

Why is socialism in disarray?

Introduction

The economic crisis has shaken the tremendous mystique which the world capitalist system had built in the two decades since the collapse of European and Russian Stalinism. They had been decades of globalisation; of enormous capitalist expansion; of US hyper-power bestriding the world; and of mass belief in markets as the self-sufficient god-like regulator of economic and therefore of all social, that is of all human, affairs. Now writers in the ultra-Tory Daily Telegraph (20 September, 2008) feel compelled by events to admit that the capitalist “cycle” has been “more accurately predicted by Karl Marx” than by bourgeois economists.

Something else too startled the world. In an era of globalization and market fetishism, it was revealed that we, in the US and Britain, were ruled by “socialistic” – selectively socialistic but socialistic all the same — governments.

The ultra-right-wing neo-liberal US administration of George W Bush and the neo-Thatcherite Blair-Brown government of Britain, both previously amongst the extreme idolaters of the market, stepped in and assumed the role which the failing large banks had played, the role of social banker, financial organiser, and regulator of the entire economy.

They used the government power to collect and redistribute taxes, to channel many, many billions of dollars and pounds from society to subsidise the banks and stop them collapsing.

This was an implicit acknowledgment that uncontrolled markets led not to the creation of the inexhaustible social cornucopia, but to social disaster. The British government’s explanation is more than merely plausible — that if it had not intervened as it did to play the role of organiser, financier, and guarantor of the financiers, then the high street cash-point machines, the fuelling-points of all mundane commercial and social activity, would have closed down. “Society”, would have seized up, as the US economy did when the banks closed their doors in the early 1930s, or worse.

As governments in ancient societies of “Asiatic despotism” and other “hydraulic societies”, in Mesopotamia, Egypt, India, had had to play an essential role in organising the prerequisites of social production — irrigation canals, etc. — so the ultra-free-market US and British governments were compelled, on pain of financial and social dislocation and collapse, to step from behind the ideological curtain of pretence and assume the role of social organisers.

In the crunch the banks depended on social action by the overall representatives of society to avert a catastrophe generated by their own capitalist system, to act to cancel out the natural consequences of market relations for the bankers and for society.

But if this “socialism”, or “social-ism”, was in the interests of society, it was also pointedly in the direct interests of the bankers and those who own, control, and benefit most from the economy.

It was bankers’ socialism, fat-cat socialism. Bourgeois socialism.

It did, however, point to and underline the fundamental rationale of Marxist socialism, the thing that makes it sensible and, essentially, invulnerable to the defeats or errors or even annihilation of socialist parties and of Marxists: capitalism itself prepares and continually develops the socialist transformation of society. As Friedrich Engels put it: socialist society “invades” large-scale capitalism. Marxist socialism is only the conscious expression of this objective reality.

Capitalism grows from small-scale production to ever more gigantic concentrations of the means of production in huge society-wide enterprises. Capitalism has developed from a world where markets regulated the affairs of small commodity production to a world of giants whose size modifies the workings of markets and whose needs — and society's needs in relation to them — can, as we have just once more seen, only be met by social, society-wide action.

Today, whole towns-worth of shops are concentrated in each big supermarket. Whole branches of social economy are organised in the giant and increasingly international companies that dominate human life.

But these gigantic social enterprises are still organised and regulated to produce the maximum private profit. Not human need but the income of shareholders and executives rules their decisions. The fate of the workers within them — whether, for example, the enterprise shuts up operations in one locality and migrates across national borders, or continues to allow a particular community to go on working, existing — all that is regulated by the obligation of the enterprise to produce profit for shareholders and enormous salaries and bonuses for the corporate bosses who run these great chunks of social activity and social labour.

An anti-Marxist polemicist (Observer journalist Nick Cohen) dismisses the idea that Marx, writing early in industrial capitalism, could have understood its essentials. In fact Marx, according to himself, based his analysis of capitalist society on over 400 years of capitalism in history — as distinct from industrial capitalism — before his time. In any case the question is, did he see into the essentials of our system?

Does capitalism continue to have and to be dominated by the characteristics which Marx analysed and their manifold manifestations in our society? Doesn't it? Do we live in a world dominated by capitalist companies, entities whose driving force and goal is to wring the maximum profit for their shareholders out of their operations — that is, out of those who work in them — no matter what the human and social consequences, have more wealth and immeasurable more social power than many contemporary governments?

Our world is shaped and reshaped, calmed or tsunami-hit by those companies' competition for profit.

It would not be too fanciful to say that the big shareholders in each company bear something like the same sort of relationship to those employed by the companies, or conglomerates of companies, as the minority of citizens in an ancient Greek city state had to the four or five times more numerous slaves, women and foreigners who made their lives there.

The competition of these international entities is reshaping our world now in ways whose ultimate working-out can only be surmised.

The great tragedy-bearing paradox of political and social life is that though this social development corresponds to the bedrock Marxist expectations of the way capitalism, in accordance with its inner drives and needs, had to develop, the fundamental case for socialism today, socialism in general and Marxist socialism in particular, is marginalised, more discredited that at any time in one hundred years and more.

Yet the necessity and the possibility of replacing this system by genuine social control, under the social ownership and the day-to-day, interstice-by-interstice control of the producers, is a great deal more obvious now, and more pressing than in the time and the capitalism of Marx and Engels. And we are now in the worst economic crisis in many years, perhaps decades... An editorial in the Daily Telegraph in 2008 said the plain truth: "the world now corresponds more to the expectation of Karl Marx than of any other economist or social philosopher."

Commentators point to the absence of an intellectually credible socialism as one of the great assets which capitalism in this crisis possesses. There is no denying it. That, indeed, is how things stand with socialism. Socialism is in intellectual, political and organizational disarray, everywhere.

The question I want to explore in this series of articles is why, by way of what events, has the socialism that embodies the project of substituting for the capitalist system a rational, democratic and non-exploitative form of economic and social life come to stand for so little in a world where once again the fundamental ideas of Marxism about capitalism have been shown beyond serious argument to be stark truth. Why is it socialism, and not capitalism, that is most discredited?

On one level, the answer is expressed in one word: Stalinism. But European Stalinism has been dead twenty years. Why has the authentic socialism, the socialism of those who fought Stalinism, and often fought it to the death, not revived, not springing alive and young again out of the vanished shadow of Stalinism?

Because, to a large extent, like Joe Hill in the song, Stalinism can assert: "I never died". Stalinism, politically, intellectually and in ingrained collective habits of mind, is still alive on the would-be left. If that left is to emerge from its present nullity, it will have to purge itself of the traits I will analyze in these articles.

[Note. The text here has an additional section, not in the printed version, section 8, and some small additions]

Contents

A] THE STALINIST ROOTS OF THE PRESENT CRISIS OF THE LEFT

- 1) Defining an age
- 2) "Communism" and the Left
- 3) Stalinism and Socialism
- 4) The Old Left and the New
- 5) The Basic Beliefs of Old Socialism
- 6) Bolshevism, Marxism and the Russian Revolution
- 7) Old Socialism and Stalinism
- 8) Lenin, and Anti-Utopian Marxism
- 9) Stalinism Was Utopianism

B) THE POLITICAL CONTENT OF THE STALINIST COUNTER-REVOLUTION

- 1) The Stalin[ist]-Refashioned Left
- 2) The Politics of Anything-Goes Expediency

A. Stalinist roots of the present crisis on the left

1. Defining an age

In the summer of 1933, a few months after the Nazis had consolidated power in Germany, a conversation that defines a whole political age, and in so doing offers a key to understanding the malaise of the left today, took place in a group of young members of the Communist Party, in Cambridge. Some of the participants in that conversation would serve the USSR as double agents within the British secret services for decades to come, and be exposed, in the 1950s, 60s and 70s. The story of that conversation is told in Andrew Boyle's *The Climate of Treason*.

Kim Philby, just back from Germany, reported to his friends. Hitler had been allowed to come to power peacefully. The powerful German Communist Party (KPD) had had six million voters and hundreds of thousands of militants. It had its own armed militia, which until the Nazis consolidated their power had had the strength to repress the fascists in the working-class districts of Berlin. And yet the KPD had allowed itself to be smashed, without even making a fight of it. When the bourgeoisie called the Nazis to power, the KPD had slunk into its grave — without even token resistance.

During the two and a half years from the September 1930 elections to the consolidation of Nazi power in January-March 1933, as the Nazis grew spectacularly, the KPD had refused to try to unite with the Social Democrats to oppose them. In 1920, a general strike had defeated an attempt at right wing coup, the so-called Kapp Putsch; in 1933 the KPD did not even attempt to organise a general strike! The KPD and the Social Democratic Party — whose leaders in the Reichstag pledged to be a loyal, legal opposition to Hitler — destroyed the possibility of a general strike. They ensured that the call for a general strike made by the small Trotskyist organisation met with no response.

It was one of the great pivotal events in the history of the labour movement, and in the history of the 20th century. The final consolidation of Russian Stalinism, World War Two, Stalin's

conquest of Eastern Europe, the decline and decay and ultimately the complete destruction of the revolutionary working class movement that had rallied to the Russian October Revolution.

In fact, the KPD acted as it did on Stalin's direct orders. Stalin had decided that it was in the USSR's interests to let Hitler come to power because Hitler would try to revise the Treaty of Versailles imposed on defeated Germany by the victors of the First World War and "keep them busy in the West while we get on with building up socialism here", as he put it to the German Communist leader Heinz Neumann. Stalin would later have Neumann shot: his wife Margurite would be one of a trainload of German Communist refugees from Hitler who were transferred — in an act that symbolised and summed up Moscow's relationship with the international "communist" movement — from Stalin's concentration camps to Hitler's, in 1940, as a gesture of goodwill to the German ally, after the Hitler-Stalin Pact in 1939. She lived to tell the story.

In Cambridge in that summer of 1933 the young men listening to Philby's report tried to make sense of events — of their own political world. The Communist International was still denying that any defeat at all, still less a catastrophe, had occurred: it denied that the KPD had been destroyed. It was still playing with idiotic slogans: "After Hitler — our turn!" Those who wanted to stay in the Stalin's "Communist International" had to accept that way of looking at it. This was the period of "High Stalinism": the Pope in Moscow decided such things and brooked neither opposition, disagreement nor sceptical reserve. Even so, the question forced its way through: were the leaders of the Communist International correct?

More daring than the others, one of the Cambridge group suggested that, maybe — maybe — mistakes had been made. Maybe they should have fought the Nazis rather than let them consolidate fascist rule peacefully? Perhaps Stalin's critics were right? Perhaps, after all, Stalin did not quite know what he was doing.

"No!", said Philby, the future KGB general, very heated. The KPD had not made mistakes, and Stalin had not got anything wrong in Germany. To talk of even the possibility that Stalin was mistaken was to miss the point, Philby insisted: he denied that, where the affairs of the labour movement were concerned, Stalin could be mistaken and wrong. Like the infallible Pope, who cannot err where Catholic "matters of faith and morals" are concerned, Stalin could not err where the affairs of the left were concerned. "W...why", he stuttered, "W...what-ever Stalin does - th... tha... that is the left!" There was no left other than Stalin.

2. "Communism" and the left

It is a statement that sums up an entire epoch in the history of the left, and, to call things by their proper names, what was becoming the ex-left: for the hitherto left and right were now melding in a new Stalinist synthesis. What Stalin did, what the Russian and later other Stalinists in power did, whatever they did, including things that had previously characterised the right, whatever they said in the name of socialism and communism — that was now socialism, that deed and doctrine, was now the left! The left today is the child and grandchild of that "left".

Defence of what that "socialist state" did, and generalisations from what it did, whatever it was — that became the left. The official accounts of what they were and what they did; the rationalisations, fantasies and lies which disguised the real nature of what they did; the learned "Marxist" commentaries on the "reasons" for what they did; the deep "theoretical" "Marxist" arguments that were concocted to explain what they did and why "socialism" in the USSR was so very far from the old hopes and socialist goals of the old left; the codification of Stalinist practice, written over and into the basic texts of socialist learning, turning "communism" and "Marxism" into incoherent and ever-changing Stalinist palimpsests — that was now "the left".

With the Stalinist counter-revolution, what had for decades been socialism, a powerful progressive force in the world, the implacable enemy by instinct and belief of oppression, social inequality, repression, exploitation, superstition, unreason, and of its own opposite, the right in instinct and conviction, was transformed into a "socialism", that, amongst other things, as we will see, incorporated the basic traits of the old right and was itself the negation of the old socialism. Everything socialistic was transformed.

3. Stalinism and socialism

The old aspirant socialism promised freedom; the new “socialism” brought slavery. Socialism was “the free association of producers”; “socialism” brought a murderous intensification of labour exploitation under a ruling class which, as Trotsky put it at the end of the 1930s, concentrated in itself all the worst traits of all the ruling classes of history.

Aspirant socialism was first the victory of the working class in the class struggle against the bourgeoisie, what the Communist Manifesto defined as “to win the battle of democracy”. “Socialism” was the victory of the bureaucratic Stalinist ruling class in its class struggle with the workers of the USSR. Aspirant socialism was republican liberty and equality; “socialism” was an absolute monarchy whose King-Pope-Caesar-Caliph-Sultan, as Trotsky observed, could truly say, like Louis XIV “society, c'est moi”. Society - it is I.

Socialism was democracy all through society and the economy — a world with no racial, national, religious, sexual or class oppression, a world with neither slave nor ruling brigand. “Socialism” was political and social tyranny. Even where there was economic progress, this “socialism” fell behind bourgeois civilisation, excising and stigmatising the gains of centuries in culture, everyday rationality and human rights, most relentlessly, of working-class political and social rights.

Socialism meant the cutting down of the state's repressive functions and its power, the beginning of its withering away; “socialism” was the rising up of a totalitarian state to the exercise of unprecedented power over society, installing a state-worship identical with that of fascism. Socialism was the triumph of a rational, humane morality, replacing class society's morality of the jungle and of petrified superstition with the moral principles of consistent, comprehensive human solidarity, rooted in the working class solidarity on which labour movements are erected; at all the levels of “socialist” society, “socialism” knew only the morality of the slave market, of the venal courtier, of the insecure, hypocritical ruling elite, of the unfeeling, greedy, privileged consumer in a world of scarcity and famine.

Socialism was the victory of reason over the murderous unreason of class society; “socialism” raised irrationality to the pitch of nightmare, and sometimes outright madness. Aspirant socialism was reason in revolt; “socialism” was reason in captivity to a church-state, ruled-over by a Pope-Caesar, with his cardinals, bishops and local supervising, enforcing, preaching and “educating” secular clergy all across the world. The intellectual and moral foundation of socialism was the ruthlessly critical appraisal and reappraisal of reality. In Marx's words, it continuously “plucked the imaginary flowers [of religious consolation] from the chain, not in order that man shall continue to bear that chain without fantasy or consolation, but so that he shall throw off the chain and pluck the living flower. [It] disillusioned man, so that he will think, act, and fashion his reality like a man who has discarded his illusions and regained his senses...” “Socialism” was consoling, degrading cant and lies about the state of things in the Stalinist-ruled part of the world.

Aspirant socialism was a coherent, developing view of history, of social evolution, and of socialism itself as the heir of capitalism in history. “Socialism” disarranged all the ideas, meaning-charged words and perspectives of socialism, shuffling them and reshuffling them into indecipherability and arbitrary, shifting meanings, interpreted by a caste of state-Caesar-Pope-licensed priests. Aspirant socialism proposed to reorganise and reconstruct advanced capitalist society and on the basis of capitalism's own prior achievements to liberate first the workers and then all of humankind from class society; “socialism” took as its goal the development of backward societies towards what capitalism in the advanced countries had already achieved from what for socialism was the take off point for working class socialism.

Aspirant Marxist socialism saw capitalism and socialism as succeeding stages; “socialism” conflated and identified the “swinishness” that was inseparably part of “catching up with” and “outstripping” advanced capitalism, with the emancipation from swinishness of the socialist future, reducing it to incomprehensibility.

Aspirant socialism organised revolutionary political parties in which discipline in action was

prepared, assessed, and made real by freedom of thought, of initiative, of criticism and of dissent. “Socialism” created monolithic sect-parties without freedom of thought or criticism or dissent, parties organised not according to the needs of the class struggle and of reason, but by the Jesuit rules of hierarchy and unreasoning obedience, self-suppression and self-hypnosis.

Socialism was the great clean, un-won truth of the 20th century; “socialism” was the foulest lie of the 20th century. Socialism is, remains, socialism; “socialism” was, of course, Stalinism.

For sixty and more years, socialism, in common discourse, was the “socialism” that existed in the USSR. The ideas conveyed by the words socialism and communism before Stalin established his system faded into the mists of pre-history, and “socialism” came to be the theory and practice of Stalinism — what became known in the 70s and 80s as “actually existing socialism”.

4. The old left and the new

The Marxist left developed its ideals and goals and norms from out of the programmes and goals of the defeated plebeian left in the bourgeois revolutions, right back to the Renaissance, the English Revolution of the 1640s and the French Revolution at the end of the 18th century (the Anabaptists, the Levellers and Diggers, the sans-culottes, Noel Babeuf). It had carried forward their drive for democracy and equality against the shallower pluto-democratic, bourgeois, versions of these ideas. Thomas Rainsborough had expressed this goal and this spirit beautifully during the “Putney Debates” at the end of the English Civil War: “I think that the poorest he that is in England hath a life to live as the greatest he...”

Fundamental to “old socialism” had been a conception of the capitalist system, as a regime under which, in order to live, workers are compelled to sell their labour-power to employers who own the means of production, exchange, and communications, and who, by setting the workers to work, get those workers to produce far more value than is paid to them as a wage. That system is regulated by fear — fear of poverty, deprivation, penurious old age, of the future of the young generation. It operates in the workplaces as a pitiless tyranny designed to exact, wring out, use, the labour power purchased by the capitalist — wage slavery.

Before the Russian Revolution, “socialism” was interchangeable with terms such as “the Cooperative Commonwealth”, the “Workers' Republic”, the “Republic of Labour”. It meant the reorganisation of the means of production, of the means of life, around which the citizens expend most of their time all over the world — under the collective control of the producers.

Old socialism proposed to substitute for capitalism and wage slavery common ownership of the means of production, distribution, and communication, and democratic common administration for the common good. Collective ownership by all of society is necessarily democratic ownership: it isn't “collective ownership” by those who “own” the state which administers the “collective” economy.

The democracy at every level of socialist society would, socialists believed, be profound and all-embracing. Where now, what Marxists call bourgeois-democracy is at its best a shallow and one-dimensional political democracy, socialism would remake the whole of society. Democracy would become real — real and full self-administration by the working class. Under socialism, socialists believed, there would be equality for all, irrespective of gender, race, sexuality. The sisterhood and brotherhood of all people would be realised. Reason, and not the blind forces of market economics, would govern society. The democratic Commonwealth of Labour would replace rule by aristocrats of the bank account, skin, inherited status and privileged, pre-empting education.

What, with their different methods, tempos, and perspectives, had all the different strands of socialism in common?

All of them — the socialist reformists such as Keir Hardie and Nye Bevan, no less than the revolutionaries — sought to abolish capitalism and the exploitation and wage-slavery on which it rested, and to replace it with a non-exploitative, rational, humane society.

Their ideas of what would replace capitalism differed greatly, for instance, as between anarchists and Marxists (though Marxists and revolutionary anarchists — which is not by any means all anarchists — agree on the ultimate goal, a state-free society). But all the socialists sought to replace private ownership of the means of production and exchange and the exploitation of the producers that goes with it, by collective social ownership by the workers themselves.

All of them, in one way or another, with one qualification or another, looked to the working class, the slave-class of the capitalist era, to achieve this great social revolution.

They saw themselves as educators and organisers of the working class, working for social betterment and for the socialist transformation of society.

Before the spread of the Stalinist plague, Marxist socialists were guided by adherence to the working class, to the working class side in the class struggle — always and everywhere and in all circumstances; and to the education of the labour movement in consistent democracy, in working-class political independence, and consistent anti-capitalist militancy.

Plekhanov, the founding father of Russian Marxism expounded the idea that governed what the Russian Marxist movement did and aimed to do. It was what all socialists, more or less, did and thought they existed to do.

“What is the socialist movement?... To a contemporary socialist the socialist movement does not look anything like it did to a [utopian] socialist in the [18]30s [for whom] ‘future history resolves itself into propaganda and the practical implementation of their social plans...’

“What did the [Marxists] see in it? Above all class struggle, the struggle of the exploited with the exploiters, the proletariat with the bourgeoisie. In addition they saw in it the inevitability of the impending triumph of the proletariat, the fall of the present bourgeois social order, the socialist organisation of production and the corresponding alteration in the relationships between people, i.e. even the destruction of classes, among other things.

“If, therefore, for the [Marxists] the whole future history of bourgeois society resolves itself in the struggle of the proletariat with the bourgeoisie, all their practical tasks are prompted by precisely this class struggle. Standing resolutely on the side of the proletariat, the new Socialists do everything in their power to facilitate and hasten its victory.

“But what exactly can they do? They “agitate, educate and organise” the working class and raise it to the position of an aspirant ruling class.

“A necessary condition for the victory of the proletariat is its recognition of its own position, its relations with its exploiters, its historic role and its socio-political tasks. For this reason the [Marxists] consider it their principal, perhaps even their only, duty to promote the growth of this consciousness among the proletariat, which for short they call its class consciousness.

“The whole success of the socialist movement is measured for them in terms of the growth in the class consciousness of the proletariat.

“Everything that helps this growth they see as useful to their cause: everything that slows it down as harmful. Anything that has no effect one way or the other is of no consequence for them, it is politically uninteresting.”

(GV Plekhanov: The Tasks of the Socialists in the Struggle Against the Famine in Russia, 1891)

5. The basic beliefs of old socialism

Marx had argued that socialism would grow out of advanced capitalist society, which had developed the forces of production far enough that want in the basic necessities of life could be abolished almost immediately; that socialism would be the creation of the mass of the people,

led by the working class, which would rule, could only rule, collectively and, by definition, therefore, democratically. That socialism would immediately destroy the old state machine, replacing it with an accountable system of working-class administration.

Marx uncovered the mechanics of the exploitative relationship between, on one hand, the owners of the social means of production, and, on the other, the sellers of labour power. The participants in the exchange are legally free and in law equal, and yet it is exploitative.

In a sentence: the worker sells his labour power to an employer, who puts him to work; his work produces more than it costs the capitalist to buy his labour power at the hourly or daily rate.

Marx explains: “The value of the labouring power is determined by the quantity of labour necessary to maintain or reproduce it, but the use of that labouring power is only limited by the active energies and physical strength of the labourer. The daily or weekly value of the labouring power is quite distinct from the daily or weekly exercise of that power, the same as the food a horse wants and the time it can carry the horseman are quite distinct. The quantity of labour by which the value of the workman’s labouring power is limited forms by no means a limit to the quantity of labour which his labouring power is apt to perform.

“[For example], to reproduce his labouring power, [a worker may need to produce new value equivalent to] working [three] hours daily... But... the capitalist has acquired the right of using that labouring power during the whole day or week. He will, therefore, make him work say, daily, [nine] hours. Over and above the [three] hours required to replace his wages, or the value of his labouring power, he will, therefore, have to work six other hours, which I shall call hours of surplus labour, which surplus labour will realise itself in a surplus value and a surplus produce [profit, interest, rent, etc.]

“The worker cannot become rich in this exchange, since, in exchange for his labour capacity as a fixed, available magnitude, he surrenders its creative power... Rather, he necessarily impoverishes himself... because the creative power of his labour establishes itself as the power of capital, as an alien power confronting him. He divests himself of labour as the force productive of wealth; capital appropriates it, as such...

“The productivity of his labour, his labour in general in so far as it is not a capacity but a motion, real labour, comes to confront the worker as an alien power; capital, inversely, realises itself through the appropriation of alien labour.”

The Marxian socialist programme is no more than the solution to this radical contradiction in bourgeois society, and the lesser contradictions at all levels which arise from it, which have shaped and continue to shape that society.

6. Bolshevism, Marxism and the Russian Revolution

Bolshevism, in power in Russia after 25 October (7 November) 1917, and taking the lead in establishing a new, Communist, International - the “Third International” — tried to reorganise the old socialist movement that had collapsed at the outbreak of war in 1914. Bolshevism and the Communist International saw themselves as the continuator of the best of the old movement — those that had held to their principles when European bourgeois civilisation broke down in 1914 — armed for the new time of open revolutionary battles.

The Bolshevik Communist International picked up many of the threads of earlier socialism, and wove them into a more or less coherent strategy of working-class struggle for power — the direct action of the French, British, Irish and American syndicalists, the political “syndicalism” of the De Leonites and Jim Larkin, the revolutionary parliamentarianism of Liebknecht, the sometimes acute criticism by communist-anarchists of the parliamentarians of the pre-1914 Socialist International, the concern with national liberation of such as James Connolly — all in previous socialist activity and theorising that was healthy, all that was above all indomitable in its commitment to the workers’ cause and in its will to fight the class struggle to working class, socialist victory.

This was at the start a living movement of self-respecting, experienced militants. It conducted its affairs according to reason; it took it for granted that honest differences of opinion inevitably arise even among very like-minded people honestly pursuing the same goals, and that they can only be resolved by reason, discussion, and democratic decision-making.

All present-day notions of both would-be left and the anti-Bolsheviks of socialist and communist popes possessing infallibility — and the power of coercion to compel compliance — arose in the era of triumphant Stalinist and bourgeois reaction. Every member of Lenin's Bolshevik party Central Committee of October 1917 had opposed him at some turning point or another, some of them even on the October insurrection itself. Trotsky too found himself opposed by all his close comrades at one point or another.

This is how Lenin, writing in 1907, defined the relationship between party democracy and majority rule in action.

