

The Fate of the Russian Revolution volume 2

The Two Trotskyisms confront Stalinism

Study Guide

Contents

Timeline - Page 2

Basic educational course - Page 4

Advanced educational course - Page 7

The real Russian Revolution - Page 10

Tutor notes for basic educational course - Page 14

Tutor note for advanced educational course - Page 20

The Fate of the Russian Revolution volume 2 can be purchased from —
www.workersliberty.org/node/25483

A website with related articles, resources, videos and session notes is at
<http://thetwotrotskyisms.org/>

This book is part of a series. The Fate of the Russian Revolution volume 1 can be purchased from — www.workersliberty.org/node/25544

Timeline

October 1917: Russian workers take power.

November 1917 to summer 1921: The Russian workers' state fights for its life in civil war against counter-revolutionaries, peasant revolts, and 14 foreign armies.

1923 to 1927: Trotsky leads the Left Opposition against the rising Stalinist bureaucracy. Trotskyists and dissidents purged from many Communist Parties outside Russia.

December 1927: Defeat of the Left Opposition in Russia. Trotsky's allies Zinoviev and Kamenev capitulate immediately; Trotskyists sent to exile in remote parts of the USSR.

January 1928 to early 1930: Stalin launches (waveringly at first) a new economic course, to forced collectivisation and forced-march industrialisation; and crushes all life in the trade unions and the Bolshevik party.

January 1929: Trotsky deported from USSR. Until his death in 1940, Trotsky will be evicted from one country after another.

April 1930: First international conference of the Trotskyist movement (seen at first as an international grouping of expelled factions of Communist Parties).

1933: After the German Communist Party's collapse in the face of Hitler's seizure of power, and the failure of the Communist Parties to react, the Trotskyists turn to building a new International and advocating a new workers' ("political") revolution in the USSR.

1934-8: Great Terror in the USSR. All known Trotskyists, and most surviving Bolsheviks, are wiped out by Stalinist repression.

From 1935: the official Communist Parties across the world, and Stalin's Russian government, agitate for an alliance of "the democracies" (taken to include Russia)

1936: Trotsky writes *The Revolution Betrayed*, his most detailed account of the rise of Stalinism, defining the USSR as a "degenerated workers' state".

23 August 1939: "Hitler-Stalin pact" signed between Nazi Germany and Russia.

1 September 1939: Germany invades Poland. Russia will invade from the east on 17 September. Hitler and Stalin agree to partition Poland

3 September 1939: Britain and France declare war against Germany: World War 2 begins

From 18 September 1939: sharp debate in the US Trotskyist group (SWP: no relation to today's British SWP) over attitudes to the Russian invasion of Poland. Majority says that the attitude to the invasions of Poland and Finland should be shaped by the old slogan "defence of the USSR". Minority denounce the invasions unequivocally but at this stage do not reject the ideas that the USSR is a "degenerated workers' state", and that socialists should side with it if it is attacked by a major power. The debate resonates internationally importance because the US Trotskyist group is the world's biggest and most experienced

30 November 1939: Russia invades Finland. Unlike in Poland, this invasion meets strong resistance. The dispute among the Trotskyists sharpens

April 1940: The US Trotskyist movement, which as the Nazis sweep across Europe soon will become almost the only sizeable Trotskyist movement in the world able to operate openly, splits after the dispute on Finland and Poland. James P Cannon leads one faction, Max Shachtman another. Trotsky backs Cannon.

August 1940: Stalinist agent murders Trotsky.

Late 1940: The expelled minority, now called the Workers' Party, shift to the conclusion that the USSR has become a new form of class society ("bureaucratic collectivism") — no sort of workers' state.

22 June 1941: Germany invades the USSR. Stalin will side with Britain and its allies for the rest of the war.

1943-5: With USSR's victory at Stalingrad and advance into eastern and central Europe, differences between the "orthodox" Trotskyists (Cannon) and the heterodox (Shachtman) sharpen.

1946-7: Temporary rapprochement between the two Trotskyist currents, as the Cannon group takes a sharper anti-Stalinist line under pressure from Trotsky's widow Natalia Sedova. But reunification talks fail.

From 1948: after the outbreak of open conflict between Yugoslav Stalinism (Tito) and Stalin, the "orthodox" Trotskyists start hailing Stalinist states outside USSR as "deformed workers' states", deficient in democracy but still expressions of an advancing "world revolution".

Late 1953: The "orthodox" Trotskyists split, as a section of them, led by Cannon, recoil and strive for a sharper anti-Stalinist line.

The Fate of the Russian Revolution, Vol 2 – basic course

Aims

This basic course requires you to read the introduction to the book. This will provide an overview of the work and help you understand the documents and debates from the 1940s.

The specific aims of this course are:

- To explain when and why Trotskyism went awry
- To understand the strengths and limitations of Trotsky's analysis of Stalinism
- To appreciate how 'orthodox' Trotskyism went wrong on Stalinism
- To assess the efforts of Third Camp, heterodox Trotskyism to comprehend the expansion of Stalinism
- To discuss the lessons the AWL draws from the 1940s debates

Methods

There are eight sessions in this course. You need to read 10-15 pages at a time of the introduction and then have a discussion.

1. Background and context
2. Trotsky's analysis of Stalinism
3. Trotsky in 1939-40
4. Russia in the war I
5. Russia in the war II
6. Russia in the war III
7. Post Trotsky Trotskyism
8. Apparatus Marxism

These suggestions are for convenience and clarity – they do not prevent comrades reading the whole introduction for themselves.

Rather than just mechanically going through the questions, it is better for everyone involved to raise their own points and to have a wide-ranging debate.

It is best to have a study copy of the book, with your own annotations, highlights, comments and questions. This will help clarify key points and help those who first complete the course to facilitate it with other comrades and contacts at a later date.

FRR II – basic course – reading and questions

1. Background and context

Read: The timeline and article, “The Real Story of the Russian Revolution”, which is part of this educational pack (page 10) and is also on the AWL website:

<http://www.workersliberty.org/story/2012/04/03/real-story-russian-revolution>

Questions:

1. How did Lenin and Trotsky conceive of the Russian revolution?
2. What forms of workers’ democracy arose with the Russian revolution?
3. Why did the Russian revolution begin to degenerate?
4. How did Stalin usurp workers’ power?
5. What did Trotsky’s Left Opposition try to fight Stalinism?

2. Trotsky’s analysis of Stalinism

Read: Introduction pp.10-24

Questions:

1. Why is 1940 split in the Trotskyist movement a key turning point in our history?
2. How did Trotsky define Stalinism in the late 1930s?
3. What was Trotsky’s attitude towards Stalin’s attacks on Poland and Finland?
4. Why did Trotskyists stand for the “defence of the USSR”?
5. How do Marxists characterise class societies?
6. What were the contradictions and limits of Trotsky’s late analyses of Stalinism?

3. Trotsky in 1939-40

Read: Introduction pp.24-39

Questions:

1. How did Trotsky break new ground with his analysis of Stalinism in 1939?
2. Why did Trotsky argue the expansion of the USSR in 1939-40 was not imperialist?
3. What were the real issues in the 1939-40 debate in the American SWP?
4. Why did the American SWP split in 1940?
5. What mistakes did Trotsky bequeath the Trotskyist movement?

4. Russia in the war I

Read: Introduction pp.44-59

Questions:

1. How did the heterodox Workers’ Party assess the USSR?
2. How did the orthodox SWP react to the Nazi invasion of Russia in June 1941?
3. Did Russian workers have “something to fight for” in the war against Nazi Germany?
4. Why was the analogy between the USSR and a trade union false?
5. What was wrong with the SWP’s minimum programme for Russia at war?

5. Russia in the war II

Read: Introduction pp.59-74

Questions:

1. What examples of self-delusion did the SWP publish in 1941?
2. Why was it wrong to characterise the Russian army as “Trotsky’s Red Army”?
3. How did Natalia Sedova critique the SWP’s line?
4. What did “defence of the USSR” mean after 1941?

