*The Fate of the Russian Revolution, volume 2*

# The two Trotskyisms confront Stalinism

## Debates, essays and confrontations

Edited and with an introduction by Sean Matgamna

Second edition

*A shape with lion body and the head of a man,*
*A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,*
*Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it*
*Reel shadows of the indignant desert birds...*
*What rough beast, its hour come round at last,*
*Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?*

W B Yeats

*The 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.*

G V Plekhanov

# Introduction: The Two Trotskys

## Part 1: Trotsky Of The Enigmas

DURING MOST OF THE 20TH CENTURY, and the 21st century so far, revolutionary-socialist politics has been some form of Trotskyism. It is rooted in the anti-Stalinist tradition that began with Lenin's 1922 attack, from his deathbed, on Stalin's Russian-chauvinist policy in Georgia, and continued with his attempt to remove Stalin as General Secretary of the ruling party. The Left Opposition of Trotsky, in October 1923, picked up the thread and augmented it.

The Left Opposition, and then the United Opposition (of Zinoviev-Trotsky), took into themselves some of the criticisms made by earlier Bolshevik oppositions to Lenin and Trotsky – the well-known Workers' Opposition, the less-well-known Democratic Centralists, and others. The Democratic Centralists joined the United Opposition. The leaders of the Workers' Opposition, Kollontai and Shlyapnikov, went over to Stalin.

For the Trotskyists – in Trotsky's lifetime they preferred to call themselves Bolshevik-Leninists – it has been a very long march through the 20th century and beyond, and over sometimes strange, unexpected, uncharted, often bewildering terrain. Central to it has been the fight against Stalinism, the attempt to understand and categorise it, the battle to wipe the labour movement clean of it.

The Trotskyist tradition is nourished by the memory of immense working-class victories – the October 1917 workers' revolution in Russia, the Bolshevik victory in the civil war, the foundation of the Communist International in 1919. It is shaped, and also mis-shaped, by the catastrophic defeats of the working class by Stalinism, fascism, and pluto-democracy. The Trotskyist tradition encompasses the historical experiences of the working-class movement in which it participated, and which it analysed, discussed, disputed about. There is no other authentic Marxist-communist tradition.

George Santayana's aphorism is not less true for having become a cliché: "Those who cannot remember their past are condemned to repeat it". Those who do not know their own history cannot learn from it. A revived revolutionary socialist movement will have to learn from the Trotskyist tradition. As Rosa Luxemburg explained:

"What does the entire history of socialism and of all modern revolutions show us? The first spark of class struggle in Europe, the revolt of the silk weavers in Lyon in 1831, ended with a heavy defeat; the Chartist movement in Britain ended in defeat; the uprising of the Parisian proletariat in the June days of 1848 ended with a crushing defeat; and the Paris Commune ended with a terrible defeat. The

whole road of socialism – so far as revolutionary struggles are concerned – is paved with nothing but thunderous defeats. Yet, at the same time, history marches inexorably, step by step, toward final victory! Where would we be today without those 'defeats', from which we draw historical experience, understanding, power and idealism? We stand on the foundation of those very defeats, because each one contributes to our strength and understanding".

A reviewer of *The Fate of the Russian Revolution*, volume 1, dismissed it as "sectariana". Aim at the sky and you are sure to hit the mark! Certainly the texts in that volume, and its introduction, like this one, dealt with the politics, problems, conundrums, debates, and disruptions of small and very small organisations. But those were the organisations that attempted to continue and develop the political ideas and practical projects of the early Communist International after that organisation had been transformed into a corrupt and vicious political instrument of the ruling oligarchy in the USSR. The concerns and disputes of those small groups dealt with all the political questions that comprise the history of the 20th century. These were the concerns that exercised the minds of thinking people for most of that century. George Orwell is widely respected today for his integrity, truth-telling, and dogged honesty. Yet Orwell's viewpoint was a variant of that of the Trotskyist movement, and, certainly, he was strongly influenced by it.

**Trotsky's Evolving Analysis**

THE MURDEROUSLY ANTI-WORKING-CLASS totalitarian state which claimed to base itself on the 1917 workers' revolution in Russia was less than two decades old when Trotsky was struck down. In historical time it was a new phenomenon. For Marxists it was as unexpected and strange as the great continent of America which loomed up before him had been for Christopher Columbus when he thought he was en route to India and the East.

From the very beginning of his exile from the USSR in 1929, Trotsky and his comrades had many disputes among themselves about the exact nature, the class content, and the historical implications and perspectives, of Stalinism, and of the territory over which Stalin ruled. Similar discussions and disputes occupied the Bolsheviks jailed and exiled inside the USSR, until Stalin killed them all. The USSR itself went through great convulsive changes: the final destruction of the labour movement and the Bolshevik party; the reduction of the working class itself to what Trotsky would name as semi-slavery; the breakneck industrialisation and forced collectivisation. Trot-

sky constantly re-thought, reconceptualised, readjusted his thinking, on the USSR as on other issues. He worked by extrapolation, deduction, prognostication on events. He concretised, adjusted, changed, or abandoned his projections in the light of experience. Often events would lead him to apply a new description to the USSR, and also to say that the new description had already been valid for some time. In 1936, for example, when for the first time he called Stalin's regime "totalitarian", he wrote: "The regime had become 'totalitarian' in character several years before this word arrived from [Hitler's] Germany". (Sources for this, and other Trotsky quotes: p.116).

By the end of Trotsky's life, events, and in the first place the development and unfolding of Stalinism in the USSR and (in 1939-40) beyond its borders, had driven him into a politics of bewildering complexity, Jesuit subtlety, and seemingly extravagant self-contradictions. Trotsky bequeathed to his surviving comrades a large quiver of half-evolved and half-eroded "positions", ambivalences, and contradictions. The ideological history of the post-Trotsky Trotskyists is the story of their attempts to work through those half-developed and half-eroded ideas in relation to yet-new and again-unexpected world events.

In 1930, Trotsky broke with the biggest group in the Left Opposition outside Russia – the German Leninbund – on their attitude to Russia's conflict with China over the Chinese Eastern Railroad. Trotsky was vehemently on the Russian government's side. Until 1933 Trotsky thought that the Stalinist aspects of the Russian state could be "reformed" out of existence. Even then he postulated a special type of reform. He expected the bungling and irrationally-run Stalinist system to encounter disaster. The bureaucracy would begin to break up. The party which Stalin had stifled and paralysed would regroup and reconstitute itself as a Bolshevik party. In that way the working class would regain direct power. In 1933 he shifted to the belief that a "political" revolution would be needed to break the Stalinist dictatorship. At that stage he still wrote of a resurgent Bolshevik party carrying out "police measures" against the bureaucracy. In 1936 he deepened and sharpened what he meant by "political revolution", defining it in fact, if not in name, as a full-scale working-class revolution against the USSR's "sole commanding stratum" and its state machine.

The direction of Trotsky's politics on the USSR all through the 1930s was unmistakable. He inched closer and closer to abandoning the idea that the USSR was a degenerated (and degenerating) workers' state. At the beginning of the 1930s he was in public a critical de-

fender of the Russian state. By the end he was publicly denouncing the Russian bureaucracy's rule as "worse" than that of any ruling class in history, and publicly calling for a new revolution against it. He compared Stalin's rule unfavourably with pre-war Hitler's.

The separation in the ranks of the Trotskyists in 1940 was the definitive branching-off of two Trotskyisms, for two reasons. It was at the end of Trotsky's life, and his last word on the subject of Stalinism. And it marked a decisive turn for Stalinism – the beginning of the Russian expansion that would by 1945 see Russia in control of half of Europe.

**Trotsky Of The Paradoxes**

AT THE END Trotsky was the theorist of a Russian "degenerated workers' state" in which, on his own account, the workers were slaves or "semi-slaves".

From the writing of *The Revolution Betrayed* (1936) onwards, Trotsky consistently referred to Stalin's Russia as an oligarchic "totalitarianism". In the programme Trotsky wrote for the September 1938 conference of the Fourth International, he said, and the movement that adopted the programme repeated after him, that Stalin's regime was uniquely reactionary and repressive, different from (pre-war) Nazi Germany "only in more unbridled savagery". "The Soviet bureaucracy has all the vices of a possessing class without having any of its 'virtues' (organic stability, certain moral norms, etc.)". The bureaucracy was "the sole privileged and commanding stratum". It "devour[ed] a lion's share of the modest national income", worse than in the USA: "The higher layer of the bureaucracy lives approximately the same kind of life as the well-to-do bourgeois of the United States and other capitalist countries". "In the USSR there are twelve to fifteen million privileged individuals who concentrate in their hands about one half of the national income, and who call this regime 'socialism'. On the other hand there are approximately 160 million people oppressed by the bureaucracy and caught in the grip of dire poverty". "Historically, no class in society has ever concentrated in its hands in such a short time such wealth and power as the bureaucracy has concentrated during the two five year plans".

And yet, Trotsky still thought, this bureaucracy was not a ruling class.

The rule of the slave-driving elite, wrote Trotsky, "from the standpoint of the interests and position of the popular masses... is infinitely worse than any 'organic' exploitation. The bureaucracy is not a possessing class, in the scientific sense of the term. But it contains within

itself to a tenfold degree all the vices of a possessing class". From the point of view of the workers, the economy functioned worse than capitalism did. The workers suffered "the classic methods of exploitation... in such naked and crude forms as would not be permitted even by reformist trade unions in bourgeois countries". "The relations between people... in many respects are still lagging behind a cultured capitalism". "The Soviet economy today is neither a monetary nor a planned one. It is an almost purely bureaucratic economy... Industry, freed from the material control of the producer, took on a super-social, that is, bureaucratic, character. As a result it lost the ability to satisfy human wants even to the degree to which it had been accomplished by the less-developed capitalist industry".

And yet, Trotsky vehemently insisted, this bureaucracy was not yet a ruling class. In an important sense the "semi-slave" working class was still the ruling class.

Trotsky himself pointed out that: "The means of production belong to the state. But the state, so to speak, 'belongs' to the bureaucracy". And yet he argued that the state-owned economy rooted in the October Revolution continued to give the system its "degenerated" but still workers'-state character. The revolution in Stalinist Russia which Trotsky advocated would smash the bureaucratic state, replace it with the organs of a democratic workers' state (soviets), destroy the bureaucrats' plans for the economy, and replace them with working-class planning, democratically decided, vetted, supervised, and adjustable. And yet he insisted that this revolution which he advocated with mounting urgency was something less than the revolution he advocated against capitalism. Why? Because in both Stalinism and in a post-Stalinist working-class system of social organisation there would be state ownership. It would be ownership by a different state, and a different kind of state, "owned" by a radically different social group, the working class, in place of the Stalinist autocracy; but the common factor of state ownership made this for Trotsky a "political", not-quite-fully-social, revolution.

He was the keeper of the terrible chronicles of the rise and consolidation of Stalinism on the graves of millions of workers and peasants, of the revolutionary working-class movement, and of Bolshevism. Yet he greeted Stalin's statification of property in eastern Poland in 1939-40 as "the strangled and desecrated October Revolution serv[ing] notice that it was still alive".

Trotsky was a bitter critic of the foreign policy that in 1939-41 flowed from the Hitler-Stalin pact of August 1939. It was more than a non-aggression pact, he said. It was a partnership. He denounced

"Hitler's quartermaster" and "jackal" Stalin. And yet he was for the "unconditional defence" of the USSR in its international dealings, that is defence irrespective of the Russian government's policies and actions, and even when it acted, as in Poland, in partnership with the Nazis. He condemned the USSR's invasions of Poland (17 September 1939) and Finland (30 November 1939). And yet, when the Finns resisted, he was for the victory of Stalin's army over the Finnish people.

He insisted that "we are and remain against seizures of new territories by the Kremlin", and that conquest in Poland by the Stalinist state was turning the people into "semi-slaves". And yet he could not side with those "semi-slaves", actual or future, for fear of the effect on the fate of that same state and of what was unique to it because of the working-class October Revolution: nationalised property and some form of economic plan, with all the evils he had angrily described, stigmatised, and urged the workers to resist and destroy.

Trotsky was a proponent of the theory that the totalitarian bureaucracy was historically, for a short time, a locum for the working class and for the October Revolution because it retained statified property; and yet he was a mortal opponent of that bureaucracy from its early days. Advocate of a thoroughgoing revolution to extirpate the bureaucracy, he nonetheless felt obliged to defend its state in international affairs, "unconditionally", whatever it did and even when he condemned it, so long as it remained the custodian and defender of the statified property. In practice, in face of a stabilisation and expansion of Stalinism which Trotsky had not expected, this attitude raised Russian nationalised property above all other concerns. In Finland, it raised it above the freedom of the working class to organise itself, to think, and to formulate and express its own politics.

Trotsky interpreted "defence of the USSR against imperialism" to mean wanting it to be victorious even when it was engaged in an attempt to reduce the Finns (and thus the free Finnish labour movement) to what he had described as "semi-slavery" (in relation to Poland, three months earlier). He was an inveterate defender of the rights of the oppressed nationalities in the USSR. And yet he defended the USSR in its war to subjugate the Finns because he thought the Russo-Finnish war would quickly merge into the Second World War. He denounced Stalin's policy in Finland sharply. He wrote: "During the war with Finland, not only the majority of the Finnish peasants but also the majority of the Finnish workers proved to be on the side of their bourgeoisie. This is hardly surprising since they know of the unprecedented oppression to which the Stalinist bureau-

cracy subjects the workers of nearby Leningrad and the whole of the USSR". And yet he felt obliged to side with Stalin in Finland.

Shortly after Stalin's invasion of Poland – in partnership with Hitler's Germany and as agreed by the Hitler-Stalin pact – Trotsky wrote: "In every case the Fourth International will know how to distinguish where and when the Red Army is acting solely as an instrument of the Bonapartist reaction and where it defends the social basis of the USSR". He bitterly condemned Stalin's policy in Poland and Finland. Yet when in 1939-40 some of Trotsky's comrades tried to separate off what should be "defended", "unconditionally", from what should be condemned as an expression of the oligarchy and its drives, appetites, and interests; and when they argued that "defence of the USSR" could not be "unconditional", he denounced and condemned them. Trotsky described the invasions of Poland and Finland as above all an "extension of the territory dominated by bureaucratic autocracy and parasitism". And yet he still felt obliged to "defend" the Stalinist system's forcible extension by Stalin beyond the USSR's borders because the alternative, once the USSR was engaged, was or might be defeat for the progressive potential of the USSR's nationalised economy. Against "conjunctural defeatism" (.siding with the USSR in wars only "conjuncturally", i.e. in some circumstances), he recalled the legend of "Columbus and the egg". Christopher Columbus challenged his companions to make an egg stand on its end. When they couldn't, he smashed one end of the egg on the table, flattening it. Thus he could make the egg, the no-longer-quite-itself egg, stand on that end. After Columbus's example, anyone could do the same thing. Thus too with defeatism: do it once, on the periphery of the World War, where inevitably there would be cross-currents and complications, and you would find it much easier to do in other situations. Trotsky feared that the "conjunctural defeatism" which he himself had seemed to advocate ("the Fourth International will know how to distinguish...") might slide into a comprehensive defeatism. He feared to disorient his comrades when (soon, in the World War), the Stalinist system would collapse, the bureaucracy would shatter, and the fate of what appeared to be the remaining legacy of the 1917 revolution would become the living axis of politics.

In fact, the collapse didn't happen. The bureaucracy didn't shatter. And most of those who were "Russian defeatists" in the Finnish war would soon reject "defence of the USSR" entirely.

For fear of the spread of a general Trotskyist defeatism, Trotsky took a position which flew in the face of his denunciations of what Stalin was doing and would do in Finland. His stance meant taking

a position on Finland motivated not by what was happening and would happen with a Russian victory there, but by concern for something else, general defence of USSR against the big imperialist powers. By way of the "Columbus and the egg" parable, he said plainly that that was what he was doing. When Max Shachtman tried to insist on answers, on their merits, to the "concrete questions", Trotsky angrily dismissed him as a mere coiner of journalistic jargon.

Trotsky was an international socialist who, feeling the need for auxiliary theses beyond those of the "degenerated workers' state" and the "progressive economy" to buttress defence of the USSR, reached for arguments indistinguishable from those of the Russian Marxist social-patriot George Plekhanov for defending the Tsar's Russia in World War One: Russia would be reduced to a colony if it were defeated. When a comrade, Simone Weil, who was to become well known as a mystical philosopher, pointed this out, he responded gnomically that she had a "right to understand nothing".

I discussed these issues in greater detail in the introduction to *The Fate of the Russian Revolution* volume 1. Some of these paradoxes are plain flat contradictions. Most can be understood in terms of Trotsky's increasingly feverish attempts to grasp and define the new Stalinist system and to hold on to the perspective on contemporary history as an "era of wars and revolutions", on the certainty of which the Bolsheviks had made the October Revolution. Yet, as we will see, the later political evolution of his co-thinkers in the 1939-40 dispute would mock his fear that it would set an open-ended precedent if the Trotskyists came out for "conjunctural defeatism" against the USSR in the Russo-Finnish war. The precedents set by Trotsky's "Russian defencism" on Finland, and by his speculations about social upheavals triggered by the "Red Army" in eastern Poland and, maybe, Trotsky thought, in Finland too – those would be the "precedents" that would begin to reshape and warp "Orthodox" Trotskyism within a year of Trotsky's death.

**The Significance For Trotsky Of Statified Industry**

TROTSKY READ OFF the class character of the USSR from the origins in the 1917 working-class revolution of the statified property that characterised it. At the same time he remembered and said that the statified property in Stalin's USSR was radically different in kind from the statified property in the early workers' state, as well as far more pervasive. It was not less radically different from the statified property of a future regenerated USSR, after a new workers' revolution, under working-class control and planning. He argued that the

fully statified property was inexplicable apart from the working-class revolution which had overthrown the old ruling class. "The first concentration of the means of production in the hands of the state to occur in history was achieved by the proletariat with the method of social revolution, and not by capitalists with the method of state trustification". The Russian system was unique.

This was central to Trotsky's reasoning. What he saw as the post-bourgeois nationalised economy in Russia was unique in the world. It could not have come into existence without the prior destruction by the working class of the Russian bourgeoisie. When the revolution came to be isolated, and declined, the bureaucracy expropriated the working class and made itself, in Trotsky's words, "the sole master of the surplus product". The Stalinist bureaucracy did not create the nationalised economy; its rule was a negation but also a continuation of the revolution, by way of the survival of nationalised property. It performed no essential function in the economy that the working class could not have done better. The bureaucracy was a parasitic formation on the workers' state, an epiphenomenon, not an independent force in history. Without the working-class revolution there could have been no statified economy in the USSR.

Because, as he believed, the bureaucracy was so unstable and historically unviable, the nationalised property still gave the state a predominant, albeit a residual, working-class character. Or, more exactly, a "post-working-class-revolution and not-yet-definitively-anything-else" character.

As yet the USSR remained a degenerated and degenerating workers' state. Or, more precisely, so Trotsky thought and said, it was better to go on seeing it like that for a while longer, until all the contradictory variables were tested, as they would be, in the World War. "Might we not place ourselves in a ludicrous position if we affixed to the Bonapartist oligarchy the nomenclature of a new ruling class just a few years or even a few months prior to its inglorious downfall?" Trotsky had admitted in September 1939 that the USSR as it was might have to be reinterpreted as a "bureaucratic collectivist" society. The lynchpin of his entire position by 1939-40 was: wait a while.

Trotsky saw the nationalised economy as the empirical evidence that the revolution had not been entirely destroyed, and thus for his "degenerated workers' state" theory. But the criterion was not just the nationalised economy "in itself". It was the nationalised economy as seen in the perspective of its origin, the workers' revolution, and then of the revolution's "political" defeat by the bureaucracy. Trotsky

saw the nationalised economy as necessarily, as well as in terms of historical fact, linked to the October Revolution. There was no other way it could have come to exist. The criterion was a question of four elements.

One: the agency, the working class and its revolution.

Two: the empirical evidence of what remained of October, the statified property.

Three: the fact that the level of statification in the USSR was, then, unique in the world.

And four: the fact that the statified economy of Russia bore some resemblance, even in its grossly deformed Stalinist reality, and in a backward country, to the social administration of the economy that the working-class revolution, as the heir to advanced capitalism, would create.

The origin of the statified property in the 1917 revolution reinforced this fourth consideration. But, for Trotsky, it could not have been nationalised property "alone".

From 1937, he began to dismantle and remodel his own edifice of theory, when, "for the sake of argument", he separated his idea that Russia was still, in a very deformed sense, a workers' state, from the idea that the system of statified and bureaucratised planning was historically progressive. It was progressive, he argued, because it developed the forces of production in an epoch of great and all-pervasive capitalist decline. Against a French comrade, Yvan Craipeau, who argued that Stalin's USSR was an exploitative class state, Trotsky wrote: "When we are faced with the struggle between two states which are — let us admit it — both class states, but one of which represents imperialist stagnation and the other tremendous economic progress, do we not have to support the progressive state against the reactionary state?... Whatever its modes of exploitation may be, this new society is by its very character superior to capitalist society. There you have the real point of departure for Marxist analysis!"

And there, too, in Trotsky's idea, you have the starting point for the post-Trotsky Orthodox Trotskyist theory of the "deformed" (deformed, not degenerated) workers' states. These would be states approximating Russia in their structure, and consequently would be considered progressive and labelled "workers' states" to signal that progressiveness; but states which the working class, as a class, had played no part in creating, as in Yugoslavia, China, Vietnam, Cuba.

In that 1937 polemic with Yvan Craipeau, Trotsky presented Russia's nationalised economy as progressive per se. Two years later, in *The USSR in War* (September 1939), he wrote that it would be pro-

gressive only if and when the bureaucracy ceased to rule over it. "In order that nationalised property in the occupied areas [of eastern Poland], as well as in the USSR, become a basis for genuinely progressive, that is to say socialist, development, it is necessary to overthrow the Moscow bureaucracy". He declared in his open letter to the Russian workers of May 1940 that "the surviving conquests of the October Revolution", "the nationalized industry and the collectivized Soviet economy", would "serve the people only if they prove themselves capable of dealing with the Stalinist bureaucracy, as in their day they dealt with the czarist bureaucracy and the bourgeoisie". In plain words, by then Trotsky saw the statified economy of the USSR as progressive only on condition that the working class took power there. (This volume, p.637).

On one level, this was as big an innovation as his shift in September 1939 to the view that it might become necessary to re-conceptualise the USSR, exactly as it was, without further "degeneration", as a form of exploitative class society. And it raised the question: what was now left of Trotsky's post-1937 reasons for "defending the USSR"?

**Trotsky: Feverish Flux**

TO RECAPITULATE: TROTSKY BELIEVED that in the Stalinist system, the state-owned economy was a result of the destruction of the old ruling classes by the working-class revolution and, ultimately, a product of the new economic foundation laid by that revolution. The workers had been politically expropriated by a bureaucratic counter-revolution. And socially, too: in his attempt to distinguish between grades of counter-revolution Trotsky did not in any degree deny that. What he proposed that the working class should fight for against the bureaucracy – destruction of the totalitarian state apparatus, soviet democracy, a working-class-controlled economic plan, etc. – spelled it out clearly.

The new autocracy drove the people like the worst slave-masters in history; it had a concentrated power over society unparalleled in history. Yet it maintained, and indeed after 1929-30 had vastly extended, statified property. It was the autocracy's form of property, rooted in their political counter-revolution, their political expropriation of the working class, and in their way of administering the socio-economic system – but also, more fundamentally, it was rooted in the great transformation accomplished by the October Revolution. The ruling oligarchy maintained that which in broad socio-economic and historical terms distinguished the USSR from the capitalist world.

In Trotsky's view, this was a "transitional" phenomenon of necessarily short duration, an unexpected phase in the protracted decline and degeneration of the October Revolution, albeit one which, because the fetters of capitalism had been thrown off, still allowed a tremendous development of the forces of production. Trotsky knew and said that much of the economic success of the 1930s depended on the savage slave-driving of the workers and the rural population by the autocracy; and he believed that they could not possibly go beyond a very partial and patchy catch-up towards the level of advanced capitalism. He put forward a programme of working-class self-defence and political reassertion against the autocracy. He analysed and described the system, which he considered unviable, as a flux of history, degenerating at an accelerating rate, rather than having degenerated finitely into a durable socio-economic formation. For decades after World War Two, almost all observers, friendly or hostile, would see the USSR as an established, and, so-to-speak, settled and stabilised, socio-economic formation. Trotsky saw it not at all like that. For him it was a temporary conjunction of contradictions which had to give way, and soon, either to bourgeois counter-revolution or to a working-class "political" revolution against the autocracy. Before September 1939, when he declared that a new way of conceptualising the USSR (as it was) might in due course be necessary, he saw the system as a freak of history arising from the political destruction of working-class power in the USSR, combined with the anachronistic maintenance of economic forms rooted in the October Revolution, whose survival in such conditions had been possible only because of the prolonged crisis of world capitalism after 1929.

Repeatedly Trotsky saw the downfall of this system as imminent – in the crisis of collectivisation before 1933 (when there was a temporary consolidation), and with the beginning of the purges in 1935-6, which he initially saw as the death convulsions of the system. Trotsky thought it certain that Russia would be drawn into the World War, and that in the war its current regime would collapse one way or another, under capitalist conquest or under workers' revolution.

In other words, Trotsky's analyses of Stalinism at the end of his life were in a feverish flux, and seen by Trotsky himself as provisional and ongoing.

**A New Organic Socio-Economic Formation "In One Country"?**

TO UNDERSTAND why Trotsky refused to "affix to the Bonapartist oligarchy the nomenclature of a new ruling class", we need to

stand back from the immediate situation of 1940. In refusing at the start of World War Two to classify the USSR as a class-exploitative society, Trotsky stood on the self-same ground as when in 1924 and after he rejected the Stalin-Bukharin theory of socialism in one country. The immediate focus of the disputes in the mid 20s around the doctrine of socialism in one country, the ideological banner under which the bureaucracy consolidated its power, was, properly, its short-term political implications. Socialism, that is, a developed socialist society on a higher level than the most advanced capitalism, and in one country? So there would be no other working-class revolution in the whole epoch in which socialism was being constructed in the USSR? The Communist Parties throughout the world would no longer work to make revolutions in their own countries? They would function mainly as frontier guards to "defend" and serve the interests of the state in which socialism was being built?

Plainly, in this schema, there would be no other working-class revolutions, and the non-Russian CPs would become international guardians and diplomatic and political pawns for the government of the socialist state a-building. And in fact they did, and very quickly. There was also a more profound theoretical reason for rejecting socialism in one country.

The programme of working-class communist revolution is grounded on the level of production attained by capitalism *on a world scale* and on the basis of the worldwide division of labour. Only that level of production, and what could be developed out of it by the working class, would provide the necessary minimum social and economic basis for a socialist society and for abolishing classes. A "socialism" in a backward country, confined to its own resources and inevitably severing at least some of its connections with the world market, could only be a sham. As Marx had reasoned: "A development of the productive forces is the absolutely necessary practical premise [of communism], because without it want is generalised, and with want the struggle for necessities begins again, and that means that all the old crap must revive". In the mid 20s Trotsky put forward an ambitious programme of economic development, which the Stalinists and Bukharinites rejected. But the idea that the USSR, in isolation, in parallel to capitalism, could build itself all the way to socialism was a new version, on a gigantic scale, of the projects of 19th-century utopian socialists, who would set out to create new societies in the wildernesses of the USA or some such "virgin" place.

Marxists argued that socialism would have to develop from capitalism, and be won by the proletariat, that is, by one of the classes

within capitalism and created by capitalist society. It could never come from outside advanced capitalism, rise in competition with it, and go on to surpass it. For Trotsky in 1939-40, the idea of the USSR being a new form of class society implied that it was not a freak of history, an "accidental" combination of circumstances, but a relatively stable, "historically established" and viable system. The objections to the idea of a new stabilised "bureaucratic collectivist" system emerging in isolation on the edges of capitalism and then surpassing it were identical to the objections to "socialism in one country".

Trotsky in the late 1930s took it as a fact that capitalism had ceased to develop on a world scale and was in historical regression. Short of socialist revolution, a series of world wars and with them "the eclipse of civilisation" were certain. It was only in such a world of catastrophically declining capitalism that Stalinism could survive and prosper and, so he wrote, if generalised internationally, stabilise as a new form of exploitative class society.

Trotsky admitted, in effect, the theoretical possibility that the USSR was already established as a new exploitative class society, a semi-slave society. But a definite conclusion that it was so would mean a big step away from his general conceptions of necessary historical evolution. So he held back. That Russia was still a "degenerated workers' state" was not something Trotsky put forward as a long-term perspective. He said plainly that it was a very short-term perspective. He did not envisage long-term Stalinism in one country, or in many backward countries. When he described the USSR as a "transitional" formation, as he sometimes did, he did not mean what that expression came to mean for his Orthodox followers: a stable society in transition to socialism.

Trotsky thought of Stalin's autocracy as too unstable for it to venture on international expansion more than marginally. "The idea of Stalin's sovietizing Germany is as absurd as Chamberlain's hope for the restoration of a peaceful conservative monarchy there", he wrote (December 1939). James P Cannon, the man who would shape post-Trotsky Orthodox Trotskyism, was even more clear-cut than Trotsky on this. "Stalin could take the path of Napoleonic conquest not merely against small border states, but against the greatest imperialist powers, only on one condition: that the Soviet bureaucracy in reality represents a new triumphant class which is in harmony with its economic system and secure in its position at home, etc.... If such is really the case, we certainly must revise everything we have said on the subject of the bureaucracy up to now..." (Letter to Trotsky, 8 November 1939). The time-frame in Trotsky's argument that the USSR could

not develop as an alternative economic model in parallel to capitalism was vastly mistaken – out by half a century. But his fundamental reasoning about the impossibility of a new social order developing on the edges of advanced capitalism and in competition with it rather than from its inner contradictions and historical achievements – on that he was not mistaken. The USSR, after competing with a revived and thriving capitalism for decades, and being drawn into arms competition with the USA which it could not sustain, went down to defeat and destruction.

**Trotsky In The 1939-40 Dispute And In The Split**

BY THE EVE OF LEON TROTSKY'S DEATH in August 1940, the American Trotskyist organisation, which was by far the most important of the Trotskyist groups, had split over "defence of the USSR" in Poland and Finland and over how the Trotskyists should organise and conduct their party affairs. (There would have been no split on "defencism" had it not been for the organisational disputes and the "Cannon regime" in the party). Two currents of Trotskyism had begun the process of complete separation, but as yet only begun. It would take most of a decade before the evolution of two distinct species was, more or less, complete. To change the image: in 1940 the two Trotskyisms were two dialects of one political current. By 1950 the dialects had evolved into two political languages, whose speakers often no longer understood each other.