“The principle of democratic centralism and autonomy for local Party organisations implies universal and full freedom to criticise, so long as this does not disturb the unity of a definite action... Criticism within the basis of the principles of the party programme must be quite free... not only at party meetings but also at public meetings.”

The Bolsheviks denounced bourgeois democracy and parliamentarism in the name of the fuller, direct democracy of workers' councils and only in the name of a better more potent democracy. Their criticism of bourgeois democracy would later, like so much else, be annexed and perverted into an absolute and unconditional disparagement and dismissal of “bourgeois democracy” and put to its own pernicious uses by totalitarian Stalinism.

The Russian working class, in its unprecedented creativity — for instance, in creating soviets (workers' councils) — and the Bolsheviks who led them to victory had in life found solutions (or, to put it at its weakest, pro-tem solutions) to many of the problems that had perplexed earlier socialist thinkers. The Communist International was experimenting, exploring, drawing provisional balance sheets when it was cut down by the Stalinist counter-revolution against the 1917 working-class revolution. But by the time of Trotsky's death at the hand of Stalin's assassin on 21 August 1940, the great socialist tradition had dwindled down to a few tiny organisations in, perhaps, a couple of dozen countries. It would dwindle further. Stalinism, which cut it down, would for most of the 20th century dwarf and overshadow socialism.

7. Old socialism and Stalinism

Lenin, Trotsky and the Bolsheviks did not believe that socialism was possible in the ex-Tsarist empire, backward and historically retarded, as it was. What they believed was that the workers could take power there, and make the first in a chain of revolutions that would encompass the advanced countries where socialism was possible. As Rosa Luxemburg, who was also the Bolshevik's friendly critic, wrote in 1918: “The fate of the revolution in Russia depended fully upon international events. That the Bolsheviks have based their policy entirely upon the world proletarian revolution is the clearest proof of their political far-sightedness and firmness of principle and of the bold scope of their policies”.

The working class revolutions in Europe — Germany, Italy, Hungary — between 1918-1923 were defeated. In isolation, the Stalinist mutation, a new form of class society emerged with collective property owned effectively by a privileged elite of exploiters of the working class and the farmers, who, in practice collectively “owned” the state which owned the economy. It triumphed by way of a bloody one-sided civil war against the workers of the USSR, and against the resistance of those Bolsheviks who held to the ideas under which they had made the October Revolution, Trotsky and his comrades. After World War Two Stalinism spread, rolling into Eastern and central Europe on the caterpillar tracks of Russian tanks and in Yugoslavia, China and other states by Stalinist organisations at the head of peasant armies winning civil wars.

“Socialism” after the victory of the bourgeoisie in the west and of Stalinism in the USSR and in the Communist International, was no longer the rule of the working people in a world created by advanced capitalism, as in Marx's and Lenin's conception of socialism it had to be, but the rule

of an oligarchy over the producers in underdeveloped or even pre-capitalist societies, with the historical mission of undertaking the development of those societies to what advanced capitalism had achieved. Values were turned inside out and upside down.

The place of “socialism” in history, the very shape and sequences of history as hitherto conceived by Marxists was radically revised. The idea of what the socialist militant was and did was turned inside out. Socialism was no longer, as in Marxism it had to be, necessarily the offspring of advanced capitalist society, impossible without what advanced capitalism achieves in history, not least the creation and social education of a working class that would create socialist society.

Where the Bolsheviks had believed only that the Russian workers could take power, as part of a wider social revolution in advanced capitalist Europe, this was improved, to the belief that the main task of socialism, following the experience of Stalin's “socialism in one country” Russia, was to do what capitalism had done in the “advanced countries” — to develop backward countries and enable them to catch up with and outstrip the advanced countries of capitalism.

“Socialism” became a thing of savage self-contradiction. “Marxism” became a pidgin religion whose paradoxes, conundrums and mysteries-of-the-faith could properly be understood only by those who approached them with the right “method”, frame of mind, and “dialectical” adaptability — those able to understand the special new meanings that now inhered in old words.

8. Socialism as state slavery

A bureaucracy collectively “owning” the state had expropriated the workers in the USSR, depriving them of all rights and using them far worse than the workers in any capitalist countries were used, worse, even than in Nazi Germany (as Trotsky wrote in the programme of the Fourth International, in 1938). It turned them into state slaves or (as Trotsky wrote in 1939) semi-slaves.

The new ruling class continued to call itself communist and Marxist; it defined and camouflaged its own savage rule over the working people as the rule of the working class over society; it represented its anti-socialist and anti-working class revolution as the living continuity of the October revolution.

By repeated purges, ideological bamboozlements, and by bribery and corruption, they took control of the Communist International, the powerful international network of revolutionary working-class organisations made up of people who had rallied to the Russian revolution.

Stalinism, totalitarian utopianism – and this is centrally important for what concerns us here, the state of socialism today — was in its role in the history of political institutions and ideas above all a movement of social and political misrepresentation and parody. The gap between what it was and what it claimed to be would, on the stage, have been a comedy of the blackest humour; in life it was stark tragedy that engulfed enormous masses of people.

In the USSR, and later in other Stalinist states, they ran fake trade unions, fake parties, fake elections, fake rule by the working class, fake national autonomies, and fake, utterly fake, socialism.

Stalinism, in its account of itself and what it was doing, was a gigantic historical masquerade, sustained for nearly six decades.

“Communism” changed in the 1920s and 30s from being a genuine revolutionary working-class movement into a series of totalitarian organisations in the capitalist states, working to serve the USSR and its leaders. Their own local leaders aspired to become what in the USSR the “communists”, the bureaucratic ruling class, were. They created immense ideological confusion in the working-class movement. They isolated the Left Opposition, and later the Joint Opposition of Trotsky, Zinoviev, Kamenev, and Krupskaya, and the international movement, led by Trotsky, from the mass army of would-be communists, who saw in the Stalinist parties the

local battalions of the Russian Revolution.

At first they used subtle political misrepresentation. Then they used violence and repression. It became increasingly reckless and intense, until in the years from 1935 onwards, it culminated in mass murder in the USSR, in Spain, and, on a much smaller scale, in other countries. At the end of World War Two, Stalinists in Vietnam and Greece massacred Trotskyists and assassinated individual Trotskyists and other socialist opponents in France, Belgium, Italy and the USA.

Throughout fascist and then Stalinist-ruled Europe, the cadres of Bolshevism, Trotskyism, were murdered. They did splendid deeds here and there in that Europe, for example in producing *Arbeiter und Soldat*, an underground paper for the German workers in uniform in the army of occupation in France, (an enterprise which cost the lives of two dozen Trotskyists, most of them German soldiers).

But those were mere episodes only, not part of, or harbingers of a great socialist movement. At the end of the Second World War Stalinism loomed in the world as a great and expanding power, surpassed only by the USA.

The USSR in 1939 made up a sixth of the world. At the end of an expansion which reached its peak with the proclamation of the Stalinist People's Republic of China in October 1949, but would not end until the Russian defeat in Afghanistan (1979-89), Stalinism controlled one-third of the surface of the earth.

It had mass parties, which were the main parties of the working class in a number of capitalist countries, France, Italy, Indonesia, etc.

9. Lenin and Anti-Utopian Marxism: the creative tension between science and utopianism

Marxist socialism and “political socialism” in general, the socialism that proposed to revolutionise capitalist society from within, rose necessarily on the grave of “utopian socialism”, the socialism that proposed to create socialist societies in colonies in some wilderness and compete from outside, by building a better society in parallel with capitalism, which one day it would supercede. Today the Marxist project itself is dismissed as utopian in the sense of unrealisable. Stalinism was a form of utopian socialism; so to an enormous extent is the would-be left.

One of the best accounts of the “anti-utopian” nature of authentic Marxism is Lenin's “State and Revolution”, written when he was forced to go into hiding in the middle of 1917. It is both demonstration and exposition of what living Marxism is.

The book is an argument that the leaders of the pre-1914 socialist movement had falsified the ideas of Marx and Engels on the state, and an attempt by the analysis of texts to re-establish what they really thought. An exercise in arid scholasticism, one might expect. Scholasticism, it is not. It is the opposite of that.

Lenin analyses the old texts to discern and establish what Marx and Engels really said. He traces the development of their opinions on the state towards the conclusions they drew from the experience of the Paris Commune, in 1871, namely, that the revolutionary working class could not simply take over the old bureaucratic state machine — the civil service, the army, the police — and make it serve them: the workers would, following the example of the Communards, have to break it up and replace it by a “Commune state”, self-administering working class democracy, without a permanent state bureaucracy; a self-armed people instead of a standing army. He relates the views of Marx and Engels, and the way their views evolved from point to point, to the experience that shaped those views. He assesses and judges their views in the light of those experiences and uses their method to shed light on his own situation.

For instance, Marx had thought that there could be a peaceful revolution in Britain and America — and perhaps, Holland, about which he felt he knew too little to judge. To the view put forward by Karl Kautsky, who was a scholastic in Marxism, that that settled it — Marx thought there

could and therefore there could be a peaceful revolution in those countries -- Lenin counterposed Marx's method, his way of arriving at that conclusion. To establish whether the opinion formed by Marx and Engels half a century earlier might still be valid, he analyses the way the institutions of these countries have evolved.

Why, he asks, did they think what they did then? He reconstructs their reasoning from their writings. Britain and the USA then had nothing like the typical state bureaucracy of the European countries, had small armies, and no great military-bureaucratic apparatus of state. He asks: is that still true? He establishes by concrete argument, from the facts, that it is not.

Repeatedly he argues — and this is what most concerns us here — that Marx and Engels were not utopian socialists, not panacea-mongers, advocates of ideal solutions plucked out of their imaginations, not advocates of an ideal world, but empirical scientists of society, who extrapolated from the actual world, from its tendencies and possibilities, building on the experience of the working class (especially of the French workers who had made or lived through a number of revolutions). Lenin explains why he thinks it is permissible to take that necessarily limited experience as representative.

(Incidentally, nobody who takes Lenin's way of working seriously, applying Lenin's way of approaching the work of Marx and Engels could be both a consistent "Leninist" and a "Leninolator", or any other sort of "olator". Consistent Lenin-olatry would carry its own antidote and thereby be its own negation!)

Within Marxism there is forever a tension between the empirical, scientific, sociological basis and the extrapolations and pre-figurations spun from them, which, of course, when they seem desirable, come to encompass hopes and feelings.

At which point might an extrapolation or projection that is considered desirable, and in which, therefore, people have invested their emotions and their lives, need to be revised in the light of subsequent experience? At which point might the governing ideas about the nature of capitalist social reality have to be abandoned? At which point might some or all extrapolations need to be jettisoned? What role would jettisoning some or all of the basic ideas or the extrapolations play in the contemporary class struggle? Would the jettisoning — prematurely or entirely mistakenly — by the Marxists work to defeat a desirable development, work to help the bourgeoisie in the class struggle with the workers? These of course are questions in the realm of judgment, opinion, argument, "character": there is no one answer at a given time.

For instance, the German socialist Eduard Bernstein concluded in the late 1890s that, though the labour movement was a force for the evolutionary transformation of capitalist society, by way of cumulative reforms, the whole notion of proletarian revolution, of a socialist negating of capitalism had been invalidated by experience: "the movement", he summed up his conclusions, is everything, the goal nothing.

Kautsky, Rosa Luxemburg, George Plekhanov, and many others, rejected that conclusion. They argued that Bernstein worked with a vulgar notion of evolution: real evolution necessarily includes revolutionary breaks, that Bernstein based himself on too limited an experience, that he was making an invalid induction.

In the Europe of two decades later, and greatly more so three decades later, as Bernstein was reaching the end of his life (1932) and Hitler was on the eve of taking control of Germany, Bernstein's thesis was unsustainable. Sixty years later it seemed valid again.

On the eve of World War One, Karl Kautsky, the leading Marxist of that epoch, postulated from the development of imperialism, a future "super-imperialism" that would peacefully organise the world. That idea did not win many supporters in the Armageddon of the World War, the succeeding international turmoil and the Second World War that broke our almost a quarter of a century after the first.

Ideas of smooth endless capitalist progress and prosperity formed in the last decades are now being toppled by the crisis that has engulfed us.

The point is that real Marxism is not utopia-mongering but rooted in the necessary evolution of

capitalist society. What is “Marxist” at a given time can only be established by argument and, ultimately by the test of experience.

Stalinism, cutting adrift from the dominant currents of history, flying in the face of the most fundamental Marxist ideas of the "shape" of history and of advanced capitalism as the nurturer of socialism and creator of its social and economic pre-requisites - Stalinism was a reactionary utopianism.

10. Stalinist Utopianism

Stalinism was a regression to pre-Marx “utopian socialism” — a bleak and strange mirage-utopianism on a gigantic scale, yes, but utopianism is what it was. Many of the features of Stalinism—like the collective-superman “Party of a new type” — could be understood by analogy with the traits of old utopian socialism.

The Bolsheviks knew and proved in practice that the Russian workers could take power; they did not “know” that socialism could be built in backward, and in addition civil-war-ruined Russia. They knew perfectly well it couldn't.

That isolated Russia, in which the Bolsheviks clung to power, should be built up and its economy developed was self-evident. The anti-Stalinist Bolsheviks were pioneer advocates that this should be done. That it could be done as far as the building of socialism, a socialism more advanced than the most advanced capitalism in its economy and its social relations, occurred to nobody before the end of 1924, when Stalin formulated the idea and the programme of “Socialism in One Country”.

Russia would be built up out of its deep backwardness and outstrip the capitalist world? It was the programme of the old utopian colony-builders who attempted in some wilderness to start society anew, in parallel to existing capitalist society. Socialism would come, so to speak, from outside capitalism, not from inside, not by the working class in advanced capitalism taking power and building on what had been achieved. The Marxist objections to it were as many as the lessons Marx and Engels had drawn from the experience of the old colony-builders, Owen, Cabet, Thompson.

In practical revolutionary politics it was objected to by Trotsky and others because it implied that Russia would remain isolated for many decades, that there would be no socialist revolution anywhere in that time, that capitalist armies would not militarily “intervene” in the process and so on. It implied that the communist parties would become “frontier guards” in their own areas for the “Socialism in One Country” Russian state.

Totalitarian-utopian Stalinism unravelled all of the assumptions and concerns of the old Marxist movement. It redefined the role of parties — in Russia as the agent of development, outside Russia as a significant network for the “defence”. It displaced the working class as the protagonist in the socialist movement and offered as its substitute, The Party, which might be tied to the working class but then again, might not, but in either case was the decisive, the irreplaceable agency. It implied redefining the relationship of the “party of a new type” to the working class: not to educate in order to develop consciousness and political independence but objects to be manipulated and used.

B. The political content of the Stalinist counter-revolution

1. The Stalin(ist)-refashioned left

Stalinism was the opium of the 20th century socialists. Stalinism was religious.

In 1920 the liberal-socialist Bertram Russell branded Communism as a religious movement akin to early Islam. That was not true then. The leaders of the Comintern, Lenin, Trotsky and others, dealt in fact, reason, logic, albeit leavened by daring extrapolation, and the will to attempt things of such enormous scale and scope that less daring people were intimidated at the very thought of what the Bolsheviks dared to do.

What was wrongly said of Bolshevism, falsely, unjustly, malevolently said, came to be true of Bolshevism's grave-digger, Stalinism.

From now on, blindly, fanatically, incorrigibly, with the religious fervour of a death- and Paradise-obsessed Islamist devoutly fighting a holy war, in which he thinks only death can bring him advantages in a wonderful afterlife, "Communists" championed a tyrannical state ruled by a narrow, intolerant, ignorant elite. For the religious fanatic, a personal afterlife, for the "Communist" a socialist future life for humanity, for both of them delusion.

The story is well-enough known amongst political people. But Stalinism and Stalinism's characteristic traits are seen as things of the past, attributes of a dreadful time and of a dreadful movement — of the past. It is not a matter of the past: the political mindset and the habits of thought — and hypnotic thoughtlessness — fostered and entrenched by Stalinism over the decades of its domination of "left-wing" politics, still dominate the "left" long after the collapse of Russian Stalinism.

The Stalinist nature and origin of the characteristics dominant in the present day "left", its characteristic mindset, its habits of thought and lack of thought, and its methods, are obscured by the fact that most of that "left" is made up of the seeming heirs of the great historical antagonist of Stalinism, Trotsky.

That Stalinist "left" came to be the predominant "Marxism", and, with more or less distancing criticism of it, the common conception of socialism, for the two-thirds of the 20th century that remained after Stalin's counter-revolution was accomplished. The anti-Stalinist Bolshevik left was extirpated or marginalised, for generations, or transformed by the pressure of Stalinism and by its example. It was restyled out of all recognition.

Living in a political world hegemonised by Stalinism the old distinctions between what was "left" and what "right" — always imprecise and conventional as such terms are, and by their nature must be — was more or less destroyed. Major aspects of what had been the old left and the old right were merged; they began to crossbreed, producing often strange and unexpected hybrids.

The "left" today, including most of those with Trotskyist movement roots to them, grew out of the Stalinist revolution in the politics of "socialist" revolution which denuded it of class, of integrity, of method, of programme, of standards, of its own real history, and of its old objectives. That Stalinist counter-revolution in the politics of revolution took place on three fronts—social and economic in the USSR and political all over the world in the labour movement and on the left.

The difference between the old socialism and the movement reshaped by the Stalinist counter-revolution was not only in day to day activities and in programme, but in the mindset of "socialism". The shift in mindset is the point here, because much of it still dominates the left.

As the capitalist world went into its deep mid-century economic, political, social and military crisis—a crisis that many, friend and foe alike, thought was terminal — fully a sixth of the world was already "socialist": a parallel world was being created in Russia. In consequence, Stalinist influence came to be far wider than the labour movement and socialist and "Communist" circles". It extended in the 1930s to the US liberal publications the Nation and the New Republic, the liberal daily in London, the News Chronicle, the New Statesman and the Labour left publication Tribune. Tribune was a Stalinist paper up to the Hitler-Stalin pact and World War Two.

Much was made of the contrast between the "communist" and the capitalist world. In the USSR there was planned progress, spectacular progress, not capitalist chaos and regression. There was no "mass unemployment", no great slump, no economic semi-paralysis. The post-capitalist future was already in being and, as one liberal admirer, H N Menken reported after a visit, "I have seen the future and it works". Many in the west who had scorned, rejected, or fought actively against the October Revolution of the Russian working class, rallied to the Stalinist

counter-revolution and its stultified economy — which had the “merit” that its waste and destruction were not blazoned forth across the world, as those of capitalism were.

Those — Trotsky and others, surprisingly few others — who pointed to the realities of Russia, to the semi-slave and chattel slave labour conditions, the helplessness before the all-powerful state to which the workers were reduced were shouted down and driven off the highways of public discourse. The virtual ignorance and indifference with which the liberal establishment as well as the broad left responded to the Stalinist terror and totalitarianism in Russia in the 30s is one of the oddest things in its history.

The anti-Stalinist left was stifled. George Orwell’s account of his difficulty in getting his account of the Stalinist police terror in Republican Spain published is nowadays well-known. When Trotsky pointed out the elements of Jew-baiting in the Moscow Trials, he was denounced by even rightwing Jewish leaders. An example of just how topsy-turvy the old left-right polarisation became is the fact that Victor Serge’s report on the Stalinist counter-revolution was circulated in Britain by “The Right Book Club”, a weak would-be counterpoint to the Stalinist-controlled and very influential Left Book Club. Meanwhile, many on the political right approved of Stalin because he was destroying the Bolshevik left. Mussolini at the time of the Moscow Trials claimed Stalin as one of his disciples. Some Russian émigré fascists made the discovery that Stalinism was Russian fascism and Stalin their “Führer”.

It was in Russia that the future of humanity was, somehow, emerging, being forged by Stalinism. Miraculously, courtesy of the miracle-working Stalinist “Party of a New Type”, socialist Russia had leapfrogged ahead to show the more economically-developed countries the way to the future. By 1950 a third of the world was “socialist”. Countries like China, which were among the least developed, now appeared to be marching at the head of history’s column; the losers so far in the modernisation and industrialisation of the world, were turning into the winners, humankind’s pioneers and leaders.

So tens and tens of millions of people all over the world believed. Stalinism’s success reshaped the thinking of the left everywhere. Even those who in Trotsky’s time had been the implacable critics and denouncers of Stalin’s Russia. The Fourth International had by about 1950 come to believe that Russia and the other states were irreversibly “in transition” to socialism. We are concerned here with the changes Stalinism brought in attitudes — political morality, standards of behaviour, mores, mindset of the left.

Why did the Stalinist counter-revolution bother to maintain an international “revolutionary” “communist” movement at all? It was of enormous value to the Russian state to have subservient movements in most countries and sometimes mass movements; legions of adherents and militant propagandists across the world such as no other state could match.

How exactly did the Stalinists achieve their “revolution in the politics of revolution”? What was changed? What was new in the socialist working class movement?

2. The politics of anything-goes expediency

In the place of all that the old socialism had done and tried to do, of the work of educating and organising the working class into political independence and anti-capitalist politics, now was put expediency — the brute expediency of the Russian ruling class. There was nothing in old socialism that could not be sacrificed, turned inside out, stood on its head.

The USSR and its external parties, controlled and, to a serious extent, financed by the Russian ruling class, came to be everything. The Stalinists concentrated all that was “nihilistic”, Jesuitical, Machiavellian into a world outlook in which rifled remnants of a bowdlerised Marxism were recast as the philosophy of manipulation in the service of the “socialist fatherland”, for use by the “Party of a new type”, which was in the jailed Gramsci’s unfortunate title for a work of genuine Marxism, “the Modern Prince — the new protagonist that replaced the working class.

Old agitational and propagandist techniques of manipulation were brought to new levels of perfection by the Stalinist rulers and their agents and allies across the world. Politics, history

and, they thought, "History", were freed from the primitive slavery to facts. Politics that were virtually fact-free and virtually truth-free became possible on a mass scale. Great political campaigns could now be and were lied into existence. To be sure, this was not something unknown before Stalinism; but the Stalinists, beginning with their lies about what the Soviet Union was, made it an all-embracing permanent way of political life.

Truth did not exist, only "class truth", which meant "party truth", which meant Russian bureaucratic truth, which meant anything they thought would be useful. Consistency was a vice of lesser, unemancipated mortals. Now you could say and do anything and it was your political and moral duty to do whatever was most useful. Logic? Anything was logical so long as you got the "context" right and understood the "historical process". It was all a matter of "perspectives". Dialectics, comrade!

Truth? No such thing! There is no "objective" truth, only shifting, relative truth. And therefore? Applying the rules of Stalinist dialectics, and putting things properly in "context" and "perspective", anything that is useful can be shown to be true. Morality? No such thing! What serves the struggle is moral. The end justifies the means.

History? There is no "objective" history, only class history. Therefore? "History is only current organisational needs read backwards", as one Stalinist professor put it. Therefore, to get the most useful history, select, suppress, construe, spin, mythologise, lie and misrepresent as much as necessary. Wherever Stalinists had the preponderant influence, there was a giant intellectual step backwards to the standards and norms of the pietistic, authority-fixated scholastic ideologues of the Dark Ages who saw nothing wrong in interpolating into ancient texts, for the greater glory of God and of the Church.

Wherever the Stalinist influence ran, it worked to falsify history. If it is true that those who do not learn from history are apt to repeat it, then those who have had their own and other history falsified simply can not learn from it: they have had their retrospective, their historical, eyes put out.

At different times Trotsky described this condition as "syphilis" and "leprosy". In the summaries of the proper revolutionary communist approach which he wrote in the 1930s, the demand to be truthful and to "be true, in little things as in big ones" is always central. The fact that such a "demand" had to be made and that it was made only by a tiny pariah minority, as incapable of imposing the necessary norms of behaviour as they were incapable of doing what they knew had to be done to defend the working class, was one measure of how far the "Marxist" movement had fallen, how deeply it had regressed, and how much had to be done to restore its health.

Trotsky, a voice crying out of the grave of Bolshevism and old socialism contended against the anti-morality of Stalinism: "Permissible and obligatory are those and only those means, we answer, which unite the revolutionary proletariat, fill their hearts with irreconcilable hostility to oppression, teach them contempt for official morality and its democratic echoers, imbue them with consciousness of their own historic mission, raise their courage and spirit of self-sacrifice in the struggle. Precisely from this it flows that not all means are permissible. When we say that the end justifies the means, then for us the conclusion follows that the great revolutionary end spurns those base means and ways which set one part of the working class against other parts, or attempt to make the masses happy without their participation; or lower the faith of the masses in themselves and their organization, replacing it by worship of the 'leaders'."

The Stalinists answered not with arguments but with lies, abuse, blows and bullets, and in Trotsky's case, with an ice-pick through his skull.

Much of the popularly accepted history of workers' and other struggles is still today shot through with Stalinist myths, lies, anathemas and demonology: for instance, the Spanish working class revolution of 1936- 7, which was bloodily suppressed, is buried in the handed down concept from that time of "The Spanish Civil War" (in which the Stalinists and some other sensible people encountered a little local difficulty in Barcelona in May 1937, and dealt with it with the proper and necessary civil-war severity.)

There was, indeed, a Spanish Civil War, but there was also the most important working class revolution since 1917. There was never any honest self-criticism and analysis of acknowledged mistakes; there was no possibility of democratic discussion other than “discussion” authorized by the leaders from time to time.

The faculty for recognising and correcting mistakes atrophied, along with the old ideas of socialism. If everything is decided by what the rulers of the USSR think best serves them at a given moment, then starkly contradictory positions — the most notorious example: anti-Nazi, then pro-Nazis, then anti-Nazi again, in 1939-41 — may indeed have all been equally “correct” and all perfectly self-consistent from a Russo-centric point of view.

