

CLASS + PARTY

IN

TROTSKYISM AND LENINISM

-PT.-LBF

(1) WHY THIS DOCUMENT

I was originally asked to write a document on Modern Trotskyism, first for the Journal then for the day-school on organisation. For the latter, given the time, a full document was out of the question. But anyway the focus of the day school, despite confusions, seems to be party & class. Therefore I decided to focus the critique of Trotskyism around this question. It is necessary to bring in Leninism for two reasons. First because the main determinant of the weaknesses of Trotskyism (T) in relation to party and class derive from a caricatured, administrative and non-historical understanding and application of the Leninist theory of Party and class. Secondly many comrades in the organisation fail to distinguish between the two theories and fuse them together in criticisms of such things as democratic centralism. It is vital that the terms of the debate be historical, putting the theory and practice in its contexts, trying to draw out the differences between previous and present periods. It is worrying that some people seem to want to resurrect old and abstract debates between Lenin and K Luxemburg, write papers on democratic centralism etc. This level of abstract debate about consciousness, leadership, struggle, organisation as if these categories remain fixed should be avoided, because it is precisely in this way that the T. organisations pose the relations between party and class mistakenly... to which we now turn.

(2) THE TROTSKYIST CONCEPTION OF PARTY AND CLASS

To say that the weaknesses of T. come from a mis-reading of Leninism on this question does not mean they are wrong because they are not pure Leninists (L). Rather, they have only a partial and abstract understanding of the Leninist theory. T. emerged as the defender of the revolutionary tradition against Stalinism and the degeneration of the Russian revolution. It is hardly surprising that one of its central points was a belief in the maintenance of the idea of the Leninist party as the Russian and smaller versions all over the world became bureaucratized and reformist. The L. conception provided the link to a democratic and revolutionary tradition of organisation. Now as ever the T. want to build Leninist parties as the essential pre-requisite to proletarian revolution. This desire is partially mistaken; not because there are no elements of the Leninist concept that are not relevant today - on the contrary there are plenty - but because the Leninist concept was partially based on the particular European and Russian context, which has now changed. This factor is not accepted by T. The same needs as Europe 1917 are said to exist - and this mistake creates the repetitive, unimaginative and unchanging line on organisation that is manifested today by the T. groups. An example:

"If only the workers in Paris in 1968 had remembered the experiences of Paris 1936, of the Italian workers in 1920, if only they had a revolutionary party, for such a party is also the memory of the class." (Cliff/IS)

In every situation, as each event in history unfolds... Chile... Portugal... if only there had been a party the cry goes up. Seldom is it questioned whether there is not a good reason for there not being a Party uniting the real vanguards of the working class. Need is not enough. A certain level of maturity of consciousness and experience, the struggle developing to the level where unification of the class and its vanguard is taking place, a certain general ripeness of conditions - without these the necessity for the party cannot be turned into reality in most situations. Without these conditions the formation of the party tends to be the imposition of an administrative machine at the head of struggles and a class that is not ready or prepared to recognise the legitimacy of the party - as its own. Yet this problem is largely unseen for the T. - because this is precisely their unwitting project. They believe it is necessary to build fully formed democratic centralist parties in any conditions, as the essential basis for further development. They may be small but an embryo is better than nothing, and it may grow.

"Even if we were still in the dark days of the late 1930's, 40's or 50's in which the strength of the Trotskyist movement was at its peak, this would not in the slightest alter the necessity of a democratic centralist International." (IMG)

The belief that a party is not appropriate to unripe conditions does not lead to passivity merely to a recognition that organisation will be of a different and more preliminary character, looser and more open - with different relationships to the working class and the struggles that emerge. The role of the organisation is to help develop the mass

parliament - combined with reformist trade unions that carried out defensive economic struggle. L theory had wider implications because Russia was not the ('backward' country that some maintained. It suffered from uneven development, rather than under-development. For combined with the large agricultural sector were some of the most advanced factories/industries in the world, with high concentrations of skilled workers. Like elsewhere in Europe it was these skilled workers that were at the centre of struggle and the revolutionary process - eg. the common cycle of struggle that swept Europe in the early 1900's... the 1905 Russian revolution, Italy's first general strike in 1904, mass strikes of German miners in the Ruhr etc.