There is no question where Trotsky stood in the split and the events that led up to it – solidly with Cannon and the "defenders of the USSR". Indeed, he was the main political writer on that side of the divide. On the underlying political and theoretical issues the picture is nothing like as clear-cut.

In the long essay *The USSR in War*, which Trotsky finished in mid-September 1939, he broke radically new ground. For the first time he accepted that the USSR, as it was, without further degeneration, might have to be reclassified as a new and hitherto unknown type of class-exploitative society. If the world war produced not the overthrow, one way or another, of Stalinism, but the spread of Stalinist-type regimes across the world, then "it would be necessary in retrospect to establish that in its fundamental traits the present USSR was the precursor of a new exploiting régime on an international scale". When some of his American comrades (some of them in mockery) branded such an idea as "revisionism", he replied in October 1939 with *Again and Once More on The Question of the USSR*, in which he dismissed such condemnation as know-nothing dogmatising.

"Some comrades evidently were surprised that I spoke in my article of the system of 'bureaucratic collectivism' as a theoretical possibility. They discovered in this even a complete revision of Marxism. This is an apparent misunderstanding. The Marxist comprehension of historical necessity has nothing in common with fatalism.... [If the working class fails to take power], fascism on one hand, degeneration of the Soviet state on the other, outline the social and political forms of a neo-barbarism..."

He suggested that the "further decay of monopoly capitalism, its further fusion with the state and the replacement of democracy wherever it still remained by a totalitarian regime" might produce a similar structure.

If Stalin's system on a world scale would be an exploitative slave society, what was the Stalinist one-sixth of the world, in the USSR? Logically, there was only one answer to the questions posed by Trotsky's reasoning: Russia was already an exploitative slave society. Trotsky had said explicitly that, looking back from the future, the socialists might have to accept that the USSR was already in 1939 the "precursor of a new exploiting régime on an international scale".

Was there some additional quality which the Russian Stalinist system would get from participation in a worldwide network of similar states? Yes, there was: stability, and the elimination of pressure and rivalry from an inimical advanced capitalism. But in terms of the social structure, and the roles of social groups in it, especially of the working class, in this putative slave-society world, Stalinist Russia would remain itself.

Trotsky believed that the USSR would give way either to a workers' revolution or to capitalist restoration, and soon. The great test would be the world war which was already being fought, and which would reach Russia ten months after Trotsky's death. The war would decide the fate of the USSR.

"Defence of the USSR" had been seen as defending a Russia under attack from imperialist states, and on the defensive. In eastern Poland the USSR was expanding its territory as Hitler's partner in imperialist rapine and plunder. Was Russia, then, to be seen as imperialist? The disputes that erupted around that question were heated, but more about terminology and historical perspective than about the substance of what Russia was, and what it was doing.

The majority of the peoples of the USSR were not Great Russians, but members of distinct nations. The Bolsheviks, in 1917 and after, had had to tear down the walls of what had been called the Tsarist "prison-house of nations". At the very start of the Left Opposition

against the rising oligarchy, Lenin, from his deathbed, had indicted the Georgian Stalin for his "Great-Russian chauvinist" treatment of Georgia. As Stalinism developed, its rigid bureaucratic centralising Russian state power subordinated all segments of the apparatus to firm Moscow control. It thereby made the formal autonomy of the smaller nations in the USSR more or less meaningless. In this way, Stalin re-erected, and higher than before, the walls of the old Great Russian prison-house of nations.

The Trotskyist proposals to smash the bureaucracy and revive Bolshevism in the USSR meant also freeing the channels of self-determination for the smaller peoples in the USSR. In 1939, when Trotsky had called for the independence of a soviet Ukraine, he had to defend the idea against both dogmatic semi-Trotskyists (the Oehlerites, a mid-30s breakaway from the American party) and such reflex Russian patriots and chauvinists as Alexander Kerensky, the one-time Russian prime minister whom Lenin and Trotsky had chased out of Petrograd in October 1917. The implications of the call for Ukrainian independence ran right through Stalin's internal USSR "empire". In 1939 Trotsky published bitter criticism of Stalin's "shameful and criminal" invasion of Poland. He refused to use the term "imperialism" for the USSR, but in fact the terms of his refusal to do so conceded that Stalinist expansion amounted to imperialism "in the widest sense of the word". "History has known the 'imperialism' of the Roman state based on slave labour, the imperialism of feudal land-ownership, the imperialism of commercial and industrial capital, the imperialism of the Tsarist monarchy, etc. The driving force behind the Moscow bureaucracy is indubitably the tendency to expand its power, its prestige, its revenues. This is the element of 'imperialism' in the widest sense of the word which was a property in the past of all monarchies, oligarchies, ruling castes, medieval estates and classes. However, in contemporary literature, at least Marxist literature, imperialism is understood to mean the expansionist policy of finance capital..."

Stalin invaded Finland on 30 November 1939, after Russia's demand for military bases in Finland was rejected. Trotsky denounced that invasion too. "The invasion of Finland", he wrote, "indubitably provokes a silent condemnation by the majority of the population in the USSR". But, seeing the conflict as inseparable from the world war, he favoured the victory of the USSR. He feared that the Finnish conflict would lead to British and French intervention. Over Finland, far more than in relation to Poland, he insisted that the necessary condemnation of Stalin's invasion was secondary to a more basic question: "defence of the USSR". "Behind the Finnish question, as behind

the question of the errors and crimes of the Kremlin, stands the problem of the existence of the USSR. Its defeat in the world war would signify the crushing not only of the totalitarian bureaucracy but also of the planned state economy; it would convert the country into a colonial booty for the imperialist states".

**The Trotskyist Schism: The Orthodox And The Heterodox**

STALIN'S INVASION OF POLAND TRIGGERED a dispute in the American Trotskyist movement between a majority led by James P Cannon and a minority led by Max Shachtman. It would end with a split down the middle of the party on 16 April 1940. The Heterodox Trotskyists launched themselves as the Workers Party ten days later, on 26 April 1940. They produced a single-sheet issue of *Labor Action* in time for May Day 1940, and by then they had already produced the April number of the *New International* magazine as their publication (as editors, Burnham and Shachtman had been the registered owners). The first weekly *Labor Action* appeared on 20 May 1940.

As always in such splits, a lot of people simply quit. The Workers Party consolidated as members fewer than the number of SWP and YPSL (youth group) people that they had had in the faction fight. The dispute was nothing like as clear-cut as it is almost universally summed up as having been. Contrary to most retellings, the dispute was not about whether the USSR remained a "degenerated workers' state" or must be reckoned as a new exploitative class state. And it was not about whether or not to "defend the USSR" against big-power invasion. With not many exceptions, the minority, the future "Heterodox Trotskyists", including Max Shachtman, agreed with Trotsky that Russia was a "degenerated workers' state". Shachtman had "doubts"; but Trotsky too had "doubts", and expressed them in September 1939 by sketching out alternative futures for the USSR. The minority also agreed that against a big imperialist onslaught the Trotskyists should and would "defend the USSR". The faction fight in the American Trotskyist movement was focused politically on whether "defence of the USSR" could guide them in the war which Russia waged against Finland between 30 November 1939 and March 1940; and, organisationally, on the "Cannon regime" in the SWP, which the opposition defined as "Zinovievite". That meant: akin to the Communist International around 1924-6, in its early stages of political corruption and debasement by demagogy, and of party-machine rule.

At the start, when Poland was invaded, Albert Goldman moved a motion to "approve of Stalin's invasion of Poland". Goldman

would shift radically in the mid 1940s and join the Shachtman Workers Party, but in 1939-40 he was a leading writer and speaker for the Cannon group. Cannon as well as Shachtman opposed Goldman's motion to "approve" the invasion. Cannon's attitude, as Shachtman recounted it, was that it was "purely a military question and we were in no position to express ourselves affirmatively or negatively on it".

Trotsky, in his first comment for the public press, wrote that the invasion was "not a question of emancipating an oppressed people, but rather one of extending the territory where bureaucratic oppression and parasitism will be practised". "The Red Army received the order to defeat in Poland those who had been defeated by Hitler. This is the shameful and criminal task that the Red Army was assigned by the jackals of the Kremlin".

Cannon and his group then condemned the invasion, and they would also condemn Russia's invasion of Finland. So they now agreed with the minority? No. The majority insisted that the real, basic, and primary question was "defence of the USSR", in effect that they should also "defend" what they denounced – Russia's invasion of Finland. Cannon and his comrades saw the minority's views as sliding towards a general renunciation of "defence of the USSR", and on that they were right. Shachtman and his comrades saw the majority's views as sliding towards alignment with Stalinist imperialism and "bureaucratic revolution", and they were right too. But that all lay in the future.

The dispute became fierce after the USSR's invasion of Finland on 30 November. In Finland, unlike in eastern Poland, there was an ongoing war, which produced a lurch by the Cannonites to what they called "Soviet patriotism" (*The Militant*, 9 December 1939: though that was accompanied by Trotsky's anti-Stalinist polemics.)

The dispute was immediately about whether in their underlying "theoretical" approach (as distinct, for example, from Trotsky's journalistic comments), the Trotskyists should want Russia to win in Finland. Should they, when and if possible, help Russia to win? Should they tell the Finnish labour movement (which would be extirpated if Stalin occupied Finland) to wish for Russian victory over the Finnish people, and act where possible to facilitate that victory? Faced with such questions, Trotsky's whole system of politics began to disintegrate because of its inner contradictions.

The split process took on a momentum of its own. On one side, Cannon and his comrades had initially declared that the organisation could not "afford the luxury of a new discussion". Trotsky had insisted that there should be discussion. But when Cannon and his

comrades started denouncing the minority as the "petty-bourgeois opposition", guilty not of mistaken views within a Marxist common framework but of capitulation to US public opinion, Trotsky joined in. The minority responded by raising the demand that they be allowed to put out a public bulletin of their own, with their distinctive views on the USSR, while still contributing to, supporting, and circulating the SWP press.

The split came on 16 April 1940. The USSR's war in Finland had finished on 13 March 1940. The USSR was 14 months away from war, the USA 20. For some time after April 1940, in nearly every respect the new organisation set up by the minority, the Workers Party, would be a smaller twin of the SWP. The precipitating factor for the split was not the heat of a current political dispute, but the majority's refusal to let the minority publish a public bulletin. In fact the majority rushed to a split without even waiting to see whether the minority would break party discipline and publish a bulletin.

Armed with a resolution from the 5-8 April conference, the Cannon group confronted the Shachtman group at the SWP Political Committee on 16 April 1940 (see *The Fate of the Russian Revolution* volume 1, p.270). Cannon produced a two-part proposal. The first part said: "That the committee accepts the convention decisions and obligates itself to carry them out in a disciplined manner". The leaders of the convention minority abstained on that. The second said that those members of the SWP National Committee (a broader body) who abstained were suspended from the SWP. And that was that. According to Shachtman, "When Cannon had us 'finished off', he turned from his watch to his colleagues with the triumphant remark, 'Only four and one-half minutes!'" For Cannon it was the dawn of a new era, of a "tightened-up", "Cannonite" SWP.

Nobody saw the demand for a special minority bulletin, or its prohibition, as matters of principle. Two things ruled out conciliation: the baiting and demonisation of the "petty-bourgeois opposition", and the minority's experience of being refused even a hearing in some Cannon controlled SWP branches (including Minneapolis, the most important branch outside New York: see p.509). Why sensible people – if they did not want a split – would think two competing parties better than a public minority bulletin is not self-evident. The argument, essentially, was that this opposition, especially degenerate, "petty bourgeois", bending under the pressure of public opinion, could not have a bulletin, or even much space in the SWP press. The production of a minority bulletin with a line on the USSR different from that of the majority might, under the impact of events, have led

to a split at a later stage; but in the meantime the duplication of effort from having two competing Trotskyist groups with very similar politics would have been avoided; and the politics would have been clearer. The best outcome would, of course, have been that the two groups, in a common party discussion, positively interacted with and modified each other. Had the SWP of April 1940 not split, it is inconceivable that the wild quasi-Stalinist zig-zags of *The Militant* in the first few months of the Russo-German war (see below) could have happened. The strange ideas which the Orthodox deployed – "Trotsky's Red Army", the description of the USSR as "the workers' state" without qualification, etc. – could not have been imposed on the organisation by the simple say-so of Cannon and his co-thinkers in the editorial office.

But the Shachtman minority intended to produce their own bulletin, in violation of the 5-8 April congress decisions, and thus there was approximate justice in the SWP Political Committee's decision to split the organisation? Everything suggests that the minority had indeed intended to do that. But then why not wait for them to act and proceed against them when they acted and for what they did?

A majority anxious to avoid a split would have been conciliatory within the decisions they had won at the convention. It would have been eager to make it plain that the minority would not be discriminated against in party activity, positions, etc. It would have followed Trotsky's recommendations from October 1939: to avoid linking the political argument to "the perspective of personal degradation, i.e. demotions, loss of prestige, disqualifications" and to establish "all the organisational guarantees for the minority". The timing and content of Cannon's motions were designed to produce the opposite effect. The majority wanted a split. Cannon's *Struggle for a Proletarian Party*, written and published just before the split, makes that plain.

**Old Antagonisms And The Test Of Events**

SUBSEQUENT EVENTS GAVE an unanswerable verdict on the charge of "petty-bourgeois renegacy" that was the banner of the Cannonites in their drive for a split. The "petty bourgeois opposition" did not bend under bourgeois public opinion when the US entered the war in December 1941. If anything it was the "proletarian majority" who aligned themselves with bourgeois and petty-bourgeois "pressure", in their pro-USSR stance after 22 June 1941, and in an initial fudging on opposition to the war (see below).

The Orthodox would continue for a decade and more to describe James Burnham as the inspirer of the minority. But four weeks after

the founding of the Workers Party, Burnham wrote a letter of resignation, announcing that he no longer had anything in common with Marxism or a Marxist party. Trotsky, he wrote, had been right about him. (See *The Fate of the Russian Revolution* volume 1, p.383). That Burnham had been a central SWP leader, writer of resolutions and articles, co-editor of the magazine, was true. The idea that he was the central leader of the minority – making them, after his departure, "Burnham's orphans" – never made much sense. It was a factional gambit.

Sharp conflicts of the previous decade of the US Trotskyist movement welled up in the SWP of 1939-40 and broke it in two. When he sent Trotsky his polemic *The Struggle for a Proletarian Party*, just before the April 1940 SWP conference, Cannon wrote, in a covering note: "The dam of ten years patience has been broken down" (*Dog Days: James P. Cannon vs. Max Shachtman in the Communist League of America, 1931-1933*, p.6). In 1933, the Trotskyists had come very close to splitting along roughly the same organisational lines as those on which they would split in 1940. Cannon had the majority of the National Committee against Shachtman and Martin Abern and was determined to hold on to it, one way or another. On all the big political questions, there were no differences between the groups. The origin of the group-clique conflict lay in the period immediately after the formation of the separate Trotskyist organisation when Cannon had a personal — and perhaps political — crisis, and had to get an outside job for a period of two and a half years. He largely withdrew from work at the office and got into conflicts with the de facto leadership of the organisation, Shachtman and Abern. Cannon resisted and opposed them on such things as publishing a biweekly and then weekly paper. A monthly was the best they could do, he argued.

There was no political basis for the intense factional conflict then. So Trotsky thought. He diagnosed the difference between the two groups as, on one side, comrades with a long political experience, even before the formation of the American Communist Party, and on the other, younger comrades. In "the local organisations... the workers, particularly those with trade union experience, go more with the majority, whereas the intellectuals, etc., who, come over to the organisation more or less on ideological grounds, go more with the minority. This categorisation is not quite exact, but it is by and large correct." Trotsky linked it to the fact that in the whole previous period the group had been concerned above all with propaganda. "The mere fact that both factions have a different social composition and the different traditions is not enough to necessitate a split, since every party

arises from various groups, elements, etc, is not socially homogeneous, and is a melting pot... The current situation coincides with the beginning of more energetic external work. Whether the League will become a melting pot through this work — that is the question that counts" (*Dog Days*, pp.462-3).

Cannon and his friends used various mechanical ploys, such as depriving Martin Abern of a vote on the leading committee while one of theirs was away, trying to co-opt a Cannon supporter onto the committee, and so on. They excluded Abern from the organising and administrative work which, by all accounts, he was most suited to, and Cannon least suited to. A secretariat consisting of Cannon and Abern was being proposed by the minority. Trotsky commented: "The question of the secretariat is also not quite clear to me. Of course, it is quite natural that Cannon was proposed as secretary, but if I were in Cannon's place I might say, 'I would in fact like a representative of the minority to work as a second secretary'. That would be an attempt to settle the disputed issues collectively, and through day-to-day collaboration frictions might indeed be eased. The personal-organisational disputes are out of proportion to the maturation of the principled differences. It seems to me, in fact, that on the part of the majority an element of organisational 'ultimatism' has played a role..." (*Dog Days*, p.465).

What in Cannon's account of 1939-40 was called "Abernism", the substitution of personal for political ties, is often a real issue in politics, whether it is called "Abernism" – or "Cannonism". In 1939 Shachtman cited as part of the evidence that a "Cannon clique" ran the organisation the moves by Cannon to cinch up a "Cannonite" majority on the Political Committee before the differences had been clearly established.

Early on in the 1939-40 dispute, according to Shachtman, Cannon offered him an amicable split in which they would share the resources of the organisation. Cannon did not deny it, but it was, he said, a joke.

Trotsky, in joining in the demonisation of the minority as "petty bourgeois", did the very opposite of what he had recommended in October 1939. If he had lived, he would have seen in the political activity of the alleged "petty-bourgeois capitulators" – in their stand against the USA in the war – the clearest possible evidence that he had been mistaken. Trotsky would have worked to eliminate the consequences of his mistake. Cannon was unwilling and perhaps unable to register the "mistake" that had allowed him to gain a control of the organisation such as he never had in its first eleven and a half years. Reunification was incompatible with the Cannonite-Zi-

novievite party into which the SWP was reshaped after 1940.

The Workers Party had been born politically premature and only half-formed. They had to sort themselves out politically on the Russian question. The discussion in the WP in 1940 produced three positions, other than those who remained degenerated-workers'-staters as (most likely) the bulk of the minority had been in April 1940.

C L R James and Raya Dunayevskaya argued that Russia was state capitalist, and in fact a "fascist" state. Two groups of "bureaucratic collectivists" emerged. A group around Joseph Carter and including Hal Draper developed towards the view that Russia exemplified a new reactionary form of class society which theoretically could (so it was implied, though their earlier statements did not say this) spread to be dominant in the world. They were impervious to Trotsky's considerations about the shape of history and the impossibility of a new form of society arising in "one country" (or a cluster of countries) on the margins of capitalism and then competing successfully with it. Max Shachtman was not so impervious. At first he developed an analysis almost identical with Trotsky's, only calling "bureaucratic collectivist" what Trotsky called "degenerated workers' state". As did Trotsky, Shachtman saw the USSR as a freak of history, a one-off, and with at least some potentially progressive content. He remained within Trotsky's strictures and theoretical structures.

Max Shachtman published an article in *New International* of December 1940, *Is Russia a Workers' State?*, expounding the majority view of the Workers Party (*The Fate of the Russian Revolution*, vol.1, pp.272ff). In 1946, in response to the consolidation and expansion of the Stalinist empire, the majority, Shachtman included, adopted a variant of the view of Joseph Carter. In this they paralleled (as we shall see) the establishment by the Orthodox in the mid-1950s of a quasi "socialism-in-one-country" perspective on the USSR as a "degenerated workers' state" stably in transition to socialism, and likely soon to overtake and surpass the capitalist world.

**Trotsky's Ambivalent Legacy**

THE TROTSKYISTS SPLIT. Four months later Trotsky was struck down by a Stalinist assassin, on 20 August 1940, and died the next day. By then most of the Trotskyist groups in Europe had been scattered and driven underground by Nazi conquest of their countries.

Trotsky bequeathed to his surviving comrades a great political heritage, but also a number of seriously mistaken ideas. As well as on Stalinism, Trotsky bequeathed mistaken views on the historical prospects of capitalism; and on the prospects of bourgeois democracy.

In *The USSR in War* (September 1939) he wrote: "The disintegration of capitalism has reached extreme limits, likewise the disintegration of the old ruling class. The further existence of this system is impossible". This huge and too absolute underestimation of the resilience of capitalism would warp and derail his comrades' thinking for many years after his death.

As for bourgeois democracy: Trotsky and the Trotskyist movement believed that there were important differences between fascist regimes and bourgeois democracy. In pre-Hitler Germany, Trotsky appealed for a workers' united front to defend the "elements of proletarian democracy" embedded in the framework of bourgeois democracy. For France, the "program of action" which Trotsky drafted in 1934 declared that "as long as the majority of the working class continues on the basis of bourgeois democracy, we are ready to defend it with all our forces against violent attacks from the Bonapartist and fascist bourgeoisie", but with the Trotskyists' own class-struggle methods. In the Transitional Program of 1938, Trotsky wrote: "The Fourth International does not discard the program of the old 'minimal' demands... Indefatigably, it defends the democratic rights and social conquests of the workers".

In World War Two, both fascist and bourgeois-democratic powers formed imperialist blocs. That fact ruled out seeing the war as simply "democracy versus fascism". But Trotsky went further, arguing that in the war bourgeois democracy would disappear. All regimes would become fascist or authoritarian. There would be no difference. This was not a real answer to the question of what weight defending bourgeois democracy should have in the war. It was an evasion. It was to substitute a judgement of how things would evolve for things as they actually were; or, to judge some things as they were and others by what one thought they would become. It was too mechanical and fatalistic.

In March 1939 Trotsky responded to Palestinian Trotskyists who argued "it is necessary to renounce defeatism in countries which are even of doubtful democratic virtue, but which are at war with the leading fascist countries" by saying that iron "socio-historical laws" ruled out any bourgeois-democratic outcome. He wrote this remarkable passage: "Fascism is the inevitable product of decaying capitalism, insofar as the proletariat does not replace bourgeois democracy in time. Just how is a military victory of decaying democracies over Germany and Italy capable of liquidating fascism, even if only for a limited period? If there were any grounds for believing that a new victory of the familiar and slightly senile Entente (minus Italy) can

work such miraculous results, i.e., those counter to socio-historical laws, then it is necessary not only to 'desire' this victory but to do everything in our power to bring it about. Then the Anglo-French social patriots would be correct".

Even if bourgeois democracy were likely to collapse soon, that generalisation faded out such questions as the life or death of working-class organisations in the next months or years. Was that all that was to be said? Was the truth that both blocs were imperialist so overwhelming that it wiped out all concern with defending bourgeois democracy in the war, that is, with defending the existence of labour movements in Nazi-unconquered Europe (and in the USA)? Or: in 1939-40, Russian conquest of Finland would have meant the destruction of the Finnish labour movement. Why was that only a detail? The Trotskyists' predictions proved to be seriously mistaken. In Britain, for example, war-time regulations were introduced against strikes, but not rigorously enforced. After the fall of France, the Labour Party joined a coalition government with the Tories and Liberals, under a Tory prime minister. The Home Secretary was Herbert Morrison, who had been a conscientious objector in World War One. After the formation of the coalition government with Churchill, the organised working class moved to massive acceptance that fascist invasion should be resisted, but it did so in its own way, not under state compulsion. The shop stewards' movement expanded during the war. The Home Guard – "arming the people" – was feared as a potential threat to the ruling class, organised by men of the left such as Tom Wintringham, who had fought the fascists in Spain.

Despite the (patchily-enforced) wartime regulations against strikes, it could be argued that in Britain there was an expansion of bourgeois democracy during the war. Even the conscript army was not quite the old army. Lectures and talks became forums for real discussions in which leftists could and did speak freely. The Eighth Army had fought in North Africa and in Italy. In 1944 their "soldiers' parliament" responded to howls in the bourgeois press against striking engineering apprentices in Tyneside by coming out for the right to strike and declaring that this right was one of the things they were fighting for. This was a Britain in political ferment, working its way towards the Labour landslide election victory of 1945, the creation of the modern welfare state, and the more or less peacefully-won independence of India, Pakistan, Burma, and Sri Lanka which followed. The Labour election victory was not our socialist revolution, but progress it undoubtedly was.

The main British Trotskyist group, the Workers' International

League, following the SWP-USA, took up the so-named "proletarian military policy". It meant that the Trotskyists accepted the need for a war against fascism and the threat it posed to the labour movement, but distrusted the way the government conducted and was likely to conduct that war. The policy of the British (and US) Trotskyists in the war was at least a close relative of "revolutionary defencism". It had a real meaning in Britain, under threat of Nazi invasion, which it did not have in the USA.

Shachtman's Heterodox group, the Workers Party, believed that bourgeois democracy would go down before authoritarianism in the war no less than Cannon's Orthodox SWP and the now-shadowy Fourth International which the SWP ran from New York did. *Labor Action* reported on 3 June 1940 that all civil liberties had been ended in Britain. "The Churchill government [has] rushed bills through... which give the Cabinet totalitarian powers equal to those of Hitler. The new powers wipe out all the guarantees of civil liberties and individual rights won in long and hard struggles... for over a thousand years". That was to substitute expectation for analysis and accurate reporting. The difference between the Workers Party and the SWP was that though the WP could be misled by such ideas, they did not regard them as fetishes. They did not believe, as Cannon did, that the prestige of the leadership rested on never being wrong, that is, in practice, on covering up when inevitably they did get something wrong. As Shachtman recorded: "Before the war, we had all declared in our analyses that once the war got under way, the political differences between the totalitarian and the democratic countries would dwindle rapidly... Refusing to be guided by disproved assertions of yesterday, we established the facts early in the war and proceeded to orient our activities accordingly" (*Five Years of the Workers Party*, April 1945).

In the USA, despite wartime regulations, repression of socialists was a great deal less than it had been in World War One and its aftermath. "Pluto-democracy", democracy dominated by the rich but still allowing leeway to the working class, thrived. And then, from 1943-5, in the Europe liberated from fascist rule and Nazi occupation, the development of bourgeois-democratic regimes confronted the Trotskyists with yet another unexpected development.

The Workers Party adjusted early and fully. The SWP and its co-thinkers in Europe did not. They insisted that bourgeois-democratic regimes – "new Weimar Republics" – were impossible in post-war Europe. There would at best be Bonapartist regimes, semi-dictatorial regimes under which the state machine, led by some self-said

Napoleonic hero like De Gaulle in France, would rise above parliament and society. As late as 1949 (in an article by Ernest Mandel [Germain] in *Fourth International* of April 1949) the Orthodox were arguing that "the characteristic form of the state in our time [is] the totalitarian state within whose framework the police dictatorship (open, as under fascism, or thinly veiled, as [in] the regimes now being established in several Western European countries) corresponds to the extreme concentration of economic and state power and to the permanent crisis of the regime". Obscurantisms cross-bred and multiplied.

**The Fallibility Of Trotsky**

IT IS IMPOSSIBLE not to attach to Trotsky much of the blame for what happened in 1939-40 and for the malign consequences that warped the post-Trotsky Trotskyist movement. How much his personal condition and the circumstances he lived in contributed to that can only be surmised. Was the raging at the "petty-bourgeois opposition" (and his tolerance of Cannon's raging factionalism) displaced feeling about the world he saw taking shape? In the diary he kept for a while in 1935 while living in France, he compared himself to a wise old physician compelled to watch helplessly as fools, charlatans, assassins, and traitors destroyed someone very dear to him. Five years later he had to discuss the question: what if the working class and labour movements fail? What sort of world will it be then? At the worst reckoning, he said it would be a world in which the Marxists would have to work out a "minimum programme" to defend "the slaves of the new bureaucratic collectivist society". In his "testament", written in February 1940, he asserted his right to decide when to die, if his health continued to deteriorate; that is, to commit suicide.

W B Yeats in old age defined himself, mind, spirit, and awareness, as a sentient creature "tied to a dying animal". Trotsky embodied Bolshevism and the legacy of the workers' revolution in Russia, but it was Bolshevism tied to a dying animal – to an old, tired, dying animal, confronting an increasingly hellish world in which the hopes and beliefs that had sustained him politically for over four decades were put in question by events and by the "syphilitic" and "leprous" (his words) condition to which Stalinism had reduced so much of the working class movement. There is no mystery in Trotsky's exasperation with Shachtman and his comrades or in his alliance with Cannon. There is no mystery in his fallibility. We need to record it, try to learn from it, pick up the pieces, and move on.

**The Fourth International And The USA's War**

THE TWO TROTSKYIST GROUPS, Cannon's SWP and Shachtman's Workers Party, moved apart politically after April 1940 also in their responses to the USA in World War Two. Neither supported the Allies in the war, though the Orthodox continued to support China in its war against Japan. (The Heterodox saw China as having become an American tool in the war). The Workers Party responded to US embroilment in the World War after 7 December 1941 in what might be called the traditional early-Comintern way. Immediately on the US entering the war the WP issued a ringing manifesto that denounced the war. It appeared on the front page of *Labor Action* of 15 December under the headline "World in Flames" (this volume, p.569).

The war was an imperialist war on both sides, said the WP. They were opposed to the USA going to war, and they did not want the US government to win. The working class should not abate its class struggle during the war, but accelerate it.

Against the government, the WP backed pacifists opposing the war and refusing to fight in it. The young men of the Workers Party and the YPSL, however, believed that they should go with their generation, and let themselves be conscripted into the armed forces. A high proportion of the Heterodox Trotskyists, who were generally younger than the Orthodox, were taken into the military machine, seriously sapping the strength of the small party. The remaining activists of the "petty-bourgeois opposition" took the wartime opportunities for jobs in industry. Hal Draper and Anne Draper, for example, became shipyard workers.

The predictions and "warnings" to the minority that their refusal to back the USSR in Finland was the first "social-patriotic sinfall" of the Trotskyists in the war, and the deduction that this political tendency would not swim against the patriotic tide of mainstream America once the USA entered the war – those were shown by what the Heterodox did in the war to be the opposite of the truth. The Workers Party behaved in the full spirit of Liebknecht, Luxemburg, Eugene Debs, Lenin and Trotsky. For them it was all politically and personally straightforward.

And the Orthodox Trotskyists? The SWP's response to the US entering the war was downright strange. The front-page lead headline of the issue of *The Militant* just after the US entered the war told the reader: "War reinstates 1917 Espionage Act". And John G Wright wrote of an imminent Russo-Japanese war. Nothing at all on the USA's war itself.