6. Russia in the war III

Read: Introduction pp.75-88

Questions:

1. What did the orthodox lauding of the Russian army signify?
2. How did Goldman and Morrow begin to question the SWP’s politics?
3. What stance did James Cannon take to the Warsaw rising in 1944?
4. How did Natalia Sedova criticise the SWP in 1944?
5. How did the SWP’s mistakes on the Red Army continue after the war?

7. Post Trotsky Trotskyism

Read: Introduction pp.89-100

Questions:

1. What attitude did the orthodox SWP take towards the Second World War (1941-45)?
2. How did the SWP assess post-war Eastern Europe?
3. Why did the orthodox Trotskyists split in 1953?
4. Why did the Third Camp, heterodox Trotskyism decline?
5. Why did the SWP survive?

8. Apparatus Marxism

Read: Introduction pp.101-113

Questions:

1. How did the orthodox Trotskyists deify Trotsky?
2. What is apparatus Marxism?
3. What did Cannon take from Zinoviev on the revolutionary party?
4. Why does the AWL believe the 1939-40 debates are so important?

The Fate of the Russian Revolution, Vol 2 – advanced course

Aims

This advanced course requires you to read most of the key texts in the book. This will provide a deep understanding of the key debates within the Trotskyism movement in the 1940s.

The specific aims of this course are:

- To explain when and why Trotskyism went awry
- To understand the strengths and limitations of Trotsky's analysis of Stalinism
- To appreciate how 'orthodox' Trotskyism went wrong on Stalinism
- To assess the efforts of Third Camp, heterodox Trotskyism to comprehend the expansion of Stalinism
- To discuss the lessons the AWL draws from the 1940s debates

Methods

There are ten sessions in this course. There is a demanding requirement to read the texts, but this is necessary to have a fruitful discussion.

1. Shachtman vs Browder on socialism
2. Cannon vs Shachtman in 1939
3. The Expansion of Stalinism 1939-41
4. The Bureaucratic Revolution and the war
5. "Trotsky's Red Army"
6. Shachtman vs Braverman
7. The Revolutionary Party
8. The Working Class is Central
9. Isaac Deutscher's capitulation to Stalinism
10. A critique of Cannon

These suggestions are for convenience and clarity – they do not prevent comrades reading the whole book for themselves.

Rather than just mechanically going through the questions, it is better for everyone involved to raise their own points and to have a wide-ranging debate.

It is best to have a study copy of the book, with your own annotations, highlights, comments and questions. This will help clarify key points and help those who first complete the course to facilitate it with other comrades and contacts at a later date.

FRR II – advanced course – reading and questions

1. Shachtman vs Browder on socialism

Read: Chapter 1 pp.131-169

Questions:

1. What is at stake in the debate between revolutionary socialism and Stalinism?
2. How does Shachtman define socialism?
3. How does Shachtman assess the USSR?
4. Why did Shachtman turn to Browder and say: “there but for an accident of geography, stands a corpse” (p.163)?
5. Does Shachtman treat the Western camp as more progressive than the East?

2. Cannon vs Shachtman in 1939

Read: Chapter 2 pp.172-213

Questions:

1. What was Cannon’s method in debating the Russian question? Was it correct?
2. How did Shachtman criticise Cannon’s approach?
3. How did Shachtman characterise the USSR’s role in the war?
4. What did Shachtman mean by: Decisive in politics is not only the “what” but also the “who” (p.204)?
5. What was Shachtman’s criticism of the party regime?

3. The Expansion of Stalinism 1939-41

Read: Chapter 3 pp.219-259

Questions:

1. What was the SWP majority attitude towards Russian’s invasion of Finland?
2. What did Goldman (part of majority) believe the differences were about?
3. Why did Trotsky believe the seizure of eastern Poland “served notice that the October revolution was still alive”?
4. According to Carter (Shachtman’s group). Why did Stalinism expand?
5. What did Stalin’s expansion into Iran signify?

4. The Bureaucratic Revolution and the war

Read: Chapter 4 pp.261-276; Chapter 5 pp.285-312

Questions:

1. Is a bureaucratic workers’ revolution possible?
2. What did Shachtman argue the Stalinist nationalisations in the occupied territories signified?
3. What examples of self-delusion did the SWP propagate about the Russian resistance to Hitler?

5. "Trotsky's Red Army"

Read: Chapter 6 pp.313-392

Questions:

1. What does Cannon's assessment of the Warsaw uprising in 1944 tell us about his politics?
2. How did Natalia Sedova criticise the SWP in 1944?
3. How does Louis Jacobs criticise the SWP over Russia and the war?
4. How did Shays and Shelton criticise the SWP in 1946?
5. How did Jean van Heijenoort assess Soviet expansion after WWII?

6. Shachtman vs Braverman

Read: Chapter 7 pp.393-426

Questions:

1. Was Braverman right that the "degenerated workers' state" formula was the "heart" of Trotskyism?
2. Why is Trotsky's book, The New Course (1923), important?
3. Who originated the theory of bureaucratic collectivism?
4. How does Shachtman justify his assessment of the bureaucracy as a ruling class?
5. What was wrong with Trotsky's assessment of the USSR?

7. The Revolutionary Party

Read: Chapter 12 pp.585-632

Questions:

1. Was Cannon right that the SWP was already the vanguard workers' party?
2. What kind of party did Shachtman try to build?
3. Why did Shachtman accuse Cannon of having a "Zinovievist" conception of party-building?
4. How did Trotsky conceive of democratic centralism?

8. The Working Class is Central

Read: Chapter 13 pp.633--650

Questions:

1. What was Natalia Sedova's message to the Russian workers in 1956?
2. What is the essence of Marxism, according to Shachtman?
3. Why does Shachtman highlight the Paris Commune and the Russian revolution of 1917?
4. How does Shachtman sum up the relationship between socialism and the working class?
5. What does Shachtman compare the Third Camp with?

9. Isaac Deutscher's capitulation to Stalinism

Read: Isaac Deutscher and the end of socialism. Max Shachtman pp.651-702

Questions:

1. What is Deutscher's view of the relationship between Leninism and Stalinism?
2. If Deutscher is right about continuity between Lenin and Stalin, what does it signify about socialism?
3. How does the bourgeoisie assert its social rule?
4. What role does Bonapartism play in class rule?
5. How does working class rule differ from other class societies?

10. A critique of Cannon

Read: Trotsky and Cannon pp.725-757

Questions:

1. Why does Shachtman argue the pioneers were not "prepared by their past" within the Communist Party to become oppositionists?
2. What did Cannon bring to the young Trotskyist forces?
3. What was Cannon's fundamental weakness in Shachtman's view?
4. What is wrong with Cannon's commitment to the Fifth Comintern Congress conception of the party, that it must be "a centralized party, prohibiting factions, tendencies and groups. It must be a monolithic party hewn of one piece"?
5. Given Glotzer's criticisms, is The History of American Trotskyism really a manual for building a Marxist group?

The Real Story of the Russian Revolution

The Russian revolution of 1917 brought the Bolsheviks to power. The Bolsheviks neither aimed to create the bureaucratic police states typical of Eastern Europe [before 1990], nor should be blamed for it. The police state was built on the ruins of the Russian revolution, and represented a destruction of all that the Bolsheviks stood for.

The Russian revolution was made in a time of great hopes, in which millions of people around the world were won to the idea of a socialism that would banish forever the causes of world war and economic chaos. The Bolsheviks, led by Lenin, were part of the revolutionary left wing of the European socialist movement that had been built before the First World War.

Their success in Russia inspired 'Bolsheviks' all over the globe. Never for a moment did these committed socialists believe that they were building or supporting a totalitarian state; on the contrary, they aspired to build a new system, far more democratic than the ossified, bureaucratic parliaments that existed in capitalist countries. The aim of all these Bolsheviks was to liberate humanity, and in the first place the working class and all the oppressed, from the chains imposed by capitalism and class society.

Understanding what happened in the USSR, and why it went wrong, is important not only as a history lesson. If the masses awakening today don't understand their past, they will find it impossible to map out their future.

