The 'bourgeoisie' of Marxist history long believed to be the essential beneficiary of the Revolution



Robespierre

was, in fact, its principal victim."⁸ And the poor were no better off than before.

2. Marx and Engels on the French Revolution

Some problems with the conservative case are obvious. If the French Revolution was so much ado about so very little, then why did it have such an impact? If only Marxist dogma can make us see the French Revolution as a bourgeois revolution, then why did bourgeois writers of the time and of the early 19th century, long before Marx, also see it as such?⁹

But some of the conservatives' detailed arguments are powerful. The French Revolution was a bourgeois revolution; but it was also more complicated.

Engels wrote: "Modern industry... was still unknown in France... The 'have-nothing' masses of Paris, during the Reign of Terror, were able for a moment to gain the mastery, and thus to lead the bourgeois revolution to victory in spite of the bourgeoisie themselves. But in doing so, they only proved how impossible it was for their domination to last under the conditions then obtaining."

And Marx described the outcome of the Revolution as follows: "The centralised State power, with its ubiquitous organs of standing army, police, bureaucracy, clergy and judicature... originates from the days of absolute monarchy, serving the nascent middle-class society as a mighty weapon on its struggle against feudalism. Still, its development remained clogged by all manner of medieval rubbish, seigniorial rights, local privileges, municipal and guild monopolies and provincial constitutions. The gigantic broom of the French Revolution of the eighteenth century swept away all these relics of

bygone times, thus clearing simultaneously the social soil of its last hindrance to the superstructure of the modern State edifice raised under the First Empire [Napoleon]... During the subsequent regimes the government... became a hotbed of huge national debts and crushing taxes..."

Again: "This executive power [in France] with its enormous bureaucratic and military organisation... this appalling parasitic body, which enmeshes the body of French society like a net and chokes all its pores, sprang up in the days of the absolute monarchy, with the decay of the feudal system, which it helped to hasten. The seigniorial privileges of the landowners and towns became transformed into so many attributes of the state power, the feudal dignitaries into paid officials... The first French Revolution... was bound to develop what the absolute monarchy had begun: centralisation, but at the same time the extent, the attributes and the agents of governmental power. Napoleon perfected this state machinery... All revolutions perfected this machine instead of smashing it..."

"But under the absolute monarchy, during the first Revolution, under Napoleon, bureaucracy was only the means of preparing the class rule of the bourgeoisie..."¹⁰

The rest of this article tells the story of the Revolution and tries to unravel these complexities.

3. The Old Regime

When the revolutionary National Assembly abolished most of France's vast jumble of privileges on 4 August 1789, it declared that it was abolishing "the feudal regime".

Feudalism emerged in Europe in the Dark Ages that followed the collapse of the Roman Empire. Peasants gathered round military leaders. The peasants would hold patches of land but have to give labour on the lord's own land, military service, or a share of the crop.

The lord might in his turn have feudal obligations to an overlord or king. Each feudal lord was not only the economic but also the political and law-administering power in his area (fiefdom). Beside the lords' fiefdoms stood the Church, a great corporate landowner, and, from the 11th century, growing cities. Feudal society was a complex web of overlapping powers.

In the 14th century feudalism fell into crisis, unleashing wars and mighty struggles between the lords, the peasants, and the cities. Between the mid-15th and mid-17th century, strong monarchies ruling large, compact states emerged from the wars. In Eastern Europe the social struggles ended with the peasants more tightly enserfed. In Western Europe, the peasants made gains, weakening their feudal ties. Trade and crafts developed in the cities, though within "guilds" which enforced traditional controls to restrict competition.

France had been the 'classic' country of feudalism, and it became the 'classic' country of the new sort of monarchy. The huge palaces at the Louvre and Versailles symbolised the regime.

Taxes were very heavy.¹¹ They were not collected directly by the State, but contracted out to the "Farmers-General" (usually nobles¹²), who made vast profits for themselves on the side. The nobles were exempt from almost all taxes. The Church paid no taxes at all (only a 'voluntary gift' to the king), and bishops were often among the most wealthy nobles.

The State tied the nobility to itself by forcing some 4,000 of the higher nobles to live at Versailles and by establishing a system of provincial governors (**intendants**) appointed by the king. It raised money by selling official posts. Many nobles drew more income from these posts than from the feudal dues on their land. The best posts were largely reserved for nobles, but a steady trickle of bourgeois bought their way into the nobility by buying middle-rank posts. The State encouraged industry, in the form of state or state-guaranteed monopolies.

The regime remained in many ways feudal. Neither taxes nor laws were uniform; they varied greatly across the country as they were modified by a crazy patchwork of traditional privileges. Internal customs barriers between one part of the country and another restricted trade.

Serfs, tied to the land, still numbered one and a half million (out of a total population of about 25 million). A large proportion of peasants had become sharecroppers, paying a percentage of their crop to a landowner in return for a lease on the land. Peasants owned about a third of the land in France (the proportion varying from area to area). They had resisted attempts to clear them off the land, enclose common land, and launch capitalist farming more successfully than English peasants; but they were desperately poor.¹³ Only a few owned enough land to produce substantially for the market and employ labour. Most had not enough land to live on, and needed odd jobs to feed themselves. "At least one tenth of the rural population did nothing but beg from one year's end to the other".¹⁴ French agriculture was backward. Its productivity in 1810 was half that of English agriculture.¹⁵

Feudal dues and obligations totalled between 5 and 10 per cent of all agricultural production, and the income of the nobility (one and a half per cent of the population) 20 to 30 per cent of the national income.¹⁶ Feudal dues, then, were a sizeable part of the income of the nobles, and a big burden on the peasants.

Over 80 per cent of the people lived in the countryside. But Paris had around 600,000 people. It was the second biggest city, after London, in the Western world. The bourgeoisie had several layers. The majority were masters of small shops and workshops — petty bourgeois rather than modern capitalists. Professionals, especially

lawyers, were to dominate the revolutionary assemblies. Rentiers lived off interest, dividends, urban rents, or land (the bourgeoisie owned maybe 35% of land¹⁷). Large-scale merchants and industrialists were a small minority.

In Paris there were about 5,000 nobles, 10,000 clergy and 40,000 bourgeoisie. The bourgeoisie shaded off into the poorer class of petty traders, **craftworkers, labourers and vagrants**. Around half the population were wage-labourers; but there was not a distinct wage-working class. Small workshops would employ only one or two journeymen. Many workers were employed casually on building sites or as **messengers, carriers, gardeners, and servants**. Only a small minority of the wage-workers were regularly employed in sizeable capitalist workplaces.¹⁸

The bourgeoisie's access to office and to noble status damped its conflict with the nobility.¹⁹ Thus France remained feudal although it was the second commercial and industrial power of Europe, after Britain.

Liberal and free-trade ideas spread among the wealthy classes, inspired by the models of England and of the new American republic.

From the 1760s the regime stumbled into severe economic trouble. The State, increasingly unable to balance its budget, tried to extend its powers of taxation, and clashed with the nobles. The nobles squeezed the peasants. Crops failed. Life became harder.

4. The explosion of 1789

In August 1788 the monarchy tried to gain assent for a programme to restabilise the State finances by convening the Estates General. This was a sort of parliament, dormant since 1614. Traditionally it assembled in three 'estates' — clergy, nobility and 'Third Estate' (the other 98 per cent of the people). There was agitation for the Third Estate to be 'doubled' (allowed as many representatives as the other two put together) and for decisions to be taken by all three estates voting together. The king tried to compromise by 'doubling' the Third Estate but insisting the three estates vote separately.

On 5 May 1789 the Estates General convened. The Third Estate stood firm for the estates voting together, the nobility for separate voting.

The conflict of previous years between nobles and the monarchy was now overshadowed by a struggle opposing the bourgeoisie to both nobles and monarchy. Whatever the sympathy of many wealthy nobles for liberal idea, the bulk of them stood solid against the alarming claims of the Third Estate. Whatever the ties of the bourgeoisie to the old order (a greater number of the Third Estate deputies were state officials²⁰), they felt alienated and aggrieved by the privileges of the nobility. Whatever the access of wealthier bourgeoisie to noble status, it didn't reconcile them to the old regime. Around one-quarter to one-third of the noble families in 1789 had been ennobled since 1700.²¹ Assuming that

the bourgeoisie was five times more numerous than the nobility, that means in each generation about one bourgeois in fifty would gain noble status. For the other 49, and maybe even that one, it was not enough to offset their anger at the way feudal privilege stifled the development of France.²²

On 17 June the Third Estate (joined by a few clergy) declared themselves the National Assembly. On 23 June the king instructed the National Assembly to dissolve, and reaffirmed that the estates must meet separately. The Assembly, which by now had been joined by three liberal nobles, refused. On 27 June the King gave in and instructed the nobles and clergy to join the National Assembly.