The Marxist standards of measurement were no part of it— the standards and criteria that have the working class and its social and political development at their heart. If they fall into disuse — or if the ascendancy of other criteria and standards makes their employment impossible — then we cannot recognise our mistakes and where we went wrong. The historical memory of the working class is destroyed, or worse, falsified, and that adds to the tremendous difficulties which its existence as the basic wage-slave class of bourgeois society, a society where 'upward mobility' is sometimes possible for some members of the working class, already places in the way of the working class developing an independent political identity.

Trotsky truly said that the revolutionary party — a real revolutionary party — is the memory of the working class. The Stalinist parties were the parties of enforced amnesia, hysterical delusion, of the substitution of historical myths and lies for the memory of a working class socialist movement which is truly itself, and knows what it is, and therefore has no need to lie about it, either to itself or anyone else, a movement which accumulates experience and learns, and unlearn, from its experience, and from its own mistakes as it goes along.

That is one of the reasons for the tremendous regression in working-class consciousness in the late 20th century. When George Orwell wrote about the “memory hole” in 1984, and about the systematic rewriting of history to get it into line with the eternally changing now, he invented nothing. He merely read off, and gave an imaginary physical expression — physically redoing and up-dating old newspapers — to what he saw happening in and around the Stalinism-infected labour movements and in the USSR.

What Stalinism did to socialism

1. Stalinism was utopianism

We have seen that Stalinism was a form of “utopian socialism” — totalitarian utopian socialism — on a vast scale. The name which its advocates gave to that utopianism was “Socialism in One Country”.

The Marxist project of subverting and overthrowing advanced capitalism from within gave place to the Stalinist project of building up backward Russia in a long-term competition from outside with advanced capitalism.

In that work, the Communist Parties, which had been founded in and after the First World War to overthrow capitalism, now had only the role of supporting the USSR, in every and any way necessary. If socialism was to be built “in one country”, then there would, by definition, be no other socialist revolutions for a whole epoch.

That meant supporting the Stalinist ruling class — of whose system the 1938 founding programme of the Trotskyist Fourth International wrote that it differed from fascism only “in more unbridled savagery”.

This core utopianism shaped and reshaped everything else. I will list the main ways in which it transformed or negated Old Socialism.

2. Absolute anti-capitalism: reactionary-romantic a-historical anti-capitalism

We have seen that for Marxists advanced capitalism is the irreplaceable mother of our socialism. And not a good mother: a poisonous old harridan-spider who eats her own young! Or tries her best to!

There were communists before Marx and Engels. There were utopians and blueprint-peddlers; there were also activists such as Auguste Blanqui, for whom Marx and Engels had great and well-merited respect. But the Blanquists' idea of the road to communist revolution was that, whenever the revolutionary communist secret society had enough guns, gunpowder and fighters to put up barricades and rise in rebellion, it would do that at the first politically favourable moment.

They had no idea of the necessary evolution of capitalist society, of its forces of production, as the irreplaceable ground-preparer for socialism; no idea of the necessity of the social, intellectual and political preparation of the proletariat through both capitalist evolution and communist education and organisational work, to make it able to seize power and replace capitalist society with working-class socialist rule.

Marxism sees the rise of bourgeois society and of the bourgeoisie on the ruins of feudalism as a great step forward for humankind. Among other things, it began to prepare the objective prerequisites of socialism. It created bourgeois freedom of the individual, freedom of speech, assembly, press, and religion. (It is true, of course, that those freedoms, those "Rights of Man and of the Citizen", were not won by the female half of humankind for many, many decades after they were won by men).

The bourgeois revolutions were usually won by the efforts of the plebeians, and the "bourgeois" freedoms were won, or their extension to the whole of the people was won, by the efforts of the working classes.

Reactionary anti capitalism or absolute anti-capitalism in the 20th century was two things close to what the Communist Manifesto, in the 19th century, called "reactionary socialism".

Socialism became possible only when capitalism had created a mass proletariat and created means of production which, liberated of the drives and unreason of capitalism, can create abundance for all in the basics of life.

The programme of abolishing bourgeois society depended on whether or not that society was advanced enough and objectively capable of generating something better and more progressive than itself. On a world scale, in the 20th century, it was. In Russia, though the workers could and did take power, it was not.

The Bolsheviks' conception of the Russian revolution was that the spread of the revolution to advanced capitalist Europe would link Russia to advanced worker-ruled societies, of which Russia would then become a backward appendage. The implication embedded in Socialism in one Country was the opposite of that.

Now Russia would advance and develop and grow towards socialism on its own strength. The Bolshevik Left Opposition criticised the cutting off by Stalinism of the world market from Russian development. Autarky became a fixed principle of other Stalinists — in China, for three decades over the "high Stalinist" period, for example.

And for the Stalinist movement the programme of abolishing advanced bourgeois society, objectively ripe for socialism, was a commitment to create... a replica of a Russia where Stalinism had wiped out all the conquests of liberty and the human and democratic rights of the citizen — and of economic enterprise — and replaced it with Stalinist totalitarianism. In France this programme was sometimes called the policy of "liberticide". That is what it was. Reactionary anti-capitalism: an "alternative" development to capitalism that was in a thousand ways, and not least in terms of liberty and democracy, a regression to pre-capitalist society.

3. The suppression of the working class viewpoint and class politics and its replacement by a sectarian-utopian outlook

The axis on which everything now revolved was not the class struggle, not the education of the working class, not the development of working-class political independence, not the centrality of the working class, the protagonist of “old Socialism”, but whatever would best serve the USSR. Class criteria were obsolete.

What in old socialism had been attributed to the actual working class, was now attributed to the USSR and its rulers.

For all practical purposes the “working class” was a cipher, a notional thing in whose name another class, the Russian bureaucratic autocracy, acted.

In the 1930s this approach led to blocking with the German Nazis against the Social Democrats. At various periods in the mid-1930s and after the creation of cross-class Popular Fronts in France, Spain, Britain and other countries became the goal of the Communist Parties.

What were Popular Fronts? With or without the formal involvement of the Communist Party, they were the broadest possible bloc of middling or right-wing and labour or socialist parties, around the axis of a very limited programme (and for their “communist” supporters mainly a negative one: anti-fascism).

In Britain, the CP wanted to include the Labour Party, the Liberals, and the “progressive wing” of the Tory Party in the broad alliance. As Trotsky pointed out, this put them to the right of the Labour right wing, who wanted a Labour government.

The truth is that even right wing bourgeois liberals were comparatively progressive compared to the Stalinist parties, whose victory would have led to the replications of the Russian Stalinist regime. But our concern here is with the influence of the Stalinists in pulping the idea of a class politics among a broader left — their influence on people like Nye Bevan, for instance, the late-40s Labour minister who founded the NHS, who was expelled from the Labour Party as a Popular Frontist in 1939.

The Stalinists perverted the idea that in history the bourgeoisie plays a progressive role and made it something entirely arbitrary: a given bourgeoisie was good or bad, historically progressive or reactionary, depending on its relations, for now, with the USSR. They even found good and bad, patriotic and traitorous fascists!

In France, the CP appealed to “patriotic” French fascists — that is, those French fascists who were not hooked up with Nazi Germany — to join their popular front. The consequence of the Popular Front period was the abandonment and destruction of even nominal commitment to independent working-class politics.

The later Stalinists found “good” bourgeoisies primarily in the Third World countries emerging from colonialism, but also, for example, in the 26-County Irish state. The bourgeoisie there was wretchedly stunted, and in social and political terms very reactionary, relentlessly grinding down the proletariat of the cities and towns.

It preened itself in the heroic light of the Irish rebellions which itself and its ancestors had played no part in, or opposed and denounced. (For example, the Irish Independent, the paper of the Catholic-nationalist bourgeoisie, after the suppression of the 1916 Rising, had called on the British to shoot the wounded socialist and trade-union leader James Connolly).

It allowed the Catholic hierarchy to run the nearest thing to a theocracy in Europe, not excluding clerical-fascist Franco Spain. It lived by exporting meat — cattle and people, hundreds of thousands of people, wretchedly educated, cast adrift on the tide.

But it was out of step with Britain because of the partition of the country. Decisively it took a neutralist line in foreign policy, standing out against great pressure to let NATO have bases in

the 26 Counties. You couldn't be more "progressive" than that!

So for decades the Stalinists — in Ireland and among the Irish in Britain through the CP's Irish front organisation, the Connolly Association — devoted themselves to promoting the idea that the Irish bourgeoisie ran "the most progressive state in Western Europe".

4. The "party of a new type" was substituted for the working class as protagonist

For Marxists, though party and class are not the same thing, there is an unbreakable link between them. "The Communists... have no interests separate and apart from those of the proletariat as a whole," as the Communist Manifesto puts it.

Not so the Stalinist parties. The Communist Parties were "Bolshevised" in the early mid 20s, and completely remoulded by the end of the decade. The idea of "the party" now became "the party of a new type", an entity distinct from the working class, as the protagonist in the socialist revolution. The "parties" were Stalinist armies — in some countries, very large armies — operating with mechanical discipline under the command of Moscow.

The Jesuits demanded "Poverty, Chastity and Obedience" from their militant priests. With Stalinism, "discipline and obedience", and often poverty, and unlimited self-sacrifice, came to be the prime qualities of the militant in its parties. The old idea of the party member as an educated, self-respecting, thinking militant, retaining the right and the duty to think and argue and dispute even while acting as a disciplined executor of the democratic will of the majority of the organisation or of the elected leadership acting within its proper competence — that was condemned as "petty bourgeois", or as "Trotskyite" sabotage" of the proletarian movement.

Working class "discipline" now meant adherence to the "party line", whatever it was, and the surrender of every old working-class and socialist position, loyalty, instinct, conscience, to "The Party" and its leaders. For them, political life came to be an endless succession of Jacob-like acts of obedience to a savage God — but where God in the Bible relented, sparing Jacob's son, Isaac, once Jacob had agreed to cut his throat as a sacrifice to him, the Stalinist Moloch demanded that the blood be drained and many millions of Isaacs eviscerated on its altar.

The propensity to reason and to think politically beyond the decision to submit to "discipline" and rationalise "the line", variously and repeatedly, was eradicated in the militants of such parties and in the parties as collectives. Stalinist "democratic centralism" meant military-style discipline and hierarchy in any and all conditions, with politics essentially the province of the leadership only — and, ultimately, in all essentials, of Moscow only. There was no provision for what members would do if the leaders were mistaken. Only Moscow could anoint and remove a CP leadership.

5. Annexation of the Marxist criticism of capitalism to the Stalinist — not the socialist — programme

In the beginning of modern socialism is the Marxist-communist critique of capital and capitalist society. It consists of a negative and a positive side — the negative criticism of what exists, and the positive alternative, the socialist programme of working class self-emancipation.

The positive proposals are, for Marxists, extrapolated from the criticism of capitalism. Marx refused to make any detailed picture of the future post-capitalist society, dismissing the idea as utopianism. The future society would evolve out of the expropriation by the workers of the expropriators (the bourgeoisie), and out of the society in which that revolution was made. We have seen what Lenin wrote of that aspect of Marxism.

But the Marxist critique of capital, rooted in advanced bourgeois society and the needs of the working class in that society, and the Marxist working-class programme, can be separated. The positive working-class Marxist programme can be cut away from the negative criticism and condemnation of capitalism.

The programme of another class can be attached to the anti-capitalism — indeed, of a number

of other classes or fragments of classes. Fascism, for example, demagogically criticises capitalism, attributing what it denounces to “Jews”, “Jewish finance”, etc.

Among people still calling and thinking themselves communists, valid criticism of capitalism and of capitalist democracy can be combined with positive support and advocacy of worse. Stalinism was worse.

One consequence of the combination was the creation among communists of a comprehensive dualism that was a political split personality. Things given heartfelt condemnation in capitalist society were defended in the Stalinist world.

Genuinely indignant at wrongs and ruling class crimes in Britain, would-be communists simultaneously defended similar and far worse things in the USSR, China, etc. The less worldly-wise simply denied what they didn't want to know; the sophisticated ones might, in a lucid moment, have summed up their attitude like this: the concentration camps, jails and torture chambers of a socialist state are not the same thing as identical things that, under capitalism, are damnable.

Stalinism took over and demagogically exploited the Marxist and communist criticism of capitalism and bourgeois democracy, and put its own programme, its utopia, itself, and a drive to replicate the Russian system in the place of the Marxist programme of expanded democracy and working-class self-ruling socialism.

Where communists criticise bourgeois democracy, we criticise it for not being really mass democracy. We criticise not representative government, but the limitations, class bias, one-dimensionality and hypocrisies. We counterpose to it mass democracy, direct self-rule.

Even the “dictatorship of the proletariat”, for Lenin and Trotsky and the Bolshevik Party, meant only the dictatorship of the working class, a class dictatorship of the mass of the people, exercised democratically, by way of what Lenin called “a state of the Paris Commune type”. It meant “dictatorship” only in the sense of political rule outside the existing laws that protect the bourgeoisie and bourgeois property, overruling those laws and old norms where necessary by direct force.

Disparaging bourgeois democracy, Stalinism counterposed to it not working-class democracy but lawless perpetual bureaucratic dictatorship. Where the communist programme stipulated, and socialism as a social system required, a collectivised economy run and owned democratically, the Stalinists put in its place a collectivised economy run by a totalitarian autocracy.

The “communist” parties, building support as critics of capitalism, complemented that critique with a non-socialist, Stalinist alternative, much of it, as we will see, derived from what had been the social and political Right.

6. Superman-saviours

The Internationale, insisting on the basic truth of Marxist socialism — “the emancipation of the proletariat must be the work of the proletariat itself” — declares:

“No saviour from on high deliver us/
No faith have we in prince or peer/
Our own right hand the chains must sever/
Chains of hatred, greed, and fear”.

Stalinism counterposed to that a “leader” principle. The cult of individuals, in the first place of Stalin, followed by many other Stalins, including Mao and “Fidel”, became in the Stalinist system as intense and all-pervasive as it is in fascism. It is often now forgotten that even Stalinist leaders in countries like France, the USA, and Britain had their own miniature cults, around people like Thorez, Browder, and Pollitt.

7. Substitution of “Party-Marxism” for Marxism

Restating the basic idea of the old socialism and communism, in the programme he wrote for the Trotskyist movement in 1938 Leon Trotsky insisted that it was a cardinal rule for Marxists to “be guided”, not by the interests of “the party”, but “by the logic of the class struggle”. There is at any given moment an objective truth, and for Marxists it cannot be dismissed just because it is inconvenient to “the party”.

But in Stalinist politics, everything inconvenient to the USSR and its parties was buried under lies, under an enormous accumulation of lies.

Marxism, as a guide to analysis, and reason itself, were replaced by Authority — party authority, the authority of party leaders and ultimately of Moscow. They laid down the line, sanctified selected texts, interpreted those they blessed, and told the comrades what, “dialectically”, they meant “here” and “now”. This was Stalinist “Party Marxism”.

Mystification and mumbo-jumbo became a central part of the “Marxism” of the Communist Parties. “Marxism” came to be the esoteric knowledge of a secular priesthood who alone could decide what it meant and what adherence to it implied in politics for any given situation.

The Catholic Church has a name for those of its doctrines that defy the rules of logic, things that, by everyday standards and to the untutored human mind, are outright gibberish. The “Trinity”, the dogma that God is both one divine person and, simultaneously, “three divine persons in one God”; or the belief that though the bread remains bread by every test of human senses, still each little piece of bread really is (is “host to”) the real body and real blood of Jesus Christ — these are “mysteries of religion”. They belong to a higher order of things. The bishops know better; the cardinals understand. The Pope is guided by God himself in these matters. These things are beyond you and your puny reason, little man!

That is what the Stalinists said too, in their own way. Their term for it was “Marxist dialectics”. Dialectics, the logic of motion and development, the logic that puts formal logic in its real, evolving, moving, changing, context, became in the Stalinist system an ever-shifting swamp of moral, political, social, historical and intellectual relativism.

It all depends, comrade! Stalin’s 1939 alliance with Hitler is an outright betrayal of the anti-fascist struggle? Not at all! As the Great Stalin said: “Germany did not attack France and Britain; France and Britain attacked Germany, and it is they who are responsible for the present war”. Put it in context and you will see that objectively Hitler has capitulated to the Soviet Union: that is the inner dialectical meaning of the Hitler-Stalin pact, comrade! (See for example R Palme Dutt’s editorials in the Communist Party journal Labour Monthly in the months immediately after the Pact. And the report of the February 1940 “anti-war” conference of nearly 900 labour movement people: Labour Monthly, March 1940).

Strike breaking is outright treason to the working class? Not at all: strike-breaking is in this situation the highest form of class consciousness! As Harry Pollitt, the Secretary of the Communist Party of Great Britain, put it: “Today it is the class-conscious worker who will cross the picket line”.

At least we can be certain of one thing: the big capitalists and the financiers are in all circumstances the enemy? It depends, comrade! It depends. In the period of the US-USSR alliance, Earl Browder, secretary of the Communist Party of the USA proclaimed that he would gladly shake the hand of the notorious and hitherto much hated financier J Pierrepont Morgan. Class treason? Not at all, comrade! It flows from the Russian-US alliance. And there is nothing more central to the cause of socialism, and therefore to the cause of the working class, than that. Is there? Browder’s proclamation is the highest form of class consciousness!

Things are not always what they may seem to you, comrade little man!

And so on. And so on. In fact, it was an eternal metaphysical dance of rationalisation around whatever the Russian autocracy did and said. Only an autocratic, Great Russian chauvinist state, deeply hostile to the workers outside Russia, as to those inside Russia, could have demanded from the Communist Parties in the capitalist states such a self-gutting mode of

existing and operating. It pulverised and destroyed the norms and standards of socialism and of working-class democracy. It did the same with the standards of reasons and intellect on which Marxism stood and which it needed if it was to sustain and renew itself.

In 1936, 1937 and 1938 Stalin put the surviving leaders of the Russian October Revolution on trail as traitors. Most of them were shot.

Now CP members had to accept as an all-defining article of their socialist faith an absurdity as mind-bending as the doctrine of the Trinity — that all the leaders of the Russian revolution in 1917 and after, except Lenin and Sverdlov, both safely dead, and one or two others, and Stalin, “Lenin’s faithful disciple”, had been agents of hostile foreign government. Accept it or break with “The Party”, “The Revolution”, and “Communism”.

Russia and its rulers, whoever they were, whatever they were, whatever they did, could do no wrong. That conviction was the lodestar. Philby in 1933 saw very clearly how things were — and faced the implications. So, if less lucidly, did vast numbers of other would-be communists.

The “cadre” of the CPs, good decent well-meaning people most of them, initially honest but insufficiently self-examining militants surrendered themselves body, mind and soul, to “The Party”. They became in politics de-politicised political sleep walkers. The true portrait of a mainstream 20th century “revolutionary” is that of a rigidly controlled, and rigidly self-controlled, “communist”, whose functional politics was a blind loyalty to the government of a foreign country and to a political apparatus, the CP, its franchised local representatives, both of which were thought to embody socialism and could be trusted to lead the workers on to socialism. “The Party of a New Type”, comrade!

The USSR and “The Party”, the USSR’s party, these were the fixed reference points in a world in which politics and policies were mere artefacts to be used, or jettisoned, as Stalin thought fit...

At each turn there was of course a shake out. But the hard core remained, and was continually replenished. They learned to think according to Stalinist “dialectics”. Everything was relative, forever in flux, in line with Russia’s foreign policy needs. These once-critically-thinking, rebellious, individually and collectively aspiring people surrendered everything to those they took for the pre-ordained leaders of the world socialist revolution — and by doing that, they became the very opposite of what they started out to be, working-class revolutionary socialist militants.

A whole new, reshaped mutant political species numbering many millions was made and bred all across the world. Details would be different from person to person, from country to country, CP to CP, but the twisted utopianism and corrupted personal idealism embodied in the “utopian socialist” fetish of the USSR, accepting it as the measure of all things, now and in the future, and its local CP, its vicar in a given country, its franchised sub-group, was common to them all. It was what made them Stalinists, whatever detailed politics they were promoting.

Millions revolted against capitalism and wanted to fight for socialism. Their political spirit and energy, mesmerised by the utopian delusion about socialism a-building in “Workers’ Russia”, was annexed, with their willing and sometimes fervent agreement, by the Stalinist movement, at the core of which was the Stalinist ruling class of the “USSR”. The revolt was transmuted into something else, into something other than itself, into its opposite.

The quotient of un-reason was kept at delusional level by the necessary self-defence of labelling as “bourgeois propaganda” all news and facts about the USSR, etc., that were uncongenial and in contradiction to the teachings of the Stalinist church.

The typical Stalinist-movement militant was depoliticised, irresponsible, crassly ignorant of the socialism she and he sought to serve, and therefore, an obedient tool in the hands of the Russian Stalinist ruling class and its franchised “Communist Parties”.

These were “communists” who — never mind what they thought they were — fought not for a cause and for principles consciously understood and used to measure societies, organisations,

people, political events and themselves, but for a fetish. The fetish of the USSR and its “communist” parties throughout the world had in their minds and feelings replaced the great socialist cause and come to substitute for it. They might have adopted an inside-out version of the catch cry of Eduard Bernstein, the right wing “revisionist” of old socialism, who said: the movement is everything, the goal (socialism) nothing. Now the USSR and “the Party” was everything, the working class movement nothing.

W B Yeats’ play “Caitlin Ni Houlihan” tells of a Queen who surrenders her soul in the cause of her people. Generations of CP members did just that, without fully knowing that they did it, and without getting, without ever having had even a remote chance of getting, what they thought their self-surrender and self-sacrifice would bring — working-class socialism.

It is impossible not to sympathise and empathise with such people on a human level, and with their tragedy, which was also the tragedy of humankind in the mid-Twentieth Century. Impossible not to find something almost heroic in the doggedness of the best and — necessarily — least critical-minded and most self-hypnotised of them. That is what makes the story tragic — the terrible, murdering, effect on the cause which they sought to serve, of the depoliticised, soul and mind-surrendering, operationally mindless, way they worked for it.

But, even so, they were thinking, reasoning beings. They have equivalents now. They made political choices. Even if their thinking never got beyond the “Kim Philby position”, that “the USSR is the measure of all things socialistic”, and that “Stalin” — like the Catholic Pope when speaking from St Peter’s Chair on “matters of faith and morals” — “could not be wrong”, thinking people is what they were. They made choices which meant their own political destruction as socialists and contributed to the degradation and rot of socialism, so far for generations.

Two lines from a fine song by an unteachable Stalinist, Ewan McColl, about miners entombed in a pit disaster, almost sums up their tragedy:

“Through all their lives they dug a grave,

Two miles of earth for a marking stone.”

The present state of the labour movement — and much of the contemporary kitsch left — is the marking stone over the grave which they inadvertently dug for socialism in the 20th century.

8. Greatly strengthened one-sided, arbitrary, unstable pacifism

Socialists and communists are natural “pacifists”, in the sense that we want relations between states to be governed by reason and agreement and compromise rather than by war.

But to make a cardinal all-defining principle of pacifistic methods is to disarm peoples who can only win liberation or emancipation, or avoid conquest, by war. It is to preach support for the status quo until those in power can peacefully be persuaded to agree to change. And in history most pacifists have rallied to wars once they have started.

Socialists therefore came to see pacifism as a treacherous snare. The British pacifist opponents of the First World War did rather better than the old guard Marxists around Henry Hyndman, who self-blinkeredly supported the war as an international “police action” against German militarism. Even so, pacifism erected into the central pillar of a world outlook is for socialists a nonsense or a hypocrisy. So the Bolshevik Communist International taught.

For the Stalinists, pacifism was a force to be manipulated and appealed to against bourgeois governments, in any case when the USSR was the antagonist of their own country’s government. In Britain the CP used pacifism very successfully — advocating peace on Hitler’s terms — for the first nine months of World War Two, and less successfully for the rest of the 22 months from September 1939 to the invasion of Russia in June 1941.

Thus pacifism with all its ambiguities and contradictions was rehabilitated in the would-be

revolutionary movement. It survives Stalinism.

The Stalinist social-economic synthesis: fusion of left and right

Elitist (Stalinist) ideas of both the class struggle and socialism are a contamination from the right. The condemnation of the left will seem to be the burden of this article, and thereby, intentionally or not, it will seem to be a talking-up of the right.

Not so. In fact the most damning thing about the Stalinist left and the kitsch-left now is that that it is all too often indistinguishable from the right — from the older reactionary right and from the invertebrate liberal left.

In fact the Stalin-remade “left” was not a real left. It was a synthesis that incorporated key elements of ideas that, before Stalinism, socialism had seen as core ideas of its enemies, of the right in instinct and doctrine.

Let us briefly examine some of the ways in which the dominant “left” became a fusion of bits of the old left and of the right, with ideas from the right shaping what in fact the would-be left was in politics.

1. Imperialist “anti-imperialism”

Marxists are consistent democrats. We are against the coercion, domination, and exploitation of one people by another; and therefore we are for the self-determination of nations, and where they want it and it is practically feasible for fragments of nations.

Where full independence is for practical reasons unfeasible (because of the geographical interlacing of populations), we are for the maximum autonomy for minority areas which want it. The Bolsheviks put it very well in 1913, in a resolution written by Vladimir Lenin:

“In so far as national peace is in any way possible in a capitalist society based on exploitation, profit-making, and strife, it is attainable only under a consistent and thoroughly democratic republican system of government... the constitution of which contains a fundamental law that prohibits any privileges whatsoever to any one nation and any encroachment whatsoever upon the rights of a national minority. This particularly calls for wide regional autonomy and fully democratic local government, with the boundaries of the self-governing and autonomous regions determined by the local inhabitants themselves on the basis of their economic and social conditions, national make-up of the population, etc.”

The USSR itself was an empire in the same sense that Austro-Hungary had been up to 1918. A vast number of its people belonged to subject nationalities oppressed by the Great Russian minority.