Marxism emerged first in the more advanced capitalist countries of Western Europe, where powerful labour movements were built by the beginning of this century. Russia was a backward country, economically underdeveloped (although there had been very rapid industrialisation in parts of the country), ruled by an absolute monarch, the Tsar, lacking any of the trappings of democracy that existed in the west.

The Marxist movement that emerged in Russia never believed that the socialist society they wanted to create could be built in their own country alone. An essential part of Marxist theory was that, since capitalism was an increasingly international system, socialism would also have to be.

Moreover, to abolish classes it would be necessary to first abolish scarcity; socialism would depend upon a certain level of abundance in society. Obviously, the most advanced capitalist countries therefore had the firmest base for a

socialist transformation. A backward country like Russia could only hope for socialism in conjunction with more developed countries.

Nevertheless the Russian Marxists believed that the people of their country could make a revolution, which could link up with revolutions in other countries. There was a big debate in the Russian Marxist movement about the precise nature of the revolution they wanted to make, and its relationship to international socialism, but that there should be a revolution all were agreed.

Two Russian Marxists made a particular contribution to the initial success of the revolution when it came in 1917: Vladimir Ilych Lenin and Leon Davidovich Trotsky.

Both Lenin and Trotsky stressed that although the industrial working class in Russia was small, it would be the decisive force in the revolution: its power in society was out of proportion to its size. Both also stressed that the working class would have to make an ally of the huge peasant class, or at least the poorest sections of it.

Trotsky more clearly than Lenin, spelled out the dominant role of the working class in this alliance, arguing that the peasantry could not play an independent role, and that the working class seizure of power would necessarily imply a socialist direction for the revolution: it couldn't stop at forming a democratic republic, and would have to take working-class socialist measures. To be successful, a workers' government would have to link up with international revolution. This was Trotsky's theory of 'permanent revolution'.

Lenin was much vaguer about the implications of working-class leadership of the revolutionary struggle. But he was much clearer than Trotsky on the need to build a political party to carry the revolution out. 'Leninism' has come to mean precisely this stress on building a particular kind of political party.

In Eastern Europe this was translated into the party's 'monopoly of power', a one-party state, and a party which moreover has not even any internal democracy. This 'Leninism' is particularly hated all across Eastern Europe, the USSR, and China.

But this was not Lenin's idea. His concern was that without a determined political party, working out what was going on and what needed to be done, the spontaneous mass movement would end up directionless and dissipated, with the result that it would simply fail. The 'Leninist' party was not a bureaucratic structure imposed on the working class, but a grouping together of the most politically advanced workers, to act in a politically united way.

The Russian revolutionary movement drew a lot of its political depth, and its energy, from the experience of a revolution in 1905 which shook the Tsar's regime and sent ripples across Europe.

The working class was central to this revolution, and created novel mass democratic institutions, called 'soviets', or councils. Russian Marxism was later to set as its objective 'soviet' democracy: a system of workers' councils, controlling both government and the workplace.

But the 1905 revolution was defeated, its leaders (like Trotsky who was president of the St Petersburg Soviet) sent to Siberia or driven into exile. The Marxist movement had to regroup in adverse circumstances and prepare for the next revolution.

In fact there were two revolutions in 1917. The first, in February (March by our calendars) overthrew the Tsar, who was replaced by a 'Provisional Government', which changed several times during the course of the year. The second, in October (November), was the Bolshevik Revolution which overthrew the Provisional Government and declared the world's first workers' republic.

The October revolution, in the phrase of the American writer John Reed, 'shook the world'. Millions of socialists flocked to the banner of the Bolsheviks, into Communist Parties formed as part of the Communist International, set up in 1919; they wanted also to establish workers' republics.

From the beginning, internationally and domestically the Bolshevik government faced a terrible situation. Russia was a country ravaged by war - it was, of course, the disasters of the war that had led to the revolution. The Bolsheviks knew that if their regime was to survive, the revolution would have to be spread.

Europe did undergo a tremendous revolutionary upheaval in the years between 1918 and 1923. But none of these revolutions saw the successful seizure of power by the working class. Often, the problem lay in the failure of the communist parties to intervene in the movement with the maturity and insight the Bolsheviks had shown in Russia.

Thus the Bolsheviks found themselves isolated in Russia. Worse, after the Bolshevik revolution, counter-revolutionary forces, supported by foreign imperialist powers, tried to smash the infant workers' republic militarily. Civil war and wars of intervention tore the country apart. Eventually the 'Reds' bed the 'Whites'; but at a terrible cost.

Famine ravaged Russia and the other countries in a federation with her. People deserted the cities in thousands in search of food. Many of the most militant workers were now dead, victims of the war.

Russia by 1922 was at a level of economic output less than it had been in 1913.

The Bolsheviks hung onto power. Their enemies had been defeated, and if they had not been, would have imposed a reign of fascist-type terror. But the working class was shrivelled and exhausted; soviet democracy had been further and further limited during the civil war; in an effort to fight reactionary forces, the Bolsheviks had been forced to ban first other parties, then even factions in their own party.

They were fighting a war, using desperate measures. They trusted in the international socialist revolution to come to their aid, allowing the workers' republic in Russia to be renewed. They did not foresee that in the absence of the international revolution, the emergency measures would become permanent features of the state, and soviet democracy would never be able to revive.

Often Lenin's idea of the Party is blamed for this outcome, and Trotsky, who did not become a Bolshevik until 1917, is criticised for failing to stand by earlier fears he had himself expressed about Lenin's theory.

According to the anti-Leninist argument, the Party, a hierarchical apparatus dedicated to the seizure of power, imposed its structures on the fledgling soviet state, destroying it. Trotsky had once warned of 'substitutionism': first the Party substitutes for the working class, then the Central Committee for the Party; then a dictator for the Central Committee.

But this cannot explain what happened in the USSR. First, the weight of economic backwardness and war-time dislocation was much greater than a mere party structure. Second, the Bolshevik Party before it came to power did not conform at all to our present-day stereotype of it. It was a thriving, democratic party, which conducted hundreds of public debates, organised special conferences in the middle of the revolution, and won the leadership of the working class precisely because it was not just an outside apparatus.

It was rather the structures of a besieged and desperate state which were imposed on the party, destroying it.

Lenin was extremely conscious of the risk of bureaucratic deformation, and in the early twenties began to warn that this was already occurring. Then Lenin fell ill, and died in 1924. The struggle against the bureaucratisation of the party and the state was taken up increasingly by Trotsky.

There had been some earlier left oppositions, to Lenin; but Trotsky's struggle against the faction that more and more had control of the party, led by Joseph Stalin, was the most important attempt to turn the party back to its original objectives. It was a struggle which failed, however.

Stalin had been a second-rank leader of the party for many years, but after 1917 won more and more power in it, as General Secretary. He came to represent a particular social group, the bureaucrats who wanted only to be bureaucrats, who had lost any interest in revolution, or perhaps had never had any; in 1924, in the bizarrely named 'Lenin levy', thousands of non-communists, past enemies of communism, time-servers and careerists were recruited to the party, completely gutting it as a voice of revolutionary workers.

Stalin defended the time-servers' corner, while Trotsky fought to revive the revolutionary, and democratic, programme of original Bolshevism.

Trotsky and those who agreed with him formed the Left Opposition, which fought the Stalinists on several main points.

- They were for the revival of party democracy, the right to form factions, etc.
- They were for a programme of limited industrialisation in the USSR, partly to alleviate the terrible backwardness of the economy, and also to rebuild the working class, to recreate the democracy of the Soviets.
- They were for an international policy geared to aiding workers' revolution in other countries.

The Stalinists were dead against democracy. Later they were to organise show trials of all oppositionists (however mild), which culminated in the execution of all the old Bolshevik leaders still alive and in the country. Trotsky was later assassinated by a Stalinist agent in Mexico, in 1940.

On economic policy, initially they scorned major industrialisation, but after they had defeated the Left Opposition i.e. purged, and later murdered them they launched industrialisation at breakneck speed, physically 'liquidated' the rich peasant class, and drove millions of peasants into collective farms, completely against their will. This did develop the economy in the long term, but at dreadful human cost.