On 14 July a crowd stormed the Bastille, the royal prison in Paris. A militia was formed (called the "bourgeois militia", and later the National Guard) and a council made up from the Third Estate's electoral college took over the city. Diehard nobles emigrated. By the end of July bourgeois militias and bourgeois municipal councils had taken power in most cities.

In late July and early August a vast peasant revolt swept France. Alarmed by rumours of an aristocratic plot to slaughter the peasants, and encouraged by the belief that the king and the National Assembly had abolished tithes and feudal dues, the peasants rebelled against paying those dues. They also destroyed enclosures and claimed back common land.

Local bourgeois often tried to suppress the peasant revolt. But in Versailles, in a hectic session on the night of 4 August, the National Assembly abolished most feudal privileges and dues. It abolished the sale of State offices and proclaimed equality before the law.

By the morning after, some of the deputies were having second thoughts. The final text of the decree required most feudal rights to be bought out rather than flatly abolished. (Abolition without compensation was eventually decreed by the Jacobin Convention in July 1793). On 26 August the Assembly adopted a Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen: "Men are born and remain free and equal in rights..."

Louis XVI refused to ratify the decrees of 4 August and the Declaration of Rights. On 5 October some six or seven thousand women, followed by 20,000 men of the National Guard, marched from Paris to Versailles. They forced Louis to ratify the decrees and to come to Paris. Versailles would never again be a royal palace.

5. 1789-91: revolution and counter-revolution gather force

In Paris, the Assembly continued to redesign society according to the ideas current among the more enlightened of the wealthy classes.

It decreed free trade in grain (August 1789) and made loans at interest legal (October 1789). It declared equal rights for Protestants (December 1789) and for Jews (January 1790). It abolished titles

(June 1790), and guilds and monopolies (March 1791). It adopted a Constitution (September 1791), with voting limited by money qualifications. It also banned trade unions (June 1791).

The Assembly also had to tackle the money crisis which had ruined the old regime. This was done by confiscating Church lands and selling them (November 1789). If Church property was confiscated, how were the priests to be supported? The Assembly adopted the Civil Constitution of the Clergy (July 1790), making priests salaried state officials. It was the first step towards confrontation between the Revolution and the majority of France's priests, supported by millions of pious peasants.

The bishops stalled. On 27 November the Assembly adopted a demand that all priests swear loyalty to the constitution.

In March 1791 the Pope denounced the Civil Constitution of the Clergy. In May and August 1792 measures were adopted providing for deportation of priests who refused to swear loyalty.

The leaders of the Assembly, Lafayette and Mirabeau, wanted compromise and stabilisation. But both revolution and counter-revolution were gathering force. The reforming ideas discussed among the wealthy few before 1789 were setting fire to millions; more and more nobles were emigrating and mobilising support from the aristocratic and royal families of other countries.

Factions ("right" and "left") formed in the Assembly. The press expanded hugely, from 60 papers in all France to 500 in Paris alone.²³ By August 1790 the left-wing Jacobin Club (launched in December 1789) had 1200 members in Paris; by June 1790, 450 affiliated clubs in the provinces.²⁴ The Jacobins charged a fairly high membership fee; other clubs were more open and more radical. General people's assemblies met frequently in the 60 districts, and then, after May 1790, the 48 sections, of Paris.

6. The Flight to Varennes, war, the Jacobin Republic

The position of Lafayette and Mirabeau, the constitutional monarchist leaders, became precarious. On 20 June 1791 the king, increasingly frustrated, tried to escape from Paris and link up with counter-revolutionary troops on the frontier. He was intercepted and brought back to Paris. A demonstration in Paris on 17 July demanding a republic was dispersed by the National Guard, who shot dead 50 people.

On 1 October 1791 the Legislative Assembly, elected according to the new Constitution with a money qualification for voting, convened. The dominant faction in it were the Feuillants, liberal monarchists who had split from the Jacobins in July 1791.

Agitation for war was launched by a section of the Jacobins round Brissot (later called Girondins, because many of them came from the Gironde, the area round the great port of Bordeaux). The Austrian Empire had family links with the French monarchy; German princes on the border with France were harbouring emigre nobles. "War to the palaces, peace to the cottages," said the Girondins, was necessary to consolidate the Revolution.²⁵

A section of the left, round Robespierre and Marat, opposed war; people would not like "missionaries with bayonets", and the war could lead to a military dictatorship in France. But on 20 April 1792 France declared

war on Austria.

The war would radicalise and harshen the Revolution, bringing first the Girondins and then Robespierre to power; but it would also vindicate Robespierre's warnings.

Louis XVI appointed a Girondin ministry. The war went badly. The Girondin leaders said aristocrats were secretly plotting for an Austrian victory (and indeed the Court was). On 12 June Louis sacked the Girondin ministers and replaced them by Feuillants. Tension grew. Lafayette tried to get the National Guard to suppress the Jacobins. The Paris sections went into permanent session. Citizens without the money qualification for voting were allowed into section meetings and into the National Guard. 47 of the 48 sections in Paris came out for a republic. The Assembly declared the confiscation of emigres' property. The armies opposed to France issued a manifesto threatening "exemplary vengeance" and "military execution".

On 10 August a revolutionary committee, based on the sections, took over the city administration of Paris. The National Guard and volunteer troops from Marseilles stormed the king's palace. The Girondin ministers were restored, and the Assembly decided that a Convention would be elected by universal male suffrage. Lafayette, having failed to get his troops to march on Paris, gave himself up to the Austrians on 19 August. On 21 September the Convention met and declared France a Republic.

On 2-6 September armed crowds rampaged through the city's prisons and massacred the prisoners, not just the counter-revolutionaries but also common criminals. This atrocity, however, was not typical of the great uprisings which set the course of the Revolution: 14 July 1789, 5 October 1789, 10 August 1792.

Those uprisings were far from modern working-class methods of struggle like strikes and factory occupations. But they were not wild riots. Apart from 14 July 1789, they all relied on **organisation**, through the clubs, the sections, and the National Guard; their political aims were set by hours and hours of debate in the sections beforehand. They were based on the working petty bourgeoisie (sans-culottes) rather than the very poorest people of the city. Of 120 Parisians active on 10 August 1792 whose occupations are known, 95 were shopkeepers, small traders, craft workers or journeymen.²⁶

The members of the revolutionary Convention were mostly from the next layer up of the middle class. Of 891 members of the Convention, fully 468 were lawyers, 142 were other professionals, and 83 were merchants, manufacturers, or bankers.²⁷

The Convention was further to the left than the Legislative Assembly. The Girondins, who had split away from the Jacobin Club, had a majority. But now they, like others before, would be ruined by their efforts to keep the Revolution within limits acceptable to the wealthy. They voted to condemn Louis XVI but tried to avoid the death penalty; he was guillotined on 21 January. Obstinate sticking to free trade, they rejected growing popular demands, from late 1792, for price controls on bread; the Jacobins did not like those demands either, but were more willing to bend to them.

In March 1793 bloody counter-revolution erupted in the Vendee, in western France. "In the more commercialised regions farmers and bourgeois made common cause against nobles and the immensely rich Church", but in the Vendee the whole rural society was set against the cities.²⁸ On 1 April 1793 the Republic's leading general, Dumouriez, followed Lafayette; he tried to turn his army against Paris, failed, and fled to the Austrian lines.

On 6 April the Convention set up an emergency Committee of Public Safety; on 4 May it passed the Law of the Maximum, controlling grain prices. On 31 May and 2 June a committee which had been set up by 33 of the 48 Paris sections organised a new uprising which forced the Convention to

expel 29 Girondin leaders. The Jacobins came to power.

7. The Jacobin Republic and the Terror

The new Jacobin regime decreed the final abolition without compensation of all feudal rights. It adopted a new Constitution on 24 June 1793 which, while insisting on the bourgeois rights of property, proclaimed many of the principles of the modern parliamentary welfare state: universal male suffrage, the right to work or maintenance, public education for all.