*The Militant* did not comment directly on the USA's entry into war,

or declare that the SWP was opposed to this war by the USA, until the issue of 24 January 1942, 47 days or nearly seven weeks later. When it finally did comment on the war, it did so not in the name of the SWP as an organisation, but in a personal statement by James P Cannon, its National Secretary.

On 3 January 1942, an editorial in the left-hand column of the front page of *The Militant* carried the headline, pushing the paper's masthead aside to the right of the page: "How labor can strike Hitler a mortal blow" (see this volume, p.573). How? Workers' and farmers' governments in Britain and the USA would evoke an anti-Hitler revolution in Germany. The article was linked to the war, but in political substance it could have been written at any time since Hitler came to power in 1933. In January 1942, it signalled that the SWP was in the fight against Hitler: "We Trotskyists want the destruction of Hitlerism and a 'lasting peace'." That seems to have been the point of publishing the article then. Thus, the Orthodox started printing advice (albeit addressed to the working class) on how to down Hitler before they had said plainly whether they supported or opposed the USA in the war. The signal given was that they supported it.

From the point of view of the USSR and its defence, the USA's entry into war against Hitler, and thus into alliance with the USSR, was very good news. That had to be one of Cannon's concerns in the six weeks or so in which he mulled over his response. The gap between the USA's entry into war and the SWP's response suggests that for them the response was not at all straightforward. In the epoch of the "Proletarian Military Policy" (see below) so much had changed – on conscription, on their attitude to militarism, and on the general necessity of an "anti-fascist" war – and the Orthodox had, as we shall see, become such whole-hog "patriots" for the USA's Russian ally — that everything connected with the war had become a more or less new question.

The Cannonites would eventually proclaim as one of the chief crimes or mistakes of Stalin, reliance on his bourgeois allies, the USA and Britain. Cannon had evidently to work hard to arrive at that position.

*The Militant* of 24 January 1942 announced that the "Trotskyist leader" Cannon had issued a statement, which it summarised. Dated 22 December 1941, the full statement was printed in *Fourth International* for January 1942, which, the paper reported, had come out just then (i.e. not at the start of the month). The "22 December" statement had either been kept hidden for a month, or backdated by a month. *The Militant* did not print it in full until 7 February, two calendar


WORKERS OF THE WORLD UNITE!

Socialist Appeal

LET THE PEOPLE VOTE ON WAR

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WORKINGMEN, THIS IS NOT OUR WAR! IT IS A WAR OF THE BOSSES! DOWN WITH THE WAR!

Roosevelt Administration Working Overtime to Drag U. S. into the War

"Government by the People"

Only the Workers Can Stop the World Slaughter!

*Socialist Appeal*, 5 September 1939. The tone of the Orthodox Trotskyists on the war changed dramatically in 1941.

months after Pearl Harbour and the USA's entry into the war.

Later, Cannon would be angered by any reference to the SWP's tardiness. At the SWP Convention ten months later, he denounced those who said he had hesitated as "liars". Remember, he said, that the SWP leaders did not repudiate their anti-war politics in the court room. That "deed" (or non-deed), he asserted, spoke louder than any written statement could. "No misunderstanding has been possible... Those who pretend otherwise are liars and provocateurs, not misunderstanding people and not honest opponents" (*The Militant*, October 2, 1942). Not doing the opposite, not declaring positive support for the war, was stronger than an explicit statement against the war could be... Cannon, in his evidence at the Minneapolis Trial (27 October to 8 December 1941) in which, eventually, he and 17 other SWP members were sentenced to go to jail for "advocating the overthrow of the US government", had expounded the SWP's general attitude to imperialism and imperialist war, and that section of the evidence was published in *The Militant* dated 6 December 1941, the day before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour.

Probably the SWP leaders feared that their organisation would be outlawed. They expected the severe repression that opponents of World War 1 had faced from the "liberal" government of Woodrow Wilson. But whatever the SWP's calculations, to issue – as the WP did – a ringing and far-reaching denunciation of an American war which they opposed was, surely, their first political duty.

**The Proletarian Military Policy**

ON 27-29 SEPTEMBER 1940 the Orthodox Trotskyists called a conference and made a new departure which according to Cannon "telescoped", so that they would be "carried out simultaneously", the tasks of defeating Hitler's fascism and those of overthrowing the

US bourgeoisie (*Socialist Appeal*, 26 October 1940). This, the Orthodox said, was "proletarian militarism", for an age of all-pervasive militarism. They based themselves on some remarks of Trotsky's ("Discussions with Trotsky", 12-15 June 1940: Writings 1939-40 pp.251ff).

The Trotskyist organisation would now have to be "a party of a new type"; it would have to "adapt itself to universal militarism... be highly centralised, with iron discipline in its ranks". It would no longer oppose conscription, as it had done up to then (in a front-page lead article on 29 June 1940, for example). Rather, it would support military training but demand that it be done under the control of the trade unions, and that union-run, government-financed schools for officers be set up. This was, the Orthodox said, the extension into military affairs of the daily struggle of the unions in the factories with the bosses. In fact it was a proposal that the trade unions contend with the government for control of the army. So they would back the USA in the war against fascism? No, they explained. It was an inter-imperialist, not an anti-fascist, war. The ruling class could not properly wage an anti-fascist war or be trusted with doing so.

As far as I know, the Orthodox made no effort (and neither did the Heterodox) to organise their comrades drafted into the armed forces for political work there.

For a while, much was made of this "new" approach in the press of the Orthodox. Then it subsided to a reference in the regular eight or nine point platform which appeared in *The Militant* each week, together with an occasional call in the press for trade-union officers' training schools. That may mean that criticisms of it had hit home. But the approach was not abandoned. For example, *The Militant* contributed "constructively" to the public debate opened up by a dispute in 1943 between the US commanders demanding a larger army, and dissenting Democrat and Republican politicians (*The Militant*, 20 February 1943). In practice the shift meant that the Orthodox dropped their once-vociferous opposition to conscription and softened their opposition to the war into one of de-facto political acquiescence, but with the caveat of a "demand" for trade-union controls that could not possibly be realised without an advanced state of dual power [1: *notes on pp.114-6*] in the country and in the armed forces. In the SWP's daily reality, what was left was acquiescence in the war, with big caveats, and glorying in the victories of the USA's ally Russia.

The proposal to take control of the armed forces out of the hands of the government – outside of a situation of dual power or revolution – was seen by the Orthodox as a demand that would be transitional to that dual power. In reality the idea that the army was separable

from the state, while that state was stable, was political fantasy-mongering, abracadabra politics. The political acquiescence was real and immediate, as was the propaganda that militarism could not be resisted and that the proletariat therefore needed its own version of the all-pervasive militarism, its "proletarian military policy". At first this stance included nasty and envenomed condemnation of pacifists resisting induction into the army (see, for example, "Paralysing poison from the ivory tower of pacifism", by Joseph Hansen, *Socialist Appeal* 9 November 1940). Later they took a warmer attitude to pacifist conscientious objectors. (Cannon wrote in 1944 urging *The Militant* to defend the Jehovah's Witnesses jailed for conscientious objection, such as he met in the same prison as himself).

The Workers Party polemicised against the new "proletarian military policy". Max Shachtman wrote that "the Cannonites have given an important finger to the devil of national defencism" (*Labor Action*, 4 November 1940).

In the trade unions the Orthodox pursued a deliberately cautious policy. This was explained as "preserving the cadre". On party guidance, SWP trade unionists tried to keep their heads down. By contrast, the Workers Party members were open and visible as revolutionaries and militants. They openly sold *Labor Action*. The SWP dismissed the Workers Party approach as that of people merely "visiting" in the unions. Whatever our judgement might be of the tactical advisability of caution in this or that case, the overall policy meant that the SWP avoided sharp clashes with the trade union bureaucracy. James P Cannon reckoned that the government and FBI offensive against the SWP which resulted in the Minneapolis jailings had been triggered by Daniel Tobin, leader of the Teamsters Union, and his friends in the Roosevelt administration. Felix Morrow, one of those jailed, later said that the Minneapolis case had been a "shot across the bows" of the SWP from the government – and that Cannon had heeded it.

**Appendix: What Did Happen In "Eastern Poland" In 1939-40?**

TROTSKY'S TENTATIVE INTERPRETATIONS of what happened in eastern Poland when Russia took over were seminal for later "Orthodox" Trotskyism. What really happened there has been pieced together by the historian Jan Gross, in his book *Revolution from Abroad*, from testimonies written by inhabitants who were deported to the USSR. The history tells us where exile Mensheviks got their stories from when they wrote accounts of a sort of social revolution accompanying the Russian invasion. Those accounts had an influence on

Trotsky – he said so – and in the Trotskyists' debates. It also shows that those stories misrepresented what was happening, taking superficials as fundamentals and ignoring fundamentals.

Germany had already invaded from the west on 1 September, sixteen days before the Russian troops entered the east. In the east the big majority of the population were Ukrainian, Belarusian, or Jewish, and Poles were mostly colonists or administrators. The Polish government machine had substantially collapsed by the time the Russian troops arrived. "Killings, beatings, and destruction of property went on throughout eastern Poland for days before the Red Army actually occupied any given area and continued for several days afterwards. Ethnic hatred ran deep in the Ukrainian and Belarusian countryside, and it filled the power vacuum created by the collapse of the Polish administration with blood". There was an addled social dimension to the violence, since Poles and Jews (the main victims) dominated the better-off classes.

"Through the western Ukraine and western Belarus, in hamlets, villages, and towns, the Red Army was welcomed by... visible, friendly crowds... largely of... Belarusians, Jews, and Ukrainians". Hatred of Polish rule ran deep. It led many to think that Stalinist rule must be better. Jews especially welcomed the Russian army, calculating that the alternative was the rabidly anti-semitic German army or pogroms by local Ukrainian anti-semites. In a couple of villages allotted to Russia by agreement with Hitler, but occupied by the Wehrmacht before 17 September, the German army organised demonstrations to welcome the Russians!

The Moscow government instructed its military commanders in Poland to let the spontaneous reprisals and chaos continue their course for a while. The chaos continued and intensified. Stalin was nervous and uneasy about the invasion. Despite protests from its German allies, Moscow publicly explained its invasion as action "in order to aid Ukrainians and Belarusians threatened by Germany". It supplied Russian Army commanders with political slogans. "For twenty years you lived under the yoke of the masters who drank your blood, and now we have liberated you and we give you freedom to do with them as you please". Moscow supplied its troops with cash to buy supplies in the occupied territories, to stop them looting and antagonising the local people. The looting came later.

After a short while the Russian occupying army set up bodies of local government. To staff them, they often selected those who had led the ethnic violence, or mere criminals released when the Russian troops opened the Polish jails. Officials, police, school principals, etc.

from the old regime were arrested. The Russian army encouraged land seizures and redistributions, though as a very short prelude to "collectivisation" – appropriation of the land by the Russian state.

Waves of arrests and deportations to the USSR (some to labour camps, some just to remote regions) followed. Hundreds of thousands of people were deported. The prisons were filled again – so full that in some of them prisoners had to try to sleep standing up. When in 1941 Germany invaded, those prisoners were either shot en masse or force-marched to the USSR, in a smaller-scale rendition of the death marches from some concentration camps which the Nazis organised in 1944-5 when facing defeat and exposure by the Allies.

Theodore Dan and the pro-Stalin Mensheviks, and after them Trotsky, were very badly mistaken about eastern Poland in 1939.

## Part 2: The Orthodox And Russia In The War

### A New Russian Empire?

DURING THE WAR the divisions between the two Trotskyist tendencies widened and deepened. The two dialects of one political language in 1940 were becoming different languages. What follows is a detailed examination of the responses of the Orthodox Trotskyists to the Russo-German war after June 1941, when Hitler launched his blitzkrieg against the USSR – of what the slogans and the polemics of the Orthodox in the 1939-40 faction fight led to in political practice during the war. The extensive quotations are used so that there is no room for serious dis-

James P Cannon in 1922

pute on the subject.

Rejection of the idea that Russia was or could be an oppressive empire had been a political foundation stone of the Orthodox in 1939-40. At least, it was taken as a foundation-stone by the Orthodox after June 1941. Although he tacitly agreed that the USSR was what in other powers was called imperialist – "the tendency to expand its power, its prestige, its revenues" – Trotsky refused to call the USSR an empire or its activities imperialist. He refused to use the same term for Russia's domineering, annexationist, and plundering activities as for the capitalist empires doing the same thing [2]. To use the same term for the USSR as for finance-capital imperialism, he said, could only cause confusion.

Events would show that refusal to call what Stalin's Russia did by its proper name, imperialism, and the combining of that refusal with indiscriminate "defencism", would generate dire confusion in the Cannonite groups.

Trotsky had not baulked at calling the USSR a "counter-revolutionary" degenerated and degenerating workers' state. Logically he need not have baulked at calling it an "imperialist" degenerated workers' state. He did baulk. And his Orthodox comrades of 1939-40 would go on baulking as Russia took over half of Europe. All through the war, and after it was over, at every turn, in every seizure of territory or demand for territory, they saw only the USSR "defending" itself. They would explain the USSR's vast post-war empire in Europe as a mere buffer or glacis for Russia's defence. They would apologetically define, or even champion, Russian expansion as "defensive" actions, at root politically legitimate.

The Workers Party had already caught on to the trend of Russian development in relation to Poland (1939), Finland (1939), the Baltics (invaded by Stalin in June 1940), and eastern Romania (invaded by Stalin in June-July 1940). While the SWP was wrestling with its own self-stifling dogmas and political fantasies, the Workers Party was straightforward in registering events and commenting on them from a working-class internationalist viewpoint. The Workers Party's commentaries were work by people who read the serious bourgeois press and thought about what was new and unexpected; those of the post-Trotsky Orthodox, the work of people who extrapolated from old resolutions about different realities; who, instead of analysing events fully, properly, and honestly, looked in them for elements that would confirm themselves, and Trotsky, as "correct" and "prophetic". They would construe things way beyond common sense, or dialectical sense, or any sense, to make them fit old schemas. We will find ample

evidence of that as we sift through their commentaries during the war.

Neither the Workers Party, the Heterodox, nor the SWP, the Orthodox, expected the USSR to survive the world war. Neither expected the USSR to expand as it did. Cannon least of all. Recall that he had written: "Stalin could take the path of Napoleonic conquest... only on one condition: that the Soviet bureaucracy in reality represents a new triumphant class which is in harmony with its economic system and secure in its position at home..." When the USSR did expand, the Heterodox registered the facts, thought about their implications, and understood what Stalin was doing. They understood that what they had described as Stalinist imperialism in eastern Poland and Finland was integral to the USSR's role in the war. The Orthodox responded by holding to the formulae which Trotsky had used, while – and this is central to the whole story – radically changing their political and class content. They moved away from Trotsky's ideas, but by way of unacknowledged reinterpretation of formulae rather than explicit rethinking. From 1943 onwards, "defence of the USSR" became defence of the Stalinist empire being built.

**The Heterodox On The USSR In World War 2**

IN JUNE 1941 HITLER INVADED the USSR. The Orthodox proclaimed that they were for the defence of the Soviet Union "under any circumstances and in all conditions". They made no conditions on their support: as long as nationalised property existed in Russia, they would be for Russia no matter what it did.

In June 1941 the Workers Party was not in principle opposed to "defending the USSR". The majority then considered it to be a comparatively "progressive" though class-exploitative society. The Workers Party took its stand on the politics of Lenin and Trotsky during the First World War, and now applied those politics to the Second World War and to all the participants in the war, including the USSR.

In both world wars there were, of course, many subsidiary conflicts and wars – wars, in which, had they occurred separately, the socialists would have taken sides. For instance, with the Serbs in the Austro-Serb conflict, which had triggered the general war in 1914. Or even with Belgium: though Belgium itself possessed a large colonial empire, it had been occupied by Germany in 1914. But, so Lenin had argued, to support, say, the Serbs, meant siding against peoples similarly oppressed in the UK-French, bloc. In the Second World War, Russia was first part of Hitler's imperialist bloc (1939-1941) and then, after the Nazi invasion of the USSR on 22 June 1941, of the British-

American bloc, in both phases gaining new territory. From 1943-4 it was a major imperialist power in its own right. In both periods of Russia's alliances, the Workers Party refused to support either bloc by way of supporting the USSR. Their attitude to the USSR was a function of their attitude to the whole war.

To choose one of the blocs was, so to speak, a political "Sophie's Choice". "Sophie's Choice" was first a novel and then a movie. In it, a woman is confronted with the terrible sudden demand that she choose which one of her two children will live and which will die. If she refuses to choose the Nazis will kill both of them immediately. She must choose, instantly. In her panic she shouts "Take the little girl!"; and of course it destroys her psychologically. Choosing the better of the imperialist blocs was for the Workers Party a political variant of "Sophie's choice" [3]. In its own terms, the Workers Party followed, perhaps too mechanically, what since the First World War had been Leninist politics on inter-imperialist war. With them, there was no big innovation, because they recognised no difference in principle between the world wars. The self-called Orthodox were the political innovators.

**The Orthodox In The Russo-German War: The First Phase**

"DEFENCE OF THE USSR" in all circumstances and by any method was the core policy of the Communist Parties, their guiding principle to which anything might be sacrificed and everything Marxist and communist was. Once the Russo-German war was on, the post-April-1940-split Cannonites too made "defence of the USSR" their highest and most urgent priority.

They did not sacrifice "everything" to it. They did not, like the Stalinists, counterpose "defence" of Russia to the working-class struggle in their own countries. But a very great deal was reshaped and subordinated to the defence – in particular, their attitude to the class struggle in the USSR. Throughout the war they failed to tell the American workers the truth about the USSR, the US ruling class's ally and accomplice in the war. Interpreting "defence" as propagandist defence, they told lies by deed and by omission. They would never tell the full truth about the Russian empire, or about the events and issues that polarised the world after 1945. Their comments on the conflicts after 1945 between the US-led bloc and Russia were usually limited to blaming the US-led bloc alone and attributing "aggression" to it alone. Commitment to the USSR, which was now becoming Stalin's imperial USSR, coloured, reshaped, distorted, and limited their whole body of politics.

During the six months faction fight in the SWP and in the period after the April 1940 split and before the German invasion of Russia, roughly a year, "defence of the USSR" figured relatively little in the press of the SWP, the Orthodox, or "official", Trotskyists. Publicly, Trotsky's writings represented the face of the Orthodox to the world at large, and he wholeheartedly denounced Stalin's policy and activity in both Poland and Finland. "Defence of the Soviet Union" was then very much an internal party matter, an "orientation issue", though one seen as of fundamental importance.

In *Socialist Appeal* of 3 November 1939, for example, Felix Morrow wrote: "The AFL convention adopted a resolution for a boycott against all Soviet goods.... No revolutionist can support either the Anglo-French-American camp or the Hitler-Stalin camp in the American labor movement. The task of the revolutionist is to build and recruit into the third camp: the camp of revolutionary struggle against war. On all questions connected with the war, the third camp stands on a different program than that of the two war-camps. This is equally true of our attitude to the Soviet Union. We neither join the democratic war-mongers in their war against the Soviet Union, nor do we join the Hitler-Stalin camp in their justification of Hitler and Stalin."

In 1940 *The Militant* welcomed the Russian annexations of the


*New International,* April 1940

three Baltic states and of eastern Romania, without the condemnations Trotsky had hurled on the invaders of Poland and Finland. "Sovietisation of the Baltic step forward" was the headline on Albert Goldman's article in *The Militant* (27 July 1940: see *The Fate of the Russian Revolution* vol.1 p.357, and this volume p.250). Trotsky was silent, though this was an explicit expression of what in the faction-fight had been denounced as a matter of Trotsky and the orthodox giving credence to Stalinist "bureaucratic-proletarian revolution". Whether he would have remained silent had he remained alive longer is not to be known.

The paper of the Orthodox (*Socialist Appeal*; from February 1941 *The Militant*) carried other reports and commentary on the USSR that were in the same root-and-branch anti-Stalinist vein as all the coverage in *Socialist Appeal* had been before September 1939 and to a great extent continued to be during the faction fight inside the Socialist Workers Party. In *Socialist Appeal* of 14 September 1940, for example, John G Wright reported on "Stalin's new labour laws... chaining the workers to the factories like industrial serfs".

When Nazi Germany invaded Russia on 22 June 1941, the Orthodox were electrified. They immediately elaborated politics on the war that were... a political and ideological half-capitulation to Stalinism! The first post-invasion issue of *The Militant* shouted in its front page headline: "Defend the Soviet Union!" This appeared above a Manifesto from the SWP which called, as basic Trotskyist politics did, for the overthrow of the Stalinist bureaucracy, but now in a sharply qualified way. "For the sake of the Soviet Union and of the world socialist revolution, the workers' struggle against the Stalinist bureaucracy must be subordinated to the struggle against the main enemy – the armies of Hitler Germany. Everything we say or do must have as its primary object the victory of the Red Army". Everything? Everything we *say*?

The ordering of priorities had also been Trotsky's: first, defence, and, second to that, "political revolution". But with Trotsky it referred to what the Trotskyists in the USSR would do: they would not act so as to hinder military defence against the invader. Right from the start, the Orthodox conflated and confused two distinct things: military defence, in the USSR itself, and "defence of the USSR" in the outside world, in the USA, for example, by way of selective and sometimes lying accounts of Stalinist society. Where Trotsky had been among the sharpest critics of Russian Stalinist society, the Orthodox now took to asserting that the USSR gave the workers great benefits which, in the war, they were eagerly defending. That was not true,

and it was not implied in the idea that nationalised property should be defended. The Trotskyists had previously identified and stigmatised lies about beneficent Stalinism as typical of the pro-Stalinist "Friends of the USSR" who were defenestrated by Trotsky in *The Revolution Betrayed* in the persons of the aged Fabian socialists Sidney and Beatrice Webb (Lord and Lady Passfield). [4]

On the masthead of *The Militant* of 28 June 1941 the new Orthodox printed a quotation from Trotsky, undated. "To defend the USSR, as the main fortress of the world proletariat, against all the assaults of world imperialism and of internal counter-revolution is the most important duty of every class-conscious worker". Those words were culled from an article Trotsky wrote in 1931: from before the Trotskyists decided, in 1933, that a "political" revolution to overthrow the bureaucracy had become necessary. The choice of this quotation, which they would frequently use as a motto during the war, was the first public signalling of what they were going to do: – jump back eight years and, episodically, lop off much of the politics on Stalinism which the Trotskyists had developed over the last decade of Trotsky's life.

The manifesto in *The Militant* of 28 June 1941 advocated what appeared to be the old politics on the USSR — what Trotsky and Cannon had advocated in 1940: defend the USSR; make a political revolution against the totalitarian Stalinist oligarchy. The Orthodox did it in the quasi-sacerdotal style that would come to be one of their trade-marks: "Workers and peasants of the Soviet Union! We appeal to you in the name of our martyred leader, Comrade Trotsky. His voice would now be urging you on to revolutionary war against Hitler. This was the hour of danger which Trotsky was destined to turn into the hour of proletarian triumph – but his noble and heroic mind was crushed by Stalin's pick-axe. Since he has been denied the happiness of participating in your decisive battles and final victory, let Trotsky henceforth participate invisibly in your struggle. Let his voice, stilled by Stalin but living on in the movement which bears his name, advise you in your struggle for a better world. Avenge his death by destroying Hitler, overthrowing the Cain in the Kremlin, and reviving the Soviet democracy which in the heroic years of the October revolution made possible the victory over imperialist intervention".

The old Trotskyist politics were weakened and reshaped by a new mode of reporting. Over the next months *The Militant* ran front-page photographs issued by the Moscow regime (workers receiving arms, workers forming guerrilla detachments, collective farmers bringing

in the harvest, etc.). It proclaimed that the Russian were fighting Hitler with uniquely high morale. The Russians fought so wonderfully well (said *The Militant*) and their morale was as high as it magnificently was, because they had "something to fight for" – the nationalised property. The Russian workers knew they were defending the October Revolution. Contrast France, they said. There, the bourgeois ruling class had surrendered to Hitler [5]. There was no such class in the USSR. And what of the bureaucracy, what Trotsky, without contradiction from Cannon, had called "the sole privileged and commanding stratum", which "contains within itself to a tenfold degree all the vices of a possessing class"?

Even if the reports of especially high morale were true, and they were not, this radical mis-reporting of – that is, lying about – the society and politics erected by the counter-revolutionary autocracy on nationalised property was no necessary part of "defence of the USSR", as the Trotskyists had it before 22 June 1941. Worse: The accounts of USSR morale repeated by the Orthodox, after Stalin and the Stalinist-friendly bourgeois press, posed urgent questions to Trotskyists. Were there then no consequences for Russian morale of Stalinist misrule? The picture which the Orthodox gave of the war implied that the answer to this very important question was: "no"; or "not much". They said, and kept on saying throughout the war, that USSR morale was uniquely high, and it was so because the people believed they owned the state property. In that belief, *The Militant* repeatedly said, they were right: they did.

In Trotsky's time, the Trotskyists had said the opposite. They had characterised the idea that the people in the USSR owned what the state owned as "the fundamental sophism" on which vast Stalinist edifices of lies had been erected. Trotsky had written: "State property is converted into socialist property in proportion as it ceases to be state property. And the contrary is true: the higher the Soviet state rises above the people, and the more fiercely it opposes itself as the guardian of property to the people as its squanderer, the more obviously does it testify against the socialist character of this state property". Or again: "The means of production belong to the state. But the state, so to speak, 'belongs' to the bureaucracy". Now the Orthodox reported the USSR very differently.

The 28 June 1941 manifesto explained the Soviet Union as follows: "The Soviet Union can be best understood as a great trade union fallen into the hands of corrupt and degenerate leaders. Our struggle against Stalinism is a struggle within the labor movement. Against the bosses we preserve the unity of the class front, we stand shoulder

to shoulder with all workers. The Soviet Union is a Workers' State, although degenerated because of Stalinist rule. Just as we support strikes against the bosses even though the union conducting the strike is under the control of Stalinists, so do we support the Soviet Union against imperialism".

Trotsky too had used that analogy. It is difficult to imagine one stranger or more maladroit. Stalin's USSR held millions in slave labour camps, held all workers in a totalitarian vice, routinely and frequently used mass murder as a political tool against the working people. It was a state power "more savage and unbridled" than that of pre-war Nazi Germany, as the Fourth International had said in the program of its 1938 congress. Even the worst gangster-ridden union in the USA came nowhere near the horrors inflicted on the workers in the USSR. This analogy worked only to suggest that the Stalinist totalitarian state was less terrible than in fact it was. Indeed, the Orthodox would assert in plain words that the USSR – the whole USSR, bureaucracy as well as the workers – was part of the labour movement (this volume, p.601).

James P Cannon, as National Secretary of the SWP, sent a telegram to Stalin: "Trotskyists all over the world, now as always, are solidly for the defense of the Soviet Union. In this hour of grave danger to the achievements of the October revolution, we demand that you release all Trotskyist and other pro-Soviet political prisoners who are now in jails and in concentration camps, to enable them to take their proper place in the front ranks of the defenders of the Soviet Union. Your crushing of workers' democracy has increased the terrible danger to the Soviet Union. We demand the revival of Soviet democracy as the first step in strengthening the struggle against German Nazi imperialism and the capitalist world" (*The Militant*, 5 July 1941).

Cannon also said this to Stalin: "The Trotskyists in this country, in the Soviet Union and everywhere in the world say to the Soviet government: place us in the most dangerous posts, we are ready and shall unhesitatingly accept". In this parody of self-abasing "loyalty", Cannon pledged the Trotskyists to active service for a state that habitually murdered people of their political species as soon as it identified, or thought it had identified, them. Cannon knew that the American Trotskyists would of course never be asked to act on this pledge. There was a broad streak of exhibitionist political masochism in post-Trotsky Orthodox Trotskyism [6].

Throughout the war many USSR soldiers fought bravely. The regime developed an effective nationalist, chauvinist, and Orthodox-Church-religious appeal. On the whole, though, USSR morale was

worse, not better, than that of the other major powers in the war. Around one million USSR soldiers ended up fighting with the Germans. There were whole units in Hitler's armies made up of USSR deserters: two Ukrainian divisions, many units from the Baltic states, and over 250,000 in "Cossack units" (sometimes including non-Cossack, but called "Cossack" because Hitler had decided that Cossacks were not Slavs and, unlike the "sub-human" Slavs, "racially acceptable"). The German Sixth Army, fighting at Stalingrad, included at least 50,000, maybe 70,000 "Hiwis", so-called "volunteer helpers" recruited from the peoples of the USSR. Many "volunteered" because their only alternatives were forced labour or death in prisoner-of-war camps, where the Nazis treated the Slavic USSR prisoners as the sub-human "Untermenschen" that their racist zoology proclaimed them to be. Some were really prisoners of war conscripted into ancillary labour – digging trenches and latrines, running field kitchens, looking after horses, etc. But many were front-line fighters. A considerable number of Hiwis stuck with the Germans even after they were routed at Stalingrad. It is a measure of the political seriousness of the Orthodox by that point that in *The Militant* and in *Fourth International* there was not one word about Stalin's August 1941 decree that the family of every soldier who surrendered should be "deprived of all state allowance and assistance". In July 1942 Stalin added that every army should organise "barrier units" to be stationed behind the front line and shoot waverers and those who tried to retreat [7].

**July 1941: A "Minimum Program" For Russia At War?**

THE SUBORDINATION OF THE OVERTHROW of the Stalinist autocracy to "defence of the USSR" now began to reshape and redefine the Cannonites' operational politics on Stalinism. Inside a month of the German invasion of Russia the Orthodox issued a new manifesto which marked an enormous shift in their politics on the USSR. Under a streamer above the masthead, "For unconditional defence of the Soviet Union", they printed "A Program Of Victory For The Soviet Union". It was aimed at supporters of the Communist Party USA [8].

"We stand for the unconditional defense of the Soviet Union. The Stalinist leaders try to fool their rank and file into believing that the Trotskyists do not defend the Soviet Union. The word 'unconditional' is plain enough. It means that we set no conditions whatsoever before we defend the Soviet Union. We do not demand that Stalin make any concessions to us before we defend the Soviet Union. We defend the Soviet Union because the foundation of socialism established by the

October revolution of 1917, the nationalized property, still remains and this foundation it is necessary to defend at all costs" (*The Militant*, 19 July 1941: p.290 of this volume).