Where the Bolsheviks had knocked down the walls of the Tsarist “prison house of nations”, the Stalinist counter-revolution erected them again.

In international politics the Stalinists emptied the terms “imperialism” and “anti-imperialism” of all “objective” content. They presented predatory Russian imperialism, ruled over by a savage and sometimes crazily chauvinistic autocracy, as the expansion of the socialist revolution, and therefore, by definition, right on everything over which its rulers — not the imaginary working class rulers, the real ones — clashed with the capitalist-ruled world or were criticised in it.

As vicarious Russian nationalists, the Stalinist parties were vicarious racists at the bidding of the Russian rulers. Toward Germans, for example in World War Two and afterwards, when 13 million Germans were driven west from Stalinist controlled Eastern Europe. The Yugoslav Stalinists massacred tens of thousands of Albanians when they occupied Kosova in 1945.

The Stalinists identified imperialism as only capitalist imperialism; and they identified advanced capitalism, ipso facto, as imperialism, and therefore historically reactionary. They educated the left to see the seizure, “ethnic cleansing”, plunder and exploitation of countries as good or bad,

imperialist or socialist, progressive or reactionary, according to who was doing it. It wasn't put like that - but there could be such things as "socialist", "working class" ethnic cleansing, slaughter or exploitation.

This was an aspect of the comprehensive dualism and political split personality that still exists in the post-Stalinist would-be left, a malign legacy of Stalinism even to some of the "anti-Stalinists".

The Stalinists expunged from the left the very propensity to judge such matters according to observation, facts, reason, and principles of consistent democracy. It was the prerogative of the Russian (and for some, later, the Chinese or the Albanian or the Cuban) Caesar-Pope to decide such things.

Recently the Morning Star, the Stalinist paper once called the Daily Worker, which calls itself the "paper of the left" and which all varieties of labour movement dignitaries write, conducted a vicious campaign against the Tibetans, taking the side of China, which by some mysterious logic it seems to see, still, as a socialist state.

2. Stalinism's "hydra-headed" nationalism

Vicarious Russian nationalism was the core of the Stalinist movement. Lesser nationalisms were adopted too, in so far as they could be aligned with, or made useful to, the custodians of the greatest nationalism, the Russian ruling class.

In the early 1930s, in chorus with the Nazis, the Stalinists campaigned for German "liberation" from the victors in the World War. From the mid-1930s onwards, they operated with categories of good and bad, or worse and better, imperialisms, and, in effect, of good and bad peoples. The bad of one period could turn out good, and the good turn again bad. What was good and what bad at any moment depended on the USSR's alliances or desired alliances, and its antagonisms.

In the second half of the 1930s, Britain, France, Belgium, Holland, "the democracies" which had colonial and semi-colonial control of much of the globe, were the good imperialists. For 22 months before Germany attacked Russia in June 1941, the German Nazis who had overrun most of Europe in May-June 1940, were not imperialists but victims of the old imperialist powers, Britain, France, Belgium and Holland, who had forced war on them.

When Hitler invaded Russia, the Stalinists switched back to glorifying and helping the "democratic imperialists", now Russia's allies.

In their zig-zags from right to pseudo-left and back again, the Stalinists built up a repertoire, like a music hall artist of old, from which they could dust off old costumes and bits of political patter for new situations.

After 1945, they supported the restoration of the old empires in "their" old territories, the French in Indochina, for example (where the local Stalinists opposed it), and Algeria. Russia tried to take defeated Italy's old territory in Libya. It tried to stay in Iran, which Britain and Russia had jointly occupied in 1941.

In the 1950s and long after, the CPs of France, Italy, Britain, etc., campaigned against "Yankee imperialism" and for British, French, etc., "liberation" from the American "occupiers".

They did not succeed in pitting Britain or France against the USA, but they did, with slogans like "Yankee bastards go home!", poison sections of the European working class with root and branch anti-Americanism.

The Stalinists treated nations and parts of nations as they treated the working class and labour movements - as tools and instruments, pawns and diplomatic make weights for USSR foreign policy. For example, in the 1930s, they backed Croatian clerical-fascist nationalists — the Ustashe, who in the 1940s ran a genocidal puppet state under the aegis of the Nazis.

In place of the general principles of what Lenin called consistent democracy in such questions, they placed the general principle: support whichever nationalism and chauvinism best serves USSR foreign policy, and change sides when that serves Russian interests. For a large part of the 20th century, long after Hitler and the Nazis had been kicked into history's abyss, they poisoned labour movements with an anti-Germanism that was indistinguishable from racism.

"Anti-imperialism" came to be riddled with double-standards, arbitrariness and frequent absurdity.

Trotsky observed at the outbreak of World War Two that both imperialist camps were telling the truth — about each other. The Stalinists told a lot of the truth about their enemies, and lies and justifications about their allies and looked-for allies. At any given moment only part of the truth was told about world imperialism.

"Anti-imperialism" as a conception, as a principle, and as a programme, became detached from its rational democratic core meaning and progressive political content, and came to be only an emotion-charged mystification.

There was widespread left-wing support for Russia's own old-colonial style invasion of Afghanistan in December 1978. The syndrome can still be seen today when the rise of clerical-fascist terrorism in the forging-ground that Afghanistan came to be in the decade after Russia's invasion is blamed on the USA, for backing the resistance, but not on Russia for invading and trying to annex Afghanistan and make it a colony.

3. Denigration of democracy and liberty as mere "bourgeois democracy"

The Stalinist and Stalinist-influenced "left" abandoned the core working-class fight to extend democracy. They abandoned what the Communist Manifesto summed up as the historic task of the working class — "to win the battle of democracy", that is to win democratic control of society on the political level as the means to democratic self-rule in society and economy.

The bourgeoisie tells the people that liberty is inseparable from its own limited "bourgeois democracy", thus trying to "sell" its gutted and severely curtailed democracy as the only way to preserve liberty. The Stalinist-influenced "left", idealising the methods of the bureaucratic counter-revolution in Russia, broke with the very idea of liberty — vis-a-vis the state and, for minorities, society — except in demagoguery against the capitalist ruling class.

This too was negativism, combined positively with its opposite — worship of Stalinist state-slavery, in which they accepted the same ground as the Old Right.

The Stalinists redefined democracy out of any concern with actual democracy. Where the extension of democracy was seen by the old socialists — including the Bolsheviks, before the exigencies of the Russian Revolution and its defence pushed them back — as essential for the education of the working class to become a self-ruling class, the Stalinists gutted "democracy" of all meaning.

They substituted double-talk redefinition. "Democracy" in Eastern Europe was full employment, low-rent housing, etc. Even if the claims for social benefits had been true about the Stalinist societies — and largely they weren't — the argument would have been a negation of democracy as self-rule.

As the bourgeoisie identified democracy with liberty and with their bourgeois democracy, the Stalinists, concurring, condemned democracy and liberty as bourgeois and necessarily bourgeois.

The Stalinist left saw liberty as only a token, something of interest only when counterposed to their bourgeois enemies, only when used as a criticism of them, not as something which we must defend and expand, and not as an irreplaceable part of any socialist programme in which working-class action is central.

The Stalinist left saw liberty as only a token, something of interest only when counterposed to their bourgeois enemies, only when used as a criticism of them, not as something which we must defend and expand, and not as an irreplaceable part of any socialist programme in which working-class action is central.

The working class and plebeians in history are usually the creators of and fighters for the advanced democracy in bourgeois democratic societies. In an important sense, that democracy is a prefiguring element of socialist society within capitalism, and part of the Stalinist left saw liberty as only a token, something of interest only when counterposed to their bourgeois enemies, only when used as a criticism of them, not as something which we must defend and expand, and not as an irreplaceable part of any socialist programme in which working-class action is central.

The working class and plebeians in history are usually the creators of and fighters for the advanced democracy in bourgeois democratic societies. In an important sense, that democracy is a prefiguring element of socialist society within capitalism, and part of Communist Parties, in reaction to what the Social Democratic right did with democracy in the service of counter-revolution, also tended to glorify and erect into a norm the emergency civil war measures forced on the Bolsheviks in the course of the Civil War, in which Soviet democracy shrank and almost disappeared.

They tended to disparage democracy. That was part of an ultra-left infection, and a mistake, an understandable one, of the whole Comintern leadership.

All through its existence, the Stalinist movement oscillated between opportunistic and demagogic appeals to a classless democracy on one side, and utter contempt for any democracy on the other. Contempt, though differently expressed at different times, was continuous.

Democracy? Comrade, a society where there is no unemployment, no hunger, where rents are cheap and there aren't any capitalists — that is more democratic than the parliamentary-democratic system: it is a higher form of democracy, a higher form of society. Even neo-Trotskyists could be found subscribing to this gobbledygook and repeating it (the influential Argentinian "Trotskyist", the late Nahuel Moreno, wrote a book to prove it as late in Stalinism's political day as the end of the 1970s).

At the least, that could not but spread confusion. In practice it created utter chaos on the question of democracy in large swathes of the left. The Stalinists taught people that bourgeois democracy meant nothing to the working class.

4. Anti-semitic "anti-Zionism"

Anti-semitism, passed down through the ages in Christian society, is one of the basic social and political poisons of the twentieth century. The presently dominant "absolute anti-Zionism" on the "Trotskyist" kitsch left, defined not by just and necessary criticism of Israel's treatment of the Palestinians and advocacy of a Palestinian state but by demonisation of and commitment to destroying Israel, comes straight from Stalinism.

In this too the political spirit of the (anti-Jewish) Old Right prevailed.

The effects of the Stalinist poison injected into how the Jewish-Arab conflict is seen in the labour movement is with us still.

The Stalinists backed Israel in 1947-8 — in the UN, and the Stalinist state in Czechoslovakia, acting as proxy for the USSR, broke the international embargo on guns for the Palestinian Jews, because that disrupted the British plans in the Middle East. Then they did an about-turn, in 1949 and thereafter, for similar motives of power politics. They filled the left with an absolute "anti-Zionism" that identified Zionism with Nazism and grossly falsified the history.

Only a few years after Hitler and the Holocaust, the Stalinists made Arab or Islamic chauvinism, and anti-Semitism, everywhere “respectable” and good “anti-imperialism” by demonising the Jewish nationalists, the “Zionists”; by treating Israel as a historical aberration, an illegitimate and temporary spawn of history; and by equating the Zionists with the Nazis and attributed to them part at least of the responsibility for the Holocaust.

They operated, in effect and inescapably, with the idea that there are good and bad peoples—peoples deserving democratic rights, and peoples so vile, so imperialistic, so much puppets and tools of imperialism, that they and their rights do not come within the proper concerns of socialists. Demagogically, exploitatively, and one-sidedly advocating the rights of one side in various other conflicts, they had no concern with the idea that to reverse the roles between oppressed and oppressor is not part of a socialist, nor of any democratic solution to such conflicts.

5. A future, “other worldly” focus rather than a human-centric one

When the de facto goal and central concern of communism and socialism became not socialism and the development and education of the working class towards making a socialist society, then socialism was reduced to something parallel to the right’s worship of God, tradition, “order”, or, now, “the market” — with the promise that it comes right in the future. In both cases there was deception — indifference to life now.

SOCIALISM IN DISARRAY, PART 3: THE FATE OF THE BOLSHEVIK REARGUARD

The terror and tragedy of the twentieth century

The twentieth century was full of terror and tragedy, and mass murder on a scale that beggars imagination and even comprehension. It was also in terms of things attempted, the most heroic in the history of humankind.

It was terrible in its murderous and enormously destructive wars of mechanised, automated, and finally automatic machines of mass murder - wars in which many millions died, by no means only combatants, and whole cities were levelled to rubble.

Terrible in its peacetime social devastation and the destruction of countless lives wreaked by economic dislocation and slump. Terrible in the recreation of the medieval Jewish ghettos in many cities, in the middle of the twentieth century, as preparation for the slaughter of six million European Jews in industrial factories designed for mass murder.

Terrible in the spawning of Leviathan totalitarian states able to use the technology of industrial society to exercise an unprecedented level of control, and without interruption for decades, over hundreds of millions of people. The East German workers who fell under the wheels of the fascist juggernaut in 1933 did not emerge from totalitarian rule for 56 years!

Terrible, in the decline of Marxism and socialism. And tragic above and beyond the many millions of individual human tragedies which the events referred to above entailed, because none of it was necessary. Better, immeasurably, better, was possible to humankind in the twentieth century.

The technology used to produce horror and slaughter was itself an aspect of an overall situation where not only better was possible, but where it was necessary and overdue, and where its retardation was the precondition for the horrors that engulfed humankind in the middle of the twentieth century.

At the core of the tragedy of the twentieth century was the tragedy of a socialist labour movement that had been built over decades to ensure what might be called an orderly historical succession - of working class socialism to capitalism - but proved unable to do that. It proved unable, despite tremendous efforts, to resolve its problems and difficulties. Was it, as it began to look to Trotsky at the end, and as the threat of it looked to Max Shachtman a decade

and three decades later, a case of looming mutual ruination of the contending classes of capitalist society? The Communist Manifesto had listed such a thing as one of the possible outcomes of the class struggle.

In the 1920s Trotsky had used as metaphor for the effect of dogmatic reformism in the British labour movement, the image of chickens bred so fine that they could not peck their way out of the eggshell and stifled in it. It seemed to many by the late mid-1940s to be the very image of the working class in recent history. The man who had spent most of the 30s living with Trotsky as his secretary, Jean van Heijenoort, who had also been one of the secretaries of the wartime rump Fourth International centred on New York, abandoned politics in 1948. He declared that the working class had definitively failed as a revolutionary class able to take humankind beyond capitalism and class society. Large numbers of hitherto revolutionaries came to the same conclusion, without like van Heijenoort writing an article to explain themselves.

To the dilemma before humankind, posed by socialists as the alternatives of "socialism or barbarism", History's answer seemed to be Stalinist barbarism spreading over much of the world and a weak and faltering bourgeois democracy in a historically privileged part of it, western Europe and the USA.

The heroism of the working class in the Twentieth Century

And with the tragedy of mid-twentieth century humanity, within it, an essential part of it, went the heroism of the working class - not all of it, not everywhere, not always, but enough of it, in enough places, enough times, to indicate what had been possible. In country after country, decade after decade, heroically the workers had risen.

Within that working class heroism, within the best of it, there was another heroism - that of the revolutionary left, in many countries, many times.

The list of working class movements, strikes, political campaigns, armed revolts, against capitalism and Stalinism, is a tremendous one. A long series of movements, aspirations and revolts against usually great, sometimes very great, and often insuperable odds.

The list is vast. A near-arbitrary selection - things I know a little about - is very long.

The Russian workers moved in great waves of strikes, from the 1890s. In the Russian Revolution of 1905, which was ultimately defeated, the workers created in the soviets - elected workers' councils - the beginnings of their own democratic system. In the same year, in the most advanced and most historically privileged of advanced capitalist countries, the USA, the Industrial Workers of the World was founded to organise the "unskilled", migrant and other workers, irrespective of race or creed, initially as a socialist and industrial-unionist-led movement. Its strikes were often small, and sometimes not so small, civil wars in which the working class side would suffer numerous casualties.

In Dublin after 1908, and especially in the great "Labour War" of 1913-14, the workers of Dublin, then the second city at the heart of the leading capitalist and imperialist power, rose off their knees to "seize the fierce beast of capital by the throat", James Connolly's summary description of the workers of Dublin and their movement can not be bettered:

"The Irish Transport and General Workers Union found the labourers of Ireland on their knees, and has striven to raise them to the erect position of manhood. It found them with no other weapons of defence than the arts of the liar, the lickspittle and the toady, and it combined them and taught them to abhor those arts and rely proudly on the defensive power of combination..."

In Russia, in October-November 1917, the workers covered the country with a network of workers' councils. They overthrew the man they knew as "Tsar Nicholas the Bloody" (now a saint, no less, of the Russian Orthodox Church!) and in October/November set up a soviet state. At the end of 1918 soviets covered Germany and Austria, but instead of consolidating the power of the working class, their leaders set up the bourgeois Weimar Republic.

Communists took power for a few weeks in 1919 in both Hungary and Bavaria. Even in backward rural Ireland striking workers in small dairy-produce factories, creameries, ran up the red flag and proclaimed their strike committees to be soviets, in perhaps three dozen separate cases. Limerick City was controlled for a while in 1919 by the Workers' Council (in British terms, Trades Council), which declared itself a soviet and contested control of the city with the British administration and its army.

In the 1920s the workers of China acted as a powerful independent force, fought great strike and other battles. In 1936 the workers of France organised a general strike, and won large reforms to wages and conditions. In the USA the workers organised great sit-in strikes and organised a powerful industrial federation, the CIO. In Catalonia, the workers took power in 1936/7 - to be smashed by the unwitting combination of their anarchist leaders, who did not believe in taking state power, on one side, and on the other, the Stalinists, who physically crushed them, opening the way for four decades of fascist rule.

In Britain in the mid 1940s the working class, which had its own deep-rooted parliamentary tradition, voted for the socialist transformation of Britain, and got instead very big reforms, the modern welfare state, achieved by the Labour Government. In France, in 1944 working revolt challenged the Nazi occupiers. The magnificent Warsaw Ghetto uprising in 1943 was led by socialists - socialist Zionists amongst them - and workers did most of the fighting.

In the 1950s, workers in East German, Poland and Hungary rose against Stalinism. In Poland they won serious concessions, making Poland at that time the least totalitarian of the Stalinist states. In Poland, the workers moved again in 1970 - hundreds were shot down at the Gdansk Shipyards. In 1968, nine million workers seized France in a tremendous General Strike. In 1969 the Italian workers mounted great strikes. Between 1971 and 1975-6 dozens of factory occupations were mounted in Britain, where, in 1974, in waves of militant industrial action, the high point of which was a miners' strike, the working class drove the Tory government out of office - an ill-judged appeal to the electorate against the miners led to the dismissal of the government - and put in the treacherous Wilson Labour Government.

In August 1980, the workers seized effective control of Poland and started on a struggle that eventually led to the overthrow of Stalinism - to be replaced by bourgeois democracy and capitalism. In Britain in 1984/5 the miners fought a bitter 13 month long strike in which they faced the mounted police of the Thatcher government - a strike in which a victory that would have smashed the ruling class offensive was possible.

There are many, many, many other examples of working class industrial battles, rebellions, armed risings, seizure of factories, general strikes - back to the Paris Commune of 1871, where the workers held power for nine weeks in the first workers' state in history; back to the Chartist General Strike of 1842 in the north of England - in bourgeois history "the Plug Riots"; and beyond that, a dozen years earlier, the seizure of Lyons by the silk workers; and back beyond that...

The historical record that contains such tremendous struggles, without definitive victory, does, of course, raise many questions about the nature and capacity of the working class as a revolutionary class. It points to the great difficulties which the working class, the basic exploited class in capitalist society, faces: it cannot develop control of a portion of the means of production within the old system, as in its time the bourgeoisie did within and under feudalism and absolutism.

The working class, again unlike the bourgeoisie on its historical journey, does not develop its own culture within this system. Its class-consciousness and historical awareness and aspirations fluctuate. Habitually its leaders - its trade union as well as its political leaders - help the capitalist rich and powerful against their own people in return for personal advancement.

Though the working class has known its age of reform under capitalism, we accumulate many defeats, not all of which the working class is able to learn from. It sometimes has to live through again and learn things earlier workers knew. What the things listed, and all the other

similar things not listed, indicate is that though the working class has not failed to fight, again and again, and again, there are special difficulties to be overcome if the working class is to emancipate itself. The question for socialists is: what can be done to overcome those difficulties?

But what the things listed most decidedly refute, is the idea that the working class has no inbuilt antagonism to the capitalist class and their system. They refute any suggestion that workers will never again revolt against capitalism.

As I write, the workers of France are in a great eruption of strikes and street demonstrations against capitalism's new era of austerity. The long absence of open big-scale class battles in Britain does not point to a death of class struggle, but to the fact that the bourgeois won great victories over the working class in that struggle in the 70s and 80s. The virtual destruction of the old Labour Party by the New Labour disciples of Thatcher was part of that series of defeats

The Russian workers, led by the Bolsheviks, proved in 1917 that the working class can take and consolidate power, when certain objective and subjective preconditions are met. That is one of the reasons why the bourgeoisie sustains an ideological offensive against the memory of the October Revolution, identifying it with the Stalinist counter-revolution against Bolshevism, the Stalinism that destroyed the working class power. They conflate and identify the rule of the workers with the rule of those who overthrew the workers' power, and massacred the Bolsheviks!

The paradoxical "anti-socialist" revolutions in Russia and Eastern Europe

But, it may be argued, the greatest manifestations of the revolutionary power of the working class for the last third of a century were working-class revolts in eastern Europe and Russia, not for but against socialism and for market capitalism. Those great deeds of the working class did not point in the direction of post-capitalist socialism but in the direction of capitalist restoration in the Stalinist states.

Socialism died of shame, failure and self disgust in Eastern Europe. Socialism was tried and is now deservedly rejected as an all-round social and historical failure. The workers wanted capitalism, and socialism, "history's great dream" - so bourgeois and ex-socialist propagandists alike say - goes the way of other ignorant yearnings and strivings, taking its place in the museum of quackery alongside such relics of barbarism as alchemy.

Yes, at the end of the 1980s, which had opened with a self-confident Russian Stalinist invasion of Afghanistan at Xmas 1979 (the last in a series of expansions during the 1970s, which even saw a Russian-financed Cuban army fighting in Africa), "socialism" seemed to die of shame and self-disgust, first in Eastern Europe and then in its USSR heartland. It was rotten and stinking for decades before its outright collapse.

Not since the Italian Fascist Grand Council met in 1943 and declared the Fascist system at an end, had anything like it been seen! "Socialism", so the bourgeoisie's ideologists brayed, had been tried and was being rejected as a failure and a curse on those it had ruled over. And, yes if the Stalinist systems were any sort of socialism, then socialism at that point died, and it deserved to be dead.

"Socialism" was rejected most explicitly by the working class in Eastern Europe and the "USSR". In Poland it was a working class movement, Solidarnosc, that made the anti-Stalinist revolution - the anti-Stalinist bourgeois revolution. "Actually existing socialism" melted like islands of ice in the thawing seas of international capitalism. Its most implacable enemies included the very working class in whose name the "socialist" states claimed their social and historic legitimacy.

Yes, but what was it that the workers and working farmers, the office workers and the intelligentsia, revolted against, when they revolted against "socialism"? They revolted against:

- National oppression by the USSR and within the USSR (and by Czechs in Czechoslovakia,

Serbs in Yugoslavia).

- The subordination of individuals, social groups, and nations to an all-powerful state, through which a bureaucratic ruling class exercised its economic exploitation and political tyranny.
- The denial of free speech, free press, free assembly, free organisation.
- Exploitation and poverty, combined with outrageous privilege.

They wanted instead:

- National and individual freedom.
- Democracy.
- Prosperity and equality - or an end, at least, to the peculiarly glaring sort of inequality imposed on the Eastern Bloc by bureaucratic privilege. Like the Parisians seeking equality in the French Revolution, they would find that equality and capitalism are incompatible.

That the workers thought they could get what they wanted, or at least get more of them, under a market system - that it was Western Europe and the USA that gave them their positive idea of the desirable alternative to Stalinism - is very important: that determined what happened in 1989-91. But it is not the end of the story.

What had the failure of Stalinist "socialism" proved?

- That rigidly bureaucratic systems, where all power, decision, initiative and resources are concentrated in the hands of the state, cannot plan economies effectively.
- That the workers become alienated from a supposed "workers' state" when in fact it means rule over them by privileged bureaucrats.
- That socialism is impossible without freedom and democracy, without free initiative and comprehensive self-rule.
- That socialism is impossible when it is posed as a way, under a totalitarian state, driving the people, to develop backward national economies, rather as the working class seizing power in an advanced capitalism-prepared society.

The collapse of European Stalinism proved all these things. But then paradoxically the experience vindicates, rather than disproves, Karl Marx's idea of what socialism is, what it is not, and its place in the succession of class societies. No pre-Stalinism Marxist ever believed that such bureaucratic tyrannies could, or should, succeed as "socialism". As we have seen, Lenin, Trotsky, and the Bolsheviks, who are cited as the fountainheads of Stalinism by people who either know no better, or refuse to "know" what they know, did not think they could.

For the socialism of Marx, Engels, Luxemburg, Mehring, Lenin, Trotsky, Gramsci, it is good that millions of people in Eastern Europe and in the Soviet Union rose in revolt against "socialism" and "communism".

Stalinism was never socialism. But (like the revolts in Europe in 1848) the revolt against it was socialism in embryo. The mass self-assertion and revolt of millions of people is the raw material of socialism - socialism as liberation and self-liberation, here self-liberation from state tyranny and grotesque state-organised inequality.

Such revolt does not, of course, necessarily develop into conscious mass socialism; yet, it is its necessary starting point and one of its essential components. There can never be a viable socialism without it.

It would be a true miracle if the workers in the Stalinist countries had attained political clarity

after many years in darkness. It would be remarkable if they had not been confused and bewildered by the official "socialism" which meant tyranny and poverty, and by the capitalism of Western Europe which meant comparative prosperity and liberty. Men such as Lech Walesa, the hero of Solidarnosc who looked for his ideal society to the capitalist world, the opposite of the society he had grown up in, and Arthur Scargill, who led the miners strike in 1984-5 and in his own confused way was an honest militant working-class leader but who looked east, to Stalinism, the opposite to the society he lived in, were tragic mirror images of each other's limitations.

What East European and Russian workers gained in 1989-91 was the freedom to think and to organise, the freedom to struggle and to learn from their struggles. Out of this, the first steps towards socialism - independent workers' organisations, trade unions, and even parties - have emerged again in countries in which history seemed to have ended in Hell with the imposition of Stalinism half a century earlier. In the east, working-class history began again.