So when Lenin proposed alternative strategies their impact was felt eventually in other European countries. The dominant Marxist theory was not only no use to the Bolsheviks because it condemned them to a passive and subordinate role to the bourgeoisie: it also condemned them to accepting the spontaneous struggle of the workers. Because we are concerned with the specific question of party and class, it is the latter which we ~~must examine~~ have to examine. Why do we say 'condemned' to accepting the spontaneous struggles? It is because they were in this period largely limited to economistic trade unionism. In European conditions (as well as in the specific Russian context, where it was constantly necessary to ensure proletarian rather than bourgeois control of the revolutionary process) only by separating and elevating the political struggle over the economic, could the question of state power and its seizure be consistently posed. This meant for Lenin a radical revision of relations between party and class. The form would be the tightly knit, highly centralised vanguard party. A cadre, combat organisation capable of intervening in and directing class struggle, not accepting its limitations as the mass bureaucratic parties in Europe did. The content was that this party of professional revolutionaries would be 'bringing political consciousness from outside' to the daily industrial struggle, which was usually only spontaneously economic.

The specific features of the L. relationship between party and class were dependant then on the level of development of the relations between working class, capital and state. To explain the historical necessity for the L. party-class relationship we have to examine in more detail these relationships. The class relations militated against the daily struggle of the class in production, being spontaneously 'political'. In the context of capitalism entering its imperialistic phase, allowing new expansionary outlets - the trend towards monopoly was present. But companies were still relatively small and methods of production were mostly structured around the individual machine. This generated a class composition in the workforce which was based on the skilled workers relation to those machines. The state's function was to provide a political-legal framework for bourgeois power, generally keeping out of production in any direct sense. This meant that the worker confronted capitalism immediately in a sectional sense: the individual capitalist rather than ~~the~~ collective capital and state power - and as a highly skilled producer divided on trade lines, with a tendency to see the problem of power more in terms of 'workers control' rather than smashing the bourgeois state and installing the dictatorship of the proletariat.

This does not mean that revolutionary challenges to the system could not arise from struggles connected to the factory. Crises were in particular provoked by attacks of capital on the skilled workers degree of control in work. The struggles over 'dilution of labour' on the Clyde being a good example. In various parts of ~~the~~ Europe Workers Councils, based on the power of skilled workers played an important part in class confrontations. But the potential for real revolutionary challenge was held back by the type of class struggle likely to arise. The potential was dependant on an outside political force to focus the struggle on the objective of state power. The organisation of the skilled workers as producers, even its radical workers' council form tended to obscure the relation to state power, 'politics' and party organisation, based as it was on the particular class composition of the workforce in this period. Nowhere is this clearer than in the Turin and Italian factory occupations organised by the workers' councils in 1920. Confident of their ability to run the factories without the capitalists - by staying inside the factories the movement failed to generalise its confrontation and prepare in a specific way ~~xxx~~ at a general-state level to take ~~xx~~ power, beyond the power to control production.

The L. separation between spheres of union and party action, between politics and economics flowed from this situation. The party had to politically re-compose the class and its vanguard outside the process of spontaneous daily struggle and politically re-direct that struggle against a consciously political object - the state.....

The roots of the Trotskyist misuse of the L. theory of party and class can be traced to the explanations that Lenin himself gave for the limits placed on the daily spontaneous struggle. This is because Lenin outlined two interwoven but contradictory elements. One stressed the limitations imposed by the conditions of struggle, the relations between class composition, capital and state we have briefly outlined. The other was a stress on a theory of the 'inevitable limitations' on working class consciousness. Compare two quotes from 'What is to be Done?':

"The economic struggle is the collective struggle of the workers for ~~the~~ ~~the~~ better terms in the sale of their labour power, for better living and ~~war~~ working conditions. This struggle is necessarily a trade union struggle because working conditions vary from trade to trade and the struggle to improve them can only be conducted on the basis of trade organisations."

and the more famous:

"The history of all countries shows that the working class, exclusively by its own efforts, is able to develop only a trade union consciousness.... The theory of socialism however grew out of theories...elaborated by intellectuals...the theoretical doctrine of social democracy arose altogether independently of the spontaneous growth of the working class movement."

