

the United States or Britain arguing a case for a new way of rearranging the political structures in Europe. It's time that we started doing the same! The left has been silent.

Cross-European unity and taking on the City are two key issues for our new agenda. If you are going to have a radical transformation of the British economy — developing its productive base, reinvesting in manufacturing industry, redistributing wealth and income — you must control the activities of the City of London. I mean controlling the outflow of capital, directing investment, limiting the activities of the capital markets and share markets.

We need institutions which are capable of dealing with transnational capital. You can't deal with transnational capital on a single-country basis, through the Westminster Parliament.

Then, if you have a European parliament with significant power, what is the role of the Westminster parliament? If you want to devolve and decentralise power to people, both at work and in civil society, then you have to strengthen the role of local and regional government. That would imply a polarity of strength at local level and at the European level, not so much at Westminster level. That issue has got to be debated.

And we need to raise the issues of economic democracy. They really haven't been discussed at all in the labour movement since the early 1970s. We need to discuss how to integrate worker and community control into national planning.

The cornerstone of socialism in the 1990s must be the ability to divest the state of power, to pull it down to the individual and to smaller collectives, and to have a political arrangement which enables those people to aggregate their views together so that they can control the great institutions of state and the great financial and economic institutions.

On all these issues — and there are many more — the role of the Socialist Movement and Labour Party Socialists is to get the issues debated and discussed. If we try to enlighten through discussion, there will be a much greater level of agreement. That was the failure of the left in previous years.

The Socialist Movement was never intended to be a specific inner-Labour-Party caucus. It's because we thought the twin-track approach was necessary that Labour Party Socialists has been formed. I want to see it carrying forward a very broad programme in two basic areas, policy development — not just criticising the Labour Party's policy, but also developing a whole new policy for the left — and a new constitutional settlement for the Labour Party.

I think Labour Party Socialists will perform that role, and I think it has got off to an excellent start.

Reg Race was talking to Martin Thomas.

The poverty of anti-Stalinism

By Robert Fine

"I am not for setting up a dogmatic standard. On the contrary, we must attempt to help the dogmatists make their dogma clear to themselves. Especially *communism* is a dogmatic abstraction." (Marx¹)

That Left and Right should find common ground on the issue of Stalinism has been a source of discomfort for a 'negative' socialism which defines its politics in opposition to the Right rather than according to its own independent standards.

One of the driving forces behind the history of left apologetics for Stalinism has been a misplaced determination to avoid common ground with the anti-communism of the bourgeois establishment, whatever the justice of the case. This attitude of mind has been a cause of great weakness for the Left.

The Right has its own good reason for being opposed to Stalinism, since Stalinist states and parties have a long and sometimes successful history of attacking the traditional capitalist classes and expropriating their property. I am thinking of the destruction of the native bourgeoisie in the Soviet Union itself after 1929, in the Baltic republics and Finland in the early 1940s, in the Soviet-dominated east and central European states after the war and in a number of Third World countries in the 1960s and 1970s — in all of which cases some form of Stalinist model was adopted on the ashes of traditional bourgeois rule.

To this extent, the hostility of the Right to Stalinism, whatever its additional ideological justifications, has been entirely rational. Since Marxism and Stalinism have in common a seemingly 'anti-capitalist' project, that is, a record of decisive inroads against capitalist private property, from the standpoint of the bourgeoisie this identity is far more important than any distinctions between them. Marxism and Stalinism appear either as equivalent phenomena or at least as located on a continuum characterised by the 'authoritarian' appropriation of capitalist private property.

From the standpoint of the working class, however, hostility to Stalinism derives not from its anti-capitalism but from its suppression of independent working class life. If for the bourgeoisie the distinction between Stalinism and Marxism appears peripheral, for the working class it is everything. For Stalinism represents not only 'anti-capitalism' but also the disenfranchisement of the working class and the suppression of independent working class organisation; in short, the opposition of

Stalinist states and parties to private property is accompanied by the crushing of political democracy and the freedoms of civil society. Marxism aspires not merely to anti-capitalism but to a definite form of anti-capitalism which empowers the working class and democratises both the state and society to its roots.

The distinguishing feature of Stalinism lies in the reactionary form it gives to the 'anti-capitalist' struggle: it represents the abrogation both of the particularity of bourgeois society (individuality, free will, civil liberties) in the name of the battle against egoism, and of the universality of bourgeois society (equal right, political democracy, universal suffrage) in the name of the class struggle. Marxism by contrast represents the extension of bourgeois particularity and universality beyond the limits imposed by bourgeois society; to use Marx's own phrase, communism is the 'positive supersession' of bourgeois property, law and state and not their 'abstract negation'. In this regard, in spite of their common commitment to 'anti-capitalism', Marxism and Stalinism are mutually and inherently antagonistic.

When I write of what Marxism is, perhaps I should say what Marxism ought to be if, firstly, it followed the spirit of Marx's own critique and, second, it placed itself firmly in the camp of democracy. Unfortunately, this is not what 'actually-existing' Marxism — not just official communism but also many strands of independent Marxism — has often stood for. Its critical emphasis has typically been placed on the insufficiency of Stalinist 'anti-capitalism' rather than on the surfeit of Stalinist anti-Marxism.

This attitude has been most visible in the interpretation of Stalinism as an essentially 'rightist' political force, which is destined to compromise with capitalism and collaborate with the bourgeoisie, akin in most respects to the extreme right wing of the labour bureaucracy. This partial analysis finds its historical foundation in those periods in which Stalinist states and parties, inside and out of Russia, have been ready to co-operate with sections of the established bourgeoisie against the more militant sections of the working class: I am thinking especially of the classic 'popular front' periods of 1924-28, 1936-39, and 1941-47; we could then add the years of peaceful co-existence and market reforms after 1956, the advent of Euro-Communism and 'historic compromise' in western Communist Parties in the late 1960s and the present readiness of sections of the Stalinist bureaucracy to embrace the accumulation of private capital as a solution to their problems.