The East European and Russian revolts of the working class against Stalinism vindicated the anti-Stalinist Bolsheviks, those who made the Russian Revolution and died, most of them, fighting Stalinism.

Stalinism and Bolshevism

Lenin, Trotsky and the Bolsheviks led the workers organized in democratic workers' councils, soviets, to power. They fought ruthlessly against the bourgeoisie and the opponents of socialism. They smashed the walls of the Tsarist prison-house of nations and gave social democracy to the oppressed nations - a majority of the population - in the Tsarist Russian Empire. Far from substituting themselves for the working class, the Bolshevik party, by its leadership and farsightedness, allowed the working class to reach and sustain a level of mass action hitherto unparalleled in history.

The Bolsheviks were fallible human beings, acting in conditions of great difficulty. Mistakes they may have made in the maelstrom of civil war and economic collapse are proper subjects for historians and socialist discussion and debate. As their critic and comrade Rosa Luxemburg wrote in 1918, the Bolsheviks would have been the last to imagine that everything they did in their conditions was a perfect model of socialist action for everywhere at all times.

When things began to go wrong the Bolsheviks stood their ground. The workers' risings were defeated in the West. Invasions and civil war wrecked the soviets. The Bolshevik party itself divided. One section took a path on which it ended up leading the bureaucratic "Stalinist" counterrevolution. The surviving central leaders led by Trotsky fought the counterrevolution on a programme of working class self-defence and of renewing the soviets.

Those Bolsheviks went down to bloody defeat. Stalinism rose above the grave of Bolshevism, just as it rose hideously above the murdered socialist hopes of the Russian and international working class. That working class hope turned into nightmares in which we are still gripped. By the late 1930s Stalin had slaughtered the leading activists not only from the Trotskyist, but also from the Right (Bukharinist) Communist and even the original Stalinist faction of the Bolshevik party of the 1920s.

Stalinism was not Bolshevism, any more than it was any kind of socialism. Trotsky, who was to die at the hands of Stalin's assassins, put it well and truly when he said that a river of working class and communist blood separated Stalinism, from Bolshevism.

The dying Lenin, in the first place, and then the Left Opposition founded in Moscow in October 1923, whose leaders were Trotsky and Rakovsky, fought the Stalinist counter-revolution that overthrew the workers' state. Fought it to the death of vast numbers, almost all of them, in Stalin's concentration camps, jails, and homicide chambers.

Trotsky and the Trotskyists

Trotskyism was no arbitrary or merely personal creation. The Trotskyists took over, developed

and fought for the ideas of the early Communist International - the International, which itself inherited the progressive work and root ideas of the previously existing socialist movement. The ideas of what came to be called Trotskyism were the continuation and summation of the whole history of the socialist working-class movement.

The Trotskyists held to the original perspectives and programme of the Communist International, the world-wide party of socialist revolution that Lenin and Trotsky set up in 1919 - to the goal of winning working-class power in the advanced capitalist countries. But that programme could only be fought for effectively by a mass movement; those perspectives depended for their realisation on the living activity of millions of revolutionary workers. And the millions-strong world-wide army of "communism" was in the grip of the delusion that Stalinism was communism. Organisationally, it was in the grip of totalitarian "communist" "parties" controlled by the Moscow Stalinist bureaucracy, which used lies, corruption, and gangsterism to keep its hold.

In the 1920s and with decreasing conviction up to the Moscow Trials Trotsky and his comrades saw USSR Stalinism as a progressive alternative to capitalism and to capitalist imperialism. But they registered also that it was neither an adequate, nor a viable, nor a desirable alternative. And from 1937 Trotsky became increasingly hostile and negative about the "USSR" which at the end of his life he defined as only potentially progressive. (See In Defence of Marxism and the present writer's introduction to The Fate of the Russian Revolution).

Max Shachtman, adapting an old joke about the Holy Roman Empire, pointed out that in the name "Union of Soviet Socialist Republics" there were four lies: it wasn't a free union, there were no soviets, it was in no way socialist, and it was more a Stalinist absolute monarchy than any kind of Republic.

Trotsky did not properly name Stalinist imperialism "imperialism", but he described it in fact, and counterposed to it a working-class programmatic alternative. Thus, for example, Trotsky championed independence for the Ukrainian nation, oppressed by Great Russian Stalinist chauvinist.

What if "the separation of the Ukraine threatens to break down the economic plan and lower the productive forces", asked Trotsky. "This argument, too, is not decisive. An economic plan is not the holy of holies. It is impermissible to forget that the plunder and arbitrary rule of the bureaucracy constitute an important integral part of the current economic plan...

"The question of first order is the revolutionary guarantee of the unity and independence of a workers' and peasants' Ukraine in the struggle against imperialism on the one hand, and against Moscow Bonapartism on the other". Trotsky understood perfectly that the USSR was a Great-Russian Empire.

The Trotskyist rearguard of Bolsheviks were comprehensively defeated, inside Russia and everywhere else. They could not rise politically when the working class had been defeated and beaten down. Let one of those Stalinists who crushed Bolshevism and lived to finally understand what happened, Leopold Trepper describe them for us.

Leopold Trepper was the head of the USSR's spy network in Nazi-occupied Europe. After the war Trepper was imprisoned by the KGB and only released during the post-Stalin thaw in the mid 1950s. In his autobiography The Great Game, Trepper honours the Trotskyists for their unyielding opposition to Stalin thus:

"The glow of October was being extinguished in the shadows of underground chambers. The revolution had degenerated into a system of terror and horror; the ideals of socialism were ridiculed in the name of a fossilized dogma which the executioners still had the effrontery to call Marxism.

And yet we went along, sick at heart, but passive, caught up in machinery we had set in motion with our own hands. Mere cogs in the apparatus, terrorised to the point of madness, we became the instruments of our own subjugation. All those who did not rise up against the

Stalinist machine are responsible, collectively responsible. I am no exception to this verdict.

But who did protest at that time? Who rose up to voice his outrage?

The Trotskyists can lay claim to this honour. Following the example of their leader, who was rewarded for his obstinacy with the end of an ice-axe, they fought Stalinism to the death, and they were the only ones who did. By the time of the great purges, they could only shout their rebellion in the freezing wastelands where they had been dragged in order to be exterminated. In the camps, their conduct was admirable. But their voices were lost in the tundra.

Today, the Trotskyists have a right to accuse those who once howled along with the wolves. Let them not forget, however, that they had the enormous advantage over us of having a coherent political system capable of replacing Stalinism. They had something to cling to in the midst of their profound distress at seeing the revolution betrayed."

Ambassador Coulondre, Hitler, Trotsky, and Trotskyism after Trotsky

On the very eve of the Second World War, the German fascist dictator Hitler had a last meeting with the French ambassador Coulondre.

Soon, for the second time in a quarter-century, France and Germany would be tearing each other to pieces in war. Coulondre remonstrated with Hitler about the Nazi deal with Stalin, the Stalin-Hitler pact. It would mean war, he told Hitler.

He conjured up for Hitler the memory of what had happened at the end of the last world war. Working-class revolt had swept across Europe. Revolutionary workers brought down the German Emperor; they took and held power in Russia; they took power and were overthrown in Hungary and in Bavaria. Europe was swept by strikes, factory seizures, and great mass movements of workers determined not to go on in the old way and desperately looking for a way out of war and capitalism, a way to a socialist society.

That, said Coulondre, is what you risk unleashing once again. To dramatise his point, and to evoke as vividly as he could for Hitler the horrors he was conjuring up, Coulondre pronounced the name under which he, and the European bourgeoisie, thought of the socialist revolution.

"The real victor (in case of war) will be Trotsky. Have you thought of that?"

Trotsky! Together with Lenin, Trotsky had led the Russian workers' revolution in 1917. He, with Lenin dead, had opposed the tyrannical Stalin regime in the USSR. Now a hunted exile, he preached the need for socialist revolution as the only alternative to the barbarism into which capitalism and Stalinism were plunging the world. For the bourgeoisie of the world and for the Stalinists who ruled the USSR he still personified the threat of working class revolution.

Almost exactly a year after the conversation between Coulondre and Hitler, on 20 August 1940, in Coyocoan, a suburb of Mexico City, the Spanish Stalinist Ramon Mercader, posing as a co-thinker in order to get close to him, smashed Trotsky's skull with an ice-pick and he died the following day.

When, at the end of World War Two, the great wave of working-class revolt Coulondre had conjured up to frighten Hitler did sweep Europe, it was controlled or repressed by the Stalinist organisations.

Trotsky left behind him a weak and tiny movement - a small splinter from the gigantic world communist movement which drew in those who had rallied to the Russian Revolution.

Most of the communists stayed with Stalin, who controlled the "Soviet" state, because they did not understand that a political and social counterrevolution had taken place within the collectivist property forms that continued to exist in the Soviet Union.

By the second half of the 1940s, the USSR had survived and had conquered a new Stalinist

empire covering half of Europe. Its European borders were established in the middle of Germany, a hundred miles west of Berlin. Russia was one of the two great world powers.

In Eastern Europe systems like that of the USSR were created; in China and other countries, Stalinists made revolutions which were against the big capitalist powers, and against the bourgeoisie, but also against the working class. In the West, in France and Italy for example, the Stalinist movements, on Russia's orders, helped the bourgeoisies to rebuild their states.

Stalinism expanded into new areas, covering one third of the world. Capitalism, which had seemed almost on its last legs in 1940, entered a post-war boom. The mass labour movements of the advanced countries settled in to live with and under capitalism. Capitalism experienced such lightning-flash revolts as the general strike in France by nine million workers in May 1968, but easily survived them.

The majority of the forces making up post-Trotsky Trotskyism continued to see the Stalinist states as degenerated or (the new ones outside Russia) deformed "workers' states", socially in advance of and superior to capitalism. Russia, Eastern Europe, and China were, they believed, "post-capitalist", in transition between capitalism and socialism.

Trotskyism thus seemed to be the embodiment of an idea whose time had come—and somehow passed it by; a movement whose programme, or the economic fundamentals of it, had been made reality by its Stalinist enemies, and grotesquely twisted into horrible shapes in the process.

Trotsky and the USSR

Why had Trotsky held on to the view that Russia remained a degenerated workers' state? Trotsky rejected the idea that Stalinist Russia was a viable class-exploitative society for the same reason that he had rejected Stalin's and Bukharin's programme of building up socialism in an isolated Russia ("socialism in one country"). He did not believe that a system of production more advanced and more viable than capitalism could be developed in an enclave alongside capitalism, and come to replace it by outgrowing and out-producing it. The idea was utopian - a reactionary utopia.

Trotsky stuck to the idea that Russia remained (or maybe remained) a workers' state, a very degenerated workers' state, a "counter-revolutionary" workers' state, because he thought that his assessment should, until events forced him to a different general conclusion, remain within the established Marxist notion of the necessary evolution of the stages of class society. He thought it was too soon, after the experience of Stalinism for only a short period - in historical time a very short period - to shift the theory. As he wrote in one of the polemics, he reserved the right to "revolutionary optimism".

He registered the Russian realities conscientiously. In September 1939 for the first time he recognised the possibility that Stalinist Russia as it was, without any new counter-revolution, might in the near future have to be recognised as a new form of exploitative class society. Then he said, wait: let us see what happens in the war. He had good reason for holding to that view then. It did not imply the sort of politics which the "Orthodox Trotskyists" would follow vis a vis Stalinism after his death.

Class society had gone through a number of stages - primitive communism, slavery, feudalism, capitalism, etc. - and a number of in-between transitional formations, with each stage or formation leading into another. (There had been distinct systems of "Asiatic despotism" or "hydraulic society" in various parts of the world, from ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt, through the Inca and Aztec societies in the Americas, to India and China, which in terms of social and economic development had been blind alleys and which had been broken up by the impact of the arms and the trade of European capitalism.)

In the basic Marxist theory, working-class rule and socialism could not precede advanced capitalism. Capitalism prepared the way for socialism by its creation and education of the proletariat itself. Socialism, the beginning of the elimination of class exploitation, was

impossible until relative economic abundance, the social precondition for the abolition of classes, had been created.

Before modern capitalism that precondition had not been created and could not be created. In conditions of low labour productivity and of scarcity, classes of slaves and masters had arisen again and again. Classes and class exploitation were a necessary condition of civilisation for human history before capitalism.

The idea of socialism preceding advanced capitalism was in Marxist reasoning as absurd as the idea of the child preceding its parents. Capitalism was the father of socialism, and the working class its mother.

It was in defence of that basic pillar of the Marxist theory and programme of working-class socialism that Trotsky and his comrades had rejected "socialism in one country", the early rallying-programme of the Russian bureaucracy that had overthrown the working-class power set up in 1917.

That way of focusing it - socialism in "one country" - was misleading. The question was not whether socialism could be built in one country, or six, or eight countries. The USSR was anyway a great deal more than "one country". Its territory covered one-sixth of the Earth's land surface.

The question was whether socialism could be built in backwardness, before advanced capitalism had done its work of developing the economy and the working class.

The Marxist programme of socialism presupposed the resources of the entire international economy, woven together into a world system by advanced capitalism. It was an international programme to replace international capitalism, or it was an utopia, an attempt akin to the colonies constructed by pre-Marxist utopian socialists to build up an alternative society and compete with capitalism from outside.

The Marxist programme was built on the development of the working class within advanced capitalism, and that working class eventually coming to be able to overthrow and replace capitalism. A classless socialist society could not be created at will in conditions of economic backwardness.

In conditions of economic scarcity, exactly the same thing would happen with any new putatively socialist society as had happened throughout history. In Marx's words, "all the old crap" would re-emerge: class differentiation, class struggle, the establishment of an exploiting class lording it over the producers.

Like Lenin and the Bolshevik party in 1917, Trotsky saw and expected that in isolation the economically backward Russian state where the workers had power would inescapably be engulfed by world capitalism, which would link up with the peasantry and other petty bourgeois groups within its boundaries.

An alternative society - in the theory of "socialism in one country", a nominally socialist society - could not be built side by side with advanced capitalism and go on to replace it. The "alternative" society would inevitably suffer an inner transformation, rooted in its backwardness, that would reduce it to the surrounding international level of capitalist society.

A stable, fully-formed alternative type of exploiting class society, emerging on the fringes of capitalism to compete with it and replace it from outside, was ruled out for the same reason that "socialism in one country" was.

A system built on a low level of economic development, and therefore of labour productivity, and cut off from the world networks and connections created by capitalism, could not coexist independently side by side with advanced capitalism and successfully compete with it, for just the same reasons as "socialism in one country" could not.

For Trotsky, it seemed more rational to categorise Stalinist Russia as a freakish, short-term aberration from a workers' state - however great or even dominant the aberration - than to theorise that a new form of class society had emerged and was competing successfully with capitalism. In the end, he proved right in thinking that the Stalinist USSR was an unviable aberration - but his timescale was hugely, disorientingly, mistaken.

Trotsky's final position had been that the USSR simply could not survive the World War. It would go down, either before the forces of world capitalism, or before the Russian workers rising against the autocracy. And if, against all his calculations, which were based on the idea that the Stalinist system was unstable and transitional to either restored capitalism or a renewal of the workers' power, the USSR survived? He said: in that eventuality Stalinism would have revealed itself to be a new form of exploitative class society, neither bourgeois nor working class.

At the time of his death Trotsky was close to identifying the Stalinist states as a new form of collectivist class society, and said explicitly that if certain things happened - which did in fact happen with the survival in Russia and expansion of Stalinism - then there was no alternative but to redefine Stalinism that way. If Trotsky had lived and stuck to what he was saying in 1940, he could not have done what the mainstream "Trotskyists" did in the late '40s and after.

As far as what he wrote and said can tell us, Trotsky would not have been a post war "Trotskyist". Trotsky's heroic rearguard struggle against the Stalinist counter-revolution and the corruption of the world communist movement was the historic "Trotskyism". Post-Trotsky Trotskyism is something else again. Yet, broadly, it remained the legatee of the old mass communist movement that - to adopt Isaac Deutscher's image - had vanished like Atlantis in the sea.

The survivors of Atlantis

When the Trotskyist mainstream, in the late 1940s, turned towards a more "positive" account of Stalinism, there was a mass exodus from its ranks. The defeated and depleted Trotskyist current, always small, shrank in the 1950s to being very little, even miniscule. In Trotsky's time the gap between its ideological riches and its small forces had been one of this movement's most characteristic features. Now, in terms of its ideas, too, it shrank

The major surviving Trotskisant current, the so-called "orthodox Trotskyists", organised in the "Fourth International" of James P Cannon, Michel Pablo, and Ernest Mandel, and its splinters, the Morenists, Lambertists, Grantites, Healyites, etc., sided with the Stalinist camp in the world polarisation into two blocs. They were "critically", but "unconditionally", for the "defence" of the Stalinist bloc against the other bloc, and for all its full and partial partisans. The expansion of the Stalinist bloc was, they insisted, the World Revolution advancing, though, to be sure, advancing in unexpected and uncongenial ("deformed") ways.

They identified Stalinism of various sorts with the "world revolution", and regarded the Stalinist states as "progressive". Automatically they took sides with the Stalinist bloc in its imperialist competition with capitalist imperialism and even in such an old-style colonialist enterprise as the Russian invasion of Afghanistan (1979). They backed China in Tibet in 1959 and after criticising the Maoists for tardiness in extending "the revolution" to Tibet.

These "orthodox" Trotskyists came to accept the essential utopian idea behind "Socialism in One Country" by way of adopting the view that the USSR, and later the Stalinist bloc, were societies "in transition to socialism". Although Isaac Deutscher was not himself a Trotskyist - he insisted on that - he was greatly influential with the post Trotsky Trotskyists. What he wrote about the rosy prospects before the USSR, in for example his 1960 book *The Great Contest*, now reads like wild ravings.

Mao was proclaimed the political legatee of Trotsky, not Stalin, for instance by Pierre Frank in an introduction to a collection of Trotsky's writings in the French language. Much scholastic ducking and weaving by such neo-Trotskyists as Ernest Mandel was devoted to "proving" that Stalin's "socialism in one country" had been refuted by the spread of "the revolution" - that is, of Stalinism - far beyond the borders of the USSR.

As we've seen, "one country" was not the point of Trotsky's objection. The point was that it was utopian to imagine that a country, or even, in the new situation, a bloc of countries, could evolve from backwardness to compete with, overtake and overthrow advanced world capitalism.

For the USSR and the East European satellite states these "orthodox Trotskyists" advocated Trotsky's old programme of working-class revolution. Following Trotsky, they called what they advocated a "political revolution". In fact what they, like Trotsky, advocated was a profound social revolution, the destruction of the Stalinist state power and its replacement by a working-class regime based on workers' councils. That meant a fundamental transformation in property, from ownership by the totalitarian state, which was itself owned by the Stalinist autocracy, to ownership by a democratic working-class quasi-state.

For the countries in which Stalinist guerrilla armies had won power in civil wars and made their own Stalinist states, the "orthodox Trotskyists" tended to advocate not revolution but reform as the way to working-class democracy. Some of them, by way of "open letters" to the Chinese or Yugoslav "comrades", turned themselves into utopian-socialist would-be advisers of Stalinist ruling classes on how to abolish their systems!

In at least two senses this was not the "Trotskyism" of Trotsky. The post-Trotsky Trotskyists shifted from seeing Russian Stalinism as a freak phenomenon that could not survive - Trotsky's position - to seeing the "USSR" and new Stalinist states as stable social formations, "in transition to socialism". Socialism itself would be at the other side of working class "political revolution" against Stalinist autocracy or - in China and other countries - radical democratisation; but this view implied an acceptance of the logic of "socialism in one country", of the idea that Russia could develop in parallel to capitalism and outstrip it. The fact of other Stalinist states coming into being had no bearing on this.

This thinking was also a radical turn away from Trotsky's tentative conclusion that if Stalinist Russia survived the world war intact it would have to be radically re-conceptualised as a new form of bureaucratic class society.

On such questions the politics of the "orthodox Trotskyists" were a hybrid of Trotsky's and those of the pre-war Brandlerite "Right Communists" or critical "liberal Stalinists", splinter from the Communist International. Isaac Deutscher, though he had been a Trotskyist from 1932 until 1940, was after that a Brandlerite in his ideas about the USSR. Brandlerite politics and assessments suffuse his very widely read three-volume biography of Trotsky, and his biography of Stalin.

For the last sixty years of the 20th century, most anti-Stalinists were of this "orthodox Trotskyist" - or better, "orthodox Trotskyist"/ Deutscherite - persuasion. In their own inadequate and contradictory way, despite their belief that the advance of Stalinism in the world was the "deformed" advance of the socialist world revolution, nevertheless, they were anti-Stalinist. At their worst, when calling on Stalinist ruling classes to reform their own system, they advocated radical reforms that, if they were realised, would not have left much of Stalinism intact.

Their adaptation to Stalinism was never uncritical adaptation - those who ceased to be critical ceased to be even nominally Trotskyist. It was a misguided attempt at a revolutionary socialist "accommodation" to the fact of Stalinism, so as to promote the "full" Trotskyist programme. It was never inner acceptance of it, never a surrender of the idea that the Stalinist states had to be democratised and transformed.

But Ernest Mandel, for example, used his erudition and his intellectual talents to weave, from the ideas of Lenin and Trotsky, ideological clothing which could be draped on the expansion of Stalinism in order to identify it as part of the world revolution of the proletariat. Directly and indirectly, over the years, this "orthodox Trotskyism" tied large numbers of anti-Stalinist militants into accepting, tolerating or half-justifying aspects even of Russian Stalinist imperialism.

As a truthful picture of Russia began to form out of the mist of fantasy, lies and falsification - after say, the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia, to put down the emerging "socialism with a human face" there - many CPers were disillusioned. Orthodox Trotskyists could not experience that sort of "disillusionment". They knew all the horrors of Stalinism already and had a theory - "degenerated and deformed workers' states" - to frame them. So long as nationalised property existed the Stalinist state would be "progressive", anti-capitalist and worthy of defence.

So in 1979, when Russian invaded Afghanistan, many CPs - the British for instance - condemned the invasion and called on Russia to withdraw. Every orthodox Trotskyist organisation in existence, with the exception of Socialist Organiser-Workers' Liberty, refused to oppose the occupation. There was a big minority in the French organisation LCR which wanted to call for the withdrawal of the Russian army, but some groups were very enthusiastic for the expansion of the "workers' state".

Mandel, the most important orthodox Trotskyist thinker, played a role similar to that of Karl Kautsky two generations earlier, who rationalised, from the point of view of a hollow "orthodox Marxism", what the leaders of the German social democracy and trade unions did. But Mandel was worse than Kautsky. Kautsky devised ideological schemes to depict the time-serving activities of a bureaucratised labour movement as an effective drive for working-class liberation; Mandel produced similar rationalisations for totalitarian Stalinist states and empires - Stalinism that must be judged historically to have had no relationship to socialism and working-class emancipation but that of a destroyer of labour movements and an enslaver of working classes.

It was their assessment of the USSR, inherited from Trotsky but erected by themselves into a self-blinding dogma, that trapped the orthodox Trotskyists into letting themselves be reduced, too often, to the role of mere satellites of the Stalinist bloc and its partisans in the capitalist states. That misidentification of the USSR was one pillar of a complex historical disorientation: the existence of the Russian degenerated workers' state and the coming into existence of other Stalinist states was seen as proof that this was "the era of wars and socialist revolution".

Almost everything "Trotskyist" in our early 21st century post-Stalinist world - including Solidarity and Workers' Liberty - has its roots in that "orthodox Trotskyist" current. It was, probably, the ambiguities, self-contradictoriness, and politically protean character of that current which allowed it to survive, in many political variants and compounds.

The other Trotskyists

There was another Trotskyist current - that of Max Shachtman and the others who fought Trotsky in 1939-40 because they rejected any sort of "critical support" for the Russian Stalinist army in its war with Finland (from November 1939 to April 1940).

They went on to break, in 1940-1, with the idea that the USSR was any kind or degree of workers' state. In response to events, they elaborated a distinct strand of Trotskyism.

In the 1940s the "orthodox Trotskyists" floundered politically in face of, first, the unexpected survival of Russian Stalinism, and then the eruption of Stalinist imperialism. Like Bible-fetish Christians, they read in the Big Book of "Trotskyist" "orthodoxy", where they themselves had written as immutable dogma an unrepresentative selection of Trotsky's works and phrases, especially on the USSR.

In contrast, the "other Trotskyists", the "heterodox Trotskyists", responded to the consolidation of the Stalinist autocracy and the rise of its empire to the eminence of second power in the world with accurate reporting and sober assessment of its meaning for socialist theory and its implications for the socialist working-class programme.

It can be argued (as I have argued, in detail and at length, elsewhere) that this heterodox Trotskyist current, in fact, despite its episodic dispute with Trotsky in 1939-40, continued the politics of Trotsky and applied them to the world, and specifically to Stalinism, in the way that Trotsky himself would have done if he had survived into the 1940s. Be that as it may, they

evolved a distinctive Trotskyist tradition and gave it life.

For two decades and more, they produced a powerful literature that has for that period no equal, nor any near relative or rival. Ultimately, from the end of the 1950s, their tendency too fell apart.

Where the orthodox Trotskyists saw the Stalinist states, which expropriated capitalism, as the advancing ("deformed") world revolution, the heterodox Trotskyists saw Stalinist revolutions as the advance and spread of totalitarian slavery that they in fact were.

What they had in common, the two basic strains of post-Trotsky "Trotskyists", was the belief that capitalism was collapsing and dying. For the "orthodox", that gave them confidence that History was (sort of, in a "deformed" blood-thirsty way), on their side, and shaped the way they saw Stalinism.