To pose political consciousness as arising not out of, but side by side of class struggle as the product of a marxist science developed by party intellectuals is an idealist formulation. Consciousness cannot be deduced from consciousness, ~~it~~ the potentiality for political struggle depends on the particular conditions struggle arises in. While the dominant tendency was not towards this in Lenin's time it was wrong of him and to a greater extent later Marxists, in particular T. to universalise these theories and conditions. First because its rigidity was not even appropriate to that period. Important spontaneous political struggle did on occasions develop and had great significance as Lenin later acknowledged, as in the case of the mass strikes and soviets in Russia 1905. Secondly its universalisation has led to consciousness being elevated above conditions of struggle as the determinant of party-class relationships, hence is responsible for the extremely mechanical notions of the party-class relationship that characterises modern T (see later). This reverses the real processes at work in struggle. It was the totality of the conditions of struggle that produced trade unionism as the dominant trend in class conflict and the consequent working class consciousness. This is not to deny the influence, even hegemony of bourgeois ideology and its influence on trade unionism. Not is it to pose some notion of spontaneously developing revolutionary consciousness in the working class. ~~It is~~

In some senses a socialist consciousness always comes 'from without' - that is outside any one sphere of experience, whether the factory, the home or the university - and usually only develops in interaction with revolutionary ideas and organisation. But some conditions of struggle encourage the struggles to take on a political ie. anti-capitalist basis, which in turn has greater potentiality for the development of socialist consciousness. We would argue that these conditions are objectively present in modern relations between working class, capital and state - as experienced in peoples' daily lives in the factory or community or college, but more of this later. It is necessary to restore a materialist emphasis about the form and content of class struggle, in line with Marx's formulation that - 'social being determines social consciousness.' Putting consciousness and ideology at the centre of analysis, as the determining ~~factor~~ factor in the level of struggle, (which is what modern T do) fixes social being in a rigid way and produces those endless abstract debates about consciousness and spontaneity that have characterised the limits of understanding of party - class relationships.

The consequences of the L. position on party and consciousness were also dangerous, and remain largely unacknowledged by T. and other groups today, who have a naive faith in the ability of democratic centralism to cure anything.

"The Leninist Party does not suffer from the tendency to bureaucratic control because it restricts its membership to those serious and disciplined enough to take political and theoretical issues as their starting point and to subordinate their activities to these." (IS)

A little ironic given recent events in IS! But more seriously it sees bureaucratisation as insured through structures, whereas it is primarily the static and manipulative relationships with the working class which are the foundation for organisational de-generation, in modern L groups.

But in a wider context the conception of revolutionary consciousness as the product of party intellectuals, with the 'subjective factor' being located solely in the ~~xxxxx~~ party can lead to a serious underestimation of the creative self activity of the masses, with a permanent danger of an elitist and authoritarian relationship between L party and working class. It is important to stress that this is no automatic process, it depends on the precise relationship between party and masses in the struggles of the period. For the Bolsheviks, their ability to be inside the needs and struggles of the masses and translating that into revolutionary strategy and tactics - kept the relationship a living dialectic, at least until the post-revolutionary conditions of material and political decay. The same cannot be said for the hordes of T. sects mechanically modelled on the Bolshevik Party, cut off from the conditions which made the Bolsheviks the revolutionary party of the Russian working class.

Despite outlining the limits, context and contradictions of the L. model of party and class, there are universal lessons and truths contained in it, which are still applicable today. The first is the concept of the vanguard organisation, which (unlike ~~xxxx~~ either the 'mass' reformist parties, based on passive individual membership or the anarchist and libertarian 'organisations', which are generally restricted to propaganda because they see direction and leadership as contradictory to class autonomy) has the capacity to intervene collectively to develop class struggle. And which is based on grouping together conscious militants as cadres with the education and training to act as members of a combat organisation. As a Merseyside BF document stated:

"Lenin outlined the reasons that make an interventionist cadre organisation unnecessary. Essentially they are that the capitalist division of labour generates in any one section of the working class only a partial and fragmented experience of the system and the struggles against it. These differences are re-inforced by the varying ideological experiences and cultural backgrounds in the working class. Also the class struggle on a general and day to day basis lacks continuity, as the crisis expresses itself in an uneven and often isolated way. Therefore a political organisation operates to bring together militants from all sectors to totalise experience and generate overall revolutionary perspectives. It links the experience and practice of struggle by bringing militants together, overcoming lack of confidence and isolation and provides consistent political education. It should be rooted enough in the masses, to enable it to be in the forefront of struggle and provide the necessary leadership." (From "What is a BF Group" - Merseyside BF)

The second important application of L. is the role of the party in arming and leading the proletariat to seize power. Although the nature of seizing power has changed in the conditions of modern capitalism, where that state is a larger and more complex set of structures, with differing types of political forces operative, the tasks and role of the party have not changed - and the degree of difference can also be over-exaggerated. There is a current of opinion which sees in the changed nature of society and state and in the existence of soviets and workers' councils etc a declined role for the party. But this is a bad mistake. As Mandel points out, the crisis does not merely grow from periphery to centre. It is a discontinuous process that cannot be solved merely by the existence of autonomous working class organs of popular power. These do not homogenise and unify the class nor dissolve differences of ideology and interest overnight, solving all tactical and strategic problems. The centralisation of the revolutionary vanguard in the party to 'seize the time' is still crucial. Recent events in Portugal emphasise that the process of power does reach crucial moments, turning points in which decisive action is needed - the kind of action (conditioned as it is by their nature cannot initiate and direct. It is also necessary to say that this role structures the task of the organisation, even in its embryonic and loose stages.

TROTSKYIST THEORY AND PRACTICE RE-EXAMINED

In the light of this critical analysis of the L. theory of party and class, it is necessary to return to T. and examine how they have failed to re-situate the essential bases of the theory in the needs of the general class situation ~~xxxxx~~ in this epoch of capitalist development. Here we introduce certain key specific weaknesses of T. which condition their inability to re-define party-class relations.

(a) Analysis of the epoch

One of the most glaring errors of the T. position is its overemphasis of the problem of leadership. An exaggerated belief in lack of correct leadership as cause of lack of

development of the class struggle and failure to take power. The roots of this error lie in a wrong and static analysis of the nature of the current epoch and a consequent undialectical separation of objective and subjective factors. Take this quote from RCG;

"In the Imperialist epoch capitalism suffers from a deep and prolonged crisis, which can only be resolved if there exists a revolutionary party capable of winning the mass of the class to its programme. The maintenance of capitalism rests, not on its material foundations, for these are in decay - but on the immaturity and backwardness of ~~the~~ the working class ~~and~~ and its leadership. The various sharp political turns and alterations or periods of revolutionary advance with periods of reaction, spring not from changes in the economic base, but from impulses of a purely super-structural character. In this epoch the outcome of the crisis rests on the subjective factor: the understanding, organisation and determination of the revolutionary party." (RCG)

In this statement lies most of the weaknesses of modern T. First of all it is absurd to see an undifferentiated 'epoch' stretching from from the first quarter ~~of~~ of this century to today. While it is true that capitalism is in long term decay, the post-war changes in its material foundations, initially froze that process and now provide a very different problem as those changes collapse into a new crisis. To be more precise the changes in relations between working class, capital and state heralded by the ~~Keynesian~~ 'Keynesian' transformations altered drastically the terrain of struggle. By using wages as a motor of capitalist development, by involving the state directly in economic and social management, by attempting to institutionalise class struggle through further incorporation of the unions, by re-structuring capital through mergers, new financial and monetary relations between states, to mention just some of the changes - the system was given a new, if temporary lease of life. This is not to capitulate to revisionist theories that capitalism no longer has economic contradictions or similar absurdities. It is to state that those contradictions, the form and content of the crisis will arise in different form - through combinations of inflation and recession, involving the state directly in political conflict, with direct links to the working class struggle against the new organisation of work under capitalism - wages divorced from productivity etc.