The Constitution was quickly overwhelmed by the emergencies of war and counter-revolution. The Girondins launched armed revolts in the provinces. The counter-revolutionaries scored victories in the Vendee. On 13 July the Jacobin leader Marat was assassinated by the Girondin Charlotte Corday.

On 26 July the Convention declared the death penalty for hoarders. On 5 September 1793 the Paris Commune organised a new uprising, forcing the Convention decision on "revolutionary armies" to requisition grain and to promise a "General Maximum", — general price controls on food, legislated on 29 September. This uprising started as a demonstration of building and other workers for bread and higher wages on 4 September; the petty-bourgeois Commune first tried to disperse this demonstration by military force, then co-opted it, asking employers, too, to close their workshops on the 5th and march on the Convention.²⁹ When the Jacobins legislated the "Maximum", they included controls on wages as well as prices.

On 22 October 1793 the Committee of Public Safety set up a special committee with sweeping powers to control production and trade and to requisition supplies. At the same time the Jacobins moved to secure themselves against the left. Militant sans-culotte leaders were arrested. The sections were restricted to two meetings a week. Activists got round this by setting up 'sectional societies'; the government denounced them and finally forced their dissolution in May 1794.

The government appointed agents to supervise the communes and districts, and banned them from liaising independently. The Society of Republican Revolutionary Women was dissolved and women's clubs were banned.³⁰

The Terror began. Queen Marie-Antoinette was guillotined on 16 October, the Girondin leaders on 31 October. Lyons, where a Girondin-royalist alliance had seized power in May 1793, was reconquered in October 1793; the Convention decided to change the city's name to Ville-Affranchie (Liberated City) and erect a monument declaring "Lyons made war on Liberty; Lyons is no more". After the counter-revolutionary armies in the Vendee had been defeated in December 1793, the whole area was subjected to mass terror.³¹ More widespread peasant counter-revolution continued until 1799-1800.

The Jacobin agents of the Terror frequently combined it with radical social policies — levies on the rich, building public workshops and hospitals, state welfare for the poor. Jeanbon St Andre, a member of the Committee of Public Safety who later became an official under Napoleon, recalled it proudly: "[It was] a government of passionate Jacobins in red bonnets, wearing rough woollen cloth, wooden shoes, who lived on simple bread and bad beer and went to sleep on mattresses laid on the floor of their meeting halls when they were too tired to wake and deliberate further. That is the kind of men who saved France. I was one of them, gentlemen. And here, as in the apartments of the Emperor...I glory in the fact."³²

The Terror was not just decreed by an elite. It was supported and indeed urged on the Jacobins by a substantial section of the revolutionary petty bourgeoisie, as was the

campaign against religion ("dechristianisation") which accompanied it in many areas despite Robespierre's consistent opposition. But right from the start the Terror was linked with the Jacobins' drive to control the masses.

The Terror was not a totalitarian state or anything like it. It was a frantic mobilisation against counter-revolution, made frantic by the war emergency and by the utopianism of much sans-culotte thinking.

Price controls and laws against hoarding did not and could not bring what the sans-culottes wanted: equality and enough to eat for everyone. They could find no answer but an increasingly desperate search for saboteurs.

The Terror did rally the forces to defeat counter-revolution and foreign armies. But both the Terror itself, and the leading Jacobins' efforts to limit the Terror by controlling the sans-culottes, narrowed and sapped the Jacobins' support.

8. Thermidor, Bonaparte, Restoration

In March 1794 the government guillotined the supporters of Hebert, the left-wing of the Convention; in April, the supporters of Danton, who had argued for easing off the Terror. In June and July the Terror rose to its highest pitch in Paris. But on 26 June 1794 the French armies had won the battle of Fleurus. This victory, easing the war emergency, was fatal for Robespierre. On 27 July 1794 (Thermidor year II by the new revolutionary calendar) a faction of more moderate Jacobins moved against him. The Paris Commune tried to mobilise the sections and the National Guard, but failed. Robespierre and 21 others were guillotined on 28 July.

The ideal of the small shopkeepers, traders and craft workers who formed the core of the great uprisings of the Revolution was a society where everyone owned a little property, but no-one much, and where prices, wages, and profits were regulated to ensure equality. It was unworkable. The Jacobin leaders, committed as they were to unrestricted bourgeois property rights and the free market, did not want it anyway. But the war emergency and the pressure from below forced them into makeshift experiments.

After Thermidor the Jacobins' radical policies unravelled fast. Power in the Convention shifted towards moderates. The Terror ended, and a White Terror began; in May-June 1795 hundreds of Jacobins held in prisons were massacred; the "jeunesse dorée" (gilded youth — expensively dressed young thugs from the wealthy classes) ruled the streets of Paris. The Paris Commune was abolished; the sections purged and banned from meeting more than once every ten days; the Jacobin Club closed down. Requisitioning was abandoned; price controls were cancelled on 24 December 1794.

On 1 April 1795, and again on 20-23 May, the exhausted and starving working people of Paris rose again, for "Bread and the Constitution of 1793". They were defeated. Again, as in August 1792, most of the insurgents were the working petty bourgeoisie — small shopkeepers, workshop masters, craft workers, or clerks.³³

The bourgeoisie at the time of the French Revolution was not yet a compact, self-aware class. The lawyers and professionals who dominated the revolutionary assemblies represented not their own immediate interests but those of different layers of the bourgeoisie, according to their views and personal connections. The constitutional monarchists allied with the small group of big merchants and industrialists and with the liberal, bourgeois-oriented nobility. The

Girondins allied with a middle layer of merchants and entrepreneurs; the Jacobins with the working petty bourgeoisie, who in turn were generally able to bring wage-workers with them. All believed that they represented the whole nation, though in fact very different attitudes to property, reflecting different interests, were clear.³⁴

Neither the lawyers and professionals of the Jacobin leadership, nor the working petty bourgeoisie, could have governed alone; an alliance welded together by the pressure of the war emergency was able to govern briefly, though only as an emergency regime. Once the emergency slackened, the wealthier sections of the bourgeoisie reasserted themselves.

A new Constitution was proposed in June 1795. The speaker introducing it explained the principles of the new order: "A country governed by landowners is in the social order; a land where non-landowners govern is in the state of nature...If you grant unreserved political rights to men without property...they will establish...harmful taxes on commerce and agriculture."³⁵ By 1795-6 the government — still based, after all, on the revolutionary Convention elected in 1792 — was alarmed and battered by the revival of royalism.

It was saved only by the victories of the French army. The national army created through mass conscription defeated armies largely run by dynasties and made up of mercenaries.

Prussia, Britain and other powers had entered the war alongside Austria in 1792-3. France won victories in 1794-5, occupied Belgium, made peace with Prussia in April 1795, and secured an alliance with Holland. In March 1796 Napoleon Bonaparte took command of France's army. A series of wars, interrupted by short peaces, led to the peak of his power in 1807-10. His empire covered half of Europe — Spain, Italy, Switzerland, the Low Countries, Western Germany and Poland.

Napoleon's grandiose tomb in Paris has an inscription praising his victories and a principle — Free Trade. In most of the countries he conquered, changes were introduced similar to those made in France in 1789-91: abolition of serfdom, guilds, monopolies, and feudal privileges; confiscation of Church lands; equality before the law. France's Civil Code, designed by Napoleon to sum up the legal framework of the new bourgeois order, was extended to those countries.

At the same time Napoleon ruthlessly despoiled those countries for the benefit of France's treasury. Only that plunder enabled the French state to keep upright — and only at the cost of Napoleon establishing a military dictatorship from 23 October 1799 (18 Brumaire).

9. Clearing the way for capitalism?

Did Napoleon, however, at least create a stable regime for capitalist development? The change from a society of feudal privilege to a free trade society was stable and irreversible, but France's political system proved unstable. In 1815 Napoleon was defeated at Waterloo and the monarchy returned to power, backed up by England, Austria, Prussia and Russia. A White Terror followed against democrats, republicans, Jacobins and Bonapartists. The nobility regained a lot of political power. Revolution in 1830 pushed it to the sidelines again, and put the richest bourgeois, the "financial aristocracy", on top.³⁶ Revolutions and counter-revolutions switched power from one section of the bourgeoisie to another until a more or less stable bourgeois republic was formed after 1871. By then a sizeable layer of industrial and commercial capitalists was, at last, cen-

tral to the bourgeoisie.