To the Shachtmanites, capitalism was sure to be replaced soon, one way or another - and the choice of replacement was either Stalinism or socialism. In the capitalist prosperity of the 1950s and 60s, they saw only a respite in the disintegration and death-decline of capitalism. The prosperity could not last, and, therefore, so it sometimes seems in their writings, it did not really exist, at least in terms of the long-term perspective.

Stalinism was indeed expanding, and it would continue to expand for some years after Shachtman's death in 1972. Following through the line of thought that under bourgeois democracy, in sharp contrast to Stalinist totalitarianism, the working-class movement could function, and could prepare itself to create a socialist alternative to both capitalism and Stalinism, Shachtman and his close friends went over to the US-led bloc.

They abandoned the socialist programme of independent working class politics, of the "third camp", and sided with bourgeois-democratic capitalist USA against the Stalinist bloc, seeing the US and its allies as the only halfway-viable alternative to Stalinism. They took that course for reasons that have much in common with those which led the "orthodox Trotskyists" to back the Stalinist bloc (critically - but the Shachtmanites too were critical of "their" bloc).

Within that bloc, they thought, working-class independent socialism could emerge; otherwise it would be crushed by advancing Stalinism. Shachtman became mired in the dirty politics of the Democratic Party. As a tendency, his co-thinkers evolved into born-again social-democrats. Shachtman himself never abjured support for the October Revolution, but some of his co-thinkers would (see Al Glotzer in *Workers' Liberty* 16).

Others in the heterodox Trotskyist tendency - Hal Draper, Phyllis and Julius Jacobson and a few others, who started the magazine *New Politics* in the early 1960s - rejected Shachtman's course and maintained independent socialist politics. But in their own particular way, they too moved very far from the politics of the tendency in its heroic days of the 40s and most of the 50s. They rejected the project of building a revolutionary socialist party. Draper repudiated and rejected what he called the "micro-sect" project of organisation-building. They became mere propagandists - with propaganda, to be sure, of a very high order.

Socialism in Disarray, Part Four

"There is not, nor can there be, such a thing as a 'negative' Social-Democratic slogan that serves only to 'sharpen proletarian consciousness against imperialism'. A negative slogan unconnected with a definite positive solution will not 'sharpen', but dull consciousness, for such a slogan is a hollow phrase, mere shouting, meaningless declamation" - V I Lenin

The collapse of European Stalinism in 1989-91 also cleared the way for the revival of the left. Socialism would now be deflated, but real. The real left gained a chance to live and grow again, to clear the old battlefields, to define itself anew, and to develop its influence in the working-class movement.

The way was cleared for the re-elaboration of our traditions and our ideas, for the re-growth of the socialism of Marx, Engels, Luxemburg, Mehring, Lenin, Trotsky, and Gramsci.

We have not yet done that.

True, international capitalism has, until the recent eruption of the global credit crisis, been going through a vast expansion under the banners of free trade, neo-liberalism, and globalisation. The social conditions have not been friendly to the conviction of the necessity of replacing capitalism with socialism, the need for a socialist revolution, the belief that, historically, capitalism has outlived itself.

These conditions helped many ex-Stalinists mutate into born-again advocates of bourgeois democracy and capitalism - something, all in all, better than their former Stalinist political personae. Working class democracy was never even potentially real for those power-worshippers, and naturally they do not regard it as a possibility.

But the world working class is expanding; it has, maybe, doubled in size over the last 30 years. That is, capitalism is rearing up armies of its own gravediggers. "Objective conditions" would have allowed us to achieve a great deal than we have.

We have seen not a revival of the left, but a riot of bourgeois triumphalism, and a continuing, indeed, increasing, accelerated, disarray and decline - political, moral, intellectual decline - of the "actually existing" left.

In so far as the bulk of the would-be left has redefined itself, it has in the last decade been in terms of an alliance with one of the most reactionary forces on the planet, "political Islam", or Islamic clerical fascism.

The rise after 11 September 2001 of international "anti-imperialist" terrorism by Islamic clerical-fascist movements, and the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, threw the remnants of the left into a mortal political and ideological crisis.

In retrospect, the collapse and disarray in the left after 1991 was understandable, and inevitable, after the way the left had been shaped in previous decades.

Though the old European Stalinism, holding state power, is dead, socialists, including the heirs of the anti-Stalinists, live still in the grip of the moral, political and intellectual chaos created by Stalinism. The moral and political crisis of the present-day left is fundamentally a confusion of ideas, of identity, of an unexplored, and often startlingly unknown, history, and of our language of politics.

The crisis of the would-be left today consists in the continued influence within it, in its ways of seeing the world, of un-purged and essentially unrecognised Stalinist politics, patterns, attitudes. This is true of most of these who think they stand in the Trotsky tradition, too.

The all-shaping fact about the post-Stalinist left, including most of the left that sees its own roots in the antipode of Stalinism, Trotsky's movement, is that it is not in fact, in real political life, post-Stalinist. Stalinism still shapes it and still ruins it. Now, in the new era of capitalist crisis, and the new age of austerity, that Stalinist shaping threatens to make the left as sterile and impotent as it was in the last two-thirds of the twentieth century.

It will be easier to understand the character and causes of the self-debilitating faults of the contemporary left in the light of our discussion of the Stalinist experience.

1. No alternative to capitalism?

Since the collapse of the Stalinist Russian empire in 1991, world capitalist power has traded even more on the idea that there is no alternative to capitalism. There never was; there never will be; there cannot be. We should, as David Marsland said at a debate organised by Workers' Liberty in 1991, "marvel at the market's gifts to mankind".

Be grateful for the things God gives you! Don't dream, don't scheme, don't rebel! For, warn the ideologues - and the old Labour Party reform-socialists too - if you rebel, then you will stumble into the nightmare of state terrorism, into the Gulag, into the Stalinist archipelago of slave labour camps and mass murder.

They trade on the claim that Stalinism was Bolshevism; that Bolshevism was not negated in the Stalinist counter-revolution, as it in fact was, but continued and developed by the logic of its own nature into Stalinism.

The Stalinist counter-revolution against Bolshevism was, they claim, Bolshevism itself. Bolshevism, which fought Stalinism to the death of the rearguard Bolsheviks, was only infant Stalinism. The anti-Stalinist Bolsheviks were fighting against their other self.

In fact, in all this, the triumphant bourgeoisie has merely appropriated the core lies of Stalinism. The story is demonstrably nonsense - nonsense as ridiculous as Stalin's indictment of the old Bolsheviks in the mid-thirties as having been working for British and other intelligence services when they were leading the 1917 Revolution!

Yet aspects of the post-Stalinist left, for instance the accommodation of the kitsch-Left to Islamist terrorism have been as if designed to prove the bourgeois ideologues' point.

2. Utopianism central still

The great and prolonged crisis of capitalism in the twentieth century properly roused revolutionary Marxists to the idea that the eras of peaceful and progressive capitalist development were gone forever. "The point was to change it", to overthrow it now: that was all. The philosophers had interpreted History; and History had favourably pronounced on the philosophers with the seeming collapse of capitalism. The point was to change it - and that narrowed down into "Build the Revolutionary Party".

This idea persisted long after the crisis that unleashed it was over, and long after History had taken unexpected turns, with the consolidation of Russian Stalinism, and the spread of Stalinism across one third of the globe.

The perspective of hopeless capitalist collapse was kept in place by the dominant "orthodox" Trotskyist doctrine that the Stalinist states were "post-capitalist", the deformed embodiment of a still developing and expanding albeit distorted proletarian world revolution, and thus proof that it was still "the age of wars and revolutions". It persisted despite capitalist revival and prosperity in the most advanced countries, and fast capitalist growth in many poorer countries.

Long before the fall of European Stalinism, and Francis Fukuyama's thesis, derived from it, that we had reached "the end of history", post-Trotsky Trotskyists had applied a similar idea to capitalism.

History, they thought, had reached a point beyond which almost everything in advanced capitalism was reactionary. The SWP-UK had its own dialect of this idea, a core idea of its sectarianism - a thesis that when world capitalism became ripe for socialism, thereafter everything capitalist became reactionary [note 1]. It was the method of the great utopian socialists - once the socialist idea has been invented, everything else is reactionary.

The "evolutionary" aspects of modern communism were, as we have seen, central to the contribution of Marx and Engels and their school of politics. They have largely been lost by the would-be left.

Here the would-be Marxist Left are victims of our own failure to come to terms with our own history in the mid-twentieth century. Capitalism did break down into protracted crisis including world war, between about 1914 and about 1950. Opportunities for the working-class to replace capitalist rule with its own rule did exist in "the epoch of wars and revolutions".

But the working-class was defeated. And in a strange and unprecedented way. The victors in the defeat of the working class and the destruction of Bolshevism presented themselves - and even thought of themselves - as representing the working class. They presented their system, in which the working class was enslaved more than in most capitalist states, as working-class socialism.

That confused all the maps and signposts. In Britain in 1940, when a German invasion seemed imminent, the road signs were removed so as to confuse the invaders. Something like that happened to the socialists. The Marxist signposts have yet to be sorted out and re-erected.

Capitalism revived; it eventually overwhelmed, in economic, military and political competition, the aberrant, historically freakish and unviable Stalinist bureaucratic collectivism which in the mid-twentieth century had seemed to many to be the alternative to capitalism.

The twentieth century crisis of capitalism (and the failure of the left) knocked out of post-Trotsky Trotskyism the "evolutionary floor" which Marx and Engels gave to communism. Socialist revolution became not a matter of the positive development and education of the working class movement, but a quasi-mechanical consequence of the ever-present "crisis" as soon as general mass discontent and the building of a revolutionary-party "machine" should rise high enough.

The post-Trotskyist movement went through its own long "Third Period". Proletarian revolution was always imminent or in process. Strange and alien phenomena - in the first place, those of Stalinism - were misidentified as aspects of it. That was an aspect of reversion to utopianism.

The orthodox Trotskyists built on Trotsky's identification of the USSR as a "degenerated" workers' state and their own definition of the new Stalinist states as "deformed" workers' states to shed Trotsky's idea that Stalinist Russia was an unviable freak social formation that would in the short term collapse, either before bourgeois onslaught or working-class revolution, or have to be reconceptualised as a new form of exploitative class society (see *The USSR In War, and Again And Once More On The Nature Of The USSR*, both in *In Defence Of Marxism*). They moved to an implicit acceptance of "socialism in one country" - the development of the USSR, and now other backward states of Stalinism, in parallel with and eventually outstripping, advanced capitalism [note 2].

They relegated Trotsky to the status of a posthumous utopian savant. The "word" was given, thereafter in capitalism no progress was possible. Capitalism was unconditionally and universally reactionary. That then meant: reactionary against Stalinism - and has now come to mean: reactionary against no matter whom.

For the post-Trotsky "orthodox Trotskyists", the basic socialist democratic programme of self-determination and opposition to colonialism came to be submerged into the notion of Stalinist deformed revolution in backward parts of the world such as China. "Imperialism" was the advanced capitalist states, as counterposed to the states and movements of Stalinism, and allied with Stalinism, which embodied "anti-imperialism". Class criteria, and Marxist programmes, were subverted and destroyed.

From a loss of historic perspective here has followed the all-shaping negativism of the "left" towards advanced capitalism.

The power of the idea that capitalism was in its death agony to motivate and mobilise made it of great value to apparatus Marxists. Trotsky once recommended the idea for its mobilising powers - he did not mean, falsify reality so as to be able to use it!

Our alternative to capitalism is a socialism that retains, spreads and deepens the conquests of bourgeois civilisation from the Renaissance and earlier onwards. These include rational, critical, realistic assessments of our world, of our alternative to capitalism, of ourselves. That too was often lost.

We need to remind ourselves of the fundamental ideas of Marxist socialism, which I outlined in

part two of this series.

For Marxists advanced capitalism is the irreplaceable mother of our socialism. (And not a good mother: a poisonous old harridan-spider who has repeatedly eaten her own young! Or tries her best to!) Socialism has become possible only because capitalism has created a mass proletariat and, created means of production which, liberated of the drives and unreason of capitalism, can create abundance for all in the basics of life.

We base our socialist programme on this Marxist idea of the necessary evolution of capitalist society, of its forces of production, as the irreplaceable ground-preparer for socialism; on the social, intellectual and political preparation of the proletariat through both capitalist evolution and communist education and organisational work, to make it able to seize power in capitalist society.

These "evolutionary" aspects of modern communism were central to the contribution of Marx and Engels and their school of politics. They have largely been lost by the kitsch Left.

3. Absolute anti-capitalism: the poverty of "anti-imperialism"

Not only has the present-day "anti-Stalinist" would-be left has taken into itself many of the political features of old Stalinism, some of the ideas and attitudes of the would-be left now are starkly more irrational than were these ideas in their Stalinist version.

Ideas that made their own sense when the supposedly socialist or travelling-towards-socialism USSR was at the centre of a world view - for instance, the absolute hostility to advanced capitalism, and automatic support for the "camp" in conflict with it - are rendered utterly nonsensical now that the USSR is no more. No socialist can even half-seriously believe that Iran or Taliban-ruled Afghanistan show a desirable future to humankind, as the devotees of Stalinist Russia thought they could.

The easiest way into the maze of post-Stalinist political remnants in the contemporary left is to deal first with one of the would-be left's all-shaping "positions" - the centrality of "anti-imperialism".

a. Vietnam

The would-be left of today is rooted in the "1968 Left". It was right for that 1968 left to oppose the Vietnam war and fight to end it - right to side against America in Vietnam, to express horror at a very savage war, at mechanised destruction rained down by the greatest power on earth on a peasant people, at the prospect that "victory" against the Stalinists would have required "bombing Indo-China into the stone age", or "destroying it in order to save it", as a US major said of a Vietnamese city in 1968.

But in the left reshaped by opposition to the Vietnam war and "reconstructed" by "1968" and after, there was a powerful strain of reactionary anti-imperialism. It was no accident that know-nothing western Maoists played such a big part in the anti-war movement. Its slogans - like "Victory to the NLF" - implied positively siding with the Stalinists. It was a formative, reshaping experience, saturated as it was with millenarian expectations for the victory of the socialist revolution, soon. For the orthodox Trotskyist ancestors of the present left (the writer amongst them), there was much of political indifference about Stalinism: "don't confuse me with complexities".

b. The Algerian war and the opposition to it

Vietnam came a decade after an earlier shaping experience for the modern left, the Algerian war of liberation against France.

On that, much of the revolutionary left tried to exercise political judgement as between Algerian organisations - which were engaged in a bloody rivalry - and backed the "left wing" of the national liberation movement, the MNA, led by Messali Hadj.

Messali was understood to have had links with the early Communist International and had support in the Algerian trade union movement and among Algerian trade unionists in France. The International Socialist League (Shachtman); the Cannon segment of the split orthodox Trotskyist world movement, including the Lambertists in France; the SWP's predecessor Socialist Review, and Healy's group in Britain, which published a pamphlet with a portrait of Messali Hadj on the cover - they all backed Messali, against the more recently emerged and formally more right-wing and initially purely nationalist FLN.

For some of them, Messali was their substitute for a Communist Party - and for the Stalinists who had already made "deformed" "socialist" revolutions in Yugoslavia, China and North Vietnam.

The Pablo-Mandel orthodox Trotskyists backed the other nationalist organisation, the FLN, the eventual rulers of Algeria.

It became known that the MNA was putting up much less of a fight than the FLN, and eventually, around 1958, that in some areas it had arrangements of coexistence with the occupying French forces. There are perhaps parallels with the rival anti-German forces in early-1940s Yugoslavia, Stalinist and Chetnik-Royalist, and with the two IRAs of the 1970s, the Stalinist led "Official Republicans" and the initially right-wing breakaway, the "Provisional IRA".

In the polemical war between the different Trotskyists, the Pablo-Mandel group eventually won hands down against the champions of the MNA and Messali. I know of no balance sheet drawn up by any of the champions of Messali and the MNA.

The anti-imperialist politics that seemed to triumph then, of unconditional solidarity with those leading the anti-imperialist fight irrespective of politics, dominated the left thereafter. This experience was fed into the anti Vietnam war movement by Trotskyist groups influenced greatly by their experience over Algeria, and by the IS organisation, the future SWP-UK [note 3].

c. The new turn in the 1999 war against Serbia

The confusionist politics of the would-be left on "imperialism" stretches way back, and is rooted in the selective anti-imperialism of the Stalinist movement. But something new emerged - or new in the clarity in which events posed the issues - in the Balkans war of 1999. It was the prelude to the would-be left's craziness with political Islam after 9/11.

By way of campaigning "against the war", NATO's war, and "against imperialism", that is against the NATO powers, which made war to stop genocide in Kosova, the would-be left actively sided with the primitive Serb ethno-imperialism of Slobodan Milosevic and worked to whip up an "anti-war movement" in support of those engaged in a war to kill or drive out the Albanian population (over 90%) of Serbia's colony, Kosova.

Some did this because they had not quite got rid of the idea that the Milosevic regime, the most Stalinist of all the successor regimes in the former Stalinist states, was somehow "still" progressive, or even still "socialist".

Others - the SWP - simply thought that a big anti-war movement on any basis would rouse young people to action and thus help build up the forces of the SWP. So the crowd came in response to their demagogic agitation, they cared not what came to the Albanians...

Yet others were one-sided pacifists, or old style Neanderthal anti-Germans, like Tony Benn. They spent the war re-enacting a foolish parody of the sort of Stalinist antics that over decades destroyed independent working-class politics.

The state of the British left at the start of the 21st century was most horribly depicted in the demagogic, one-sidedly pacifistic "anti-imperialism" which it deployed to build that pro-Milosevic "stop the war" movement in April-June 1999.

In an overflow meeting at the Friends Meeting House on the Euston Road, the CND Catholic ex-Bishop Bruce Kent denounced the then Minister of Defence George Robertson, a man of Scottish working class background, in the tone and manner of a Duchess talking of a careless dustbin man, as "that l-i-t-t-l-e man!"

The central "demand" of the anti-war movement of 1999 was for NATO to stop the war before it had secured its immediate objective of forcing the Serbs in Kosova to desist and withdraw their troops. Translated into the real political world, that meant: let the Serbs get on with it!

d. The Iraq anti-war movement

Three years later in Britain the same people recycled their "anti-war movement" as an opposition to war with Iraq. Now they took on the colours of the Ba'th Party - Galloway on the platforms left no doubt of that - and after the occupation of Iraq, of the "resistance" which they supported there, made up of Sunni supremacists, Al Qaeda, and other clerical fascists, including, on and off, the Shia-based Sadr movement.

The Iraq anti-war movement of 2002-3 consisted of a number of very large demonstrations. Vast numbers of people came out to proclaim that they did not want war, or, after the war, the occupation of Iraq. A smaller number came out to protest against Israel in the Israel-Hezbollah war of August 2006.

The ongoing campaign, between demonstrations and long after they had passed, consisted of a group of people with politics that were not necessarily those of the marchers: the Communist Party of Britain, the Socialist Workers Party, the Muslim Association of Britain (which proudly proclaimed its links to the Muslim Brotherhood), George Galloway MP, the long-time voice in Britain of the fascistic Saddam Hussein regime in Iraq, and others.

These gave the campaign its slogans and rallying cries and, so to speak, constituted the face and voice of the anti-war movement: they also (the SWP mainly) provided the many thousands of placards distributed to marchers. Thus they determined that the demonstrations had a markedly Islamist and anti-Israel dimension, demanding the destruction of Israel in such slogans as "Palestine free - from the river to the sea" - often carried by young people who had not grasped the implications of such slogans.

It became a very Islamic "anti-war movement" after 2002, although, when it had first taken shape in 1999, its SWP core had made it into a murderously anti-Muslim movement...

The SWP-UK's "Respect (George Galloway)" party, rooted in the anti-war movement, campaigned in the 2004 Euro-election as "the best fighters for Muslims".

The chameleon political quick-change antics would denote utter political disorientation even without any of the "anti-imperialist" extravagances that went with them.

e. Different imperialisms and different "anti-imperialisms"

There are many different sorts of imperialism, and therefore of anti-imperialism, in history. Up to the middle of the 20th century, and in some cases beyond, the world was divided into great colonial empires - British, French, Belgian, Dutch, Portuguese, Russian. Russia waged the last of the old-style wars of colonial conquest for the decade after it invaded Afghanistan, in 1979.

That colonial imperialism has gone out of existence, as a result of revolt against the rulers, or because the rulers found continued occupation unprofitable. In the capitalist world after World War Two, the USA exerted a great pressure on the old colonial empires to liquidate; using its superior economic power, it stopped the British-French-Israeli "Suez Adventure", the invasion of Egypt in 1956.

To an important extent the repression of peoples that was a routine part of colonial imperialism continues, now worked by the successor states, many of them bureaucratic administrative

units, not nations, created by colonialism, to contain "alien" segments of the state's population.

Against old colonial imperialism, the Communist International advocated struggle for national independence, led by "revolutionary" nationalists or by the Communist Party, or both in alliance. This was seen as part of the movement towards world revolution and the global removal of capitalism, in which the working class, especially the working class of the advanced countries considered ripe for socialism, would be the protagonist and leader of the rest of the plebeian population. The proletarian revolution was the central "anti-imperialism", the answer to the domination of the world by the rich countries

With the liquidation of old colonialism, what is imperialism? Primarily, the workings of the capitalist world market. What, now, is anti-imperialism? It is the working class anti-capitalist revolution!

Against the "imperialism of free trade, and economic might, and military clout", of the USA now, the only feasible, serious, real "anti-imperialism" is inseparable from working-class anti-capitalism.

Against colonialism and military occupation, anti-colonial struggle for self-determination has definable, reachable, achievable, limited objectives. The anti-imperialism which denounces ineradicable aspects of the natural and necessary relationship of capitalist states where the world market is God - which condemns inequalities of wealth and what goes with them, which denounces state egotism and self-aggrandisement - is, if translated into the realities of our world, denouncing capitalism.

Populist anti-imperialism, as distinct from working-class anti-imperialism, denounces capitalism in a mystified and mystifying, and fundamentally confused and incomplete, way. It does not propose to overthrow capitalism, and hence has no serious anti-imperialist programme.

As the Theses of the Second World Congress of the Communist International noted in 1920, the unequal weight of different independent countries is as natural a consequence of market relationships as is inequality in wealth between formally equal citizens within a bourgeois democracy. It can perhaps be ameliorated in both cases, but then the inequalities pile up again. It is like hacking down grass, that is densely seeded and abundantly watered: the effect is soon undone by nature, so long as seeds and roots remain in place.

Populist nationalists at most aspire to or attempt to create "economic independence" - autarky. That too is limited in its possibilities, economically regressive, and unsustainable. It was the policy of ruling Stalinists - Trotsky itemised as one of Stalinism's most reactionary aspects its policy of cutting off from the world market, as distinct from regulating and controlling relations with it.

For decades populist nationalists in Latin American and other independent countries have been denouncing "Yankee imperialism".

What can they do against imperialism, as populist "anti-imperialists"? Not a lot, and nothing fundamental.

That sort of "anti-imperialism" ruled in independent Ireland for the quarter century before 1958. It implied autarky, cutting off from the international division of labour. From 1958, the same politicians who set it up, with the same individual in the lead, Sean Lemass, began to dismantle it.

Behind high tariff walls, it created some native small industries, which couldn't compete internationally. The economy stifled, haemorrhaging people.

"Partial" anti-imperialism of that populist and nationalist sort is, in general, regressive and reactionary. It is of limited effectiveness and duration. In some cases it is possible for industry to grow up behind "nursery tariffs", as in its day 19th century German industry did; but generally the populist anti-imperialism does not even lay foundations on which the economy

can build once reintegrated into the international division of labour from which it has withdrawn to one extent or another.

At best it proposes more or less serious interim ameliorations - protectionism, nationalisation of foreign owned industries, etc. It aims to strengthen "national" capitalism against "foreign" capitalism. These ameliorations may in themselves be worthwhile, play important roles in developing the economy of a given state for a period, in changing the relative places of developing states, but "imperialism" will not in that way be overthrown. Other than the proletarian revolution no anti-imperialist programme exists except a reactionary one, more or less reactionary according to the degree of regression to economic autarky.

We live in a world where the most important victims of imperialism in the time of Lenin's and Trotsky's Communist International, India and China are becoming super-powers... In which Iran, occupied as late as 1946 (by Britain and Russia), and Iraq, a British protectorate until fifty years ago (1958), long ago grew to be competing regional imperialisms, and spent most of the 1980s locked in a World War One-style regional imperialist war of attrition, with horrendous World War One-level casualties on both sides.

In this world, the residual elements of "anti-colonialism" will be auxiliary and subordinate to working-class socialist anti-imperialism. Otherwise "anti-imperialism" becomes a siding with anything else against the dominant capitalist powers, and comes to include siding with lesser, weaker imperialisms and regional imperialisms, like Iran or Iraq.

We are against imperialism as such, on the lines sketched by the Second Congress of the Comintern? Yes, but the point is that "anti-imperialism" is not an absolute imperative, not outside of context, not outside of the concrete truths of world politics. The Comintern theses themselves made a modification, an exception, insisting on "the need to combat pan-Islamism and similar trends, which strive to combine the liberation movement against European and American imperialism with an attempt to strengthen the positions of the... mullahs, etc."

f. Chameleon anti-imperialism

Nameless, class-less, anti-imperialism, specifying only what it is against, is in existing conditions a trap and a snare. Despite the froth-at-the-mouth hostility to "imperialism", it is only as progressive or otherwise as the "anti-imperialist" forces it identifies with. Anti-imperialism is only a negative, is, so to speak, politically translucent, undefined, shading in politics. It is a form of chameleonism, taking on the colours of the chosen "anti-imperialist" forces, including lesser imperialisms in conflict with the USA.