Internationally, the Stalinists pursued a policy designed to protect their short-term interests, rather than aid the revolution. This began as short-sighted factionalism which led to tragic defeat in the Chinese revolution of 1925-27,

lurched into ultra-left madness (at the same time as forced collectivisation), which in Germany meant denouncing Social Democracy as worse than Hitler, and ended up as a directly counter-revolutionary policy in the Spanish Civil War of 1936-9, where Stalinist thugs murdered more left-wing socialists.

The Left Opposition was purged. Trotsky, who had personally led both the October insurrection and the Red Army, was expelled from the party in 1927, and from the country in 1928. After the so-called Third Period line led to Hitler's unresisted rise to power, and the failure of the world communist movement to learn anything from their mistakes, the Trotskyists decided they needed to build a new international socialist movement. They called for a new revolution to overthrow the Stalinist bureaucracy.

Stalin's victory was not inevitable, and was the result of the defeat of the Bolshevik Party - a peculiar defeat, organised from within the party apparatus. It was a defeat made possible by the isolation of the revolution in a backward country.

The Stalinist system was not the fault of the revolution in Russia, nor of the people who led it. The ruling classes of the USSR and its Eastern European satellites are not the inheritors of the Bolshevik revolution, they are its murderers. And a really democratic revolution in the Eastern bloc would have to create a system similar to the 'soviet democracy' that the Bolsheviks tried to build in the USSR.

FRR II – basic course – tutor notes

The following are suggestions and some passages from the text to highlight certain points. Clearly the purpose is to discuss, raise other questions, probe gaps and other silences.

1. Background and context

Ideally, comrades will have read the Fate of the Russian Revolution, Volume 1 (1998) – or at least the introduction to it. For newer comrades, it is worth doing a background session before volume 2.

Read: The timeline and article, “The Real Story of the Russian Revolution”, which is part of this educational pack and is also on the AWL website:
<http://www.workersliberty.org/story/2012/04/03/real-story-russian-revolution>

Questions:

1. How did Lenin and Trotsky conceive of the Russian revolution?

Both Lenin and Trotsky stressed that although the industrial working class in Russia was small, it would be the decisive force in the revolution: its power in society was out of proportion to its size. Both also stressed that the working class would have to make an ally of the huge peasant class, or at least the poorest sections of it. To be successful, a workers' government would have to link up with international revolution. This was Trotsky's theory of 'permanent revolution'.

2. What forms of workers' democracy arose with the Russian revolution?

The working class was central to this revolution, and created novel mass democratic institutions, called 'soviets', or councils. Russian Marxism was later to set as its objective 'soviet' democracy: a system of workers' councils, controlling both government and the workplace.

3. Why did the Russian revolution begin to degenerate?

Thus the Bolsheviks found themselves isolated in Russia. Worse, after the Bolshevik revolution, counter-revolutionary forces, supported by foreign imperialist powers, tried to smash the infant workers' republic militarily. Civil war and wars of intervention tore the country apart. Eventually the 'Reds' beat the 'Whites'; but at a terrible cost. Famine ravaged Russia and

the other countries in a federation with her. People deserted the cities in thousands in search of food. Many of the most militant workers were now dead, victims of the war.

4. How did Stalin usurp workers' power?

Stalin had been a second-rank leader of the party for many years, but after 1917 won more and more power in it, as General Secretary. He came to represent a particular social group, the bureaucrats who wanted only to be bureaucrats, who had lost any interest in revolution, or perhaps had never had any; in 1924, in the bizarrely named 'Lenin levy', thousands of non-communists, past enemies of communism, time-servers and careerists were recruited to the party, completely gutting it as a voice of revolutionary workers.

5. What did Trotsky's Left Opposition try to fight Stalinism?

They were for the revival of party democracy, the right to form factions, etc.

They were for a programme of limited industrialisation in the USSR, partly to alleviate the terrible backwardness of the economy, and also to rebuild the working class, to recreate the democracy of the Soviets.

They were for an international policy geared to aiding workers' revolution in other countries.

2. Trotsky's analysis of Stalinism

Read: Introduction pp.11-25

Questions:

1. Why is 1940 split in the Trotskyist movement a key turning point in our history?

It was at the end of Trotsky's life, and his last word on the subject of Stalinism. And it marked a decisive turn for Stalinism — the beginning of the Russian expansion that would by 1945 see Russia gain control of half of Europe. (p.13)

2. How did Trotsky define Stalinism in the late 1930s?

Degenerated workers' state; totalitarian (“differed from fascism only by its bridled savagery”); nationalised property; political revolution

3. What was Trotsky's attitude towards Stalin's attacks on Poland and Finland?

He condemned the USSR's invasions of Poland (17 September 1939) and Finland (30 November 1939). And

yet, when the Finns resisted, he was for the victory of Stalin's army over the Finnish people. He insisted that "we are and remain against seizures of new territories by the Kremlin", and that conquest in Poland by the Stalinist state was turning the people into "semi-slaves". (p.15-16)

4. Why did Trotskyists stand for the "defence of the USSR"?

Nationalised property defined as progressive, residual gain from the original 1917 revolution.
Belief that the military defeat of the USSR in a war would mean a return to capitalism, probably as a colony.

5. How do Marxists characterise class societies?

State property (who owns the state); sole master of the surplus product; agency

6. What were the contradictions and limits of Trotsky's late analyses of Stalinism?

Trotsky: "The means of production belong to the state. But the state, so to speak, 'belongs' to the bureaucracy" (*The Revolution Betrayed*). (p.15)
If Stalinism was defined as socialism in one country, how could it expand?
How could the working class simultaneously be a ruling class and an oppressed class?
Who did control the surplus product in the USSR?
If the bureaucracy could spread socialist nationalised property relations, why was socialism still defined as working class self-emancipation?

3. Trotsky in 1939-40

Read: Introduction pp.25-40

Questions:

1. How did Trotsky break new ground with his analysis of Stalinism in 1939?

For the first time he accepted that the USSR, might have to be reclassified as a new and hitherto unknown type of class-exploitative society. (p.25)

2. Why did Trotsky argue the expansion of the USSR in 1939-40 was not imperialist?

Trotsky refused to use the term "imperialism" for the USSR, but in fact the terms of his refusal to do so conceded that Stalinist expansion amounted to imperialism "in the widest sense of the word". "History has known the 'imperialism' of the Roman state based on slave labour, the imperialism of feudal land-ownership, the imperialism of commercial and industrial capital, the imperialism of the Tsarist monarchy, etc. The driving force behind the Moscow bureaucracy is indubitably the tendency to expand its power, its prestige, its revenues. This is the element of 'imperialism' in the widest sense of the word which was a property in the past of all monarchies, oligarchies, ruling castes, medieval estates and classes. However, in contemporary literature, at least Marxist literature, imperialism is understood to mean the expansionist policy of finance capital..." (p.27)

3. What were the real issues in the 1939-40 debate in the American SWP?

Attitude to the Russian invasions of Poland and Finland. [Not the class nature of the USSR or the 'class character' of the opposition]

4. Why did the American SWP split in 1940?

The precipitating factor for the split was not the heat of a current political dispute, but the majority's refusal to let the minority publish a public bulletin. In fact the majority rushed to a split without even waiting to see whether the minority would break party discipline and publish a bulletin. (p.31)

5. What mistakes did Trotsky bequeath the Trotskyist movement?

As well as on Stalinism, Trotsky bequeathed mistaken views on the historical prospects of capitalism; and on the prospects of bourgeois democracy. (p.36)

4. Russia in the war I

Read: Introduction pp.45-60

Questions:

1. How did the heterodox Workers' Party assess the USSR?

When the USSR did expand, the Heterodox registered the facts, thought about their implications, and understood what Stalin was doing. They understood that what they had described as Stalinist imperialism in eastern Poland and Finland was integral to the USSR's role in the war. (p.46)

2. How did the orthodox SWP react to the Nazi invasion of Russia in June 1941?

The Orthodox responded by holding to the formulae which Trotsky had used, radically changing their political and class content. They moved away from Trotsky's ideas, but by way of unacknowledged reinterpretation of formulas rather than explicit rethinking. (p.46)

3. Did Russian workers have "something to fight for" in the war against Nazi Germany?

Matter of national self-determination and fascism, not nationalised property.
Around one million USSR soldiers ended up fighting with the Germans.