In this light it is completely wrong to see the nature of class struggle as dependant on "impulses of a purely super-structural character." The form and content of modern class struggle is for the most part a direct product of changes in capitalisms' 'material foundation.' To take just a couple of examples. Firstly the immense changes in attitudes to work as a product of mechanisation (assembly lines etc) of manual and now white collar work, and the massification of the class itself in industries. With the de-skilling of work traditional leftist attitudes to work are becoming out of date and behind workers' attitudes: who are increasingly unresponsive to such concepts of workers' control and the 'right to work', when much of their daily struggle is against the capitalist organisation of work - the gradings, the line speed, the work discipline etc. What is more important to workers is guaranteed jobs and income, whether work is available or not. Like the miner who was asked why he only worked a four day week - replied: "because I can't live on 3 days money." Secondly the role of the state. The direct involvement of the state brings it home far more clearly the fact of political nature of struggles. The role of the state as 'collective capitalist' means that its ability to intervene and shape the direction of the crisis means that talk of unemployment as a 'natural disaster' of the system is inadequate. The role of the state in social management also means that it acts as a factor of cohesion between different sectors of struggle - the community, the health service, education etc. - thus totalising the impact of the crisis and objectively making links between struggles in consciousness and practice more possible.

The effect of this is to detach subjectivity from its objective basis. That is to abstract class consciousness from its determination by the changing structures and ~~relations~~ relations of capitalism. In practical terms it is the constant T. battle cry that the objective conditions were ripe, but the consciousness was lacking. This ~~separation~~ separation is completely undialectical. If working class consciousness was not mature enough (due to lack of experience or creation of autonomous organisation) then that is part of the objective situation! It is partially because the T. have not re-analysed the 'objective' basis of the system that they view it as static - the variable then becoming only consciousness and leadership. In specific terms, with the immense changes in capitalism, it has taken time for class consciousness itself to adapt and change.

What this separation leads to is the belief that leadership can be transplanted on top of the development of the class struggle - whether the struggle itself had undergone sufficient transformation and maturation, ^{or not} For the T. the existence of the party is the condition for development as the subjective factor, the supposedly only missing link; is located solely within the party. So we end up with the extremely vulgarised and over-estimated notion of leadership that characterises modern T. a concept of leadership that as we shall see in section B, is completely separate from whether it has the capacity to lead from inside the process of struggle itself.

The separation of objective and subjective factors is not new to T:

"The problem then (1920's) was and is still today - to develop working class consciousness to the level of maturity of the objective situation." (

(Document of the Trotskyist Opposition of IS)

This is not only determined by a static analysis of the epoch, but also by the historical experience of understanding the de-generation of the Russian Revolution. This is because the concepts used to understand that have heavily contributed to the static analysis of the epoch and the objective/subjective split. A typical view of the de-generation is:

"The question of the nature of Soviet Society is no longer of the material basis of that social formation - but its political super-structure." (

(IS Opposition)

In other words the material basis of Russia, its economy (nationalised property structure, etc) is healthy, a workers' state; but political structure is controlled by a bureaucracy not the working class. This is not the time for a lengthy analysis of Russia (for that see the previous longer document on the origins of T) - but the main point is that it is a similar undialectical separation which has its origin in the wrong split between forces and relations of production. To Marxism the main contradiction is off capitalism is between forces and relations of production. But a mistake has been made common to all revisionist parts of marxism that forces of production are neutral and contain only science technology, organisation of work, plant, machinery, the market etc. Whereas the relations of production were seen as solely property relations. In the Russian context that meant seeing nationalised property relations as the basis of socialism and the abolition of the major capitalist contradiction. But the forces of production is not only machinery etc but people, with their technical and social-experiences, their degree of organisation and consciousness. It is therefore wrong of the T. to see de-generation of the revolution solely at the 'superstructural level' - solved by a political ~~xxxxxxx~~ revolution. All the relations of production are 'de-generate' in Russia, including the organisation of work etc. Therefore a total revolution at ~~xxxxxxx~~ all levels is necessary. The contradiction is not between factory and society (as for the T) but within both factory and society.

It should also not be underestimated what effect the understanding of bureaucracy has had in vulgarising T. concepts of leadership. The T. movement emerged out of a genuine struggle ^{against} the Stalinist bureaucracy. They wrongly characterised this as a 'parasite' on the 'healthy body' of the workers state. This has meant an over-concentration on bureaucracy as the main problem of leadership. Great stress has been laid on replacing the bureaucratic leaderships (of countries, parties, unions etc) by revolutionary ones. The error lies in thinking that the existence of a bureaucracy is separate from the nature of the institution. So therefore the creation of a revolutionary leadership is abstracted from the transformation of the institutions themselves, as if replacement is purely a superstructural problem again. This is particularly the case in the unions where it is the nature of the role of unions in capitalism that is the key question. T. politics come over as negatively anti-bureaucratic, as if the limitations of struggle arise always from the existence of the bureaucracy.