Pure and simple negativism towards the USA and the advanced capitalist countries can and does lead those "anti-imperialists" - people operating by emotion, positive but above all negative, without a map of the political terrain in which they operate or a living conception of a socialist "destination" - into self-righteous political reactionism. They take on the colour of the "anti-imperialists" (including real or aspirant lesser imperialisms, for example again Iraq or Iran). The same approach would have led them in World War Two to back Japan, the fundamentally weak and less developed imperialist power; and Japan talked of "Asia for the Asians" and of itself as embodying that course.

In our world, chameleon "anti-imperialism" necessarily signifies not only residual struggles for national independence, but also, and more powerfully, the anti-imperialism, and "anti-capitalism" of people who reject everything socialists see as progressive in capitalism and liberal-democratic bourgeois society, everything on which we must build socialism - religious maniacs of the various currents of political and fundamentalist Islam. Many of them consciously support regional imperialisms such as Iran and Iraq, and not a few of them pine for the restoration of the pre-1918 Turkish Empire - "the Caliphate"!

When the Communist International codified its guiding principles on such things, the victory of "revolutionary nationalists" could be seen as a part of a general movement against imperialism spearheaded by the drive against capitalism of the Communist workers of the advanced world. Or as "anti-imperialist" movements in which communist working class local forces, allied to,

augmented and in part defined in their political character by their links with the world movement, could compete with reactionary "anti-imperialists" for political and social dominance, and shape the movement into a working-class-led anti-capitalist "permanent revolution". The Comintern did not expect that the colonies would become independent under capitalism - least of in a world in which communism has disappeared as a mass force.

Today, "anti-imperialism" is often only a detached fragment of the programme of the Communist International. The frame and the prospect of short or medium term working-class victory is no longer part of it, except in the heads of people who shout about "permanent revolution", not as a strategic orientation in which the working class can really fight for power, but as a magic mantra. It is a foolish mystification and in practice a mechanism for accommodation - and de facto political submission to - alien class and political forces. Forces, it needs to be said bluntly, that are sometimes reactionary compared to a straightforward capitalist society. Iran, and its 1979 revolution, is the seminal modern experience here.

In Iran, the clerical-fascists have been in power 30 years and will rule for some incalculable time yet.

For the kitsch anti-imperialists of the would-be left, it is not enough to criticise the great powers, tell the full truth about their goals and methods, and the consequences of what they do - in Iraq now, for the pertinent example. They believe that "Leninist", "anti-imperialist" political virtue demands that they side explicitly with the enemies of their "imperialist" enemies, no matter how reactionary is what they counterpose to imperialism and its Iraqi allies. They also counterpose their "anti-imperialism" to the working-class communist version of anti-imperialism.

Slogans have become detached from their conscious meaning; they have turned into fetishes - into things with more of the nature of religious mysticism to them than rationally deployed political tools. "Troops Out Now" is a pointed way of siding with the enemies of our enemies, of calling for their defeat. Sometimes it can be a *reductio ad absurdum* of self-determination, conceived of as progress.

It is a purely negative thing here: another sloganistic fetish-object. The idea of self-determination is separated from the whole complex of ideas and goals, and processes which, for Marxists and in the Marxist programme, it is part. There is no time-perspective; no idea of letting things develop until they become - or may become - more favourable to a desirable positive outcome. The negative-only outlook devours that dimension. Here too the lack of historic perspective is all-devouring!

It is not the "anti-imperialists'" indignation against advanced capitalist society and power politics which socialists reject, but their crazily improvised alliances and the alternatives which their allies propose, and which they - to put at its weakest - "go along with".

The craziest current example is the support by some of the would-be left of the "right" of the ruling Iranian mullahs to have nuclear weapons! Iranian self-determination and "independence" demands the further proliferation of nuclear weapons, and in particular their possession by the mystics of a clerical-fascist regime, some of whom, certainly, are capable of wanting nuclear annihilation for the greater glory of Allah and their own ascent into a Hollywood bordello-heaven.

Those who accept as "anti-imperialist" progress the various strands of anti-western politics and military campaigns, rampant in and around the Muslim world, and to an extent in the countries of western Europe wherever Muslims are a sizeable part of the population - they are "reactionary anti-imperialists", like those they reflect.

g. Lenin's critique of "anti-imperialism"

At the same time as Lenin denounced the "high imperialism" of his day, condemning it as having led ineluctably to the catastrophe of World War One, he also criticised the different sorts of anti-imperialisms, as Marx and Engels had criticised the different socialisms and anti-

capitalisms in their day (the Communist Manifesto).

"There is not, nor can there be, such a thing as a 'negative' Social-Democratic slogan that serves only to 'sharpen proletarian consciousness against imperialism'. A negative slogan unconnected with a definite positive solution will not 'sharpen', but dull consciousness, for such a slogan is a hollow phrase, mere shouting, meaningless declamation".

"The bourgeoisie makes it its business to promote trusts, drive women and children into the factories, subject them to corruption and suffering, condemn them to extreme poverty. We do not 'demand' such development, we do not 'support' it. We fight it. But how do we fight? We explain that trusts and the employment of women in industry are progressive. We do not want a return to the handicraft system, pre-monopoly capitalism, domestic drudgery for women. Forward through the trusts, etc., and beyond them to socialism!"

"Imperialism is as much our 'mortal' enemy as is capitalism. That is so. No Marxist will forget, however, that capitalism is progressive compared with feudalism, and that imperialism is progressive compared with pre-monopoly capitalism. Hence, it is not every struggle against imperialism that we should support. We will not support a struggle of the reactionary classes against imperialism; we will not support an uprising of the reactionary classes against imperialism and capitalism".

If we support national uprisings against imperial rule, wrote Lenin - and we do - then that is not just because we are "against" imperialism, but because we are positively for national freedom.

When Marxists, continuing the policy of the anti-imperialism of early twentieth century Marxism and communism, support even the most undeveloped victims of capitalism against their advanced capitalist-imperialist conquerors, would-be conquerors, maltreaters and exploiters - for example, the Ethiopians under the leadership of the feudal monarch, Haile Selassie against the Italian invasion in 1935 - we do not adapt to, and still less do we idealise, such forces and their dominant views of the world. We do not champion such views against the typical world outlooks of advanced capitalism.

We do what we do from our own class viewpoint on history, on advanced capitalism, and on what programmatically we fight for as an alternative.

Those who uphold reactionary anti-imperialism on the left today conflate that old communist policy with idealising and glorifying anti-US forces and accepting them as a viable programmatic alternative to capitalist imperialism.

For some of those who tried to build an anti-war movement in support of the Serbian regime of Slobodan Milosevic over Kosova in 1999, "anti-imperialism" came to mean condoning attempted genocide because it was done by a "progressive" regime opposed by "imperialism"...

The way that much of the Left today courts and flatters Islamic clerical fascism, painting up its "anti-imperialism", etc., is the clearest and most terrible example here. The Communist International never did that, nor did the Fourth International of Trotsky. Nor even, for a very long time the Fourth International after Trotsky, despite its partial political disorientation, and its putting "The Colonial Revolution" at the centre of its conception of an ongoing socialist revolution, Stalinist-led "for now". We never abandoned or subordinated our critical attitude to, and political war against alien, non-working class, criticisms of imperialism.

h. Anti-imperialism shades into reactionary anti-capitalism

What Marx and Engels, in the Communist Manifesto called "reactionary socialism" was the view of much of the traditional right at the time of the Communist Manifesto. Strong strands of it can be found in political Islam, as in Catholic-Christian clerical fascism.

It was and never entirely ceased to be an aspect of the Catholic Church. For example, even the mildly pro-Nazi Pope Pius XII, whose church in Europe after the war organised and itself became

a network of escape and temporary refuge for clerical-fascist collaborators with the Nazis, who were often mass murderers themselves (the Croatian Ustashe, for example) - even Pius XII, in his Christmas message for 1942, called for "legislation [to] prevent the worker, who is or will be a father of a family, from being condemned to an economic dependence and slavery which is irreconcilable with his rights as a person. Whether this slavery arises from the exploitation of private capital or from the power of the state, the result is the same..." (He also, as other parts of that Statement show, was one of the legion of those then who thought that capitalism was coming to an apocalyptic end.)

The socialist who therefore would have looked to the Pope and his subordinates as allies would have been a certifiable political idiot!

For the reactionary anti-capitalists whom Marx and Engels discuss in the Communist Manifesto, it was a matter of criticising modern industrial society and wanting to go back to a pre-industrial time, back to an idealised Middle Ages or rule by enlightened kings and aristocrats. Its essence was an incapacity to link their criticism of capitalist industrial society and its bourgeois rulers with a perspective of the development of the actual, real, evolving society which they lived in and criticised.

They had a positive alternative to offer, though one historically, and in terms of social development, behind existing society. In part it was an imaginary older system they advocated - an utopia, based on idealisation of what had once existed. They were radical critics of capitalist society too alienated to do much about it. The criticism of Thomas Carlyle, a political reactionary and of John Ruskin was used in anti-capitalist educational work until well into the twentieth century.)

The would-be left has, by way of accommodation to "anti-capitalists" like clerical-fascist Islam, taken over this reactionary, critical, alienated, impotent role of the reactionary socialists of the 19th century. Does it have an "ideal"? Nothing so worked out as that of the "back-there-somewhere" reactionary socialists.

The severe rejection of utopianism by Marx and his followers restrains the elaboration by would-be Marxists of ideal societies. So the alternative is defined only negatively. And that opens the way for even clerical fascism to be embraced - or at least to be held hands with - on the basis of the single cardinal virtue of being against 'imperialism' .

But, aside from and as well as the effects on it of accommodating to reactionary anti-capitalist or "anti-imperialist" forces, the kitsch leftists are made into sterile critics like the "reactionary socialists" by a too-all-cutting-off negativism towards capitalist society - the society on which, in the Marxist perspective, we must build to erect our socialism. This is one of the pre-requisites of their accommodation to Islamic clerical fascism.

i. Opposition to European unity

The most long-standing example of the regressive - archaic-nationalist, right wing - character of the would-be left is the way that a large part of it has made opposition to a capitalist European Union a central policy, indeed a principle. "No to the Bosses' Europe - Yes to the Socialist United States of Europe", the slogan of the Trotskisant left, sounds good, but in practice it means and, in the absence of immediate prospects of a European working class revolution, must mean, supporting the continuation or re-erection of barriers between countries in Europe.

For the pioneers in this question, the Communist Parties and their sympathizers, and the USSR which guided them, that is what they wanted it to mean. Their de facto advocacy of the continued "Balkanisation" of Europe, flowed from their opposition to that which gave the movement to a united Europe much of its impetus - Europe as an effective antagonist of the USSR. Described candidly, it was literally opposition to progress outside Russia, outside the "utopian socialist" colony.

In the 1960s and 70s, anti-EUism came to be part of the Trotskisant Left in the 1960s and '70s, for whom it never made any political sense higher than keeping in with the "big battalions" of

the pseudo-left.

Socialists and the labour movement cannot be consonant with our own history and oppose the unification of Europe, even by the bourgeoisie, when the immediate and short-term alternative is the old state system. Within the bourgeois moves to unification we, of course, have our own programme - working-class unity across the fading frontiers, democratic structures and procedures.

The Socialist United States of Europe has been part of our programme since World War One showed the bloody bankruptcy of the European state system, and indeed before that. Because of the multifarious defeats of communism, the working class did not unite Europe.

After the Second World War, the bourgeoisie, faced with the looming power of Stalinist Russia, looked to unite Europe in their own bourgeois-bureaucratic way, taking as their model the Zollverein, the customs union set up after the Napoleonic Wars by the myriad small German states, which over decades prepared the way for the unification of most of Germany half a century later.

"Left" opposition to the unification originated with the Stalinists. Right-wing social-democrats like Hugh Gaitskell opposed British involvement, orienting instead to the British Empire and Commonwealth. The trade union bureaucracy and the Labour Left followed suit, adding their own little Englandism and national reformism.

The would-be revolutionary Left first adapted to mainstream trade-union and Stalinist-influenced attitudes, then moved to their own "revolutionary" version of the same attitudes.

During World War One, Trotsky wrote: "Let us for a moment admit that German militarism succeeds in actually carrying out the compulsory half-union of Europe, just as Prussian militarism once achieved the half-union of Germany, what would then be the central slogan of the European proletariat?"

"Would it be the dissolution of the forced European coalition and the return of all peoples under the roof of isolated national states? Or the restoration of tariffs, 'national' coinage, 'national' social legislation, and so forth? Certainly not.

"The program of the European revolutionary movement would then be: The destruction of the compulsory anti-democratic form of the coalition, with the preservation and furtherance of its foundations, in the form of complete annihilation of tariff barriers, the unification of legislation, above all of labour laws, etc. In other words, the slogan of the United States of Europe - without monarchy and standing armies - would under the foregoing circumstances become the unifying and guiding slogan of the European revolution".

Trotsky underestimated the degree of nationalist recoil from such a German-imposed European unification, but the whole approach is enormously instructive in a world in which opposition to the European Union and to European unification under the bourgeoisie has for decades been a "left-wing" article of faith.

To be continued.

Notes

1. See Tony Cliff's *Russia - A Marxist Analysis*. The claim that all capitalist development had become reactionary was Cliff's way of avoiding, ducking, the conclusion which implicitly saturated his own version of state capitalist analysis of Stalinism - that the Stalinist economic system, presented by him as better-developing than "western" capitalism, was therefore relatively progressive. His picture of Russian Stalinism paralleled that developed by the orthodox Trotskyists. It was, beneath the name "state capitalism", one of its dialects of the orthodox Trotskyist account. Russian Stalinism had, he wrote, quoting the assessment by Marx and Engels of early capitalism in the *Communist Manifesto*, created wonders greater than any of the wonders of the ancient world. When he finally arrived in 1963 at a general theory of state capitalism which supposedly unified his radically different theories of state capitalism in

Russian and in China, it was that state capitalism was the only way that backward countries could develop. The role of state capitalism in underdeveloped countries was analogous to the role of the bourgeoisie in the development of ordinary capitalism in Europe. It was progressive? Yes by the logic of what he wrote, and by the logic of his historical analogies. But he avoided that conclusion with the cancelling out statement that because world capitalism was ripe for socialism, therefore this state capitalism, though it was developing the means of production in a large part of the world, could not be progressive. It was reactionary. The conclusion was entirely arbitrary.

2. So, after about 1947, did the heterodox Trotskyists of the Workers Party/ISL when Max Shachtman abandoned Trotsky's idea - which he had maintained despite deciding that Russia was a new form of class society - that the USSR was historically unviable. He came to see it as a viable alternative to capitalism - indeed, to believe that it was winning in the competition with capitalism and inevitably would win if a working class socialist revolution did not in good time replace capitalism. The battle between socialism and the looming threat of world Stalinism was what the old slogan "socialism or barbarism" now meant. If Shachtman was "revisionist" vis a vis Trotsky and the Marxist tradition upon which he stood, it was here not in seeing the USSR as a new class society, but in seeing it as able to defeat capitalism by competition from its periphery.

3. The point at which "anti-imperialism" came to be used by orthodox Trotskyists as a euphemism for the Stalinist revolutions can perhaps be pin-pointed in the second month after the start of the Korean War in June 1950. For over a month after the outbreak of the war, the American orthodox Trotskyists, the SWP, hovered on the brink of a "third camp" position, refusing to back either side. They had too sharp an awareness of what Stalinist rule brought to people and to working classes not to be inhibited in backing Russia's proxy - North Korea. Their segment of the orthodox Trotskyists would not conclude that China was a "deformed workers' state" until 5 years later. They were only just bringing themselves to accept the idea, against which they had first fought bitterly, that the Stalinist satellite states in Europe were deformed workers states. They resolved their dilemma and came down solidly on the side of North Korea by way of ignoring was specific to Stalinist societies and rechristening Korean Stalinism as "the colonial revolution" in the Korean peninsula. James P Cannon, after a month's indecision, wrote an open letter to the President and Congress of the USA demanding they stop their attack on the "colonial revolution" in Korea. "Anti-imperialism" allowed him to square the political circle.

Build a Revolutionary Party? But What Is a Revolutionary Party?

View(active tab) Edit Revisions Track Nodequeue

Submitted by martin on 17 November, 2010 - 23:15

Marx

Author:

Sean Matgamna

Socialism in disarray, part five

For the rest of the series, click here

Cultural inertia

The precondition for the direct and indirect effect which Stalinism still has on the current would-be left is the fact that a culture, once established, has a tremendous power of inertia.

A culture can be extirpated, wiped out, adulterated, or turned inside out, as the previous socialist and Marxist political culture was by Stalinism; but it can also, left to "itself", go on for a very long time, especially if it still seems to "work" and nothing better replaces it.

The degenerated social-democratic culture in the working class is a case in point. It survived long after the political and moral collapse of social democracy in 1914, even where it had to compete with the vigorous early Communist International.

Antonio Gramsci: "Mass ideological factors always lag behind mass economic phenomena... at certain moments, the automatic thrust due to the economic factor is slowed down, obstructed or even momentarily broken by traditional ideological elements... Hence ... there must be a conscious, planned struggle to ensure that the exigencies of the economic position of the masses, which may conflict with the traditional leadership's policies, are understood. An appropriate political initiative is always necessary to liberate the economic thrust from the dead weight of traditional policies".

The revolutionary Marxist tradition

Today we live in conditions where the tradition of revolutionary Marxism that "flowed" through Trotsky and the Trotskyism of his time is highly fragmented.

Its elements are disassembled and sometimes needlessly counterposed to each other as fetish-objects, that is, dogmatically overemphasised aspects of what should be one integrated movement. This situation has much in common with the state of revolutionary socialism before the Communist International, after the October Revolution, began to reintegrate the contributions of the Social-Democratic left, the revolutionary syndicalists, and the best of the anarchists, into a coherent whole.

Yet the revolutionary socialist tradition is immensely important.

The revolutionary movement is, in Trotsky's words, "the memory of the working class". The bourgeoisie has a vast retinue of intellectuals to record, construe, explain, slant, spin current and past events from the point of view of the ruling bourgeoisies. It has a many-faceted educational apparatus which teaches its history, its values, its outlook, which glorifies its system.

It tells the young that capitalism and bourgeois democracy are the culmination of history. It fights the bourgeois class war on the "ideological front", waging a never-ending ideological war on the bourgeoisie's behalf. (For instance, the way the oil and other "interests" have systematically worked to discredit the evidence about global warming.)

The bourgeoisie also has social and political institutions which "socialise" people in general and the working class in particular, into the values, the outlook, and the tradition which expresses its interests.

The working class has none of that. It exists in a bourgeois world, dominated by commerce, which inculcates bourgeois values. It is constantly under bombardment by the bourgeois media, which do the same.

Against all that we have our under-resourced educational and propaganda work; and a large part of that depends on and is enriched by the written residues of the socialist past - what we have of them.

You cannot at will take the working class through the enlightening experience of a general strike. You can teach workers about the general strikes of history, like Britain in 1926 and France in 1936 and 1968, and about such half-buried events as the British general strike of 1842 (in bourgeois histories, the "Plug Riots").

Our traditions embody our history, our collective, codified experience, spanning generations and the work of generations of socialists. They exemplify our Marxist methodology, our models of how to analyse and think.

In times of adversity, one-sided "sects" can sometimes play a positive role, by preserving valuable ideas, even in a decayed, desiccated, or petrified form.

The "orthodox Trotskyists" did that, and so in their different ways did the others. AWL, over decades, evolved its own political tradition out of the "orthodox Trotskyism" of James P Cannon. We then "discovered" the literary work in the 1940s and 50s of Max Shachtman and others.

We have learned much from the "heterodox Trotskyists" and from attempting to reintegrate the positive contributions of others - the De Leonites and revolutionary syndicalists, for example - into our work. Much of what we had been doing had been done earlier by the Shachtmanites, and done better because the Workers' Party and ISL emerged as part of a general Bolshevik-Trotskyist culture much richer and deeper than was the culture of the politically impoverished dialects and descendants of the earlier Trotskyist movement out of which the AWL tendency evolved.

We live in a situation where the living aspects of our tradition are dislocated, and embedded in partly, or sometimes greatly, alien traditions, for instance, that of the "orthodox Trotskyists", from which AWL has evolved. Therefore, in striving to integrate the sundered elements of the Trotskyism of Trotskyists we face the danger of vapid eclecticism. To a shaping extent, such political and theoretical eclecticism is central to the SWP-UK.

Avoiding that is a question of striving for consistency, critical understanding of what we take as our "tradition", and above all in living by the cardinal rule of Marxist politics - to be guided always by the logic of the class struggle, and within that by the interests of the working class, including its "interest" in learning what capitalism is and what socialism strives to be and to achieve.

What Marxist party is and does

The working class, at high points of struggle, can and does improvise with great creativity, often forcing the Marxists to shake themselves up and re-think in order to "catch up".

But a lucid overview of the mechanisms of capitalism, of the nature and relations of the social classes, of the long historic evolution of which working-class socialism will be the culmination, and of socialist strategy, cannot be improvised.

Broad labour movements can arrive at generally socialist hopes and aspirations, just as young people can arrive at angry rebellion against capitalism. Scientific understanding of capitalism, of society, of the centrality of the working class and the politics of working class self-liberation - in short, understanding of how we can map the way from capitalism neo-barbarism to human liberation - does not arise "spontaneously".

It has to be brought into the struggle by those who have laboured for years or decades in advance to educate themselves and absorb the lessons of past struggles.

Quick, seemingly miraculous, transformations in the thinking of labour movements have occurred and will occur. Why? Because the worker who accepts capitalism is in a condition in which her and his objective interests as both worker and human being are at odds with the ideas about society and the world she or he has been taught to accept. In times of big struggles, those ideas come into direct conflict with the experience of the worker, and start to totter. Once that begins, everything can change.

Marxism is a necessary part of this process. But it has to be the authentic Marxism, the real Marxism, of its best period.

It is to make Marxist theory a living reality in working-class practice that socialist organisations do what they do.

Lenin on the formation of socialist labour movements

Writing about Russia 100 years ago, Lenin put it like this:

"Social-Democracy [the revolutionary Marxist movement, in the terminology of Lenin's time of writing] is a combination of the labour movement with socialism. Its task is not passively to serve the labour movement at each of its separate stages, but to represent the interests of the movement as a whole, to point out to this movement its ultimate aims and its political tasks,

and to protect its political and ideological independence.

Isolated from Social-Democracy, the labour movement becomes petty and inevitably becomes bourgeois: in conducting only the economic struggle, the working class loses its political independence; it becomes the tail of other parties and runs counter to the great slogan: 'The emancipation of the workers must be the task of the workers themselves.'

In every country there has been a period in which the labour movement existed separately from the socialist movement, each going its own road; and in every country this state of isolation weakened both the socialist movement and the labour movement. Only the combination of socialism with the labour movement in each country created a durable basis for both the one and the other.

But in each country this combination of socialism with the labour movement took place historically, was brought about in a special way, in accordance with the conditions prevailing at the time in each country... The process of combining the two movements is an extremely difficult one, and there is therefore nothing surprising in the fact that it is accompanied by vacillations and doubts."

And again: "The strikes of the 1890s [in Russia] revealed far greater flashes of consciousness: definite demands were put forward, the time to strike was carefully chosen, known cases and examples in other places were discussed, etc. While the earlier riots were simply uprisings of the oppressed, the systematic strikes represented the class struggle in embryo, but only in embryo.

Taken by themselves, these strikes were simply trade union struggles, but not yet Social-Democratic struggles. They testified to the awakening antagonisms between workers and employers, but the workers were not and could not be conscious of the irreconcilable antagonism of their interests to the whole of the modern political and social system, i.e., it was not yet Social-Democratic consciousness. In this sense, the strikes of the 1890s, in spite of the enormous progress they represented as compared with the 'riots', represented a purely spontaneous movement.

We said that there could not yet be Social-Democratic consciousness among the workers. This consciousness could only be brought to them from without. The history of all countries shows that the working class, exclusively by its own efforts, is able to develop only trade union consciousness, i.e., it may itself realise the necessity for combining in unions, for fighting against the employers and for striving to compel the government to pass necessary labour legislation, etc.

The theory of socialism, however, grew out of the philosophic, historical and economic theories that were elaborated by the educated representatives of the propertied classes, the intellectuals. According to their social status, the founders of modern scientific socialism, Marx and Engels, themselves belonged to the bourgeois intelligentsia. Similarly, in Russia, the theoretical doctrine of Social-Democracy arose quite independently of the spontaneous growth of the labour movement; it arose as a natural and inevitable outcome of the development of ideas among the revolutionary socialist intelligentsia".

Today, Marxism, scientific socialism - what in Lenin's time was called Social Democracy - is everywhere separate from the labour movement, greatly more so than when Lenin was writing. To unite Marxism with the labour movement is the task of revolutionary socialists and consistent democrats everywhere. The collapse of Stalinism gives us a better chance of doing that than we have had in 75 years.

But Marxism itself - the consciousness of the unconscious processes of society - Marxism as a guide to revolutionary action, has suffered tremendous blows in the last historical period. The collapse of the Russian state-fostered pidgin Marxism clears the way for the development of unfalsified Marxism. We have a considerable way to go yet to achieve that.

Renewing Marxism

The revolutionary Marxist tradition is "given", but Marxism is not. Marxism as a living force in socialist organisations and in the labour movement is not something given - it has to be fought for and won and then again fought for and won over again, and then yet again.

It has to be clarified and refined and augmented, again and again in a never-ending process. That process is, in a word, "the class struggle on the ideological front".