4. Why was the analogy between the USSR and a trade union false?

It is difficult to imagine an analogy stranger or more maladroit than that one. Stalin's USSR held millions in slave labour camps, held all workers in a totalitarian vice, routinely and frequently used mass murder as a political tool against the working people. It was a state power "more savage and unbridled" than that of pre-war Nazi Germany, as Trotsky himself had observed. Even the worst gangster-ridden union came nowhere near the horrors inflicted on the workers in the USSR. This analogy worked only to suggest that the Stalinist totalitarian state was less terrible than in fact it was. (p.51)

5. What was wrong with the SWP's minimum programme for Russia at war?

It was the Trotskyist program reduced to free-floating advice and suggestions — without the affirming the need to make a new working-class ("political") revolution, without telling the full truth about Stalinist Russia, without invoking the Russian working class. (p.55)

5. Russia in the war II

Read: Introduction pp.60-73

Questions:

1. What examples of self-delusion did the SWP publish in 1941?

"Red Army Forces Still Intact. Soviet Masses Are Fighting To Defend October's Gains". (p.56)

"Red Army Morale Astonishes Its Enemies". A subordinate headline asserted: "Soviet Soldiers Fight Bravely Because They Have Something Worth Defending". (p.57)

2. Why was it wrong to characterise the Russian army as "Trotsky's Red Army"?

James P Cannon: It wasn't Stalin's Red Army, but Trotsky's! (letter of 22 October 1944). (p.59)

John G Wright it plainly: "The name of Leon Trotsky is inseparably bound up with the formation, life and victories of the Red Army" (p.59)

Trotsky expelled 1928. Trotskyists incarcerated and killed, Russian Army purged 1936-39

3. How did Natalia Sedova critique the SWP's line?

It is necessary by means of the merciless blows of fact to lay bare unceasingly, with all our energy, the causes for the defeats of the Red Army. The time has come to remind all workers daily, hourly, of the crimes of the Kremlin regime and its chieftain. The questions I raise are questions of the greatest importance. Everything must be concentrated on them, everything else must be subordinated to them. For the fate of the Soviet Union is now being decided..." (p.67)

4. What did "defence of the USSR" mean after 1941?

Quotes on the masthead

Support/apology for the Stalinist bureaucracy

A binge of vicarious triumphalism.

6. Russia in the war III

Read: Introduction pp.74-89

Questions:

1. What did the orthodox lauding of the Russian army signify?

The idea of "Trotsky's Red Army" had an ideological function in addition to its usefulness in a labour movement in which the "Red" Army was extremely popular. All the praise of the "Red" Army, and all the many vicarious gloryings in its successes, implied, as has been said, that the Trotskyist denunciation of the Stalinist regime could not have been fully justified after all. (p.77)

2. How did Goldman and Morrow begin to question the SWP's politics?

"It is almost impossible to conceive of the Red Army's marching into Germany without a social revolution following". But whose social revolution? (p.78-79)

3. What stance did James Cannon take to the Warsaw rising in 1944?

When he read the editorials, Cannon came close to denouncing the SWP leaders as traitors — to the "Red" Army. "The editorial again fails to put explicitly and unmistakably our slogan 'Unconditional defense of the Soviet Union' against all imperialists... No consideration is given to the question of whether or not the Red Army was able at the moment to launch an all-out attack on Warsaw in view of its long-sustained offensive... Nor does the editorial take up the question of the duty of guerrilla forces — and in the circumstances that is what the Warsaw detachments are — to subordinate themselves to the high command of the main army, the Red Army, in timing such an important battle as the siege of Warsaw..." (p.86)

4. How did Natalia Sedova criticise the SWP in 1944?

"You seem to be hypnotized by the slogan of the 'defense of the USSR' and in the meantime profound changes, political as well as moral-psychological, have taken place in its social structure. In his articles, especially the last ones, L.D. [Trotsky] wrote of the USSR as a degenerating workers' state and in view of this outlined two possible paths of further social evolution of the first workers' state: revolutionary and reactionary. The last four years have shown us that the reactionary landslide has assumed monstrous proportions within the USSR..." (p.86-87)

5. How did the SWP's mistakes on the Red Army continue after the war?

*The USSR had seized large numbers of countries and territories: the mentions of that in *The Militant* were very few, and tended to explain away the expansion as being "defensive", An SWP resolution in February 1946 advocated that workers in Eastern Europe "tolerate the presence of the Red Army" in the name of its alleged help in "the fulfilment of agrarian reform and the stateisation of the means of production" — with the proviso that they should rethink if the Russian Army "hindered in any way whatsoever the free development of the working-class movement" (p.90)*

7. Post Trotsky Trotskyism

Read: Introduction pp.90-100

Questions:

1. What attitude did the orthodox SWP take towards the Second World War (1941-45)?

The orthodox were people who supported a war against fascist Germany as necessary and just, but regarded those running the USA's war as unserious in their declared opposition to fascism, and as people of the ruling class who could not be trusted. (p.91)

2. How did the SWP assess post-war Eastern Europe?

Most Orthodox Trotskyists, up to 1949-50, recoiled from accepting the East European states as the equivalent of Russia. But they did not take the rational way out of that dilemma, that is, decide that Stalinist-bureaucratic nationalisation defined a workers' state neither in Eastern Europe nor in the USSR.

In the prolonged discussions among the Orthodox between 1945 and 1949-50, the SWP majority, including Cannon and John G Wright, were among those resisting the notion that the East European satellite states had, by being restructured on the model of the USSR, become "deformed workers' states", akin to the "degenerated workers' state". (p.93)

3. Why did the orthodox Trotskyists split in 1953?

James P Cannon, who was in some ways always better, or trying to be better, than the movement he had educated and miseducated, made a confused revolt in

1953 against some of the trends that the Orthodox Fourth International developed around the August-September 1951 Third Congress. He split the Orthodox Fourth International, accusing the Pablo-Mandel leadership of conciliation with Stalinism; of failing to support the East German workers' uprising of 1953 with demands that the Russian army, which was shooting the East Berlin workers, should withdraw from Germany; and of liquidating the small independent Trotskyist groups into the big Stalinist parties. Cannon was in part driven by an internal SWP faction fight with people who claimed to be acting for "Pablo", and he explicitly refused to "go back to 1940", or even to the Third Congress of 1951. (pp.98-99)

4. Why did the Third Camp, heterodox Trotskyism decline?

Their hostility to Stalinism and to the Stalin-controlled workers' movements, and their stringent rationalism, deprived them of the sheltering and sustaining illusions and delusions that the Orthodox would repeatedly avail themselves of when they saw the "world revolution" as advancing through Tito, Mao, Ho Chi Minh, or Castro. The democratic structure of the Workers Party and ISL cut away the sectism that can sometimes scaffold even the most intellectually and politically feeble organisations and enable them to survive and grow. In the 1950s and after, the bulk of the Shachtmanites slowly biodegraded into social democracy. (p.101)

5. Why did the SWP survive?

The Orthodox survived for the same reason that the Stalinists did... core commitment was to the Russian Stalinist state... their "defencism" kept them from recoiling from Stalinism towards bourgeois democracy. (p.102)

8. Apparatus Marxism

Read: Introduction pp.103-116

Questions:

1. How did the orthodox Trotskyists deify Trotsky?

Marxism was now the texts of Trotsky — and earlier leaders, but primarily of Trotsky, who had unpacked his mind of all it contained and "laid up a literary treasure for us, a treasure that the moths and the rust cannot eat". Not said, but implied — and it would be the

guiding rule for the Orthodox — was the idea that Marxism as a process of scientific investigation had more or less come to an end. Now those whom Cannon himself called Trotsky's "disciples" had to "apply" Trotsky's "teaching" (as they sometimes put it). They themselves would, of course, have to pick and choose at each time whatever of Trotsky's written "treasure" they thought relevant. Marxism was now a set of texts and old analyses, positions, and predictions, for deployment by "Trotsky's disciples". They would defend it and link it to current politics. (p.103)