"The multi-millioned masses arise again and again, entering the road of revolution. Each time they are held back by their own conservative machines." (

(Trotsky)

This has had the unfortunate effect of drastically simplifying the nature of the revolutionary process and underestimating the depth and breadth of changes in working class life and institutions that is necessary to challenge capitalism. It also feeds the naive view that "if only we had the right leaders" the problems of struggle would be solved. Having the right leadership is necessary, but with T. it tends to be at the expense of changing or providing alternatives to institutions of struggle and at the expense of encouraging the self-confidence and organisation of the mass of the working class.

(b) Consciousness, Struggles and programmes

The failure of T. to see that substantial parts of L. were specific to kits historical period and therefore the nature of the epoch is changing has also had negative effects on analyses of the nature of class struggle and the relationship of organisations to it. How the organisation/party formulates its relationship to the class is still seen in static forms. First of all it continues to be seen as determined by an analysis of consciousness.

"The Leninist concept of the Party cannot be separated from a specific analysis of proletarian class consciousness." (Mandel-ING)

To K. Mandel, Leninism is the 'Marxist science of the subjective factor.' "So the party becomes based on a view of class consciousness as inherently limited. As we said ~~xxx~~ earlier, the potentiality of consciousness, while not spontaneously developing: depends on the conditions of struggle. Modern T is notable for not attempting to re-analyse these changing conditions and therefore changing content of struggle. In fact they are pre-cluded from seriously doing so by their view of an unchanging epoch and inherently limited consciousness. Mandel's pamphlet- "The Leninist Theory of Organisation" is abstract from start to finish, it never situates relations between party and class in changing conditions of struggle, but only in absolutes of consciousness -spontaneity, party and the like. It remains incumbent on us of course to show that there have been changes and here and elsewhere we have tried to do so. But to briefly state some examples of changes brought about by different relations between working class, state and capital:

~~xxx~~With the interventionist role of the state (via. incomes policies for instance) and the linking of the wage to expansion of production (obviously under controlled conditions) - wage struggles, in particular fights to separate wages from productivity and availability of work (via. guaranteed lay off pay demands) are directly political, not only because they involve the state, but because they are more immediately anti-capitalist and less defensive.

~~xxx~~The de-skilled composition of the working class makes unification of the proletariat a greater possibility, particularly through struggles ~~xxx~~ against gradings, work hierarchy, for parity etc.

~~xxx~~The drawing in of community, education, health and welfare services into a more direct relationship with capitalist production, via. the state has vastly increased the anti-capitalist potential of struggles outside the factory and the strategical importance of organising with health workers, students, housewives etc.

To sum up; we think the spontaneous (ie. immediate/daily) struggles of the class have a greater political potential (ie. for being directly anti-capitalist) than in the period when E the L. theory of party and class was formulated. This is a ~~direct~~ product of the changing composition of the working class, the changed role of the state and the new structures of capital. They create a greater possibility of struggle confronting the state, of links between sectors (eg. factory-community) being made and unification of a more homogenous working class being created in struggle. 'Politics' now is less an 'outside' factor that organisations have to bring in to struggles. Rather they have to discover, direct, and generalise it from within, to overcome the continuing hold of sectionalism, reformism and bourgeois ideology.

These attempts to re-analyse class struggle determine for us the nature of party-class relations. But the form of these relationships remains static for T. as the basis of struggle has remained the same, it becomes a question of 'injection' of a political programme by the party.

"The building of the Revolutionary Party is the process whereby the programme of the socialist revolution is fused with the experience of the majority of advanced workers in struggle." (Mandel)

Unfortunately this political programme does not arise for T. from the changing experiences and needs of the struggle, it is worked out above that process - in a supposed scientific process of what Mandel calls 'theoretical production.'

