

THE REVOLUTION UNFINISHED ?

A CRITIQUE OF TROTSKYISM

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A BIG FLAME PAMPHLET

50p

PREFACE

The politics of this pamphlet have grown largely from the theory and practice of the organisation Big Flame. For instance, at our 1976 conference we adopted a political position on the nature of Russia and China for the first time. Yet it opens up new areas not collectively discussed inside the organisation. It is for this reason that the pamphlet is signed individually. If there are inaccuracies or errors they are our responsibility. We have tried to avoid misinterpretation or distortion of Trotskyism or Trotskyist organisations. This pamphlet is a spirit of debate that we hope can lead to a long term process of unity. We would welcome comments and replies that could be published by Big Flame. Thanks to comrades Nick Davidson, Richard Lapper and others for help and work on this pamphlet of various kinds.

Paul Thompson and Guy Lewis
April 1977

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Introduction

The most important tendency on the revolutionary left in Britain today is Trotskyism (IMG, WRP etc) or 'semi-Trotskyism' (IS). They are important not primarily because of size, but because Trotskyist politics has for a long time defined the terms of debate among revolutionary socialists. Anarchism is irrelevant, Maoists largely absent and an independent Marxist tradition weak. So for those of us outside of or critical of the Trotskyist tradition, there has been a great need of an all-round critique [1] which did not suffer from political sectarianism and slander (the 'Solidarity' pamphlets [2], Mavrakis [3]).

That is the aim of this pamphlet, though in many ways our analysis is still inadequate and under-developed. We hope it will stimulate the kind of debate that helps towards the long-term process of unification of the revolutionary left that in some ways shares the historical experience and tradition of Marxism and Leninism.

We have had little to draw on and have had to come to terms with the fact that for many years the revolutionary left in Britain has been synonymous with Trotskyism, unlike many other European countries, notably Italy. The pamphlet does not concentrate on detailed criticisms of the theory and practice of various groupings. Where this is made, it is attempted to be integrated into a general analysis of the development of Trotskyist politics. We know there are differences between the various groups, and we try to explain some of them: but we also believe it is necessary to understand the general characteristics of Trotskyism. After all, even the IMG stated recently that the differences between the various groups was less than existed inside the Bolshevik Party.

If the Trotskyist organisations have weaknesses today they exist because of two factors. First, because of a failure to radically up-date Trotsky's analyses and theories; to understand the specificity of the development of those ideas in the

process and de-generation of the Russian revolution and how they were consolidated in the peculiar conditions of the 1930s with the creation of the Fourth International. The fact that we refer to 'up-dating' indicates that we are not totally hostile to the Trotskyist tradition. Trotsky was one of the world's greatest revolutionaries and many of his ideas played an important part in the unfolding of the revolutionary process. More importantly, Trotskyism during three long and difficult decades kept alive almost single-handedly and against tremendous odds many of the essential elements of revolutionary Marxism — concepts of proletarian internationalism, workers democracy and a struggle against bureaucracy in party and state — even if much of the politics became ossified in the political wilderness not of their own making.

Despite the strength and historical importance of Trotskyism, the second factor of weakness is more general and is located in Trotsky's methodological errors of political analysis. In his recent book Mavrakis points to three inter-connected methodological errors:—

1. "Principled dogmatism", a level of abstract generality of politics which seldom develops correctly because the concept of practice and political programmes does not allow for new understandings to filter back to theory.
2. Therefore a failure to analyse a conjuncture in its specificity.
3. An inability to distinguish between various levels of the contradictions between classes and social forces (economic, legal-political, ideological etc).

Lenin once criticised Trotsky by saying:—

"In all his theses he looks at the question from the angle of general principles." (Collected Works Vol 32)

The idea of 'from principles to reality' has a bad effect on the development of an understanding of new strategies and tactics; different phases and stages of struggle. It badly reduces the effectiveness of Trotsky's theories. For instance, Gramsci referred to the theory of permanent revolution as:—
"Nothing but a generic forecast presented as a dogma and which demolishes itself by not coming true." (Prison Notebooks p. 241)

This static and unchanging concern to impose abstract principles on almost any situation has been both the strength and weakness of Trotskyism. Strength because it has meant consistency and continuity of analysis whose very certainty is attractive and which facilitates the kind of cadre-training that means that all over the world in innumerable meetings Trotskyist comrades will be getting up and giving the same line. Weakness because it has hampered the revolutionary left's ability to respond to new situations and because many arrogant 'interventions' in meetings have alienated thousands of people from the idea of revolutionary organisation of *any* type. It is this type of political method that generated one of the most bitter attacks on Trotskyism by Regis Debray. [4]

"One could say of Trotskyism, as of Abraham, that its separation from destiny is just what its highest destiny is. The worker-cum-peasant government and the proletariat are two abstract universals that can never change, which will inevitably dry up in the bitterness of accusation, because they can never link up with the actual fact of *this* socialist government, *this* proletariat, here and now.... Unfortunately a day will come when power is achieved, when the negative will come to mean something positive.... This content is a blot on the abstract and universal: it is a fact, a destiny, like the fact that a certain socialist state may not have enough natural resources of energy, may be thousands of miles away from its nearest friendly neighbour, may be involved by its past as a single-crop in foreign trade and so on..... By the fact that he (the Trotskyist) rejects every concrete embodiment of socialism from his theoretical circle of pure forms, he is actually expelling himself from the reality of history. The wheel always comes full circle: the Trotskyist is always right."

While there is a certain amount of exaggeration in the statement it is disturbing how little Trotskyism tends to learn, that actually changes the analysis. The International Marxist Group (IMG) in their pamphlet on 'Permanent Revolution' show the trap they are caught in:—

"We think that Trotskyism has much to learn from the Chinese, Cuban and Vietnamese revolutions just as it has from the unsuccessful revolutions of Spain 1936, France 1968, Bolivia 1971, etc. . . . The point, however, . . . is that it is the total theory that defines the parts. The contributions of Guevara and others are of great value *if re-defined in terms of Trotskyism.*" (Our emphasis)

But what if these "contributions" actually change long-standing assumptions? Under the Trotskyist method they can only be re-defined to ignore unacceptable content. The most notable example of failure to learn something new was the reaction to the Cultural Revolution in China. For all its weaknesses, it was the first indication that the degeneration of revolutionary processes was not inevitable. Internationally, Trotskyism tended to dismiss these events as a "struggle within the bureaucracy". The ability to learn is hampered by the search for a politically linear history. The same IMG pamphlet says that the aim of Trotskyism is to:—

" . . . give an analysis of the inner-mechanism of entire process — from the causes of the Cuban, Chinese and Bolivian revolutions to the internal crises of the workers states, to the revolutionary events of May '68". [p.48]

Unfortunately, no single analysis is possible, precisely because there is no "inner-mechanism" that motivates such widely differing processes. Attempts to have an International dictating universal formulas to organisations in different countries has proved disastrous to the Trotskyist movement, reducing its effectiveness and adaptability in places like Portugal, where it has been marginalised.