2. What is apparatus Marxism?

Apparatus Marxism is a peculiarly rancid species of "Marxism" from which everything "objective", disinterested, spontaneous and creative is banished. Creativity is incompatible with the prime function of "Apparatus Marxism": rationalising for "the party" and its apparatus. Creativity and, so to speak, spontaneity, is the prerogative of the all-shaping, suck-it-and-see empirical citizens who staff the "Party" apparatus. Everything is thereby turned on its head. The history of the Orthodox Trotskyist, or Cannonite, organisations is a story shaped by this conception of the relationship of Marxism to "the revolutionary party" — as a handmaiden of the apparatus. "Apparatus Marxism" is both blind and sterile because it is not and cannot be a guide to honest analysis and to practice consistent with theory. It exists to rationalise a practice that is in fact guided by something else — usually, the perceived advantage of the organisation. (p.107)

3. What did Cannon take from Zinoviev on the revolutionary party?

James P Cannon was the Zinovievist cuckoo in Trotsky's small nest. It was not all negative Zinovievism. Cannon stood for a serious attitude to organisation, and that was necessary. But the Zinovievism eventually, as Cannon himself seems ruefully to have recognised in the 1960s, "strangled the party"... The question of Cannon's ascribed pre-eminence in the organisation had been a contentious issue since about 1929. The notion — and it was Cannon's governing notion — of a fixed "prestige" for certain leaders, and a common leadership duty to maintain it, can not but play a deadly role. (p.108)

4. Why does the AWL believe the 1939-40 debates are so important?

The Alliance for Workers' Liberty, which had distant origins as "1953", that is, sharply anti-Stalinist "Cannonites", made our way to the Third Camp politics of the Heterodox Trotskyist tradition by our responses to successive political events, rather than by way of a sudden conversion. Then we revised our ideas about the history of the Trotskyist movement: we "went back to 1940", to the parting of the ways of the two main Trotskyist currents. The AWL has for practical purposes, that is, in our political response to events, been in the Heterodox Trotskyist camp since the late 1970s, though some formal explanations and changes of "position" were made later. (p.115)

FRR II – advanced course – tutor notes

1. Shachtman vs Browder on socialism

Read: Chapter 1 pp.131-169

Questions:

1. What is at stake in the debate between revolutionary socialism and Stalinism?

Shachtman: if the cold horror of Stalinist despotism, that vast prison camp of peoples and nations, represents the victory of socialism, then we are lost; then the ideal of socialist freedom, justice, equality, and brotherhood has proved to be an unattainable Utopia. (p.147)

2. How does Shachtman define socialism?

Shachtman: Socialism is based upon the common ownership and democratic control of the means of production and exchange, upon production for use as against production for profit, upon the abolition of all classes, all class divisions, class privilege, class rule, upon the production of such abundance that the struggle for material needs is completely eliminated, so that humanity, at last freed from economic exploitation, from oppression, from any form of coercion by a state machine, can devote itself to its fullest intellectual and cultural development. (p.148)

3. How does Shachtman assess the USSR?

Production; labour productivity; output; standard of living of workers; inequality; wages; trade union organisation; position of women; political organisation; position of revolutionaries

4. Why did Shachtman turn to Browder and say: “there but for an accident of geography, stands a corpse” (p.163)?

Purge of other Stalinists

5. Does Shachtman treat the Western camp as more progressive than the East?

No – Third camp: Neither Washington nor Moscow. But they understood the differences in terms of working class freedom.

2. Cannon vs Shachtman in 1939

Read: Chapter 2 pp.172-213

Questions:

1. What was Cannon’s method in debating the Russian question? Was it correct?

Cannon: Our tendency, being a genuine, that is, orthodox, Marxist tendency from A to Z, has always proceeded on the Russian question from theoretical premises to political conclusions for action... Such issues, by their very nature, admit no unclarity, no compromise, because it is a matter of taking sides! One must be on one side or another in war and revolution... Our position on the Russian question is programmatic. In brief: The theoretical analysis – a degenerated Workers’ State. The political conclusion – unconditional defense against external attack of imperialists or internal attempts at capitalist restoration. (p.177-78)

2. How did Shachtman criticise Cannon’s approach?

Shachtman: The fundamental position of the party, no matter how often reiterated, does not provide us automatically with an answer to the concrete questions. For example, Goldman, Cannon, Trotsky, all proceed from the fundamental conception that the Soviet Union is a workers’ state. Yet Goldman approved the invasion, Cannon was indifferent to it, considering it a purely military question which we were incapable of judging, whereas Trotsky denounced the invasion. (p.198)

3. How did Shachtman characterise the USSR’s role in the war?

Shachtman: The first is the fundamental and decisive character of the war in question, and we say that the decisive character of the present war is imperialist. And secondly our policies in all questions must be derived from the fundamental conception of the interests of the world socialist revolution, to which all other interests are subordinate and secondary... (p.199)

Until concrete examples are given by the majority, and until the other questions I have raised are answered, and answered objectively and convincingly, I continue to contend that our slogan of unconditional defence of the Soviet Union has been proved by events, by reality, to be false and misleading, to be harmful, and that therefore it must be abandoned by our party. We must adopt in its place a slogan which is clear, which is defensible, and

which makes possible a correct policy in harmony with our revolutionary internationalist position. (p.212)

4. What did Shachtman mean by: Decisive in politics is not only the “what” but also the “who” (p.204)?

Agency matters as much as the situation

5. What was Shachtman’s criticism of the party regime?

Shachtman: I do not agree that any one man must under all circumstances be guaranteed the leadership of the party or the control of that leadership. I do not agree that if you approve that concept you will have a democratic regime in the party. I want a genuinely collective leadership, one that operates, discusses, and decides collectively. And a leader cult which we have had flagrantly expressed by a number of responsible members of the Political Committee is a bad substitute for a collective leadership. (p.216)

3. The Expansion of Stalinism 1939-41

Read: Chapter 3 pp.219-259

Questions:

1. What was the SWP majority attitude towards Russian’s invasion of Finland?

If a struggle breaks out between bourgeois Finland and the Soviet Union, it is the duty of the Finnish workers to be Soviet partisans in that struggle.

SWP, “The Kremlin’s aims in the Finnish crisis”, Editorial, Socialist Appeal 1 December 1939 (p.225)

2. What did Goldman (part of majority) believe the differences were about?

To put it plainly: in spite of Stalin’s crime in invading Finland under the circumstances that he did, we shall work for the victory of the Red Army against the Finnish bourgeois army representing imperialism. Why?

Because in a war against imperialism, whatever the cause of the war, the consequences of a defeat of the Red Army by an imperialist army can be very grave indeed to the nationalized property.

Albert Goldman, SWP Internal Bulletin vol.2 no.5, December 1939 (p.238)

3. Why did Trotsky believe the seizure of eastern Poland “served notice that the October revolution was still alive”?

The seizure of eastern Poland — a pledge of the alliance with Hitler and a guarantee against Hitler — was accompanied by the nationalization of semifeudal and capitalist property in western Ukraine and western White Russia. Without this the Kremlin could not have incorporated the occupied territory into the USSR. The strangled and desecrated October Revolution served notice that it was still alive.

Trotsky, Manifesto of the Emergency Conference of the Fourth International, May 1940 (p.247)

4. According to Carter (Shachtman’s group). Why did Stalinism expand?

Stalin’s aid to Hitler flows from his own desire to increase the revenues, power and prestige of the reactionary bureaucratic rulers of Russia, whose interests have nothing in common with those of the Russian or world working class. Through his partnership with the most powerful and aggressive imperialist power, German Fascism, Stalin has taken over part of Finland, the Baltics, part of Poland, and now Bessarabia and Bukovina. Like Russian Czarist imperialism, Stalin seeks control over the Dardanelles, and with that, influence in the Mediterranean and the Near East. Carter, “Russia’s Occupation of Rumania Extends Hitler-Stalin Balkan Hold”, Labor Action, 8 July 1940 (p.257)

5. What did Stalin’s expansion into Iran signify?

And Iran is an even plainer case than was Poland. It is a war of joint imperialist expansion on the part of Churchill and Stalin, according to the simple and exact description by Lenin, who wrote on February 24, 1918, not of capitalist imperialism alone and in particular, but of imperialism in general: “I characterize here as imperialism the robbery of other countries in general, as imperialist war a war of robbers for the division of the booty.”