The foundation of socialism? Even under the totalitarian bureaucracy? Nationalised property alone, regardless of who "owned" the state? We have seen that Trotsky, in his last letter to the workers of the Soviet Union (May 1940: this volume, p.637), posed things very differently: for the existing nationalised property to be the foundation of socialism the working class would first have to take it out of the hands of the bureaucracy. It would only prove to be progressive if it could be taken out of the hands of the ruling autocracy.

"It is to assure victory in the struggle against Hitler that our party presents a minimum program of imperative tasks for the Soviet Union". For whom in the Soviet Union? "Whether the Stalinist bureaucracy accepts or rejects this program, we shall defend the Soviet Union. But we insist that this minimum program is vital in order to strengthen immeasurably the fighting power of the Soviet Union.

"1. Release all pro-Soviet political prisoners. Restore them to their rightful place in industry and the Red Army.... The release of this great army of pro-Soviet political prisoners, kept in jail solely because Stalin feared their opposition to his false policies, is imperative for the salvation of the Soviet Union.

"2. Revive the democratically-elected Soviets. Workers' democracy in the trade unions....

"3. Legalization of all pro-Soviet political parties. Their right to present their programs to the masses. Every political party that is for the defense of the Soviet Union must be given the right to exist as an open political organization, to present its program, and to agitate among the masses for that program. Without these rights, there can be no true democracy. [9].

"4. For revolutionary unity with the German working class. For the Socialist United States of Europe.... The Soviet government must call upon the workers of Germany to join hands with the Soviet Union to create the Socialist United States of Europe..."

The Orthodox asked Stalin's Soviet Union to "undermine Hitler by pledging to the German workers that the defeat of Hitler will not mean a second and worse Versailles [Treaty] but will begin the creation of the Socialist United States of Europe... The imperialist states cannot possibly make this pledge to the German workers. Only the Soviet Union, the Workers' State, can thus cement revolutionary unity with the German proletariat. The Soviet Union must clearly state its peace terms – the Socialist United States of Europe, the right of all

nations to self-determination".

The Workers' State could, and in 1917 had done so. The degenerated workers' state? To call Russia simply "the Workers' State", to elide the enormous and basic caveat that it was a monstrously "degenerated" workers' state, to combine that with the suggestion that because Stalin's Russia was "the Workers' State" it could generate and embody a Bolshevik program – all that had nothing in common with the Trotskyist analysis and program as the new Orthodox had had it before 22 June 1941. As a comment on reality, the suggestion that Stalin's Russia was uniquely well-placed to make a democratic and socialist proposal was absurd: a lie-bearing Stalinist absurdity.

The list of desiderata was not a "minimum" but a comprehensive program, *almost* the whole Trotskyist program against Stalinism. Missing only was the idea of a workers' anti-Stalinist "political" revolution. In its place was an appeal to Stalin to do what for Trotsky, and for Cannon up to that point, could only be done by that new working-class "political" revolution.

The real imperial Stalinist Russia could not conceivably offer such peace terms. It ran and would continue to run a brutally chauvinistic and spectacularly inhumane war. At the end of the war it would try to grab as much of Germany as it could. It would capture as many German slave labourers for deportation to the USSR as it could. It would deprive many nations, including the German nation, of self-determination. All those horrors were already part of what the Stalinist bureaucracy did where it ruled.

This aberration of the Orthodox was rooted both in their dogma that Russia could never be an imperialist power, whatever it did, and in their translation of "defence of the nationalised property" into the idea that Stalinist society was "better" for its workers than anything else in the world. There was nothing in the pre-1941 Trotskyist policy of defending the USSR that demanded or licensed any of this fantastic quasi-Stalinist rigmarole. It would have been less absurd to demand such a program from Winston Churchill or Franklin D Roosevelt than to express it as "demands" to Stalin.

**Program And Agency**

WHAT THE MILITANT DEMANDED could only be achieved as part of a revolution against the totalitarian autocracy. However achieved, it would amount to a revolution. Cannon and his comrades could not but know that as well as Stalin would. The propaganda gambit here – directed at their American audience – was made absurd by being couched as socialist demands addressed to Stalin. It was im-

plicitly to lie about the USSR and Stalinism, to suggest that Stalin could conceivably do the things demanded. Or that (because of nationalised property!) Stalin was more likely to do these things than Roosevelt or Churchill. In terms of real-world politics, it was an appeal to the Stalinist autocracy for self-reform and self-abolition. It was a wilful denial of what Trotsky and they themselves had known and said about the Stalinist regime for a decade. When they said it was a "minimum program", they meant that it was the Trotskyist program without "political revolution", the Trotskyist program reduced to free-floating advice and suggestions, the program but without telling the full truth about Stalinist Russia, the program but without invoking the Russian working class as the agency that could achieve it.

The manifesto spoke of "tasks... for the Soviet Union". The key terms in any political statement, "who" and "whom", were missing. The tremendous divisions within the USSR, between the workers and working farmers on one side and the privileged bureaucratic ruling elite on the other, were glossed over or denied by talking of tasks for "the Soviet Union" as an undifferentiated whole. As late as December 1943 an official SWP policy document written by Bert Cochran would rhapsodise about "the amazing unity of the Soviet peoples" (p.314 of this volume).

By calling the manifesto a minimum program, the SWP meant to underline that, as people who put "defence of the USSR" first, for now they did not call on the Russian workers to make a new revolution — a "political revolution" — against the autocracy. They were splitting off the "tasks" from the question of the agency which would carry them out and from the revolutionary method it would have to use. By presenting the program as a series of "demands" on Stalin for self-reform, Cannon aimed to "take the harm out of them" for a Stalinist audience: the SWP were no longer "counter-revolutionary Trotskyites", you see, but utopian socialists! This separation of task from agency and class would for many decades be central to the politics of the new Orthodox Trotskyists.

Thus, in their day-to-day propaganda and agitational work, in deference to "defencism" and the hoped-for Communist Party audience, they suspended or neutralised their own full politics, and came to purvey reform-Stalinist politics for the USSR. And they were getting into the habit of believing what they wanted to believe, what was emotionally satisfying or likely to be organisationally fruitful for them. They were beginning to work themselves loose from the trammels of doctrine, of program, and of the centrality of the working class in revolutionary Marxist politics. To an enormous extent, they

were beginning to cut themselves off from reality too.

Lenin defined the self-destroying "opportunism" that led to the collapse of the Second International in 1914 as a way of working that took the line of least resistance and greatest temporary advantage, losing sight of whether those activities were or were not consonant with the stated overall goal and purpose of the movement. Shachtman and his comrades alleged that Cannon's tendencies in the labour movement were opportunist in that sense: the sacrifice of the long view to short-term considerations; the concoction of "lines" and gambits that did not fit with or advance the overall educational work and purpose of the organisation. The artificially and inorganically constructed Orthodox "lines" of the World War Two period were a giant example of that pattern. Cannon steered by instinct and political appetite, not by theory, program, history, or, too often, fact. Awkward facts could be simply ignored.

In the next issue of *The Militant*, on an inside page, a picture of captured German soldiers accompanied the headline: "Red Army Forces Still Intact. Soviet Masses Are Fighting To Defend October's Gains". Stalin and his "lackeys" were criticised for depriving the soldiers of "weapons the October Revolution put in their hands" — a socialist appeal to the German workers in uniform (26 July 1941). The 19 July 1941 program would in time dwindle to this "proposal": that a working-class appeal be made to the German armies by the Russian autocracy. [10].

In fact, this was charlatan stuff. The Kremlin did "appeal" to the workers, though not, of course, in the internationalist and Marxist terms the Orthodox Trotskyists called for [11]; it had set the Communist Parties in Nazi-occupied Europe to organising armed resistance in many countries.

In a speech printed in *The Militant* on 30 August 1941 Cannon obliquely explained a likely origin of the comments of the Orthodox on Russian morale. "What [those who expected the collapse of the USSR] overlooked was the one most important and most fundamental element in war.... [It] was elucidated by Comrade Trotsky in our last talk with him in Mexico, fourteen months ago, the element of morale. The great battle of France was raging – we asked him to give us his opinion of the military prospects of that fight. And again and again he repeated. 'It depends on the morale of the French army. If the French army really has the morale to fight, Hitler cannot win, not even if he comes as far as Paris'... The Russian workers and peasants... know better than all the renegades... who have turned their backs on the Soviet Union in the hour of danger... Trotsky said more than once,

that the beginning of a war of imperialism against the Soviet Union would arouse [an] outburst of genuine revolutionary patriotism and fighting spirit in the Russian masses... By their tremendous demonstration of fighting heroism, the Russian masses have said once again that the revolution in Russia is still alive..." (p.297, this volume).

In August 1941 *The Militant* revived its excited agitation about high Russian morale. "Red Army Blasts Myth of Hitler Strength", an article by "George Stern" with a picture of captured German soldiers, claimed: "The Red Army stand against Hitler's legions has come as a revelation to the rest of the world. Churchill and Roosevelt have greeted it as 'magnificent' and the press gives surprised recognition to the fact that the Red Army has exploded the myth of Nazi invincibility" (*The Militant*, 9 August 1941). Another headline in that issue, over an article by George Breitman (see p.299, this volume), shouted: "Red Army Morale Astonishes Its Enemies". A subordinate headline asserted: "Soviet Soldiers Fight Bravely Because They Have Something Worth Defending".

Under a crosshead, "Trotsky's predictions now come true", Breitman triumphantly told the reader that in 1934 Trotsky had written: "Within the USSR, war against imperialist intervention will undoubtedly provoke a veritable outburst of genuine fighting enthusiasm. All the contradictions and antagonisms will seem overcome or at any rate relegated to the background. The young generations of workers and peasants that emerged from the revolution will reveal on the field of battle a colossal dynamic power..." Trotsky (so wrote Breitman) "was able to foresee this stubborn resistance chiefly because he understood the class character of the first workers' state and, as a result, the determination of the workers and peasants, even under the parasitic Stalinist bureaucracy, to hold on to what they have". And what of events after 1934, such as the great slaughter of 1934-8?

This article had some of the quality of hysteria, of a flood-tide of emotion breaking its banks. Breitman was responding to explanations given by the Nazis and others for their failure to have in Russia the quick and easy victory they had expected. "Unlike the European armies, the [Russian] soldiers have something to fight for, and they know it!" The European and American soldiers "know that it is not the people who will benefit from the results of the war, but their masters, the imperialists, and that the lives of the worker-soldiers are being thrown away in a cause that is not theirs." The broad mass of workers in Europe and the USA understood all that? Nationalism and chauvinism, or simple "defend-my-home-and-family" ideas, had vanished from among them?

Breitman felt obliged to admit: "The Nazis have maintained a certain high discipline in their armies". But that was only skin deep. The German army too was made up of "men who know they are not fighting for their own interests. The Red soldiers, on the other hand, not only have something to fight against... but they also have something to fight for." German morale would collapse, therefore it need not be evaluated as something existing now.

A subtitle prepared the reader to be told "What the Red Army Defends". "The October revolution destroyed the political power and the economic power of the capitalist class... In spite of all the crimes and blunders of the Stalinist bureaucracy since then, the economic foundation established by the Russian Revolution still exists. It is this for which the Soviet troops are willing to give their lives rather than capitulate".

The Red Army soldier knew that "he is not fighting for the benefit of a gang of bosses who will continue to exploit him after the war just as viciously as before. He knows that he is fighting for himself and his children, to preserve what he has left of the greatest revolution of all time, the nationalized economy which must exist and be extended before society can go ahead to socialism, peace and plenty." Experience had "shown the Russian masses the superiority of living in a workers' state, even though isolated and degenerated under Stalinism". Here, "defend the nationalised economy" was translated into direct "Friends of the Soviet Union" style fantasies – and lies – about Stalinist society.

This article was crude Stalinist propaganda, utterly at odds with the realities of the USSR and with what the Trotskyists had truthfully been saying about Stalinism for most of a decade. But it was in accord with the US government, the US press, Hollywood. In politicians' speeches, in newspapers, and in a number of mainstream films, a fantastically false picture of the USA's Russian ally was being presented. The "capitulation" of the Orthodox to the Stalinist nonsense about the glories of "the Workers' State" was simultaneously a "capitulation" to bourgeois and petty-bourgeois opinion and pressure.

The young George Breitman was merely following "the line". The "minimum program" printed in *The Militant* had plainly said that the Stalinist system already had "the foundation of socialism".

The people of the USSR resisted the Nazi invaders who openly called the Slavs subhuman ("Untermenschen"), and treated them accordingly, murdering, starving, and enslaving the people in areas they conquered. The Orthodox took all that the Stalinists said about high morale as hard fact; ignored the evidence of widespread low

morale; ignored examples of high morale during the war in other countries. They refused to see the obvious reason — apart from being driven by a murderously coercive state — for mass Russian self-defence. For it they substituted their own notion — the people of the USSR were "defending nationalised property". The Orthodox spun a story, instead of giving honest reports, accounting, and analysis. Their political "lines" were being cut loose from the basic politics of the Trotskyist account of the USSR.

Breitman's article was the most extreme and explicit case as yet of the substantial collapse, in the camp of the Orthodox Trotskyists, of the working class content of Trotsky's politics on Stalinism. It was still only a beginning!

**"Trotsky's Red Army" In World War 2**

TO KEEP THIS IN PERSPECTIVE and in context, it needs to be underlined that the SWP continued to make vigorous propaganda against the American Stalinist party. It argued that the American workers should prosecute their own class struggle in war time. It held consistently to the view that for US workers the "best way to help the USSR" was to fight and win the class struggle at home. It opposed the often spectacular strikebreaking, scab-herding, and shameless class collaboration which was the American-Stalinists' contribution to "defending the Soviet Union". The Orthodox denounced Stalinism in general and carried historical articles about the conflict between Trotskyism and Stalinism. When in 1943 it became known that two leaders of the Polish Bund, Wiktor Alter and Henryk Ehrlich, had been killed by the Russians, the SWP would join in the outcry against Stalin.

But soon they took a further large step into a world of political make-believe, in an article by John G Wright, "How Leon Trotsky Organized The Red Army" (*The Militant*, 16 August 1941). It was nothing less than an attempt to claim, on behalf of Trotsky and, therefore, for themselves, the credit that was now, for many Americans, beginning to attach to the Russian Army. They discovered that the Army that existed in 1941 was not after all Stalin's Army, but still "Trotsky's Red Army"! They spun off into political delirium [12].

A defining idea, for the Cannonites as for Trotsky, was that the state-owned means of production could rationally be separated out from the totalitarian state and those who controlled it. That idea was now extended to the claim that the army of that state also had a political and class character unchanged and uncorrupted by those who controlled it (and who in purges four years earlier had massacred

over 15,000 of its officers). Like the statified means of production, this "Red Army" was a continuation of the October Revolution, nestling inside the Stalinist putrefaction, like the honey bees in the bible story inside the carcass of the dead lion. The Red Army of 1941, so John G Wright wrote in plain words, was a "conquest of October", and, like nationalised property, it retained the fundamental character it had had a quarter-century earlier. As late as October 1944 James P Cannon would write from his prison cell rebuking the editors of *The Militant* for allowing someone to use the expression "Stalin's Red Army". It wasn't Stalin's Red Army, but Trotsky's, Cannon insisted (letter of 22 October 1944).

John G Wright said it explicitly: "The name of Leon Trotsky is inseparably bound up with the formation, life and victories of the Red Army... No one will succeed in obscuring the connection between his role in organizing and building the Red Army and its successes, including the present heroic resistance of the Red soldiers against the Nazi onslaught." The Army too was a great "conquest of the revolution". "Long after Stalin concentrated political power in his own hands, he had to leave the command of the Army in the hands of those who commanded it under Trotsky". Stalin, said Wright, had little control over the major armed body of the totalitarian state! "It is the Army of the October Revolution and the Civil War – Trotsky's Red Army – that is now fighting so heroically".

As a critic of this thesis said: to believe that you have to believe in ghosts (see p.354, this volume). In the SWP press John G Wright, Felix Morrow, and others would develop this idea all the way to imagining that the "Red" Army in the war was something other than the instrument of Stalin; that it was an instrument of working-class politics and working-class socialist revolution.

Wright separated off the core of the USSR state machine, the army, from the Stalinist counter-revolution: then, had there in fact been a counter-revolution at all? One consequence of this sort of thinking would be that the Orthodox sometimes seemed to be uncertain about whether or not the bureaucratic autocracy really ruled. In late August and early September 1941, as we will see, they would write things which could only make sense if the bureaucracy were very weak or had faded away and lost control of the USSR.

Wright's idea was a radical departure from Trotsky's analysis of Stalinist Russia and from the positions held by the Fourth International at Trotsky's death. Trotsky had seen the Army as one of the prime sources of the bureaucratisation that engulfed the revolution. The habit of command, of hierarchy, had spread from the Army to

the party and society. Discussing the idea that he should have organised a military coup against the bureaucracy, Trotsky replied that that would only have been another, and maybe a quicker, route to bureaucratism. In *The Revolution Betrayed*, written in 1936, he had written: "The restoration of officers' castes 18 years after their revolutionary abolition testifies to the gulf which separates the rulers from the ruled, to the loss by the Soviet army of the chief qualities which gave it the name of 'Red'".

**The Second Phase: The Leningrad Delirium**

UNCHECKED POLTICAL DELIRIUM breeds more delirium. In *The Militant* of 30 August and 6 September 1941 – it needs to be said bluntly – the Orthodox went very close to outright political dementia. Their critical judgement, their memory and their sense of reality, were temporarily paralysed. They came close to suggesting that the Stalinist regime in Russia had ceased, or was ceasing, to exist.

The German siege of Leningrad, which would continue for 882 days, was beginning. Workers' battalions were organised from Leningrad factories, those that had not been evacuated – on the initiative of the Stalinist autocrats and police and under their control. The people of the city were willing to resist: the Nazis declared in leaflets dropped into the city that: "We will level Leningrad to the earth and destroy Kronstadt to the waterline" (Harrison Salisbury, *The 900 Days*, pp.209-10, 208). On 30 August 1941 the front page headline of *The Militant* announced: "Workers Arm To Save Leningrad". Subheads: "Masses Inspired By Memories Of October 1917. Kremlin Finally Compelled To Make Appeal To Traditions Of The October Revolution As Workers Rally For Defense To The Death".

"In the hour of gravest danger to Leningrad, birth-place of the October Revolution, its proletarian inhabitants are mobilizing arms in hand to defend their city to the death against the German army. A tremendous revolutionary resurgence is sweeping the masses. Leningrad today is witness to scenes having their only parallel in the heroic days of the civil war, when, in October 1919, Yudenich's army was crushed by the aroused might of the armed Leningrad proletariat....

"In tremendous mass meetings the workers are shouting forth their defiance of the imperialist enemy. From every factory and shop, picked units of workers are joining the regular troops to help hold the battle lines and are filtering through to the enemy's rear to aid the guerilla detachments."

In fact the "units of workers" were "picked", organised and con-

trolled by the Stalinist state apparatus. *The Militant* drew and coloured the picture as if the workers were no longer under the physical or political or ideological control of the bureaucracy's murdering political police, the GPU. The Kremlin, said *The Militant*, had been "compelled" to play a positive role in rousing the working class: "Up to the last moment, the Kremlin had held back the mobilization of the workers. Up to the last moment, Stalin suppressed the traditions of the October Revolution, appealing instead to the traditions of the Napoleonic era.... Today, however, a Voroshilov is compelled to proclaim to the workers of Leningrad... 'Leningrad was and is and shall forever remain the city of the great October Revolution'." Everything was changed!

*The Militant* writers operated by seizing on reports in the bourgeois press, reports filtered through the Stalinist censorship, that would fit their "theses", their hopes, and their desires, and then, like a space rocket escaping its scaffolding as it rises, wildly extrapolated from that. From a mere 4,000 miles away, they knew themselves to be able with certainty and precision to judge the ideas in the heads of Russian workers – who would have been shot for speaking critically about Russia and its rulers.

"The masses of Leningrad are demonstrating that that is the appeal for which they have been waiting" (!). "Once again, as in the days of Lenin and Trotsky, they are surging forward, ready to die in defense of the conquests of the October Revolution".

All this was false, arbitrary, political self-projection – self-indulgent foolishness. *The Militant* did everything that could be done by excited words, the flashing of romantic revolutionary images and reminiscences, and the arbitrary assignment of motives – the people defended nationalised property – to paint a picture of revolutionary workers acting outside the political control of the Stalinist bureaucracy. They substituted their own concerns and fantasies for the likely concerns of Leningrad workers facing Nazi enslavement. They wrapped up Russian-Stalinist realities in ideological red ribbons, appealing political mirages, fantasies mistaken for hard fact, and blissful self-induced political amnesia.

That 30 August 1941 issue of *The Militant* editorialised in the same vein: "Leningrad is in danger. The imperialist wolf-pack is closing in upon the city. Workers, understand what this means. Leningrad is the hearth of the October Revolution. The most glorious traditions of revolutionary struggle cluster around this proletarian center. Despite the degeneration of the workers' state under the Stalinist regime, these glorious traditions inspire the working class of Leningrad. Once

again, as in 1905 and 1917, the Leningrad workers are rising and arming themselves to cope with their class enemy. Barricades are going up. The factory workers who constituted the Red Guard of Lenin's day are practising armed drill..." The same factory workers? The leading Bolshevik workers of the revolution had survived the civil war and Stalin's butcherings?

"This mass rising" – who have they risen against? what resistance did they meet with? what was the political result of their rising? – "is the supreme manifestation to date of the resurgence of the revolutionary spirit of 1905 and 1917. The proletarian power that created the USSR now springs forth to save it from destruction". Power? For Marxists the term usually denotes state power, and they had already, through John G Wright (sponsored and backed, certainly, by Cannon), claimed that Stalin did not "really" control the army, the military core of the state machine. But *The Militant,* in its fantasy-addled language, may here have just meant energy or strength.

Lack of political self-appraisal and self-criticism, a fondness for easy demagogy, too-loose and loosening ties to the theoretical and programmatic moorings of their starting-point politics, and the absence of an independent-minded opposition in the post-1940-split party, here reduced them to political raving [13]. Where the Trotskyists in Trotsky's time had seen the nationalised industry as the sole, albeit large, survival from the October Revolution, submerged in the totalitarian filth, and Stalinist society as an exceptionally vicious parody of a class-exploitative system, Trotsky's self-named "disciples" now saw a survival of the workers' revolution itself in the whole society.

"The proletarian revolution within the Soviet Union exhibits irrepressible vitality. Despite the injuries laid by Stalin's regime upon the revolutionary proletariat, its living forces well up in a mighty stream. Stalin, who disarmed the workers years ago, is now compelled to rearm them. The Stalinist bureaucracy takes this step with misgivings, at the most critical hour of its existence, in order to save its own skin. But that does not lessen the objective significance of the act. The arming of the people gives testimony that the workers' state endures... Leningrad is not, like Paris and Brussels, ruled by a powerful capitalist clique which could oppose the arming of the people and their fight to the death against the fascists." And the Stalinist autocracy? The Nazis too, in 1944-5, "armed the people" in the Volksturm, and hundreds of thousands of them died resisting the Allies in the last months of the war. There was no capitalist clique in Berlin either? Or in Britain? In Britain, and not under a totalitarian state but as part

of a functioning bourgeois-democratic political system, the government armed the people, creating the "Home Guard".

When Trotsky (and Cannon after him) said the bureaucratic autocracy had all the vices of all the ruling classes and seized a proportionately greater share of the social product in Russia than the rich in the advanced capitalist countries, that it deprived the workers even of the basic necessities of life, they were wrong? It wasn't true? It had ceased to be true? The Russian workers hadn't noticed? Politically serious people would feel obliged to say how all that fitted into the picture they were now drawing of Russian Stalinist society. In this vein, the Orthodox were not being serious political people; they were being irresponsible demagogues and fantasists. Above all: demagogues.

"The workers have no selfish private property interests to protect at the expense of others". The workers decide? They rule? "The readiness of the Leningrad workers to offer up their lives to save their city demonstrates that they know they are defending, not the privileges of Stalinist bureaucrats, but the nationalized property and other remaining conquests of the revolution". If they withstood the siege, the nationalised property would be in the hands of the workers and not of the autocracy and its state?

"The Stalinist regime fears the people in arms as the forerunner of new revolutionary struggles. But even more do they fear the loss of Leningrad and further victories for the fascists, which would endanger their rule from within and from without. Under these compelling circumstances they have been obliged to approve the arming of the masses. But they did not permit the people to take arms until the danger was poised at their heart. Now suddenly they sound the alarm and call upon the workers to save them from the consequences of their own ruinous policies." The Stalinist bureaucracy was projecting a roughly revolutionary orientation...?

*The Militant* continued: "The Stalinist propaganda machine strives to conceal the real character of this mass uprising... The masses of the USSR lack the necessary class organs through which to exercise their creative energies and mobilize their maximum forces. The Soviets, the trade-unions, Lenin's Bolshevik Party, the Young Communist League – all these indispensable class agencies have been destroyed by the Stalinist regime... These institutions must be reborn and resume their commanding place in Soviet life. The arming of the people [by the Stalinist regime] is the first step in this direction. The class in arms possesses power to demand and to win the restoration of its political rights and its democratic institutions. The Soviet proletariat is

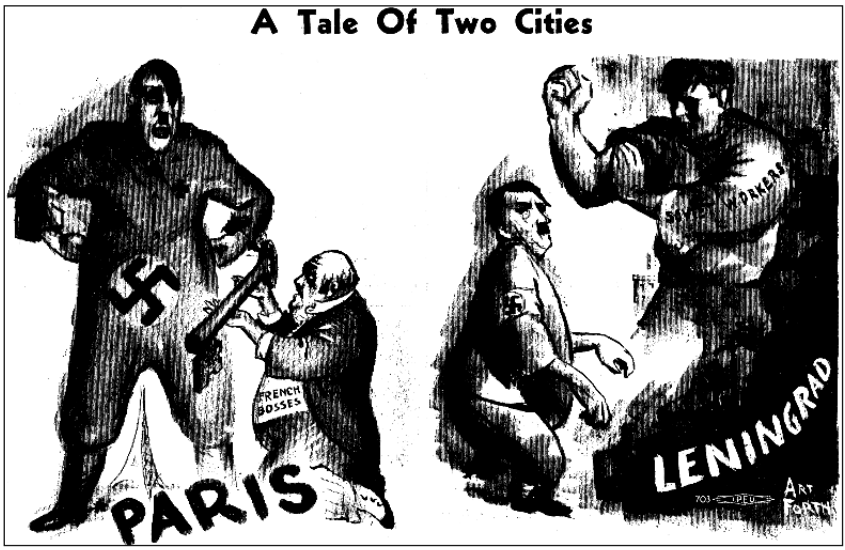
in a position to move forward and regain all that has been taken from it by the Stalinist reaction". The workers, or "the masses", now shared "dual power", or something not far from it? [1]

And even in its ecstatic delirium, *The Militant* did not forget denunciations, damnings, and fatwas against the Heterodox Trotskyists: "The Russian workers exhibit no signs of defeatism. Such renegacy belongs to the petty-bourgeois radicals in the capitalist countries. The independent revolutionary proletariat is moving to the forefront in the Soviet Union on the wave of a resurgent revolutionary tide. This class movement imparts a new dynamic force to the defense of the workers' state. This can be the beginning of the renewal of the Russian Revolution".

They recalled their "minimum program", and now addressed it to "the masses". "The program for victory presented by our party can be realized in life through the action of the Soviet masses themselves". Here at least the proposals were aimed in the right direction – at the workers and the other "masses". "We urge the unconditional defense of the Soviet Union against imperialist attack as the elementary duty of the working class. The stubborn resistance of the Red Army and the mass rising of the urban proletariat demonstrate how both recognize the necessity for defending to the last ditch the remaining achievements of their revolution." Not only the urban proletariat, but also the "Red Army", is a political force independent, or becoming independent, of the bureaucracy?

"Down with Stalin's ruinous policies!" – defined as "faith in imperialist alliances", instead of appealing to the German workers – and "drive out the Stalinist bureaucracy". Those phrases were surely better than silence on the bureaucracy, but still too far from a plain reiteration of the necessity for working-class revolution against Stalin and the autocracy.

The front page headlines of *The Militant* of 6 September 1941, the second number issued under the imprimatur of political bedlam, told its readers: "Masses Defend Soviet Cities. Hold Nazi Army At Odessa, Kiev And Leningrad. Traditions Of October 1917 Inspire Masses To Fight To Death Against Imperialists". This outdid the previous issue in at least one respect. It carried a straightforwardly Stalinist cartoon on the front page, headed "A Tale of Two Cities". It had two panels, labelled "Paris" and "Leningrad". In "Paris" we see a bourgeois on his knees, representing the French bosses, offering a giant key to a big thug stamped with a swastika, Hitler. In "Leningrad" we see the Hitler figure crouching, almost on his knees, and looming above him, much larger, is a muscular worker grimly




*The Militant*, 6 September 1941

rolling up his sleeves. The Stalinist autocracy is no part of the picture.

They were still working on their translation of the idea that Russia remained a degenerated workers' state because of the nationalised economy rooted in the 1917 revolution into the idea that the class character given to the "workers' state" by nationalised economy pervaded everything and made it a state equipped with "the foundation of socialism", one where "the masses" – the slave-driven masses – knew by experience "the superiority of living in a workers' state".

"Surrounded by vast, heavily mechanized Nazi force, the armed workers of Odessa, side by side with the Red Army, are holding the invaders at bay". The misreporting here, as if the workers were the independent protagonist on the Russian side, could only be deliberate. And they were, and would be throughout the war, above all experts on Russian morale: "As in Leningrad and Kiev, the proletarian masses of Odessa are rallying to the defense of the Soviet Union, spurred on by the memories and traditions of the October Revolution. Eye-witness reports from the beleaguered Ukrainian city relate the tremendous effect produced on the workers' morale last week when a unit of Black Sea Marines paraded through the city's streets singing the Kablochka, famous fighting song of the Civil War of 1918-1921. Stirred by this revolutionary song, the populace danced in the streets and morale soared to a high pitch". It would have been well to remind the readers and themselves that all reports coming out of Russia had passed through the Stalinist censorship. In fact Odessa fell to Romanian troops a few weeks later. Russia's Black Sea fleet

evacuated the Russian troops in Odessa, but not the Jewish population, some 75,000 to 80,000 of whom were murdered by the invaders after the city fell.