The attempt to maintain doctrinal purity, rather than flexibly adapting to new conditions (always condemned as 'centrism' or 'populism') is at least partially responsible for the incredible history of faction-fighting that has dogged the Trotskyist movement. In Britain alone the number of new groups in the past couple of years has almost reached double figures. Unfortunately, for the left as a whole, this is more a product of the crisis of Trotskyism than the crisis of the capitalist system itself.

We now turn to an examination of the context and development of Trotsky's theories.

NOTES

1. Independent critiques of Trotskyism are beginning to emerge. A recent example is Geoff Hodgson's "Trotsky and Fatalistic Marxism" (Spokesman pamphlet) but this concentrates on only a small, if important, area of Trotskyist politics.

2. There are numerous critiques of Trotskyism from the 'Libertarian' pens of the 'Solidarity' grouping. Aside from confusing Leninism with Trotskyism, the criticisms are too abstract and moralistic to be of any real use. They are also as sectarian as any 'Stalinist' hacks could produce.

3. The recent book "On Trotskyism" (RKP) by Kostas Mavrakis is a good example of an excellent, serious work marred by sectarianism and occasional slanders emanating at times from a semi-Stalinist position and tail-ending China.

4. From "Prison Writings" — Regis Debray (Penguin) — "An Ideological Digression on Trotskyism". . . pages 138-141.

5. IMG Pamphlet — "Imperialism, Stalinism and Permanent Revolution." — John Robens..

2. Trotsky and the Degeneration of the Revolution

We begin this section by giving a brief account of Trotsky's role and attitudes during the degeneration of the revolution in the 1920's. It is impossible to explain Trotsky's theories without putting them into a developing historical context.

THE BACKGROUND SITUATION

In 1921 the exhausting and destructive three year Civil War against the counter-revolution finally ended. But Bolshevik Russia was in a mess:—

"The material foundations of its existence were shattered. It will be enough to recall that by the end of the civil war Russia's national income amounted to only one third of her income in 1913, that industry produced one fifth of the goods produced before the war, that the coal mines turned out less than one tenth and the iron foundries one fourtieth of their normal output, that the railways were destroyed, that all stocks and reserves on which any economy depends for its work were utterly exhausted, that the exchange of goods between town and country had come to a standstill, that Russia's cities and towns had become so depopulated that in 1921 Moscow had only one half and Petrograd one third of its former inhabitants, and that the people of the two capitals had for many months lived on a food ration of two ounces of bread and a few frozen potatoes and had heated their dwellings with the wood of their furniture — and we shall obtain some idea of the condition in which the nation found itself in the fourth year of revolution". (Deutscher — "The Prophet Armed".)

Famine and civil war had decimated the industrial working class, the vanguard of the revolution. The working class, its unions, clubs, co-operatives, the soviets were an empty shell. Even worse, the expected European revolution had not happened. After the wave of revolutionary struggles that swept Europe in the first couple of years after the war, the old regimes had stabilised to some extent. The failure of a pathetic attempt at a communist uprising in Germany set the seal on the isolation of the revolution in Russia for the time being. It was in these conditions that dreams of a vital working class democracy, outlined in Lenin's masterpiece *'State and Revolution'* was supposed to take root. Of course, there was no chance, instead everywhere the revolution was in retreat. The Bolsheviks had partially been thrust, and partially had assumed a position of absolute power. Their organic link with the proletarian vanguard was fast disappearing. In its place only the aspirations to preserve the revolution and act in the interests of a newly constructed working class, who would one day be in a position to resume the brief responsibility they once had in 1917-18 to direct the country's affairs through the soviets. But in these adverse conditions they felt forced to embark on what was a dangerous and ultimately self-defeating course.

They set up the CHEKA (Extraordinary Commission for Repression against counter-revolution, speculation and desertion) which acted on its own, controlled by bureaucrats not only against counter-revolutionaries but against genuine critical communist and Party cadres. Most of the other political parties had been suppressed; for good reason. The Mensheviks and Right Social Revolutionaries were openly

against the revolution and for a return of bourgeois power; the left Social Revolutionaries and anarchists (many of whose best activists had joined the Bolsheviks) didn't worry about stooping to terror and other tactics of utopian disorder. But the *necessary* repression of political opinion soon became the repression of *all* criticism; even within the party. As Deutscher said:—

"They did not realise that they could not ban all controversies outside their ranks and keep it alive within their ranks: they could not abolish democratic rights for society at large and preserve those rights for themselves alone."

The left opposition in the party had been represented earlier by leading Bolsheviks from Leningrad such as Bukharin and Radek, the Democratic Centralists and other people who were protesting about the extent of the retreat from the ideals of the revolution. Concessions to the rich peasants (Kulaks) and foreign capitalism, the arbitrary rule of the Politbureau, the over-centralistic methods of government were all targets for attack. The most important was the *'Workers' Opposition'*, composed mostly of disillusioned veteran Bolshevik workers and cadres. Their criticisms are worth noting because they were the first systematic critique and can be compared with the criticisms later developed by Trotsky.

THE WORKERS' OPPOSITION

They acknowledged that the worsened material environment, the economic and political chaos was the main factor in forcing the retreat. But they said that the leadership had not learned where to stop. It was under pressure from the peasants, the petty-bourgeoisie, former capitalists, traders and petty officials. It had to contend with the growing influence of specialists, technicians and managers, who in their ideas and methods were tied to bourgeois ways of running the economy. Most importantly, the party was being subverted from within. It had to fill posts in government, industry and unions and wanted to control these people. But by admitting so many non-proletarian elements they were being swamped by people, many of whom were interested only in personal power and jumping on the bandwagon. Bolsheviks who had fought in the underground before the revolution formed only 2% of the membership in 1922 — during this time the membership had grown from 23,000 to 700,000.

Given this, the Workers' Opposition said the leadership had chosen the wrong road: relying on managers, cultivating a bureaucracy, over-centralising the political and economic apparatuses, stifling the soviets and factory committees and replacing collective with 'one-man' management. Even with a partially decimated working class it was necessary to involve it in economic management; to slowly develop its creative powers. The alternative was to alienate the workers, lose the impetus for productivity rises, risk increasing absenteeism and, most importantly, *slowly strangle the working class as a political force*. The debate came to a head around the role of the *trade unions*. The Workers' Opposition and others wanted to see the unions established as an independent force, enabling the workers to control the economy. On the other extreme, Trotsky saw no role

for the unions, they were to be an arm of the state, limited to 'education' of the workers, getting them to increase productivity and maintain labour discipline. Lenin took a middle position which eventually won out, that denied the unions a say in economic management, but maintained their semi-independence as a connecting link between the state and the needs and aspirations of the workers.