"The gradual injection of these demands into mass struggles can only come about through the efforts of a broad layer of advanced workers who are closely linked to the masses who disseminate and publicise these demands, which do not normally ~~xxxx~~ grow out of the day to day experience of the class." (Mandel)

In other words, these advanced workers are the passive carriers of a 'politics from the outside'. Outside because the programmes are no longer appropriate to today's ~~xxxx~~ conditions. In this context we can understand why T. politics seems so often out of touch with the reality of struggle and why party leaderships (responsible for this 'theoretical production' of the programme) so often have bureaucratic and manipulative relationships with the rank and file members - the carriers of outworn politics.

The wrong belief that the experiences of the working class remain unchanged can be also shown by the way T. conceive of the application of such programmes. From their position that correct programmes can be worked out above struggle, the T groups believe that if they are big enough, in a crisis situation - the transplantation of such a set of demands can lead the working class to power.

"Events such as the French strike of May '68, to which the transitional programme provided a key set of programmatic demands, that had those who used them been strong enough, could have led the workers movement step by step to the conquest of power." (Workers Fight)

The slightly absurd thing about this, is that hordes of T. groups have had such programmes for years on end and they've seldom succeeded in leading anyone anywhere. They don't seem to question whether these 'politics from the outside' programmes are not making impact, not because of lack of size, but because of lack of relevancy - as some wit once said, they're attitude is - "If reality doesn't fit, send it back." Lotta Continua once said that the problem is not to put yourself at the head of the masses (The Trotskyists), but to be the head of the masses. To be a leadership from within the struggle an organisation must sink itself into the changing process not only to give direction, but to learn about the effects of changing conditions, so it can articulate and generalise working class needs in demands and programmes. It must form its organisation to be adequate to the actual level of struggle. At the moment Big Flame does not regard itself to be the party or even its embryo. As we said in "What is Big Flame?":-

"The creation of a ~~wxxx~~ revolutionary working class party can only be the summit of the growth of the autonomy of the mass working class movement. The party can only be created by revolutionaries out of a new, higher level of class struggle and the development of leadership form all the sections of the working class...." (Big Flame)

This view has particular relevance to Britain, where it is very clear that the class struggle has to experience many profound changes in breaking down sectionalism, chauvinism and other barriers before the party could be anything other than the ~~xxxxxx~~ imposition of an organisation from above, with the capacity to lead no-one. An example of this is the oft repeated refrain of T. groups that:-

"The revolutionary party must make all progressive demands and movements of oppressed social layers and classes its own."

Of course in the long term this is true. But the formal existence of a general party does not guarantee its capacity to be that factor of unity. It must in practice prove that it understands the particular dynamic of each sector of the class (women, immigrants etc) its own needs - before it attempts to find points of unification as the struggle develops. At the moment the tendency is to submerge particular needs in such 'general' organisations, subordinating them to the models of organisation and politics of the stronger and more traditional sectors.

In this section we have dealt with the inadequacies of the proposed form of the relations between party and class that derive from the T. notions of consciousness, struggles and programmes. We have not dealt in detail with some aspects of content in particular the concept of the 'transitional' programme. The notion that WE ARE IN a transitional era, where capitalism's material foundations are in complete decay, held together by defective leadership in the working class we talked of earlier. But the solution to this is not simply a programme but a transitional one. ie. for most T. groups the re-worked application of the Transitional Programme published by Trotsky in 1938. Given that this programme is based on the belief of an unchanging epoch, of imminent collapse of the system, a critique of its content is central to our disagreements with modern T. But unfortunately its going to have to wait, because its late and I'm tired.

CONCLUSION

For me the lessons of studying T & L concepts of party and class revolve mainly around a strong belief that discussions of organisation should not be dominated by questions of structure, nor should they be outside historical contexts in which particular theories arise. For me the reason for the de-generation of so many T & L parties is not primarily linked to their structures. When it comes to how structures should work I've got few quarrels with them. The de-generation of organisations is usually a product of an inadequate relationship with the masses, usually ~~xxxxx~~ because they have failed to adapt to changing conditions. In the case of T. their 3-decade-long isolation from mass struggle has left a permanent imprint of ossified and mechanical thinking, which has made them excessively vulnerable to splits and obsessions with leadership. (PP - MBF)