"In Leningrad... workers at the end of their factory shifts engage in vast defense drills... In mortal fear for its own existence, the Stalinist bureaucracy is finally forced to rally the workers by appeals to the real tradition of the Soviet Union – the October Revolution... All evidence points to the one inspiring fact: the October Revolution still lives and fights on". Their gratitude for a few words – Voroshilov's reference to Leningrad as "the city of the Great October Revolution" – and their satisfaction with them, was not only pitiable but also evidence of their deep political demoralisation and disorientation.

Someone reading all this without knowing what happened next would have thought that the SWP was going over to a species of critical Stalinism, on the basis of out-of-control fantasy and self-delusion. In fact that's what, politically speaking, they did. Then they backtracked, recalled to something like sense by Natalia Sedova Trotsky and by their own better political selves. Episodes of similar delirium would be a recurrent feature of the Orthodox over the decades to come.

This, I think, was the first appearance in the history of the Trotskyist movement of this sort of wilful, knowing or half-knowing, misrepresentation and downright falsification of reality in order to spin consoling fantasy. Of course mistakes had been made before then – recently, about Russia's Stalinist armies in Poland and Finland. But there is no just comparison of Trotsky's mistaken view of Poland and Finland and the Stalinist invasion with this wilful cutting loose from reality and the Marxist – notionally their own – program.

There is no such thing, it has been observed, as a "sincerometer" in politics. That Cannon sincerely lost his sense of reality at different points in World War 2, is, I think, a matter of recorded fact. That he calculated and postured and assumed positions for organisational advantage is, I think, a certainty. Where calculation started and sincere delusion, whipped up among themselves by a small group of like-minded people, ended, is impossible to know.

As we will see, in late 1941, in the SWP's retreat from the Leningrad delirium, and again in 1944, Cannon would back down from positions in which he seemingly had a great emotional investment, in face of rebukes from Natalia Sedova Trotsky.

**The Third Phase: Natalia Sedova's First "Intervention"**

THE WIDE-EYED CREDULITY AND FANTASY was abruptly abandoned in the next issue of *The Militant*, 13 September 1941. Someone had poured a bucket of political ice water over the too-heated Orthodox – Natalia Sedova Trotsky. So too, perhaps, had the unfolding events in Russia. The Nazis had completely surrounded Leningrad on 8 September, starting a siege which would last for two and a half years. Kiev would surrender on 19 September. Now there was a dramatic shift in *The Militant*'s coverage of the war and the USSR. No explanation for the shift was offered. No explanation would ever be offered for the two weeks of delirious triumphalism in August-September 1941.

"Catastrophe faces USSR as result of Stalin's rule. Stalin's purges beheaded Red Army", *The Militant* told its readers in its 4 October 1941 front-page headline, over an article by Natalia Sedova Trotsky. "The German army keeps advancing deeper and deeper into the Soviet Union. The fascists have seized Kiev, they are marching on Kharkov, Rostov, the Donets Basin. They are in a position to occupy Crimea. They can occupy Leningrad. The heroic Red Army is not attaining its goal despite its high morale, despite its frightful sacrifices, despite the millions of fighters who perish... It is necessary to undertake a resolute campaign against the criminals responsible for the defeats. Irrefutable facts are now confirming with invincible force the diagnosis made by Leon Trotsky on the basis of an all-sided analysis of the general political and economic conditions in the USSR. It is necessary by means of the merciless blows of fact to lay bare unceasingly, with all our energy, the causes for the defeats of the Red Army. The time has come to remind all workers daily, hourly, of the crimes of the Kremlin regime and its chieftain. The questions I raise are questions of the greatest importance. Everything must be concentrated on them, everything else must be subordinated to them. For the fate of the Soviet Union is now being decided."

Sedova angrily dismissed the idea exulted in and rhapsodised upon by *The Militant* that the use of guerrillas by the regime constituted independent working-class intervention in Russian political life and military affairs. She related it to old intra-Bolshevik disputes of the Civil War period. "What is the truth about guerrilla warfare? Stalin has come back to it, he has returned to the guerrillaism against which Lenin and Trotsky fought so relentlessly during the civil war in the revolutionary Soviet Union. Stalin needs guerrillaism as a facade, as something to show, something to fool the people with. By guerrillaism he tries to cover up the absence of strategists, the absence

of a genuine revolutionary and planned leadership of the war; he distracts public opinion by means of the heroes of guerrilla warfare. But in a correctly conducted war there is no need at all of guerrillas; they can only be a hindrance and incur disproportionate sacrifices. Who benefits by this?"

Natalia Sedova's article, dated 25 September 1941, was a tacit reprimand to the Orthodox. They accepted it meekly. It is probable that there had been an exchange of letters before Sedova's article appeared.

A front-page editorial, "Trotsky showed Road for the Victory of the Soviet Union", once again proclaimed the immediate "minimum program", as demands on "the Soviet government": "release pro-Soviet political prisoners; revive the democratically-elected Soviets; legalise all pro-Soviet political parties; seek revolutionary unity with the German working class. For the Socialist United States of Europe".

After 4 October 1941, for about a year, during which the war went badly for the USSR, *The Militant* repeated the themes of Natalia's angry article. Why such defeats? Stalin had beheaded the "Red" Army by purging most of its top commanders shortly before the war. The idea of the overthrow of the bureaucracy reappeared occasionally, though in an addled form in which the "Red" Army, as it was, as a whole, or more or less as a whole, was to rank equal to the working class as the agency for this "political revolution".

"The Soviet masses and the Red Army must rid the country of the bureaucratic regime which constitutes the chief internal obstacle to the victorious defence of the workers' state" (*The Militant*, 25 October 1941). Correlated with reality, this would be a call for a military coup!

**"Resurgence Of The Soviet Masses"**

IN THE MAGAZINE *FOURTH INTERNATIONAL*, January 1942, John G Wright published a "think-piece" on "The USSR in War". A cross-head sums up the article: "Resurgence of the Soviet masses". Wright wrote of the "enthusiastic response" to the decree of "universal military training" from October 1941. In many cities workers were "arming and drilling" even before the official decree. "There is considerable evidence that the initiative for this measure did not originate at the top". Evidence from where? Wright did not tell his readers.

The "worker detachments", wrote Wright, were "not... guerrillas fighting behind enemy lines". They "coordinate their activities with those of the regular army". Moscow, wrote Wright, "kept silent about the role of these proletarian militias". So how did Wright come to know better? "The bureaucracy is not enthused by the prospect of an

armed and trained population". (In fact, three battalions of Leningrad civilians were formed and sent into battle with little training. The third such battalion had only one day's training). All through the piece, Wright implied, without saying it, that the "worker detachments" were politically independent working-class groups, or becoming independent. He wrote of "the trade unions", as if the Stalinist labour-front organisations for controlling the workers were real trade unions. A "section of the trade union activists and trade union organisers" had gone into the army. Activists? Organisers?

"The contradiction between the political needs of the regime and the military tasks of the country is being brought to the breaking point". The Communist Party of the Soviet Union "holds no meetings, conducts no political agitation, accepts no new members... The party has been a hollow shell for many years. The war has cracked the shell". There is "growing pressure from below... Under the hammer blows of events the ranks of the bureaucracy are being shattered". Workers' control, not stifling bureaucratism, was necessary in the factories to maximise production. There was "rising confidence and self-action among the Soviet masses".

Wright's basic idea was that the contradiction between the needs of war and bureaucratic rule was an absolute one – the bureaucrats could conduct no adequate war effort – and the contradiction was shattering the Stalin regime. It was impossible for the bureaucracy to adjust and survive. The Stalinist structures in Russian society were crumbling. In the early 30s Trotsky had believed that the mechanisms of Stalinist rule were falling apart under the stresses of forced-march collectivisation and industrialisation. Something like that was in Wright's mind now, and of course the Orthodox "knew" that the bureaucracy was in no degree a ruling class, but only a flimsy encrustation on Russian society: it could be easily sloughed off.

Even in the period when defence of the USSR was downplayed, the idea theorised by Wright that the "Red" Army was a proletarian force autonomous or semi-autonomous from the bureaucracy would be kept alive and developed. A front-page cartoon in *The Militant* of 15 August 1942 claimed it was "Trotsky's Red Army" (p.175, this volume).

**1941-2: Taking Stock**

FOR ABOUT A YEAR, up to the turn of the tide in Russia's favour at Stalingrad after 19 November 1942, the Orthodox expected Russia to be overwhelmed. Coverage of Russia lessened. The fluctuating moods of the Orthodox were registered in *The Militant*'s use of the

1931 quotation from Trotsky — "To defend the USSR... is the most important duty of every class-conscious worker" — as a heading for its editorial page. It was there, then it wasn't, then it was again. It ran from 9 August 1941 to 13 December 1941, then it was dropped for a year, reappearing only from 19 December 1942 until 31 March 1945.

On 25 October 1941 *The Militant* spoke out against the Stalinist regime in renewedly sharp terms. "Stalin Orders GPU Rule For Moscow. Turns To Open GPU Terror To Bolster Regime. Edict Aimed at Silencing All Those Who Criticize Or Oppose Kremlin's War Policy", it reported on page one – as if "GPU rule" in the USSR were startling news. *The Militant* did not report the background of a new order by Stalin, which was that the Germans had taken the important city of Rostov almost without a fight. The USSR troops had panicked and fled. That defeat, and the bureaucracy's visible measures to move government operations from Moscow to Kuibyshev (further east), created panic and flight from Moscow. Stalin responded by moving up the GPU from its usual second-line role to front-line policing in Moscow, with powers to shoot there and then anyone whose talk they overheard and did not like.

John G Wright wrote on Stalin's decree that it was "only the latest link" in a series of decrees (all of European Russia under martial law, 22 June; GPU-controlled political commissars in the army, 16 July, and in the navy, 21 July) instituting "the investment of the GPU with open and sweeping powers not only over the population, but over the Red Army itself".

Wright thought the overthrow of Stalin was now very close. "Stalin's monstrous bureaucratic apparatus of repression began crumbling on the eve of the second World War. The war has violently speeded up this process of disintegration. We are now witnessing the final stages of the death agony of Stalinism... Every day, every hour of the struggle brings additional overwhelming proof that the Soviet Union can be successfully defended only by the reconstitution of the Soviets and the return to the policies of Bolshevism" (*The Militant*, 8 November 1941). The Soviet Union could only be defended after a "political" revolution? A revolution whose achievement was ruled out in deference to the priority of defence? Therefore, in reality, it couldn't be defended at all? Essentially, that's what they still thought.

On 1 November *The Militant* issued advice to "the masses" living under the GPU terror. "The Soviet masses, while they continue the military struggle against the fascists, must take steps to provide a leadership for the fronts that is qualified, trained and capable of leading them to victory... While the struggle against Stalinism, the chief

internal obstacle to the successful defense of the USSR and the organizer of its defeats, must be subordinated to the defense of the military front against the imperialists, the Soviet masses must take the first favorable opportunity, without weakening the front against the imperialists, to remove the bureaucratic regime..."

This new formulation had the merit of pointing once again toward the need for a working-class revolution against Stalin and the autocracy. But the idea that the "Soviet masses" could change the army leadership while Stalin still held power (or did he? remember that his power was "crumbling") was another bizarrity to add to the growing collection. The Proletarian Military Policy for the USA may have infected their thinking here – the idea that the trade unions, without taking power or at least achieving "dual power", could take over the training of the US armed forces.

The Socialist Workers Party held a Plenum-Conference on 11 October 1941, in Chicago (this volume, p.304). "Only our analysis of the anti-revolutionary character of Stalinism explains to the workers why the Kremlin has refused to arouse the masses of Europe and undermine Hitler in Germany". The Heterodox Trotskyists were never far from Cannon's concerns. "Our program for the revolutionary defense of the Soviet Union has been confirmed not only against the Stalinists, but also against all the petty-bourgeois renegades who denied the Soviet Union its character as a workers' state and who refused to defend it." Cannon had a new "proof" that the USSR was a workers' state: "The unparalleled morale with which the Red Army and the Soviet Union masses rallied to the defense of the workers' state can only be explained by our analysis of the class character of the Soviet Union. The Soviet masses, despite the oppression which they are under from the Kremlin bureaucracy, proved to be wiser politically than the 'cultured' petty-bourgeois snobs who abandoned the Soviet Union; the masses were able to distinguish between the Soviet Union and Stalinism" (*The Militant*, 18 October 1941). In fact, of course, Stalin and his GPU were absolutely inseparable from the reality of the USSR.

Cannon told the conference: "From all indications, Stalin and his gang are carrying their work to its predestined end. Stalin and Hitler together are dealing the Soviet Union what appears now to be its most catastrophic blow. The bitter truth can no longer be concealed by any blustering. The reality is too glaringly obvious now". He was plain about his organisational calculations: "We should intensify our work among the Stalinists; try to reach them at all costs; fix the responsibility for the catastrophe of the Soviet Union where it really belongs – on the shoulders of Stalin and his gang; and try to win over

every possible Stalinist worker to the movement of the Fourth International". And again he did not forget to curse, damn, and anathematise the Shachtmanites. "In such an hour as this, we see again how absolutely right were Trotsky and the majority of our party and the International in defending the Soviet Union to the very end; in establishing such a clear record that if we have now come to the catastrophe... nobody can justly say that one iota of responsibility clings to the Fourth International. We remain loyal to the Soviet Union in spite of everything, and that gives us the political and moral right to approach the disillusioned Stalinist workers. It is not so with the petty-bourgeois elements who deserted our ranks on account of the Russian question. What position are they in to approach a sincere Stalinist worker who in his heart believed, and believed with justice, that the Soviet Union was a great fortress of the proletariat?..." (*The Militant*, 15 November 1941).

Self-righteous bragging was never absent for long. Typically, Cannon here judged, and urged his comrades to judge, the rightness or otherwise of an analysis or a programmatic position by how it would "play" to an audience, not by whether it was true to reality or not.

The SWP summed up again a year later, in an October 1942 convention resolution."We are proud of our record on the Russian question... Not one stain of dishonour will fall upon the banner of the Fourth International... The Fourth International [never] failed in its duty of defending the Russian revolution to the very end. That is one of the proudest assets of our movement". The October 1942 convention still believed that "unless the revolution rises and conquers in the capitalist world and the Soviet workers throw the Stalinist usurpers off their back, the Soviet Union will inevitably be crushed". No one else but themselves understood the USSR and therefore no one else but themselves understood world politics."The events affecting the Soviet Union... are incomprehensible except to those who are guided by the Trotskyist analysis of the character of the Soviet Union. We alone have accurately explained the course of the USSR, we alone do not have to conceal what we said yesterday... Petty-bourgeois deserters turned their back on the USSR which they suddenly termed 'imperialist', but we... explained that by the seizures of the Finnish, Polish and Baltic territories, the Kremlin bureaucracy was not pursuing imperialist aims but was in its own bureaucratic and reactionary way seeking to safeguard the defences of the Soviet Union" (*The Militant*, 17 October 1942; p.305 of this volume). Trotsky, of course, had said a great deal more about the Kremlin in Poland and Finland. Here was another leitmotif for the decades ahead:

Everything imperialistic-seeming the USSR did or would do, was done only for purposes of the legitimate defence of the workers' state.

Cannon and his comrades let their "Soviet patriotism", as SWP resolutions called it, lead them into very strange territory. Lauding nationalised property, they slipped into lauding Stalinist totalitarianism. The resolution said: "The Red Army and war production were free from the fetters which private property imposes upon 'national defense' even in wartime; no profiteers existed to limit war orders to monopoly corporations. The 'scorched earth' policy could be applied by a land without private property with a determination and planfulness which are impossible to capitalist countries. The moving of industrial plants from endangered areas to places deep in the interior, the building of a second railroad across Siberia – such gigantic economic actions in wartime were made possible only by the system of nationalised property".

This rodomontade about the superior efficiency of nationalised economy in the war was entirely Stalinist. The nationalised economy did not run itself. People made the decisions, decisions about other people. The Stalinist bureaucracy made the decisions. The "second railroad across Siberia", presumably the Baikal-Amur mainline, was constructed by the captive slave labour of 100,000 German prisoners-of-war. Only 10% would survive to be repatriated. All that was faded out in order to present a picture of the pure glories of nationalised property.

What they hailed here was the totalitarian power, ruthlessness, and inhumanity of the bureaucracy. Not nationalised property permitted that ruthlessness, but the totalitarian concentration of power in the hands of people who had the strength, imperviousness, and ruthlessness casually to kill off millions of "their own" people. Even the picture they painted of the capitalist states for contrast with the USSR was false and in substance a senseless glorification of Stalinist totalitarianism: the governments in both Britain and the USA had taken direct political control of industry, and they ran, as in World War One, effective capitalist war economies. The bluster here contrasted Stalin's system of totalitarian slave-driving favourably with the capitalist state-directed war economy in states that essentially preserved most of the bourgeois-democratic rights and liberties.

The program for democratisation was there too in the resolution, but how it all fitted together was still far from clear. In truth, it did not fit together. The October 1942 resolution did not explain the sudden collapse after two weeks of their wild fit of enthusiasm in August-September 1941. It "processed" it into a smooth "story-line".

"After five months of terrible defeats, workers from the factories joined the heroic Red Army warriors at the gates of Leningrad and Moscow and helped recover Rostov... in an outburst of proletarian revolutionary endeavour". Why was it revolutionary? In relation to what was it revolutionary? Because they "defended nationalised property", and doing so was ipso facto "revolutionary"? That is not how they had presented things in August-September 1941.

All this specious pseudo-explanation and demagogy stood on forceful assertion, misrepresentation, political dishonesty, bluster — and on a party system which made it very difficult for anybody to challenge the incumbent leaders. Such self-righteous demagogy could not but smother political discussion and dissent in the SWP, and any attempt at honest accounting. Thus the first fruit of the "tightening-up" of 1940, James P Cannon's "Bolshevisation" of Trotskyism, was to make possible this flood of irresponsible, capricious, and self-indulgent "apparatus politics" and "apparatus story-lining".

**The Fourth Phase: After Stalingrad**

A FOURTH PHASE in the responses of the Orthodox came with Russia's successes in the war, as the third phase had come with its defeats. In November 1942 the Russian army encircled the German army at Stalingrad. It was the turning point in the war. Russian strength, success, and territory began steadily to increase. The new cycle of enthusiasm and delusional politics on Russia was signalled with a front page headline on 5 December 1942: "Red Army's Offensive Staggers Germans At Stalingrad And Rzhev". And they knew what to do next, and what "tasks" they should set for Stalin's Russia: "The Task Now Is To Arouse German Revolt". And the "tasks" in the USSR?

"The military victories of the Red Army can be extended and turned into decisive victories. The ferment in Germany" – in response to a hypothetical Russian appeal to the German workers – "can completely disrupt Hitler's rear and facilitate Soviet victory. But for this a correct revolutionary policy is necessary. The Soviet masses, while fighting with all their energy against Hitler's attack, must convince their German brothers that they are allies who will fight with them against the imposition of a new Versailles [Treaty] and for the creation of a workers' government in Germany". Unless "Soviet masses" included the Stalinist regime, that was rampant nonsense, with no grip on any reality.

"As in 1918-19, today [a revolutionary appeal] can not only save the Soviet Union but can lead to the emancipation of all the workers

of Europe". This line made even less sense now that the "Red" Army was beginning to advance. They saw no contradiction between the emancipation of the workers – of Europe or of Russia – and Russian military victory. Such talk as there had been about the overthrow of the bureaucracy subsided again.

On 5 December 1942 the SWP added "Defence of the USSR" as a ninth point to the previously eight-point policy platform in *The Militant*, and on 19 December 1942 they restored to the editorial page the 1931 quotation from Trotsky — "To defend the USSR... is the most important duty of every class-conscious worker". It would remain there until 31 March 1945. In mid-December 1942, they brought out, under the title *In Defence of Marxism*, a very one-sided selection of Trotsky's articles on Poland and Finland from 1939-40 (omitting the articles he had written for the public press to condemn Stalin's invasions, those he wrote after April 1940, and the May 1940 manifesto of the Fourth International). By that time much of the content of the book, Trotsky's polemics against the "petty-bourgeois" who would capitulate to US public opinion in the war, had been disproved by events, and its reproduction without comment on that disproof was therefore wilful libel on the Workers Party. A proper collection of what Trotsky wrote on Russia between, say, the USSR's turn to Germany in March 1939, or from the Hitler-Stalin pact in August 1939 to his death in August 1940, including his articles and drafts for the public press, would have been very valuable politically. Instead, the SWP produced a "cut out" Trotsky, limited to his internal polemics, to back up their own current politics. *In Defence of Marxism* was the first big example of "Apparatus Marxism" in the Trotskyist movement.

The introduction to the first edition of *In Defence of Marxism* (this volume, p.467), written by Joseph Hansen and William F Warde (George Novack), acting as Cannon's amanuenses, was an important document in the history of the Fourth International. It enshrined the Orthodox myth that the origin of the two Trotskyisms lay in the "renegacy" of "petty-bourgeois traitors". The introduction asserted, as allegedly bedrock Trotskyist principle, ideas flatly contradicted by the two major articles by Trotsky in the book, *The USSR in War* and *Again And Once More*. Hansen and Novack held forth on "dialectics"; but, in asserting that the "workers' state'" characterisation of the USSR and commitment in all circumstances to its defence were fixed parts of the "program of the Fourth International", they were utterly undialectical. Trotsky's point was the changeability of the USSR and therefore of Marxist assessments of it. What in Trotsky was a matter of ongoing investigation and successive approximations, in Hansen

and Novack became a matter of barebones dogma. The Orthodox experts on materialist dialectics were creaking crass old-fashioned metaphysicians in their own attitudes to the USSR. In August 1943 the SWP followed up *In Defence of Marxism* with a book of Cannon's writings during the 1939-40 dispute, entitled *The Struggle for a Proletarian Party*. For decades, those two books would be international pillars of the Orthodox version of Trotskyism. As the question of "defending the USSR" receded in military terms with the successes of the Russian army, it became more prominent in the weekly and monthly publications of the Orthodox. According to what they had said in 1939-40, in the first place Trotsky and in the second place Cannon, it was now time to reassess the "degenerated workers' state" characterisation of Russia in the light of the survival of and imperialist expansion by Stalin's regime in the war. Instead, they veered off on a binge of vicarious proto-Stalinist triumphalism.

The emotions proper for revolutionary socialists in relation to the October Revolution and working-class movements in general were unleashed full-blast in support of Stalin's Russia. Russian military successes were successes of "Trotsky's Red Army"; of the October Revolution; of nationalised and planned industry; of the absence (thanks to the workers' revolution) of capitalists to hinder success, act as a fifth-column, or be a sell-out leadership such as the bourgeoisie in France had been when facing Hitler.

A regular contributor to *The Militant* in those years, Louis Jacobs, would comment in a document distributed at the 16-19 November 1944 SWP convention that calls for the overthrow of Stalin were there when things were going badly for Stalin's army, and absent when it was doing well. That was just.

**The "Class Significance" Of Russia's Victories**

THE STRANGE IDEA of claiming the "Red" Army for Trotskyism had started in Wright's article in 1941 and was epitomised in the front-page cartoon published in *The Militant* of 15 August 1942, before the turn of the tide in the war. Their use of the term "Trotsky's Red Army" for the Russian military helped the Orthodox ride the floodwaters of mass popular enthusiasm in the USA for the "Red Army" and "Uncle Joe" Stalin's Russia. The idea of "Trotsky's Red Army" had an ideological function in addition to its usefulness in a labour movement in which the "Red" Army was extremely popular. The USSR's army had survived Hitler's onslaught and was now scoring military successes against the Germans. It was doing deeds that the Orthodox had not believed it capable of. They explained the suc-

cesses by conjuring up the idea that this pillar of Stalin's state was not "really" Stalinist. Splitting off the "Red" Army (in their heads) from the Stalin regime had an extra daftness of its own; but the method and pattern was the same as with the splitting-off of the nationalised economy as a thing-in-itself separable from the people who ran and served it and from the social relations they set up within it. This method would play a very great role with the post-Trotsky Orthodox Trotskyists as, between the end of World War 2 and, say, the outbreak of the Korean war five years later, they struggled to comprehend a world they had never expected and the role in it of Stalin and Stalinism.

In 1939-40 Trotsky had written that the Russian Army in Poland and Finland could evoke revolutionary mass activity: Stalin would use it and then strangle it. The facts proved to be different, and in the Fourth International Manifesto of May 1940, Trotsky acknowledged that "Stalin did not find any support whatever in Finland... the invasion of the Red Army assumed the character of direct and open military violence". In 1943-4 the Orthodox took Trotsky's previous ideas about the Russian army evoking revolutionary activity, and applied them to the "Red" Army advancing on Europe. There would be an "impetus inevitably imparted by the Red Army advances to the revolutionary moods and movements of the masses and to an overturn in political and property relations", so they said as the Army entered Poland (*The Militant*, 8 January 1944); and the victorious Red Army, Trotsky's Red Army, would not let itself be used for Stalinist repression, or not all of it would.

Felix Morrow in *The Militant* of 20 February 1943: "Even before the Nazis are beaten, the fundamental class attitude of the capitalists toward the Soviet Union is revealing itself. They know that behind the Soviet victories and making them possible is the nationalized property system created by the October revolution. They are not too sure – and with good reason! – that the bureaucratic regime of Stalin will last long after a definitive Soviet victory over the Nazis. They fear that in place of Stalin... there will arise again the democratic Soviets in the spirit of Lenin and Trotsky – the spirit of the world socialist revolution. That's what capitalist reaction fears will be the outcome of Soviet victory. For exactly the same reason all workers truly loyal to their class are fervent supporters of the Soviet Union, knowing that its victory is also the victory of workers everywhere". The front-page headline the next week, 27 February 1943, warned: "New anti-Soviet manoeuvres reported. USSR Menaced By Finnish 'Peace' Move, Polish Plan, Vatican Plots". *The Militant* would worry

much about things like that from now on. The Orthodox would back Russia's claims to the borders Stalin desired.

Two questions were confused and entangled here: the likely behaviour of Russia as a burgeoning military-imperialist power, and the "class character" of the USSR and of the areas it seemed now to be able to take under its control. The reasonable expectation that Russia would take what it could was mixed up with the notion that Russia, as a workers' state, would impart a "workers'" or "workers' state" character to a large part of Europe. The idea was sometimes that the "Red" Army would inspire working-class revolution and maybe help it along, and sometimes of the Army (which, remember, for the Orthodox, was not Stalin's "Red Army" but "Trotsky's") not letting itself be used against the workers.

Albert Goldman, in his column in *The Militant*, would explain "Why The Reactionaries Are Worried About Soviet Gains" (27 February 1943). "The magnificent victories achieved by the Red Army in recent months have inspired all the defenders of the Soviet Union with new hope... What worries some of the big capitalists is the possibility that the Red Army will reach Berlin before the British and American armies [and] of the Soviet Union extending its influence to Germany and to all of Central Europe... It is almost impossible to conceive of the Red Army's marching into Germany without a social revolution following". Whose social revolution? "They are worried that regardless of Stalin a social revolution will come as a result of a defeat of Hitler by the Soviet armies..." The ghosts of Ttrotsky's misunderstandings of Finland and Poland, in 1939-40, could be seen dancing wildly inside this and the many similar assessments.

What did all this mean in the SWP branches? The same issue of *The Militant* carried a report that inadvertently answered that question: "Speaking on 'The Class Meaning of the Soviet Victories' to an intensely interested New York audience of well over a hundred, Felix Morrow, editor of *Fourth International*, stated that the first victories of the Red Army have already revealed the fundamental hostility between the capitalist states and the workers' state. Listing a series of anti-Soviet moves by the capitalist 'friends' of the USSR, he quoted [British cabinet member] Lord Beaverbrook's admission that the Red Army had captured in two months more equipment from the Nazis than they had received from England and the US since the start of the war. The victories of the Red Army have caused panic not only amongst the Nazis but among the reactionaries in the United Nations who fear that the new confidence and high morale of the Red Army bodes ill for their plans to make a deal with Stalin guaranteeing them

against a Socialist Europe".

The delusions and fantasies that ran riot in *The Militant* for two or three weeks in August-September 1941 had revived in a lower key. "The stranglehold of the Stalin bureaucracy has progressively weakened with every new Red Army victory and its consequent rise of morale among the Soviet masses. The Red Army is fighting for a Socialist Europe as well as a Socialist Russia, Morrow declared, and they will never submit to any underhanded deal to preserve capitalism in Europe for the benefit of the very same imperialist powers that attempted to overthrow the October 1917 Revolution".

Max Shachtman's response in *Labor Action* (15 March 1943) will serve as an interim summing up. "Felix Morrow... says: 'The stranglehold of the Stalin bureaucracy has progressively weakened with every Red Army victory'. Where, when, how? Nowhere, thus far, not even in the pages of *The Militant*, have we read of a single important (or for that matter, unimportant) fact to support this absurd contention. A weakening of the stranglehold of the bureaucracy would manifest itself in any number of concrete ways... a moderation of the terror regime, increased independent class activity of the workers, etc. Will such things, especially the last-named, take place? They will... As yet, there is no sign, no evidence, for Morrow's assertion. A totalitarian regime is weakened in wartime when it suffers military setbacks. To speak now, especially now, of a weakening of the bureaucracy's stranglehold on the country and its people is, at the very best, wishful thinking. Rise of morale among the Soviet masses? If by 'morale' Morrow is referring in general to the readiness of the masses to fight, to make sacrifices, then substantially the same thing could be said about the 'morale' of the Germans and the Japanese. Didn't their morale hold up, and rise, with the big victories of their armies? And isn't it still pretty high, according to most reports? What does this fact, by itself, prove about Russia that it does not prove about Germany or Japan?

"There is no evidence – again we emphasise, as yet – of any rise in the class morale of the Russian workers. Such a rise would show itself in the development of organised opposition, however primitive, to the counter-revolutionary regime; in the development of an independent class movement, of a socialist consciousness, of internationalist spirit. That will come. But where is there a single sign of it now?