The Workers Opposition also called for the restoration of full democracy within the party, and the ending of appointments from above rather than elections from below, except in cases of unavoidable expediency. Unfortunately, some of their other suggestions were totally utopian in the circumstances, such as the expulsion from the party of all non-proletarian elements and their carefully vetted re-admission; every party worker to be required to live and work 3 months as a worker or peasant and the revision of wage policies to replace money wages gradually with rewards in kind.

THE NEP AND KRONSTADT

Despite this, the Workers' Oppositions questions — '*What type of economic development and who directs it?*' — were crucial ones. Even more so in the context of the economic retreat forced on the Bolsheviks, contained in the *New Economic Policy (NEP)*. This gave tax and other concessions to the peasants, freedom of trade, freedom of production by craftsmen, concessions on attractive terms to foreign capital and partial freedom for private enterprise. It amounted to, as Lenin admitted, a partial restoration of capitalism in an attempt to get the economy moving again and to appeal to the peasants in their backward and isolated stage of development. We will return to this question later.

All the accumulated problems reached their explosion point at *Kronstadt* (an old revolutionary stronghold) where there was a popular rebellion of sailors, workers and peasants against the Bolshevik regime. Many of its demands were correct, '*but it could not be allowed to succeed*'. As Serge explains:—

"Soviet democracy lacked leadership, institutions and inspiration; at its back there were only masses of starving and desperate men. The popular counter-revolution translated the demand for freely elected soviets into one for 'soviets without communists'. If the Bolshevik dictatorship fell, it was only a short step to chaos, and through chaos to a peasant rising, the massacre of the Communists and the return of the emigres, and in the end, through the sheer force of events, another dictatorship; this time anti-proletarian." p.128 op.cit.

In this context the oppositionists within the party, including Serge, decided to fight the rebels, who were eventually crushed, on the ice outside Kronstadt.

THE EARLY ROLE OF TROTSKY

During these early years Trotsky had built the Red Army from almost nothing to 500,000 men in two years and had brilliantly led them to victory against the White armies and their foreign allies. He had also shown brilliance as an organiser and administrator on the railways and other aspects of economic planning. His other great ability was as a political orator and mobiliser of the masses, an invaluable asset in this period. In foreign affairs he also played a major role in developing the *Communist International (CI)*.

But there was little hint of Trotsky's later role as an oppositionist. In fact he had been one of the most extreme disciplinarians. He indicted the Workers' Opposition on behalf of the Central Committee before the party and the CI. He was loud in his condemnation of criticism within the party and a major supporter of the suppression and banning of the Workers' Opposition at the 11th Congress (1921), which banned all factions. He was the most

extreme opponent of workers' control of the economy, advocating the fusion of unions and state: the biggest advocate of a layer of bureaucratic functionaries with material privileges. After the civil war he advocated the most authoritarian policies, continuing the unfortunate necessities of 'war communism'. The best known aspect of this was '*the militarisation of labour*', through which the labour force was to be treated like an army — to be moved around and disciplined from above. So rigid and authoritarian were his attitudes that he was distrusted by many of the old Bolsheviks. This was compounded by the fact that he had only joined the party in 1917. Straight away he 'parachuted' to the summit of the Bolshevik organisation as leader of the Red Army and major figure on the Central Committee. To the masses and to revolutionaries outside Russia he was seen with Lenin as the leader of the revolution. But to the old guard he was, as Mikoyan put it, '*a man of the state, not of the party*'.

TROTSKY IN DECLINE. 1922-3

This goes some way to explain Trotsky's rapid fall from power. He became increasingly isolated at the top of the party, distrusted by the oppositionists and the emergent bureaucracy in the old guard. The major determinant of his fall was Lenin's growing illness and paralysis. He was becoming increasingly unable to take part in the decision-making process and it was obvious that he would not last long. In that partial void the struggle for the political succession and therefore the direction of the revolution began. In this struggle Trotsky was a pre-determined loser, his inexperience of party life and practice and his lack of a firm power base (except perhaps in the army) were deciding factors. It is wrong to see Trotsky as a cynical fighter for political power, who having lost, then turned oppositionist. In fact he showed no real ability or willingness to indulge in political in-fighting at this stage.

Stalin, at the time supported by Lenin (who believed he was the best man to consolidate the party's hold on affairs and stifle criticism) became manager of the party machine as General Secretary. With Lenin out of the way the bureaucracy was consolidating its hold, led by the triumvirate of *Stalin, Zinoviev and Kamenev*. They accelerated previous tendencies towards authoritarianism, over-centralisation, and constructed an apparatus *above the party*; using this apparatus to stifle all criticism and to trample on the rights of the smaller nations in the republic, in particular the Georgian Bolsheviks. They knew that to consolidate their power they needed to eliminate Trotsky as a power in the party. Trotsky was the most obvious successor to Lenin as leader of the party in many people's eyes — he was certainly the figure of greatest stature, as theoretician, organiser and orator, able to dominate meetings for hours on end.

Trotsky for his part began to be alarmed at his isolation amid the growing power of the triumvirate. He began to protest at the abuse of bureaucratic power, *although not against its existence*. But it was not just on the question of inner party democracy that he began to split with the Politbureau. Over a period of time he had been advocating greater economic planning and a strengthening of the state sector as against the private sector, the towns as against the countryside. With great foresight he envisaged the role long-term planning and the state could play, while the rest of the Politbureau was concerned only with the day to day running of the NEP. The advocacy of such policies created opposition, it challenged the existing policies and the tendency towards more and more concessions to private commerce, business and the peasantry. This section of the party, led by Rykov, charged Trotsky with hostility towards the peasantry, a charge that was to be used frequently in future.