The general pattern elsewhere in Europe, in England and Germany for example, was for the rising bourgeoisie and the old aristocracy to compromise. In France, the clash between the bourgeoisie and nobility had been too violent for a solid compromise to be reached easily between the wealthier bourgeoisie and the liberal nobility, both minorities of their classes. The relative strength of the classes also made compromise difficult; neither was strong enough easily to make the other a junior partner, nor weak enough easily to accept being a junior partner itself.

The bourgeoisie was weak, disunited, and heavily dependent on the State. Of 67,000 'notables' in 1810, 25% were landowners, 34% administrators, 14% professionals, 16% others and only 11% tradesmen.

The nobility had been seriously damaged. "A typical provincial noble may have lost...one third of his income as a result of the Revolution"; presumably the higher nobility, based at Versailles, who were more conspicuous politically would have lost more, and nobles certainly lost their near-monopoly of high public office. But nobles were still a big proportion of France's wealthy people: 34% of France's biggest landowners in 1803 had been nobles before the Revolution.³⁷

Moreover, the State machine itself was the main source of income for the wealthy. It had expanded from maybe 60,000 officers in 1778 to 130,000 civil servants in 1839.³⁸ As Marx put it: "The parties that contended for domination regarded the possession of this huge state edifice as the principal spoils of the victor."³⁹ The nobility and different fractions of the bourgeoisie were set in competition with each other for these spoils.

French industry did grow faster after the Revolution than before: 61 per cent between 1730 and 1830, then another 60% in 20 years between 1825-34 and 1845-64.⁴⁰ But it grew much more slowly than Britain's or Germany's. Before the Revolution, French trade and industry had lagged only a short distance behind Britain, and were way ahead of Germany's. Between 1801-14 and 1865-74, French industrial output increased fourfold; British, sevenfold. By 1880 Germany was overtaking France industrially.⁴¹

According to Eric Hobsbawm, "The Jacobins...established that impregnable citadel of small and middle peasant proprietors, small craftsmen and shopkeepers...which has dominated the country's life ever since. The capitalist transformation of agriculture and small enterprise...was slowed to a crawl; and with it the speed of urbanisation, the expansion of the home market, the multiplication of the working class...Both big business and the labour movement were long doomed to remain minority phenomena in France, islands surrounded by a sea of corner grocers, peasant smallholders, and cafe proprietors."⁴²

And Tom Kemp: "The effects of the Revolution and its sequel were detrimental to French economic growth both directly, by diverting resources to non-productive outlets and curtailing trade links with the overseas world, and indirectly through a land settlement which...tended to retard the growth of an internal market, the creation of an industrial working force and the transfer of resources from the land to industry."⁴³

Although bourgeois bought most of the Church and emigre land sold during the Revolution, the peasants gained land: in the department of the Nord, they increased their share of the land from 30% to 42%.⁴⁴ Napoleon's Civil Code wrote peasant custom into law by compelling landowners to divide their land equally among heirs rather than bequeathing the whole lot to a single heir; this helped keep landholding fragmented. Both revolutionary and counter-revolutionary mobilisations of the small-proprietor classes forced the State to conciliate those classes;

hence the "sea of corner grocers and peasant smallholders". France remained much more rural than Britain or Germany.

10. The French Revolution and us

Is Simon Schama right to maintain that the French Revolution meant little progress and much mayhem? No.

The legal and institutional results of the Revolution did help the development of the productive forces, both in France and in the countries transformed under Napoleonic conquest. They would probably not have happened anyway. In Austria, Emperor Joseph II attempted between 1780 and 1790 to introduce from above liberal, free-trade reforms similar to France's of 1789-91. Very little of his work survived his death, and the Austro-Hungarian Empire remained heavily feudalistic up to World War I.

The social policy of the Jacobin Republic of 1793-4 was unsustainable; but the only reason why Schama thinks it was backward-looking is that he identifies "modernisation" entirely with Thatcherism! The old regime had controls on the economy to preserve a traditional social hierarchy, with privileges and monopolies for the wealthy classes. The sans-culottes wanted controls on the economy to create an equal society of small property-owners. Although they were unworkable as a whole, in many ways sans-culotte ideas blazed a trail for socialism.

The Jacobin Republic of 1793-4 set benchmarks for radical and democratic politics for a whole era. So much the worse for it, as far as Schama is concerned. Indeed, he endorses Louis XVI's apology for himself: "How was it possible to have a coherently governed state of the size and populousness of France with administrations hostage to the fickleness and hysteria of press and club opinion?" He comments that "the designated successor to royal authority — the Sovereign People — was no more capable than Louis XVI of reconciling freedom with power." Schama's language is vague, but makes sense only if he is saying that parliamentary democracy is no better than, or maybe worse than, absolute monarchy.

He philosophises a great deal about "the moral squalor of the revolutionary predicament," meaning that any use of popular violence to bring about political change leads inescapably to terror and atrocities. Instead of examining the particular class conflicts behind the Terror, he generalises vastly; once you have decided that violence against aristocrats can improve society, then you are bound to go on seeking more aristocrats and crypto-aristocrats until you are knee-deep in blood.⁴⁵

The logic does not hold, unless you assume that only kings and bureaucrats are capable of rational thought, not working people.

Yet the French Revolution was in fact the first great example in world history of working people organising in a sustained way, debating ideas in print and by word of mouth, and then acting collectively to implement them. It was not and could not be socialist. But it did incubate the beginnings of the modern socialist movement.

In 1795, Gracchus Babeuf, a Jacobin who had worked in the Paris food administration, came to the conclusion that the only way to bring about equality was common ownership of wealth. He organised a group called the Conspiracy of Equals, which was broken up by the police in 1796. Babeuf was guillotined but his ideas, through such people as Auguste Blanqui, inspired a whole current of socialist militancy in the 19th century. The group which Marx and Engels joined when they became socialists, and for which they wrote the Communist Manifesto, was part of that current. The French Revolution is the starting point for our politics.