"According to Morrow, not only is the 'Red' Army fighting for a socialist Russia (which does not exist except in the lying propaganda of the Kremlin) but also for a socialist Europe. With all deference to the delicate eardrums of our readers, we say again: Nonsense! But

this time, especially dangerous nonsense. There is no such thing today as a Red Army. It once existed. It was organised by Trotsky and the Bolsheviks. It was the army of the workers, of the people, of the socialist revolution. But Stalinism destroyed that army! Hasn't Morrow heard? He can find the whole story told and analysed in Trotsky's writings. What is 'Red' (that is, socialist, internationalist, democratic) in the Russian army today?... The Stalinist army is the army of the Bonapartist counter-revolution. Does Morrow get this? – the army of Bonapartist counter-revolution, not the army of socialism!... What Morrow says is, at the best, apologetics for Stalinism. If it is 'fighting for a socialist Europe as well as a socialist Russia', that is welcome news. It would be a miracle – and we don't believe in miracles. The Russian masses will really be fighting for a socialist Russia and Europe when they have first destroyed the rule of bureaucratic totalitarianism, rid themselves of the poison of Stalinist chauvinism, and taken control. Not before! To disseminate the idea that the Stalinist army is fighting for a 'socialist Europe as well as a socialist Russia' is to disseminate the most vicious pro-Stalinist propaganda, and thereby help destroy the prospects of a truly socialist Russia and Europe. Morrow evidently does not know that the rule of Stalinism is the rule of slavery. Morrow evidently does not read Trotsky, who wrote that the victory of the 'Red' Army in Poland (which it divided with the Hitlerite pirates in 1939) meant the subjugation of the 'liberated' masses to Stalinist slavery.

"Because of the dangerous illusions created among some workers here and in Europe by the 'victories of the Red Army', the revolutionary socialist should and will emphasise: The extension of Stalinist rule means the extension of a new slavery. Call it bureaucratic collectivism, as we do, or 'degenerated, counter-revolutionary workers' state', as Trotsky did, it is nevertheless a totalitarian slavery that Stalinist rule represents, a slave-master oppression which crushes everything that is noble, progressive, democratic, socialist and internationalist in the working class that comes under its heel. Be irreconcilable toward imperialism, be it in the form of fascism or 'democracy'. But be no less irreconcilable to Stalinism. Whoever teaches differently is either an outright enemy of socialism, or a well-meaning obstacle in its path". (The whole article is in *The Fate of the Russian Revolution* volume 1, p.414-6).

**The Orthodox Defend The Victorious USSR**

AT THE START OF JANUARY 1944 18 SWP leaders and Trotskyist leaders of the trade unions in Minneapolis went to jail, some for a

year, some for 16 months. The FBI had raided the party headquarters in Minneapolis just as Hitler's invasion of the USSR started, and the defendants, convicted of "advocating the overthrow of the government" were sentenced the day after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour on 7 December 1941. Now, after two years of appeals, they went to jail. The court decisions included an instruction from a judge that the books and other such material seized in the FBI raid of 1941 should be burned. Among those jailed were James P Cannon, Felix Morrow, and Albert Goldman. A serious political dispute had already developed between them.

Goldman was the SWP's attorney. His summing-up speech in the Minneapolis courtroom had been issued by the SWP as a pamphlet, a companion to the pamphlet *Socialism on Trial* which comprised the courtroom question-and-answer sessions between Goldman, as attorney, and Cannon, as defendant, about the politics of the SWP. Felix Morrow was the editor of the SWP's monthly magazine, *Fourth International*. The 1940 split had taken out of the SWP those who had been the party's leading intellectuals and most qualified theorists. Shachtman, in an analogy with factory workers and perhaps seriously, described James Burnham as a "skilled" intellectual and himself as "semi-skilled". After the split, Goldman and Morrow replaced them as the leading party intellectuals. Goldman had been the main speaker for the Cannon faction at the conference in April 1940.

Goldman and Morrow had been in favour of allowing the minority to put out a public bulletin that would express their views on Russia. (Cannon's refusal to agree to that was the immediate cause of the 1940 split). They had also been among the most sure and vehement of the Orthodox. Goldman had at first proposed that the SWP "approve" the Russian invasion of eastern Poland. He had written in *The Militant* approving the annexation of the Baltic states in June 1940. In many of the journalistic skirmishes between the SWP and the Workers' Party after the split, it was either Goldman or Morrow who defended the SWP viewpoint.

Morrow had been editor of *The Militant* during the August-September 1941 Leningrad delirium. He had written some of the worst and most disorienting nonsense about the "class meaning" of Russian successes in the war. But he was an honest man. He learned from his mistakes. By 1946 he would have abandoned the "degenerated workers' state" account of Russia in favour of a very rudimentary state-capitalist account, as would Goldman.

Goldman was a downright and candid man. For instance, early in 1943 the Nazis had revealed their discovery of the bodies of 10,000

Polish officers, massacred in April-May 1940 and buried in the Katyn forest, in Russia near the Polish border. It is reckoned that in total the Stalinists killed about 22,000 captured Polish officers at that time. Stalin claimed that the story was a Nazi fabrication, and that the Nazis themselves had killed the Polish officers. Though the SWP was still in full "Soviet patriot" mode, and Goldman too, he weighed the evidence in *The Militant* (8 May 1943), including the record of Stalin in such matters, and concluded that it was at least a serious possibility that the Katyn massacre was the work of the Russians.

On current politics, Goldman and Morrow had begun to differ from Cannon and others in the latter half of 1943, over how the prospects of socialist revolution in Europe had to be seen after the experience of the "Italian revolution" of July 1943. The Fascist Grand Council had voted out Mussolini and installed a new government, which switched to the Allied side in the war. *The Militant* (and Goldman and Morrow) had hailed this as "the revolution", a working-class revolt. After a while Goldman and Morrow felt obliged to record that it had been a palace coup, not a revolution, though great crowds had come out to welcome it.

From the experience of Italy they began to argue that a series of democratic slogans – against the monarchy, for the republic, for restoration of parliamentary democracy, etc. – would play an important part in preparing the European labour movements to take power. The SWP leaders responded, and would continue for years to respond: "Roosevelt and Churchill are absolutely right when they calculate that the choice is either a Franco-type dictatorship [i.e. like the fascist regime in Spain, with which the USA and the UK had friendly relations] or the socialist revolution. There is no alternative. There exists no middle-of-the-road program" (*The Militant*, 4 December 1943). There was no space at all for democratic demands. In this epoch of working-class revolution such democratic demands were no longer a proper and necessary part of their program as they had been for the 1938 Fourth International. At the SWP National Committee plenum (effectively, a small national conference) in October 1943 Goldman and Morrow moved amendments to the resolution on Europe. It seems to have been the bureaucratic chicanery with which the central administration of the SWP met the amendments that, at that point, brought them into sharp conflict with the party regime.

In jail, from January 1944, two groups formed among the Trotskyists, one around Goldman and Morrow, the other around Cannon. Out of jail, in early 1945, a Goldman-Morrow minority took shape, arguing against what they saw as the ultra-left and sectarian politics

for Europe of the SWP and the European Trotskyists who, effectively, followed the SWP. They were heavily influenced by the Workers Party on those political questions, and in their experience-born views on the bureaucratic nature of the Cannon regime in the SWP. They were also, perhaps, influenced by Natalia Sedova's criticism of the SWP leaders and their attitude to Stalinist Russia. They would soon begin to champion reunification between the SWP and the Workers Party. [14]

**The Warsaw Rising And James P Cannon**

ONE OF THE THINGS that the critics inside the SWP may have learned from was the strange episode of Cannon's letters from prison on policy towards the advancing "Red" Army. The interim SWP leaders while the 18 were in jail veered a little, in response to events, from the "Trotsky's Red Army" and automatic "Soviet patriot" line, and they came into conflict with the jailed James P Cannon.

As the Russian Army approached Warsaw in August 1944, Polish nationalists and others, including a large part of the workers of Warsaw, rose in rebellion against the Nazis in anticipation of the Russian entry into the city. They wanted to assert Polish self-liberation, as also the French who rose in August 1944 as the Americans approached Paris wanted French self-liberation. In response, the Russian Army ceased to advance. For nine weeks the Warsaw insurgents fought magnificently and were slowly destroyed by the Nazis. 150,000 Poles died. The Russian Army did not budge. Eventually it occupied the corpse-strewn ruins of the city. Stalin later expressed his view of the rising: a "criminal act of an anti-Soviet policy".

The interim SWP leaders editorialised in *The Militant* and the magazine *Fourth International* that the Russians had betrayed the Warsaw fighters. When he read the editorials, Cannon came close to denouncing the SWP leaders as traitors – to the "Red" Army. (This volume, p.326).

"The editorial again fails to put explicitly and unmistakably our slogan 'Unconditional defense of the Soviet Union' against all imperialists... The Moscow charge that the London 'Polish government in exile' ordered the uprising without consulting the Red Army command is brushed aside without being clearly stated, much less analyzed in the light of the current Soviet-Polish negotiations.

"No consideration is given to the question of whether or not the Red Army was able at the moment to launch an all-out attack on Warsaw in view of its long-sustained offensive, the Nazi defensive preparations along the Vistula, the necessity to regroup forces and mass

for new attacks after the not inconsiderable expenditure of men and material in reaching the outskirts of Warsaw, the fact that there was a lull along virtually the entire Eastern front concurrent with the halt before Warsaw, etc.

"Nor does the editorial take up the question of the duty of guerrilla forces – and in the circumstances that is what the Warsaw detachments are – to subordinate themselves to the high command of the main army, the Red Army, in timing such an important battle as the siege of Warsaw..."

Cannon was vibrantly aware of his responsibilities: "Great care should be taken in treating the Polish and similar questions... We must never forget that our party statements and editorials are now regarded as programmatic documents and taken with the greatest seriousness by the revolutionary workers of the entire world.... [Our] carefulness... has given all our resolutions since the death of the Old Man their thought-out character and made them stand up from year to year as supplements logically flowing from one unchanging program, and, like the program itself, needing no fundamental revision".

**Natalia's Second Intervention**

NATALIA SEDOVA WROTE to the SWP endorsing the editorial Cannon complained of and declaring: "You seem to be hypnotized by the slogan of the 'defense of the USSR' and in the meantime profound changes, political as well as moral-psychological, have taken place in its social structure. In his articles, especially the last ones, L.D. [Trotsky] wrote of the USSR as a degenerating workers' state and in view of this outlined two possible paths of further social evolution of the first workers' state: revolutionary and reactionary. The last four years have shown us that the reactionary landslide has assumed monstrous proportions within the USSR... The Red Army, at the basis of whose organization were lodged the principles of the October overturn, and whose (the Red Army's) goal was the struggle for the world revolution, has become transformed into a nationalist-patriotic organization, defending the fatherland, and not against its bureaucratic regime but together with its regime as it has taken shape in the last decade. Do you recall the answer of L.D. to the question put to him in the Politburo in 1927: whether the Opposition would defend the USSR in case of war? 'The socialist fatherland — yes; Stalin's regime — no'.... At the present time there is only one danger threatening the Soviet Union — that is the further development of black reaction, the further betrayal of the international proletariat. This is precisely the direction in which it is necessary to sound the

alarm... It is necessary to hammer away at one point: to warn against the consequences of Russian victories; to warn, to sound the alarm on the basis of the elements that have already been disclosed with complete clarity..." (This volume, pp.335ff).

Cannon retreated. He wrote a letter from jail proposing a shift in "emphasis" to "defence of the European revolution against Stalin". That letter was published inside the SWP so as to make it seem that he was independently proposing the same sort of shift as that advocated by Sedova. As we've seen, he had in fact just written to the opposite effect.

The SWP decided at its November 1944 conference to drop the 1931 quotation from Trotsky about defending the USSR which had been in its editorial masthead most of the time since June 1941, and to substitute another quotation from Trotsky, this time from the May 1940 manifesto: "Only the world revolution can save the USSR for socialism. But the world revolution carries with it the inescapable blotting out of the Kremlin oligarchy". Despite the conference decision, the 1931 quotation continued on the masthead, most likely because Cannon wanted it, until the end of March 1945. The cutting edge of its replacement was still concern with defence of the USSR, and the new quotation was still far too far from a plain statement that the Russian bureaucracy should be overthrown by a new working-class "political" revolution; it was, nonetheless, progress of sorts.

**The Fifth Phase: Free-Swirling Confusion**

LEAVING ASIDE ALL OTHER QUESTIONS for the moment, it was already plain from experience that Russia would expand into as much territory as it could and hold as much as it could, for as long as it could. Britain and Russia had jointly occupied Iran in August-September 1941. After the end of the war, in 1946, when Britain had evacuated Iran, Russia stayed on for some months in its northern part of the country. Stalin withdrew from Iran only under intense US pressure. At the end of the war he laid claim to Italy's ex-colony Libya. Stalin's oligarchy had immense and growing power. After looting and pillaging the countries they occupied, they would want to assimilate property forms in those countries to Russia's. In any case, much of the means of production in the countries Russia occupied was already state property. In Czechoslovakia, the most industrially advanced of the territories being occupied by "Trotsky's Red Army", the Nazis had expropriated around 70% of industry, putting it into the hands of the German state or German companies. In August 1945, a coalition government under the bourgeois liberal Edvard Benes de-

creed the nationalisation of two-thirds of industry. The question was not whether or not industry would be nationalised, but whether this nationalisation constituted in any sense, no matter how limited, a workers' revolution.

The problem many of the Orthodox had in registering the plain facts and trends arose out of the idea that nationalised property akin to Russia's in and of itself might define a species of Stalin-made bureaucratic "workers'" revolutions. Certainly replicas of the Stalinist system created by the activity of the Russian Stalinist state would have the same characteristics that the "degenerated workers' state" formula cherished and defined as the essential remaining "workers'" element in the "degenerated workers' state" [15].

Either Stalin could carry through revolutions – from above – to make workers' states, or the whole "degenerated workers' state" notion for the USSR was wrong. This dilemma paralysed them politically for a long time. They would not cut themselves out of it in the only way possible: by redefining the USSR. [16]

In an SWP Political Committee discussion on 2 August 1949 about the "class character" of Eastern Europe, Cannon would say:

"I don't think that you can change the class character of a state by manipulation at the top. It can only be done by revolution which is followed by fundamental change in property relations. That is what I understand by a change of the class character of a state. That is what happened in the Soviet Union... I don't think there has been a social revolution in the buffer countries and I don't think Stalinism carried out a revolution... The role of Stalinism is not revolutionary at all. It gave an impulse to the revolution in this sense, that the victories of the Red Army stimulated the revolutionary movement. But the actual role of Stalinism was to strangle that revolution, to suppress the mass movement of the workers and to re-stabilize the capitalist state and capitalist property relations. The fundamental role they played there was counter-revolutionary...

"If you once begin to play with the idea that class character of a state can be changed by manipulations in top circles, you open the door to all kinds of revision of basic theory... Nationalization plus the [state monopoly of] foreign trade, is not the criterion of a workers' state. That is what remains of the workers' state created by the Russian Revolution. That is the remnants of the Russian Revolution. That is why the Soviet state is called 'degenerate'. There is a tremendous difference whether a state has nationalized property relations as a result of a proletarian revolution, or whether there are certain progressive moves toward nationalization, by the Stalinists in one case or by

English reformists in the other..." (SWP IB vol.11 no.5, Oct 1949).

The whole political tragedy of Orthodox Trotskyism is there, dissected and laid out. Cannon said it clearly: "Nationalised property... is not the criterion of a workers' state". A working-class revolution is necessary for the class character of a state to go from "bourgeois" to "working-class". Cannon was clear, and in terms of Trotsky's theory of the USSR as we have discussed it in this introduction, entirely correct. But the nationalised property was held to be what empirically linked Stalinist Russia back to the revolution. Stalin was creating in a number of countries as much as "remained" of the October revolution. To judge things in the satellites according to which class held political power would destroy the position that Russia remained a degenerated workers' state because of nationalised property. In Russia, nationalised property was held to identify who held power. Either the whole Russian question had to be rethought, or nationalised property in Russia's satellites defined them as some sort of workers' states. (Not degenerated workers' states: a new term would eventually emerge, "deformed workers' states").

If you made it a "programmatic" dogma that the USSR was a degenerated workers' state, and would remain so as long as nationalised property survived, then an inexorable logic pushed you to a similar position for the satellites. Cannon would have to change his 1949 position, shared with John G Wright, and go with those who called the satellites "deformed workers' states". The alternative was to conclude that he had been wrong in 1940 and in the war years that followed.

The morally, politically, and intellectually self-destroying method was there on display too: "The victories of the Red Army stimulated the revolutionary movement". The wartime dogma was recycled, processed, and slipped in as one part of a "story". It was dealt with, as the Leningrad delirium of August-September 1941 had been dealt with in its time, by inserting a smoothed version into a fabricated storyline. Cannon would not say that he, and the others on the SWP Political Committee, were wrong in their expectations in 1943-5. If there really had been Russian-army-stimulated "revolutionary movements" in the areas conquered by Stalin, then *The Militant* and *Fourth International* had been seriously remiss in not reporting them...

Thanks in part to the remonstrations of Natalia Sedova Trotsky and in part to experience, the Orthodox recoiled in late 1944 from their ideas about "Trotsky's Red Army" and Stalinism being "objectively revolutionary". Then they lurched back in 1945-6: assertions by the SWP that war against Russia was imminent (a judgement few

in the world shared) licensed keeping "defence of the USSR" at high tension. In 1946 two members of the SWP-USA made a detailed analysis of *The Militant*'s response to news concerning the USSR between the end of war in Europe, May 1945, and June 1946. They published it in the Internal Bulletin of the SWP (this volume p.375). On the large-scale pillaging and removal of industrial equipment by the Russians from areas they had conquered, in 56 issues, there appeared two articles by Morrow, one by Goldman, and only four other brief items. Millions of women and men in "enemy" countries were deported to forced labour in the USSR. In 56 issues *The Militant*, except in the Morrow and Goldman articles just mentioned, carried no reference (though the deportations were very graphically depicted in a cartoon by Laura Gray: this volume, p.174). The USSR had seized large numbers of countries and territories: the mentions of that in *The Militant* were very few, and tended to explain away the expansion as being "defensive".

An SWP resolution in February 1946 advocated that workers in Eastern Europe "tolerate the presence of the Red Army" in the name of its alleged help in "the fulfilment of agrarian reform and the stateisation of the means of production" – with the proviso that they should rethink if the Russian Army "hindered in any way whatsoever the free development of the working-class movement" (p.394, this volume)! That encapsulated the de facto pro-Stalinist policy of the Orthodox. They lurched again to a more anti-Stalinist policy. A resolution calling for the withdrawal of Russian troops from the countries they occupied was adopted by the Fourth International in June 1946 and published by the SWP in August 1946. But they never made an explicit self-correction. After 1948 and the Tito-Stalin split, they lurched again. "Objectively revolutionary" Stalinism, which they would criticise and condemn but nevertheless felt compelled to support, would dominate their picture of the world for decades after that.

**How The War Re-Shaped Orthodox Trotskyism**

WE NEED TO SUM UP what the war period did to immediately post-Trotsky Orthodox Trotskyism, as embodied in James P Cannon and his close circle. In the responses of the Orthodox Trotskyists to the USSR at war, the Trotskyism of Trotsky was pulped and pulverised, mashed up, deconstructed and reconstructed, reduced to detached and recombinable segments. A bit like the horse in Picasso's "Guernica": you can see that in straightforward terms it is a horse, yet in naturalistic terms it is also not a horse. The limbs are all higgledly-piggledy.

They slid back years to outlived Trotskyist attitudes, before the Trotskyists declared for "political revolution" in Russia, and let much of the further development of Trotskyist thinking on the USSR in the mid and late 1930s fade to the background. They detached their agitation and propaganda from their own theory as they had it before June 1941, and sometimes designed agitation according to whatever selection from the old Trotskyist ideas would "play" best with Stalinist-inclined workers in the USA.

In most of their day-to-day journalism they dispensed with "degenerated" and called the USSR simply "the workers' state". They ascribed to Stalin's "workers' state" qualities and possibilities that both Trotsky at the end, and the Cannon of 1940, would have dismissed as either weak-minded fantasy or downright lies.

They based much of their commentary on the USSR at war on what Trotsky had called "the fundamental sophism of the bureaucracy", the idea that the people owned what the Stalinist state owned. They embraced the Stalinist idea that just by having nationalised property the USSR embodied "the foundation of socialism". They wrote that the USSR workers were defending that foundation because they knew from experience that it was the best place in the world for workers to live. (Breitman: experience had "shown the Russian masses the superiority of living in a workers' state"). They patched together unreliable reports of high morale in the USSR and erected "morale" into a criterion for determining the class character of the USSR at that point.

They related to the USSR of the bureaucrats as if major social elements of the revolution – not just, as in Trotsky, the nationalised property – had survived, or had revived. They used the "trade union analogy" to pretend to readers of *The Militant* that the USSR bureaucracy was no worse than the worst trade-union bureaucracy in a bourgeois-democratic society. They said that the USSR was part of the working-class movement, bureaucratic autocracy, slave-labour camp guards, and all. They denounced the USSR's ruling autocracy, but would also glory in the "unity" of the people of the USSR.

Most of their adverse comments on Russian Stalinism during the war were solely-political criticism, most importantly of Stalin's failure to issue a "class appeal" to German workers and to assure them that at the end of the war there would be no repetition of the terrible Versailles Treaty of 1919. By making their proposals "demands" on the bureaucracy, they cut the political criticism off from the Trotskyist social criticism. They deployed the absurd claim that the "Red" Army, a central part of the Stalinist state apparatus, was not Stalinist, had

not "really" experienced the Stalinist counter-revolution. They wrote of this "Red" Army bringing socialist revolution with it, and not, as Trotsky had described it for eastern Poland, bringing "semi-slavery" on its bayonets and tanks. In this "Trotsky's Red Army" make-believe, they pioneered a technique they would later use to pretend and half-pretend that Tito's Yugoslavia and Mao's China were not really Stalinism.

At some points, notably August-September 1941, they implied that the power and control of the bureaucracy were being sloughed off, implicitly begging the question: had there really been a Stalinist counter-revolution at all? And the question: hadn't Trotsky's and their own denunciations of Stalinism been exaggerated and false to reality? What they said about the USSR's high morale implied that yes, they had.

They turned "defence" of the USSR into defence of Stalin's imperial Russia. They presented every Russian demand for territory, or for conquest and occupation by Stalin's army, as a legitimate or at any rate an arguably defensive measure by the USSR. Thus, in the war and after, they translated "defence of the USSR" into pixilated partisanship for the Stalinist bureaucratic empire that was spreading into east and central Europe and the Balkans.

The subordination of "political revolution" to "defence", for the Orthodox, sometimes came to mean couching their politics in the form of a program of reforms of the existing USSR system. Such an approach, promoting the idea that the bureaucracy could do this, might do that, could not but radically inhibit workers influenced by the Communist Party in drawing the conclusions that Trotskyists had already drawn about the USSR from the early mid-1930s onwards. (It was also a prefiguration of the later "defencism" of the Orthodox for Yugoslavia, China, North Korea, Vietnam, Cuba, etc.)

Episodically they detached Trotsky's program for "political revolution" against Stalinist totalitarianism from the working class as its agent and reduced it to a series of "demands" on Stalin (and later on Tito, Mao, Ho Chi Minh, or Fidel Castro), implying the autocrats could conceivably carry them out. From a working-class program, they transformed it into a species of utopian socialist advice to the rulers. They pretended, by "demanding" it of them, that the Stalinist autocrats might conceivably wage an internationalist working-class war.

They pushed the whole notion of "defence of the USSR" towards an interpretation (which did not emerge fully until the mid-1950s) that the Stalinist socio-economic formation was a stabilised system

which could develop from the existing "foundation of socialism" to something near socialism itself. Ideologically, that was a giant step towards "socialism in one country".

These traits, which I have isolated here, the better to see and define them, were not of course the whole face of the Orthodox. *The Militant* carried routine anti-Stalinist commentary, especially against Stalinism in history. But its telling silences at crucial times and on very important issues added more or less heavy, neutralising, qualifications.

The focus and the emphasis of the Orthodox oscillated, but within a narrow circle. The totality of their Orthodox "Trotskyism" combined elements of Trotsky's Trotskyism with their own accommodation to the bureaucracy by way of "defending the USSR". They were compelled, in the general picture they gave of the USSR, to invent more virtues for it than that nationalised property remained and was historically progressive. And the qualification that Trotsky had added from late 1939, that the nationalised property was only potentially progressive, and would be really progressive only on condition that the workers overthrew the bureaucracy, disappeared from their picture. They filled the yawning gap between the reality of the totalitarian state, and the high-morale-inducing society they portrayed, by misreporting and fantasising about the USSR.

In an important sense, it all flowed from the stark contradictions in their politics on the USSR. The state which represented the progressive survival of the October Revolution was also the agency for enslaving and half-enslaving Russian workers and those whom it conquered. The complex theoretical and historical reasons for Trotskyist "defencism", as Trotsky had them in 1939-40, were impossible to explain in agitation and propaganda aimed at non-political, or superficially or newly political, people. That problem had at the time of the 1939-40 dispute been resolved by Trotsky's public denunciation of Stalin in Poland and Finland, coupled with "defencism" mostly confined to esoteric reasoning inside the Trotskyist organisation. The war and the US-Russian alliance made "defencism" now the public focus. Why? became an imperative immediate question. The US state was now for the "defence of the USSR" too. Stark condemnation of Stalinism would have pitted the Orthodox against the massive pro-Russian sentiment in the labour movement and against bourgeois public opinion. Cannon boldly solved this dilemma. He deployed as reasons for "defending" the USSR a large chunk of the lies the CP-USA and the "Friends of the Soviet Union" deployed: workers defended the USSR because they knew the advantages of living in a "workers' state". Then the Orthodox added a big element of pseudo-

Trotskyist fantasy. Theycombined trimming their political sails to the winds and moods around them with bombast about their imperviousness to the pressures of public opinion, their unchanging "finished program", their disciplined organisation, their firmness against "revisionism", and their "class loyalty" to the USSR. "And after twenty years of hard work, of study, of struggle, the Fourth International, the movement of living Bolshevism, has hammered out a finished program, has welded together a tested cadre, has created a firm organizational structure. It stands today, just as Lenin's small band of Bolshevik internationalists during the last war, unyielding, intransigent, confident of its destiny to lead the working class in the next great revolutionary offensive, confident of its future successes and its final triumph" (editorial in the magazine *Fourth International,* January 1945).

The result was what a critic inside their own ranks, Louis Jacobs, called "apparatus politics". Apparatus politics and "Apparatus Marxism" could and did combine strident Orthodoxy about verbal formulae with flat opportunism and never acknowledged or accounted-for fumbling in real political tests. It had a long future before it.

All this anticipated and cleared the way for the political transmogrification that would overcome the Orthodox Trotskyists at the end of the 1940s, and be codified by the "Third World Congress" (in fact the first congress of a new Trotskyist movement) in 1951. All that would unfold in the decades after World War 2 was there already, not always fully explored or fully developed, in the "positions", makeshifts, political and theoretical self-editing, Trotsky-selecting and Trotsky-editing, of the Orthodox during the war.

In a 1946 polemic against C L R James and others in the Workers Party who were moving towards rejoining the SWP – they would do so in July 1947 – Irving Howe neatly summed up the records of the Orthodox and the Heterodox in the war:

"When the SWP hailed the advancing Stalinist army as 'the liberating Red army', when the SWP national secretary called upon the workers of Warsaw to subordinate their struggle to the oncoming Stalinist army – was that the SWP's 'inestimable advantage' over us, their means of espousing the 'full Trotskyist tradition'? When the SWP press discovered that the workers in Russia 'owned' the factories and the land and that that was the cause of their determined resistance – was that the SWP's 'inestimable advantage?'

"When the SWP the week after the [USA's entry into] war [in December 1941] responded by printing a learned dissertation on criminal syndical laws while we of the 'Menshevik' WP responded by

printing a bold declaration against the imperialist war – was that the SWP's 'inestimable advantage?' When the SWP played ostrich in the trade unions and finagled with bureaucrats while our comrades boldly and with some success pursued a class struggle line in the unions – was that their 'inestimable advantage' over us? When the SWP national secretary spoke of 'telescoping' the struggle for socialism with defense of country – was that their 'inestimable advantage'?" (Workers Party Internal Bulletin, 28 March 1946).

**Part 3: The Orthodox And The Heterodox After The War**

**The Orthodox After The War**

BY APRIL 1946 Max Shachtman could comment: "It is hard to find anyone in the Fourth International who will today offer, with any measure of conviction, an argument in favour of 'unconditional defence' of Stalinist Russia. Many of the Trotskyist militants in this country and elsewhere, who opposed us vigorously in 1940, are today abandoning this outlived and now reactionary slogan". The Second Congress of the Fourth International, in April 1948, would officially amend the slogan to the ambiguous and open-ended "defence of what remains of the conquests of October".

"Others go further in our direction", wrote Shachtman, "by abandoning the preposterous theory that Russia today represents any kind of 'workers' state'... The...'workers' state' theory, in whose demolition we are proud to have pioneered, is dying in the Fourth International and there is pretty nearly nobody around with enough belief in it to try to save it".

But there was no conscious, open, and clear-cut self-correction. The minorities in the Orthodox Trotskyist groups in the USA (Goldman-Morrow), in France, and in other countries, who did slough off the "degenerated workers' state" formula, and did openly attempt self-correction, were demagogically beaten down with charges of "revisionism" and dispersed. The Trotskyist groups had grown around the end of the World War, but then from 1947 the political climate turned very unfavourable for Trotskyists of all stripes.

The April 1948 Second Congress of the Fourth International defined the East European satellite states as capitalist police states. There, in effect, the Orthodox gave the same answer as the James-Dunayevskaya segment of the Workers Party had given in its definition of the USSR as a fascist state-capitalism. If state capitalism, rather than "degenerated workers' state" or "bureaucratic collectivism" was true for Russia's satellites, then it was true for the USSR too. Fetishi-

sation of the "degenerated workers' state" term for Russia kept them from saying, or seeing, that.

The sorting-out would come in the wake of another startling shift. Exactly 68 days after the close of the Second Congress, a split between Stalin and the Tito Stalinists ruling Yugoslavia became public, complete with mutual vituperation. Untypically among the European Stalinist regimes, the Yugoslavs, at the head of a peasant army during the World War, had taken and held power without any important help from Stalin's army.

Just a few days after the public Tito-Stalin split, the Fourth International, which had very recently characterised Yugoslavia as a capitalist police state, that is, some sort of fascistic state, wrote an open letter to the Yugoslav Communist Party, addressing the YCP leaders as "Comrades". It offered "to assist [them] in resolving the present crisis in communism along proletarian and Leninist lines". Within the next year they would, most of them, decide that the other satellite states – Czechoslovakia, Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, Albania, East Germany, North Korea – were also "deformed workers' states" and should also be "defended". The long gestation of full-blown post-Trotsky "Orthodox Trotskyism" was nearly over. The political changes had become qualitative. This was a new political tendency, a hybrid combining strands of Trotskyism as Trotsky had it, of pre-1933 Trotskyism, and of the 1930s "Right Communist" Opposition of Heinrich Brandler, Jay Lovestone, and others, who advocated reform not revolution for Russia.