Meanwhile, Lenin was beginning to be alarmed at the tendencies developing and the power of Stalin and the triumvirate. He violently opposed Stalin's suppression of the Georgian Bolsheviks. He wrote a letter to Stalin threatening to break off all personal relations and confided (so Krupskaya told Kamenev) *to crush Stalin politically*. He told Trotsky to oppose Stalin at the Central Committee and to accept no compromise, but again underestimating their power. Trotsky thought that Lenin's opposition would ensure their decline. Unfortunately Lenin had another relapse and the triumvirate went about consolidating their power. By the time Lenin finally died they were strong enough to suppress Lenin's last testament which called for the removal of Stalin as General Secretary and described Trotsky as 'the most able man in the present Central Committee'. (But it should be borne in mind that this 'will' is open to debate and has been misused by both sides). During this key period Trotsky remained largely isolated, incurring the wrath of the managers and administrators for his attacks on their inefficiency, the pro-peasant wing of the party and failing to support the Workers' Opposition. He remained impassive at the 12th Congress when the Workers' Opposition demanded the disbandment of the triumvirate and attacked the General Secretariat. He was on the defensive, still claiming absolute solidarity with the Central Committee. However, he was building up some support quietly as others flocked to Trotsky as a new and leading oppositionist.

TROTSKY AS OPPOSITIONIST

The first signs of serious opposition came with the 'statement of the 46', a document using Trotsky's terms of analysis, directed against the official leadership. These included Trotsky's political friends and allies — Preobrazhensky, Pyatkov, Sosnovsky, Antonov-Ovseenko and Smirnov; but they also included leading members of the Workers' Opposition and the Decemists like Saprnov, Bubnov, plus Ossinsky. Although still a loose grouping and coming together for different reasons, a united left opposition was being built.

Everyone of the 46 held, or had held, important positions in government and party, so they could not easily be suppressed. The 46 statement and two of Trotsky's documents — 'The New Course' and 'Lessons of October' gained a large degree of support in party cells, especially in the large factories, the army and the youth and student organisations. The triumvirate had to retreat and join in the critique of 'officialdom', a critique that was superficial enough to be recuperated by the bureaucracy. The accusations and attacks on the 1923 opposition grew to an unprecedented height and the triumvirate strengthened its position (as it was to do many times in the future) by taking and distorting elements of the opposition's proposals and putting them into practice. This came with the 'Lenin Levy'. Trotsky had attacked the weakness of the proletarian cells as the chief cause of 'bureaucratic deformation'. This in itself was a shallow and faulty analysis, reducing a political problem simply to one of class composition. What was more it was open to distortion. The triumvirate, between Lenin's death and February 1924 recruited 240,000 workers to the party. Presented as a 'homage to Lenin', in fact it was a means of smashing opposition by swamping the party with a mass of raw and easily manipulated new recruits.

THE COMMUNIST INTERNATIONAL

The triumvirate had a tough job explaining the way Trotsky and the opposition were being treated to foreign communists. Trotsky was still seen outside Russia as the embodiment of the revolution.

So before the end of 1923 the Central Committees of the French and Polish Communist Parties protested about the treatment of Trotsky and the German CP had asked that

he lead the planned insurrection in Germany. But two factors destroyed the rumblings of discontent. Firstly, with a shallow and clumsy plan the German party failed in their insurrection, calling it off half-way through and leaving the Hamburg workers, who fought on hopelessly, isolated and then routed. Together with similar setbacks in Poland and Bulgaria the prospects for revolution in Europe receded for a number of years. This confirmed the opinions of the 'isolationists' in the Bolsheviks who thought that Russia, must stand alone, and weakened Trotsky's position as the advocate of *permanent revolution* and the necessity of European revolution to save the Russian revolution. The triumvirate also managed, amazingly, to pin some of the blame for the German setback on Trotsky and his associates. But the key factor in the case by which the Communist International was swung round behind the triumvirate had its roots in the past. Right from the start the Russians had acted as the unifying and dominating factor in the International — sometimes for good reasons. But they had a tendency to impose the *lessons of the Russian experience* on the diverse parties and conditions in other countries. With Trotsky often acting as chief agent they were used to browbeating and dictating to the rest, who dared not challenge the Russian formula. When the triumvirate asked for their approval for the action taken against Trotsky in 1924 the Communist International, used to unquestioning acceptance of the Bolshevik line, submitted, only Boris Souvaine, the French delegate, voting against.

A month later, at the Fifth Congress, the Russians, led by Zinoviev, 'Bolshevised' the submissive parties, suppressing all opposition before congress. Ignoring Lenin's last speech at the Fourth Congress, which warned against a mechanical and slavish imitation of Russian methods, they made sure that in future the Communist International would become a farce, a plaything for the needs of the Russian bureaucracy.

THE OPPOSITION IS JOINED BY ZINOVIEV

There followed a relative lull in the battle for 18 months into the summer of 1926, in which Trotsky's position was further weakened by debates on literature and the history of the revolution. But there soon followed an event of momentous importance — the triumvirate was splitting. This was lucky because the opposition was getting very weak. Trotsky had again showed a lack of political tactics, for example in his refusal to challenge the triumvirate on the suppression of Lenin's will and being drawn into a phoney conciliation. Asked merely to 'maintain contacts and cadres of the 1923 opposition' the Trotskyists had dwindled into small groups, except in Moscow.

Despite a facade of social peace, the nation was still riddled with poverty and social tension. It was the *major social antagonism — that between town and country — that was to split the Bolshevik leadership*. It split into a *left, a right and a centre*. Some of the divisions reflected changes in the hierarchy of power. Those pushed out began to be more critical, those in office for several years less tolerant of criticism. But it was the question of *economic development* that was at the centre of the controversy. A new right wing emerged, led by the ex-left Communist, Bukharin. Saying that Russia was and would continue to be isolated from any chance of European revolution, he urged further concessions to the peasants. This was a policy that had not borne much fruit in the past. The peasants did not own the land, the Kulaks did. Bukharin advocated a continuation of

the NEP — building at a snail's pace 'dragged along by the peasant's handcart': ignoring the fact that the Kulaks got rich by squeezing the labourers, poor farmers and workers and generally slowed down accumulation in the state sector by striving to accumulate themselves.

The strongest reaction against this tendency was from the party organisation in the big cities like Leningrad. They found their voice in Zinoviev, who became the leader of the 'left'. The Bolshevik cadres and workers in such places had had enough of the retreat at the expense of the working class. Significantly Zinoviev came out with a critique of 'socialism in one country'. The Soviet Union might remain isolated for a long time but any chance of achieving full socialism was unreal without revolution abroad.

Stalin and his followers defined their position as 'centre'. This was a key development. The growth of the Stalinist monolith received great impetus. *By remaining at the centre, Stalin set himself the strategy of capturing and totally dominating the now fused party/state apparatus.* With power as strategy, Stalin could use and distort the politics of left and right, playing them off one against the other, and finally destroying them. This is precisely what Stalin proceeded to do, using the left to politically defeat the right, he then systematically removed the left from positions of power inside the apparatus.