“Stalin in Iran”, editorial, New International, August 1941 (p.263)

4. The Bureaucratic Revolution and the war

Read: Chapter 4 pp.261-276; Chapter 5 pp.285-312

Questions:

1. Is a bureaucratic workers' revolution possible?

Inasmuch as Stalin's Bonapartist dictatorship bases itself not on private but on state property, the invasion of Poland by the Red Army should, in the nature of the case, result in the abolition of private capitalist property, so as thus to bring the regime of the occupied territories into accord with the regime of the USSR. This measure, revolutionary in character – "the expropriation of the expropriators" – is in this case achieved in a military bureaucratic fashion.

Trotsky, "The USSR in War", 25 September 1939 (p.266)

I repeat, I do not believe in the bureaucratic proletarian (socialist) revolution. I do not mean by this merely that I "have no faith" in it — no one in our movement has. I mean that I do not consider it possible. I reject the concept not out of "sentimental" reasons or a Tolstoyan "faith in the people" but because I believe it to be scientifically correct to repeat with Marx that the emancipation of the working class is the task of the working class itself... But the proletarian revolution cannot be made by others than the proletariat acting as a mass; therein, among other things, it is distinguished from all preceding revolutions. No one else can free it — not even for a day.

Shachtman, Open Letter to Trotsky, 1 January 1940.
New International, March 1940 (p.273)

2. What did Shachtman argue the Stalinist nationalisations in the occupied territories signified?

The Red Army came in as a counter-revolutionary force. Far from "giving an impulse to the socialist revolution" it strangled it (the Vilna "Soviet" was of course violently suppressed). Just what has since then been "nationalized", how it has been "nationalized" — I do not know and no one has yet been able to say exactly. In any case, I repeat with you that the nationalization, real or alleged, cannot be the decisive criterion for us. The Stalinist bureaucracy is capable only of strangling revolutions, not making them or giving an impulsion to them.

Shachtman, Open Letter to Trotsky, 1 January 1940.
New International, March 1940 (p.271)

3. What examples of self-delusion did the SWP propagate about the Russian resistance to Hitler?

But the Russian workers and peasants think there is a difference, and they think the difference is worth dying for. Cannon, speech at a Trotsky memorial meeting, Militant, 30 August 1941 (p.298)

The unparalleled morale with which the Red Army and the Soviet masses rallied to the defense of the workers' state can be explained only by our analysis of the class character of the Soviet Union.

Resolution adopted by an SWP "Plenum-Conference", The Militant, 18 October 1941 (p.305)

But the workers and Red soldiers of the Soviet Union fight with a "bitterness unmatched in this war" because they are defending the socialist achievements of a workers' revolution. Factories, mines, mills, railroads, workshops belong to those who work them. The soil belongs to those who till it.

Clarke, "Stalingrad fights", The Militant, 12 September 1942 (p.310)

If the Soviet masses have shown wonderful morale, it is only because they have accepted the position of Trotsky on the Soviet Union and the Stalinist bureaucracy. Goldman, speech on the Russian Revolution, The Militant, 13 November 1943 (p.312).

5. "Trotsky's Red Army"

Read: Chapter 6 pp.313-392

Questions:

1. What does Cannon's assessment of the Warsaw uprising in 1944 tell us about his politics?

Finally, the editorial again fails to put explicitly and unmistakably our slogan "Unconditional defense of the Soviet Union" against all imperialists... No consideration is given to the question of whether or not the Red Army was able at the moment to launch an all-out attack on Warsaw in view of its long-sustained offensive... Nor does the editorial take up the question of the duty of guerrilla forces — and in the circumstances that is what the Warsaw detachments are — to subordinate themselves to the high command of the main army, the Red Army...

Letter from Cannon (in jail) to be transmitted to the SWP leadership, August 1944 (p.326-27)

2. How did Natalia Sedova criticise the SWP in 1944?

Natalia Sedova: You seem to be hypnotized by the slogan of the "defense of the USSR" and in the meantime profound changes, political as well as moral-psychological, have taken place in its social structure. In his articles, especially the last ones, L.D. [Trotsky] wrote

of the USSR as a degenerating workers' state and in view of this outlined two possible paths of further social evolution of the first workers' state: revolutionary and reactionary. The last four years have shown us that the reactionary landslide has assumed monstrous proportions within the USSR (p.335)

3. How does Louis Jacobs criticise the SWP over Russia and the war?

Soviet patriotism; Trotsky's Red Army; Tito; unity of the Soviet people; Warsaw uprising; party regime

4. How did Shays and Shelton criticise the SWP in 1946?

Relegating defence of the USSR; Industries in occupied territories; forced labour; Korea; forced migrations

5. How did Jean van Heijenoort assess Soviet expansion after WWII?

Van Heijenoort: The most vivid manifestations of bureaucratic imperialism – plunder, requisitions, dismantling of factories, forced labor – are thus the direct consequences of the bureaucratic domination of the Soviet economy and not the product of Zhukov's caprice, or Stalin's thirst for power, or the depravity of Soviet soldiers. The whole bureaucratic management of the economy calls for such methods. In this sense, it is fully legitimate to speak of bureaucratic imperialism as a system growing out of definite economic needs (p.389)

Van Heijenoort: If the Soviet Union still remains today, in my opinion, a degenerated workers' state, it is because, from that monstrous society, nothing new and stable has yet come out. In the rotten apple no germ has appeared. (p.391)

6. Shachtman vs Braverman

Read: Chapter 7 pp.393-426

Questions:

1. Was Braverman right that the "degenerated workers' state" formula was the "heart" of Trotskyism?

Braverman: With typical impudence, Shachtman pretends that Trotsky's class analysis of the Soviet Union as a degenerated workers' state "is not even a decisively important part" of Trotskyism. This is like saying that a man could function without a heart. (p.399)

2. Why is Trotsky's book, The New Course (1923), important?

Shachtman: What Trotsky says there about party democracy, about a free and vibrant internal life, about the role of tradition and the need of constantly enriching it, about critical and independent party thought, about Leninism, about discussions and how they should be conducted, about loyalty in discussion and in leadership, about the relations between leaders and ranks, between "young" and "old," about bureaucratism and conservatism, about factions and groupings, and a dozen other vital problems of any revolutionary party amounts to an annihilating criticism of the inner-party regime of the SWP today, of its leaders and their methods. (p.409)

3. Who originated the theory of bureaucratic collectivism?

Rakovsky, Left Opposition

4. How does Shachtman justify his assessment of the bureaucracy as a ruling class?

Shachtman: The bureaucracy is the ruling class because its "mere" political power makes it the owner of the conditions of production. It is always the relation of the owners of the conditions of production to the actual producers that shows us the real basis of a class society and establishes the true class character of the state. The Stalinist state is no exception to this rule. (p.423)

5. What was wrong with Trotsky's assessment of the USSR?

Shachtman: The second theory of Trotsky is radically different from the first. Originally, the state was the repository of the property relations; now the "property relations" (nationalised property) are the "repository" of the state. Originally, the character of the economy was determined by the character of the state power (Frankel's "political superstructure"); now the character of the state power is determined by the character of the economy. (pp.424-25)

7. The Revolutionary Party

Read: Chapter 12 pp.585-632

Questions:

1. Was Cannon right that the SWP was already the vanguard workers' party?

The revolutionary vanguard party, destined to lead this tumultuous revolutionary movement in the US, does not have to be created. It already exists, and its name is the Socialist Workers Party. It is the sole legitimate heir and continuator of pioneer American Communism and the revolutionary movements of the American workers from which it sprang.