The difference between the Orthodox Trotskyists, as their doctrine solidified in 1949-51, and Trotsky, was vast. The difference between them and the Workers Party (the Independent Socialist League from 25 April 1949) was now one of two radically different world outlooks. The Orthodox Trotskyists' jump on Yugoslavia and Eastern Europe ate into everything else in their politics. On Yugoslavia and then China, then North Vietnam, then, a decade and a half later, Cuba, the Orthodox jumped back explicitly to the "reform" Trotskyism before the movement's decision in 1933 that a new, "political", revolution was necessary in Russia, and to the "reform" Trotskyism to which they had reverted implicitly and erratically during World War 2 in relation to the USSR. It would be 20 years after Mao conquered all of China before the Fourth International decided that a "political revolution" was necessary. (The SWP-USA had been for a "political revolution" from as soon as it decided that China was a "deformed workers' state", in 1955, later than the rest of the Fourth International).

The new reformism vis-a-vis some Stalinist states was not the old "reformism". The pre-1933 Trotskyist "reformism" meant orienting to the elements of the Bolshevik party, assumed to be still a force despite Stalin's destruction of party functioning, and still loyal to the ideals of the 1917 workers' revolution. In a sharp crisis of the system – which the Trotskyists expected to come, and very soon – all those elements would be shaken up. The party would recompose itself, its functioning would be restored, and the bureaucracy could be sloughed off.

There was no equivalent agency in the new "reformist Trotskyism". It was a matter of advocating reform for states identical in structure to the Russian state in its fully-Stalinised, post-counter-revolution condition. In some instances the reform proposals were addressed as advice to the rulers in the style of 19th century utopian socialists petitioning governments. Yet those who had taken and held power in those states had done so at the head of totalitarian parties and armies that were not working-class in their membership or in any Marxist sense at all. The Yugoslav CP did loosen up its totalitarian rule after 1948, and it made some reforms, but they went nowhere near allowing the existence of a workers' movement or independent communist organisations. After 1950-1 the Yugoslav CP would back the United Nations (US-led) forces in the Korean war, while the Orthodox Trotskyists backed the North Koreans and their Russian and Chinese sponsors. The Yugoslav Stalinists would eventually denounce the Orthodox Trotskyist Fourth International, which had loudly backed them against Stalin and organised international work brigades to go and help build roads in Yugoslavia, for being too soft on... Russian Stalinism!

In Czechoslovakia, the Communist Party had been a mass working-class party before the Nazis took over. The final act in creating a full replica of Stalinist Russia, in February 1948, was a grim parody of a workers' revolution, in its way something new in Stalinism: working-class demonstrations, strikes, and other activities were staged and regimented by the Stalinists who had long before acquired real state power as a gift from Moscow. *The Militant* assessed the Stalinist action as a victory for Czech capitalism: "Stalinists utilise mass pressure to make deal with Czech capitalists" (8 March 1948). In all the world only one Trotskyist organisation thought the Stalinist action in Czechoslovakia good and desirable. The Revolutionary Communist Party in Britain welcomed it in an article in its *Socialist Appeal* (March 1948), signed by its secretary Jock Haston: "Capitalists routed in Czechoslovakia". Such was the political chaos that would grip the

Fourth International that the people who published that article would also make valid criticisms of the delusions about Yugoslavia which the other Orthodox Trotskyists held from July 1948.

In June 1950 Stalinist North Korea invaded the bourgeois South. It was acting as Russia's proxy. After December 1950 large Chinese armies fought in Korea. The US and its allies, including Britain, responded to the June 1950 invasion with full-scale war, for which they got the backing of the United Nations, since Russia had temporarily quit the Security Council. The SWP at first responded with a "Third Camp" stance – "Let the Korean people decide their own fate free from US or Kremlin" (*The Militant*, 3 July 1950). Here too, as at the start of the USA's war in December 1941, James P Cannon took some weeks to decide what he thought. But then, with an Open Letter to the President and Congress (31 July), he threw the Orthodox Trotskyists behind the Stalinists. Cannon simply redefined the political picture, fading out the Stalinist dimension in Korea. It was not Stalinism but the Korean Revolution, part of the world-wide Colonial Revolution, that confronted the USA and its allies. The technique was familiar from the political performance of the Orthodox during the World War. It was a further turning point in consolidating the new Orthodoxy. In the following three years, up to Stalin's death in March 1953, the Fourth International would elaborate a world view that expanded the idea of war-revolution that had exercised the Dan Mensheviks, the SWP, and some European Trotskyists, in 1943-5.

World War Three, which many people far from Trotskyism then expected too, would be an international class war. In it, the European mass Stalinist parties would rally to the USSR and lead revolutionary mobilisations as the Russian army marched across Europe to the Atlantic. The Stalinist-led forces would establish systems and regimes similar to those of the East European satellites and the USSR itself. This would be the next, albeit "deformed", stage of the world socialist revolution. The Orthodox Trotskyists were its advocates by way of their "perspectives" and "predictions" and orientations, which in Europe included entry into the big and authoritarian Stalinist parties of Western Europe.

This new "war-revolution" perspective differed from that of the SWP in 1943-5. It had never been sufficiently clear whether the "Red" Army, or workers roused by it, would make the revolution, but the SWP had talked of the "Red" Army stimulating working-class revolutionary movements that it would not be able to control or repress, and indeed would not want to control or repress, even if ordered to. There was none of that in the 1950-53 war-revolution thesis. The re-

sult would not be socialist revolutions beyond the power of Stalin to quell, as the 1943-5 line had it, but Stalinist states set up by the "Red" Army, with more or less local support. The Fourth International's main leader, Michel Pablo, even wrote speculatively of "centuries" of Stalinist and semi-Stalinist deformed workers' states ("Where Are We Going?", SWP International Information Bulletin, March 1951).

**The Revenge Of "Bureaucratic Collectivism"**

IN HIS SPECULATION about Stalinist states covering much or all the world for "centuries", Pablo came close to defining the Stalinist states as "bureaucratic collectivist", that is, states of a substantial new type of ruling class. It was what Trotsky had outlined hypothetically in 1939 as a global slave-society, but now re-evaluated as a first wave of socialist revolution. Curiously, Pablo, who separated from the Fourth International in 1963, by the late 1960s had come explicitly to call the Stalinist systems bureaucratic class states. He remained a "defencist" against capitalist imperialism for those states.

In that he merely brought his own publicly-expressed half-thoughts of the early 1950s to their logical conclusion. A number of "anti-Pabloite" Orthodox Trotskyists took an essentially similar course, disguising it from themselves in the idea that "deformed workers' states" were so sharply distinct from "workers' states" that the "deformed workers' state" was a separate stage in history, not necessarily connected to working-class action (and therefore should not be accommodated to in the way that Pablo had accommodated to it around 1950). These were "bureaucratic collectivist" ideas in an ill-fitting "deformed workers' state" shell, advocated for example by the Grant tendency (Militant, the Socialist Party, Socialist Appeal) and the once-noisy Spartacists.

"Workers' state", in this version of "deformed workers' state" doctrine, signified nothing about the relation of the state to workers, and nothing at all but an encoded expression of approval. The only difference on the level of basic theory between this sort of "deformed workers' state" doctrine and the "bureaucratic collectivist" idea of the Workers Party/ ISL was a difference of political attitude and of historical evaluation: an attitude of "defending" and lauding and helping along the expansion of Stalinism (because it was historically progressive), as against the WP/ISL's horrified rejection of it (as a historically regressive totalitarian tyranny). And in that rejection, the WP/ISL, and not the Orthodox, were the Trotskyists.

A sizeable section of the Pablo-Mandel international, the Latin American Bureau, split away in 1962, led by Juan Posadas. Advocacy

of the "demand" that Russia and China start the war-revolution came to be one of their central policies. The other Orthodox Trotskyists said that the Posadas group was deranged, and it surely was. When Hal Draper defined the Orthodox Trotskyist Fourth International of the early 1950s as "borderline crackpot", he erred, if he erred, on the side of restraint and mealy-mouthedness [17].

The great expansionary wave of Stalinism that ran from the 1940s until it broke in Afghanistan, in Russia's colonial war of the 1980s, was revolutionary against the bourgeoisie, but also counter-revolutionary against the working class and against all elements of bourgeois democracy and political liberty, that is, against much of the historical achievements of bourgeois civilisation over centuries, not to speak of socialism. The Stalinist revolutions were in no sense or degree working-class revolutions. Under them, the working classes were the immediate victim of repression, labour movements of extirpation, Trotskyists simply of murder. They had none of the characteristics that had led Trotsky to believe that Russia remained some kind of degenerated and degenerating workers' state.

Thus, in their own way the Orthodox Trotskyists had arrived at a theory of what Trotsky had described in its future projection as "bureaucratic collectivism", while yet rejecting that term for Russia and the other Stalinist states. They rejected the suggestions which Trotsky had given for reviewing the class character of the USSR in the light of events in World War 2, as they had "suspended" his (and their own) program of political revolution for much of the war. They developed a concept of "deformed workers' state" that was a new theory of a new form of society, connected only by thin verbal formulae to Trotsky's theory of Russia as a "degenerated workers' states". Trotsky made a well-known joke that even though James Burnham did not recognise the dialectic, the dialectic recognised him. The Orthodox Trotskyists refused to recognise any variant of the theory of bureaucratic collectivism, but the theory, in a thin disguise and with pro-Stalinist politics, recognised and took possession of them.

The Orthodox became political satellites of the Stalinist bloc in world affairs – outspokenly so from 1950 and the Korean war. They did not become uncritical supporters of either the foreign or (most of) the domestic policy of Stalinists in power. For the "autonomous" Stalinist states, those not set up by the Russian army, they did as the SWP had done in 1941 with its "minimum program" for defence of the USSR: they advocated "reforms" that would have amounted to a revolution. As in the pioneering model in 1941, these "demands" had their head and executive organs lopped off. The demands – which of

course were a form of propaganda in the Orthodox Trotskyist press, aimed at their own milieu – were separated off from the necessary conclusion: a workers' revolution. On one level they were advice to the rulers to cut off their own horns, claws and tails. They were a species of utopian socialism.

James P Cannon, who was in some ways always better, or trying to be better, than the movement he had educated and miseducated, made a confused revolt in 1953 against some of the trends that the Orthodox Fourth International developed around the ideas of the August-September 1951 Third World Congress. He split the Orthodox Fourth International, accusing the Pablo-Mandel leadership of conciliation with Stalinism; of failing to support the East German workers when they rose in 1953 with demands that the Russian army, which was shooting them, should withdraw from Germany; and of liquidating the small independent Trotskyist groups into the big Stalinist parties. Cannon was in part driven by an internal SWP faction fight with people who claimed to be acting "for Pablo", and he explicitly refused to "go back to 1940", or even to the Third Congress of 1951. When one of his comrades, Sam Gordon, argued in a private letter that what Cannon denounced was rooted in the positions of the Third Congress, Cannon responded that they should recognise no major errors as having been made by the Third Congress or themselves. Prestige and calculation of factional advantage ruled then, as they had since Trotsky's death and always would. The consequence for the "anti-Pabloite" segment of the Fourth International was that they arbitrarily asserted their own picture of reality, as they had during World War 2, and didn't bother too much with logic, theories, the recent past, or the implications of positions taken or not taken. They cut loose from the theorising of the Third Congress and of Pablo, as earlier from that of Trotsky [18].

Those who sided with Cannon in 1953 – the British Healyites and French Lambertists – would evolve into the worst regime-ridden, undemocratic, and irrational organisations in the Trotskyist archipelago. In 1979 the SWP itself went the same way, transformed by its own party machine, under new control. It soon expelled almost all the older Orthodox Trotskyists and transformed the group into a semi-Stalinist sect rigidly aligned with the Castro regime in Cuba.

That was not a matter of political logic only, or of the habit of establishing a political line for short-term advantage. It happened, could happen, only because the organisations of the 1953 Cannonite "International Committee of the Fourth International" were under the control of strong bureaucratic machines.

When the SWP and the Mandel grouping reunited in 1963 (minus Pablo), the Healyites and Lambertists rejected the reunification, and went their own, increasingly bizarre, ways. In 1967, the Healyites came out for Mao's Cultural Revolution – a debauch of wild physical and intellectual wrecking and destruction by "Red Guard" youth controlled by the Maoist army.

The mainstream "Orthodox Trotskyists", with Mandel, zig-zagged wildly, playing political chameleon to many other political tendencies, Stalinist and non-Stalinist. In the 1950s and most of the 1960s they operated as factions inside social democratic parties and official Communist Parties. Then in the late 1960s and the 70s they grew into sizeable organisations, usually ultra-left, in a number of countries.

From the 1980s, they generally declined. After the collapse of Stalinism in Europe and the USSR in 1991, they officially declared that their "deformed workers' state", "post-capitalist society", or "transitional society" descriptions of Stalinism must be critically reviewed. Their well-known writer, Daniel Bensaid, explicitly repudiated all those formulas. Their summary of their adjustment after 1991 was, however, "new epoch, new program, new party", which in practice means they have become proponents of building ill-defined "broad left" parties rather than of parties of the type advocated and built by Lenin and Trotsky. In Britain their small group attached itself to George Galloway's ill-born and ill-fated "Respect party".

**Why The Shachtmanites Declined And The Cannonites Survived**

IN THE MID 40S THE SHACHTMANITES REVISED their version of "bureaucratic collectivism" to see Stalinism as a viable world system able to compete with advanced capitalism and likely to supplant it unless the workers first made a socialist revolution in the advanced capitalist countries. It was, they decided, very urgently a case of socialism or barbarism. Stalinism was barbarism.

They drew sharp, angular, truth-centred but often too abstract lines and definitions – in World War 2, in their characterisation of the mass Stalinist parties, in their trade-union work. In their belief that Stalinist bureaucratic collectivism was a viable alternative to advanced capitalism, they paralleled the view which the Orthodox took, though with a different evaluation, from the mid 1950s. The Heterodox never ceased to see capitalism as in retreat before Stalinism and historically vulnerable to its predatory competition. Stalinism did expand enormously, and was still expanding for many years after Shachtman's death in 1972. But in the years after World War 2, when Stalinism was expanding into backward countries, capitalism had re-

organised itself in its two-thirds of the world, which included the most developed areas, and it began to flourish again. The Heterodox refused to take sides in the Cold War; but they thought and said that the bourgeois West was "better", economically, socially, politically, and in general civilisation, than the Stalinist East, and they were always under a pressure of political logic to side with "the West" as the lesser evil.

In the decades of capitalist prosperity, their commitment to the working class and its movement subjected their revolutionary politics and perspectives to great pressure. Trade-union routines drained off much of their politics. They were pushed towards going where most of the unions were politically immersed, in the Democratic Party.

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

In the early 1950s, a section of the younger leaders of the group (since 1949, called the Independent Socialist League) – Irving Howe, Stanley Plastrik, Emanuel Geltman, Jack Ranger, and others – hived off to found a new journal, *Dissent*, which still appears today, after they are all dead. One of them, Irving Howe, would in 1965 produce the best one-volume anthology of Trotsky's writings. The ISL produced a politically high-grade weekly paper and a quarterly journal. But many of its members dwindled, in their activity, to being mere trade unionists. They were greatly under pressure, from the realities of the American labour movement and its politics, to participate in Democratic primaries when the trade unions did, as they did. In 1958 the ISL fused with the small Socialist Party. Some former ISL people, around Max Shachtman, gained great influence in the Socialist Party. In 1961 Shachtman refused to condemn the CIA-backed invasion of Castro's Cuba, and the Shachtmanites divided again. Shachtman and some of his long-time close associates, for example Al Glotzer, evolved to backing the US against Stalinism. Shachtman wound up in the Democratic Party; he died in November 1972.

But as long as the Heterodox Trotskyists of the Workers Party and the ISL were alive as a revolutionary political tendency, they did not

become in any way or degree supporters of the bourgeois-democratic capitalist system, as the Orthodox Trotskyists became critical supporters of varieties of Stalinism. It took Max Shachtman 21 years of erosion and demoralisation after the death of Trotsky to adopt the same attitude to bourgeois-democratic capitalism that the Cannonites had taken to Stalinism less than 21 months after Trotsky's death.

Hal Draper, who had disputed with Shachtman over Cuba, produced scholarly books of great value. Some of Draper's younger cothinkers linked up with the British IS (forerunner of the SWP), and acted as revolutionary socialists where they could. Despite a dispersal in 1976-7, when pressure from the British IS for greater control broke the American group into half-a-dozen splinters, they continue to do that. But, on the whole, the Heterodox Trotskyist current had withered to very little by the time the revolutionary left revived in the late 1960s, and its legacy has had to be rediscovered in libraries rather than being passed on directly through living political organisations.

If the outlook of the Heterodox was aridly chaste and truth-centred, that of the Orthodox was full of sloppy political and historical fantasies, delusions, and adulterations, and it was polluted by promiscuous association with reactionary regimes.

The Orthodox had the weight of Trotsky's authority on their side. They presented their ideas about Stalinism as the only consistent development from Trotsky's (in fact very different) ideas. And they survived for the same reason that the Stalinists did. The Stalinist parties were Stalinist even when their politics were bourgeois-conformist. In Britain, for instance, they were against the Labour Party leaving its coalition with the Tories in May 1945. Even after Labour had won the general election in July 1945 the Communist Party advocated a new coalition that would include the Tories. Even Labour's right wing was to the left of this Stalinist party! What made the Communist Party Stalinist and prevented its sometimes bourgeois-conformist politics leading to full conciliation with the bourgeoisie was that its core commitment was to the Russian Stalinist state. That kept it in the orbit of Russia, and at odds with the local bourgeoisie, no matter how much the Stalinists became mired in the local bourgeoisie's politics. So too with the Orthodox Trotskyists: their "defencism" kept them from recoiling from Stalinism towards bourgeois democracy. The Heterodox had no such moorings.

1700 years ago Catholic Christianity fought for supremacy with Arian Christianity. The Arians were rational for their times, severely sensible, impatient with such ideas as that Jesus was god. The Catholics dealt in intellectual gibberish like the Trinity, the idea that

god is both three persons and one. They absorbed pagan cults and worshipped local pagan gods as Christian saints. But the Catholics' myths and monkish fantasies catered for emotional and other needs in their congregations that the Arians could not cater for or hope to satisfy. The Heterodox were the Arians, and the Orthodox the Catholics, of post-Trotsky Trotskyism. The "Catholic" Orthodox, by virtue of their fudging of issues and their revolutionary fantasies and delusions, and their willingness to accept or adapt to alien political movements, were the better equipped to survive in an age of Stalinist expansion and of the widespread credibility of Stalinism even in the political eye of its critics and its bourgeois outright enemies.

**Dogmatic Marxism And Apparatus Politics**

A WEEK AFTER TROTSKY'S DEATH on 21 August 1940, a big memorial meeting for him was held in New York. Al Glotzer represented the Workers Party there, but the main speaker was James P Cannon. His speech was printed in *The Militant* (6 September 1940: p.527 of this volume).

Cannon's powerful and moving speech for Trotsky was also a clear declaration of what Marxism was to be for the Orthodox now that Trotsky, its eminent practitioner, was dead. It was the manifesto of a new Trotskyism. "The mighty ideas of Trotsky are... a clear guide to action in all the complexities of our epoch, and a constant reassurance that we are right... He worked against time to pour out through his pen the whole rich content of his mighty brain and preserve it in permanent written form for us..."

Marxism was now the texts of Trotsky – and earlier leaders, but primarily of Trotsky, who had unpacked his mind of all it contained and "laid up a literary treasure for us, a treasure that the moths and the rust cannot eat". Not said, but implied – and it would be the guiding rule for the Orthodox – was the idea that Marxism as a process of scientific investigation had more or less come to an end. Now those whom Cannon himself called Trotsky's "disciples" had to "apply" Trotsky's "teaching" (as they sometimes put it). They themselves would, of course, have to pick and choose at each time whatever of Trotsky's written "treasure" they thought relevant. Marxism was now a set of texts and old analyses, positions, and predictions, for deployment by "Trotsky's disciples". They would defend it and construe it in current politics.

Before the 1940 memorial meeting, an attempt had been made to bring Trotsky's corpse to New York for the ceremony. As well as being an undeserved insult to the Mexican people, whose government had

given the live Trotsky refuge, this was bizarre – the idea of a Marxist political event organised around the specially imported carcass or ashes of the great dead man. The American government's refusal to give permission saved the Orthodox from this mummery, and they had the memorial without the corpse.

More than 40 years later in London, the Workers Revolutionary Party, the organisation (now defunct) that had once been the Cannonites' section in Britain but had long ago separated from them, somehow got hold of Trotsky's death mask and used it rather as Cannon had wanted to use Trotsky's body. They organised a mass meeting at which the centrepiece was the death-mask. It was a mix of showmanship, idolatry, kitsch religion, and all-round mumbo-jumbo.

The WRP had come close to realising Cannon's ambition half a century later. Cannon, however, did do with Trotsky's thinking what he couldn't do with Trotsky's corpse.

Cannon took on the role of St Peter, to whom Jesus Christ had supposedly said: "Thou are Peter" – his name up to then had been Simon; Peter meant "rock" – "and upon this rock I will build my church". Peter was, so the Catholic Church said, the first pope, the "vicar on Earth" of the departed Christ. For the Trotskyist movement, Cannon also took a role similar to that played for the "De Leonites" (the Socialist Labor Party) by Arnold Petersen after the death in 1914 of the SLP's central figure, Daniel De Leon – De Leon's dogmatising and sterile "vicar on Earth".

That this was Cannon's conception of Marxism would be demonstrated again and again all through the 1940s, the formative period of Orthodox Trotskyism. Much of their history in that period was a succession of more or less demented blunders rooted in a fixation on Trotsky's "predictions" and on verbal formulae taken from Trotsky.

We have seen that Trotsky had said that bourgeois democracy would soon give way in all the combattant states to fascism or authoritarianism. That proved to be not true of the USA, Britain, etc. during the war. It was proved not true in Italy after the fall of Mussolini in 1943, and in France as the Nazis retreated in 1944. But the Orthodox – or most of them: the British RCP was comparatively sensible about it – insisted, and insisted again, long after the actual establishment of new bourgeois-democratic states in Western Europe, that only authoritarian or "Bonapartist" police states could emerge there.

The Orthodox understood Trotsky to have believed that all imperialisms were equally predatory, the British and American as predatory as Hitler's. Therefore, they concluded, the triumphant USA

would treat the European peoples liberated from German rule just as the Nazis had. That conclusion was by 1943-4 far from sensible. Yet long after the war was over, and the Americans were not behaving like the Nazis in Europe, the Orthodox clung to their belief.

Trotsky had predicted that during and immediately after the war there would be mass working-class anti-capitalist risings and socialist victories. That had been a plausible idea before the war, rooted in the experience at the end of World War One; but it did not happen. The war in Europe ended on 8 May 1945 (and in Japan on 2 September). Ah, but had the war *really* ended? At a public meeting on 4 November 1945, Cannon addressed himself to that question. No, the war hadn't ended, he said. Only "careless thinkers" believed it had (p.546 of this volume). The Marxists, Trotsky's disciples, knew better. There was only a pause in the ongoing and unended war. Trotsky's predictions would yet be proven true. His Marxist foresight would be vindicated.

Everyone, well-prepared and experienced speakers at public meetings too, sometimes gets carried away with an idea, or makes exaggerations. There was a sane and reasonable idea within the ridiculous claim that World War 2 was not over. Many smaller wars continued. Lines were already being drawn for a possible World War 3. But sensible people would see the exaggeration, or have it pointed out to them, and modify or retract.

Not Cannon. Not the "disciples". When Felix Morrow proposed to have the SWP repudiate the idea that World War 2 was not over, the rest of the SWP Political Committee rallied to Cannon. Morrow's motion was "factionally motivated", and therefore it was not necessary to separate the SWP from the idea, expressed by the Leader of the Orthodox in a major public speech printed in their paper, that World War 2 was still going on (p.549 of this volume). Thereafter the broad idea that the war was not over was repeated again and again in *The Militant*, in a toned-down and not-crazy form. For example, "Only Militant warned 'There is no peace!'" (16 March 1946). To reassert the idea in some form, while silently retreating from the letter of what Cannon had said, became a point of honour with the Orthodox.

The accumulating effect of this prestige-heavy and politics-light approach to Marxism was to change the public persona of the organisation from one of reasonable Marxists in touch with reality (and, where necessary, with their own fallibility) into one that was quirky, arbitrary, capricious, a little eccentric, sometimes very eccentric. Reading the Orthodox papers and magazines of the 1940s, you get the feel of people not reasoning things through but tacking, trimming,

and manoeuvring with "smart" formulations and gambits cut loose from their notional political doctrine and the Marxist framework. You get the feel of agitation-led "lines" and commentaries and not honest or free discussion of unexpected or problem-raising events – of an edifice dominated by apparatus politics and calculations about likely short-term political effect – above all of arbitrariness and caprice.

There was a famous dispute, recorded in Lenin's *What Is To Be Done?*, between Lenin and the future Menshevik (and future Stalinist) Alexander Martynov about the relationship for Marxists between agitation and propaganda. Martynov thought agitation and propaganda were separate things that, so to speak, sometimes didn't talk to each other. Agitation was measured by its results as a "call to action". Lenin, following Plekhanov, argued that agitation was bound by the theory and basic propaganda of the movement. There could be no such thing as doctrine-free agitation, no separate category of slogans which were "calls to action". Agitation on specific questions flowed from the basic doctrine and purposes of the Marxist movement, and led back to them.

In Cannon and the Orthodox after Trotsky's death, for example in their jugglings about Russia, there is a loosening or breaking of the link between agitation (which Plekhanov defined as one or a few ideas reaching a large audience) and propaganda (many ideas, reaching a few), and theory.

On the one hand, the Orthodox sometimes practised daft fidelity to the letter of Trotsky; on the other, when it suited them, they could ignore Trotsky's reasoning. Not only Trotsky, but also Cannon, had based their assessment of the Stalinist USSR in 1939-40 on the idea that it was unviable even in the short term, and certainly incapable of large expansion. Russia had survived and seized half of Europe. The Workers Party asked the Orthodox: what about that? On this the Orthodox were not at all "Trotsky-to-the-letter" people. They made a joke of it. Shachtman thinks he has a "promissory note" from Trotsky and from History! Ha! Ha! Ha! These were pick-and-choose dogmatists.

One reason for their fixation on, for example, the idea that bourgeois democracy was impossible in post-war Europe, was their own inability to elaborate revolutionary working-class politics based on the same premisses, norms, and methods as Trotsky in unexpected realities. The truth about all dogmatists is that in practice they pick and choose what to do empirically, according to pressures, perceived opportunities or dangers, pet ideas, brainstorms, and then fit dogma to deed. Even when the text-fetishists get hooked in the wheels of a

dogma which runs away with them – the idea about bourgeois-democratic regimes being impossible in post-war Europe, for example – on the whole they match dogma to deed, not deed to dogma. Marxism becomes not method and precept but afterthought and rationalisation: apparatus Marxism.

In Orthodox Trotskyism, the tendency over decades came to be for "the party" and what was considered to be good for "the party" to become the all-defining supreme good – to become what the USSR was to the Stalinised Comintern. There are very few things people calling themselves Trotskyists have not done for organisational advantage. Much of the time, for many of the "Orthodox" Trotskyist groups, everything – perceptions of reality, "perspectives", truth, consistency, principle – is up for "construing" and reinterpretation in the light of perceived party interest. Their "Marxism" is "Apparatus Marxism": it exists to rationalise what the party apparatus thinks it best to do. The idea of the "finished" or "unchanging" program has sometimes been presented as a barrier to opportunism, but in fact has become a licence for it: any emphasis, extrapolation, or selective reading is justified so long as it remains or can be claimed as remaining within the limits of the barebones formula.

This is "Marxism" with its eyes put out, chained to the millwheel, "Apparatus Marxism". Apparatus Marxism is a peculiarly rancid species of "Marxism" from which everything "objective", disinterested, spontaneous and creative is banished. Creativity is incompatible with the prime function of "Apparatus Marxism": rationalising for "the party" and its apparatus. Creativity and, so to speak, spontaneity, is the prerogative of the all-shaping, suck-it-and-see empirical citizens who staff the "Party" apparatus. Everything is thereby turned on its head. The history of the Orthodox Trotskyist, or Cannonite, organisations is a story shaped by this conception of the relationship of Marxism to "the revolutionary party" – as a handmaiden of the apparatus.

"Apparatus Marxism" is both blind and sterile because it is not and cannot be a guide to honest analysis and to practice consistent with theory. It exists to rationalise a practice that is in fact guided by something else – usually, the perceived advantage of the organisation. For Marxists, the unity of theory and practice means that practice is guided by theory, a theory constantly replenished and sometimes modified by experience. In "Apparatus Marxism", the proper relationship of theory to practice and of practice to theory is inverted.

Our predominant Marxist culture today is largely made up of the various "Apparatus Marxisms", protected, as behind high tariff

walls, by the "party" regimes they serve. Demurrers or questioners of cloistered certainties are inimical to that culture, which, progressively over the 1940s, reshaped the Orthodox Trotskyists and their policies. James P Cannon was the Zinovievist cuckoo in Trotsky's small nest. It was not all negative Zinovievism. Cannon stood for a serious attitude to organisation, and that was necessary. But the Zinovievism eventually, as Cannon himself seems ruefully to have recognised in the 1960s, "strangled the party" (p.621, this volume). Grown fully, and without Trotsky restraining him, Cannon bit off the heads of a lot of the smaller birds in the nest or pushed them out. With Trotsky's help in 1939-40, he tried to bite off the head of some of the bigger birds: in the first place Shachtman. He "bumped off" a succession of leading SWP intellectuals in 1939-40 (Shachtman and others), 1943-6 (Morrow, Goldman, van Heijenoort), and 1952-4 (Cochran, Braverman), until he had left only the Cannon cultists, George Novack and Joseph Hansen, and, until his death in 1956, John G Wright, who was certainly a patronised member of Cannon's inner circle. Cannon, again and again, urged that the organisation become "tighter", more "centralised". Farrell Dobbs, who succeeded Cannon as secretary of the SWP and served in the post until the 1970s, summarised in 1941 how those close to Cannon had seen the April 1940 split: "the petty-bourgeois minority... tried to force the party to renounce the defense of the Soviet Union. They tried to turn the organization into the shambles of a social democratic debating society" (*The Militant*, 13 September 1941). Eventually the "tightening" and the "centralisation" squeezed the life out of the organisation.