In isolation, both groups suffered and the Leningrad opposition dwindled to a few hundred. At the Fourth Congress, removed from power, they were reduced to calling for a return to proletarian democracy. A proletariat they themselves had partly been responsible for dispersing, disintegrating and destroying its political vigour. However, after considerable delay and heartsearching on both sides, there was a fusion of the opposition.

THE JOINT OPPOSITION ENTERS BATTLE

The joint opposition (JO) engaged with the Stalinists and with Bukharin for about 18 months. It was a *battle for the Bolshevik rank and file*, with the odds heavily stacked in Stalin's favour. As long as it was a battle between small groups he could win, backed by the party/state machine. The majority of people were unaware of the battle and any way would favour Stalin insofar as he represented the myth of peace, stability and Russian self-sufficiency. The JO attempted to address factory and community cells; everywhere they went thugs followed to heckle and abuse them. The hacks and careerists dominated the meetings, repressing support. They were increasingly forced to act clandestinely, holding their meetings in workers' houses, tramping the streets as in the old days, agitating amongst small groups of proletarians. Their membership stood at between 5 and 8,000 at maximum. The battle took place on three fronts: *economic and agricultural policy, party democracy and foreign affairs.*

ECONOMICS AND AGRICULTURE

A detailed counter policy in these areas was outlined in the *1926 Platform*, signed by 17 members of the Central Committee. Serge explains its basic outline:—

"The 100 pages of the platform attacked the anti-socialist forces that were growing under the NEP system, embodied in the Kulak, the trader and the bureaucrat. Increase in indirect taxation, bearing heavily on the masses, real wages held static at an excessively low level, barely that of 1913; 2 million unemployed, trade unions fast becoming organs of the employer state (we demanded the preservation of the right to strike); 30-40% of the peasantry poor and without horses or implements, and a rich 6% cornering 53% of the corn reserves; we advocated tax-exemption for poor peasants, the development of collective cultivation and a progressive tax system. We also advocated a powerful drive for technological renewal and the creation of new industries and mercilessly criticised what was the first, pitifully weak version of the five-year plan".

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

The policy of socialism in one country was having a predictably disastrous effect on foreign policy. Giving up hope of revolution abroad and subordinating everything to Russian stability they imposed a reformist line of development

on foreign CP's. Believing that capitalism had stabilised itself they encouraged an accommodation with social democratic parties and reformist trade unions. In no way did such pacts and reformist united fronts further the class struggle. Nowhere was this clearer than in Britain. The British Communist Party was encouraged to form an alliance with left trade union leaders like Purcell and Hicks. When the General Strike came about the CP had not prepared the working class for the necessary break and independence of action from the reformist left. Hence during the struggle the CP was confused and impotent, the unions retreated and the strike was lost. Precisely these developments were predicted by Trotsky in his 1925 book *'Where is Britain Going?'*

This is just one example. There were other notable setbacks involving the Comintern, notably the temporary defeat of the Chinese revolution.

PARTY DEMOCRACY AND THERMIDOR

The platform also called for a restored life for the soviets, revitalisation of the party and the trade unions and a restoration of inner party democracy and debate. In their position these proposals were doomed and it was precisely through the control of the party/state apparatus that the leadership was to humiliate and crush the JO. Their attempt to win over the party cells having predictably failed the JO were demoralised and on the retreat, still clinging to the idea that Russia was a 'workers' state', and that the Bolshevik monopoly power, now the Stalinist bureaucracy, must be defended. They yielded ground and accepted 'truce' terms little short of surrender. Stalin soon cynically broke the 'truce' by kicking Trotsky off the Central Committee and Zinoviev off the Executive Committee of the Comintern.

Trotsky began to accept that they were in for a period of isolation, bowing to 'the reactionary mood of the masses'. The question which now dominated the opposition in the relative calm of winter 1926-7 was the *'Soviet Thermidor'*, (ie. counter-revolution generated by forces inside the party). The left of the JO, including some Trotskyists, believed that the Thermidor had long passed and that the party was ossified monolith speaking for the Kulaks, the 'NEP bourgeoisie' and the bureaucracy against the working class. But Trotsky maintained that the Thermidor had not yet happened. The forces interested in a Thermidorian counter-revolution he defined as the Kulaks, the NEP men and sections of the bureaucracy. He said the party would divide on these cleavages, the chief instigator or ally of a Thermidor being the Bukharinist right. The Stalinist centre had no programme and no social backing, it would lose in a counter-revolution, therefore it must be supported against the right. But as we said before, the fact that the Stalinist centre had no programme and no social backing was *precisely its strength*. To identify the counter-revolution with the increasingly ineffective Bukharinist right was a grave error which conditioned many of the future mistakes Trotsky made.

On the tenth anniversary of the revolution, the opposition made a belated 'appeal to the masses'. In the parades they shouted the slogans 'strike against the Kulak, the NEP man and the bureaucrat'. "Carry out Lenin's testament". 'Down with opportunism' and, paradoxically, 'Preserve Bolshevik unity'. Stalin's agents and the police smashed them on the streets before the largely uncomprehending masses. Not long after Trotsky and Zinoviev were expelled from the party for 'inciting counter-revolutionary demonstration and insurrection'. They appealed to the next congress but with not one opposition delegate it went unheeded. The JO disintegrated. Many of the Zinoviev wing capitulated as expulsions multiplied. Their leaders announced that they accepted all the decisions of the congress. Some remained true to their beliefs and along with the majority of the Trotskyists they were



Trotsky takes the salute of the Red Army just before his downfall.

TROTSKY IN EXILE

The leaders of the vanquished opposition attempted to set up a clandestine organisation in the vain hope that events would prove them right and they would be strong enough to achieve rehabilitation, freedom of speech and propaganda. Trotsky worked hard to maintain contacts and act as link man for the scattered opposition.

Hopes were actually raised by the major event that characterised the brief period in exile. A new social crisis shook the country in the winter of that year. There was a grain shortage and widespread hunger. In this context the Stalinists and Bukharinists engaged battle. The latter wanted to give the peasants further concessions and were against forced collectivisation and 'premature' industrialisation, and as is usual for the defeated in a power battle, against the growing totalitarianism. To get out of the crisis Stalin adopted a supposedly 'left' course, borrowing from the opposition.

'From 1928-9 onwards the Politbureau turned to its own use the fundamental ideas of the newly expelled opposition (excepting of course that of working class democracy) and implemented them with ruthless violence. We had proposed a tax on the rich peasants — they were actually liquidated! We had proposed limitations and reforms of NEP — it was actually abolished! We had proposed industrialisation — it was done on a colossal scale which we 'super-industrialisers' as we were dubbed, had never dreamed of, which moreover inflicted immense suffering on the country. At the height of the world economic crisis food stuffs were exported at the lowest possible price to build up gold reserves, and the whole of Russia starved.' (Serge p.252 op.cit.)