Cannon, "Theses on the American Revolution", Fourth International, January 1947 (p.592)

2. What kind of party did Shachtman try to build?

The kind of party we have built up is our richest possession. In itself, it does not guarantee against making political mistakes, including serious ones. But it makes possible a speedy correction of such mistakes if they are made, a correction without the convulsive crises to which bureaucratized parties are doomed whenever a serious difference of opinion forces its way past the lid. Shachtman, Five Years of the Workers Party, New International, April 1945 (p.593)

3. Why did Shachtman accuse Cannon of having a "Zinovievist" conception of party-building?

The Zinovievist preachment of a "homogeneous" and "monolithic" party marked and symbolized the beginning of the end of Bolshevik Party democracy and what that end is we all know. We cannot consider it a mere coincidence that the leader of your party, the one who sets its tone and course, was one of the principal "Bolsheviseurs" in the Zinovievist style in the Communist movement of a score of years ago.... Your leadership betrays its bureaucratic Zinovievist monolithism in every line of its attack on our conception of a revolutionary party.

Shachtman and Ernest Rice McKinney, Labor Action, 11 November 1946 (p.599)

I was greatly influenced by Zinoviev in the early days of the Comintern...

Cannon, letter to Theodore Draper, 26 July 1955 (p.619)

4. How did Trotsky conceive of democratic centralism?

A political line predominates over the regime. First of all, it is necessary to define strategic problems and tactical methods correctly in order to solve them. The

organisational forms should correspond to the strategy and the tactic.

Trotsky, "On democratic centralism", December 1937 (p.631-32)

Only we can permit genuine honest democracy so that a young worker, a young student can feel he has the possibility of expressing his opinion openly without being immediately subjected to persecution. Ironical statements from someone in authority is also persecution. We can attract new members to the youth [organisation] as to the party only by genuine intelligent democracy. Everybody is tired of the lack of democracy... We cannot establish with one blow or with one resolution the authority of the party. We cannot create the authority for the party with one resolution... I believe now we should exaggerate the democracy and be very, very patient with centralism in this transitional time.

Trotsky, "Towards a Revolutionary Youth Organisation", 18 November 1938 (p.633-34).

8. The Working Class is Central

Read: Chapter 13 pp.633--650

Questions:

1. What was Natalia Sedova's message to the Russian workers in 1956?

Everything you were taught about Trotsky since that time is vile slander.

Natalia Sedova, Labor Action, 30 July 1956 (p.642)

2. What is the essence of Marxism, according to Shachtman?

Marxism is proletarian socialism.

Shachtman, speech delivered on 18 November 1953. Labor Action, 30 November 1953 (p.646)

3. Why does Shachtman highlight the Paris Commune and the Russian revolution of 1917?

That is why we are in the tradition of the Paris Commune, for example, the first great attempt of the proletariat to emancipate itself. That is why we are in the tradition of the great revolution in Russia - the Bolshevik revolution - the second great attempt of the proletariat to emancipate itself
Shachtman, speech delivered on 18 November 1953. Labor Action, 30 November 1953 (p.648)

4. How does Shachtman sum up the relationship between socialism and the working class?

There is no socialism and no progress to socialism without the working class, without the working class revolution, without the working class in power, without the working class having been lifted to "political supremacy" (as Marx called it) to their "victory of democracy" (as Marx also calls it). No socialism and no advance to socialism without it! That is our rock. Shachtman, speech delivered on 18 November 1953. Labor Action, 30 November 1953 (p.650)

5. What does Shachtman compare the Third Camp with?

We would be for a Third Camp you see, if it existed. Show us a Third Camp and we would be the first ones to be for it – if it were big and powerful and had lots of dues-paying members. But there is no Third Camp now, so why be for it? But the minute it comes into being – we don't believe that it will ever happen, of course, but if despite our scepticism it should come into being against capitalism (which were are not really for) and against Stalinism Shachtman, speech delivered on 18 November 1953. Labor Action, 30 November 1953 (p.651)

9. Isaac Deutscher's capitulation to Stalinism

Read: Isaac Deutscher and the end of socialism. Max Shachtman pp.651-702

Questions:

1. What is Deutscher's view of the relationship between Leninism and Stalinism?

To Deutscher, the Russia of Lenin and Trotsky, the Russia of the Bolshevik revolution, is organically continued in the Russia of Stalin (and his recent successors). (p.659)

To Deutscher, the evolution to Stalinist totalitarianism was the inevitable outcome of the Bolshevik revolution, in the same way that an equivalent tyranny has always been and must presumably always be the inevitable outcome of any popular revolution. The idea that the masses of the people can ever directly manage and control their destiny is as erroneous as the assumption that such control is essential for human progress in general or socialism especially. (p.663-64)

2. If Deutscher is right about continuity between Lenin and Stalin, what does it signify about socialism?

If Deutscher's theory is valid, it is not as an explanation for the "brand of socialism," as he calls it. It is the end of socialism. And so, in one sense, it is. It is the end of socialism for an entire generation. That generation is finished and done for so far as the fight for human dignity is concerned. (p.672)

3. How does the bourgeoisie assert its social rule?

Or, to put it in other words: the social power, the class power, the state power of the capitalist class is determined and assured by its economic power, that is, its ownership of capital, of the capitalist means of production and exchange. (p.675)

4. What role does Bonapartism play in class rule?

Deutscher is overwhelmingly fascinated — you might also say obsessed — by indiscriminating, uncritical and unthought out analogies between the bourgeois revolutions (the French in particular; but never the American, it is interesting to note) and the Bolshevik revolution. (p.680)

The question is put by people, especially those who have been influenced by analogies once drawn between bourgeois Bonapartism and what Trotsky so questionably called "Soviet Bonapartism" (and Deutscher is one of those who have been very badly influenced by the very bad analogy) (p.682)

5. How does working class rule differ from other class societies?

How is it with the working class, however? Its unique characteristic, which distinguishes it from all preceding classes, may be a "disadvantage" from the standpoint of the shopkeeper, but from the Marxian standpoint it is precisely what makes it the consistently revolutionary class and the historic bearer of the socialist future, is this: it is not and it cannot be a property-owning class. That is, its unalterable characteristic excludes it from any possibility of monopolizing the means of production, and thereby exploiting and "alienating" other classes. (p.685)

The trouble, as it were, was this: others can exploit the working class, but it cannot exploit itself. So long as it

has the political power, it will not exploit itself nor will it allow others to do so. (p.695).

10. A critique of Cannon

Read: Trotsky and Cannon pp.725-757

Questions:

1. Why does Shachtman argue the pioneers were not "prepared by their past" within the Communist Party to become oppositionists?

Shachtman: From its birth, the Cannon faction never had a distinguishing programme of its own, never played an independent role, never had a meaningful solution for the factionalism that incessantly corroded the party but whose roots it did not even begin to understand. If, as a small minority, it nevertheless had the support of a number of excellent militants (p.734)

2. What did Cannon bring to the young Trotskyist forces?

Shachtman: Cannon gave the American Trotskyist movement a personal link with the preceding revolutionary movements and therewith helped to preserve the continuity of the movement (p.738)

3. What was Cannon's fundamental weakness in Shachtman's view?

Shachtman: The Trotsky movement... was compelled to start and for a long time to remain almost exclusively a movement passionately and earnestly devoted to a theoretical reconsideration of many basic suppositions, theoretical re-evaluations, theoretical criticism, clarity and preciseness, as the prerequisites of revolutionary political practice. In this field Cannon was, to put it bluntly, helpless, much more so than had been so notoriously the case with him in the Communist Party. (p.740)

4. What is wrong with Cannon's commitment to the Fifth Comintern Congress conception of the party, that it must be "a centralized party, prohibiting factions, tendencies and groups. It must be a monolithic party hewn of one piece"?

Zinovievism; democracy, theory

5. Given Glotzer's criticisms, is The History of American Trotskyism really a manual for building a Marxist group?

Gestation theory; dog days; foreign language papers; New International magazine