Footnotes

1. Not all conservatives want or have wanted to discredit the Revolution. The alternative conservative argument is that capitalist society corresponds to human nature; revolution may have been necessary in the past to oust artificial ancient despotism, but it cannot be needed in future now that we have modern democracy, the product of the great Revolution.
2. *Citizens: a chronicle of the French Revolution*, Viking 1989, p.184.
3. *Newsweek*, 20 February 1989.
4. DMG Sutherland, *France 1789-1815: Revolution and Counter-Revolution*, Fontana 1985. William Doyle, *Origins of the French Revolution*, OUP 1980. Alfred Cobban, *Aspects of the French Revolution*, Cape 1968. Francois Furet and Denis Richet, *La Revolution Française*, Marabout 1979. None of these is as vehemently anti-revolutionary as Schama.
5. Doyle, p.21; Sutherland, p.15ff; but not all the "revisionists" share this view. "In the course of the 18th century," write Furet and Richet, "aristocratic predominance in French society was greatly increased...From the death of Louis XIV [in 1715] the aristocratic counter-offensive began. It did not have the power to destroy royal absolutism, but it did manage progressively to control it through a quasi-monopoly of official positions...The monarchical state lost a part of...its aptitude for reform." (p.31)
6. Schama insists that the Revolution was bad from the beginning. "The notion that, between 1789 and 1791, France basked in some sort of liberal pleasure garden before the erection of the guillotine is a complete fantasy. From the very beginning, the violence which made the Revolution possible in the first place created exactly the brutal distinctions between Patriots and Enemies, Citizens and Aristocrats, within which there could be no human shades of grey." (p.436). Furet and Richet argue that the revolution "went off the rails" in 1790-1 (p.125ff of their book).
7. Schama, p.184
8. Schama, p.787
9. Albert Soboul, *The French Revolution 1787-1799*, NLB 1974, p.51. George Comminel, *Rethinking the French Revolution*, Verso 1987, p.53ff. Comminel argues that the whole notion of the French Revolution as a bourgeois revolution is an uncritical borrowing from liberalism: "the theory of bourgeois revolution did not originate with Marx, and in fact is not even consistent with the original social thought which Marx did develop" (p.4). Marxists should recognise that the conservative critics have indeed exploded the "traditional" Marxist view of the French Revolution, and instead develop a theory of the Revolution more in line with Marx's basic method. I find the argument baffling.
10. Marx-Engels Selected Works, p.402-3 (*Socialism, Utopian and Scientific*), 289 (*The Civil War in France*), 170-1 (*The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*).
11. Fernand Braudel (*Civilisation and Capitalism, 15th-18th centuries: Volume 3, The Perspective of the World*, Fontana 1985, p.312-3) reckons that Crown revenues were about 5% of national income. This seems low. But much more tax was collected from the people than reached the Crown, and most people's surplus over subsistence was very small.
12. Between 1726 and 1791, 90 per cent of the Farmers General were nobles — Doyle, p.21.
13. See T H Aston and CHE Philipin (ed), *The Brenner Debate*, CUP 1986, for the contrast between English and French peasants.
14. Georges Lefebvre, *The Great Fear*, NLB 1973, p.14.
15. According to Paul Bairoch, *Economic Development of the Third World*, Methuen 1975, p.40.
16. Feudal dues: Sutherland, p.72. Total noble income: Perry Anderson, *Lineages of the Absolutist State*, NLB 1974, p.101; the figure is for the 17th century, but I see no reason to suppose that it was hugely different in the 18th century. See also Doyle, p.116.
17. Soboul, p.35-45, estimates that peasants owned about a third of the land, the Church about 10%, and nobles about 20%, so bourgeois about 35%. All these proportions varied widely from region to region.
18. See Soboul, p.35-54 and George Rude, *The Crowd in the French Revolution*, OUP 1959, p.12-19. Soboul (*The Sans-Culottes*, Princeton UP) quotes estimates of 70,000 for the number of wage-workers in Paris, and 290,000 for wage-workers and their families. For the average number of workers per employer, Soboul cites a figure of 16.6, but gives reasons to suppose that the true average could be as low as 6. Thus there were between 4,000 and 11,000 employers in Paris. With their families, they would number between 16,000 and 44,000. Doyle estimates 105,000 bourgeois in Paris.
19. Marx, letter to Engels, 27.7.1854; *Selected Correspondence*, Progress Publishers 1975, p.82; Anderson, p.97. Doyle, p.129, cites an estimate that the bourgeoisie had grown threefold between 1700 and 1789.
20. Cobban, p.101-3 and p.110-1.
21. Sutherland, p.17; Doyle, p.21.
22. Schama makes a great deal of the fact that various bourgeois revolutionaries were not "fuming failures" but "success stories of old-regime capitalism" (see p.410, for example). Of course they were. Otherwise they would not be bourgeois. I in 50 is a maximum estimate for the proportion of bourgeois ennobled; it could be 1 in 200. Cf Doyle, p.120, 129.
23. Schama, p.525.
24. Furet and Richet, p.108-11; Schama, p.527. Of the members of the Jacobin Clubs between October 1791 and May 1793, 45% were artisans, tradesmen, or shopkeepers; 25% members of the liberal professions, government officials or salaried employees (ie. clerks, etc.); 1.6% manual labourers. (M Kennedy, *The Jacobin Clubs in the French Revolution*, Princeton UP 1988, vol.2, Appendix D)
25. Maybe the Girondin leaders were also motivated by the prospect of profits from war contracts. Sutherland, p.138.
26. Rude, p.106.
27. Cobban, p.110.
28. Schama, p.694. I don't know how Schama reconciles this observation with his denial that the Revolution was a class struggle.
29. Rude, p.128; Sutherland, p.206; Soboul, p.333-4; Furet and Richet, p.226-7.
30. During the Revolution feminism was very marginal, and under the Civil Code women's legal position became worse than before the Revolution. Schama uses the male prejudice which dominated Revolutionary thinking to discredit the Revolution. But in the long view of history, the French Revolution, by establishing the idea of human equality, contributed to the modern movement for equality for women.
31. Some 1700 people were shot or guillotined in Lyons, and some 40,000 in the whole Terror; Soboul, p.388. Schama claims a quarter of a million people were killed in the Terror in the Vendee, but gives no details.
32. Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution*, Abacus 1977, p.99.
33. Of 168 arrested on 20-23 May 1795 whose occupations are known, 45 to 50 were wage-earners and the rest shopkeepers, craft workers, etc. Rude, p.158.
34. I think this view of the French Revolution can illuminate what I (though not necessarily other contributors to *Workers' Liberty*) would call the bourgeois revolutions of the late 20th century — those in the Third World, usually made by middle-class groups against much of the big bourgeoisie (which was linked to landowning oligarchies or a colonial power) and often leading to a sort of permanent Jacobin war dictatorship.
35. Soboul, p.454.
36. Marx, *The Class Struggles in France 1848 to 1850*, in *Surveys from Exile*, Penguin 1973, p.36.
37. Sutherland, p.385-7 (but he suggests one-third may be an exaggeration for the nobles' loss of income. The picture of the post-Revolutionary bourgeoisie is confirmed by Tom Kemp (*Industrialisation in nineteenth century Europe*, Longman 1969, p.63, 57): "Well into the nineteenth century the property interests of the bourgeoisie continued to be mainly concentrated on lands and buildings. Loans to the state offered a further secure outlet...State offices and service, as well as landed property, for long conserved a special attraction for members of the bourgeoisie..." It is also confirmed by Jacques Droz (*Europe Between Revolutions 1815-1848*, Fontana 1967, p.39): "The power of the civil service, inherited from the Empire, caused a rush for the bureaucratic professions...a career in the civil service came to be regarded as the chief means of social betterment...so far it was rare for money to be invested in companies or industrial undertakings, for the risk was regarded as too great."
38. Figure for 1839: Hobsbawm, p.236; for 1778, Furet and Richet, p.34. Warning: they may not be comparable. Marx, in *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, gives a much higher figure: half a million state officials. The army was not enormously bigger after the Revolution than before: in 1756-60 (wartime) it was 330,000; in 1789, 180,000; in 1812-14, 600,000; in 1816, 132,000; in 1830, 259,000 (Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, Unwin Hyman 1988, p.99, 154).
39. Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, in Marx-Engels *Selected Works*, p.171.
40. Soboul, p.49; B R Mitchell, *Statistical Appendix to Fontana Economic History of Europe*, ed C M Cipolla, Vol 4.2, Fontana 1973, p.171.
41. Mitchell, p.768ff.
42. Hobsbawm, p.91-2.
43. Kemp, p.52.
44. Soboul, p.559.
45. Passages quoted: p.559, 675, 637. For the argument about violence, see p.436, 532, 690, 852, etc.

What to read

The best short introduction to the French Revolution and its place in history is *Revolutionary Europe 1783-1815* by George Rude (Fontana).

For a more detailed history, go on to *The French Revolution 1787-1799* by Albert Soboul.

The Crowd in the French Revolution by George Rude gives a vivid picture of the sans-culottes in Paris. *Class Struggles in the First French Republic: bourgeois and bras nus* by Daniel Guérin focuses on the conflict between the Paris masses and even the most radical Jacobin leaders.

Origins of the French Revolution by William Doyle is the best summary of the 'revisionist' case, a lot more serious (and shorter) than Simon Schama's much-boosted volume.

Old-fashioned, not all scientific, romantic and bombastic, *The French Revolution* by Thomas Carlyle (written in the 1830s) nonetheless conveys some of the excitement and drama of the Revolution.

Salman Rushdie's splendid novel

Edward Ellis reviews 'The Satanic Verses' by Salman Rushdie (Viking Penguin)

Falling 30,000 feet from a terrorist-exploded aeroplane, Saladin Chamcha, TV voice-over specialist, and Gibreel Farishta, star of Indian movies, undergo extraordinary transformations, the first into a beast with horns and cloven hooves, the second into his own archangelic namesake.

Across the centuries (or maybe not), these two foes confront each other in Salman Rushdie's 'Satanic Verses', possibly the most famous book in the world, discounting religious texts.

It is an extraordinary novel, weaving past and present myths into a story dealing with almost innumerable subjects: the identity of the immigrant from the Indian subcontinent in Britain; what life is like here, his confusion confronted with second-generation Asians who don't conform at all to his image of Englishness; Thatcherism, racism, police violence, inner-city chaos; religion: fundamentalism, the 'revolution against history' in which clocks are abolished; the past and the present; the nature of fiction. Really, it covers all that.