Stalin's left course threw the fragmented opposition into disarray. After recovering from the shock, Trotsky said that they should critically support the left course. Following the wrong logic of previous analysis he still saw the Stalinist apparatus as a bulwark against the Kulak and the NEP man. He believed that this struggle would bring the party closer to the working class, rehabilitating them in the process as 'the party still needs us.' Indeed in some senses Stalin still did need some of the oppositionists — talented theorists, planners and experts to supplement his largely faceless men of the party machine.

But he needed them on his terms. So he encouraged those within the opposition who urged a conciliation with Stalin on the grounds that he was carrying out, albeit imperfectly, their policies. Trotsky was against a pact on the existing terms, but a substantial number eventually went over, led by Preobrazhensky, who claimed that they were merely carrying Trotsky's policies to their logical conclusion.

Most oppositionists, however, remained irreconciled to the regime. Younger ones, less attached to the party and more concerned with proletarian democracy than economic policy, were sympathetic to the extreme left of the opposition — the old Workers Opposition and Decemists, who judged correctly that the revolution and the Bolsheviks were unfortunately dead — even if their analysis of the nature of the Stalinist regime was way off course, (they denounced it as a 'bourgeois' or 'peasants' democracy, and accused Stalin of restoring capitalism when he was about to destroy the private farmer.)

The final tragedy was Trotsky's attempts in late 1928-9 at a *pact with Bukharin and the right!* Stalin had restarted his 'left' course with a vengeance and was preparing for the final crushing of Bukharin. In fear and desperation the Bukharinists decided to appeal to the left opposition before Stalin did. At first Trotsky kept to his original analysis, while becoming more critical of the left course. Then, to the amazement and indignation of the opposition, he said he was prepared to work with the right purely on the issue of *restoring inner party democracy*. Believing their only hope of salvation lay in a temporary alliance of all 'anti-Stalinist' Bolsheviks. However, the brief flirtation had no sequel, both sets of followers resisted it.

Despite these farces and the isolation of the opposition, it was gaining more adherents in the political and economic chaos. The GPU (political police) had to imprison or deport thousands more new oppositionists and there were plenty more where they came from if things got worse. The mystique and power of Trotsky was the magnetic force behind this revival, so Stalin prepared to bring him down with another blow against the opposition. Unable to physically eliminate him, Stalin, in January 1929 finally had Trotsky exiled to Constantinople. He spent the next five years on the island of Prinkipo, interpreting the events in Europe from a distance.

Conclusion

This involves examining Trotsky's early ideas in the Russian and general historical context. A wider and more general examination of Trotsky's theories comes in the later section — 'The Political Basis of Modern Trotskyism'

STALINISM, BUREAUCRACY AND THE NATURE OF THE REGIME

The struggle of the Left Opposition (LO) is primarily remembered for its assertion of proletarian democracy against the bureaucracy. Yet Trotsky, in particular, always had a remarkably shallow and blinkered analysis of bureaucracy and the question of democracy and its suppression. Right up to the end Trotsky always maintained that early restrictions of democracy, whether political (the other parties; within the Bolsheviks), or 'economic' (the factory committees; the soviets; the unions) — were the product of the backward and chaotic material environment, only becoming unnecessary with the growth of Stalinism.

We have already stated that the conditions *did* impose heavy limitations on the Bolsheviks: when every democratic debate threatened to exacerbate the tensions in society and threaten the collapse of the revolutionary process. Yet it is impossible to maintain that what was necessary before 1922, was unnecessary afterwards. As we have explained, this contradictory position was precisely used by Stalin against the Trotskyist opposition, when time and again their own words were used against them. It was one of the greatest defects of Trotsky and the Trotskyist tradition to have failed to face up to the contradictions within Leninism and the Bolsheviks; the tensions between proletarian democracy and authoritarianism. These tensions were not *just* a product of the material conditions, they were partially linked to certain aspects of Leninist theory and its context (which we examine later in Section 5b — 'Party, Class and Epoch').

While the revolution was going forward and the masses had independent organs of power themselves in the form of factory committees and soviets: the gap between party and class remained small, the living dialectic remained. And we must remember that the Bolsheviks were the only weapon the working class could possibly use to capture and maintain state power. But when the situation deteriorated, the gap widened, the elitist strand became stronger, precisely because *the material situation dictated the terms*. There was, however room for manoeuvre to close the gap. It was a small space, but it would determine the future of the revolution. Unfortunately, the Bolsheviks felt impelled to take the pessimistic road, limiting the powers of soviets and factory committees (as early as 1918), appointing functionaries from above, setting up the CHEKA, suppressing internal debate in the party. In general, taking an all-powerful role — political, administrative, social and economic, in the process swelling its ranks with administrators, managers and functionaries inherited from the bourgeois ranks of Czarist Russia.

All this happened with Trotsky's approval or acquiescence, whilst he was still holding the reigns of power. Yet he maintained that the de-generation was not a danger before 1922! It is little wonder that Trotsky consistently underestimated the degree to which the pre-1922 measures destroyed the working class as a political force, sealing it inside an apathetic and cynical passivity. Having aided the conditions for passivity and suppression of democracy inside and outside the party, it was futile to expect, as Trotsky did, that the proletariat would re-emerge as a social force in the struggle against the bureaucracy — or that inner-party democracy could be restored once the freedom of debate had been stifled and the banning of factions imposed during Lenin's lifetime. This merely gave the go-ahead for a powerful party apparatus to emerge and consolidate its power.

Trotsky's inability to see the links between pre- and post-1922 extends to the question of the Communist International. The way that Stalin 'Bolshevised' and used the Comintern to crush revolution and manipulate foreign Communist Parties in the interests of 'socialism in one country', could only have taken place in the context of the degree of control and 'Bolshevisation' carried out by Trotsky and Zinoviev. In the early years they imposed the Russian pattern of political strategy and structure on the humble and diverse foreign Communist Parties. But again the links go largely unacknowledged by Trotsky and modern Trotskyists.