Lenin said it plainly and truly: "Without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement." He also said: "Practice without theory is blind: theory without practice is sterile". In a declaration of the Editorial Board of the revolutionary newspaper *Iskra*, Lenin wrote:

"The intellectual unity of Russian Social-Democrats has still be to established, and in order to achieve this it is necessary, in our opinion, to have an open and thorough discussion of the fundamental principles and tactical questions... Before we can unite, and in order that we may unite, we must first of all firmly and definitely draw the lines of demarcation. Otherwise, our unity will be merely a fictitious unity, which will conceal the prevailing confusion and prevent its complete elimination.

Naturally, therefore, we do not intend to utilise our publication merely as a storehouse for various views. On the contrary, we shall conduct it along the lines of a strictly defined tendency. This tendency can be expressed by the word Marxism, and there is hardly need to add that we stand for the consistent development of the ideas of Marx and Engels, and utterly reject the half-way, vague and opportunistic emendations which have now become so fashionable..."

Having rejected eclecticism and indifferentism, he went on:

"But while discussing all questions from our own definite point of view, we shall not rule out of our columns polemics between comrades. Open polemics within the sight and hearing of all Russian Social-Democrats and class conscious workers are necessary and desirable, in order to explain the profound differences that exist, to obtain a comprehensive discussion of disputed questions, and to combat the extremes into which the representatives, not only of various views, but also of various localities or various 'crafts' in the revolutionary movement inevitably fall.

As has already been stated, we also consider one of the drawbacks of the present-day movement to be the absence of open polemics among those holding avowedly differing views, an effort to conceal the differences that exist over extremely serious questions."

These words offer a guide to revolutionary Marxists now. They guide the conduct of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty.

Marxism now

The fight for Marxism and for a Marxist labour movement is the fight to prepare the only force capable of taking humanity out of our age of social neo-barbarism, the working class, for that task. It is for that task that the Alliance for Workers' Liberty exists and fights.

In the decades before World War Two, Trotsky organised the tiny forces that could be organised to compete, with desperate urgency, for the leadership of the working class against the perfidious incumbent leaderships of social democracy and Stalinism. But Trotsky and everything he represented was defeated and - as we have to recognise in retrospect - defeated for a whole historical period. Capitalism renewed itself on the mass graves, on the destroyed means of production and the ruined cities of the Second World War, and began a long period of expansion. Stalinism survived, expanded and then slowly asphyxiated in its own bureaucratic caul, for half a century, until, in Europe, it collapsed.

It is impossible to tell how long it will take the working class to make itself ready to suppress capitalist neo-barbarism and take humankind forward. It is more easily definable in terms of

things that must be accomplished.

The labour movements again need to learn by way of their own experience and by the enlightening work of socialists:

That capitalism is neither natural nor eternal. The economic crisis makes explaining this easier now than for decades.

That it is a historically finite system whose inner processes - the creation and recreation of a proletariat and the relentless socialisation of the means of production, of which "globalisation" is the latest manifestation - prepare its own end.

That capitalism digs its own grave.

That the working class, which finds no class in society "lower" than itself and which can only organise the economy collectively, that is, democratically, is the representative within capitalism of the post-capitalist future, and the only force that can suppress this neo-barbarism and replace it with something better.

What is propaganda? What is agitation?

In part one of this series, I quoted part of an answer to the question "What is the socialist movement?" given by George Plekhanov, the "father of Russian Marxism".

In other words: what is the revolutionary socialist party, and what does it do? Let us remind ourselves of, and quote more from, his answer, an answer which guided all the Russian revolutionary socialists, including the Bolsheviks. (In *What Is To Be Done?*, for example, Lenin based himself on Plekhanov's ideas on the relationship of propaganda and agitation).

"Shortly before the revolutionary year of 1848 there emerged among the Socialists men who looked at socialism in a completely new perspective... What... the Socialists with the new outlook [saw was] above all class struggle, the struggle of the exploited with the exploiters, the proletariat with the bourgeoisie.

In addition they saw in it the inevitability of the impending triumph of the proletariat, the fall of the present bourgeois social order, the socialist organisation of production and the corresponding alteration in the relationships between people, i.e. even the destruction of classes, among other things...

All their practical tasks are prompted by [the] class struggle... of the proletariat with the bourgeoisie...

Standing resolutely on the side of the proletariat, the new Socialists do everything in their power to facilitate and hasten its victory. But what exactly can they do?

A necessary condition for the victory of the proletariat is its recognition of its own position, its relations with its exploiters, its historic role and its socio-political tasks.

For this reason the new Socialists consider it their principal, perhaps even their only, duty to promote the growth of this consciousness among the proletariat, which for short they call its class consciousness.

The whole success of the socialist movement is measured for them in terms of the growth in the class consciousness of the proletariat. Everything that helps this growth they see as useful to their cause: everything that slows it down as harmful...

You will only be recognised as a Socialist if your activity has directly facilitated the growth of the class consciousness of the proletariat. If it does not exert this direct influence then you are not a Socialist at all...

My view... is expressed in its entirety in the epigram: Without workers who are conscious of their class interests there can be no socialism

If I assert that the promotion of the growth of the class consciousness of the proletariat is the

sole purpose and the direct and sacred duty of the Socialists, then this does not mean that the contemporary Socialists stand for propaganda, for propaganda alone, and for nothing but propaganda.

In the broad sense of the word this is perhaps true, but only in the very broad sense... In general it is not easy to draw the line between agitation and what is usually called propaganda.

Agitation is also propaganda, but propaganda that takes place in particular circumstances, that is in circumstances in which even those who would not normally pay any attention are forced to listen to the propagandist's words. Propaganda is agitation that is conducted in the normal everyday course of the life of a particular country.

Agitation is propaganda occasioned by events that are not entirely ordinary and that provoke a certain upsurge in the public mood. Socialists would be very bad politicians if they were not to use such notable events for their own ends".

How socialists are made

Side by side with the broad, elemental class struggle of the working class - and with some autonomy from it, not necessarily on the same rhythms and tempos - a certain proportion of each generation growing up under capitalism become convinced that they must fight to replace this society of exploitation and competition by socialism, a society of class and human solidarity. And some of them become committed activists.

For working-class struggles to move towards revolutionary conclusions, what is needed is that those activists organise themselves; educate themselves; keep their theory and their revolutionary drive bright and sharp; and integrate themselves into the existing labour movement and win respect and support there, so that at critical moments of working-class battles they can directly challenge the old time-serving leaders and prevent the diversion of the "spontaneous socialist" impulses of the workers in struggle.

That way the activists can win wider influence, recruit and educate new activists, refresh their own ideas by learning from the battles, and ultimately enlarge, improve, and sharpen their organisation so that at one of the inevitable points where large working-class struggle coincides with drastic internal crisis for capitalism they can lead the working class to revolutionary victory. That is what the Russian Marxists did between the 1880s and 1917.

The Russian revolutionary movement

In Russia the first revolutionary socialists - most of whom also considered themselves "Marxists" - were the populists, peasant-agrarian socialists, who hoped to avoid full-scale development of capitalism in Russia.

The development of the Russian Marxist movement involved a small section of activists separating themselves off from a populist movement which, though in crisis, was still large, active, and influential, in order to argue in theoretical pamphlets for a new approach.

That approach was summed up by Plekhanov in the idea that the Marxists were "convinced that not the workers are necessary for the revolution, but the revolution for the workers"

Later the Marxists became a mass movement in 1905, only to split definitively and be reduced to very small numbers of reliable activists in the years of reaction which followed. As Lenin put it, "Russia achieved Marxism... through the agony she experienced in half a century of unparalleled torment and sacrifice, of unparalleled revolutionary heroism, incredible energy, devoted searching, study, practical trial, disappointment, verification, and comparison with European experience".

Difficulties of the working class as a revolutionary class

The need for a revolutionary party arises from the fundamental nature of the working class as a

revolutionary class.

The working class remains a class of wage slaves until, by seizing political power and the means of production, it makes the decisive step towards emancipating itself. Contrast the classic bourgeois experience.

The bourgeoisie develops historically within feudalism, neo-feudalism, and absolutism as part of a division of labour within society which allows the bourgeoisie to own a segment of the means of production, and itself to be an exploiter, long before it takes political power in society. It thus builds up wealth, culture, systems of ideas to express its interests and view of the world. It, so to speak, ripens organically, and the taking of power, the sloughing off of the old system - even though accompanied by violence - represents the natural maturing and growth of a class already in possession of important means of production, and of the new system it represents.

The working class remains an exploited class - in more developed capitalist countries, the basic exploited class - up to the death knell of bourgeois social and political rule. It does not accumulate leisure and wealth. Its natural condition as a raw social category is to be dominated by the ideas of the ruling class. Its own natural and spontaneous self-defence and bargaining within the capitalist system - trade unionism - binds it ideologically to the ruling class, to bargaining within the system and in times of crisis taking responsibility for it. Its natural tribunes and intellectuals are the trade union bureaucrats, who adopt middle-class lives and standards and thus grow away from - and often into antagonism to - the working class whose interests within capitalism they are charged to represent.

On the face of it the proletariat might be doomed to go through history as a subordinate class. Marx and Engels themselves wrote: "The ruling ideology in every society is the ideology of the ruling class."

In fact the working class becomes a revolutionary class, conscious of its own historic class interests and possibilities in the following way, according to the views of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Trotsky, Luxemburg, Gramsci, and all the great Marxists. A set of social theories is created and developed on the basis of bourgeois social science (economics, philosophy, history) which uncovers the necessary logic of the historic evolution of capitalism towards the completion of its organic tendency to become more and more social and monopolistic - by way of common ownership and the abolition of capital and wage-labour. The proletariat is identified as the progressive protagonist in this stage of history.

A segment of the intellectuals of the bourgeoisie comes over to the proletarian wage slaves.

The proletariat itself evolves as a class through the stage of primitive elemental revolt at being driven into the capitalist industrial hell-holes to the stage of organising itself in combinations to get fair wages, and then to the stage of banding itself together for political objectives. It develops various political traditions.

In Britain the world's first mass working class movement grouped around the demand for the franchise, which meant, in the conditions then, the right to take power. In France a tradition of communist insurrection, involving sections of the proletariat, developed. It was rooted in the left wing of the great bourgeois revolution. A tradition, experience and theory of working class politics developed.

Instead of control of a portion of the means of production, the working class develops its own organisations. Within these organisations a struggle takes place between the ideas that represent the historic interests of the proletariat - Marxism - and the ideas of the bourgeoisie. This struggle occurs even where Marxists are the founders of the labour movement.

Three fronts of the class struggle

Antonio Gramsci summed up the threefold nature of the class struggle

"We know that the proletariat's struggle against capitalism is waged on three fronts: the

economic, the political and the ideological. The economic struggle has three phases: resistance to capitalism, i.e. the elementary trade-union phase; the offensive against capitalism for workers' control of production; and the struggle to eliminate capitalism through socialisation.

The political struggle too has three principal phases: the struggle to check the bourgeoisie's power in the parliamentary State, in other words to maintain or create a democratic situation, of equilibrium between the classes, which allows the proletariat to organise; the struggle to win power and create the workers' State, in other words a complex political activity through which the proletariat mobilises around it all the anti-capitalist social forces (first and foremost the peasant class) and leads them to victory; and the phase of dictatorship of the proletariat, organised as a ruling class to eliminate all the technical and social obstacles which prevent the realisation of communism.

The economic struggle cannot be separated from the political struggle, nor can either of them be separated from the ideological struggle.

In its first, trade-union phase, the economic struggle is spontaneous; in other words, it is born inevitably of the very situation in which the proletariat finds itself under the bourgeois order. But in itself, it is not revolutionary; in other words, it does not necessarily lead to the overthrow of capitalism...

For the trade-union struggle to become a revolutionary factor, it is necessary for the proletariat to accompany it with political struggle: in other words, for the proletariat to be conscious of being the protagonist of a general struggle which touches all the most vital questions of social organisation; i.e. for it to be conscious that it is struggling for socialism...

The element of consciousness is needed, the 'ideological' element: in other words, an understanding of the conditions of the struggle, the social relations in which the worker lives, the fundamental tendencies at work in the system of those relations, and the process of development which society undergoes as a result of the existence within it of insoluble antagonisms, etc.

The three fronts of proletarian struggle are reduced to a single one for the party of the working class, which is this precisely because it resumes and represents all the demands of the general struggle.

One certainly cannot ask every worker from the masses to be completely aware of the whole complex function which his class is destined to perform in the process of development of humanity. But this must be asked of members of the party.

One cannot aim, before the conquest of the State, to change completely the consciousness of the entire working class... But the party can and must, as a whole, represent this higher consciousness."

The post-Stalinist "fetish-party"

The revolutionary party has as its central task to achieve the political and organisational independence of the working class, i.e. to help the working class learn to see capitalism and itself as they are.

It needs the organisational sinews of a body of socialists organised for combat all the way from the struggle on a trade union level at the point of production through to organising an armed insurrection. But it is centrally, irreplaceably, and uniquely, the carrier of a system of ideas, a world outlook, a socialist programme, a method of analysing the world and society which serves the interests of the working class.

Its core activity and responsibility in history is as an educator of the working class, enlightening workers about the nature of capitalist society and about what the working class can and must do in history.

The Stalinist "party of a new type" had an entirely different and antagonistic function, and a substitutionist relationship to the working class. The tragedy of the Trotskyist movement has been its adoption of a Stalinist model of a machine party. Such a party cannot serve our goal of working-class liberation.

The cry "build the revolutionary party" is too often, among would-be revolutionary socialists, an expression of an unthought-through yearning for revolutionary socialist competence and adequacy; and too often it encapsulates a false idea of a "revolutionary party" as essentially a "machine", an apparatus. That conception of a revolutionary party has been dominant in Britain for half a century now.

But revolutionary adequacy in any specific situation will include many factors beside the work of a political machine, many of them not to be created at will by the revolutionaries and dependent on the objective conditions of capitalist society and of the proletariat at a given time.

The cry for a "Revolutionary Party" often works against the revolutionary adequacy it has failed adequately to anatomise and define: it is a snare. This fetish too arises from misreading cause and effect: like the medieval architects who copied the appearance of ancient buildings but had no idea of how exactly it worked: they would make things like columns as mere decoration, that had functions in the structures they tried to copy.

Adequacy, beyond sectist convenience and streamlining of decision-making, is unlikely to be the outcome of creating an infallible "party" Pope, and a college of Party Cardinals - as this project almost always does, and has done in the history of the post-Trotsky "Trotskyists".

Again: such a structure served the Stalinists in what they were really trying to do (as distinct from what they said they were trying to do), but cannot conceivably serve a genuine left wing movement.

"The party" comes in practice to be seen as self-sufficient, and to have interests of its own that it can serve irrespective of the working class. This is a sectist caricature of the pre-1914 Second international approach. The apparatus comes to be seen as in practice more important than the working class. The history of the British Trotskyist movement in the last 30 years contains some terrible examples of this.

The idea that the party is, or can be, counterposed to the working class, and can be set adrift from the core ideas of Plekhanov, Lenin, Trotsky, and others, summarised above, is a source of endless ideological corruption in the would-be left.

Any argument will do to win a point or sustain "a line", and never mind the political education of the working class. Agitation becomes autonomous from propaganda and programme.

The SWP is the great contemporary practitioner in Britain now of the approach that any argument will do; but the approach starts, like so many of the ailments of the kitsch left, with the Stalinist Communist International, which learned to rationalise from the politics of the Russian Stalinist government, whatever they were at a given moment.

To see the revolutionary party only as a "machine" is radically to misunderstand its nature and its prime task - that of education.

To go beyond that to the view that the apparatus can say and do anything that "builds the party", more or less irrespective of the effects on the consciousness of the working class, is a vicious and essentially Stalinist travesty of the idea of "building the party".

Often, by way of demagoguery and the dominance of agitation-led activity to "build the party", this travesty works against the education of the working class.

Only the conscious struggle of the living Marxists, reacting specifically and concretely, focusing and redefining Marxism, can make of Marxism a consistently revolutionary instrument for the

working class, for separating out and maintaining scientific consciousness in the working class.

The priorities of the party

If there is no irreplaceable function of this type for the Leninist party, then there is no need for our party. Were it not for the ideological task of the revolutionary party of the working class, were it not for the peculiar problems of the proletariat in that respect, then the working class could be expected to improvise the necessary organisation for the seizure of power, as the bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie have done. If all the proletariat needs is an organisation, then the tightly knit revolutionary organisations are just sects, premature and almost certainly irrelevant.

If what the proletariat needs is only a machine, then it does not need to have its militants labouring for decades in advance of the maturation of the situation where it requires an uprising.

The consequences of this are that our party is in the first place and irreplaceably a selection of politically conscious militants committed to activity in the struggles for the party's goals. It must thus be selected on the basis of a minimum of political education and knowledge, and commitment.

If it is to be a party which is a living organ in the class struggle, then it must try to integrate itself in all the areas of the class struggle and in the actually-existing labour movement. If it is to be a party whose deliberations correspond to experience in the struggles of the working class, then it has to be a party of activists - of people with a minimum of commitment to the struggle. That commitment, under the direct control of the party, must be a condition of participation in the party's deliberations - that is, of full membership.

It has to be a party of the proletariat, but it is not identical to the proletariat: it must be capable of standing against the proletariat and of struggling within it when the mass of the working class is under the influence or domination of the ruling class or of pernicious pseudo-radical doctrines, be they Stalinist, Peronist, Christian or Islamic clerical-fascist, or any of the many variants of reactionary anti-imperialism. Its proletarian political character depends in the first place on its programme and its historical relation to the proletariat. A proletarian character in the crude sociological sense is not sufficient and in some epochs may not be possible.

The proletarian party without a mass working class membership organised at the point of production and deploying the power which the working class potentially has at the point of production, is impotent; proletarian militancy at the point of production devoid of the historical programme of working class socialism and perspectives for achieving it, is sterile and ultimately impotent.

For the keystone Marxist idea that the emancipation of the working-class is the work of the working-class itself - which in the history of socialism was a proclamation against utopian sects and saviours, individual or collective - the would-be left substitutes indifference to the working-class (for instance the old local government Left around people like Ken Livingstone) or reduces the working-class to a cipher, a token, a fetish of the sect.

The Stalinist fetish of the revolutionary "party of a new type" was a by-product of the utopian project of building socialism in Russia, China, etc. A recognisable descendant of that idea of a party continues in the ranks of the Trotskisant left today. Both the SWP-UK and the Socialist Party (Militant) are terrible examples of party fetishism.

In 1984 the SP/ Militant found itself in the leadership of the Liverpool labour movement in conflict with the Tory government, during the great miners' strike. It made a short-term deal with the Tories, which bought the council a year's time. It left the miners in the lurch - and guaranteed its own defeat when, with the miners beaten, the Tories and the Labour Party leaders came for Liverpool council, as they did.

Why did SP/Militant do that? They wanted to preserve their own "apparatus", their "party", and

- very foolishly - thought that was the way to do it.

Likewise, as the Tories, intent on crushing the working class, came to power in 1979, the SWP adopted the thesis that nothing could be done in the period ahead except build "the socialists" , i.e. the SWP (the "theory of the downturn").

Both these groups continued the Stalinist conception of the "party of a new type" - only rendered more absurd - and senselessly counterposed it, when they thought that would serve their interests, to the working class.

The bomb and the book

A hundred and twenty years ago, in the Russian Empire, as far as the Tsarist authorities were concerned the most fearsome revolutionaries were the Narodnik terrorists. They killed a Tsar in 1881. Lenin's brother Alexander, who took part in a plot to kill a Tsar, was hanged in 1887.

By comparison, the Marxists, with their doctrinal disputes, seemed relatively harmless. Some Marxist scientific literature was legally tolerated. Yet, Trotsky would write with perfect truth after the October revolution, it was not those who set out with guns and bombs in their hands who overthrew the Tsar, but those who set out with Marx's Capital under their arms.

Of the Ulyanov brothers, it was not the heroic martyr Alexander but the book-worming Vladimir Ilyich (Lenin) who posed the fundamental threat to the system. Marxism offered an alternative world outlook to that of the bourgeoisie and the landlords and those throughout society who supported them. It provided a theory of society and a method of extending and deepening that theory; it offered the perspective of a different type of society growing up within the capitalist class society, but dependent for its realisation on the revolutionary activity of the capitalist wage-slave class, the proletariat. The Marxist socialist movement was the memory of the proletariat.

The "fusion of science [Marxism] and the proletariat" created mass working class movements that did, indeed, seem capable of carving out the future they proclaimed. The battle for Marxism against bourgeois and petty-bourgeois outlooks within the labour movement was understood to be itself a front of the class struggle - the "ideological front".

After the collapse of the Second International in 1914, Lenin and others felt obliged to dig down to the roots of the Marxism that had dominated the International, and worked to define the flaws, mistakes and corruptions of doctrine that had led to the International's collapse. Of the results of this work Lenin's State and Revolution is perhaps the best known.

The Marxist "movement of the book" had to clean, shuffle, re-read and supplement its books. In Russia "science and the proletariat" had been fused as nowhere else - a raw, militant proletariat able to innovate new weapons like the mass strike and a Marxist movement forced to keep its intellectual weapons sharp and clear: "Marxism", which saw capitalism as progressive in history, had been adapted by layers of the Russian bourgeoisie opposed to the backward Tsarist system. The proletarian Marxists had to define and redefine themselves, the nature of the Russian revolution they worked for and their own role in that revolution. "Theory" was central.

Yet, though Lenin and Trotsky, Luxemburg, Plekhanov and Martov believed that there could be no revolutionary movement without a revolutionary theory, they made no fetish of "theory".

What distinguished Lenin's group from all the others was its capacity to pierce through the limits of its own theory and learn from the living working class, adjusting theory accordingly. There was a living fructifying interaction between theory and practice.

Thus, though Lenin and his comrades, like all the Marxists before 1905, believed that Russia needed and could not have other than a bourgeois revolution, they came in practice to differ from the others. Using theory as blindfold rather than microscope, the Mensheviks were content to stay on the level of generalities and to draw conclusions not from life, but from

theoretical generalisations. A bourgeois revolution? Then obviously it will be led by the bourgeoisie.

A bourgeois revolution? Yes, said Lenin, in chorus with the others. But, he continued, no longer in chorus, what kind of bourgeois revolution? He insisted on examining the real Russian bourgeoisie as it was in life, irrespective of what theory said. He concluded that the Russian bourgeoisie could not lead a revolution and postulated that the workers and peasants would have to make the bourgeois revolution, against the bourgeoisie.

Focussing on the social realities, he thus concretised and deepened theory and laid the grounds for a revolutionary transformation of Marxist theory in the course of the revolution of 1917. The idea of fetishising "theory" in such a way that it blinkered perception and stifled concrete analysis and thought was utterly alien to Lenin. So was the idea that one could blame "bad theory" if, out of deference to "theory", one failed to keep concrete social, political and economic reality under constant review, testing and honing, and, where necessary, supplementing the theory in the process.

The "Never On A Sunday" left

The SWP's attitude to Islam is possible only because they themselves have a quasi-religious outlook which they mistakenly think is Marxist and "dialectical".

They live in a hazy mental world where everything is essentially in flux; where "Revolution" is imminent; where things are therefore never just what they are; where everything solid dissolves into air. Political Islam is only a transient form of something else, the unfolding "Revolution". Islamic reaction does not matter because the socialist world revolution will soon clear everything up. It is not "really" reactionary because "objectively" it is part of something progressive, namely "revolutionary" opposition to "US and British imperialism". It is not a threat to anyone because it cannot last long.

"After Hitler, our turn", was how the complaisant Communist Party of Germany expressed a similar outlook over 70 years ago. "After the Islamists, our turn"?

History is a revolutionary roller-coaster. Realities dissolve into a pseudo-dialectical flurry.

All sorts of accommodations are licensed, because the thing accommodated to is not fully real. Thus their "revolutionary" socialist politics dissolve into a pseudo-historical mysticism which is very much like a religious belief in a godlike spirit of History which will "take care" of everything for us.

But in fact Islam is real - an immensely oppressive reality for many people in Muslim societies and communities, and especially for those of them who disagree to one degree or another. It is worth recalling that most of the left supported, for its "anti-imperialism", the comprehensively reactionary Islamic regime installed in Iran by the priest-led revolution - it was a revolution, and a profound one - of 1979. The priests are still in power 23 years later.

In *Never on a Sunday*, a once-famous movie made by an American refugee from McCarthyism, Jules Dassin, the heroine is Ilia, an earthy, primitive, whimsical, ignorant, wonderful creature, who makes a living fucking sailors in the Athens port of Piraeus. She loves the ancient Greek tragedies. The hero of the film sits with her in the amphitheatre as Medea, the wronged wife, slaughters her own children for revenge against their father, Jason. Ilia laughs her head off at the tragic events unfolding before her.

Why is she laughing, he asks? She knows it isn't real. It isn't really happening, she tells him. The children aren't really dead. When the play is over they will "all go to the seaside".

Such a way of looking at contemporary history, with an uncomprehending numb indifference rooted in the belief that horrors are not real horrors, is to rational socialism what the religious belief that nothing matters because everything will be made right in the afterlife is to a this-world, humanity-centred philosophy of life. It was at the heart of much 20th century socialist

experience, for example of the attitude which people who should have known better took to Stalinism, and not only to Stalinism.

For Marxist socialists in Britain who have to combine defence of Muslim people from racists and scapegoaters with implacable hostility to Islam, the old Catholic tag offers guidance: love the sinner, hate the sin!

Defend Muslim people, fight Islam! Understand that political Islam is the enemy of everything that socialists stand for! Don't try to relate to the "Muslim community", but to the Muslim working class and to the "Muslim" secularists. Work to split the "Muslim community"; help organise the ex-Muslims, the insurgent women and the socialists within the "Muslim community"!

For Marxists there is no such thing as agitation that does not enlighten and educate the working class about the system as a whole. But if "building the party" is the goal, then almost any agitation that attracts interest can make sense. "Action" becomes all-important, irrespective of the conditions, and almost irrespective of what action.