The question of Cannon's ascribed pre-eminence in the organisation had been a contentious issue since about 1929. The notion – and it was Cannon's governing notion – of a fixed "prestige" for certain leaders, and a common leadership duty to maintain it, could not but play a deadly role. Inevitably a leader's prestige fluctuates. Everyone, even a Trotsky, sometimes makes mistakes, is slow to understand or too hasty or one-sided in response. To try to stop the natural fluctuation of prestige involves putting the judgement, and the freedom to think and express themselves, of the organisation's members in a bureaucratic straitjacket. It comes to involve falsification of the political records, covering-up, and the stifling of anyone who might politically undermine the leaders' prestige. A serious revolutionary socialist will practise a politics of truth and honest dealing, and inescapably that involves being unpopular sometimes. That, as they say, goes with the territory. Valid prestige based on honest dealing in politics can come only from having been right on a number of occasions, despite un-

popularity. That is the "prestige" which Lenin had in the Bolshevik party, for example. It is very different from prestige based on pretend-omniscience and an eternal bureaucratic struggle to maintain it.

Cannon, in his "Notes on the Party Discussion", produced during his battle with Goldman and Morrow (SWP Internal Bulletin vol.7 no.2, April 1945), was surely right that "workers will not stay in a kibitzers' club. They won't talk back to the articulate smart alecks, and they won't write letters to the national office, either. They 'vote with their feet'." And, certainly, from that must flow some regulation as to time, occasion, and place for discussion, and broad guidelines for the chairing of such discussions in branches. But the gap between "kibitzers" and workers who can gain confidence in abstract debate and attend meetings only by effort against the pressures of social conditions and of long and tiring hours of work, demands not just restraint on the "kibitzers" but a "levelling-up" of the workers by education, experience, and discussion. As Gramsci put it: "Education, culture, the spreading of knowledge and experience – this is the independence of the masses from the intellectuals". Or again: "Marxism is antithetical to this Catholic position [of an iron discipline over the intellectuals so that they do not pass beyond certain limits of differentiation] ... If [Marxism] asserts the need for contact between the intellectuals and the simple people it does so, not in order to limit scientific activity and maintain unity at the low level of the masses but precisely in order to build an intellectual-moral bloc which makes politically possible the intellectual progress of the masses and not only of a few groups of intellectuals... [This] means working to produce cadres of intellectuals of a new type who arise directly from the masses though remaining in contact with them and becoming the stay of the corset."

In fact, Cannon offered as solution a levelling-down. What did the "kibitzers" of the 1945 SWP want to discuss? General politics, issues in dispute inside and outside the SWP, current events, Marxism... That such things be discussed by the membership is a necessity for a healthy party organisation. To stifle the "articulate" people who want to discuss those things in deference to new working-class (and other) members – or, with Cannon in 1945, in deference to a hoped-for big "influx of new, politically-inexperienced worker militants" which in fact never came – is to stultify the organisation, cramp the functioning of its cadres, and cut off the development of new worker activists. It is to make discussion of complex political issues into a preserve of an intellectually-privileged caste within the organisation, of just a few leaders (or one leader) and their personal political friends, sheltered

from criticism. And a consequence of that is progressively to lower the intellectual and political level of the "top" layer in the organisation itself.

That deadly "dumbing down" could already be seen in the SWP-USA in the early 1940s. It did not eliminate petty-bourgeois intellectuals, and in any case they should not be eliminated; it just added another requirement for entry into complex discussions: selection by or subservience to the leading group, the apparatus, or "the leader". It led to a lowering of the level of the "intellectuals": a Wright for a Shachtman, a Novack for a Morrow, a Hansen for a Goldman, or a Dobbs for a McKinney, was not progress. If entirely party-trained intellectuals, without a "petty-bourgeois" (that is, a wide) educational background, are made the ideal, then they are likely to be narrow and one-sided. Cannon's approach tended artificially to cut the party off from contributions not only from independent-minded but also from better-trained intellectuals. In an apparatus-ruled party, no-one can know or say more than the apparatus and its leader says, or licenses them to say.

John G Wright, who conjured up the "Trotsky's Red Army" nonsense, was not a negligible man. He translated important texts and wrote some valuable articles. He, like Cannon, was one of the last of the Orthodox to accept the formula that the new Stalinist states were "deformed workers' states". Even so, in the early 1940s, he had the position he had in the SWP press by virtue of membership in a clique around Cannon. Novack and Hansen were selected over time, and survived, by dint of their intellectual and political biddability and willingness to operate within limits set by the apparatus, that is, to one degree or another, by their intellectual and political lack of independence and of personal political integrity, in a word, by their corruptibility. The levelling-down and stultifying gradually killed intellectual life in the SWP, and paved the way for the coup in 1979, when apparatus-made and now apparatus-controlling younger leaders revolutionised the organisation from above. They made it a Castroite sect and expelled the remaining veteran Trotskyists (except, notably, George Novack, who remained subservient even to the Castroite "leadership" and apparatus). The smaller would-be Trotskyist groups around the SWP reported in the mid-80s an episode that in its symbolism summed up the whole tragic story. The new SWP leaders threw out Cannon's personal collection of pamphlets and documents, placing them in a dumpster. When they found interested people with respect for Cannon rescuing the documents, they put a guard on the dumpster until it was hauled away. The paths of artifi-

cial prestige sooner or later lead only to the historical dumpster.

Their junking of the "old Cannonism" could happen the way it did – through clique control of the apparatus – only on the basis of further development of the apparatus control Cannon created after the 1940 split. One of the veterans expelled after the 1979 coup, Frank Lovell, described the regime after 1953 like this: "Disagreements that developed within the National Committee were smoothed over and remained unresolved. The leaders in the national office made decisions by consensus and discouraged any general discussion within the ranks of the party about the correctness of their decisions or the best way of implementing them. This sufficed to keep the organization together... But this method tended to have a stultifying effect. It discouraged political initiative and debate". (Introduction to *In Defence of American Trotskyism*, FIT pamphlet 1992).

**Cannon And Shachtman**

THE HONEST CRITIC of the Trotskyist movement — of both the Cannon and Shachtman segments of it, which are intertwined in their history and in their politics — must remind himself and the reader that those criticised must be seen in the framework of the movement as a whole. Even those who were most mistaken most of the time were more than the sum of their mistakes, and some of them a great deal more. The US Trotskyists, Shachtmanites and Cannonites alike, mobilised 50,000 people in New York in 1939 to stop fascists marching into Jewish neighbourhoods of that city. When some idea of the extent of the Holocaust became public, the Orthodox responded vigorously (and the Heterodox would have concurred): "Anger against Hitler and sympathy for the Jewish people are not enough. Every worker must do what he can to aid and protect the Jews from those who hunt them down. The Allied ruling classes, while making capital of Hitler's treatment of the Jews for their war propaganda, discuss and deliberate on this question endlessly. The workers in the Allied countries must raise the demand: Give immediate refuge to the Jews... Quotas, immigration laws, visa – these must be cast aside. Open the doors of refuge to those who otherwise face extermination" (Statement of the Fourth International, *The Militant*, 3 April 1943).

We, the Orthodox – the writer was one of them – identified with the exploited and oppressed and sided with them and with the labour movements of which we ourselves were part; with people struggling for national independence; with the black victims of zoological racism. We took sides always with the exploited and oppressed. To those we reached we brought the basic Marxist account of class soci-

ety in history and of the capitalist society in which we live. We criticised, condemned, and organised against Stalinism. Even at the least adequate, the Orthodox Trotskyists generally put forward proposals that in sum meant a radical transformation of Stalinist society, a revolution against Stalinism. Always and everywhere the Orthodox Trotskyists fought chauvinism. When some got lost politically, as they sometimes did and do, it was usually because of a too blandly negative zeal for things that "in themselves" were good, such as anti-capitalism and anti-imperialism. We mobilised political and practical support for movements of colonial revolt. French Trotskyists, living in a world gone crazy with chauvinism of every kind, set out to win over and organise German soldiers occupying France. They produced a newspaper aimed at German worker-soldiers: some twenty French Trotskyists and German soldier sympathisers lost their lives when the Nazis suppressed it. The Orthodox Trotskyists even kept some elements of feminism alive in a world in which it was long eclipsed. Michel Pablo, in a French jail for helping the Algerians in their war of independence, applied himself to studying and writing about "the woman question". Large numbers of people shared the view of the Trotskyists on specific questions and worked with them or in parallel to them. The Trotskyists alone presented and argued for a whole world outlook that challenged the outlook of the capitalist and Stalinist ruling classes. We embodied the great truths of Marxism in a world where they had been bricked up alive by Stalinism. We kept fundamental texts of anti-Stalinist Marxism in circulation.

Read the accounts of the day to day mistreatment of black people in the USA in the mid 20th century — Jim Crow in the South, where blacks had been slaves, segregation in the North, all-pervasive humiliations, exclusions, beatings, mob lynchings, burnings, the systematic ill-treatment of children as of grown-up black people. Work through even a little of that terrible story and you run the risk of despairing of the human race. The Trotskyists, consistently and unswervingly challenging Jim Crow, championing and defending the victims of injustice, showed what they were. To have been less would have been despicable. That does not subtract from the merits of those who did what was right and necessary, when most people did not.

James P Cannon and Max Shachtman, the main representatives of the two currents of Trotskyism, were, in my judgement, heroes, both of them. Cannon, when almost all of his generation of Communist International leaders had gone down to Stalinism or over to the bourgeoisie, remained what he was in his youth, a fighter for working-class emancipation. I make no excuses for the traits and deeds of

Cannon which are shown in a bad light in this volume. It is necessary to make and keep an honest history of our own movement if we are to learn from it.

After Trotsky's death Cannon found himself, and fought to remain, the central leader of the Trotskyist movement, a job which, as the Heterodox said, he was badly equipped politically to do. Moving by instinct and the great tradition of which he was part, he steered a course between what he saw as the twin evils, Stalinophilia and Stalinophobia — as he might have said, between Deutscher and Shachtman. That was a long way from being politically or intellectually adequate. He did the best he could, in a world that had turned murderously hostile to the politics he worked for and the goals he fought to achieve. More than once he must have reminded himself of the old lines, "The times are out of joint. O cursed spite/ That ever I was born to set it right". James P Cannon remained faithful to the working class and to revolutionary socialism. Such a book as his *History of American Trotskyism* cannot be taken as full or authoritative history, but it has value as what Gramsci called a "living book": "not a systematic treatment, but a 'living' book, in which political ideology and political science are fused in the dramatic form of a 'myth'." Socialists today can learn much from both Shachtman and Cannon.

In his last decade (he died in 1972), Max Shachtman followed the US trade unions into conventional politics and dirty Democratic Party politicking. He took up a relationship to US capitalism paralleling that of the Cannonites to Stalinism of different sorts and at different times. Politically that was suicidal. But those who, again and again, took similar attitudes to one Stalinism or another forfeit the right to sneer and denounce. Shachtman got lost politically at the end of the 1950s; the Cannonites got lost politically, in relation to Stalinism, twenty years earlier!

When Trotsky in 1939-40, living under tremendous personal strain, reached a crossroads in his political life and fumbled and stumbled politically, Max Shachtman, who had tremendous and lasting regard for Trotsky and a strong loyalty to what he stood for, had the integrity and spirit to fight him and those who — Cannon and his comrades in the first place — were starting on a course that would warp and distort and in serious part destroy their politics in the decade ahead and long after. The Prometheus myth has been popular amongst socialists, supplying names for organisations and newspapers. As punishment for stealing fire from the gods and giving it to humankind, the Titan Prometheus is chained forever to a rock in the Caucasian mountains and vultures eternally rip at his liver. Shacht-

man picked up the proletarian fire Trotsky had for a moment fumbled with and carried it forward. Generations of mockery, obloquy, misrepresentation, and odium where it was not deserved, have been his punishment for having been right against Trotsky and Cannon. This book is intended as a contribution to the work of those who strive to refurbish and renew the movement that in their own way both James P Cannon and Max Shachtman tried to serve, and served.

**Historiography**

MOST HISTORIES of the Trotskyist movement are what might be called "apparatus historiography". They are tendentious, selective to the point of distortion or outright falsification. The histories are written for purposes other than providing accurate chronicles or analyses. It sometimes reaches the point that there is very little real history in the stories of themselves and their opponents that some Trotskyist organisations tell.

That was true of the Workers Revolutionary Party of Gerry Healy, now long defunct but once the biggest activist organisation of the revolutionary left in Britain. But not only extremely degenerated organisations fail to provide accurate history. Even honest academic-style efforts such as those of Robert Alexander fail miserably [19]. This volume tries to provide a broader political picture by presenting in their own words the different sides of every dispute it covers. Of course, even then selection can serve to distort. All I can offer the reader is assurance that I have not knowingly held back anything that would change the picture my selection paints.

The reclamation of a true picture of our own history is one of the most important tasks of revolutionary Marxists today – an essential element in reconstituting a viable revolutionary socialism. As with Lenin's work on State and Revolution, the reanimation of revolutionary Marxism requires that we dig down into our own roots.

The "Shachtmanites" have in my opinion suffered worst in the handed-down history of the revolutionary movement after the death of Trotsky. And yet in the 1940s and 50s they continued and elaborated an alternative strain of Trotskyism from that of the Cannon tendency, whose literature has for most people today and for more than three quarters of a century has defined "Trotskyism". The historical reputation of the Shachtmanites has largely been defined by the Cannonites' account of them. Peter Drucker's biography, *Max Shachtman and his Left* (1994), and the first volume of *The Fate of the Russian Revolution* (1998), have opened things up quite a bit in the last two decades, but for many people, still, the very tendentious selection of

polemical texts by Trotsky put together by Cannon and his comrades in 1942 under the title *In Defence of Marxism* has frozen the image of the Shachtmanites. Generations of Trotskyists have been cut off from the ideas of "the other Trotskyists" – and thereby from many ideas of Trotsky himself, major aspects of whose thinking were jettisoned by the Cannonite "Orthodox Trotskyists". The history of that time is told usually by supporters of the Orthodox. It is told, when it deals with the Shachtmanites, as if the Heterodox were aberrant and the Orthodox were balanced, properly pro-USSR but adequately anti-Stalinist. Pretty much the opposite is true. The Orthodox went prolifically haywire after June 1941. In important respects they ceased to be Trotskyists at all, as that term had been understood before June 1941.

A valuable and honest book like Peter Drucker's account of Max Shachtman is diminished by the author's apparent belief that there was, side by side with the WP/ISL, a balanced or more balanced Trotskyism. (He is a member of the Mandelite Fourth International). There surely was not. It is not possible to understand the WP-ISL without a properly filled-in background of the politics and activities of the Orthodox. One can't be understood without consideration of the other. For the Workers Party in the 1940s and well into the 50s, it is a case of: what can they know of Shachtman, who only Shachtman know? It not possible to clear space for the real history of the two Trotskyisms without demolishing the myths and self-serving misrepresentations of the Orthodox, which occupy the space now.

The story of the Orthodox Trotskyists told in this introduction and in the documents in this book is one of political confusion, bewilderment, inadequacy, and defeat. Of a small political tendency being overwhelmed by events and, despite its revolutionary, working-class, anti-Stalinist best intentions, magnetised by the Stalinist USSR as it conquered and consolidated a great European empire. Of a small political tribe that got lost trying, half-blind, to work its way through the murderous maze of mid 20th century history.

From the standpoint of broad, long-term, impartial history, there is no mystery here, and there should not be much surprise. The Fourth International was a very small political tendency. It was heavily dependent on one person, Trotsky, who was, you could say, a visitor from another world, the lost world of Russian and international Bolshevism. He was removed by the assassin at the decisive turning-point of mid-20th century history. So, soon, were many of his most experienced comrades, victims of Stalin and fascism.

The fate of the Polish Trotskyists in the war is only an extreme ex-

ample of the fate of the whole tendency. They were targeted by the German and Russian totalitarians who turned Poland into a battlefield and then a slaughterhouse. They were hunted by Nazis and Stalinists, as communists and Trotskyists, as Poles, and (a very large proportion of them) as Jews. Not a single member of the Trotskyist organisation in Poland survived the war. At the end of the war, the Stalinists in Greece slaughtered several hundred Trotskyists. The Nazis had already killed the Greek Trotskyists' outstanding leader, Pantelis Pouliopoulos. In Vietnam the members of the sizeable Trotskyist organisation were massacred in 1945-6 by the Vietnamese Stalinists, led by Ho Chi Minh. In China, the members of the Trotskyist organisations were killed by the Guomindang or the Stalinists, or put in Maoist jails for decades.

Even before that, the leaders of the Fourth International in Europe were killed as the International was being proclaimed in 1938. Rudolf Klement, a German émigré, was kidnapped and murdered on the eve of the Fourth International congress; his body, without its head, was found floating in the Seine. Leon Sedov, son of Natalia Sedova and Leon Trotsky, and an important leader of the Fourth International in his own right, was murdered in a French hospital in February 1938.

This slaughter was inflicted on a political tendency faced with the theoretical and political conundrums that exercised Trotsky at the end of his life. Many quit in despair, exhaustion, and disgust, or a combination of them. Like the First International, whose centre was moved from Europe to the USA after the Paris Commune, the Fourth had its centre relocated to New York early in World War 2. In Europe, underground Trotskyist organisations continued to exist and fight. All their expectations were proved false, their expectations of Stalinism too. Stalinism survived and prospered and kept its grip on the working-class movement. That shaped everything else.

In other words, this is the history of a movement which suffered a comprehensive defeat. One of the modes of its defeat was that it was, to a serious extent, conquered and politically overwhelmed by Stalinism. In the name of "defending the USSR", it turned itself into a group of auxiliary frontier guards, albeit highly critical ones. It went into a political and historical blind alley, a cul-de-sac.

That is the story of a historical tragedy. But it is not the whole story. That is what makes the "other Trotskyists", the Heterodox, so important for the future of revolutionary socialist politics. In parallel to and in polemic with the Orthodox, on issue after issue and in general, they elaborated a politics of consistent anti-Stalinism as well as consistent anti-capitalism. Where the Orthodox built on Trotsky's

mistakes at the end of his life, the Heterodox built on the whole record of Trotskyist anti-Stalinism and anti-capitalism.

The Heterodox too were organisationally scattered and dispersed, even more radically so than the Orthodox. The surprising thing is not their setbacks, but that they were able to do the work they did for two decades and more. Their political legacy, not that of the more numerous and seemingly more successful Orthodox, is the one on which a renewal of revolutionary Marxism is possible.

In history, revolutionary movements suffer defeat and again defeat. That is in the nature of things for movements confronting the entrenched might and power of ruling classes. There are no words of explanation and consolation that can make that historical reality less bitter. But the movement continues, because the bourgeois oppression to which revolutionary socialism is the opposite and the antidote continues. The defeated bear their defeat honourably, and work to prepare the future. Brave young people pick up the fallen banners. They try to learn from the past.

To learn from the past we must know the past. To renew and build on the history of the Trotskyist movement it is necessary to know that history. It is necessary to know the whole heritage; to know that, important as the Orthodox organisations are, theirs has not been the only strand of Trotskyism, or the best. The Heterodox are pivotal in the history of Trotskyism, and in its future. Don't mourn: study, think, and organise! Or, as James Connolly used to put it: hope, and fight!

**The Alliance For Workers' Liberty**

THE ALLIANCE FOR WORKERS' LIBERTY, which had distant origins as "1953", that is, sharply anti-Stalinist "Cannonites", made our way to the Third Camp politics of the Heterodox Trotskyist tradition by our responses to successive political events, rather than by way of a sudden conversion. Then we revised our ideas about the history of the Trotskyist movement: we "went back to 1940", to the parting of the ways of the two main Trotskyist currents. The AWL has for practical purposes, that is, in our political response to events, been in the Heterodox Trotskyist camp since the late 1970s, though some formal explanations and changes of "position" were made later. The Russian invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979, and our decision to argue for the withdrawal of USSR troops – alone of Orthodox Trotskyist organisations – is a convenient point from which to date our allegiance to the "Third Camp" tradition. Despite its vicissitudes, and despite the fact that it does not come down to us as a neatly-codified package transmitted by a continuous chain of organisational and in-

tellectual activity, that tradition, and the formulations of its politics form a rich heritage. As well as the political disputes, mistakes, and degenerations, there is also a magnificent record of indomitable devotion and courage in the fight for socialism against both capitalism and Stalinism.

**This Volume, Volume One, And Volume 3**

IN THE FATE OF THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION, volume 1, I assembled key texts of a strand of Trotskyist thinking which had been confined to the archives for many decades, the "Heterodox Trotskyism" of Max Shachtman, Hal Draper, C L R James, Al Glotzer, and others. This volume continues that work of rediscovery. It documents the fact that the characteristic ideas of later "Orthodox Trotskyism" – "objectively revolutionary" Stalinism; socialist revolution by "bureaucratic impulse" or by Stalinists being "compelled" by circumstances; the supposed self-sufficiency of a "party" apparatus with an allegedly "finished" program; the fetishisations of some formulas of Trotsky's, such as that the USSR was a "degenerated workers' state" – had developed within a year or so of Trotsky's death in 1940, though it took another decade for them to develop into a locked-down system. It makes the case that revolutionary socialists today who want to find clean political ground on which to rebuild, in labour movements where seepage from many decades of Stalinism still poisons the ground, must go back to re-examine the old debates and the flaws and lacunae in the political legacy which Trotsky left at his death – back to 1940.

My original plan was to cover all the important disputes and debates that helped form the two basic strands of the Trotskyist movement in one sizable volume. That proved impossible. There will be a third and final volume. Important issues are being held back for the third volume, most notably perhaps on the Trotskyists and the Jewish question in the period of the Holocaust.

In producing this volume I owe much to Martin Thomas for suggestions and insights, for much discussion and argument, for the index, and for pre-print technical work, and to Gemma Short for technical work.

Sean Matgamna, October 2015

**Notes**

This is an edited and expanded version of the introduction printed in the first edition of this volume.

1. Dual power would mean the working class maybe expressing itself through workers' councils (soviets) so strong that they vied directly with the government for political and social control – the disintegration, enfeeblement, and paralysis of the bourgeois state and the coming into being of a rising and strengthening working-class movement with authority comparable to that of the state, as in Russia before the October revolution.

2. In fact the policy adopted on Trotsky's initiative in mid 1939 of championing the independence of a "Soviet Ukraine" against Moscow rule implied that the USSR was an empire in the sense that pre-World-War-1 Austro-Hungary was, and in the 1930s the Trotskyists defined Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia as imperialist states – states with national minorities held against their will. Ukraine vanished from the SWP press during the war.

3. On the lines of Lenin's and Trotsky's arguments in World War 1, the strongest argument against "defending" or siding with Britain – the Britain of the labour movement and the trade unions – against the Nazis would be Britain's alliance with the USSR, the real Stalinist USSR, not the imaginary one that still for Cannon and his comrades shone with the glow of the October Revolution.

4. It is a strange fact of history that the serious and detailed critical accounts of Stalinist society available in the West in the 1930s were mostly limited to the works of Trotsky and his comrades, and those of disillusioned ex-sympathisers of the CP. In Britain, it was a "Right Book Club", run by the publisher Hutchinson's, a weak parallel to the very strong "Left Book Club" of Victor Gollancz and the Communist Party, that published Victor Serge's book on Russia, Eugene Lyons' *Assignment in Utopia*, and *I Was A Soviet Worker* by Andrew Smith (a sympathiser who went to the USSR). In the era of the great capitalist slump, there was eager sympathy for "the Russian experiment" among liberals and reform-socialists, and even some aristocratic Tories. There was a tremendous wide credulity for the Stalinist account of USSR society. The *New Statesman* and *Tribune*, like *The Nation* and *The New Republic* in the USA, were Stalinist propaganda sheets on everything connected with Russia.

5. The post-Hitler-Stalin-pact pro-German defeatism of the strong French Communist Party had, of course, been a factor in that.

6. The open letter, too – the appeal to Stalin as if to an errant comrade-in-arms – was a precedent. Similar appeals to Stalinists in power – in Yugoslavia, the USSR, China, etc. – would punctuate the later political history of the Orthodox like interjections from a victim of political Tourette syndrome.

7. Richard Overy, *Russia's War*, chapter 5; Antony Beevor, *Stalingrad*, pp.184-5, 385, 84-5; Antony Beevor, *Berlin*, p.113.

8. During World War Two the Communist Party USA would have over 100,000 members at its peak, and great strength in the trade unions.

9. And what of communists who want to overthrow the autocracy, but might not be willing to subordinate themselves meekly to Stalin in the war or join the Orthodox in their pledges of loyalty?" If the Cannonites ruled in Russia, the "petty-bourgeois renegades" of the Workers Party would be outlawed? They

wouldn't qualify for release from Stalin's jails?

10. *The Militant*'s proposal of the Socialist United States of Europe as an immediate alternative to the war seemed to take the existing German empire as a given starting point, ignoring the conquered European peoples and their national rights and possible inclinations. That may have been rooted in Trotsky's 1915 "Peace Program", in which he argued that if Germany united Europe, then socialists should fight within that Europe for its transformation into a democratic federation. It is plain in hindsight that Trotsky underestimated the upsurge of nationalism that conquest would trigger in the forcibly "united" nations of Europe. The caricature of Trotsky's 1915 idea in the press of the Orthodox in World War 2 was an aspect of their blindness towards the national liberation movements that would develop in some of the Nazi-occupied countries.

11. And so at the outbreak of war in 1939 did the Nazis. They issued an appeal to the working class of the world – in the form of a call from Robert Ley, gauleiter of Hitler's police-state "unions". In Britain that appeal was reprinted in the press of the anti-war but often confused Independent Labour Party.

12. This sort of mental operation would be a model for many other political rationalisations in the future, as for instance to explain how Mao Zedong's peasant army could make a working-class revolution in China, as they believed it had.

13. The lack of internal party critics with enough self-confidence to call the SWP leaders to order also contributed. It was sometimes said, approvingly, of Stalin's USSR in World War 2 that it had no disloyal "fifth column" because all the "fifth columnists" had been shot. James P Cannon, too, faced no revolt or "fifth column" in his ranks because, politically speaking, he had shot them.

14. These important critics from within Orthodox Trotskyism as it took shape themselves fell down before the contradictions and difficulties of the time. Goldman and some of his co-thinkers joined the Workers Party in June 1946. Goldman remained active until 1948, when he left the Workers Party, differing with them about the Marshall Plan of US aid to Europe (Goldman was for it). He then quit political activity. Morrow did not leave the SWP with Goldman. He was expelled in November 1946, and left politics at that point. Another significant critic, Louis Jacobs, distributed his document "We arrive at a line" in late 1944 and then dropped out of the SWP, writing occasionally for the WP press. Jean van Heijenoort, wartime secretary of the New York based Fourth International, dropped out too.

15. See Trotsky's *Letter to Borodai* of late 1928, in which he defined political reformability as the criterion of a workers' state, and Shachtman's discussion of Trotsky's later shift to nationalised property as the empirical criterion. *The Fate of the Russian Revolution* volume 1, pp.300-309.

16. At least one Trotskyist tendency, Lutte Ouvrière, argued right up until the end that Stalinist Russia had one class character, and the structurally identical satellite states another.

17. In Posadas, the patterns of 1940-5 and of the war-revolution perspective of

1950-4 were upfront. After all, if War-Revolution would be a stage forward towards socialism, as the Fourth International in 1951-3 had believed, then serious socialists should indeed advocate it. Some time in the 1970s the author listened to a British Posadist exulting in the "transformations" and "regeneration" that had taken place in the USSR. He cited tremendous working-class gatherings and marches in Moscow. Hadn't we heard? No. What had happened? What working-class demonstrations? It turned out that he was talking about the annual official Stalinist May Day march and military display.

18. In 1953 Cannon indicted Pablo, Mandel, etc. for thinking that the Russian state could project "a roughly revolutionary orientation" in the imminent Third World War, which would be a War-Revolution.

19. Alexander's accounts of Trotskyist movements in the two countries I know about in some detail because I have been active in them, the UK and Ireland, are not even a reliable chronology. Even such a "standard" work as Isaac Deutscher's biography of Trotsky fails, at least in its third volume, which tells the story of Trotsky's last exile, after 1929. Deutscher radically misrepresents Trotsky's views on Stalinism at the end of his life by "splitting" Trotsky into two, assigning views that were Trotsky's to other anti-Stalinists whom he fought with, and narrowing Trotsky down to something not too far from Deutscher's own critical pro-Stalinist politics.

Quotations from Trotsky, by page number • 5, "totalitarian": RB ch 5 • 5, "police measures", W33-4 p.8 • 6, "savagery", W38-9 p.325 • 6, stratum, RB ch 9 • 6, "lion's share", "same as US bourgeois", W39-40 p.144 • 6, "twelve to fifteen million", W39-40 p.115 • 6, "no class ever", W37-8 p.444 • 6-7, "all the vices" W38-9 p.325 • 7, "classic exploitation", RB ch 4 • 7, "behind a cultured capitalism", RB ch 5 • 7, "bureaucratic economy", W32-3 p.224 • 7, "state belongs", RB ch 9 • 7, "strangled", W39-40 p.197 • 8, "quartermaster", W39-40 p.76 • 8, "jackal", W39-40 p.92 • 8, "against seizures", UW • 8, "semi-slaves", AO • 8, "during war with Finland", W39-40 p.166 • 9, "in every case", AO • 9, "extension", UW • 10, Simone Weil, W37-8 p.331 • 11, "the first concentration", RB ch 9 • 11, "ludicrous", UW • 12, "sole master", *Stalin* vol.2 p.240 • 12, "both class states", W37-8 p.27 • 13, "only if", W39-40 p.166 • 16, "as absurd", W39-40 p.124 • 19, "history has known", AO • 19-20, "silent condemnation", "behind the Finnish question", W39-40 p.144 • 21, "not a question", W39-40 p.91 • 21, "shameful and criminal", W39-40 p.92 • 27, "fascism inevitable", W38-9 p.210 • 43, "to defend", W30-1 p.229 • 44, "state property", RB ch 9 • 72, "not any support", W39-40 p.201 • W signifies the volumes of Trotsky's writings, RB Revolution Betrayed, UW The USSR in War, AO Again and Once More.

Our thanks to Marty Goodman, the Riazanov Library Project, and the Marxist Internet Archive for their work in making many of the texts used here more accessible and available. Most of the non-Trotsky quotations are from texts in this volume: they may include cuts not indicated by ellipses which can be identified from the full texts. The texts have the old usage of "man" for "human being", "he" for "she or he", etc.: that reflects their times, rather than indifference by the speakers and writers to women's liberation.