What we have said does *not* mean that we share the reactionary belief common to ultra-left and bourgeois commentators alike that Stalinism was a direct product of Leninism. Let Victor Serge comment on this:—

"It is often said that the germ of all Stalinism was in Bolshevism at its beginning. Well I have no objection. Only, Bolshevism contained a mass of other germs — and those who lived through the first years of the first revolution ought not to forget it. To judge the living man by the death germs, which the autopsy reveals in a corpse — is this very sensible?" (From *Memoirs of a Revolutionary*)

THE BUREAUCRACY

Trotsky's shallow analysis of relationships between party and class would not be so serious if they were not accompanied by an equally superficial understanding of the bureaucracy and the nature of the regime. Despite the ferocity of his struggle against it, Trotsky always *underestimated* and misrepresented the bureaucracy. He regarded it as a *parasitical layer on a healthy body*, a 'morbid outgrowth on the working class', as he once put it. That 'healthy body' was the 'workers' state' based on:—

"The nationalisation of the land, the means of industrial production, transport and exchange, together with the monopoly of foreign trade constitutes the basis of the Soviet social structure. Through these relations, established by the proletarian revolution, the nature of the Soviet Union as a proletarian state is for us basically defined." (Trotsky: 'The Revolution Betrayed'.)

Leaving aside for a moment the characterisation of the regime as a 'workers' state' — the error was that by viewing the bureaucracy as an unstable parasite, *the analysis separated it from its real role and functions*. As we indicated previously, Trotsky consistently underestimated the power and independence of the bureaucracy, claiming it had no programme or social backing. But its 'programme' was unmediated power and its social backing were the very forces it was creating itself. That is, the uncontrolled party/state apparatus, directing the organs of economic control and the means of terror and repression. The bureaucracy became an independent power in itself, it did not need direct social backing in other class forces, because its strength lay in the ability to keep those forces fragmented, powerless and terrorised.

The inability of Trotsky to recognise this, in fact was partially derived from a tradition of Marxism, which linked classes and class struggle to the existence of private property relations. Instead we have to examine how bureaucratic control over new economic forces and property relations creates the conditions for new class forces with their own interests and privileges to arise. While the bureaucracy had to (and still has to) balance the aspirations of other class forces, this was a strength, not a weakness as Trotsky saw it. This was because they had sufficient distance and control, through hierarchy and terror, to maintain that balancing process.

Trotsky preferred to see the inner-party and bureaucratic battles as solely ideological clashes, reflecting wider social trends; once saying:—

"Even episodic differences in views and nuances of opinion may express the remote presence of distinct social interests". ('The New Course' p.27)

His underestimation of the importance of the power battle between Zinoviev and Stalin and his characterisation of the Bukharinites as agents of the Thermidor (reaction) are only two examples of this mistaken political position in action. While it is true that such clashes do often represent underlying social trends — they have their own *specific political level*. Here is one of the most important roots of Trotsky's defective theories of bureaucracy, his failure to recognise the *autonomy of the political sphere*. He relapses into what Krasso calls 'sociologism', that is the reduction of political processes to the movements of social forces/classes. [1] Trotsky was always a genius for grasping the fluidity and movement of social classes and trends, as will be shown in other sections, but he tended to abstract and idealise them, making them the determinant of everything. Thus he failed to acknowledge that a political apparatus, through its control of the state and the economy, could have its own interests and logic of development, partially above other forces. It ceased to be a temporary and artificial creation "simply using the old label of Bolshevism, the better to fool the masses", as Trotsky said in one of his less enlightened moments. Trotsky's view that at one stage the bureaucratic deformations in the Party could be overcome by the re-proletarianisation of Party cells is another instance of 'sociologism'.

For us, in this period, the bureaucracy was a distinct and autonomous social layer, characterised by its total control of the political-economic apparatus, impossible to separate from the so-called 'healthy body' of the basic infrastructures of Russian society. In this sense, it meant that the new mode of production and all social relations had a 'bureaucratic' character. The control and nature of work, cultural life, the position of women in the family and political structures are only examples of spheres where either little was changed, progressive measures gradually eliminated or new hierarchical form and content emerged. For instance, industry did not simply lack workers' control or independent trade unions, it was dominated by capitalist work methods and management techniques, including Taylorism and 'one-man management'. Trotsky, while admitting that the working class did not in any way control the state, kept the myth of a workers state because of the existence of an economy he wrongly defined as 'healthy'. As long as the bureaucracy defended it against 'capitalist encroachment' it would remain a workers' state — again he made the mistake of seeing the forces of degeneration solely as external to the dynamic of the bureaucracy. To maintain that nationalised property etc. equals a workers' state is to *abstract property relations from the mode of production as a whole*, and to ignore the total social and political relationships involved in the whole of economy and society. It is responsible for the reduction by the Trotskyist tradition of the problem to "good base — bad super-structure".

DEFEATING THE REGIME

This determines the weakness of the Trotskyist solution to the problem of bureaucracy in transitional societies — i.e. the need for a *political revolution*. A revolution that initially seeks to change the state personnel, but does not transform the supposedly 'healthy body' of the 'workers' state'. The degeneration of the state is seen at the political level only; when in fact any revolution must be social and material, as the bureaucratic character of production and society in general is in the traditional Marxist sense a 'fetter on the development of productive forces'. It suppresses working class creativity and involvement in all spheres of life. The character of the state machine is such that it cannot be reformed or restored. There is nothing to restore — the working class has no power, there are no soviets, the trade unions are paper institutions. The state is run by a class hostile to working class power, using 'Marxism-Leninism' as an ideology to hide the real situation.

We must be clear that while new class forces and hierarchical social relations were emerging, the bureaucracy was not yet a class. Classes are formed in an historical relationship with

other classes and social forces. The bureaucracy was a '*class-in-formation*' throughout the 1920s and 30s because certain conditions had not been fulfilled, so that it could come to have a vital class characteristic — a consciousness of its own interests and unity. This required firstly, that all remains of opposition be suppressed, whether Trotskyist revolutionaries on the left, or old-guard bureaucrats on the right. It is remarkable and tragic that of the 24 people on the Bolshevik Central Committee of 1917, only Stalin remained in 1938. The rest had either died, been murdered by Stalin or had conveniently 'disappeared'. The second paradoxical condition was the death of Stalin. His personal dictatorship and terror apparatus had distorted the functioning of a new class system.

PERMANENT REVOLUTION

One of the strongest points of Trotsky's theories was his critique of 'socialism in one country', and its effects on Russia's political and economic development and the progress of revolution abroad. Yet even here there are decisive weaknesses which add to his failure to grasp the dialectic of transition from capitalism to socialism.