Karl Marx: communism is the positive supersession of bourgeois property, law and state, and not their 'abstract negation'

The existence of these 'rightist' periods of Stalinism has led many Marxists to misconstrue Stalinism as *essentially* a force for class collaboration with the bourgeoisie, so that Stalinism came to signify at best an irresolute anti-capitalism and at worst a positive opposition to anti-capitalist politics. The Stalinist doctrine of 'socialism in one country' was interpreted in this light as an abandonment of anti-capitalism outside of the Soviet Union itself. The same characterisation of Stalinism as a 'rightist' political force was shared by many Communists and Marxists who attached a positive meaning to

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popular frontism, idealising it as the 'golden period' of Communist Party history, when the demands of international Communism were married to those of indigenous national movements and when Communists escaped from sectarian isolation in order to lead the struggles of the people as a whole. Their rose-coloured retrospectives on the popular front have been amply criticised on the anti-Stalinist left², but the bitter fights between Stalinists and anti-Stalinists over the assessment of popular frontism obscure the common ground they share: namely that Stalinism is fundamentally designed for class collaboration.

The identity of argument between supporters and critics of popular frontism consists in their common appraisal of the popular front as the kernel of the Communist-Stalinist tradition. We should add that the fog is further thickened when supporters of popular frontism have reserved the name of 'Stalinism' for the left turns of the Communist Party and elevated popular fronts as the jewel of the 'authentic Communist tradition'.

The defect of this paradigm — I use the term to denote a mode of thought which contains different and opposing political judgements — is that it projects definite and limited periods of Communist politics, its so-called 'right turns', as the essence of Stalinism. Consequently the 'left turns' of Stalinism have either been ignored, repressed or assimilated in some other way to this model, for example, by interpreting them as the result of pressures from below on a reluctant Stalinist bureaucracy or seeing them as a temporary zig-zag soon to be rectified. It is not surprising that the Right has perceived the 'anti-capitalist' aspect of Stalinism with much greater clarity than the left, since the traditional national bourgeoisies have been its immediate victims. In seeking out the 'quintessence' of Stalinism, the left definition of its leaning on and towards capitalism is but the obverse of the traditional bourgeois definition of its unrelenting anti-capitalism. Neither addresses the phenomenon as a whole.

For socialists caught up in this way of seeing Stalinism, periodic disorientation has followed each Stalinist turn to the left. On each occasion that Stalinist states and parties have both spoken the language of anti-capitalism and translated their word into deed, these socialists have been trapped by their own imagery: they have either denied reality, asserting that the Stalinists

have not in fact moved against the bourgeoisie, or have treated the left turn as an inessential passing phase. When the reality of left Stalinism breaks through the constraints of this theoretical paradigm and forces itself on consciousness, socialists have been drawn to the entirely erroneous conclusion that the Stalinists have adopted the programme and policies of revolutionary socialism; interpreted on the left as a belated seeing of the revolutionary light and on the right as an ultra-left deviation.

Consequently, Marxists — the revolutionary wing of socialism — have turned themselves either into the extreme left wing of Stalinism, pushing for a quicker and yet more radical turn to the left, or into the democratic wing of Stalinism, pushing for a more humane, softer version of the same. The identification of Stalinism with class collaboration has led to both an inconsistent anti-Stalinism, over-critical of its right turns and under-critical of its left turns, and to an identification of 'true' socialism with left Stalinism. By defining Stalinism as insufficiently anti-capitalist, the left presents itself as really anti-capitalist, as what we might call anti-anti-capitalist.³

Such has been the source of the Stalinisation of Marxism far beyond the confines of Stalinism itself and is the central problem of defining a Marxist response to the contemporary crisis of Stalinism. Marxism cannot be defined negatively; it is neither simply the negation of bourgeois forms of social life nor is it simply the negation of Stalinism. The slogan of 'anti-capitalism, anti-Stalinism' may be a useful starting point for socialists, but is no substitute for the positive re-formulation of Marxism.

One of the stock Marxist answers to the identification of Stalinism and socialism is to say that whatever Stalinism is, it is not socialism. Stalinism is counterposed either to the *idea* of socialism, the definition of which is given prior to the critique of Stalinism, or to the *ideal realisation* of socialism, which is usually located in the Russian revolution. This line of argument inverts the procedure of investigation which is required: it sets socialism up as a dogmatic standard against which to measure Stalinism, whereas the proper method must be a criticism of Stalinism that is not afraid of its findings, even when these findings undermine our idea of socialism or our belief that we have beheld its ideal realisation. It is through the critique of Stalinism that we reconstruct the ideal of socialism; it is not by positing socialism as a dogmatic abstraction that we complete our critique of Stalinism.

1. Karl Marx: Letter to Arnold Ruge, September 1843.
2. See for example Leon Trotsky: 'Problems of the Chinese Revolution'; Theodor Draper: 'The History of the American Communist Party'; Felix Morrow: 'Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Spain'; George Orwell: 'Homage to Catalonia'; Dan Guerin: 'Front Populaire: Revolution Manquée'; Jacques Danos and Marcel Gibella: 'June '36 Class Struggle and the Popular Front in France'; and Robert Fine: 'Beyond Apartheid: Labour and Liberation in South Africa'.
3. To adapt a passage from Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verse*.