Rushdie's writing forms part of the genre known as 'magical realism', associated with South American authors like Gabriel Garcia Marquez; or, as Rushdie himself would prefer, just old-fashioned surrealism. Commonplace things assume the proportions of fantastic events, and the bizarre and magical coexist with the starkly realistic. In his 'Midnight's Children' all those born at the moment of India's independence possess extraordinary powers (such as telepathy caused by blocked sinuses). Here the flavour is more nightmarish, gothic...indeed, satanic.

The book is famous, of course, for blasphemy, because it pours scorn on the Muslim religion, renaming Muhammed, sacrilegiously, Mahound, and describing both the Prophet and his followers (not to mention an Imam clearly representative of the exiled Khomeini) in somewhat unsympathetic language.

There is no question that this is an anti-religious book, and one which, moreover, sees Islam in particular as a kind of symbol of the irrational past. It is not without ambiguity, though: we never entirely dismiss the possibility that Gibreel is the Archangel, and supernatural acts throughout the story seem to dare us to believe in them.

But religion belongs to the

mythologised past. One character says, on a night of 'purifying fire': 'Stay with me. The world is real. We have to live in it; we have to live here, to live on.'

Possibly rather more offensive to the pious, although less commented upon, is that when God himself appears in the story, his description is obviously of Rushdie (who as author, you see, is God, able to turn people into devils with the head of goats).

That the 'Satanic Verses' could be construed as racist, however, is a travesty. It is not accidental that Douglas Hurd found the book offensive. It is an impassioned and lavish attack on Thatcherite Britain and the position of black people in it. In an Asian disco, youth burn an effigy of Thatcher. "Maggie-Maggie-Maggie," says the crowd, 'burn-burn-burn...And O how prettily she melts, from the inside out...'

Tories wouldn't like it.

The emphasis on Satan, too, derives from this. Hearing of the existence of a real live devil in London, Asian youth adopt him as their symbol, and devil horns become trendy. A teenage Asian girl says to the behorned Chamcha, "You're a hero. I mean, people can really identify with you. It's an image white society has rejected for so long that we can really take it, you know, occupy it, inhabit it, reclaim it and make it our own."

It is a heavily allegorical book, by no means easy to understand. But Rushdie tells his story (or rather, stories) with such power that after the first few chapters it really is difficult to put down, fully comprehended or not. He is a writer of spectacular ability, if sometimes a little too self-consciously brilliant. One critic complained that this is a book "to study, not to enjoy"; but even at its most bewildering it is, in fact, exciting and entertaining.

What makes it stranger even than its contents, however, is the eerie sense of self-prophecy. The Imam haunts its pages, "grown monstrous, lying in the palace forecourt with his mouth yawning open at the gates; as the people march through the gates he swallows them whole."

And Gibreel, the movie star, embarks on a cinematic 'remake of the (Hindu) Ramayana story in which the heroes and heroines had become corrupt and evil instead of pure and free from sin... 'Gibreel is playing Ravana,' George explained in fascinated horror. 'Looks like he's trying deliberately to set up a final confrontation with religious sectarians, knowing he can't win, that he'll be broken to bits.'

It is to be greatly hoped that Rushdie himself is never blown to bits by the religious sectarians he has so implacably offended.



Demonstrators in Tehran

Revising James Connolly

Sean Matgamna reviews 'James Connolly: a political biography' by Austen Morgan (Manchester University Press)

This is commonly agreed to be the age of revisionism in Irish historiography. Or is it the first age of Irish historiography worth speaking about as history?

Austen Morgan's book is a coolly revisionist, deliberately deflating assessment of James Connolly, the socialist and labour activist who was the military leader of the 1916 Rising in Dublin, after which the British Army shot him.

The major previous biography of Connolly was by the Stalinist author Desmond Greaves, who died last year. According to his paper, the *Irish Democrat*, Greaves denounced Morgan almost with his last breath as typical of the new breed of debunkers and historical myth-smashers.

Until perhaps 25 or 30 years ago, heroic tales and myths did service for Irish history. Orange myths and Green myths did ghostly battle with each other in the schoolroom, above an Ireland slumbering (with occasional kicks and twitches) through the quiet decades before Northern Ireland erupted in 1968-9.

When the ancient Green and Orange battle was resumed in real life, that stirred many people to debunk, discredit and bury the myths, and to set about establishing accurate history. The drive to revise received history was in fact already well underway, but events after 1969 boosted it enormously. The

alarmed southern Irish bourgeoisie, having been in power for half a century, felt an increasingly urgent need to cut away its own revolutionary past.

That is hardly surprising. Far more surprising is that they left it so late; surprising too is what the tepid and small-minded rulers of the right-wing and intensely Catholic 26 County state had been saying about themselves and their history.

Until well into the '60s, at least, the southern Irish schools taught a version of Irish history more or less identical to what the Provisional IRA today teaches its recruits. They told the terrible story of the ancient subjugation of the Irish, of the repeated massacres and land-confiscations. They taught us how Ireland's Catholics were outlawed and persecuted in the 18th century under the 'Penal Laws', a system of helotry very like South Africa's apartheid.

They taught history as the struggle of oppressors and oppressed, whose heroes were the revolutionaries. They gloried in the various risings — often exaggerating their scope and importance, seizing on anything that could be construed as evidence of national virility and proof that the Irish never accepted their incorporation into the 'English system'.

Where British school children learned the dates of kings, we learned the dates of risings — 1641, 1689-90, 1798, 1803, 1848, 1867, 1916... Our history was our struggle for liberation; our heroes were not conquerors but rebels and freedom fighters whose glory lay in plotting or leading a rising, and then bearing their martyrdom bravely, defying their enemy with a 'speech from the dock'. They were good speeches, too, some of them, which we were taught to recite.

Of course there was a heavy overlap here with religious ideas of martyrs bearing witness for the faith. Protestants had a parallel tradition, but we didn't hear about that, and for us the national cause and Catholicism were entwined like tendrils of ivy on an ancient wall.

The ideas and symbols were interchangeable. They cast a glow on each other. The cause of Ireland was the cause of the Catholic Church; the cause of the Catholic Church was the cause of Ireland.

To this day we sing 'Faith of our Fathers' at All-Ireland Hurling Finals, as they sign 'You'll never walk alone' at Wembley: 'Faith of our fathers living still, in spite of dungeon, fire and sword'.

The great modern Irish hero was Padraig Pearse, the President of the Republic proclaimed in 1916, shot by the British after he surrendered — a man with a highly visible Messiah complex, who in his poems and plays more or less openly aspired to play the role of Christ-like redeemer to the suffering Irish nation.

Pearse wove together disparate strands of Catholicism, 19th century Fenian nationalism, 18th

century Republicanism, and the intense and sometimes mystical nationalism that swept over Europe in the early part of this century, into the ideology of the Irish Catholic bourgeoisie's political revolution, through which it won independence from Britain in 1922. (The social revolution, the dismantling of the landlord system in favour of peasant proprietorship, had been made from above by British Tory and Liberal governments at the turn of the century.)

How come the Southern state was teaching its children the same history that the Provisional IRA now teaches? Both the dominant Southern Irish parties, Fianna Fail and Fine Gael, and the Provisionals, have common roots: they are splinters from one party, the second Sinn Féin of 1917-1922.

Of course, the Southern state had a shortish way with individuals who got the wrong message, who decided that it was not just a matter of ancient heroes from the dim and misty years and that they themselves should carry on the tradition of rebellion that they had been taught to revere. For them the state had the jail, the firing squad, and the concentration camp, in which young men were interned without trial in several periods up to 1957-9.

Yet people did take that tradition of rebellion seriously, and not only Irish people. Irish Catholic missionaries took the message of Ireland's struggles with them all over the world. There are many examples of the influence of Irish nationalism in Africa; Robert Mugabe, the president of Zimbabwe, for example, came under the influence of Irish missionaries, and one of the first things he did after he won power in 1980 was to go over to Ireland on a sort of political pilgrimage.

In Ireland, the logic of the version of history we were taught could lead not only to the IRA but further. If you generalised that picture of history to the world around you in the '50s and '60s — with the Algerians fighting the French, the Greek Cypriots fighting the British, Africans demanding their freedom and organising 'Mau Mau' in Kenya — then you would arrive at general anti-colonialist and anti-imperialist politics.