Both Trotsky and Lenin provided the theoretical basis for the Bolsheviks to understand that the revolutionary process did not and could not go through separate stages. The bourgeoisie was too weak and subordinate to the old Czarist regime to carry through a 'democratic' revolution. The peasantry, while large sections were potential allies of the working class, was in Russia too distant from the unfolding process of struggle and in some aspects too fragmented to play a leading role. This meant that the urban working class was the central revolutionary force and the means of providing continuity between the democratic and socialist tasks of the revolutionary process. Trotsky understood this and stated it in his theory of 'permanent revolution'. It played an important role in successfully developing Bolshevik strategy. Yet it had weaknesses. In section 5d we will show how firstly it underestimated the necessity for distinct phases and tasks, despite the continuity, and secondly how it failed to understand how the working class built an alliance with the peasantry, instead regarding the relationship as one of subordination. This has passed on a legacy to Trotskyism which consistently underestimates the revolutionary potential of the peasantry and their achievements, in China and throughout the 'Third World'. Lenin's concept of the 'democratic dictatorship of workers and peasants' provided a better basis for understanding both these problems. (see Mavrakakis, Chapter 2).

In this section we want to look at permanent revolution in relation to 'foreign policy'. There is no doubt that again the theory of permanent revolution played an important part in the Bolsheviks' understanding that Russia, in isolation and backwardness, could not develop into *complete* socialism without revolution in some of the advanced capitalist countries. This gave the Bolsheviks a firm basis for a revolutionary foreign policy. But in the early years neither Lenin nor Trotsky were foolish enough to pin all their hopes on such developments, especially after the German defeat and the necessity for the New Economic Policy (NEP) in Russia. Trotsky himself wrote:—

"Needless to say, under no circumstances are we striving for a narrow 'national' communism: the raising of the blockade and the European revolution all the more, would introduce the most radical alterations into our economic plan, cutting down the stages of development and bringing them together. But we do not know when these events will take place; and we must act in a way that we can hold out and become stronger under the most unfavourable circumstances — that is to say, in face of the slowest conceivable development of European and world revolution." (From 'Terrorism and Communism' — 1920)

Hence Trotsky held the essentially correct dialectical position, but unfortunately he was not to maintain it. After Lenin's death and Stalin's rise to power, the situation changed.

Stalin's strategy was based on the idea of 'socialism in one country'. Despairing of revolution abroad and surrounded by people lacking international political understanding and culture, Stalin embarked on what Colletti (The Question of Stalin – New Left Review No. 61) has called a policy of 'national restoration'. A policy that ignored and distorted previous Bolshevik theory and practice.

SOCIALISM IN ONE COUNTRY?

There are two things wrong with socialism in one country as preached by and practised by the Stalinist bureaucracy. The first is that it often gave up the possibility of revolution abroad. This meant that the Comintern, once the vanguard of world revolution, became increasingly subordinate to the needs of the Russian party. This created a series of ultra-right and ultra-left zigzags, as the situation changed in Russia and the Stalinists attempted to rectify their previous political mistakes at home and abroad. What's worse, they ensured the defeat of the revolutionary forces in Germany, Britain and China – to name but three instances.



Secondly, it adversely affected the process of economic development. While industrialisation, capital accumulation and collectivisation of agriculture were necessary, the bureaucracy carried them out in an anti-socialist way. Not only were they accompanied by vicious repression, 'a revolution from above', as E.H. Carr called it, without attempts to bring changes in values from below; it failed to challenge concepts of economic development that had arisen in capitalist countries. This wasn't simply the already described adoption of capitalist work processes, but a failure to question the viability of total large-scale production and to integrate the organic development of town and countryside.

Trotsky and the Left Opposition's economic policies showed a much better grasp of many aspects, such as the role and detail of state planning. They were, however, flawed in that they too failed to question the nature of economic development. As we seek to show later, both Stalin and Trotsky's conceptions were 'economistic'. This was tragically shown when from 1928 onwards Stalin used the Opposition's economic policies to industrialise and collectivise – accompanied of course by the terror and lack of real planning in distinction to Trotsky's ideas. The reaction of many Opposition-

ists was understandably confused by Stalin's so-called 'Left Course', given the similarities. In the end, many capitulated, including Preobrazhensky, in the belief that Stalin was carrying out their policies.

In relation to foreign affairs Trotsky was using the theory of permanent revolution on many occasions to brilliantly predict and criticise the consequences of Stalin's foreign policies. But in this struggle he gradually abandoned his dialectical position and permanent revolution became an almost metaphysical internationalism and a vain hope for revolution abroad. A hope abstracted from the real circumstances and peculiarities of each country and their different ideological and political institutions. He later wrote, describing his analysis of the time:—

"The specific alignment of forces in the nation and international field can enable the proletariat to seize power first in a backward country such as Russia. But the same alignment of forces proves that without a more or less rapid victory of the proletariat in the advanced capitalist countries, the workers' government will not survive. Left to itself the Soviet régime must either fall or degenerate. More exactly will first degenerate and then fall. . . without a revolution in the West, Bolshevism will be liquidated either by internal counter-revolution or by external intervention, or by both." ('Stalinism and Bolshevism' – 1937)

In this context permanent revolution lost its precise meaning. A consequence was *fatalism* about political events in Russia, a fatalism that was to prove disastrous in the struggle against Stalin. Stalin was able to present Trotsky's views as idealistic and ignorant of the real situation. When combined with all the political contradictions of his own economic policy Trotsky's arguments about permanent revolution degenerated still further. Continuing to deny that a 'Thermidor' had occurred and that the bureaucracy was a strong and independent power, he asserted that 'socialism in one country' could not survive because:—

- a) It could not withstand the hostility of the capitalist world market and the economic blockade.
- b) The USSR was militarily indefensible.

Time proved him wrong on both points and his arguments undermined the opposition, as Trotsky was posing a version of historical fatalism that almost devalued political action. Such action was necessary on the question of the quality and political direction of the transition period, that is, it was not so much a question of total opposition to the policy of socialism in one country, but posing the question '*what kind of socialist transition, and who controls it?*' that was needed. To struggle on these ground would not have been easy, given the power and the control of the Stalinist apparatus: but as a perspective it could have broken through the confusion that had been created by what permanent revolution had come to represent – *a collapse into an undialectical opposite of a wrong policy*, simply a mirror image of Stalin's policies.

Despite all its power Trotsky's analysis has for generations mystified the ways in which there can be a *transition* to socialism, whether in conditions of backwardness or advancement. As C.J. Arthur points out in his critique of Trotskyism – 'The Revolution Betrayed?' [2] – some transitional society is inevitable in the ebb and flow of class struggle after the seizure of power. While any revolutionary process, class or party bears the risk of degeneration or defeat, permanent revolution has been responsible for an ultra-left short-circuit in its conception of transition to socialism. For while it is correct to say that the achievement of full socialism is impossible in a single country, it is the most mechanical fatalism to deny that a process of *building socialism* cannot begin in the real world of one space and time. (see Section 5d).

NOTES.

1. Term coined by Krasso in his article 'Trotsky's Marxism' in 'New Left Review No.44'
2. In 'Radical Philosophy' No. 6