And if you went from the Irish countryside or small town to industrial England, and assumed your place in the lower orders of the proletariat, then the step from concern for national freedom to concern for working-class freedom, towards socialism or communism, was a very short one. Many made the transition; that many more didn't is probably to be accounted for by the power of the Catholic strand in the mixture.

No wonder the Southern state began to change its official history. Now a posse of historians is beavering away. They are trying to replace the heroic myths with dry-as-dust

facts and statistics, and to banish, like mist from the morning, all vestiges of the revolutionary outlook on life.

James Connolly has a strange place in all this: a national hero of Catholic Ireland who was also a Marxist! But he was a man full of contradictions: the Marxist who lost his life in a foredoomed nationalist rising, the militant socialist who made his peace at the end with the then very reactionary Catholic Church.

In the pantheon of the 26 County state Connolly was accorded an important place, but one definitely subordinate to Pearse. The Marxist and revolutionary socialist (communist, in later parlance) was reduced to 'the labour leader'. Only the left,



Robert Mugabe — Irish nationalist?

including, naturally, the Republican left, tried to keep a notion of what Connolly really was.

The bourgeoisie and the Church said that Connolly had ceased to be a socialist. It was as late as 1941 that the first collection of his writings was produced — by the Communist Party, concerned to use Connolly's writings during World War 1 to justify their stand (formally anti-imperialist, actually favourable to Nazi Germany) between the Stalin-Hitler pact in 1939 and Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941.

The CP's Connolly was, of course, truer to the real person than the bloodless figure lined up with the other heroes in the Irish bourgeoisie's shrines.

As the drift, and then stampede, away from idealistic Pearse-centred history got under way, the balance shifted in favour of Connolly. But this was a new Connolly again — Connolly the practical-minded no-nonsense man. Connolly was indeed a 'man for all seasons'. It depends on which bit of him you caught

sight of.

For Austen Morgan, Connolly was a socialist who abandoned socialism to go over to nationalism after World War 1 broke out. Morgan rejects the idea — even for 1916 — that there could be a socialist struggle by way of the national struggle, within it and coming out of it. He can find no reason to believe that Connolly said what the trade union leader O'Brien said Connolly said before going out on Easter Monday: *"The odds against us are a thousand to one, but in the event of victory hold on to your rifles, as those with whom we are fighting may stop before our goal is reached"*.

Whether Connolly said it or not, the words reflect the spirit of Marx's advice to his comrades in 1850: that socialists and bourgeois revolutionaries should strike together in national-democratic revolutions, but march separately. It seems to me impossible to doubt that Connolly acted in that spirit.

The same idea was to be repeated in one of the key documents of revolutionary socialism in the 20th century — the Communist International's 1920 Theses on the National and Colonial Question.

To be sure, the great and immensely tragic weakness of Connolly was that he did not build a revolutionary movement able to lead and shape the nationalist upsurge that followed 1916. Had the post-1916 Irish national movement been shaped by Connolly's class politics, then it might very well have appealed to the Protestant workers of Northern Ireland on a working-class basis, across the sectarian-communal divide.

Connolly did have many of the faults of his generation of Marxist socialists, and some, like his Catholicism, which were peculiar to himself. But he was right to base himself on the just struggle of the great majority of the Irish people against their national oppression. In doing so he made a step forward from the political common stock of his generation of Marxists, who generally had little interest in the revolts of oppressed nations.

That Connolly was, so to speak, politically gobbled up by the bourgeois nationalists after his death and made into one of their plaster-of-Paris saints, proves only that he lost, not that he was wrong to make the attempt.

The early Communist International gave much thought to the problem of dealing with nationalist rebellions, and even its ideas, based on far wider experience and discussion than Connolly ever had access to, could not prevent the Chinese Communist Party making errors similar to Connolly's, and of catastrophic proportions, in the 1920s.

There is an implicit assumption in Austen Morgan's criticism of Connolly that he should have chosen to struggle for the unity of the Irish working class by fighting for socialism within the old United Kingdom and having

no truck with Irish separatism. But that would have meant Connolly turning his back on the democratic demands fought for by the big majority of the Irish people for many, many decades (at least), and trying to get the labour movement to do the same.

No Irish labour movement could have been built with such politics — only (in most of Ireland) sterile Unionist sects. On that road there was no possible solution to the Unionist/Nationalist division — only the self-isolation of the socialists and the strengthening of the bourgeois and petty bourgeois nationalists.

Connolly's understanding of the character and depth of the Catholic/Protestant division in Ireland was inadequate. On the other hand, no-one has ever written with more biting class hatred of Catholic-Nationalist bigotry than did Connolly in his writings against the Ancient Order of Hibernians and the old Home Rule party.

Austen Morgan's book reads to me too 'academic' and a bit too summary, as if it has been cut down too brutally from a much longer draft.

It is a sustained assault on the image of Connolly held today by the revolutionary left; in fact, though from a different viewpoint, Morgan paints a picture of Connolly rather like that of our schools in De Valera's Ireland. For Morgan too, Connolly ceased to be a socialist when he became the rebel hero our teachers lauded and Morgan rather regrets.

Austen Morgan is a socialist, not one of the bourgeois revisionists of Irish history. But his enterprise must be understood in relation to theirs.

They want to destroy the heroic myths of Irish history as a struggle of the oppressed against the oppressor. In many ways the project resembles the evolution of a section of the Russian intelligentsia in the 1890s away from the heroic Narodnik tradition of struggle against Tsarism. They became 'hard-headed' — and reconciled to capitalism.

For a while, strangely, a big section of the bourgeois-oriented intelligentsia used Marxism as a cutting edge against the Narodnik revolutionary tradition. The Russian Marxists had to fight both Narodism and the anti-revolutionary negation of Narodism by the 'Legal Marxists'.

What will replace the now discredited idealist-nationalist version of Irish history? Will the tremendously positive and wise core of that history — the necessity and justice of the struggle of the oppressed against the oppressor — be lost, cut away by the academic scalpels? Or will it be incorporated into an adequate and comprehensive Marxist history of Ireland, as the heroic tradition of Narodism was absorbed into Russian Marxism?

The critical work of the revisionists can help with the creation of a new, revolutionary-oriented but proletarian, account of Irish history. It depends on what the Marxists do with their work.

Gorbachev won't make a revolution

Stan Crooke reviews
'Beyond Perestroika' by
Ernest Mandel (Verso)

Ernest Mandel locates the roots of Gorbachev's policies in the prolonged economic crisis and social stagnation which characterise the Soviet Union. Gorbachev's reforms are not the initiative of one individual, but the response of a section of the Soviet bureaucracy to that social and economic crisis.

The government's economic reforms, covered by the general heading of 'perestroika' (re-organisation), seek to regenerate the Soviet economy — at the expense of the Soviet working class. Mandel cites a series of examples of economic reforms, often involving the re-introduction of market mechanisms which have worsened workers' living standards and working conditions.

Hence the policy of 'glasnost' (openness), as a complement to the economic policies. By allowing, and even encouraging, a limited liberalisation, the government hopes to dissipate the working-class unrest provoked by its economic measures. As Mandel puts it, "it is therefore necessary to ensure that the pill (of perestroika) is swallowed through making political changes."

It is here that the regime runs into trouble, given that the working class (and other sectors of society, such as the oppressed nationalities, or the ecological movement) is not prepared to restrict itself to the limited liberalisation sanctioned by the government. The outcome is increased social instability and a further weakening of the regime's standing — the very opposite of the intended goal of the economic and political reforms.

Mandel rules out the possibility of a 'revolution from above'. The Soviet Communist Party, he writes, "is a party of the bureaucracy; it is not a party of the working class." And, whatever the changes which have resulted from 'glasnost', the government remains a "regime of bureaucratic dictatorship". Hence Mandel looks forward to "the triumph of the political revolution (from below), in the Marxist sense of the term".

But Mandel also describes Soviet society as "a combination of the dynamic and the immobile". Nothing in Mandel's book would justify using the term 'dynamic' in relation to the Soviet Union. So why does Mandel describe Soviet society as

a "combination" of these two factors?

The answer is that Mandel continues to apply Trotsky's definition of the 1930s of the USSR — as a "degenerated workers' state" — to the Soviet Union of today. However implausible it may sound, the 'dynamic' element in Soviet society is the workers' bit of it, while the 'immobile' element in it is the degenerated bit.

A related problem crops up when Mandel deals with the nature of the Soviet bureaucracy. In line with Trotsky's writings of half a century ago, Mandel rejects the notion that the bureaucracy is a ruling class. At the same time though he writes that "in the Soviet Union the central state apparatus, that is to say, the bureaucracy, controls the social surplus product."

But Mandel cannot have it both ways. From a Marxist point of view, what defines a class as a ruling class is whether or not it has control over the surplus product. Mandel cannot simultaneously claim that the bureaucracy exercises such control (in fact, it does not; but that is a separate argument) but nonetheless is not a ruling class.

Mandel goes on to rule out the possibility of any capitalist restoration in the Soviet Union. 90% of the bureaucracy would lose more than they would gain under such circumstances, and it would be the equivalent of collective hari-kiri by the bureaucracy, he writes. But, given the extent to which market mechanisms have already been re-introduced, such a possibility surely deserves more discussion than the limited amount it receives in the book.

Mandel also writes that "the bureaucracy has not completely cut its umbilical cord (after over 60 years!) with the working class." Again, such an assertion flows out of the notion of the Soviet Union as a "degenerated workers' state". Given the 'logic' applied to reach such a claim, Mandel would have to argue the same with regard to the bureaucracy in Poland — and even China!

The book concludes with a lengthy quotation from Trotsky, from a work of 1937. Mandel's selectivity in assembling quotes from Trotsky allows him to declare that the current evolution underway in the Soviet Union is a confirmation of Trotsky's analysis of the Soviet Union and of his predictions about its future.

Although there is much of value in Trotsky's writings on the Soviet Union, it should not be forgotten that he did not expect it to survive — still less to expand — in the aftermath of the Second World War. Unfortunately, however, Mandel would appear to prefer backdating his views on the Soviet Union to up-dating Trotsky's analysis.

But such points are secondary to the fact that, whatever Mandel's asides about the logic of the 'dynamic' of the process in the Soviet Union, his book brings out the nature of the economic

and social crisis in the Soviet Union and successfully challenges the idea that Gorbachev is attempting to establish democratic socialism in the Soviet Union.



The other Marx

Does the right have all the best jokes?

Belinda Weaver reviews
'Holidays in Hell', by P.J. O'Rourke (Picador) and *'Joe Bob goes to the Drive In'*, by Joe Bob Briggs (Penguin)

Sad to say, right-wing humour is alive and well, and perhaps worse, it's funny too. I admit it. I laughed reading both these books. A lot.

O'Rourke is a former student radical turned Republican who now runs the International Affairs Desk at Rolling Stones magazine. He's carved out a kind of cynical, bad boy identity for himself, denying the 'folly' of his liberal, protest years, and claiming he's now a definite conservative. The left have made a mess of it in Russia and Eastern Europe, he says, and anyway, they don't know how to party. *Holidays in Hell* is P.J.'s search for the global good time.

But the cynical mask slips now and again. It takes a lot of booze and a lot of drugs for him to close his eyes to the world's troubles. Right-wing or not, he wants to the world to be better; he has just convinced himself it's impossible, so he might as well have fun.

The man can write. Some of the jokes seem familiar, but they're still funny, and he's a master of the throw away line. "They [Shiite women] wear ankle length chadors in the water, which may explain the lack of a world-class Shiite women's swimming team."

P.J. visits Lebanon, Korea (where he names the different

Kim candidates Kim, Kim: The Sequel, and Kim: The Early Years), Panama, Nicaragua, Disneyland, Poland, the Mexican border, and even Australia for the America's Cup, wisecracking all the while, clutching as many drinks and cigarettes as he can get his hands on, and trying but failing to convince himself he's just a good ole boy who loves truth, justice and the American Way. I predict a serious liberal reversion for P.J. fairly soon.

In a different key, but also well to the political right, is Joe Bob Briggs, the world's first drive-in movie critic.

Joe Bob was the invention of John Bloom, a film reviewer on the Dallas newspaper, the *Times Herald*. Supposedly a thrice-married, nineteen year old Texas redneck who had seen more than 6,000 drive-in movies, Joe Bob became a cult by reviewing the kind of movies other reviewers wouldn't touch — exploitation movies, the blood, beast and breast flicks. Joe Bob's plot summaries became famous:

"Two heads roll. Maggots in the throat. Great slime glopola lizard-face genetic-DNA attack. An eighty-two on the vomit meter. Twelve gallons blood. One beast. Two breasts...Joe Bob says check it out."

Most film reviewers ignore films like 'Mad Monkey Kung Fu', 'I Dismember Mama', and 'Bloodsucking Freaks', but Joe Bob only liked that kind. If we have a rash of horror/Gothic/gore films in the mainstream cinema circuit now ('Nightmare on Elm Street', 'Friday the 13th' in the multiple sequels) it's partly because Joe Bob rescued this kind of drive-in flick from obscurity and made it news. He also made people laugh.

But he offended people too. Joe Bob's views were openly sexist, racist and homophobic. Of course it was all done tongue-in-cheek, but that was partly the problem.

Opponents of Joe Bob found him hard to tackle, since he had a way of getting the last word. When Dallas feminist Charlotte Taft complained about his column, he challenged her to a nude mud wrestling match as a way of settling their differences. (When Taft later ran into trouble funding her abortion clinic, she wondered whether she had been right to turn him down. She might have struck it rich on sponsorship.)

Joe Bob made his critics look like spoilsports who couldn't take a joke. After all, the column was supposedly satire, not to be taken seriously.

But was Joe Bob's column a satire of ignorance and prejudice, or was it actually pandering to prejudice? Hard to say. Many people found the column offensive, and the protests of the black community in Dallas finally killed it. Joe Bob was dropped by the *Times Herald*.

We need to keep an eye on what the right are up to, so, as Joe Bob would say, "Check these suckers out."

In defence of the French revolution

Conservatives are out to discredit the French Revolution, particularly through Simon Schama's much-advertised new book 'Citizens'. Martin Thomas takes up the arguments.

The Oxford dictionary dates the word "democrat" from 1790 ("an adherent or advocate of democracy; orig. opposed to aristocrat in the French Revolution"). It dates "revolutionary", in general use, from 1794; "liberal" in the modern sense and "constituent assembly" from 1801; "radical", from 1802; "socialist", from 1833. The terms "right" and "left" in politics derive from where the factions sat in the French revolutionary assemblies.

The French Revolution launched the concept of human rights — rights which belong to everyone equally and automatically whatever their birth or livelihood. Under the old regime "liberty" meant much the same as "privilege" — defending the traditional rights or privileges associated with a particular status (noble, priest, merchant, craft worker, peasant) against other groups or against the king and his tax-collectors. The Revolution redefined liberty as inseparable from rights which belong to everyone equally. Under the old regime, "liberty" was almost the opposite of "equality"; in the Revolution it was almost the same thing.

The ideas of the French Revolution did not spring out of a void. Many of them had been advanced by the philosophers of the 18th century Enlightenment, pioneered in the American War of Independence of 1775-81 or foreshadowed in the earlier revolutions in England (the 1640s) and the Netherlands (1568-84). The dictionary dates "patriot" in the sense of "one who maintains and defends his country's freedom and rights" from as early as 1605, "nationalist" from 1715, "politics" as a word for the views of a person or party from 1769.

But the French Revolution marked a new start. It was the most radical of the revolutions which replaced the new order of fixed hierarchy and privilege by a new system of free trade, free enterprise, equality before the law, and a ruling class based on profits from the



Images of liberty: above, from France's revolutionary past and, below, from China 1989

market economy. It provided the example of how an old regime could be completely overturned and society reconstructed on new principles, it set the benchmarks for radical and democratic politics within the limits of capitalism, and it was the launch-pad for socialist politics.

That is why conservatives want to discredit the Revolution.¹

In England, bookshop displays on the Revolution are dominated by Simon Schama's *Citizens*, a book which argues that the Revolution set back the modernisation of French society, and did so, moreover, at the cost of vast bloodshed; its "enduring product" was only "a new kind of militarised state".² In France, Pierre Chaunu has claimed that the revolutionary Terror was "the beginning of a long and bloody sequence which runs from the genocide of the French Catholic West to the Soviet Gulag, the ravages of the Chinese Cultural Revolution and the autogenocide of the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia."³



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